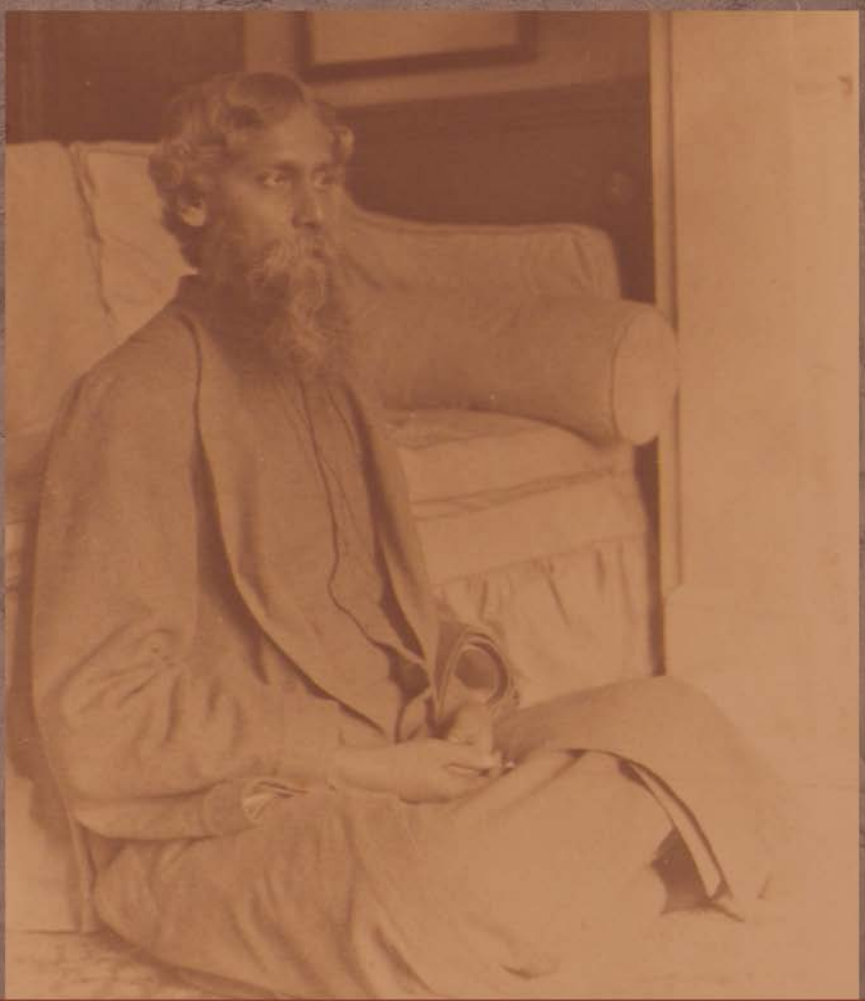
Empire, Nationalism and the Postcolonial World

Rabindranath Tagore's writings on history, politics and society

Michael Collins



ROUTLEDGE

Empire, Nationalism and the Postcolonial World

By presenting a new interpretation of Rabindranath Tagore's English language writings, this book places the work of India's greatest Nobel Prize winner and cultural icon in the context of imperial history and thereby bridges the gap between Tagore studies and imperial/postcolonial historiography.

Using detailed archival research, the book charts the origins of Tagore's ideas in Indian religious traditions and discusses the impact of early Indian nationalism on Tagore's thinking. It offers a new interpretation of Tagore's complex debates with Gandhi about the colonial encounter, Tagore's provocative analysis of the impact of British imperialism in India and his questioning of nationalism as a pathway to authentic postcolonial freedom. The book also demonstrates how the man and his ideas were received and interpreted in Britain during his lifetime and how they have been sometimes misrepresented by nationalist historians and postcolonial theorists after Tagore's death.

An alternative interpretation based on an intellectual history approach, this book places Tagore's sense of agency, his ideas and intentions within a broader historical framework. Offering an exciting critique of postcolonial theory from a historical perspective, it is a timely contribution in the wake of the 150th anniversary of Tagore's birth in 2011.

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Foreword by Tapan Raychaudhuri

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For Sutapa

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Preface

Approaches and sources

In adopting any kind of approach broadly categorised as intellectual history, a researcher will always encounter the difficulty of escaping the 'hermeneutic circle'. In attempting to recover an author's intention, he or she will impose his or her own interpretation, thereby changing the original *historical* meaning of that intention. The problem can never fully be resolved, but its effect can be mitigated. As J. G. A. Pocock has argued, the dangers are greater 'when we have no evidence regarding . . . intentions other than the text itself'.[1] With this in mind, my perspective on intellectual history and the use of archival evidence follows that of Pocock, who seeks to marshal as much contextual evidence as possible, seeing this as difficult, but nevertheless worthwhile.

> There may be evidence, unreliable and treacherous but still usable, from the author's other writings or his private correspondence . . . The more evidence the historian can mobilise in the construction of hypotheses regarding the author's intentions, which can then be applied to or tested against the text itself, the better his chances of escaping from the hermeneutic circle.[2]

Whilst the arguments and ideas explored in this thesis have been built around work in archives, reading letters and unpublished material of varying degrees of legibility, the maps and pathways laid (as well as the treasure troves assembled) by others are what have made this work possible.[3] It is this layered element of interpretation which further complicates the exercise, and to some degree – as I point out in the book that follows – Tagore has too often suffered from the transmission, via the secondary literature, of received wisdom.

The primary archive for the writing of this thesis has been *Rabindra Bhavana* in Shantiniketan, which I visited twice, once for an extended stay of four months. Many of Tagore's letters have been published by *Visva Bharati* in a series entitled *Chitti Patra*, but the most significant single volume collection of Tagore's letters – based on the Tagore archive – is Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson's *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*.[4] C. F. Andrews also edited a volume of his correspondence with Tagore entitled *Letters to a Friend*.[5] Neither collection is exhaustive of the enormous amount of material held at *Rabindra Bhavana*. The unpublished materials that I have worked through have been referenced either as

'Tagore Papers' or 'Andrews Papers', both of which are stored within the Tagore archive. I have used a significant amount of unpublished material, but wherever I have used a letter that is also available in published form, I have made reference to the archive *and* to the published version in order to maximise the ability of the reader to cross check my use of primary sources. This is particularly important in the case of any discrepancy or omission, the frequency of which is a reminder that edited collections of letters and hitherto unpublished correspondence are often marked by the subjective interpretations of relevance and value made by the editor. This is particularly so in the case of C. F. Andrews' book, which was a politically motivated enterprise. Chapter 5, on Tagore's relationship with E. J. Thompson and C. F. Andrews has also been written following work in the Bodleian Library's collection of E. J. Thompson's papers. Uma Das Gupta's *A Difficult Friendship* is an excellent and comprehensive collection of the Tagore–Thompson correspondence and again, wherever relevant, I have provided an archival reference and a page reference to Das Gupta's book.[6] I have explored other archives with varying degrees of success, including: the E. M. Forster and T. S. Eliot collections at King's College, Cambridge; the Thomas Sturge Moore Papers at Senate House Library, London; the Yeats Papers at the National Library of Ireland, Dublin; the Paul Morand Papers at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; the archive at the Nobel Institute, Stockholm and the Ramananda Chatterjee Papers at the National Library, Kolkata.

I have been extremely fortunate to have written this book immediately following the publication of some very important collections of primary sources. There are two collections of Tagore's writings and one collection of reviews of Tagore's work in the British press which have transformed the possibilities of Tagore scholarship over the past decade. The first and most important of these is the massive three volumes of *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore* edited by Sisir Kumar Das and supplemented by the recent fourth volume edited by Nityapriya Ghosh.[7] The community of Tagore scholars (and, hopefully, in due course, a wider critical academic and reading public) owe a great debt to this endeavour. However, I would add that, as with the edited collections of Tagore's letters, this work is not complete. In particular, there are some essays published in the Calcutta journal *The Modern Review* that are extremely important to an understanding of Tagore's approach to Indian history, Indian nationhood and the relationship with the West, some of which are not included in this collection. I make a good deal of use of *The Modern Review*, particularly in Chapters 1 to 3. Another recent collection of essays that has brought to light an extraordinary exchange – spanning the 1920s – between Tagore and Gandhi is Sabyasachi Bhattacharya's *The Mahatma and the Poet*.[8] Almost all of the material included in this collection was previously in the public domain, primarily in the pages of *Young India* and *The Modern Review*, but the publication of this volume has made the letters and journal articles – in which Tagore and Gandhi thrashed out their positions on nationalism and non-cooperation – far more accessible. Finally, the work done by Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar to bring together press cuttings in *Imagining Tagore: Rabindranath and the British Press* has made a very important

contribution, though it does not cover all relevant publications, and I have included references from beyond this volume.[9] Since all of the material included in these three edited volumes – Sisir Kumar Das, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Kundu *et al*. – was previously in the public domain, I have not included references to the original primary sources which are widely available.

In addition to the archives and collections of primary sources, many biographical studies of Tagore have been invaluable to my work in either providing additional access to primary sources or indicating where and how such access might be gained. These include works by Ernest Rhys (1915); E. J. Thompson (1921 and 1926); Vincenc Lesný (1939); Mary Lago (1975); Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson's *Myriad-Minded Man* (1995), as well as their 1997 *Anthology*; and, most recently, Uma Das Gupta (2004).[10] The biographies by Krishna Kripalani are, in my view, compromised both by the author's closeness to Tagore and by a lack of judgement.[11] Several other published collections of letters and biographical works have provided extremely important background information. Mary Lago's *Imperfect Encounter* covers Tagore's relationship with William Rothenstein.[12] Rothenstein's own *Men and Memories* (recently reissued by Kessinger) is a rich source for cultural and intellectual history at the end of the nineteenth and in the first half of the twentieth century.[13] E. P. Thompson's book about his father, *Alien Homage*, is useful in many respects, but was written before the E. J. Thompson papers were collected at the Bodleian Library, and is also marked by E.P.'s entirely understandable – though not always justifiable – attempt to mount a defence of his father's reputation.[14] Hugh Tinker's *Ordeal of Love*, looking at C. F. Andrews and India, deals at length and with great sympathy with the Andrews–Tagore relationship.[15] Roy Foster's two volume work on Yeats is an astonishing piece of scholarship that includes important sections on Yeats and Orientalism. The earlier work of Joseph Hone also has many interesting things to say about W. B. Yeats and India.[16]

Acknowledgements

In publishing my first book I am aware of the enormous debt of gratitude that I owe to the teachers who have guided me along an academic path, and thereby allowed me to reach a stage at which I might put forward my own arguments and criticisms, building upon the foundations they put down. The most influential of these have been Quentin Skinner and Anthony D. Smith. My 2009 Oxford D.Phil., out of which this book has developed, could not have been written without the intellectual guidance and constant good humour of my supervisor, David Washbrook, and thus to him I owe a special thank you. Over the years I have also greatly benefited from conversations about Tagore and imperial history with Crispin Bates, Chris Bayly, Sibaji Bandyopadhaya, Elleke Boehmer, Antoinette Burton, John Darwin, Faisal Devji, Catherine Hall, Stephen Howe, Subrata K. Mitra, Partha Mitter, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, William Radice, Tapan Raychaudhuri and Andrew Sartori, as well as the many students and scholars who have shaped my work through questions and contributions at various seminars and conferences along the way. Needless to say, none of the above is in any way responsible for the errors of fact and interpretation contained herein.

At a more practical level I would like to express my particular thanks to all those who have helped me with primary research materials, not least the staff at the various reading rooms of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford; especially the Modern Papers room, and in particular Mr Colin Harris. The staff at *Rabindra Bhavana*, Shantiniketan went well beyond the call of duty to help me locate and make use of Tagore's unpublished letters and photographs. I met with a similar mix of professionalism and kindness at: The British Library, London; Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; National Library of Ireland, Dublin; Nobel Institute Library, Stockholm; King's College Library, Cambridge; and Senate House Library, London. I should also mention Krishna Dutta for her help with sources and Ram Advani who provided me with a steady stream of books that were difficult to access in England. Further, the primary research that forms the basis for this book would not have been possible without the financial help of many funding bodies. First and foremost, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded my three years at Oxford and gave me a number of travel grants. I also received monies for travel and research from: The Arnold, Bryce and Read Fund (Oxford University, Faculty of History); The Beit Fund (Oxford University,

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Of the many friends who have helped me complete this book, I would like to thank Uma Das Gupta for overwhelming kindness and invaluable guidance, and Bachoo and Dilip Roy, the *Brahmos* of 'Rai Bari', who became my second family in Shantiniketan. At Oxford, Cambridge and the LSE I would like to mention Benjamin de Carvalho, Alex Cook, Vincent Martigny and John Springford, who shared so many of the ups and downs of academic and personal life. And at UCL I have been blessed with intellectual and personal support from new colleagues including Catherine Hall, Avi Lifschitz, Keith McClelland, Nicola Miller, Jason Peacey, Antonio Sennis and Adam Smith.

Finally, if it were not for my wife, Sutapa Choudhury, I might never have come to know Tagore. You are both friend and inspiration. Last but not least come my baby sons, Robin and Manu: if the sleepless nights of the last three years have done little for the head, the joy you have brought to my life has done wonders for the heart.

M. C.
Kampala, May 2011

Foreword

Indian authorities have decided to invest a substantial amount in celebrations centred on the life and work of Rabindranath Tagore in the hundred and fiftieth year of his birth. The initiative has led to curious side effects outside India. In reviewing one of the myriad meetings to celebrate the poet's life, a prominent British journalist recently remarked that though Rabindranath does not make much sense as a poet if read in translation, perhaps he has worthwhile things to say on other matters. Perhaps, but he did not really know and it was not worth bothering finding out what these other matters were. A more memorable dismissal was that by Graham Greene who felt that only 'pebbly eyed theosophists' could take Rabindranath seriously. Bernard Shaw's Begendranath Bagore, according to the playwright, probably had twenty wives at home, a probability to be taken into account in assessing his alleged genius.

One major contribution of Michael Collins' remarkable study is his research and analysis of the ups and downs in Tagore's reputation among a section of the Anglophone intelligentsia. Tagore's English and Irish promoters, in honouring him, felt they were being 'wise imperialists' (Yeats' phrase) because they were also indirectly honouring India. In fact, Yeats' oblique claim of a substantial contribution to the translation of *Gitanjali* (no Indian knew how to write English, according to the Irish poet) which helped win the Nobel Prize is probed in depth and found to be essentially incorrect: Collins' research in the Nobel archives shows that the Nobel Committee had one expert who knew Bengali and they assessed the worth of three works – *Gitanjali, Kheya* and *Naibedya* – in the original.

The 'mystic Tagore', according to his first British admirers, was also a national leader (which he certainly was not). From the very beginning a false image, Orientalist in origin, shrouded the persona of the poet in England. He never escaped it and it acquired over time more negative features which flowed from the initial errors. Here was a pseudo-mystic, mildly seditious Oriental who could never enjoy for long the approbation of a section of the British intelligentsia who were not exactly radical in outlook. The rest were just not interested. The American press had questioned the wisdom of the judgement in awarding a Nobel Prize to a non-white person though there were some redeeming circumstances: the poet's complexion happened to be relatively light. The uglier and less civilised aspects

of white imperialism were not entirely irrelevant in the negative responses to Rabindranath. How dare Caliban share a seat with Ariel or Miranda?

Tagore started writing seriously in English after 1912. On that visit to England he had gone with a serious purpose, not of career-building, but of inter-cultural communication. As this book makes clear, meeting and mutual exchange among cultures was the explicitly stated mission of the poet. The Divine purpose behind all such encounters was immanent in positive exchanges. The history of India culminating in the emergence of an 'ocean of humanity' was the grand exemplar of such meeting of minds. His lectures in many parts of the world carry this message. It was finally enshrined in his effort to build a university, *Visvabharati*, meaning Universal Knowledge.

Tagore's writings in English, most of which are available in print (with some significant omissions), have been too-often ignored in studies of the poet's life and work. We now have several decent translations of Tagore's prose and poetry to add to the large body of work written directly in English, but the image of the poet as a creative artist has changed little in the Anglophone world. Significantly, there is a lack of awareness among English-speaking readers of Tagore's enormous output in the form of prose, poetry, plays and essays that address problems relating to society, politics and philosophy. These works reveal a brilliant mind concerned with the deeper issues of human existence: a Tagorean philosophy, which he never articulated in a systematic multi-volume work, but which certainly can be reconstructed and examined from his writings, as the author of this book has done. Dr Collins' study, based on a thoughtful analysis of Tagore's (published and unpublished) writings on history, society and politics will draw attention to Rabindranath's contribution as a major world-historical figure of the twentieth century.

Dr. Collins' book locates and explains Tagore in the context of his nineteenth century background, especially with reference to the ideas of Rammohan and the poet's father Debendranath; the renewed emphasis on monistic/monotheistic tradition of the *Vedanta*; and the evolving strands in Indian nationalism, passing in two decades from empire loyalty to organised resistance to violence aimed at individual functionaries of the Raj. A remote and ill-defined object was freedom. In another decade and a half, Gandhi's *satyagrahas* were at the centre-stage of nationalist resistance. Tagore's early 'nationalism' was articulated via involvement in the anti-partition agitation, but he had parted company with all outward expressions of the phenomenon when it became manifest in chaotic, negative and at times violent action. He saw nothing good in the modern idea of a nation, as contrasted with the natural formation we call society. Tagore shared with some other great thinkers of his time, notably Romain Rolland and Albert Einstein, this deep suspicion of nationalism. His anti-nationalism was not popular at home. One Bengali poet, Satyen Datta, summed up the sense of grievance:

> Behind closed doors, in the light of a lamp
> What nonsense do you write?
> The city streets now resound with one name
> 'Gandhiji, Gandhiji'.

Tagore's critique of nationalism had provoked angry responses in the Far East as well. Nationalism was the dominant ideology of the time. Those who stood up against it had to pay a price. Romain Rolland's name was virtually rubbed out from the list of great French writers in India. By comparison, Tagore had an easier time.

In his somewhat romanticised ideology, Tagore defined 'society's' object as harmony, a higher purpose – of the fulfilment of God in Man – evident in creativity and always seeking understanding among cultures and close mutual exchanges. His explanation of the *Ramayana, Mahabharata* and the *Gita* as lessons in tolerance and harmony, morally superior to the European inheritance, strains one's imagination. And the Brahminical society which invented the caste system including untouchability and the Brahmins' dominance can hardly be described as a model of moral equity. However, the direction in which a preoccupation with narrow national interest and competition would lead could be seen from the historical experience of Europe, both recent and long term. Rabindranath's critique, focused on nationalism and the nation-state, was genuine and profound, not simply an exercise in cultural self-assertion. He was suspicious of these phenomena wherever he encountered them. Only, he was also aware of Europe's many-splendoured culture, its 'spirituality' manifest in its very great and multi-faceted creativity. As a representative of India's great and, by his implication, superior cultural tradition – marked by acceptance and assimilation – it is that spirituality with which he wished to negotiate. In their attempts to cope with contact with the West and the more painful experience of subjection, many of the nineteenth century thinkers had come up with varied answers. Though the poet hardly ever talks of Vivekananda, in a way he comes closest to the patriotic monk who hoped to inspire the energy of the West with the wisdom inherent in the Eastern tradition, i.e. *Vedanta*, for a grand synthesis which would transform mankind. Both believed in the moral superiority of the Indian experience.

On the question of nationhood – which this book examines in great detail – Tagore's difference with Gandhi was basic. But the similarities have often been overlooked. Both Tagore and Gandhi had little faith in brown men replacing white ones as a desired improvement in the Indian situation. Freedom, to be real, had to be a liberation of the spirit. For Gandhi its necessary precondition was non-dependence in the material sphere through revival of self-sufficient village communities. Tagore had some contempt for much indigenous politics, particularly Congress-led nationalism, which he described as 'begging'. In his famous essays published as *Atmashakti* (one's own strength) he suggests a programme of rural uplift not very different from Gandhi's. The central idea was the recovery of the vantage points in Indian life, centred on the villages, through which India did not need to deal with the ruling power. Tagore relied for this purpose on the co-operative programme and a new system of education, based on joy and closeness to nature while Gandhi worked out a programme of rural reconstruction and basic education, centred on vocational training. The similarities were great though the differences should not be ignored and this book makes a genuinely new contribution to our understanding of their complex relationship.

Since the charge of 'nationalism' has been brought against Tagore, it helps to probe his very complex responses to imperialism, which also forms a key subject of inquiry in this book. Like Gandhi, Tagore found the response of hatred and anger in the face of the evident inequities of empire deeply distasteful. But there appear to have been moments when Tagore almost shared the angry rejection of his fellow subjects. His deep aversion to imperial oppression was expressed in his famous poem *Prasna* (The Question)

> Oh God, you have sent your messengers in every age.
> They called on us to love our enemies,
> to root out the poison of hatred from our souls.
> But I ask, oh lord,
> those who poison your air and put out your lights,
> do you forgive them, is your love for them too?

And yet Tagore came to a quaint conclusion from his encounters with the English who, he figured, belonged to two types. First, the small-minded (*choto*) Englishman who had come east of Suez and ran the daily business of empire with little interest and less imagination. These were the philistines who boasted of their racial superiority and laid claim to advantages based on that alleged superiority. Such are the men and women one encounters at the famous 'bridge party' of *A Passage to India*, appropriate objects of pity rather than hatred. Against such people Tagore juxtaposed the large-hearted (*baro*) people he had encountered in England, the inheritors of a great civilisation, endowed with virtue and free from meanness of spirit. His mission was aimed at the latter, an ultimate measure of elitism.

As nationalism increased in complexity, the poet tried to deal with the phenomenon in three of his famous novels: *Gora, Ghare Baire* and *Char Adhyay*. The first is a story of emergence from uncompromising orthodoxy and nationalism into a luminous awareness of the life universal. *Char Adhyay* probes the pitfalls of revolutionary action. *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*) does the same for political extremism. They each constitute a critique of nationalism. The poet was by no means reconciled to the fact of political subjection. But the existing agenda of action for the purpose of freedom from alien rule was unacceptable to him because he had no faith in the nation-state itself.

It is difficult to deny the fact that Tagore found himself in a quandary in his life time which covered almost the entire final stage in India's struggle for freedom. His political message was not appreciated, perhaps not fully understood. With this in mind, it is worth noting that there are many reasons for the relative neglect of this undoubted genius. Even in India, not many outside Bengal are familiar with the grand expressions of this man's ideas. One of his prophecies about the future of his work has proved true. Bengalis, who neglect much of his work, especially his prose writings, are steeped in his songs.

Dr. Collins has written a formidably well-researched book that argues the relevance of Tagore's thought for a globalised world that threatens all particularities of human culture and all motivations other than unlimited consumption. The

often-forgotten purpose of mutual enrichment has been replaced by ferocious encounters sometimes described as a clash of civilisations. Clash of barbarisms might be a better description. It is my hope that Dr Collins' profoundly insightful monograph will provoke some re-examination of much that we take for given in our present quandary.

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Introduction

Tagore, imperialism and a global intellectual history

> The true India is an idea, and not a mere geographical fact.[1]
>
> Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 13 March 1921

The poet Rabindranath Tagore was born in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1861 and died in the same city in 1941. He was the first Asian to bring Eastern culture into the mainstream of intellectual life in the West, from Europe to America, north and south. For perhaps a decade after he won the Nobel Prize in 1913, Tagore was one of the most famous cultural and intellectual figures in the world.

The purpose of this book is not to proclaim Tagore's genius once again. What I wish to do in the pages that follow is explore some of the reasons why – following his immense fame *c.* 1913 – Tagore has been consistently misunderstood, misrepresented, sometimes ignored, and in many respects diminished as a writer and thinker. Amongst Western academics, beyond a few poems, perhaps one or two novels and some of his paintings, much of Tagore's output – especially his essays on philosophical, political and social issues, and his provocative ideas about imperialism and nationalism – has not received the critical attention that it might have. It should have received such attention on account of the inherent value of his thinking, but also – in the spirit of intellectual history – because his ideas formed part of a web of exchanges that were critical to the development of anti-imperial thought and postcolonial imagining during Tagore's time. This was especially important in the context of Tagore's debates with M. K. Gandhi. In addition to re-examining Tagore's ideas, I also take a critical view of Tagore's 'practice', that is, his approach to actualising his philosophical positions. In short, my aim is to show that Tagore remains of relevance to historians, political scientists and theorists of modernity, postmodernity and the postcolonial world who are concerned with ideas and with action; with politics, broadly construed.

Provincialising Tagore

To say that Tagore came from an elite family is true, but wholly insufficient in explaining the deep influence he and the rest of the Tagores had on the cultural, religious and literary movement referred to as the 'Bengal Renaissance'.[2] His

grandfather, 'Prince' Dwarkanath Tagore, though not in fact a prince, was nonetheless a fabulously wealthy landowner, businessman and entrepreneur, who believed that race was not necessarily a barrier between himself and his British metropolitan peers. Dwarkanath travelled to London twice in the pre-1857 period; once in 1842, and a second time in 1845. In London he was famed for his money and his social connections, which went very high indeed and saw him dine at Buckingham Palace with Queen Victoria. Rabindranath's father, Debendranath, was an entirely different character: a scholar and founder of the Hindu reformist *Brahmo Samaj*, which occupied a highly influential position amongst the Calcutta intelligentsia. Moreover, Calcutta was, at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, still the formal capital of British India and the pre-eminent political, cultural and economic city of empire. In the Tagore family – from Dwarkanath to Debendranath – the privileges of wealth and high society were fused with learning, culture and the high-minded seriousness of the first Indian intellectual to be feted in the West, Ram Mohan Roy.[3]

And yet, as I have suggested, Rabindranath, the heir to Dwarkanath's wealth and Debendranath's mind – and ultimately the most famous of all the members of this illustrious family – is a much maligned and misunderstood figure. This was the case amongst his contemporaries both in Bengal and in Western Europe, and in many respects it remains so in terms of Tagore's place in the popular collective memory of today's Bengal. Living during the high period of anti-colonial nationalism in India – and yet espousing the ideal of 'universal man' – Tagore was inevitably portrayed by some of his more nationalist-minded contemporaries as insufficiently patriotic and unduly influenced by the West. Confusions about Tagore's loyalty arose not least on account of his network of high profile non-Indian friends and his desire, against the traditions of high caste Hindus, to travel outside of India, as well as his public chastisement of Gandhi's non-cooperation movement. But he was equally prone to being misrepresented by his supposed well-wishers. Consider the following passage:

> Poor Tagore, whatever he did seemed wrong in the eyes of his countrymen. He was maligned for his radicalism, blamed for his good manners. He whose poetry expressed the heart of his country through the ages, who loved the very dust of the soil where he was born, never really won the hearts of his people. They could not forgive him for not sharing their superstitions, the biggest of which was the patriotic solution that they were God's chosen people. Tagore loved his country and his people, but made no secret of the fact that he admired the British character more than the Indian. This his compatriots never forgave him. For this history will honour him.[4]

Whilst this passage is suggestive of some of the reasons for Tagore's mixed reception, it is hard to think of a more perverse and patently false statement about Tagore than that he 'admired the British character more than the Indian'. And yet this passage is to be found in one of the most widely read in-depth English language biographies written about Tagore.[5]

At the same time, in a post-1947 world of nation building, the fidelity and authenticity of an iconic figure such as Tagore is often grounded in a somewhat reductive and simplified picture, with his more transgressive and anti-national ideas sidelined in favour of the memory of the poet's *Amar Shonar Bangla*.[6] Tagore's popular image remains first and foremost that of a poet and writer of Bengali songs – known as *Rabindrasangeet* – which are still sung to this day across the far corners of Bengal. Perhaps all creative writers are apt to be appropriated by a cultural community – in Tagore's case the Bengalis – in such a way that writers of prose and political essays rarely are, and it is possibly for this reason that Tagore is known as a Bengali, whilst Gandhi is never referred to as a Gujarati.

As Ramachandra Guha has written, it is not only in the popular memory of Bengal that Tagore has been misrepresented. In Guha's view, 'Bengal in general, and Bengali intellectuals in particular, are to blame here. They have provincialised and parochialised Tagore, turning a thinker of universal reach and significance into local hero'.[7] One of the objectives of this book is to delve more deeply into the ways in which intellectuals might be, as Guha puts it, 'to blame'. Specifically, in Chapter 6, I argue that the most innovative and influential historiographical trend in India over the past 20 years – 'history from below', or, in its Indian incarnation, *Subaltern Studies* – is in certain respects responsible for the persistent failure to do justice to Tagore's historical role. Under the influence of this field of study, historians of modern India have developed new and challenging narratives of India's struggle for independence, focusing not on elite nationalism but on grassroots and popular forms of 'everyday resistance'. Coming from one of Bengal's foremost families, the subaltern paradigm has tended to cast Tagore rather too unproblematically in the 'elite' mould, without attempting a fully contextualised historical analysis of his actual ideas or activities.[8] Hence, as Stefan Collini (adapting E. P. Thompson's famous line) has put it, 'it is not *only* the poor and inarticulate who may stand in need of being excused from the enormous condescension of posterity'.[9]

Whilst recognising the merit of much of the work done in the field of *Subaltern Studies* and postcolonial historiography, this book aims to sidestep (though certainly not ignore) both the 'elite–subaltern' and 'imperial–national' dichotomies. I propose that an historical actor such as Tagore has been too often misplaced or ignored precisely because of the continued, and in many ways understandable, tendency to see the colonial past in terms of a series of essentialised binaries. Tagore, in both his practical work and his theoretical writings, refused this perspective, and for this reason it has been difficult to bring him into historical focus. What I wish to do in the following section is trace some of the shifts in the historiography of empire in order to illustrate some of the reasons why it has been difficult to do historical work on a figure like Tagore within this field of study.

Mapping shifts in imperial history

Historians and theorists of empire working in the period after the formal *dénouement* of the European empires have raised a number of important questions that

continue to challenge academic historians thinking about colonial history: where did 'imperialism' take place; what is its spatial typography; what was its direction; who did what to whom, and how? Was the exercise of colonial power and control primarily political, economic, social, cultural, ideological, physical, technological or environmental? How are we to judge colonial history? What is the legacy of imperialism for colonised societies, and for the colonisers themselves? In seeking to answer this question, is it possible to escape the pitfalls of subjectivity – to successfully navigate between fact and interpretation beyond the 'hermeneutic circle' – in constructing an historical narrative of colonial encounters?[10]

The Saidian intervention

The initial impetus for this book on Tagore was a negative one, arising from a reading of *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*; two brilliant books by the late Edward Said.[11] The idea that Said's seductive and inspirational polemics did not satisfy the (supposedly) more rigorous standards of the historian has been a commonplace assertion since the publication of *Orientalism* in 1978.[12] But even if this has now become a hackneyed idea amongst historians, it is a difficult one to reject. It is hard to read Said and not be impressed, but also troubled by the tremendous sweep and scope of his argument, which appears to conceal so much more than it reveals.

Said's core insight was to stress the significance of colonial discourse and the production of knowledge as components of an imperialist mode of domination, famously suggesting that this domination took place through a process of the Occident 'dealing' with the Orient by 'making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, [and] ruling over it'.[13]

> [E]very European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist and almost totally ethnocentric. Some of the immediate sting will be taken out of these labels if we recall additionally that human societies, at least the more advanced cultures, have rarely offered the individual anything but imperialism, racism, and ethnocentrism for dealing with 'other' cultures.[14]

The construction of 'knowledge' by the European coloniser about the so-called 'Orient' had functioned as a form of power and control. Moreover, Said claimed, the consumption and acceptance of that knowledge led to a form of hegemony – complete domination, accepted and internalised by the dominated – not only of the physical body and geographical space of the colonised, but crucially, of their minds also. In short, Said claimed that 'Orientalism [is] a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient'.[15] The book emerged at a time when French poststructuralist thought, particularly that of Foucault, was beginning to make its impact in the wider field of the (Anglophone) humanities. With its emphasis on language or 'discourse' as a form of power, it naturally lent itself to the study of colonialism, particularly where the decline of Marxism and

the persistence of 'neo-colonial' forces were making non-materialist explanations of power more relevant. It was Said, above anyone else, who pioneered this move.

At the same time, Said's work obviously reinscribed the very same binaries of 'self' and 'other' that provided the conceptual framework for his critique.[16] His position rested on very broad constructions – 'Orient' and 'Occident' – and appeared to be as totalising and essentialist (indeed perhaps more so) in respect of these two categories as many of the Orientalists who formed the object of his study. Said meant to speak of 'the West' as an imagined idea rather than a concrete reality, but surely it had been imagined and contested in different ways? In this respect Said's work also raised serious concerns about the pervasiveness of the Orientalist impulse. 'All of the subjugated peoples', Said wrote in a 1990 Field Day,

> had it in common that they were considered to be naturally subservient to a superior, advanced, developed, and morally mature Europe, whose role in the non-European world was to rule, instruct, legislate, develop, and at the proper times, to discipline, war against, and occasionally exterminate non-Europeans.[17]

Moreover, '[f]rom these views that were held in Europe and America, there was no significant divergence from the Renaissance on'.[18] Such a position seemed to entail a quite radical compression and flattening of history, which had little or no room for any sense of resistance, counter-culture or competing ideologies. It also appeared to take away a sense of agency on the part of the colonised themselves, rendering the colonised the passive recipients of an omnipotent 'power knowledge'. Within this framework of analysis, how could we bring into focus either those thinkers in Europe's colonial metropole who may have engaged with non-European cultures out of admiration and genuine respect, or those individuals in Europe's colonies who had *critically* evaluated European culture, intellectual life, politics and economics? It is at this point that the figure of Rabindranath Tagore – among others – seems highly relevant.

In the aforementioned Field Day essay, Said in fact referred to Tagore in a list of the 'great nationalist artists of decolonisation and revolutionary nationalism'.[19] This was evidence that Said's macroscopic and essentialised perspective led to serious errors of interpretation, since Tagore had written a fairly lengthy book explicitly and categorically denouncing nationalism as ideology and practice.[20] By the time he published *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said might have become aware of Tagore's *Nationalism*, in which Tagore argued that nationalist ideology was derivative of the worst aspects of the West's political thought.[21] This may have encouraged Said to be a little more circumspect in his presentation of another, revised version of his original Field Day essay, which now formed a large part of the third chapter of *Culture and Imperialism*, entitled 'Resistance and Opposition'.[22] In this chapter Said shifted his stance, and now acknowledged that 'many nationalists are sometimes more coercive or more intellectually self-critical than others', and argued that his own book was 'that, at its best, nationalist resistance to imperialism was always critical to itself'. Moreover, he wrote, 'an attentive reading

of towering figures within the nationalist ranks – writers like C. L. R. James, Neruda, Tagore . . . Fanon, Cabral, and others – discriminates among the various forces vying for ascendancy within the anti-imperialist, nationalist camp'.[23] But even this revised analysis is confusing. In terms of understanding, more is lost than gained by Said lumping these thinkers together in the 'nationalist ranks', and I suggest that this is especially so with regard to Tagore. Tagore was a pioneer of the idea that anti-colonialism should take the form of a non-instrumental rejuvenation of society and religion, and hence his position stood in contradistinction to a straightforward dialectic between colonialism and nationalism.

Contrary to Said's insistence that 'every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was . . . a racist, an imperialist and almost totally ethnocentric',[24] what is striking about Tagore's encounter with the West was not simply that his work was received in the metropole, but that it was celebrated. We should remind ourselves that this was not a peripheral colonial encounter. This was a representative of Indian culture and intellect in the heart of the metropole meeting with tremendous acclaim amongst not only sections of the *avant-garde* intelligentsia, but the wider reading public. This may have happened for a short period only, and may have also revealed, under the surface of things, some of the familiar tropes of the Orientalist gaze. But it at least calls into question Said's application of Foucault's power knowledge to the colonial encounter. This raises a number of questions. Taking Tagore as an historical example, did his dialogue with Western intellectuals, which suggests at least the potential of a rich and genuine type of intellectual exchange, simply replicate many of the prejudices of Orientalism, or did it create networks of genuine influence from periphery to core? I address this issue most directly in Chapter 4 on W. B. Yeats, but the question foregrounds a number of central problems in the study of colonial history, which relate to the boundaries of the field and to the tools of interpretation available. In order to explore this further – and to be able to situate this study within the wider field of colonial history – I now turn to an overview of the shifting, and indeed expanding, historiography of colonialism and the changing conceptions of colonial 'spatiality'.

'Traditional' imperial history

If much nineteenth- and early twentieth-century imperial historiography was primarily concerned with lauding the achievements of the civilising mission, the immediate post-war period of decolonisation is marked by relative silence about the colonial past.[25] During this period, 'scholars and intellectuals were most captivated by the drama of liberation movements and the possibilities of "modernisation" and "development" for people whom colonialism and racism had excluded from the march of development'. In general terms, by the 1970s, 'the study of colonial empires had . . . become one of the deadest of dead fields within history'.[26]

There were, however, notable exceptions. Amongst these were the writings of Ronald Robinson and Jack Gallagher, who had expounded what they called an 'ex-centric' model of colonial expansion, explaining nineteenth-century British imperialism through the idea of an 'imperialism of free trade'.[27] This type of

flexible imperial structure relied upon the judicious 'official minds' of civil service men who governed in diverse circumstances and adapted imperial policy to suit local needs. As elaborated in later versions, the approach focused on the intermediaries who were engaged in striking bargains according to circumstances at the periphery of the empire, thereby accounting for the existence of different types of colonial rule. Most controversially, it implicated a host of indigenous collaborators in the process.[28] Robinson and Gallagher's perspective was novel and interesting in the sense that it saw the locus of imperial power residing at the periphery: Whitehall had to rely upon the interpretations and information networks of officials working in far-flung corners of the globe, and the 'men on the spot' came to be viewed as more significant than had previously been recognised. But whilst the emphasis on a new direction in the flow of power was innovative, the power-holders were not. They remained the usual suspects: white male elites, albeit now linked to the interests of their native elite collaborators. Robinson and Gallagher's spatial perspective 'provided successive imperial historians with a well-demarcated field of study,'[29] but it was the fact that colonised subjects were unwilling to rest content with playing this 'bit-part'[30] in the making of their own histories that ultimately disturbed imperial historians' integrated field of investigation. This provoked something of a crisis in the field of colonial historiography, one that would help to explain the trajectory of later developments in the field.[31]

As discussed in an influential article published in 1984 by David Fieldhouse, the study of imperial history had, by that time, fragmented into a variety of regional studies and national histories. For theorists of modernisation and development, as well as indigenous historians re-writing their own history from a nationalist perspective, 'the proper unit of research and analysis was the individual society in the process of becoming a nation'.[32] Moreover, this was 'the starting point for regional studies as a substitute for imperial history'.[33] Fieldhouse's question was whether it could be 'put together again' – in the sense of imperial history being reformulated as a cohesive object of scholarly inquiry.[34] A response to this came in the form of a new focus on metropolitan concerns and the projection of imperial power from the centre through a system of 'gentlemanly capitalism' which gave explanatory primacy to the City of London. The financial services sector, conspiring with government, used empire to maintain and strengthen its elite interests.[35] But this important thesis developed by P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins was yet further provocation to those critical of Eurocentric histories, which placed metropolitan debates and interests at the centre of imperial history and relegated the colonised peoples of the world – if they featured at all – to the margins and footnotes. Such a means of recreating the field of colonial or imperial history would do little to satisfy the growing idea – then beginning to emerge from post-Marxist and poststructuralist quarters – that the very practice of writing history was implicated in the project of Western imperialism.[36]

Via more traditional avenues, Fieldhouse returned to the idea of 'interactions' between the metropolitan core of empire and its peripheries in order to recover the historical connectedness that a focus on nation states had obscured. But whilst this could be seen as an advance in the sophistication of imperial history, the types of

connections made by Fieldhouse – which allowed for the influence of imperial questions on metropolitan life – included 'the nature of the economy, the patterns of foreign policy [and] even the character of the armed forces',[37] but did not stretch to the newly fashionable areas of culture and discourse. This meant that Fieldhouse failed to pick up on the source of a new 'reintegrative move' within the field of imperial history which would come from 'literary and cultural theory, with ever more vigorous offshoots into cultural history, and centred around the concept of colonial discourse'.[38] The reasons for this development are reflective of some important currents in the philosophy of the humanities and social sciences in the last quarter of the twentieth century; currents that go well beyond the field of imperial history, but which have shaped it in significant ways.

Postcolonialism and Subaltern Studies

The postcolonial critique of 'traditional' colonial history has mirrored much of the poststructuralist attack on the Eurocentric, logo-centric canon of Western historiography in general. That is to say, it has attacked the history of empire as written by white male elites, who have privileged the narratives not only of the dominant gender, class and culture, but also the idea of Reason itself. Poststructuralism has sought to deconstruct the epistemological foundations of the Western intellectual tradition; indeed to debunk the very notions of foundationalist knowledge, and in some cases the possibilities of writing history at all. Over the past quarter of a century, with Foucault as the new weapon in their armoury, a series of authors have applied what might be called 'postmodern perspectives' to the battlefield of colonial history, and have achieved significant victories. As I have already suggested, the seminal move in the direction of a postcolonial focus on discourse and knowledge as power was that made in Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said's work revealed that the dirty business of empire was not simply done 'out there' in the colonies, allowing it to be easily 'marked and eventually excised'.[39] In disturbing contradistinction, Said showed that the darkness of empire went to the heart of metropolitan culture. But whilst raising awareness of the idea that the West's objectification of the East might be more pervasive than had previously been understood, Said can be accused of actually encouraging the generation of myths and stereotypes about 'the Orient'.[40]

The very basis of Said's position – that the existence and development of any culture requires the existence of a contrasting 'other' – led to the paradoxical strengthening and reinforcement of the very binary divisions that Said sought to elucidate, and hence presumably escape. The primary issue of concern, as I see it, is to pay close attention to what we are actually trying to explain. The danger of the postcolonial attraction to the power of discourse (and the discourse of power) is that it has itself become hegemonic, apparently capable of explaining everything. The result has been a proclivity in postcolonial theory towards unsustainable generalisations resulting from what Fred Cooper calls the postcolonial tendency of 'turning the centuries of European colonisation overseas into a critique of the enlightenment, and democracy, or modernity'.[41]

A more historically oriented contribution to the study of colonialism and the nature of the colonial and postcolonial world is that developed by the *Subaltern Studies* collective. In terms of approaches to the study of history, the most significant methodological innovation of the collective was to adopt the postcolonial focus on the aforementioned 'knowledge as power' as opposed to existing – usually neo-Marxist – analyses of 'interest as power'. The latter constituted precisely the sort of focus on economic and political motivations that, according to Subaltern historians, privileged the historical role of colonial agents and their elite counterparts in the peripheries. Whether collaborators or nationalists, the Subaltern historians felt that such versions of colonial history ignored vast swathes of the colonised society. First and foremost, it overlooked the peasant movements and their undocumented acts of rebellion, 'the numerous peasant uprisings of the [colonial] period, some of them massive in scope and rich in anti-colonial consciousness, [which] waited in vain for a leadership to raise them above localism and generalise them into a nation-wide anti-imperialist campaign'.[42] But the core of the *Subaltern Studies* challenge concerned not simply method and perspective, but also the issue of rights to 'knowledge creation': by whom, and how, should social scientific or historical knowledge about India be developed?

The work done under the auspices of the *Subaltern Studies* collective in the past ten to fifteen years has been highly varied, and I cannot give an account of its internal diversity. However, one of the strengths of the Subaltern approach has been its encouragement of a more reflexive attitude on the part of the historian to the attention that he or she gives to particular aspects of history, and to particular narratives of historical development. And yet, with a certain irony, this process has to some extent replicated existing Western interpretations of the direction of ideational influence under colonial conditions. From a *Subaltern Studies* perspective, the supposedly imitative nature of the Indian nationalist struggle illustrates the neo-colonisation of the Indian elite in terms of mental categories. But in this sense, power at the level of ideas is conceived of only as the domination of periphery by the core. Following in Said's footsteps, *Subaltern Studies* history has tended to 'imagine Europe' and portray it as 'solely universalist and liberal',[43] thereby masking some of the more complex and multi-directional cultural encounters. Again, as with the wider field of postcolonial studies, much of the dissonance within the 'Western canon' has tended to receive little attention. In place of historically varied contestation and debate, 'the West' is imagined and constructed as 'liberal-rationalist', 'positivist' or 'utilitarian', and 'Europe' is too often presented – either explicitly or implicitly – as a homogenous and monolithic entity. Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* – in many respects a profoundly interesting, richly detailed and thought-provoking book – is a notable case in point.

In addition to its often reductive vision of 'the West', the type of postcolonial historiography undertaken by the *Subaltern Studies* Collective, has – almost by definition – been unable to elucidate the historical significance of figures who do not easily fit into the Subaltern category; of which Tagore is a prime example. Tagore was a long way from 'subaltern'. And yet he was often isolated in his own

Bengali cultural context (a fact entirely lost on many of his Western contacts), as well as misinterpreted in the West. In many senses his voice has been marginalised and suppressed. The historians who founded and then emerged from the *Subaltern Studies* collective – Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty, amongst others – constitute an astonishing, dazzling generation of intellectual talent, not simply in an Indian but in a global context. There is no particular reason to assume that any of these historians ought to have devoted substantial amounts of intellectual energy to working on Rabindranath Tagore. But one cannot help noticing that – where they have written about Tagore, either in a cursory or in a more substantive fashion – the theoretical presuppositions of some *Subaltern Studies* historians have often caused Tagore to be badly misrepresented by the very scholars who are, ironically, best placed to foreground the complexity of his thinking and historical agency for the postcolonial world. In Chapter 6, I expand on this point through an examination of some of Partha Chatterjee's, Ashis Nandy's and Dipesh Chakrabarty's judgements of Tagore.

The exclusion of non-Western peoples from their own history was certainly a characteristic of the Eurocentric economic and political histories written by figures such as Gallagher and Robinson and Cain and Hopkins. But in their efforts to traduce and transcend these approaches, postcolonial theorists and historians – from Said to *Subaltern Studies* – have created an intellectual climate within which much historical detail has been missed. Often the creative force and agency of colonised peoples and their efforts to judge, translate, reject, utilise and influence various aspects of European thought have also been overlooked; as in the case of Tagore. It is this maintenance of rigid binaries, by design or by error, which I wish both to reveal and to counter in this book.

New imperial histories

In spite of this tendency towards dichotomy and abstraction at the expense of complex trajectories within the field of postcolonial theory, I do not see the need for a mutually antagonistic relationship between insights derived from philosophical moorings in poststructuralist on the one hand and an empiricist 'traditional imperial history' on the other. If power structures are neither symmetrical nor dichotomous, it may well be that we need both theory and history to get to grips with phenomena that are simultaneously pervasive and uneven, general and particular. These objectives – often pursued with great openness to the insights of postcolonial theory – can be traced in the work of the New Imperial History which has emerged in the past decade or so. Efforts to 'reconfigure' the national narrative of British history and place this history within a colonial framework are clearly articulated in Catherine Hall's work – perhaps most importantly her *Civilising Subjects* (2002) – which has been central to efforts to link colony and metropole in the same analytical framework. Elleke Boehmer's *Empire, the National and the Postcolonial* (2002) marked a new departure in the exploration of intellectual and cultural networks of exchange between peripheries of empire, as opposed to solely between metropole and periphery. This theme was theorised

by a range of leading historians in Antoinette Burton's *After the Imperial Turn* (2003), the impact of which can be traced in Lambert and Lester's *Colonial Lives* (2006) which has done much, along with the work of Miles Ogborn, to bring imperial history and historical geography into a fruitful dialogue. Last but not least, these creative interactions can be seen in the renewed interest in economic history, and especially efforts to reconnect economy and culture through the study of networks such as Gary Magee and Andrew Thompson's *Empire and Globalisation* (2010).[44]

With all of this activity in mind, Stephen Howe has rightly argued that 'the singularity of a supposed "new imperial history" is misleading and obfuscatory. We should pluralise it and speak instead of fresh, creative histories of imperialism.'[45] Whilst more sceptical of the merits of postcolonial theory, Chris Bayly's *The Birth of the Modern World* (2004) – as well as much of his earlier work – displays a desire to overcome the simple binaries of 'the West and the rest'. Bayly has been a pioneer of the idea that interconnectedness, networks and 'complex interactions' are central, and the task of the historian is to explore these, within a unified realm of knowledge, and thereby show that 'historical trends and sequences of events, which have been treated separately in regional or national histories, can be brought together'.[46] As R. I. Moore puts it in his preface to Bayly's book, the 'birth of the modern world' should not be read simply as

> something which some people or some regions did to others less favoured or deserving, but as a series of transformations in which most of the people of the world participated, and to which most of them contributed, not simply as the objects or victims of the successes of others, but actively, independently and creatively.[47]

The potential problem with this perspective, however, is that it leaves less room for the specific analysis of power, and it is in its insistence on taking issues of power seriously that the 'theory' component of postcolonialism still has so much to offer. It is for this reason that Catherine Hall is right to suggest that we should 'struggle to put global history and postcolonial theory in the same frame'.[48]

Towards a global intellectual history

In its simplified form, a Marxist teleology posits a 'globalised modernity' that emerges with the age of empire and the reorganisation of feudal social orders through their integration into an imperialist–capitalist global system. In non-Marxist versions of modernisation theory, industrialisation and rapid urbanisation are followed by the emergence of bourgeois democratic nationalism. The uneven development thesis provides for a totalising theory of historical evolution in the postcolonial period, whilst at the same time allowing for cultural differences and variations from what are considered to be fundamentally European patterns. Much of the impetus behind the *Subaltern Studies* project lay in a rejection of all of these Eurocentric perspectives. And yet, with a certain degree of irony, *Subaltern*

Studies – and the wider postcolonial movement – accepted much of this, and sought to ground its opposition to 'Western modernity' in an essentialised 'subaltern other', an untouched or pristine subalternity whose very existence illustrated the fact of imperial 'dominance without hegemony'. And yet, the Foucauldian notion of omnipotent discursive power seemingly undermines the efforts (even by historians interested in identifying subaltern resistance) to actually locate and explain the historical efficacy of such resistance, prompting the question, 'can the subaltern speak?'.

It is the contention of this book that imperial history may be better understood as constituting multifaceted forms of resistance, transgression and subversion of 'official', 'dominant' and even 'hegemonic' discourses, achieved by a wide range of social, economic, cultural and ideological means. In short, in order to retain the richness of colonial history as *a site for understanding human thought and action*, 'we need to consider both the entire range of forms of power and the consequences each one entails'.[49]

Ideas and intentions

Moving beyond the limits of a Subaltern and Foucauldian paradigm, the task of constructing a coherent reading of Tagore's thought remains difficult in the sense that he was, as the title of his most comprehensive recent biography suggests, a 'myriad-minded man'.[50] Tagore was not a conventional theorist or philosopher. He did not lay down the corpus of his thought in systematically arranged tomes. For this reason, it has often been difficult to uncover the internal connections in his work and in his actions. But, contrary to some popular misunderstandings, Rabindranath did not simply indulge in poetic idealism. He was very much connected to the 'real world'. His poetic genius and creative powers were coupled with a profound commitment to *social* action. The word social is stressed because it is true to say that Tagore tried, as far as possible, to keep himself away from the political fray. But this was not out of aloofness: his emphasis on action at the social level reveals a good deal about the coherence of his philosophical position and the unity of his active and spiritual life. Tagore's ideas about religion and the nature of God informed his thinking about the balance of good and evil, which in turn shaped his attitude towards the relationship between the state and the individual. Tagore's critique of the constraining forces of the state – particularly where the state had joined forces with the destructive power of nationalism – follows from this. It was also connected to his ideas concerning education and his school at Shantiniketan, which constituted a real and creative manifestation of his philosophical worldview.

In an attempt to capture these interconnections, I employ the methods of the intellectual historian in seeking to link context and text.[51] This means utilising a wide range of sources, including published monographs, lectures, journal and newspaper articles, speeches and private correspondence. (Many of Tagore's letters run to tens of pages and amount to short philosophical essays in their own right.) Most importantly, intellectual history seeks to understand the ideas and motivations of a given actor within a wider framework of ideas and debates. I take

agency seriously and do not disregard authorial intent. But it is not enough to focus on particular texts and thereby interpret an author's meaning and the 'contribution' of her or his work.

Tagore was operating within a given historical period and as an agent he was navigating within certain social and intellectual structures. Well before the practice of colonialism itself (as opposed to the societies and cultures of subjugated peoples) was considered a proper object of inquiry in the West, nineteenth-century Bengali intellectuals were deeply preoccupied with interpreting the impact of British colonialism on Indian politics, economy, society and culture, and forming judgements about its merits and demerits. According to Tapan Raychaudhuri, 'the Bengali intelligentsia was the first Asian social group of any size whose mental world was transformed through its interactions with the West'. Indeed, he notes 'an all-pervasive concern, almost obsessive, in their social and intellectual life – an anxiety to assess European culture in the widest sense of the term as being something to be emulated or rejected'.[52] This colonial context represented a significant part of Tagore's intellectual inheritance. Dominant figures in Bengali intellectual and cultural life such as Rammohun Roy and Rabindranath's father, Debendranath Tagore, had attempted both to assess and to come to terms with the relationship between coloniser and colonised, West and East. The latter part of the nineteenth century saw a more radical turn taken by influential figures in the political and cultural vanguard, such as Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. By 1905 and Curzon's partition of Bengal, the contradictions of colonialism had been exacerbated by the ideology of nationalism. The spirit of Giuseppe Mazzini and the ideals of national self-determination had emerged as the politicised crest of a deeper current of cultural recovery and assertion that was flowing through Bengal. In a rapidly changing context, Rabindranath rode this wave of nationalist fervour for a short time, but soon profoundly reconsidered his position, identifying what he saw as a dark and violent reality behind the façade of patriotic fervour.

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Tagore had adopted a clearer, more definitively anti-national position. He still aimed at developing a project of resistance to British – and indeed European – imperialist expansion, which he saw as driven by an aggressive nationalist impulse. But where he may have been ambivalent before, he now proclaimed that anti-colonial nationalism was explicitly not the best way to address the problem of colonialism. Indeed, in a very large corpus of English writings, he stated that contact between India and Europe via the system of British colonial rule had certain progressive, meta-historical functions. This – as I will argue throughout this book – placed Tagore in a complicated, some would say compromised, position *vis-à-vis* the British Empire (and Western culture more broadly), which was easily misrepresented, both in his own time and today. But Tagore's concern was with *both* coloniser and colonised. The great failure of the British in India, Tagore felt, was to misunderstand, and thus fail to learn from, Indian culture. In this sense British rule in India was a failure of imagination and intellect as much as anything else, and in this respect it degraded the British, just as it degraded India.

Tagore articulated a vision or pathway out of the colonial predicament of the early twentieth century which aimed at the recovery and preservation of what he saw as an authentic Indian culture, which had never based itself around a politicised nation state. He became, as Gandhi called him, 'the Great Sentinel', warning his fellow Indians of the terrible dangers inherent in an anti-colonial struggle founded on the one hand on the categorical rejection of all that the West stood for in intellectual and cultural terms, whilst, on the other hand, paradoxically mimicking its form of political organisation. At the same time he saw himself as a conduit for Indian or Eastern culture to be communicated to the West. Far from seeing the East as inferior and subordinate, the values and traditions that Tagore believed India stood for – the essential 'unity of Man', the *Upanishadic* inheritance and the primacy of the social-religious world over that of politics and the state – urgently needed re-articulation.

What is important to note is that Tagore's English language writings – quite obviously intended both for elite Indian and Western consumption – suggest that he cannot be adequately comprehended through an analytic paradigm that accepts (implicitly or explicitly) Orientalism meant that 'Indians figured as inert objects of knowledge'.[53] In this sense, Tagore can help us to better understand some of the limitations of postcolonial theory. From 1912 until his death in 1941, going well beyond a simple desire for 'cultural contact', Tagore made an explicit attempt to convey a set of ideas concerning religion, culture, politics and society to Western audiences. And yet, contrary to much of the received wisdom in the (still relatively limited) postcolonial historiography on Tagore, the discursive terms of reference found in his writings cannot adequately be represented as the workings of imperialist pedagogy. To put it bluntly, Tagore's interest in, to choose a popular example, English romantic poetry is almost entirely irrelevant to an understanding of his philosophy. With this in mind, I aim to show that Tagore was a more empowered, purposeful, provocative and transgressive figure than he has sometimes been given credit for.

This makes Tagore's English language writings, which he began to publish from 1912, of great historical significance, and it is the reason for my period of study to be demarcated as 1912–1941. None of Tagore's novels, nor any of his major poetic works, were originally written in English or intended for an Anglophone audience. But following his visit to London in 1912, Tagore opened a new chapter in his career – that of a bilingual writer – and much of his subsequent work came in the form of essays and polemics on political and social matters. This means that, whilst the issue of translation is an important one, the vast output of English writings also require independent study not simply for their linguistic or stylistic form, but for their philosophical and ideological content.[54]

Most of Tagore's philosophical, political and social writings published in English during this period were not translations. *Sadhana* (1914); *Personality* (1917); *Nationalism* (1917); *The Centre of Indian Culture* (1919); *Creative Unity* (1922); *Letters from Abroad* (1924); *Talks in China* (1924 and 1925); *Letters to a Friend* (1928), edited by his confidant C. F. Andrews; *Lectures and Addresses* (1928); *Thoughts from Rabindranath Tagore* (1929), also edited by Andrews; *The*

Religion of Man (1931); *East and West* (1935); and *Man* (1937) were all written directly in English. Many of his essays, such as the early *Sadhana* and *Personality*, were studied by Western readers 'as much for their idealistic content as for their conformity with the Oriental wisdom perceived by the West'.[55] In this regard, a study of Tagore's English writings can take us away from the rigid and reductive binaries of 'self' and 'other', 'Orient' and 'Occident' and – via a focus on the agency of individuals such as Tagore – take us towards a better understanding of the interconnectedness of the colonial world and the nature of imperial networks and intellectual exchange, and hence to a more complete picture of the historically varied and shifting exercise of power under colonial conditions.

When thinking about some of the most important ideas developed by Tagore, the most persistent confusions surround his attitude towards 'nationalism', 'patriotism', or 'love of country'. To be clear, Rabindranath Tagore was not a nationalist in any analytically useful sense of the word. Correcting this widespread misperception is vital if we are to make sense of Tagore's other writings on topics as diverse as education, science, art, agricultural reform and the environment which were all inflected with a philosophical universalism diametrically opposed to the rationality of the nation state. Why has Tagore been so frequently classified as a nationalist? A simple problem of interpretation arises if one sees the colonial predicament of the early twentieth century as marked by two competing trends: colonialism and anti-colonial nationalism. Tagore was a critic of British and European colonialism, but he did not see nationalism as a desirable mode of resistance. Indeed, it was the modern ideology of nationalism and the territorialised cult of the nation state that had led the European powers into a negative relationship with the non-European subject peoples, not to mention into a terrible war on the European continent. But it must also be recognised that for Tagore the colonial encounter had a progressive side. More than this, it was part of Tagore's idealist vision of Indian and World History that Britain and India should come into such contact. The question for both parties was whether a positive outcome might be engineered. In this historical vision Tagore was a determinist, with a progressive, idealist and teleological view of history that saw the 'meeting of the races' as the unfolding of an idea: the essential unity of mankind grounded in the essential unity of God and the world. At the same time he also saw a crucial role for individuals – not least himself – to shape that history.

Certainly Tagore's philosophical world view was idealist, but – as I will explain in more detail in Chapter 2 – Tagore did not neglect 'the real'. Even so, he exhibited a striking propensity to stress the primacy of 'the ideal' in the face of material expressions of power and oppression, to an extent which frustrated even the likes of Gandhi. Tagore did not develop any substantive critique of capitalism, nor did he seem to recognise liberal bourgeois politics as essentially ideological. The material form of the nation state was singled out by Tagore as deeply harmful to the 'unity of man', but a liberal political economy could be accommodated in his vision of the good society – so long as certain spiritual ideals were allowed to dictate its operation. We thus begin to see that it is not easy to accommodate Tagore within established categories of 'Enlightenment reason', 'modernity', 'anti-modern', 'idealist' or 'romanticist'.

Through colonialism, the British had made the problem of 'modernity' an Indian problem, and, as Chris Bayly has recently put it, modern Indian intellectual history 'attests to the virtuosity of Indian thinking' on this topic.[56] Tagore embraced 'reason' and 'science' to some extent, yet rejected modern political organisation and in particular the politics of nationalism. He used the modernist language of progress and even, at times, spoke of the 'laws of history', but he did so from an autochthonous position outside the bounds of a Western positivist framework. He was deeply embedded in his own tradition, yet spoke of the benefits of cultural diversity on a local and global scale, and frequently referred to the existence of 'universal man'. He sought ways to think about the West without essentialising it. From roughly 1912 he made it his life's mission to rebalance the relationship between Britain and India, but controversially he can be shown to be ambivalent – in a deep sense that I explore most fully in Chapter 4, even indifferent – about the specific political arrangements of colonial India and indeed a future, postcolonial India. For all of these reasons Tagore constitutes an under-recognised element in the genealogy of colonial and postcolonial thought, and a figure who remains of great importance in the context of today's global predicaments.

Colonial and postcolonial encounters

By the early 1900s, Tagore was living and writing in a rapidly changing world, and the mission that he set himself in 1912 went against the ideological trajectory of the colonial relationship between Britain and India that was evolving in the first half of the twentieth century. With the rise of anti-colonial nationalism amongst the Indian intelligentsia and an increasingly oppressive British response, the space for interaction between coloniser and colonised, Britons and Indians, was rapidly diminishing. Indeed, this was precisely why Tagore believed his mission was of great importance. Already more than 50 years old, he felt that a major part of his calling in life remained unanswered and, over the next three decades, he exposed himself to a public sphere of ideas and intellectual exchange that stretched well beyond the confines of his home city of Calcutta, into the cultural heartland of the colonial metropole, and beyond.

Tagore was a well-travelled man by any standards, but given the difficulties involved in long-distance voyages in the early twentieth century he has to be considered a *bona fide* globetrotter. He sought out and developed a number of important intellectual contacts and friends in the United States, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and China; and he travelled as far as Iran, Iraq and Argentina in pursuit of intellectual intimacy and influence. But it was in London that Tagore first began to sow the seeds of cultural and intellectual exchange with Western intellectuals. His early encounters were with writers and artists associated with London's India Society, an organisation set up with the intention of combating the deficiencies in the colonial administration's understanding of India (not to mention the majority of Britain's academic and cultural elite).

Tagore's arrival in London in June 1912 presented the recently formed Society with an opportunity to showcase a man whom they had been told was the jewel in

India's cultural crown. William Rothenstein, the Hampstead-based painter and member of the Society's executive committee, met Tagore and began to circulate rough translations of a collection of poems entitled *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings). They were soon in the hands of W. B. Yeats, who was moved by the emotional intensity of Tagore's work, which, he wrote, 'stirred my blood as nothing has for years'.[57] Just one year later, Tagore became the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. By 1915, he was Sir Rabindranath Tagore (a title that he famously renounced following the Amritsar Massacre in 1919). His rise to intellectual stardom in the West was nothing short of meteoric. He became, almost overnight, a cultural phenomenon, and the fame and critical acclaim that he received was unprecedented.

Tagore placed a very high price on friendship for non-instrumental reasons, but the building of friendships was also part of a political strategy, that is, an approach to effecting change in the relationship between coloniser and colonised. Although well-travelled, and despite his professed universalism, Tagore was very much tied to place and to culture, and thus the universalism inherent in the cosmopolitan ideal remained rather abstract for him. The interactions of the elite 'cosmopolitan' social group – based around friendships – were more concrete and promised the possibility of changing the world around him. And yet Tagore never accepted the label 'cosmopolitan', which he saw as 'colourless' and vague.[58] For this reason, the various accretions of meaning that inhere in the term 'cosmopolitanism', which have amounted to the general idea that cosmopolitanism is a moral ideal in which humanity constitutes a single community, are perhaps better replaced – for my purposes here – by the phrase 'the politics of friendship'.[59] Tagore practised a politics of friendship in part as a refusal of the friend/enemy binary that Jacques Derrida also rejected, but for Tagore it constituted an instrumental approach to effecting change. As C. F. Andrews wrote to Tagore in 1914, '[t]he greatest good I have been able to do to bring peace and love, instead of strife and hate, has been through my friendship with you and through the place that you now hold in the heart of East and West alike'.[60] Tagore's vision of the good society, grounded in traditions of reciprocity, community and religion, contrasted with his approach to effecting progressive change, which was grounded in a liberal elitism that saw the 'pluralisation' of high-minded, civilised individuals as the necessary path.

In his famous essay on the 'Bloomsbury Fraction', addressing Bloomsbury's putative enlightened and cosmopolitan attitudes, Williams argued that Bloomsbury was in fact 'carrying [forward] the classical values of bourgeois enlightenment'.

> It was against cant, superstition, hypocrisy, pretension and public show. It was also against ignorance, poverty, sexual and racial discrimination, militarism and imperialism. But it was against all these things in a specific moment of liberal thought. What it appealed to, against all these evils, was not any alternative idea of a whole society. Instead it appealed to the supreme value of the civilized individual, whose pluralisation, as more and more civilized individuals, was itself the only acceptable social direction.[61]

This key idea of the 'pluralisation of civilised individuals' grasps much of what is essential to Tagore and his network of friends and interlocutors. The trans-national, trans-imperial friendships established by Tagore were intended to be pathways to a more enlightened future and the realisation of his elaborate project of communication and 'healing'. Yet, despite the ostensibly progressive credentials and intentions of all parties, the politics of friendship in the sense of this 'pluralisation' can, as Williams suggests, involve the rejection of a deeper transformative politics that might overturn the structural drivers of economy, class, gender and race that had given rise to the imperial situation. Williams goes further, suggesting that the pluralisation of individuals is in fact

> the central definition of bourgeois ideology . . . It commands the public ideals of a very wide range of orthodox political opinion, from modern conservatives through liberals to the most representative social democrats. It is a philosophy of the sovereignty of the civilized individual, not only against all the dark forces of the past, but against all those other and actual social forces which, in conflicts of interest . . . can be quickly assigned to the far side of that border which is marked by its own definition of 'civilised'.[62]

Tagore very much shared Andrews' vision of friendship being East and West together, but in spite of Tagore's high social status in India, he was, and would remain, an outsider to the cultural world of the metropole. In other words, Tagore's status as a trans-national, trans-cultural intellectual and cultural figure is illustrative of the limits of a liberal politics of friendship for the reasons that Williams outlined. As the distinguished Tagore scholar and critic Sisir Kumar Das has written, 'there was hardly any Indian author before him who received such a tumultuous welcome and also such wide critical attention from the Western reading public'. Yet to a large extent 'what dominated the Western mind in respect of Indian literature were certain stereotypes; vague and imperfect notions of an exotic, mystical literature, a literature that defies the major norms of Western literature'. Accordingly, and in the patronising spirit of cultural superiority that was 'so blatantly articulated by Macaulay', attempts to engage with and understand 'the other' were 'generally half-hearted and sporadic'.[63] From this perspective, Tagore represented a cultural tradition that had always been, and continued to be, considered subordinate: he was a transgressor of boundaries that were not only the markers of cultural difference, but also the bearers of colonial power.

In seeking to understand the historical significance of Tagore's entry into Western metropolitan cultural and intellectual circles, the primary movers behind Tagore's reception and interpretation – and their possible involvement in counter-cultural or alternative intellectual movements – become significant figures. It is both obvious, and simplistic to say that Tagore – with his long beard, flowing robes and saintly persona – satisfied the trite stereotypes of the Eastern mystic. This was indeed the case, but Tagore's arrival in London in 1912 resonated with certain intellectual trends of a more profound nature. In this respect, Tagore's

critique of a Western intellectual tradition debased by an overbearing materialism found affinity in the minds of many of his Western counterparts.

For example, by 1912, W. B. Yeats and his like had already developed an interest in Eastern spiritualism through the Theosophical Society. Tagore's engagement with Western audiences came during a period of growing interest amongst certain *avant-garde* intellectual circles in non-European cultures. In fact, the very idea of 'culture' – understood as organic and evolving – was emerging as the basis for a non-Marxist critique of industrial capitalism, reflected in later work such as Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1926), a text that found its 'minor English resonance' in F. R. Leavis' *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930).[64] 'Civilisation' had come to be seen by many as abstract, alienating, fragmented, mechanistic, utilitarian and 'in thrall to a crass faith in material progress'.[65] Debates over mysticism, 'Eastern wisdom', realism versus idealism, positivism and 'rationalism' as inimical to 'culture' and 'tradition' were salient features of the intellectual flux of early twentieth-century Britain. Such a context, it would seem, should have provided fertile ground for Tagore's ideas. But Ezra Pound soon decided that 'Tagore's philosophy hasn't much in it for a man who has "felt the pangs" and been pestered with Western civilisation'.[66] This scepticism as to whether Tagore's thought could really connect with the tragic persona of 'modern man' was something that set in early amongst the Bloomsbury group. Yeats soon distanced himself from Tagore, and whilst his encounters with Indian philosophy and religious thought outlasted the Tagore moment, he found it difficult to move beyond the problematic posed by Pound.

But if Tagore's initial experiences in the West can be described as a bad case of falling in with the wrong crowd, there were other figures who took a strikingly different approach. Amongst these characters, C. F. Andrews and Edward Thompson stand out as important, not because they were especially influential, but because they pursued what might be referred to as a 'politics of friendship' that others within metropolitan cultural and literary circles professed, but were rarely, if ever, able to extend across cultural boundaries. Both Andrews and Thompson devoted most of their lives to the cause of India; living there, learning its languages and spending considerable periods of time in close contact with Tagore and his Bengali world. They shared a profound desire to effect a Christian-inspired reconciliation between East and West, India and Britain. Their approach was motivated by the Christian idea of atonement. Andrews and Thompson thus represent an interesting case study in the limits and contradictions of a liberal politics of friendship under colonial conditions.

There was no doubt that Tagore felt he had a particular contribution to make. As he saw it, the time was right for a new chapter of world history to unfold in which the East and West would meet at the level of culture and ideas; that this would have profound implications for the power dynamics between them; and hence the nature of the colonial relationship would be transformed. And if recognition of the intimacy of knowledge, power and colonialism is familiar to modern day readers, that is because Tagore had understood their connection long before the advent of Foucault, post-structuralism and postcolonial theory. What marks

Tagore out, as we shall see, is a presupposition that not *all* knowledge can be categorised as power knowledge, and a nuanced understanding of both the internal differentiation within East and West and the potential mutual benefit to be derived from a meeting of the two.

Tagore's resistance to colonial rule was not to take the form of non-cooperation, but of active engagement. It was to be an effort to communicate a set of intellectual and cultural positions emanating from India's religious and philosophical traditions; and an appeal to Europe to rediscover aspects of its own 'self', thereby breaking free from the chains of nationalism and colonialism that enslaved Europe just as much as they had enslaved the rest of the world. The evils of colonialism were not *inherent* in 'post-Enlightenment rationality', but constituted the failure of that same project. Tagore felt that as a self-appointed spokesman for the body of Eastern wisdom, he could foreground the idea of 'Universal Man'. According to Tagore, the West was 'eager to know the East', and in particular to know India, 'and to seek help from the store of wisdom which has come to us from ancient times'.[67] However clichéd this may sound, in historical terms Tagore's attempt to effect such a move constitutes a revealing case study of imperial networks and the agency of colonised intellectuals.

Presentation of the argument

This book is thus built around the twin themes of Tagore's 'ideas and intentions' and his 'colonial encounters'. At the same time it seeks to engage with some of the historiographical problems that have prevented these two aspects of Tagore from receiving proper historical scrutiny. I argue throughout that there are certain theoretical limitations deeply embedded in postcolonial historiography that have obscured a figure like Tagore. Through a closer examination of the archive and of some of Tagore's lesser known writings (sometimes, one suspects intentionally marginalised), I aim to bring out a more coherent picture of Tagore's stance towards the West, and the way he felt India ought to position itself in light of the impact of colonialism.

I present Tagore as an intellectual – operating within a colonial context – drawing largely upon autochthonous traditions in order to develop a critical stance towards a particular conception of 'the West'.[68] This is a case study, then, encompassing structure and agency, looking at Tagore's assessment of European ideas within an Indian setting as well as his self-confident (yet self-consciously benevolent) assertion of Indian cultural, spiritual and even social superiority in the face of the perceived downward spiral into which colonialism had dragged Western cultures. At the same time, this focus on the agency of the colonised – as embodied in the life and work of Tagore – offers the opportunity to distinguish between some of the different metropolitan cultural and intellectual formations that sought to interpret and receive Tagore. My primary case studies in this regard are Yeats on the one hand, and Andrews and Thompson on the other.

Tagore was engaged in a twofold, potentially contradictory venture; shaping indigenous resistance to colonial domination, whilst simultaneously engaging in

creative dialogue with the cultural elite of the colonial power. Yet for him, the two were intimately connected and potentially complementary. As Ashis Nandy has commented, 'not even Gandhi could ram down the throat of the Indian literati his particular awareness of Indian traditions as Tagore did'.[69] But, nor did any other Indian intellectual of the period make quite such an impression amongst the European literati of his day. It is this duality, this double engagement, which makes Tagore such an interesting historical figure.

Tagore's interactions in Britain were with a specific set of individuals, each operating within an intellectual and cultural milieu, each with their own intellectual inheritance, which they brought to bear upon this encounter. Understanding how Tagore was represented and interpreted – and how ideological and personal divisions affected this – is central to a full appreciation of Tagore's contact with the West. In so doing, the dissonances within the varying discourses concerning the East can be explored, as opposed to simply positing a monolithic 'Orientalism'. This allows both the possibilities for, and obstacles in the way of, a two-way flow of intellectual and cultural influence to be made clearer.

Structure of the book

The idea that Tagore's attitude and stance towards the West was derived from his own cultural and spiritual context is an important starting point, and Chapter 1 provides some of that background, enabling his later encounters and ideas to be connected to philosophical debates and experiences prior to 1912. Chapter 2 moves directly to 1912, the year in which Tagore embarked upon his mission to communicate and interact with Western intellectuals and audiences. It examines in historical detail the purpose of Tagore's journey to England and the outcomes he intended. It also explores some of the ways in which interpretations of Tagore were established in metropolitan circles during that period. In terms of understanding the development of Tagore's thought, Chapter 3 is in many ways the central section of the book. It looks at the nature of his anti-colonialism and his writings on nationalism, many of which have been long forgotten and even excluded from recent edited volumes of his English writings. Whilst paying attention to how these writings shaped his evolving reception in the West, it also seeks to explain how Tagore's ideas were developed in parallel with an emerging Gandhian philosophy, and how Tagore's thought differed from Gandhi's. It is concerned first and foremost with establishing a coherent Tagorean position on the central modern problematic of nationhood out of a disparate set of essays, lectures and letters on the subject.

The focus of the book then shifts away from Tagore's writings towards a more extensive consideration of his encounters with Western intellectuals and cultural figures. This raises questions not only of what Tagore was attempting to communicate, but also about his 'methodology'. If Eastern ideas needed to be communicated to the West, and the 'meeting of the races' put on a more progressive footing, how exactly should this be done? Tagore placed great value on the 'proliferation of individuals', but how effective was such a strategy? With this problem in mind,

Chapter 4 takes Tagore's relationship with Yeats and examines it in more detail. It seeks to understand why, and to what end, Yeats was interested in Tagore, arguing that ultimately their relationship ended in failure and mutual disappointment. Chapter 5 involves a comparison of two other important interlocutors, Edward Thompson and C. F. Andrews, contrasts Thompson and Andrews themselves, but also seeks to distinguish between the type of liberal attitudes that they exhibited towards Tagore (and India more widely) and the attitude of Yeats.

Following the archival and textual focus of Chapters 1 to 5, Chapter 6 returns, from a different angle, to some of the theoretical and historiographical problems raised in this Introduction. Taking a broader historical view, it seeks to read Tagore's historical encounter with the West against some recent theories and perspectives on postcolonialism and postcolonial historiography.

Purpose of the book

The primary goal of this book is to pay due attention to Tagore's writings and consider his intentions when making various intellectual 'moves', in Skinnerian terms. My hope is that the book will make a contribution to taking Tagore beyond the specialised sub-field of 'Tagore studies'. But it is equally important to consider the relevance of Tagore's thought today and to consider Tagore's legacy in the postcolonial world.[70] It is ironic that a figure such as Tagore – who in his time had such global resonance and espoused a distinctively universalist philosophy – has in many ways become so narrow in his appeal, leaving aside his poetry and more recently his art. For historians, political scientists and theorists of modernity, postmodernity and postcolonialism, his relative absence from the literature is a significant loss. This is not because Tagore should once again be recognised as a 'great prophet'. But the complex, sometimes contradictory positions that Tagore adopted ought to be considered as central to a broader debate in the history of ideas, a global intellectual history of thinking about the nature of the modern, the West and the East, colonialism and the emancipatory potential of various alternatives to both empire and nation.

Part I

Ideas and intentions

1 Religion and reform

Tagore's nineteenth-century inheritance

> I was born to a family who were pioneers in the revival in our country of a religion based upon the utterance of Indian sages in the *Upanishads*. But owing to my idiosyncrasy of temperament, it was impossible for me to accept any religious teaching only on the grounds that people in my surroundings believed it to be true. I could not persuade myself to imagine that I had religion simply because everybody whom I might trust believed in its value.[1]
>
> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of an Artist*

The primary focus of this book is the years 1912 to 1941: the period between Tagore's first travels to the West as an English language writer and the year of his death. But whilst most of the discussion is concerned with Tagore's writings on empire and nationalism, and his interactions with Western cultural figures, it is necessary to situate Tagore within the context of nineteenth-century Bengal. Throughout his life and work Tagore identified himself as a marginal figure, and with good reason. And yet it is difficult to understand Tagore unless we are aware of the traditions and intellectual currents out of which he emerged, which were in part shaped by unprecedented trans-national movements of elite Bengalis from Calcutta to the imperial metropole and back.

The intellectual, cultural and religious history of Bengal cannot be seen simply through the lens of Calcutta's modern colonial existence. And yet, as the nineteenth-century intellectual, cultural, political and economic hub of British imperial power in the subcontinent, the city – and not least its intelligentsia – developed a marked colonial character. The distinctive nature of Bengali cultural and intellectual life arose from a dialectic process which can be summarised – following David Kopf – as 'reformist modernism' encountering 'nationalist ambivalence', giving rise to a synthesis grounded in 'Hindu *Brahmoism*' and 'Universal Humanism'.[2] The key point of this chapter, then, is to explore the history of the various elements – an eclectic mix of 'Upanishadic ideas blended with modern humanism',[3] aspects of Vaishnavism and Keshubite universalism – that led Tagore towards his 'mission' in the West.

Central to our understanding of Tagore's mission is a proper appreciation of his religiously derived theory of human nature. Like all theories of human nature,

Tagore's was essentially speculative; and this speculation posited love as the defining impulse of the human condition. As Kalyan Sen Gupta puts it, for Tagore, '[l]ove involves an *appropriate* stance towards other human beings, as creatures who are not objects, but other subjects intimately involved in one another's identity', and it is therefore 'only through such affective experiences as love and compassion that one fully appreciates the superficiality and error of regarding people as distinct, hermetically sealed selves'.[4] The aspect of God or the Infinite Personality in the individual, finite self is evidenced by man's 'surplus', manifested in his capacity – beyond that of mere animals – for love, for joyousness, for creativity and for art. Tagore 'delighted in life', and in so doing followed 'a great tradition which has come down from the seers of the *Upanishads* and the author of the *Gita*'.[5]

Realising the infinite in the finite requires a particular form of behaviour towards one's fellow man, and this appropriate type of behaviour is both a form of worship and a form of salvation. The search for unity in man is an ongoing process, one that takes Tagore away from what he perceived to be the blind alley of nationalism towards a 'meeting of minds' across cultures, East and West. This was both a personal journey and equally a meeting of cultures with emancipatory potential. This meeting of cultures, which would be effected through Tagore and other highly cultured individuals, was seen in strongly teleological terms. As Datta argues, 'Tagore dreamt of that stage of perfection in an *evolutionary* process where Humanity assumes the form of Supreme Reality', suggesting that 'the idea of cosmic evolution . . . played a most vital role in shaping Tagore's thought'.[6] He felt, indeed, that empire had brought different cultures and races into intimate contact, but not under beneficent terms. The trajectory of man was towards greater harmony, and it was incumbent upon intellectuals and cultural figures such as Tagore to carry out this urgent work. It is in this spirit that Tagore – drawing on both the religious teachings of *Brahmoism* and his experiences of a nationalist movement – made his voyage westwards in 1912.

In order to provide a background for these themes, this chapter will give an overview of nineteenth-century Bengali intellectual history as it pertained most directly to the development of Tagore as a thinker, looking at his background and his main influences, and tracing some of the contradictions and ambiguities underlying this narrative. With a significant part of this story concerned with figures who sought to step outside of their immediate social and cultural sphere, it begins with an early pioneer of intercourse with the West, Rammohun Roy. It then looks at the foremost intellectual and spiritual movement of nineteenth-century Bengal – the *Brahmo Samaj* – founded by Rabindranath's father, Debendranath, before moving to Rabindranath himself.

Rammohun Roy: the 'father of modern India'

According to Swami Vivekananda, Rammohun Roy (1772–1833) was 'the first man of the new, regenerate India'.[7] From Max Müller's European perspective, he was 'the first who came from East to West, the first to join hands and to complete

that world-wide circle through which henceforth, like an electric current, Oriental thought could run to the West and Western thought return to the East'.[8] His enormous standing in Bengali culture in the nineteenth century was a consequence not only of the depth of his thinking but also the breadth of his contribution. Rammohun's work spanned education, literature, economy, politics, social reform and law. In this sense he was a true 'Renaissance man', and many of his biographers have chosen to see him in this light. He has also been seen as a pivotal figure crossing cultural boundaries and enabling a 'modern synthesis' of East and West.[9] As Wilhelm Halbfass has put it, 'in the context of modern Hindu self-awareness, the role played by Rammohun often assumes mythical proportions'.

> He has become a kind of focal point for a retrospective glorification and the personification of many of the most important aspirations of modern Hinduism, in particular its claim to a comprehensive and harmonising openness and universality: in him, the potential for such superior openness seems to have been fully actualized, and demonstrated to the modern world.[10]

Whether this perspective is accurate or not, it had a high degree of cultural and intellectual purchase in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bengal and was, as we shall see, central to the articulation of a particular view of the Indian nation that would provide an important reference point for Tagore. Before the nineteenth century had come to a close – and some decades before Indian nationalism had moved into its state-seeking phase – the 'Hindu revival' had already raised the standards of culture and religion as the bearers of inclusion or exclusion from the proto-national group. In this context, the historical trajectory of an open, inclusive and tolerant Hinduism required a clear genealogy; and it was towards a particular construction of Rammohun Roy as the 'father of modern India' that many of India's liberal intellectuals looked. Tagore himself played his part in this historical imagining, hailing Rammohun as 'the greatest man of modern India'.[11] Indeed, Rammohun was

> a very great-hearted man of gigantic intelligence . . . [who] tried to reopen the channel of spiritual life which had been obstructed for many years by the sands and debris of creeds that were formal and materialistic, fixed in external practices lacking spiritual significance.[12]

Tagore felt that part of his life's work was to keep the spirit of Rammohun alive, and he was certainly not alone in seeing Rammohun as a key figure, not only for the birth of a new era in Indian history, but as the forebear of an open and tolerant sense of Indianness.[13]

Perhaps the most significant historical problem surrounding the memory of Rammohun was the degree to which he was influenced by Western sources. How far was the idea of rebirth or renaissance derivative of an Orientalist discourse, one which for many thinkers (and not only those writing after Edward Said) was intimately connected with the exercise of power? A number of scholars have

sought to complicate Rammohun's legacy, pointing out his supposed inability to produce anything distinctively Hindu,[14] or looking at the *Brahmo Samaj* – Rammohun's main vehicle for religious reform – and stressing its elitism and inability to shape the attitudes and preferences of the vast majority of Hindus.[15] But the main line of inquiry and criticism has been the Western origins of Rammohun's 'Bengal Renaissance'. From a Marxist perspective, Sumit Sarkar's essay on 'Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past' suggested that the Western influence evident in the 'Bengal Renaissance' and the work of a figure such as Roy led to a kind of aborted modernity, 'not a full blooded bourgeois modernity, but . . . a weak and distorted caricature of the same, which was all that colonial subjection permitted'.[16] Writing from a different angle, Rammohun's proximity to certain Western perceptions of India's predicament in the nineteenth century – and his personal and intellectual affinity with Orientalist scholarship – led David Kopf to suggest that his 'preoccupation with an authentic Hindu tradition or golden age, which he sharply set off against a dark age of popularised religion and social abuses stamped him as a figure in the camp of the Orientalist modernisers'.[17]

To what extent was the reformist impulse created by external colonial pressures 'progressive' or 'conservative' in its intellectual, cultural and social manifestations? This is a question that nationalists and Marxists would engage with, but one which would be rejected by many postcolonial scholars. From a postcolonial perspective, the notion of progress or teleology – implicit in the very nature of such an historical problem – undermines its legitimacy as a problem at all.[18] However, what is more relevant for my purposes is – as Halbfass suggests – that the originality or otherwise of Rammohun's thought is not necessarily the central question if 'his thinking and self-presentation are so exemplary in terms of their cross-cultural hermeneutic structure' that they 'provide so many clues for subsequent developments'.[19]

With this in mind, three points should be reiterated. Firstly, for many thinkers and activists engaged directly or indirectly with the emergent Indian nationalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Rammohun was an important, influential and in many ways inspirational figure. Secondly, his significance – and certainly the nature of his influence – was contested. Thirdly, and logically, the decision – on the part of Tagore and others – to emphasise Rammohun's positive legacy was an ideologically charged one. For now, it is important to note that for many Indians in the early-to-mid twentieth century, from Tagore to Jawaharlal Nehru, the memory of Rammohun as 'the universal man', a figure representing India's 'unique genius' – catholicity of mind – was central to the contested imagining of a new India.[20]

The primary conduit for Rammohun's philosophy was the monotheistic religious and social reformist organisation which he founded in 1828 and called the *Brahmo Sabha*. Yet having died in Bristol in 1833, Rammohun did not live long enough to shape the future course of the organisation, and it remains unclear exactly what he envisaged it to be.[21] The *Sabha* went through a period of relative intellectual stasis until 1843, when Debendranath Tagore formally evolved Rammohun's *Brahmo Sabha* into the *Brahmo Samaj*. At the same time, he set up

a publication called the *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, the 'truth-seekers journal', to propagate *Brahmoism* amongst the educated classes of Calcutta. In an important sense, this revival – with its emphasis on organised worship, codification and the use of print culture – represented the degree to which Debendranath's thinking was more in tune with the coming age of nationalism.

Debendranath's theological position differed from that of Rammohun. Although Rammohun referred to the 'original rationalism'[22] of the Indian tradition, David Kopf's judgement that Rammohun was first and foremost 'a moderniser and not a revivalist', adopting a 'comparative religious approach' is a fair one.[23] Certainly, elements of cultural and religious self-assertiveness were present in Rammohun's writings, and he saw India's 'original rationalism' as proof of the universal nature of Man and God. The comparative approach was thus intended to draw out something of a higher and more enduring value than just the vindication of the particular genius of Indian civilisation. One of the key considerations here, as with Rabindranath in a later historical period, is the problem of an intellectual positioning himself or herself between cultures. As Wilhelm Halbfass has argued,

> Rammohun's hermeneutical situation leaves little room for detached systematic and theoretical thinking or strictly text-oriented interpretation. He conceives and articulates his ideas 'for others' and with an eye on different horizons of reception and expectation. He presents his own tradition for as well as against the Europeans and within their religious and philosophical horizon of expectations. And in the act of presenting himself and his tradition to the foreigners, he learns, as it were, to see himself with foreign eyes.[24]

The danger was that both Europeans and fellow Indians were prone to misinterpret Rammohun's position, often seeing it as conceding too much ground to the Unitarian version of Christianity, by which Rammohun was deeply influenced.

Monism and dualism

The assumption that India had 'shaken off its ancestral inertia' and was 'proceeding to a new stage of religious and philosophical consciousness' was deeply engrained in the Orientalist view. This position took succour from an interpretation of Rammohun that suggested that 'India had finally attained a transitional stage on the way to Christianity' and to 'other plateaus of thought that the West had long since achieved'.[25] M. Monier-Williams may have called Rammohun 'the first earnest-minded investigator of the science of comparative religion that the world has produced'.[26] But the tendency by scholars such as Monier-Williams and Max Müller was to see in Rammohun the 'universality in the spirit of Christianity', which saw Hindu reform linked to the possibility of a Christian India.[27] This deeply problematic issue of Western influence and Hindu reform lay behind the numerous differences between Rammohun Roy and Debendranath Tagore, who in many ways assumed Rammohun's role – despite the time lag between the

latter's death and Debendranath taking the leadership of a newly constituted *Brahmo Samaj* – at the intellectual vanguard of Hindu social and religious change.

Rammohun's emphasis on social reform was tied to his theism. A concern with the religious practice and social order of the Hindu population at large saw him strike 'at the root of the conventional practice of idolatry by reviving the Vedantic idea of one formless God, the Supreme Being'.[28] The idea of ultimate reality as one – a 'pure, monistically oriented monotheism' – was embodied in the theology known as *Vedanta-Darshana*, and 'manifested particularly clearly' in Shankara's *Vedanta*.[29] Significantly, it was this monotheism that best satisfied Rammohun's socially driven, anti-Brahmin agenda, which argued that the Brahmins had obscured the true and commonplace meaning of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* under the dark cloak of Sanskrit. By contrast, Debendranath was a dualist in that he rejected the monistic idea evident in Shankaracharya and Rammohun that God and Man were ultimately one and the same. As Debendranath put it, 'those *Upanishads* which treated of Brahma were alone accepted by us as the true *Vedanta*'.[30]

> We had no faith in the *Vedanta* Philosophy . . . [of] Shankaracharya [which] seeks to prove therein that Brahma and all created beings are one and the same. What we want to do is worship God. If the worshipper and the object of worship become one, then how can there be any worship? . . . We were unable to fully acquiesce in the commentaries of the *Upanishads* as made by Shankaracharya, inasmuch as he has tried to interpret them all in a monistic sense.[31]

The idea of worship here is partly linked to Debendranath's desire to reformulate a more organised and institutionalised form of Hinduism, one that could provide the basis for a similarly structured, organised and focused national revival. Debendranath aimed at a move from a universal philosophy to the particular application and practice of that philosophy in a given historical and social context. With this in mind, he sought to establish which elements of the Hindu holy scriptures could form the basis for a *Brahmo* religious order and sought reliability and a binding basis for institutional, perhaps proto-national, movements. Following the creation of the *Brahmo Samaj* in 1843, he set about producing his own commentaries on the *Upanishads* and in 1850 published the *Brahmo Dharma*, a codified set of 'duties' corresponding to the *Brahmo* faith. Debendranath felt that dualism was central to the establishment of a new religious and social life and hence sought to update commentaries on the *Upanishads* through his own work.

But in this apparent contrast, we may be somewhat misrepresenting Rammohun. He may have greeted the British as instruments of 'Divine Providence' (a theme that recurs in the work of many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bengali intellectuals, including in Tagore's own writings) and 'considered their rule over India and the introduction of a European educational system into India to be both necessary and good'.[32] But at the same time, in Rammohun's work, and in particular in his later development, that 'cultural and religious self-assertiveness which would later be transformed into modern Indian nationalism became increasingly

pronounced', and 'the introduction of European means of orientation in the fields of politics and ethics, science and technology . . .[had] to be mediated by a new appropriation and "actualization" of the original teachings of Hinduism'.[33] Perhaps, then, the real change in the development of the *Brahmo Samaj* under Debendranath Tagore was more one of emphasis rather than any substantive disagreement: a shift of focus towards the apparently inherent validity of Indian culture as a core element of 'universal culture'. The arguments over dualism did not, in fact, mask the coherence between the positions of Rammohun and Debendranath. The latter, for example, stressed the idea that the source of spiritual truth was to be found in intuition and experience, which took precedence over scriptural forms of revelation. The notion that intuition has 'common-sense' components has certain affinities with nineteenth-century European romanticism, but it also ties in with a view that has all the hallmarks of Rammohun's belief that truth, love and goodness are common human themes. Clearly many exponents of religious world views across history and different cultures were inflected with similar tropes. Where Debendranath differed was in the degree to which he felt a need to assert that these universal elements were fully and manifestly present in Hindu culture. Such a move allowed for a defence of tradition, and for a rejuvenated and recovered Indian Hindu culture to take its equal place amongst the cultures and nations of the world.[34]

'Liberals' versus 'nationalists'

The contrasts between Debendranath and Rammohun over religious doctrine do not necessarily overshadow the similarities in perspective. But, as David Kopf has put it, there was 'a world of difference between the *Brahmo* nationalism of . . . Debendranath Tagore' and 'the Hindu nationalism of *Brahmo* defectors such as Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya and Aurobindo Ghose' who came after him. 'The greatest difference between the two generations', Kopf suggests, 'was [simply] a matter of time'.[35] The period in question is roughly 1870–1890, and it was one in which, as Sumit Sarkar has described, there was 'a hiatus between the myths of renaissance improvement and nationalist deliverance'.[36] By the early 1870s the delicate balance of universalism and the forces of national religion came to set the intellectual context for a whole generation of Bengali scholars and reformers. The tensions between a 'cross-cultural horizon of self-understanding and appeal' and 'receptivity and self-assertion' intersected with the twin forces of 'Westernization' and 'Hindu revivalism'. Together, these formed 'the background and basic condition of modern Hindu thinking and self-understanding'.[37] However, as we have seen with Rammohun and Debendranath, the dividing lines are not always so distinct. Indeed, as Rosinka Chaudhuri has noted, there were various 'cross-currents of contemporary intellectual thought'[38] at play in Bengali intellectual life at this time, and a 'study of the conflicting attitudes prevalent at the time . . . will show that it is very difficult to construct any straightforward picture of what, in the nineteenth century, constituted the Hindu right and what the liberal centre'.[39]

The main divide that might have affected a very young Rabindranath took place in 1866 between the 'Keshubites' and the *Adi* (original) *Brahmo Samaj*, at that

stage still led by Debendranath Tagore though taken over by Rajnarian Bose in the same year. Keshub Chandra Sen was born into a family of clerks and secretaries, but with influential connections. Keshub's grandfather had been an employee of Dwarkanath Tagore, and his father, Peary Mohan Sen, was Secretary of the Asiatic Society from 1831. Keshub held this same position in 1854, becoming a private secretary to Dwijendranath Tagore (Rabindranath's eldest brother) in 1857. He was admitted to the *Brahmo Samaj*, and between 1857 and 1866 he devoted himself to promoting its religious and social teachings. But in Calcutta in May 1866 Keshub delivered an address on *Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia*, which increased already widespread suspicion about the extent to which he had become influenced by Christianity.[40] In fact, it was not so much Christianity but a monistic sense of truth uniting the various world religions that marked the development of Keshub's thought. From Jesus to Buddha, Caitanya, Moses and Kabir, Keshub was 'much more inclined than Debendranath to search for "inspired" sources outside of Hinduism', and sought 'to demonstrate the universal harmony among traditions by compiling exemplary records of religious experience'.[41] On the issue of external influences, it has been suggested that

> [i]n his attempts to find a criterion for the truth and validity of 'intuition' and the 'voice of the heart' . . . [Keshub] adheres to such eighteenth and nineteenth century Western philosophical conceptions and 'instinctive belief', 'common sense', 'a priori truths', 'moral sense', 'primitive cognitions', and a complete arsenal of corresponding concepts.[42]

This may be correct, but there is probably little to be gained from seeing such impulses as having a Western origin. It was certainly the case that such notions – for example, as embodied in the intuitions and commentaries of the great *rishis* – also had deep roots in the Hindu tradition.

It was in this spirit that Keshub had founded the *Brahmo Samaj* of India as a 'progressive' wing of the *Brahmo Samaj* in 1866. But the resurrection under Keshub of what might be seen as the legacy of Rammohun was in many ways flowing against the tide. On 24 January 1868, Keshub laid the foundation stone of a new church in Calcutta: The Tabernacle of New Dispensation. The chapel was consecrated on 22 August 1869 and represented a bold declaration of spiritual universalism. But by 1878 the Keshubite faction would undergo its own schism, following his apparent regression into social convention when he married off his youngest daughter in highly orthodox fashion. The creation of the *Sadharan Brahmo Samaj* as the self-proclaimed defenders of progressive *Brahmoism* thus saw tensions between the universalist tendencies and nationalist sentiments prevalent in *Brahmoism* further accentuated, and it was into this heightened intellectual climate that the young Rabindranath was born and made his earliest associations and bonds. By the later nineteenth century, these would be complicated, and in other senses clarified, by a heightened 'Hindu revival' which saw the emergence of the staunchly traditionalist *Arya Samaj* and the aggressive nationalism of figures such as Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghose and Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

With regard to Tagore's earliest years, Keshub remains an interesting – and in some ways highly formative – figure. David Kopf proposes that a 'traditionalist-Westerniser' split can be traced back to Tagore's childhood (when Keshub lived at the Tagore house) and the years after 1866 when the Keshubite split was bitterly resisted by Rabindranath's elder brothers. As suggested earlier, part of Debendranath's intention in terms of strengthening the institutional and textual basis of the *Brahmo Samaj* had been to put down deep roots, in the hope that the coming national flowering would be nourished by the teachings of *Brahmoism*. In this respect, to the *Adi Brahmos* the Keshubite challenge 'not only violated the fundamental purpose and direction of the Hindu reformation, but threatened the cultural integrity of Hinduism itself'.[43] The response by *Adi Brahmo* leaders to Keshub was 'one of [a] militant defence of one's own culture or civilization', which Kopf equates to 'nationalism'.[44] As Tapan Raychaudhuri has commented, the 'saintly Debendranath' was amongst the chief anti-Christian agitators and the *Brahmo* journal *Tattvabodhini Patrika* was 'for a while, a mouthpiece of anti-Christian sentiments'.[45]

Debendranath Tagore and others such as Rajnarian Bose and Dwijendranath Tagore thus sought reform, but within an increasingly proto-national form. Dwijendranath was a self-trained philosopher, but developed a keen interest in indigenous industries. His thinking in this area, as well as his setting up of the Hindu *Mela* – a festival of Hindu culture funded in large part by the Tagore family – can be seen as 'a precursor of the *swadeshi* movement of the early 1900s'.[46] The idea of 'self-help' as a means of development put Dwijendranath within what might cautiously be called a 'modernist paradigm' of thought, at least when contrasted with the 'Hindu revivalists'. But this was 'modernism' based on Indian traditions, seeking stimulation from a comparative study of Western experience, but not seeking to replicate that experience. As Geoffrey Moorhouse has observed, Tagore's father 'spent a great deal of energy in fighting the missionary instincts of Christianity, starting the Hindu Charitable Institution, a free school for middle-class Hindu boys who would there be shielded from the influence of Serampore and its brothers in Christ'. The Tagores, says Moorhouse, 'wanted to see a reformed Hinduism, not one vitiated by outsiders or apostates'.[47] In fact, 'Debendranath was so strict in his observances that he once forbade his cousin Jnanendramohan to address the *Brahmo Samaj* in English, just as he once refused to accept a letter from a son-in-law because it had been written in the same language'.[48] In the sense that he sought to defend Hinduism against the perceived insults caused by missionary activity, Debendranath can certainly be seen as anticipating those who employed Hinduism as the basis of their anti-imperialism. At other times Debendranath's grounding of universalism in the validity of indigenous, or national, culture partly blurred the differences between Debendranath and Rammohun. However, as the nineteenth century moved into its concluding quarter the increasingly antagonistic relationship between British imperial rulers and native Indian intellectuals saw a hardening conservatism,[49] and within the *Adi Brahmo* tradition of the later nineteenth century, which formed the core environment for Rabindranath's early enculturation, 'nationalism was more characteristic than universalism'.[50]

In discussing the different streams of thought in Bengali intellectual life towards the latter half of the nineteenth century, David Kopf refers to an apparent 'traditionalist–Westerniser' split, the 'polar opposites' to which Tagore was 'alternately attracted'.[51] This line of argument seems a little tenuous because of his insistence on adding psychological to social and historical explanations. Throughout his book on the *Brahmo Samaj* Kopf deploys the idea that Bengali intellectuals passed through a form of 'identity crisis': a concept suggestive of some kind of psychological flaw; perhaps something inherent in the mind of the individuals concerned. Society, culture and intellect at large pass through systemic shifts, and these may or may not be adequately characterised as 'crises'. The individuals concerned are seeking to navigate their way through these historical changes, to interpret them and to shape them. The idea of social, intellectual and cultural structures as both shaped, and shaped by, individual agents does not seem to be enhanced if we add the psychological category of 'identity crisis'. On the contrary, it misleadingly implies an empty centre to the mental world, which sees the individual mind lurch between extremes.

Kopf's assertion that '[l]iberals defended the right to apply modern values from the West to reform their own society; [whereas] nationalists defended the right to preserve their own cultural integrity against the arrogant claim of Western superiority' displays – it seems to me – a limited understanding of the phenomenon of nationalism, which is not corrected by his further comment that the nationalist is 'a different psychological type, predisposed from his earliest manifestation of an identity conflict to shape his dialectic between "them and us" rather than, as with the liberal, between tradition and modernity'.[52] As I will argue explicitly in Chapter 3, these types of categories do little to illuminate Tagore's position. In this particular case, Kopf seems to imply that 'nationalist' is an essential category: an infantile reaction to the challenge of modernity.[53] Such an interpretation is at best simplistic.

Delineating Tagore's path towards anti-nationalism

Rabindranath remains a controversial figure, not least because the central intellectual problems involved in navigating tradition and modernity are still at the core of many current debates in India. He thus continues to provoke extreme responses, both positive and negative. We can certainly take note of the basic fact that Rabindranath's grandfather was a co-founder of the *Brahmo* movement with Rammohun Roy, that his father revitalised the movement and that his brothers were active and dedicated members of the *Adi Brahmo Samaj*. This suggests that, in general terms, Rabindranath's life and thought had to have been affected at a general level by a particular set of historical circumstances. But at the level of the particular, Tagore himself was keen to stress the individual nature of his thinking, and there are reasonably objective grounds from which to support the idea of a strong sense of agency and intentionality on Tagore's part.

Despite the clear direction signalled by his father and his elder brothers, the 1880s saw Rabindranath increasingly occupy the outsider's position with which he

would grow familiar and accustomed. Unlike his elder brothers, he eschewed formal education and at the age of 21, in 1882, he had 'no worldly responsibilities to concern him' with 'an income from the tenants of the family's estates . . . assured him for life'.[54] He spent much of the 1890s in rural East Bengal, cut off from the organised urban intelligentsia of Calcutta, and it was during this period that he may have developed both his sense of isolation from the *bhadralok*, and a greater understanding of the lives of the rural poor.[55] In an essay on 'The Religion of an Artist', published in 1936, Tagore wrote retrospectively of his (by then) famous sense of individuality. 'If I am reluctant to speak about my own view of religion', he said, 'it is because I have not come to my own religion through the portals of passive acceptance of a particular view owing to some accident of birth'.[56]

We do not need to take Tagore's self-interpretation at face value, and we can accept that it is flattering for any individual to stress the unique aspects of his or her being. But we should see an intellectual such as Tagore acting within, and often against, the structures of thought and culture into which he was born. Despite his frequent use of a 'liberal–nationalist' dichotomy, Kopf implicitly acknowledges this when he writes that 'Tagore's ideology, too often viewed against some vague, East–West encounter model, was really the outcome of *his response* to the challenge of the unresolved problems . . . of the legacy of *Brahmo* social history'.[57] From this perspective we get a better sense of the different periods of intellectual development that Tagore went through, and the way in which he drew upon his intellectual inheritance whilst also evolving an individual position. This is crucial to a periodisation of Tagore's life in which he first embraced the *swadeshi* sentiment, but then dramatically turned away from it political nationalist implications.

The partition of Bengal

The period roughly corresponding to 1901–1906 marks a seminal moment in Tagore's life: one in which his future intellectual trajectory would be set. It was a period that saw Rabindranath deeply involved in the *swadeshi* movement, which was concentrated in opposition to Lord Curzon's partition of Bengal, and also a time when he was influenced by the mercurial figure of Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya.

Tagore had spent the years between 1891 and 1901 managing his family's estates in eastern Bengal. There, in the pacific rural bliss of Shelidah, Tagore had a great deal of time for poetry and contemplation. But he also gained a deeper insight into the daily travails of India's overwhelmingly agricultural society, not least what he saw to be the often indifferent, frequently callous behaviour of Raj officials. The lack of self-belief on the part of his tenants, and their apparent helplessness in the face of corrupt state functionaries, led Rabindranath towards what Dutta and Robinson call 'two unshakeable convictions'.[58] These were 'that Indians must help themselves, not wait for the government to help them; and that India could not regenerate itself without regenerating its villages'.[59] It also developed within him a belief that the disconnectedness of the Calcutta *bhadralok* from the masses was a growing obstacle to any form of collective, or national,

improvement. He wrote satirical essays that 'dissected the pretensions of almost every Bengali politician to represent the interests of his country', and through the 1890s Tagore uttered 'many burning words in Bengali on the subject of national degeneracy'.[60] By 1901 it was time for Tagore to take action himself.

Tagore's school in Shantiniketan – inaugurated on 21 December 1901 – was conceived as a major project of regeneration. Evidence of Tagore's romantic frame of mind at this point in time is to be found in a letter he wrote to the Prince of Tripura asking for support for his new project. 'I wish to keep my students away from all the luxuries of European life and any blind infatuation with Europe', he said, 'and thus lead them in the ways of the sacred and unsullied Indian tradition of poverty'.[61] Interestingly, although the school can be seen as a learning environment that looked back to the ancient forest hermitage of India for inspiration, when the school started there were five pupils and five teachers, three of whom were Christians. Of those three, one was a remarkable figure with whom Tagore had become much impressed.

Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya (1861–1907) was a contemporary of Tagore, born into a Brahmin family, 35 miles north of Calcutta. Following in the footsteps of his uncle, Brahmabandhab converted to Christianity, joining the Protestant Church in February 1891 and six months later converting to Catholicism. The young Brahmabandhab had always been attracted to an aggressive, action-oriented way of life, and Dutta and Robinson describe him as 'a charismatic and muscular Bengali'.[62] Ashis Nandy suggests that he was influenced by his grandmother's caustic comment that 'lectures have finished the country', and so undertook a series of exuberant escapades in his youth in search of action and military training.

> At the same time, the idea of the ascetic warrior that had become a part of the *bhadralok* folklore since the publication of Bankimchandra's *Anandamath*, was re-emerging in . . . [Brahmabandhab's] imagination as a practical proposition, probably sanctified by his reading of *Gita* as a political text.[63]

So, despite his conversion to Catholicism this bellicose, martial trend in Brahmabandhab's life had deeper roots in his Hindu upbringing. Julius Lipner points out that the family deity was the goddess *Kali*, not 'the mild, sensuous figure [which] the sage Ramakrishna popularised later in Bengal, but the awesome deity current in popular devotion – of frightful countenance, terrible to her enemies but beneficent to her devotees'.[64]

By the late 1890s, Brahmabandhab's increasingly unorthodox Catholicism – laced as it was with *Vedantic* Hinduism – had got him into trouble with the Catholic authorities of Calcutta. It was around this time that Brahmabandhab, who had started a literary journal in 1894, began to take note of Tagore's poetry. At this stage of Tagore's life he was not receiving a great deal of critical acclaim, so Brahmabandhab's attentions led to the development of a mutual friendship. This coincided with the birth of Tagore's new school in 1901, and Tagore asked Brahmabandhab not simply to be one of the first teachers at the school, but to be its headteacher. This was to be the path that Brahmabandhab would follow. But

his stay in Shantiniketan was brief, not least because of Tagore's dislike of Brahmabandhab's disciplinarian stance (the kind of discipline learned on the cricket field, according to Rabindranath's son, Rathindranath).[65]

But Tagore, still in the full flux of his patriotic phase, continued to be very interested in Brahmabandhab's fate. Brahmabandhab was a deeply learned, spiritual man but he was also one who took to extremes of religious and political persuasion, which by the beginning of the 1900s saw him apostasise and return to the Hindu fold. Driven on by what he saw as the enormous insult of Curzon's partition, he started an anti-British newspaper in Bengali and by 1907 had been accused of sedition. As Nandy tells us, Brahmabandhab refused to appear in court, saying: 'I do not want to take part in the trial because I do not believe that in carrying out my humble share of the God appointed mission of *Swaraj* [self-rule] I am in any way accountable to the alien people who happen to rule over us.'[66] Whilst the British sought prosecution Brahmabandhab fell ill and eventually died from a tetanus infection in October 1907. His death was seen by many Indians as a heroic suicide, undertaken to avoid the humiliation of being tried by the British.[67]

Plate 1 Tagore c. 1905, during his *swadeshi* phase. The violence of this period led him to turn his back on nationalism as a political ideology. (Photo courtesy of Rabindra Bhavana, Santiniketan.)

During the same period – between 1901 and about 1908 – Tagore went through a phase of ambivalence and intellectual turmoil, brought on by the fast changing events around him. As Rosinka Chaudhuri has noted, 'Rabindranath himself, the most successful and talented of writer activists in this period, wrote extensively on the Hindu component in our [Bengali] national life in this, one of his most revivalist phases'.[68] In *Swadeshi Samaj*, Tagore had asked: 'will not Hinduism be able to bring every one of us day by day into bonds of affinity and devotion to this *Bharatbarsha* of ours – the abode of our gods, the hermitage of our *rishis*, the land of our forefathers?'.[69] This 'Hindu revivalist' flirtation was short lived, not least because the violence unleashed by the patriotic fervour of the *swadeshi* movement deeply shocked Rabindranath. Similarly, the tragic fall of Brahmabandhab was a stark warning for Tagore. Ashis Nandy even implies that Brahmabandhab represented Tagore's darker *alter ego*, hence, perhaps, the fascination.[70] Brahmabandhab's radical shift from a 'liberal' Catholic convert – albeit one steeped in the ascetic martial traditions of Hinduism – to a belief in 'an integral Hindu system' that 'had to be kept undefiled from Western penetration at all costs'[71] was for Rabindranath the disturbing – but nevertheless logical – corollary of the nationalism of Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghose and Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

In the pretext to his 1936 novel *Four Chapters*, Tagore makes explicit the connection between the novel's content – concerned as it is with patriotism, nationalism, violence and liberation – and his memory of Brahmabandhab. Writing about the period of partition, Tagore provides a commentary on Brahmabandhab which is worth quoting at length.

> I found, one day, that the *sanyasin* [Brahmabandhab] had flung himself into this whirlpool of emotional ferment overwhelming the entire nation. He started the *Sandhya*; the intoxicant he began pouring out in this (daily) newspaper in fiery language raced through the veins of all our countrymen. It was in this newspaper that the first intimations of terrorism . . . in Bengal began appearing in oblique references and hints. Such a momentous transformation on the part of the *Vedantic sanyasin* I had never imagined. I did not meet with him for many years during this period of our history. I had believed that perhaps he had turned away from me in contempt, sensing the different paths we adhered to . . . [A]ll around us a spate of disruptions and tyrannies began making their presence felt. One day, when I was alone in my room in the third floor of our Jorashanko home, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya suddenly entered the room. In the course of our conversation, something of our former discussions also came up. After we had talked for some time, he rose to take his leave. At the threshold, he turned around to face me. And he said, 'Rabi Babu, I have greatly fallen' . . . having said this, he left immediately. Clearly, it was to say this heartrending sentence that he had come to visit me. But he was enmeshed in the toils of action – there was no scope of release. These were his final words to me, and this was the last time we met.[72]

We might speculate, with some evidence in support, that the shift that had taken place in Tagore's own mind became manifest in 1908. In a speech to the *Sadharan Brahmo Samaj*, Tagore spoke of how he now – post-*swadeshi* – aimed to explicitly reach out beyond the confines of Calcutta, the Bengali intelligentsia and indeed India. He wished to reach out to an international, and especially English, audience. 'If we do not come in contact with what is best in the Englishman, seeing him only as a soldier, or merchant or bureaucrat', he told his audience, 'if we will not stand on the plane where man may communicate with man; if, in short, the Indian and the Englishman stay apart – they will simply be objects of mutual repugnance'.[73]

With *swadeshi* violence and the fall of Brahmabandhab as the impetus, in 1910 we also see a reconciliation with Keshub as Tagore drew upon his deep reserves of intellectual and culture heritage for the purposes of a new project. In the Keshub Sen anniversary lecture of that year, Tagore claimed that '[t]ruth is to be sought in all religions – it is to be revealed and then accepted', and that '[t]his was Keshub's burning desire'. 'This is what he achieved [through comparative religion] and then revealed it in the name of the New Dispensation. When I realised this, all my earlier antagonism for him vanished and I came to pay him homage'.[74] David Kopf suggests that this speech illustrated that Keshub's 'recognition of the unity underlying religious diversity was now accepted by Rabindranath as a valuable and courageous defence of the truth'[75], and this does indeed seem to be a seminal moment in the development of Tagore's post-*swadeshi* thought, in which he reconciled himself to the universalism of Keshub. In 1911 Tagore revived the *Tattwabodhini Patrika* in an attempt to unite the three streams of *Brahmoism: Adi*, Keshubite and *Sadharan*. It is surely no coincidence that just as he was preparing for his travels to the West, Rabindranath, now in his early fifties, was becoming convinced that the *Brahmo* heritage 'had to be preserved and elaborated upon as an antidote for what he diagnosed as the disease of contemporary Bengali society and politics'[76], and he saw 'no incompatibility in his mind between his Hindu identity and socio-political universalism'.[77]

Appearance, reality and action

So what does the 'mature', post-*swadeshi* philosophy of Tagore look like, and how does it relate to his mission from 1912 onwards to reach communion with the West? Tagore started from the premise that the essential message of the *Upanishads* relates to the idea of a single ultimate reality; what the *Upanishadic* seers called *Brahman*. This particular monistic expression, associated with the work of Shankaracharya, was adopted by Rammohun and rejected by Debendranath. But the central point about this *Upanishadic* monism is, as Kalyan Sen Gupta explains, that 'the *Upanishads* purport to highlight the central metaphysical truth about ourselves . . . [that] each of us is an expression of the universal soul, or, put differently, each of us *is* this same soul or *atman*'.[78] The ethical implications of such a metaphysical perspective – which Tagore shared – are clear.

Rabindranath's interpretation of the *Upanishads* is one that could be characterised as a form of 'concrete monism': that is, human reality is grounded in an

organic whole derived from *Brahman*.[79] For Rabindranath, reality is one, an ultimate whole comprehending the multiplicity of existence, and in this basic sense Rabindranath owes a debt to Rammohun, rather than to his father's dualism. Bhabatosha Datta, in his recent work *Resurgent Bengal*, suggests that 'from the *Upanishads*, Rabindranath learnt the existence of Absolute Reality that surpasses all the barriers of caste, creed, religion and nationality . . . it was neither a scientific abstraction nor . . . [the] sociological concept of modern political philosophers'.[80] And yet, whilst Datta is right to stress that Tagore's position derived neither from science nor from sociology, the idea that his position was deduced from the *Upanishads* is misleading. Tagore often referred to the *Upanishads* as a source, but they did not provide him with a complete picture.[81] In fact, in what I'll refer to as orthodox *Upanishadic Advaita Vedanta*, there is a sharp dichotomy between the world of *maya* (appearance) and the world of reality that stands behind it.[82] It is for this reason that the idea of Tagore as a straightforward exponent of *Vedanta* – first put to Western readers by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan – is misleading.[83] In Tagore, the world of *maya* can be seen as 'an integral part of the world of truth', and in holding this position we see elements of a distinctive Tagorean position, as opposed to a merely derivative one.[84] But in order to further our understanding of the ontology of *maya* for Tagore, we need to consider what he means by the idea of 'Personal God'.

In an important article on Tagore's 'Personal Man and Personal God', R. D. Bhattacharya provides a convincing explanation of Tagore's understanding of God. According to Bhattacharya, Tagore thinks at two levels, 'the essential and the existential'. God remains 'absolute', but not in the Christian sense of absolute power and absolute kindness: i.e., a God serving as 'an enormous parent-figure'.[85] Rather, God is a primary ontological category. Crucially, as the force which gives rise to the human world, we need to understand that God's creative work is unfinished: i.e., it is in the process of moving towards something. With this idea in mind, Bhattacharya proposes that Tagore's 'Personal God' is intimately connected to his idea of Man: that is to say, both are ultimately grounded in an essence of creativity.[86] The idea of creative 'surplus' is the defining characteristic of man, and accounts for the predominant characteristic of our lived, existential experience: our overwhelming and determining drive towards communication and union with others. Likewise, Tagore's God is 'artistic-personal'. According to Bhattacharya, Tagore believes that artistic activity is a combination of 'groping in darkness' and 'seeing light suddenly'. The 'groping' is 'symbolised in the notion of *maya*'. In this sense, there are distinct 'unconscious' (Bhattacharya later uses the word 'subconscious') elements.[87] If the world is the creation of a Personal God, then *maya* can be seen as an aspect of God's creative impulse, which is incomplete.

The position developed by Bhattacharya resonates with Tagore's social and political writings, and the way in which Tagore believes we actually live in the world. Tagore is explicit that metaphysical speculation is just that, and 'we can never go beyond man in all that we know and feel'.[88] This should not be mistaken for a form of anthropomorphism. Rather, it is the affirmation of the core elements of Tagore's position: that the phenomenology of direct emotional experience

conveys the deep conviction that God and Man, man and man, as well as Man and Nature are fundamentally not in a relationship of opposition and antagonism. Instead, as Sen Gupta has put it, the self is 'decentred'. A person is without 'own-being', separate from others, and can only be understood as existing 'out there', in the world and amongst others. This is very close to what Heidegger calls our 'being-in-the-world' and 'is the crucial dimension of human being', as opposed to 'egohood or private autonomy'.[89] As Radhakrishnan put it, 'self and not-self into which the universe has been dichotomised are no rivals, but are the different expressions of the same Absolute'.[90]

By deploying the idea of the unconscious impulse towards creation, Bhattacharya's interpretation of Tagore creates an intimate bond between God and Man, retaining the idea of the Absolute but suggesting that the world of Man – the world of God's creation – is still in the process of becoming, and moving towards something higher. Bhattacharya suggests that such an approach 'gets rid of an empty Absolute, without throwing out the total ontological framework'. It also 'demolishes the twin fallacy of omnipotence and omniscience (with *maya* as integral to Him, He is partly nescient and since He does not know all, his power is effectively limited)'.[91] God without his creation is incomplete, but God as a totality or 'Absolute' has two aspects. 'In the consciousness aspect of God, we find all the supreme personal values like love, joy, and cooperation, and yet the *maya* aspect of him remains incomprehensible, baffling, and, to most men, terrible.'[92] This gives us a sense, I would suggest, that God needs man and the world just as much as the reverse may be true, for 'God the total person, the personal-artistic combination of the benign and the terrible . . . strives to help, to love and to be understood'.[93] Like all artists, 'He wants to communicate' and 'the personal man stands at the receiving end of the channel of communication'.[94] Tagore's idea of God's immanent creativity, including elements of the unconscious as *maya*, helps us to understand the presence of joy and sorrow, life and death, love and terror. For Tagore, all of these are aspects of the one Absolute, and it is through an acceptance of this that we move towards God. Just as we acknowledge the various aspects of God's creation, so we acknowledge our creative essence. For Rabindranath, it was the spontaneity and creativity of the everyday that confirmed the validity of the insights contained in *Upanishads*. Tagore's favoured examples were the Sufi mystics, the Shantal tribal people living in the vicinity of Shantiniketan and the Bauls of Bengal.[95] What is affirming about such people – in Tagore's eyes – is that they live a supposedly unalienated life, in tune with nature and the essence of God's creativity. The idea of creativity and the everyday world are thus central to any understanding of Tagore's philosophy.

The social and political implications of Tagore's philosophy

It is crucial to recognise Tagore's notion of a concrete monism which yet sees the world as incomplete, still in the process of becoming, if one is to move away from some of the clichés about the 'abstract mysticism' of Tagore's thought proffered by British commentators following the publication of *Gitanjali*, and also used

against Tagore – for political reasons – by realists or materialists in Calcutta as the nationalist struggle progressed. This creativity and its implication are embodied in the concept of *jiban-debata*, a 'life-god'. Rabindranath himself described this concept as a 'baffling mystery', but eventually came to resolve this mystery in his own mind in terms of the very notion that 'the divine was to be found in humanity and that humanity was forever in search of the divine'.[96] In other words, *jiban-debata* was the revelation of God to man, and the presence of God in man: the 'life spirit', which constitutes 'the meeting point of the *Vedantic* Absolute and the theistic God'.[97] In 1927 Tagore described *jiban-debata* as 'the limited aspect of divinity which has its unique place in the individual life, in contrast to that which belongs to the universe'.[98] As William Radice has insightfully put it, 'just as God governs and penetrates and harmonises all aspects of an endlessly varied universe, so this *jiban-debata* governed and penetrated and harmonised Tagore's own varied creative activities'.[99]

Tagore's work is pervaded by a sense of a harmonising force, drawing together the many into the one. In the social world this is suggestive of ideas of inter-dependence and inter-subjectivity, and is connected to Tagore's conception of freedom, which 'is not that simply of independence and non-interference', since such a conception 'is only embraced by people who already feel alienated from one another'.[100] As he put it in *Gitanjali*: 'Deliverance is not for me in renunciation/I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight'.[101] Tagore's sense of freedom is 'an altogether more "positive" thing and requires harmony in one's relations with others, and, indeed, the world as a whole'.[102] As Tagore put it in his 1930 lectures on *The Religion of Man*, 'in the social or political field, the lack of freedom is based upon the spirit of alienation, on the imperfect realisation of the One'.[103]

In this context, it is important to stress that abstract monism is not something that Tagore countenances.[104] Rabindranath places a great deal of emphasis on the necessity of action and direct experience, a form of worship that centres on Man and what he sees as the reality of love. It is in this sense that we can say that 'his conception . . . [of Man] has a rational basis in the practical nature of Man'.[105] As Tagore wrote in 1918,

> [o]ur life is the material whereby we have to build the image of the ideal of truth . . . But life, like all other materials, contains an obstinate antagonism to the idea, to which it must give shape. Only through the active process of creation, can such antagonism be discovered at every step and chiselled away at every stroke.[106]

For Tagore love is a central concept because of its lived, *active* nature. Indeed, 'the fact can never be ignored, that we have our greatest delight when we realise ourselves in others, and this is the definition of love'.[107] Love, according to Tagore, is in fact the most real and truthful element of human existence: '[t]his love gives us the testimony of the great whole, which is the complete and final truth of man'.[108] To illustrate this further, consider the following extract from an

extended letter to C. F. Andrews. Andrews had written to Tagore about an image he had seen in Shantiniketan which had disturbed him. Tagore's reply was as follows:

> The impulse to realise comes from the fullness of joy but the process must be through pain . . . Always there is completeness with the incomplete, otherwise there would be no pity in us for the suffering; no love in us for the imperfect . . . You saw the monkey dead, entangled in the telegraph wires, and all round it was beauty in all its superbness [sic]. The incongruity struck you as cruel. That is something. The cruelty of it would not be apparent to you if ugliness were absolute. You feel the pity of it because there is the ideal of perfection. Here lies our hope and the ultimate solution of our doubts – in this ideal. In creation our joy is always getting the better of the pain: otherwise our sympathy for pain would be meaningless. For then a moral duty would be to attain utter callousness – whereas on the contrary our moral duty is to cultivate the sensitiveness that makes us feel the pain not immediately ours. It shows love is more real than pain. Then why should we despair? We cannot fathom the mystery of existence. But this much we have known, that there is love which is greater in truth than pain and death. Is that not sufficient for us?[109]

The experience of love is manifest evidence of the existence of a Personal God. In his essay *Man*, originally delivered as a lecture in 1937, Tagore elaborated the theme of 'Universal Man', which features in many of his English essays and lectures. Tagore declared that Man 'must prove that in him dwells the Eternal Man, the Universal Man, the Man who is beyond the bounds of death'.[110]

> We attain our unity with this dweller of our heart to the extent that we realise truth in knowledge and feeling. All the misfortunes of man are caused by the obscuration of the Inner Man, through searching Him in external forms, in making strangers of our ownselves [sic].[111]

Much of what is central to the philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, especially as it relates to his career in English letters, is contained in this passage. Tagore distinguishes his view from that of the *Shankaracharya*-inspired position taken up by Rammohun. The Infinite Personality is also manifest in Man, and in this sense there is room in Tagore for a theism – a form of concrete monism – which speaks of God in Man. God remains separate from Man, and hence an object of worship. But such worship must be *of that part of God contained in Man*. Hence, Tagore does not see the idea of a Personal God as contradicting *Vedanta*, and instead insists that God has to be humanised, to be God and Man at the same time: 'if this faith be blamed for being anthropomorphic then man is to be blamed for being man, and the lover for loving his dear one as a person instead of as a principle of psychology'.[112] On this basis it is ultimately in the world of experience and action that, according to Tagore, this truth is revealed, and hence the trope of Tagore the

other-worldly mystic – too easily repeated by both European and Indian commentators over the years – needs to be dropped. If we persist with this myth then the vast corpus of Tagore's writings, and indeed his active life's work, are rendered largely unintelligible.

Communion with strangers

When thinking about Tagore within the context of nineteenth-century Bengali intellectual life, it is important to speak both of continuity and discontinuity. In *Europe Reconsidered* – one of the richest and most illuminating accounts of intellectual exchange between Bengal and Britain during the colonial period – Tapan Raychaudhuri has explained the complex ways in which nineteenth-century Bengali intellectuals received and assessed their own intellectual, cultural and spiritual heritage, the reinterpretations of that heritage emanating from the new work of Western Orientalists, as well as the varied corpus of ideas originating from Europe itself. His focus is on three in particular: Bhudev Mukhopadhyay (1827–1894); Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894); and Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902). Through a close analysis of the life and writings, Raychaudhuri shows, contrary to the 'view regarding the colonial intelligentsia's unquestioning acceptance of Western superiority and the corresponding inferiority of the colonised',[113] that Bengali intellectuals exhibited 'a measure of self-confidence in relation to Europe', which was 'founded on the social experience of several decades of contact'.[114] In other words, the approach to European ideas was critical, selective and often instrumental; and it exhibited more agency on the part of Bengali intellectuals than is implied by the assumptions of a Saidian Orientalist discourse.

In addition, we need to note the shift in Bengali intellectual life from what might be called proto-nationalist critique, assertions of defiance and autonomy to a fully-fledged nationalist ideology. Nationalism, in its strongly political-ideological form, makes a fetish of boundaries: the formal sovereignty of the nation state.[115] Even as late as the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, political demands against the British were being made for greater autonomy and representation, but not complete independence (what Gandhi would later call *purna swaraj*). For some members of Congress, the objective was to embarrass the British into governing India in a more 'British' fashion.[116] Hence it is difficult to describe the early Congress as 'nationalist' in any technical sense of the word. By the time of the partition of Bengal in 1905, much had changed. The motivations for the partition, effected by then Viceroy Lord Curzon, have caused much historical controversy since independence, with so-called apologists for empire stressing the administrative motivations for reducing the size of the 'unwieldy' province and nationalist historians seeing this as yet another example of the deliberate British political policy of 'divide and rule'. What is certain is that both politically and administratively the partition was an unmitigated disaster, with Bengal being reunited in 1912, after seven turbulent years of resistance and rebellion.[117] What was perhaps most significant was the strength of feeling that it engendered amongst the Bengali population, and particularly amongst the intelligentsia.[118]

Some of the foremost militant and radical opponents of the British Raj emerged in Bengal during the *swadeshi* period.[119]

By 1908, the increasingly violent turn of the *swadeshi* movement led Tagore to make public speeches in Calcutta denouncing violence, and to express ideas that he would later elaborate in his debates with Gandhi about the proper way to approach British rule.

> Many of us have the illusion that our subjection is not like a headache, an ailment pestering us from within, but like a load on the head, pressing down on us from without in the shape of the British Government; and that relief will be ours as soon as we can shake off that load by some means or other. Well, the matter is not so simple as that. The British government is not the cause of our subjection; it is merely a symptom of a deeper subjection on our part.[120]

Anger towards the British did not seem an appropriate response to the problem of empire. Something deeper and more transformative was required. And yet the legacy of Upadhyaya's fall from a Hindu-Catholic syncretism to a rejectionist terrorism haunted Rabindranath.

> Upadhyaya was a psychological threat. At one time, Upadhyaya had summed up for Tagore Indian attempts to resolve the contradictions between East and West, and between Hindu and non Hindu. Upadhyaya had achieved in personal terms what Tagore was only now struggling to do.[121]

This made Upadhyaya's turn to violence a very difficult one, for it reminded Tagore of his own earlier nationalist stance, 'which the poet had – perhaps painfully – transcended'.[122]

It is important to reiterate just how formative the events and memories of the *swadeshi* era were for Tagore, and hence make a proper distinction between Tagore's thought – particularly his thoughts on nationalism, colonialism and the West – pre- and post-partition. As Nandy has commented, the true depth of the distinction is difficult for some, and 'may sound strange to Indians whose own nationalism has been significantly shaped by Tagore and his creative works'. For example, 'many former freedom fighters recall how they faced police violence during the freedom movement singing Tagore songs'.[123] It is on the basis of this way of remembering him that he is often referred to as a nationalist, as if his English language writings from the post-*swadeshi* period are of no significance. But the earlier, and far more transient *swadeshi* Tagore was categorically not the Tagore of his English language writings, and this is of great significance as, ahead of his visit to the West in 1912, Tagore charts a distinctly new course.

In an essay entitled 'The Future of India' published in *The Modern Review* in 1911 (though originally given in lecture form in Calcutta), indications of this new position become clear. Surveying Bengal's recent experience of partition and the militant response, Tagore asks a rhetorical question: 'how should we regard the hostility which has recently sprung up between the English and the educated (and

even uneducated) public of India?'.[124] The reply that Tagore gives related first and foremost to India's conception of its own self. 'We once went abegging to Europe, foolishly, inertly', he wrote, and

> [o]ur reason was so clouded that we could not see that true acquisition cannot come from *begging*, that knowledge and political power alike have to be *earned*, i.e., to be acquired by one's own power [*atmashakti*] . . . a manner of acquisition which is humiliating to us cannot be a source of gain . . . [f]rom this cause it is that for some time past we have rebelled against Western education and influence . . . [h]itherto we had been taking things from the West without examination, without objection, weakly, humbly; we could not test them, appraise their value and thereby make them our own.[125]

In this sense, Tagore was arguing that 'the present conflict between the English and the Indians is the result of this reaction: – our inner nature was being crushed while we took in English thought and power inertly, submissively'.[126] The militant nationalist response was on account of 'the pain in our nature [which] accumulated unseen', and 'has now suddenly revealed itself and turns the heart of the country strongly away from things English'.[127] Tagore's argument here can be linked to Tapan Raychaudhuri's characterisation of certain nineteenth-century Bengali intellectuals as receiving and assessing Western culture on their own terms. It was active engagement that Tagore was seeking, steering a course between passive reception and aggressive rejection. Tagore listed pioneering spirits whom he saw as having adopted this approach, including Rammohun, Vivekananda and (perhaps surprisingly) Bankimchandra. Violent nationalists had urgent lessons to learn from the 'great men' of Bengal. Tagore's message was that 'the West has entered the house of India' but 'we cannot turn it out in disappointment, we must make it our own by our own strength'.[128] This, of course, was less a statement of fact than a plea.

As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, Tagore actually held a distinctly deterministic view of history and the 'meeting of the races' was part of an unfolding historical process. But he also saw a role for human agency: the power to advance or retard historical movement. 'If we lack that native power of absorption, then the aim of time meets with a check and causes a revolution. On the other hand, if the West grudges to express its true self to us, that will also bring about unrest.'[129] That 'native power of absorption' had to involve a rediscovery of the inner cultural and spiritual strength required to evaluate Western contributions to Indian civilisation from a position of equality. A position of equality meant also taking what is 'best in India' to the West.

The transition from the *swadeshi* to post-*swadeshi* period illustrates Tagore's desire to turn away from rejection towards engagement, and from violent and destructive forms of negotiating with the British towards a creative and constructive journey of self-discovery. The type of constructive activity to which Tagore felt he could contribute was initially in the field of education, and it was to his school at Shantiniketan that he began to devote his energies. Tagore's school

would develop and grow, and by 1921, Shantiniketan also saw the foundation of the *Visva-Bharati* (universal learning) University, which embodied the full spirit of Tagore's ambition to engage the world. Writing in the introduction to W. W. Pearson's 1916 biography of the Shantiniketan school, Tagore recalled his thoughts about the nature of *swadeshi* and the idea that freedom was to be won by constructive effort.

> I seemed to choke for breath in a hideous nightmare of our present time, meaningless in its petty ambitions . . . and felt in me the struggle of my motherland for awakening in spiritual emancipation. Our endeavours after political ambition seemed to me unreal to the core, and beautifully feeble in their utter helplessness. I felt that it is a blessing of Providence that begging should be an unprofitable profession, and that only to him that hath shall be given. I said to myself that we must seek for our own inheritance, and with it buy a true place in the world.[130]

This desire to find 'a true place in the world' was a driving force behind Tagore's turn from what he saw as destructive anti-Britishness to the search for a constructive path towards freedom, which would constitute India's proper contribution to a universal civilisation. Likewise, we should see Tagore's decision to travel to London in 1912, to translate his Bengali poetry and begin a new career as a writer of English prose as a decisive move towards such engagement.

In contrast to this more profound impetus, the decision to embark upon a journey to Britain in 1912 has been portrayed as something of a whim on Tagore's part. It seems more convincing to me to see it as part of a new and novel response to colonialism that had been evolving in Tagore's mind for a number of years. Tagore embarked upon his mission in the West with what can be characterised as a particular view of India and its cultural, social and religious history, which would be deployed in strategic terms to contribute to a 'new dawn' in the relations between man and man. Tagore 'visualised India as a commingling of various races and cultures' and 'he had a vision of national integration which he called the ocean of humanity'.[131] But this special attribute of India would constitute his message to the world. The particular experience of India was an aspect of the universal, but one that had become lost, or at least suppressed, in the West. However, as we shall see, although I am keen to stress that Tagore is the subject-agent of this intellectual move, he was far from being the sole author of its outcome.

2 England and the Nobel Prize

Tagore at home in the world

> We have been very much interested with the English poems of a Buddhist mystic, Tagore, – which have been published in England lately with a preface by Yeats . . . Mysticism of all kinds is getting fashionable in some circles, in reaction, no doubt, to the cold materialism of the 19th-century scientists.[1]
>
> Robert Bridges

This chapter examines how Tagore set about actualising the philosophical positions outlined in Chapter 1. In other words it takes us from ideas to intentions. It looks at Tagore's visit to London in 1912, the first in his post-*swadeshi* phase, and it aims to shed light on the reasons why Tagore embarked on this voyage. It also looks at some of the expectations and prejudices of Tagore's contacts in London such as William Rothenstein, W. B. Yeats and Ezra Pound; some of the ideas about Tagore articulated in the British press; and the Nobel Prize controversy. The popular narrative of Tagore in the West has too often revolved around the role of Yeats in supposedly securing the Nobel Prize for Tagore. Correcting some of the enduring myths about Tagore's relations with metropolitan intellectuals is a starting point for a better appreciation of Tagore as a purposeful historical actor, and hence to understanding both his real motivations for visiting London in 1912 and the grander, more theoretically interesting nature of Tagore's project.

A passage to England, 1912–1913

Tagore's son Rathindranath, who was closely associated with his father's work and accompanied him on his 1912 voyage, has written that as a result of ill health 'doctors and friends prevailed upon . . . [his father] to take a long sea-voyage and visit Europe for treatment and an operation, if necessary'.[2] In a letter to his niece, written from London on 6 May 1913, Tagore provides further evidence to support the idea that his new career in English letters was 'accidental': 'you may wonder why such a crazy ambition should possess one in such a weak state of health,' Tagore writes 'but believe me, I did not undertake this task in a spirit of reckless bravado. I simply felt an urge to recapture, through the medium of another language, the feeling and sentiments which had created such a feast of joy within me in these days gone by'.[3]

Nirad C. Chaudhuri has hinted at a deeper drive emanating from Tagore's dissatisfaction with his reputation in his native Bengal. 'The idea of obtaining from the English literary world', writes Chaudhuri, 'what he had not secured in Bengal must have been vaguely present in his mind.'[4] It is true that in late 1911 and early 1912 Tagore was coming more and more into conflict with his fellow Bengalis. According to Dutta and Robinson, 'orthodoxy – both Hindu and *Brahmo* – was up in arms over his novel *Gora*, his satirical play *Achalayatan* and a lecture to *Brahmo* sectarians', in which Tagore asked provocatively: 'how can we utter this great lie that only what is dull and lifeless is part of Hinduism, whereas its ideal and its striving towards freedom are things which belong to the world but not to the Hindus?'.[5] In her biography of Tagore, Uma Das Gupta has written that in the *Gitanjali* episode Tagore 'saw God's hand'.[6] And in an address in Shantiniketan shortly before his departure for London, Tagore had spoken of his trip as a 'pilgrimage', though it was 'without a particular mission'.[7] In retrospect, he felt that his visit was 'an opportunity given by God for a meeting of the races'.[8] This idea is also hinted at, though not fully pursued, by Dutta and Robinson in their edited volume of Tagore's letters when they suggest that he undertook his voyage partly for medical treatment and 'partly because he felt a need to get in touch with Western artists and intellectuals'.[9]

However, such intimations seem unsatisfying as explanations of the events of 1912 for, as Mahasweta Sengupta has argued, 'in spite of the widely prevalent myth of the sudden and capricious nature of Tagore's efforts at translating his own poems, it could be proved that . . . he had been preparing to reach a wider audience for quite some time'.[10] Tagore may have decided to take up translation work on *Gitanjali* as a way of convalescing during his period of illness in early 1912, but he had been encouraged to translate – particularly by the London-based art critic A. K. Coomaraswamy – since about 1908, a period that coincided with Tagore's growing belief that 'it is literature, art and such like that are the real bridges uniting one country with another'.[11]

Existing historical accounts and interpretations of Tagore's 1912 visit to London do not do justice to the significance of his motivations, which, as I have argued in Chapter 1, grew out of a major shift in his thinking that followed the violence of the *swadeshi* period. The years 1912 and 1913 mark the period during which Tagore emerged into the metropolitan public sphere. It constituted a new development in his identity, during which he began to write profusely and directly in English on a wide range of social, political, philosophical and theological issues: in short, this was the moment at which he became an English language theorist and critic. Most significantly of all, the archive for this period can be read as revealing the first enactment of Tagore's grand design for repairing the damage done by colonialism to the relationship between East and West.

Rothenstein and the India Society

On 13 January 1910, at the Royal Society of Arts, London, William Rothenstein and Ernest B. Havell (the former principal of the Calcutta School of Art) attended

a meeting on Indian art education and the issue of 'fine arts'. Outraged by the attitude of certain members regarding the supposed inexistence of 'Indian fine arts', the two men proposed, there and then, the creation of an 'India Society' to educate the British public about Indian art, music and literature. The London India Society was founded later in the year by an assembled group of artists and intellectuals that included Abanindranath Tagore, Rabindranath's nephew and then President of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta; the art critic A. K. Coomaraswamy; and the eminent industrial magnate and philanthropist Sir Ratan Tata. The founders declared their belief that 'the ascetic culture of India, more particularly in the provinces of Painting, Sculpture, and Music, had in it elements of beauty and interest which in Europe and even in modern India were too little understood and valued'.[12] Yet the Society was explicit and categorical in stating in its objectives that 'politics are definitely excluded from its scope'.[13]

During the winter of 1910–1911 Lady Christiana Herringham – an expert copyist of Indian paintings – travelled to Hyderabad to secure, on behalf of the Society, copies of the remaining Buddhist frescoes found in the famous rock temples of Ajanta. She was accompanied by Rothenstein and assisted by four Indian artists trained at the Government School of Art in Calcutta under the supervision of Abanindranath Tagore. After Hyderabad, E. B. Havell recommended that Rothenstein travel to Calcutta with Abanindranath to meet Tagore's other nephew Gaganendranath (1867–1938), also an artist working with Indian motifs. It is via this route that Rothenstein first met Tagore and made his now famous set of portrait drawings.[14]

Tagore's first point of contact with a British metropolitan intellectual in 1912 was thus with Rothenstein. As Tagore's son wrote, 'we hardly knew anybody except Mr Rothenstein, whom father had met when he was in Calcutta about a year before'.[15] That meeting had taken place at the Tagores' house in the Jorashanko district of Calcutta when Rothenstein was visiting Tagore's nephews. Recalling this day in his memoirs, Rothenstein wrote that he was

> attracted, each time I went to Jorashanko, by . . . a strikingly handsome figure, dressed in a white dhoti . . . He sat silently listening as we talked. I felt an immediate attraction and asked whether I might draw him, for I discerned in him an inner charm as well as great physical beauty, which I tried to set down with a pencil. That this uncle was one of the remarkable men of his time no one gave me a hint.[16]

The summer season

Back in London, Rothenstein was eager to introduce Tagore to his extensive network of literary friends. Although Rothenstein's primary occupation was that of a painter, he was equally well known for having 'an instinct for the most effective way of setting careers in motion and for recognising emerging genius in others – genius that very often produced works widely divergent from his own tastes'.[17] Somewhat bewildered by London's seething metropolis, Tagore called

upon Rothenstein at his Hampstead residence almost immediately upon his arrival and offered him his *Gitanjali* translations. Rothenstein has written that Tagore 'begged' that he would accept them.[18] Tagore's account is somewhat different: 'I handed him my manuscript with some diffidence. I could hardly believe the opinion he expressed after going through it. He then made over the manuscript to Yeats'.[19]

Rothenstein is to some degree a unique character amongst the figures who took it upon themselves to communicate or represent Tagore to Western audiences (primarily W. B. Yeats, C. F. Andrews and E. J. Thompson) for, as well as having one foot firmly in the camp of London's literary intelligentsia (unlike Andrews and Thompson), Rothenstein also qualifies as a genuine 'Indianist'. As opposed to holding only a rather abstract fascination for things Oriental (a charge that applies particularly to Yeats, and one that I expand on in Chapter 4), Rothenstein took a genuine and active part in aiming to secure what he saw as a better future for India. Rothenstein sought to elevate India's status in the eyes of the West and showed concern for India's political travails. Nevertheless, he also remained something of a 'liberal imperialist', seeking to improve Britain's relationship with India (as manifested in projects such as the India Society), but not to challenge or fundamentally question British political rule. Indeed, this position was manifest in the animating philosophy of the India Society which sought 'less friction between rulers and ruled'.[20]

Rothenstein had thus passed W. B. Yeats the manuscript of *Gitanjali* and the lines stirred the latter's blood 'as nothing had for years'.[21] 'We have seen', so Yeats wrote in his introduction to the 1913 Macmillan edition of *Gitanjali*, 'our own image . . . our voice as if in a dream'.[22] Yet his reading at Rothenstein's house on 7 July 1912 was to prove the seminal moment.[23] Rothenstein had managed to assemble a host of London luminaries including George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, John Galsworthy, Ernest Rhys, Thomas Sturge Moore and Robert Bridges. Also present – somewhat incongruously – was C. F. Andrews, the Christian missionary who would soon become intimate with Tagore, devoting the rest of his life (from 1913 onwards) to service at Tagore's *ashram* in Shantiniketan. Recollecting that night, Rothenstein wrote in his memoirs that 'the young poets came to sit at Tagore's feet; Ezra Pound the most assiduously'.[24] 'It was pleasant to see homage paid so readily to an Indian', he continues, 'for nothing of the kind had happened before'.[25] Among these men, Yeats and Ezra Pound had the influence to 'make or break' a poet; and they decided they would 'make' Tagore. Exactly what they made of him, and why, is significant in understanding certain aspects of British cultural life during this period, and the perceptions that intellectuals such as Yeats and Pound had of the 'East'. It is also important if we are to properly comprehend Tagore's subsequent reputation in the West.

In a revealing article placed in the influential *Fortnightly Review* in March 1913, Ezra Pound praised Tagore's poetry for both its aesthetic and technical qualities. Seemingly ignorant of the politics of Bengal and Tagore's controversial standing in his native land, Pound wrote that he (Tagore) is 'their great poet and their great musician as well. He has made them their national song, their

Marseillaise, if an Oriental nation can be said to have an equivalent to such an anthem'. Tagore's 'Golden Bengal' is wholly Eastern, yet it has a 'curious power . . . to move the crowd' and 'all the properties of action'.[26] The idea of Tagore's poetry and song containing 'the properties of action' obviously contradicts established stereotypes of the Oriental as placid and static; ideas to which Pound soon returns. 'And yet there is in him', he continues, 'the stillness of nature'.

> The poems do not seem to have been produced by storm or by ignition, but seem to show the normal habit of his mind. He is at one with nature, and finds no contradictions. And this is in sharp contrast with the Western mode, where man must be shown attempting to master nature if we are to have 'great drama'.[27]

In the case of both Yeats and Pound, Tagore would be instrumentalised for their own ends. The objective was cultural and intellectual renewal; a way out of the mechanised, deadening weight of modernity that was crushing man's creative spirit. For Pound, the 'discovery' of Tagore meant that 'we' – that is, a narrow section of London's cultural elite, usually meaning those with a fondness for aristocratic social orders and a weakness for imagined pasts – 'have found our new Greece'. 'I find in these poems' he adds, 'a sort of ultimate common sense, a reminder of one thing and of forty things which we are ever likely to lose sight of in the confusion of our Western life, in the racket of our cities, in the jabber of manufactured literature, in the vortex of advertisement'.[28]

For Yeats, the 'discovery' of Tagore – and of India more generally – was a stimulus to the re-awakening of Celtic mysticism that would invigorate Irish nationalism and its bid for independence from British rule. Neither Pound nor Yeats showed any such concern for the politics of India or the problem of colonialism in general. In fact – echoing Rothenstein's and Andrews' sentiments about rectifying and soothing relations between coloniser and colonised – Yeats wrote to Edmund Gosse in November 1912, regarding Tagore's proposed election to the committee of the India Society, that: 'from the English point of view it would be a fine thing to do, a piece of wise imperialism, for he is worshipped as no poet of Europe is . . . I believe that if we pay him honour, it will be understood that we honour India also for he is its most famous man today'.[29] I shall return in Chapter 4 to Yeats' obliviousness to the fact that Tagore was a deeply controversial and far from universally acclaimed writer in India.[30] For now, it will suffice to say that Yeats shared Rothenstein's idea that cultural dialogue could be part of a liberal imperialist agenda. Yet for both Yeats and Pound, issues of colonialism were clearly of secondary importance, and there was seemingly no clear link established in their minds between the Irish and Indian predicaments.

Tagore's primary function was as a reminder of a forgotten European past, and thus they proffered an interpretation of *Gitanjali* that, as has been argued elsewhere, 'denies the existence of a separate history and [a] culture different from their own, something new, something they do not have'.[31] Tagore's poetry was immediately incorporated into existing philosophical divisions between idealism

and realism, with Tagore characterised as 'highly idealistic and subjective, moody or fanciful', in the words of Ernest Rhys, one of Tagore's earliest Western biographers.[32] In some senses, intellectuals such as Yeats and Pound merely reflected many of the ideas about India that permeated the British newspaper's reviews of Tagore's work and his visit. Like Pound and Yeats, a November 1912 review of *Gitanjali* in the *Times Literary Supplement* went so far as to see Tagore's poetry as a positive influence upon a decadent British poetic scene that 'lacked ideas' and 'effused coldness towards God, values and nature'. Tagore's efforts to create a 'harmony of emotion and idea' represented welcome input.[33]

By contrast, my reading of this encounter suggests that what Yeats and Pound were unwilling to accept was Tagore's didacticism. This was clear as early as 1913, when, in a review of *The Gardener* – Tagore's second collection of English language poems – in the feminist journal *Freewoman*, Pound complained that

> [w]hy the good people of this island [Britain] are unable to honour a fine artist as such; why they are incapable, or apparently incapable, of devising for his honour any better device than that of wrapping his life in cotton wool and parading about with the effigy of a sanctimonious moralist, remains and will remain for me an unsolvable mystery.[34]

At this early stage, Pound was willing to blame the so-called sentimentalists. 'The long entrenched view of the time was, of course, that art and politics fell into separate categories and their mixture was unwarranted . . . Rabindranath Tagore as a mystic poet, as a seer from the East was welcome in Britain, but not a political Rabindranath.'[35] Tagore's intentions to lecture and educate the Western reading public on topics such as colonialism, nationalism and the modern nation state would become clear by the late 1910s, and accordingly the interest from men such as Yeats and Pound would soon wane.

The politics of the prize

The fruition of Tagore's western voyage in 1912 came with his receipt of the Nobel Prize in late 1913, and unsurprisingly it was this event that provoked the largest number of column inches. By this time, Tagore had returned to Shantiniketan, where news of the accolade reached him by telegram on the afternoon of 14 November. Much perturbed by what he saw as the undue attention he soon gained from his compatriots, who flocked to Shantiniketan to disturb the poet's peace, Tagore happily avoided immediate exposure to much of what British journalists had to say.

The *Birmingham Post* wrote that 'the chief significance of Mr Tagore's triumph is that it marks the culmination of the development of an offshoot of English literature'.[36] There was much consternation that Thomas Hardy had not been awarded the prize. The *Daily News and Leader* of 14 November felt that Tagore was an easy and uncontroversial choice because 'the great themes of art are the same for the Orient as for the Occident'.[37] (Tagore would have partly agreed with

this assertion, though he would have disagreed that this should make his writings 'easy' or unchallenging.) Linked to the idea of the spread of the English language as an imperial 'gift', many commentators were also keen to see the influence of a Christian ethic in Tagore's work. In July 1913, William Canton wrote to his friend Edward J. Thompson – later to become one of the foremost interpreters of Tagore to the English speaking world – that it was 'impossible to accept the poems as Hindu pure and simple, unless Indian religion had been grossly misrepresented'. For Canton, they were 'essentially Christian in their feeling'.[38] An article by R. Ellis Roberts in the *Daily News and Leader* of 27 October 1913 rejected the idea that East and West were different at all. What is important to recognise about India, he wrote, is that 'neither in art nor letters has it ever reached the perfection which Europe attained'.[39] Tagore's popularity was on account of the fact that his 'inspiration derived from Western rather than Eastern sources'.[40] By early 1914, the tone in some quarters had turned from patronising to hostile: 'unfortunately Tagore does not acknowledge his debt to Christianity', wrote *The Spectator* on 14 February, and implicitly 'asserts that India has nothing to learn from Europe on the spiritual side'. Tagore, they claimed, was so obviously influenced by Christian teaching that to claim his work 'as an unaided product of *Vedic* inspiration was wrong'. In fact, it 'veils a hostility and inexcusable ingratitude to his debt to Western teaching'.[41]

The story behind the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Tagore has been subjected to much speculation – and not too few conspiracy theories – many of which still have some currency today. The most significant one was the idea that the English version of *Gitanjali* was not in fact Tagore's work, but was dependent upon Yeats' translation. Sir Valentine Chirol – an infamous imperialist reactionary and Calcutta-based correspondent for *The Times* – led public accusations that Tagore was essentially taking credit for someone else's labour, and Tagore wrote to Thomas Sturge Moore in early 1914 expressing his concern over this matter.

> A report has reached me from a barrister friend of mine who was present on the occasion when in a meeting of the leading Mohammedan gentlemen of Bengal, Valentine Chirol told the audience that the English *Gitanjali* was practically a production of Yeats. It is very likely that he did not believe it himself, it being merely a political move on his part to minimise the significance of this Nobel Prize affair, which our people naturally consider to be a matter for national rejoicing. It is not possible for him to relish the idea of Mohammedans sharing this honour with Hindus. Unfortunately for me there are signs of this feeling of antagonism in England itself, which may be partly due to the natural reaction following the chorus of praise that *Gitanjali* evoked and partly, as you have said in your letter, to the bitterness of disappointment in the minds of the partisans of the candidates for the Nobel Prize.[42]

Tagore was acutely aware of the dangers of this suggestion, and in the context of both colonial politics and of Tagore's vision of a meeting of minds between East and West, the issue of authenticity is a matter of some importance.

Four days after receiving the prize, Tagore wrote to William Rothenstein to acknowledge his debt: 'the very first moment I received message of the great honour conferred on me by the award of the Nobel Prize, my heart turned towards you with love and gratitude'.[43] The extent to which his fame and fortune in the West was due to the assistance given to him by his Western, largely English friends was an issue that was uppermost in his mind. The issue of direct involvement in creating *Gitanjali* as a work of English literature still plagued him as late as April 1915, when Tagore wrote to William Rothenstein that 'since I have got my fame as an English writer I feel extreme reluctance in accepting alterations in my English poems by any of your writers'.[44] Well aware of the rumours that had circulated since *Gitanjali's* critical acclaim, he added that he

> must not give men any reasonable ground for accusing me – which they do – of reaping advantage from other men's genius and skill. There are people who suspect that I owe in a large measure to [C. F.] Andrews' help for my literary success, which is so false I can afford to laugh at it. But it is different about Yeats. I think Yeats was sparing in his suggestions – moreover, I was with him during the revisions. But one is apt to delude himself, and it is very easy for me to gradually forget the share Yeats had in making my things passable . . . if it be true that Yeats' touches have made it possible for *Gitanjali* to occupy the place it does then it must be confessed.[45]

With regard to the translations, the evidence is mixed. Throughout his life Yeats would continue to refer to the significance of the changes he made to Tagore's work. One of the last documented conversations Yeats had with an Indian scholar about Tagore took place at Yeats' Riversdale cottage on the outskirts of Dublin on 1 June 1937. During the exchanges between Yeats and Abinash Chandra Bose – a young Bengali scholar who had recently completed a PhD at Trinity College on mysticism in East and West – Yeats is reported to have reaffirmed, yet again, that 'he used to ask Tagore to give a literal translation of the original [*Gitanjali*] in certain cases and then touch it up to make it come nearer the Western mode of expression'.[46] That Yeats would have sought such changes may be expected given his stated belief that 'no Indian can write or speak in animated English'.[47] As we know, Tagore was somewhat ambivalent as to the extent of Yeats' role. William Rothenstein, by contrast, was unequivocal: 'I know that it was said in India that the success of *Gitanjali* was largely owing to Yeats' re-writing of Tagore's English. That this is false can easily be proved. The original of *Gitanjali* in English and Bengali is in my possession. Yeats did here and there suggest changes but the main text was printed as it came from Tagore's hands'.[48] And even for those who were not intimate with the facts of the case but judged *Gitanjali* on its literary merit alone, it was felt that 'no amount of correction – short of absolute re-writing – could make it what it is'.[49]

The issue of translation is significant in that it represents yet another example of the way in which Tagore as writer and thinker – as an agent in his own right, from a different, non-Western culture – has become gradually concealed by the

web of individuals and influences in the West that provided the context for his rise to fame in 1912 and 1913. We have already explored some of these themes: the 'accidental' nature of his voyage to the West; the practical assistance given to Tagore by friends such as Rothenstein; the alleged help with translation offered by Yeats; and the Christian sentiments that had passed – by some mysterious process of osmosis – into Tagore's psyche and enabled him to produce *Gitanjali*. A further issue of some importance relates to the basis upon which Tagore was awarded the prize by the Nobel committee. This is so because it remains widely held and often repeated that Tagore won the prize for *Gitanjali* alone.[50] If this was so – and it appears that Tagore himself believed this to be the case – then the role of Yeats and others in London who helped to promote *Gitanjali* during 1912 and 1913 (men such as Thomas Sturge Moore, who as a member of the Royal Society of Literature was responsible for Tagore's initial nomination) appears to be crucial. If, however, the Nobel committee considered a wider range of material, which was largely unseen (and certainly untouched) by any London based critic, then the importance of *Gitanjali* is diminished.

The definitive research work dealing with the Nobel Prize in literature is Kjell Espmark's *The Nobel Prize in Literature: A Study of the Criteria Behind the Choices* (1991). In his discussion of the prize for 1913, Espmark has written:

> The prize to Tagore in 1913 seemed like an expansive gesture, but in reality it illustrates . . . limitation. The proposal originated not in India but from a member of the Royal Society of Literature in Britain, and the final decision was based on Tagore's English version of *Gitanjali*, without the aid of Oriental experts to assess the rest of his production. (One of the committee members, Esais Tegnér, Jr., could in fact read Tagore in Bengali, but *there is no indication that use was made of his expertise in the matter*.)[51]

Contrary to Espmark's assertions, there is in fact *some* evidence that Tagore was read in the original Bengali. Three works in Bengali – *Naivedya, Kheya* and *Gitanjali* – were received by the Nobel library on 18 July 1913. The English *Gitanjali* was composed from these three Bengali texts. The Nobel committee, consisting of just five members, was the body responsible for deliberating the merits of proposed candidates and subsequently making recommendations for the prize in literature to the Swedish Academy. In 1913, the committee included Harald Hjärne (chairman), Karl Alfred Melin and Erik Axel Karlfeldt. A fourth member was Hans Hilderbrand who died in February and was replaced by Per Hallström. The fifth member was a notable Swedish novelist and man of letters, Esais Tegnér the younger, who, as Espmark points out, had knowledge of Bengali. Exactly how proficient his command of Bengali was is difficult to establish, but from an investigation of the accessions register, we learn that Tegnér actually borrowed the three Bengali texts mentioned above in August 1913.[52] In response to this fact, it is perhaps worth making two further points: firstly, it is hard to imagine why Tegnér would have taken Bengali texts out of the library if he could not read them; and secondly, in a committee comprised of just

five people – and particularly given Tegnér's high standing within Swedish intellectual circles – it is also reasonable to assume that if Tegnér did read Tagore in the original Bengali, his reading and interpretation of its merits would have had some bearing on the committee's deliberations. The notion that the Nobel committee had access, via Tegnér, to the three original Bengali components of the final English *Gitanjali* is significant, for it reduces the importance of Yeats' 'collaborative' role.

Similarly, the idea that the Nobel Prize of 1913 was awarded to Tagore solely on the basis of *Gitanjali* also needs to be called into question, for it has tended to give credence to an interpretation of Tagore as someone who lacked the depth necessary to produce work of much diversity. In fact, the 1913 presentation speech given by the aforementioned Harald Hjärne, Chairman of the Nobel Committee of the Swedish Academy, tells a different story. Hjärne said that *Gitanjali* was '*one* of . . . [Tagore's] works that especially arrested the attention of the selecting critics', but he also mentions that *The Gardener* (1913) and *Lyrics of Love and Life* (1913) came before the committee, and that through these 'we see another phase of his personality, now subject to the alternately blissful and torturing experiences of youthful love, now prey to the feelings of longing and joy that the vicissitudes of life give rise to, the whole interspersed nevertheless with glimpses of a higher world'.[53] Hjärne also refers to *Glimpses of Bengal Life* (1913), and the records of the Nobel Library show that the committee received English translations of this text prior to its decision to award Tagore the prize. The borrowing register shows that *The Gardener* and *Glimpses of Bengal Life* were frequently withdrawn by a number of committee members in late October and early November, with one committee member borrowing *Glimpses of Bengal Life* as late as 13 November. We also know that, according to a statement issued to the Swedish Academy on 24 October, the committee was at this point minded to recommend the award go to the French writer Emile Faguet.[54] This gives the committee's readings of *The Gardener* and *Glimpses of Bengal Life*, which took place after this time, even greater significance.

One possible influence upon the committee's late swing towards Tagore may have been a letter sent from Gustav Verner von Heidenstam – a member of the Swedish Academy, a respected Swedish Orientalist and an enthusiastic supporter of Tagore – to the permanent secretary of the Academy, Erik Axel Karlfeldt (also one of the five committee members) on 18 October.[55] In his letter he expressed his intuition that the committee appeared to want to give the prize for 1913 to a writer of prose fiction, which would concur with the reports that at this stage Faguet headed the list. Von Heidenstam also informed the committee that a new English translation of a Tagore text had become available, and that they ought to acquire this before taking any final judgements. For von Heidenstam, Tagore's thought and poetry was 'united in a depth of rare spiritual beauty', and 'the loving and innate religiousness that flows through all his thoughts and feelings' were indicative of a 'purity of heart' and 'natural sublimity', such that no contemporary writer on the world stage matches him.[56] At a meeting of the academy on 23 October, reference was made to von Heidenstam's letter and it is soon after this date that

several members of the committee began to borrow both *The Gardener* and *Glimpses of Bengal* from the Nobel Library.

We also learn from the second of Per Hallström's two reports on Tagore, which he prepared as briefing documents for the committee, that there is a shift in focus from the first to the second: that is, between April 1913 and October 1913. Hallström's first report was, by his own admission, a naïve document: in it, he states that he is 'entirely ignorant of Indian language and literature', but nevertheless states that on the basis of *Gitanjali* alone Tagore merits the Nobel Prize.[57] The second report, submitted to the committee on 29 October following recommendations from von Heidenstam and the acquisition of both *Glimpses of Bengal* and *The Gardener*, makes numerous references to the latter text. According to Hallström's judgement at the time, 'it ought to be possible to predict with fair certainty that the admiring appreciation that has been accorded to *Gitanjali* in England and America will not be in the least diminished by *The Gardener*. On the contrary, it will perhaps be acclaimed still more warmly and spontaneously'.[58]

In the event, Hallström was wrong. Nevertheless, the evidence presented here shows – contrary to the received wisdom amongst both academic students of Tagore and the public at large – that it was *not* simply on the basis of *Gitanjali* that Tagore received the Nobel Prize, and that the Nobel Committee did, via Esais Tegnér the younger, have some access to Tagore in the original Bengali. This detracts from the overarching significance of Yeats' contribution, raises the profile of Tagore's works other than *Gitanjali*, and puts him and his work in a more central historical position.

Individual destiny and World History

Tagore was keen to portray his voyage to Britain as the consequence of unforeseen events, which, much to his surprise, culminated in a Nobel Prize. That he was awarded such an honour just one year after he began to publish in English was both a remarkable achievement and entirely unexpected. It was, to some extent, also unwelcome for it threatened the peace and solitude that Tagore coveted so much. The 'summer season' in London gave him little time to think, let alone write. But in October 1912, he set sail for the USA and spent time in Urbana, Illinois, where his son Rathindranath had studied. It was there that Tagore wrote much of what would in 1913 be published by Macmillan as *Sadhana*, a set of philosophical essays on Indian culture and civilisation. Rathindranath, who was responsible for typing so many drafts of the manuscript that he felt he 'knew almost the whole book by heart', claimed that *Sadhana* represented part of Tagore's 'natural urge to communicate what he considered India's message to the West'.[59]

This makes sense, for it is clear from Tagore's other letters that the issue of East–West communication in the context of colonialism and the 'race problem' was at the forefront of his mind at least as early as January 1913.[60] In a letter to C. F. Andrews in that month, Tagore wrote that

> [t]he problem of race conflict is the greatest of all that men have been called upon to solve . . . different races and nations of the Earth have come nearer each other than ever they did before. But we have not been ready to accept the responsibilities of this wider humanity. Men are still under the thraldom of the spirit of antagonism which has been associated with a narrow sentiment of nationality . . . I feel that the time has come, and after all kinds of patch-work of superficial experiments the spiritual nature of man is getting ready to take up the task and broaden the path of reconciliation of all different races and creeds.[61]

The theme of Tagore's letter to Andrews was expanded in a lecture on 'Race Conflict', delivered in Rochester, New York, on 30 January 1913 and later published in *The Modern Review*. On this occasion, Tagore appears to put himself centre stage in this process of East–West reconciliation. 'It is a matter for congratulation', he wrote, 'that today civilised man is seriously confronted with the problem of race conflict'. Moreover, 'the day of triumph is approaching'.

> The world is waiting for its poets and prophets and hosts of humble workers . . . When the call of humanity is poignantly insistent then the higher nature of man cannot but respond. In the darkest periods of his drunken orgies of power and national pride man may flout and jeer at it, but in that very paroxysm of arrogance, when his attitude is most hostile and his attacks most reckless against it, he is suddenly reminded that it is the direst form of suicide to kill the highest truth that is in him.[62]

It does not take a great leap of faith to assume that Tagore considered himself to be one of those 'poets and prophets' who would answer the call of humanity, and the strong echoes of Keshub's sense of destiny and personal importance are prevalent here.[63] We know that Tagore felt this was a momentous period in his life for, in a letter to William Rothenstein dated 19 November 1912, Tagore said he thought he 'had come to that age when doors to my inner theatre must be closed and no more new admission could be possible'.[64] From this point onwards, at the age of 52, there is a profusion of work in English and a deepening of the already extensive networks he had established with Western intellectuals, including not only a vast array of correspondence but also two more extended visits to Europe. But of course Tagore was certainly not the first Indian to place himself in this privileged position of cultural go-between or either to adopt or be awarded the status of the sage from the East.

Nineteenth-century Indians in the metropole

The politics of the prize are significant because it remains the Nobel Prize – as a marker of both intellectual and public approbation – that distinguishes Tagore from previous Indian travellers to the metropole. However, Tagore was by no means the first Indian intellectual or cultural figure to have a wide audience in England, and his fame in 1912 must be set within the context of that historical legacy.

The reception of Rammohun Roy in 1830s England prefigured some of the themes that would later re-emerge in response to other travellers, notably Keshub Chandra Sen. At the same time, the tensions between coloniser and colonised were less in the 1830s than they would become in the latter part of the century. Rammohun was sent to England as the ambassador of Akbar II at a time when the declining Mughal dynasty and the ascending British presence (then still, of course, in the form of the East India Company) conspired against Hindu interests in matters such as Lord Bentinck's banning of *sati*. Although a Hindu Brahmin, Rammohun's 'reformist' credentials and his position on *sati* had endeared him to mainstream English opinion many years before his famous 1831 visit to England, and his diplomatic status upon his arrival in that year afforded him very high social connections indeed. Nevertheless his treatment in England was quite remarkable. As a recent book by Lynn Zastoupil has argued, Rammohun enjoyed 'trans-national celebrity' in England, Europe and North America, but most particularly in England where '[e]vidence of this fame is abundant and striking'.[65] What is interesting is that Rammohun was invoked in a range of often contradictory and competing contexts amidst the fervent debates taking place about empire in England at the time. As Zastoupil has summarised it,

> [g]roups and individuals fashioning the Victorian age lionized him because he shared their vision and contributed intellectually to their causes. Unitarians, leading the assault on the confessional state, lauded Rammohun for a defense of rational religion that placed him in the company of Locke, Newton, and Milton. Advocates of liberty of the press employed his example in India to fight the good fight at home. Propagandists for competing visions of Empire did the same, holding Rammohun up as proof of the benefits of free trade or as a voice of caution against rash innovations. He gave a boost to humanitarians struggling to awaken the national conscience. Where early feminists gathered, admirers of Rammohun were likely to be found.[66]

And yet, as with those who followed him, Rammohun's virtues were often contrasted with those of his fellow countrymen. If an Indian, a Bengali or a Hindu were singled out for praise, the binaries of coloniser and colonised had to be subtly – or not so subtly – maintained. For example, a letter containing 'biographical material' on Rammohun, sent by M. d'Acosta – then editor of *The Times* of Calcutta – to his friend the Abbé Gregoire in 1818 for the preparation of the latter's *Chronique Religieuse*, stated that '[w]hatever be the abstract merit of Rammohun Roy, there is, probably, throughout India no Brahmin who is less a Brahmin and less a Hindoo than he . . . It is against the division of his countrymen into castes that Rammohun Roy's correcting hand is turned'.[67]

> We may easily imagine that a man who has raised himself so much above the level of his countrymen by his intellectual attainments cannot exactly resemble them in his conduct. He not only refrains from their superstitious practices (which is not saying much in his favour, since he might do so from

> various causes not highly laudable), but, what is much more important, all his conversation, his actions and manners, evince a powerful sentiment of individual dignity; whilst, in general, meanness and feebleness of mind are characteristic of the Hindoo.[68]

Yet Rammohun wrote a considerable amount of material that concurred with this interpretation, and often evinced a very aggressive reformism that made for excellent propaganda in the imperial metropole. 'I (although born a Brahmin, and instructed in my youth in all the principles of that sect), being thoroughly convinced of the lamentable errors of my countrymen, have been stimulated to employ every means in my power to improve their minds, and lead them to the knowledge of a purer system of morality', wrote Rammohun in 1819.

> Living constantly amongst Hindoos of different sects and professions, I have had ample opportunity of observing the superstitious puerilities into which they have been thrown by their self interested guides; who, in defiance of the law as well as of common sense, have succeeded but too well in conducting them to the temple of idolatry; and while they hid from their view the true substance of morality, have infused into their simple hearts a weak attachment for its mere shadow.[69]

Looking back upon Rammohun's life and work Tagore preferred to gloss over these details and concentrate on the man who, in Tagore's eyes, 'had the comprehensiveness of mind to be able to realise the fundamental unity of spirit in the Hindu, Muhammadan and Christian cultures'. For Tagore, Rammohun represented

> India in the fullness of truth; and this truth is based, not upon rejection, but on perfect comprehension. Ram Mohun Roy could be perfectly natural in his acceptance of the West, only because his education had been perfectly eastern – he had the full inheritance of the Indian wisdom. He was never a schoolboy of the West, and therefore he had the dignity to be a friend of the West.[70]

Yet if this is the historical legacy that Tagore wished to be bequeathed to India in the twentieth century, it is very clear that Rammohun's writings and stance towards Hindu custom in early nineteenth-century Bengal would markedly colour his reception in England in a favourable light. Whereas for proto-nationalists such as the Bengali *brahmin* Bhudev Mukhopadhyay (1827–1894) Rammohun's attack on idolatry constituted evidence of the negative impact of Western culture in India. Where there was vigorous criticism of Indian society, any subtleties in argumentation would almost inevitably be lost amidst the contestation between coloniser and colonised, with the Indian protagonists being identified with the former. This precedent was firmly established in the case of Rammohun.

In England Rammohun's status was such that he was feted by royalty, courted by Tory and Whig grandees alike and, '[o]ut to destroy the English establishment

and transform the world into a republican paradise', Jeremy Bentham 'dreamt of Rammohun in Parliament and as collaborator in his global network of radical reformers'.[71] The fact that Rammohun directed so much of his critical fire towards India itself – coupled with the more benign political relationship between Britain and India, as compared to the later nineteenth century and certainly to the early twentieth century – the English public, press and especially the political elite, found it far easier to admire and accept Rammohun than they did with regard to some of those who came later. As Zastoupil has stressed, another marked dimension of Rammohun's time in England was his 'celebrity status'. As Antoinette Burton has put it, 'whether on the city streets of London when taken for "Tippoo" or in the more privatised space of the London drawing room, Roy was made into something of a spectacle by onlookers'.[72] Much of that spectacle revolved around dress and appearance, overwritten, of course, by the issue of gender: the femininity or masculinity of the Indian subject and the corresponding vices and virtues ascribed to these two roles in Victorian discourse.[73]

Aside from Dwarkanath Tagore who, despite his prominent social connection during his two visits in 1842 and 1845, did not make a major cultural or intellectual impact, the next figure to achieve the celebrity status of Rammohun in England was Keshub, whose career in England briefly overshadowed '[Rammohun] Roy's image as the quintessentially cosmopolitan Indian'.[74] Certainly Keshub's reception in England closely prefigured the themes that would be raised when Tagore's star was in the ascendancy some decades later. As with Tagore, Keshub's brilliance, his civility, his reformism, his proto-Christianity 'confirmed in the minds of many Britons the possibility that there was great scope for English social reform schemes in India'.[75] In other words, just as with Tagore, many of those who commented upon, or took an interest in Keshub failed to take him seriously as a thinker or intellectual who represented a distinct, non-Western tradition that might pose a challenge to Christianity, or provide a lens through which it should be critiqued and reformed itself. As with Rammohun, Keshub became something of a show, with his dress, appearance and voice becoming a source of great interest. Like Rammohun, he dined and socialised at the highest levels, and Friedrich Max Müller claimed that Keshub had become a 'household name'.[76] All of which could be used as a display of English liberal sensibilities and openness towards the colonial subject, as well as a way for Keshub to enhance his own social standing back in Calcutta.

Keshub had come to England in 1870 at the head of the *Brahmo Samaj* of India, which he had created following the schism with Debendranath's wing in 1866, which would thereafter be known as the Calcutta, or *Adi* (original) *Brahmo Samaj*. As discussed in Chapter 1, Keshub's actual career and shifting alliances within the *Brahmo Samaj* is complicated and often contradictory. However, in England in 1870 he was cast very firmly in the reformist mould. He was received warmly and widely, especially within the Unitarian circles with whom he had already made contact in India, on account of the contribution he might be able to make to reforming or re-igniting the Christian spirit in England, and the impetus to auto-critique was as prevalent in Keshub's reception as it would be in the response to

Tagore some forty years later. What Keshub in fact brought to England was a 'strong universalism'. He contrasted the ethical 'Oriental Christ' with the 'muscular' Christianity of missionaries in India, but his purpose was not to proclaim any kind of superiority for Christianity, but to develop and expound the underlying unity behind all religions. With echoes of Rammohun's thoughts in *The Precepts of Jesus* (1820), Keshub's writing linked the particular strain of Hindu universalism which predates the *Brahmo Samaj* schism in the form of Rammohun to later figures such as Pratap Majumdar, who – as a young devotee – had accompanied Keshub to London in 1870 and then, along with Vivekananda, represented this at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1893.[77]

Keshub's universalism was taken very seriously in many quarters. Some of the most prominent engagement with and approbation of Keshub was driven by the supposed dichotomy between the spiritual and the material. The leading Unitarian thinker James Martineau introduced Keshab at a 'Welcome Soiree' which took place in the Hanover Square Rooms, London, on 12 April 1870 on the invitation of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association with the following eulogy to Keshub and the role of the East in the West, which is worth quoting at length.

> The European mind had a certain hardness in it, in virtue of which intellectual force was gained at the expense of spiritual depth; and the larger the scientific universe became, the more did it shut us up in a materialist prison . . . It seemed in our own time as if there was to be again an apparent hostility between Science and Religion. With the Indian genius he believed it would be otherwise. While quick to absorb and appropriate all modern science, it would do so without sacrificing at the same time the Divine interpretation of the universe. It would put our hard and gross philosophy into the crucible under a more refining and intenser fire, and save many an element which we had lost . . . It was said in one of the Indian dramas that the external creation and God had been separated from one another in the human mind by the action of the demon Illusion, and that whenever that demon was destroyed they would again re-unite. That Illusion was a demon that had ever haunted the Western mind; and again and again had Eastern prophets set us free.[78]

The idea that the East could redeem the West was widely held in Unitarian circles in the 1870s and, as we have seen, by the time that Tagore arrived in London in 1912, this notion had put down widespread, if not always deep roots. But the striking thing about Keshub's visit is the greater insecurity on display in English responses and the acceptance by some that Keshub had 'lessons' to offer, and many of the newspaper reports of his visit welcomed his position as a critic of English society.[79] In short, it was not necessary for Keshub to be a fierce critic of India in order to be accepted in the metropole, in some circles at least. And yet, as Antoinette Burton has noted, there was a wider, arguably more resonant process of ridiculing, infantilising and, most commonly effeminising that also took place. Although it was noted that he had a handsome and masculine appearance, the 'sweetness' of Keshub's expression was linked to his 'simplicity'.[80] The colonial

subject could be safely welcomed in the metropole if the civic virtues of the manly Englishman could be contrasted with the emotionalism and spiritualism of the Oriental mind.

Thus, although Shompa Lahiri's judgement that the 'first generation of students and visitors [amongst whom she includes Keshub] excited interest from the host population rather than the hostility encountered by later arrivals', does not quite capture the whole picture, as a general observation there is certain degree of truth to it.[81] By the time that Mohini Chatterjee[82] reached Dublin in the 1880s, Swami Vivekenada[83] arrived in England in the 1890s, and then Tagore reached London in 1912, the recurrent fascination for the 'seer from the East' still persisted and Pratap Majumdar's observation that 'English cities sometimes take strange fancies to . . . certain individuals for a season, and London specially suffers from such fits of sporadic hero worship' retained its validity.[84] The discursive construction of Tagore was frequently centred around the common themes that Western audiences had used to frame colonial subjects throughout the nineteenth century: the image of Tagore as a 'soft, gentle Christ', the echoes of Christianity in his poetry, the bent of mind were all by now quite familiar. However, it was not only against the accumulated weight of precedent and established prejudice that Tagore had to struggle. His engagement with the West in large part retains its distinctiveness because of a markedly changed historical context, both in England and in India. In India, this was precisely because of the precarious position he occupied between an increasingly aggressive political nationalism on the one hand, and an intransigent British imperialism on the other. As Raychaudhuri has argued, even the later nineteenth century has to be seen as a very fast moving period, and figures such as Bhudev, Bankimchandra and Vivekananda belonged to 'three different generations, though Bankim was younger than Bhudev by only twelve years'. Moreover,

> [w]hen the Queen-in-Parliament assumed responsibility for the governance of India, Bhudev was a mature man and Bankim a precocious youth of nineteen. Interestingly, the former considered the Company's rule in many ways superior to its successor. Bankim's nationalism and gut reactions to British rule were influenced *inter alia* by the Indigo Rebellion and the Anglo-Indian agitation against the Ilbert Bill. But he, like his senior contemporary, could still maintain some faith in at least the objectively beneficial role of the British presence. The attitude of total rejection, the increasingly dominant response to colonial rule, is already there in Vivekananda.[85]

Bearing in mind the rapidity of these developments noted by Raychaudhuri, we can mark continuity in terms of reception and themes between Rammohun, Keshub and Tagore, as was discussed at greater length in Chapter 1. We can also note the parallels between Keshub and Tagore in their self-perception as communicators of Eastern 'wisdom' and 'healers' of Western civilisation. But, these similarities aside, we can also say that by 1912 Rabindranath – post-*swadeshi* – faced the problems of colonialism, nationalism and the East–West encounter in a context that was markedly different from his nineteenth-century predecessors.

Indian history and historical laws

Tagore's essay 'My Interpretation of India's History' was published in two parts in *The Modern Review* in August and September 1913.[86] The two essays were translations of a Bengali article published in 1912, and in this sense they represent an important historical source germane to our understanding of Tagore's mindset immediately prior to his 'mission' to London.

In the article, Tagore gives a sense of his historical perspective, using the metaphor of a rhythmic breath, or 'an eternal rhythmic beat' for the movement of both Nature and History. In terms of human societies this 'alternative swell and cadence' relates to a condition in which

> Man is being called from two sides by self and others, acquisition and giving away, self restraint and freedom, custom and reason; the true education of humanity consists in learning how to balance both forces, so as to reach the middle point. Human history is the history of the efforts to acquire this balancing power. India affords us the means of clearly observing the picture of the quest of this harmony.[87]

Tagore is quite explicit in this essay that there is such a thing as historical law; what he calls 'the law of world-rhythm',[88] and in so doing he adopts a World Historical view that is both teleological and deterministic. He gives various illustrations based on a rough sketch of Indian history which, he says, illustrates the tendency towards not simply the expansion and contraction of 'self' but also what he calls the assimilation of the 'other'. By way of explanation Tagore claims that the development of an Aryan identity was based on Aryan immigrants coming into India and hence into contact with the 'aborigines' (Dravidians). It is via this process that the Aryans developed a sense of their own self, and 'racial oneness'. Were it not for the presence of this contact with difference, 'then the Aryan colony would have speedily split up into a thousand branches and dispersed'.[89] However,

> [l]ike all other things of the universe, even conflict has two opposite poles,– difference and union. Hence it was that India's history could not forever stop short at the self contraction bred in Aryan society at the first stage of the conflict by the spirit of preserving the distinct existence of one's own race. India had to turn into the path of expansion, turned towards assimilation, under the law of the world-rhythm.[90]

In making these remarks Tagore is keen to point out that there is a difference between the natural and the human world: 'the rhythm of universal nature is clear and free; not so the rhythm of human nature . . . there, too, we have the same mystery of expansion and contraction; only we cannot reconcile them so easily, so naturally, as universal nature does; the end has to be achieved by strenuous effort'.[91] Hence, we might say Tagore holds that there is both direction and movement in the sense of ineluctable force, but also a role for human agency in

realising a 'middle way'. Even so, there were particular characteristics that Tagore wished to stress concerning the nature of historical movement, the historical juncture at which the world stood, and India's potential contribution. 'We must fulfil the purpose of our connection with the English', Tagore claimed, and, more specifically, 'this is our task today in the building up of great India'.[92] To reiterate, Tagore saw the 'building up' of India in the twentieth century as *necessarily* connected to a process of engagement with the West, in this case 'the English'.

> If we turn our face aside, if we isolate ourselves, if we refuse to accept any new element, we shall still fail to resist the march of time, we shall fail to impoverish and defraud Indian history. The highest intellects of our country in the modern age have spent their lives at the task of reconciling the West to the East. For instance, Ram Mohan Ray [sic].[93]

I return to the theme of India's self-recovery requiring interaction with the West in detail in Chapter 3, but for now we should note that what emerges – firstly from Tagore's early essays on the East–West encounter (*c.* 1910–1912); and secondly from his early encounters in the West – is a strong sense of agency on Tagore's part, and a more theoretically significant interpretation of the colonial encounter than that which has been revealed in most of the biographical work to date. Tagore develops in his later writings, and in his correspondence, a particular agenda that evinces as much concern for the coloniser as for the colonised. He is unwilling to see the colonial situation as framed solely by material or political conflicts of interest between the coloniser and the anti-colonial nationalist. Colonialism, Tagore would later argue, has been responsible for the subjugation of not only colonised peoples, but also Western civilisation itself, for it is colonialism that has led the West away from its highest ideals. In postcolonial writings, the most frequently cited author expressing this ideal is Aimé Césaire, who said that 'colonisation works to decivilise the coloniser, to *brutalise* him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism'.[94] But well before Césaire, Tagore had developed the idea that resistance to colonialism should take the form of remedying the flaws of both coloniser and colonised. It is this theoretical position, as well as Tagore's personal involvement in realising such goals, that makes him a significant figure in terms of both the intellectual history of India and the colonial encounter.

As we have seen, Tagore was portrayed by some in England as having a positive contribution to make, for example in 'catching the mind of Europe on its recoil from materialism' as *The Saturday Review* put it in its review of *Sadhana* and *The Crescent Moon* on 27 December 1913.[95] But his identity, according to this interpretation, was not so much as a representative of a *different* Indian civilisation but rather another example of the march of liberal humanism in its imperial form: a kind of mediator between East and West 'helping the latter to recover its lost soul, a pristine Christian humanistic soul'.[96] The irony is that Tagore's own letters and writings reveal a position that is far more subtle, but does not deviate

altogether from this. As Tagore wrote to C. F. Andrews in an extensive letter: 'modern Europe, scientific and puissant, has classified this wide earth into two divisions'.[97] Through the filter of this classification, Tagore continues, 'whatever is finest in Europe cannot pass through to reach us in the East.'[98] What Tagore sought was a way to critique the West without essentialising it; that is, to move beyond reductive antinomies between East and West, and simple juxtapositions of 'self' and 'other', 'tradition' and 'modernity'. Tagore felt that his compatriots, 'in order to withstand the ravaging inroads of Europe' were simply imitating its worst aspects. By contrast, Tagore believed that he had a positive contribution to make to the development of a global modernity through the critique of what in his time constituted a Western modernity imposed on India through imperialism. He sought to reform and restore both East and West.

Specifically, Tagore attacked the nationalist drive for power and material gain that lay behind colonialism, and which he felt India – through its desire for freedom – was replicating. In this sense, Tagore sees anti-colonial nationalism as a 'derivative discourse' (to borrow Partha Chatterjee's famous phrase) that could not lead India in the direction of genuine freedom.

> When organised national selfishness, racial antipathy and commercial self-seeking begin to display their ugly deformities in all their nakedness, then comes the time for man to know that his salvation is not in political organisations and extended trade relations, not in any mechanical rearrangement of social systems, but in a deeper transformation of life, in the liberation of consciousness in love, in the realisation of God in man.[99]

Tagore's contribution thus emerged from a reading of Indian history combined with an idiosyncratic interpretation of Hinduism together with a historical context that did not have any parallel in the nineteenth-century world of Keshub, Bhudev, Bankimchandra or Vivekenannda. Where imperialism and nationalism had dragged the world into a spiral of violence, Tagore's task was to recover India's own self by speaking to a different Europe, one that could be recognised and absorbed across the fictive divides of empire and nation. As Tagore wrote to Andrews,

> I, personally do not believe that Europe is wholly and entirely materialistic. She has lost her faith in religion but not in humanity. Man in his essential nature can never be solely materialistic. In Europe the ideals of human activity are truly spiritual; for these ideals are not paralysed by shackles of scriptural injunctions, or, to put it another way, their sanction lies in the heart of man and not in something external to him. This freedom from changeless, irrational bondage of external regulations, is a very big asset of modern European civilisation. In Europe man is pouring forth his life for knowledge, for the land of his birth and in the service of humanity, through the urge of his own innate ideals and not because some revered pundit has ordained it, nor because the scriptures or regulations of orthodoxy have indicated such action. It is this attitude of mind which is essentially spiritual.[100]

To contest Europe on conceptual grounds framed solely by the material or the political entailed either subjugation or mimicry. Tagore put forward the position that India's unique contribution to an emerging global modernity would be in the social and religious domains. By being true to its past, India would do service to itself and to the West, for the West was in a state of imbalance in which its own spiritual ideals had been lost at the expense of aggressive materialism and expansionism in the form of empire. The clear and present force resisting this possibility on both sides was nationalism.

However orientalised such a division appears, is it not the case that we are either to take Tagore's position seriously in its own terms or we are to ascribe a form of false consciousness? In other words, how are we to take agency seriously if we are not willing to accept the possibility of individual thought that – whilst clearly the product of a complex of ideational and material factors – cannot be reduced to the product of one or another historical contingency, whether this be bourgeois, liberal, *Brahmo* or *Vaishnava*. Andrew Sartori's *Bengal in Global Concept History* provides an innovative and sophisticated response to this problem. His contention is that it is only within the problematic of certain structures of social practice that it becomes possible to think certain concepts, in this case the 'culture concept'. What is important about concepts, Sartori argues, is their 'object orientation' or what they actually seek to explain or describe. Through a critical re-reading of Raymond Williams, Sartori reminds us of Williams' account of culture as 'an abstraction and an absolute', grounded in 'the recognition of the practical separation of certain moral and intellectual activities . . . from the driven impetus of a new kind of society'. 'the dynamic impulse to global expansion that is characteristic of capitalist social forms'.[101] In other words, the culture concept becomes meaningful because of its denotative capacity, the 'assumption of cultural subjectivism, whether individual or collective as the standpoint for a critique of the abstract, coercive, and destructive forces of modern industrial society'.[102] Sartori's account is compelling as an historical explanation of the emergence of what he calls 'assertive culturalist politics in colonial Bengal', and indeed the analytical framework that Sartori develops via Williams is theoretically powerful.

Having said this, it is perhaps more difficult to actualise the theoretical model when seeking to explain the particular thought of a given intellectual or writer. Tagore himself undoubtedly articulated a form of culturalism, and this culturalism partly involved a critique of a particular version of modernity. And yet if culturalism did constitute a 'new concept', which 'new kind of object' had 'come into existence demanding a new concept through which it could be thought'?[103] The difficulty is compounded when Sartori adds that cultural discourse itself

> cannot be grasped adequately in terms of the series of (more or less) cognitively apprehensible objects that instantiate culture in its diverse discursive usages. Rather, and more fundamentally, this object is a historically determinate form of human subjectivity whose self-understanding is one of underdetermination and autonomous agency.[104]

Tagore certainly prized autonomy and hypostasised under-determination and the free play of his *jiban-debata* often via his readings of Indian history and Indian religious texts. As I explore at length in Chapter 3, he saw this as inherent in the world, and God-given. Insofar as this position is derived from a reading of Indian religious texts and traditions, can we adequately account for a subjectivity emphasising autonomy as being 'historically determinate' and constituted by 'structures of social practice'?[105] As Tapan Raychaudhuri has argued, '[a]n unbroken indigenous tradition of Sanskritic scholarship was an autonomous source of knowledge of the past so far as the Bengali intelligentsia was concerned'.[106] Moreover, if we accept that Tagore at least expressed a form of culturalism, was the culture concept's object orientation towards capitalism, the state, the nation, industrialism or something else?

As I explore in the next chapter, Tagore was concerned with genealogies of 'Indianness', readings of India's past which espoused its 'true meaning' and from which India ought not to stray. The object of Tagore's critique – arguably what makes his wide corpus of work intelligible – is a form of instrumental rationality. He may well have seen the subjectivity which gave rise to nationalism – or even culturalism in its rejectionist, *swadeshi* form – as arising out of new social structures through the grafting of a Western modernity into a new colonial modernity. This functions at the level of the general, but at the level of the particular – the level of the distinctiveness of the individual thinker – one has to return to a degree of scepticism as to the effectiveness of Sartori's formulation to undercover specificity.

The need to focus on the particular is accentuated in the case of Tagore precisely because of the multi-layered ways in which an image of him – at best incomplete, at worst ignorant and ethnocentric – was historically constructed during the period of his emergence into the Western cultural mainstream. The misinterpretation of events surrounding *Gitanjali* and the Nobel Prize has in many ways overshadowed Tagore as an historical actor – as an agent in his own right – and thus has partly obscured the significance of his larger project of inter-cultural communication which, as I have argued here, was conceived prior to 1912 and provided the real motivation for his trip. This in turn has reduced the level of present-day attention given to Tagore's theorising of the East–West encounter – in particular his writings on the nation – in numerous essays (either translated or written directly in English) from roughly 1910 onwards. Instead, when Tagore is remembered and written about today, we tend either to think of the 'nationalist' of the *swadeshi* era, or of the mystical poet of *Gitanjali* who was feted, and soon disregarded by Western audiences for 'talking too much about God'.[107]

The reception of *Gitanjali* and the Nobel Prize furore was only ever part of the story of Tagore and the West; and a very small part at that. If we are to move beyond the petty narratives developed by Western critics at the outset of Tagore's career in the West we need to turn to Tagore's social, political, philosophical and religious essays. And we need to subject them to a form of criticism which takes seriously the possibility that they might have been founded on a degree of autonomous insight which renders them meaningful as historical sources and indeed as sources which help us to re-think our place in today's postcolonial world.

3 On nations and empires

Tagore's debates with M. K. Gandhi

> What is needed is eagerness of heart for a fruitful communication between different cultures. Anything that prevents this is barbarism.[1]
>
> *Rabindra Rachanabli*

> What I should like to tell Indian students is, that they should not try to Westernise their ideas, but to develop them, at the same time extending a sympathetic understanding to European conceptions.[2]
>
> *The Sprit of Indian Religion*, 1923

> Rabindranath has no sympathy with the moderates of the Congress party whose political faith is symbolised by the mid-Victorian catchwords of Rationalism and Enlightenment, Progress and Liberty, and whose method is that of peaceful agitation through the press and the platform. Their attitude to the ancient spirit of India is one of indifference, if not contempt.[3]
>
> Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

As we have already seen with reference to the work of Edward Said, Tagore is often referred to in passing as a 'nationalist poet' or a 'nationalist leader'.[4] The fact is that by 1912 Tagore had explicitly rejected nationalism, where he may have been ambivalent before. Indeed, even this ambivalence is disputed by those who knew him most intimately. In a long and insightful letter, Prasanta Mahalanobis (an eminent statistician and a close friend of the Tagore family) has claimed that Tagore 'never supported nationalism, not in any form or guise. Even at the height of the *swadeshi* movement he was protesting against some particular aspects'.[5]

For his trouble, Tagore would come to earn the wrath of many of his contemporaries. An editorial in the pages of the Calcutta newspaper *Ananda Bazar Patrika* on 19 August 1925 bemoaned the 'ludicrous opinions of the Poet', which 'may appeal to those who live in a dream-world', whereas 'those who are grounded in the soil of this country and know of the realities . . . will no doubt feel that the Poet's useless labours are sad and pitiful'.[6] An article published in 1928 by a Bengali Gandhian went further still: 'it will not be unjust to say that he [Tagore] is unfit to be a priest at the sacred sacrificial rites for freedom'.[7] These discomforting judgements indicate why Tagore the anti-nationalist, anti-non-co-operator

and critic of Gandhi is often ignored. Tagore's views, expressed during the high period of anti-colonial nationalism, could all too easily be misinterpreted as a form of collaboration with colonial power. It is my suggestion here that Tagore's opposition to nationalism as a political ideology centred on the idea of the corruption of ends via mistaken means, and that focusing on these disagreements helps to elucidate a more complex understanding of his thought that refutes the simple application of the various imported, essentially Western classifications – 'liberal humanist' or 'romantic modernist' – that Tagore is placed under today.[8]

We have seen that Tagore's voyage to London in 1912 was neither casual nor accidental, and the idea that he set off in search of the recognition he was missing at home also misses the seriousness of Tagore's intentions.[9] There is an overwhelming body of evidence in his English language essays – mostly published in *The Modern Review* and in book form by Macmillan – that supports a coherent Tagorean line of thought linking Indian history to a critique of the modern ideology of nationalism, and an ambivalent position *vis-à-vis* the British Empire. This Tagorean position remains a controversial one, but it is one firmly grounded in a critical reading of Indian traditions, particularly in evidence in Tagore's deployment of his *Brahmo* inheritance and the ideas of the *Upanishads*.

The Tagore–Gandhi debates about the freedom struggle, India's stance towards the West and towards Britain as the colonial power point towards a complicated engagement with the West, its position in the world, its relationship to India and the political and intellectual influences that it had in India. The ideas expressed by the two men also relate to some of the historiographical and theoretical problems outlined in the Introduction, i.e. that there has been a tendency amongst some subalternists and postcolonialists to dismiss Tagore and to place him within categories which are both inappropriate and, ironically, imitative of Western terms of reference.

What is interesting is that, like Hegel, Tagore saw World History as the steady unfolding of an idea. The difference was that he placed India at the centre of that process. In this regard, Tagore developed an alternative conception of modernity which saw the ideas, politics and technology of the West as only one aspect of a developing historical process, rather than its core movement. This not only challenges the spatial dimensions of modernity but also requires us to think more critically about modernit*ies* and the kinds of categories we deploy to make sense of the modern and counter-modern.

What is Tagore's 'nation'?

Tagore was, it should never be forgotten, a poet first. He never opted for a straightforward definition when an elegant comparison could be made instead. E. P. Thompson noted this tendency in his introduction to the 1991 edition of *Nationalism*, and quoted his father, E. J. Thompson, as having rebuked Tagore over this point ('no man should let himself be at the mercy of his similes').[10] In fact, on the question of the nation Tagore makes one of his clearer statements. A nation, he says, is understood 'in the sense of the political and economic union of a people' and is 'that aspect which a whole population assumes when organised for a

mechanical purpose'.[11] Immediately we get a sense of Tagore's strategic use of the term. For Tagore, a nation cannot be equated with 'ethnie', nor straightforwardly with a cultural or linguistic group. It may have been born out of – and still comprise – such phenomena, but for Tagore the nation is distinctively modern and exclusively Western. Its 'mechanical purpose' implicates an instrumental rationality in its political and organisational form. The nation is a force that is greater than the sum of its parts: it has a purpose, and this purposeful element is reified in the form of the state. Therefore, in Tagore's critique, the nation is always the 'nation state'.

This approach to the idea of the nation cuts across late-twentieth-century debates about the nature of nations and nationalism. If we think about the exchanges between two of the most significant recent scholars of nations and nationalism, Ernest Gellner and Anthony D. Smith, and overlay this with a Tagorean perspective, we would find Tagore (perhaps unexpectedly) agreeing, in some senses at least, with Gellner's modernist understanding of the nation. Smith's emphasis on the importance of 'history, myths and memories'[12] for nations, thereby stressing their pre-modernity, shares a certain affinity with what Tagore calls 'a people' or 'peoples'. Gellner's emphasis is on high politics and the ideology of nationalism which 'creates nations', rather than pre-existing nations giving rise to nationalism.[13] This is precisely what Tagore sees as essential to nations, which are historically possible only within the context of specific aspects of Western modernity. The characteristics of that particular modernity which give rise to nations are the regulatory power of the state, combined with science, set within a wider framework of commercial and military competition between individual national units.[14] With these things in mind, Tagore's interpretation of the Western nation was that it belonged to a particular period in the West's history, and that it constituted neither a universal model nor a necessary path of convergence for World History.

State and society

Tagore's 'contrast concept', which helps us place his definition within the parameters of contemporary debates on nations and nationalism – as well as distinguish a distinctively Tagorean position – is 'society'. The nation is equated with the state as 'the organised self-interest of a whole people, where it is least human and least spiritual'.[15] The nation state is a 'machinery of commerce and politics turn[ing] out neatly compressed bales of humanity which have their use and high market value'.[16] Society, in contradistinction, has 'no ulterior purpose', but is rather 'an end in itself'.[17] In short, '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'.[18] Tagore replaces the ideology of nation with that of *swadeshi samaj*, of 'social relations that are not mechanical and impersonal but based on love and cooperation'.[19]

The key characteristic of the modern Western nation is that it seeks to exercise power by regulating its populace (what Tagore would simply call 'the people') and directing their collective energies towards externally oriented goals. The

nation state, for Tagore, is an organising system and a structure of power. This 'hardening method of national efficiency gains in strength, and at least for some limited period of time it proudly proves itself to be the fittest to survive . . . but it is the survival of that part of man which is the least living'.[20] It produces efficiency but also monotony and sameness, such that Western modernity – for example, as manifested in modern towns, which present to us 'the physiognomy of this dominance of the nation' – is 'everywhere the same from San Francisco to London, [and now] from London to Tokyo'.[21] The nation is thus characterised as externally aggressive and competitive, but is also equated with internal disciplinary and regulatory power and the erosion of difference. Hence, in both its internal and external orientations, it is the negation of that freedom which is to be found in the life-world of 'peoples': 'living personalities' that find their self-expression in 'literature, art, social symbolism [and ceremony]'.[22] Again, the similarity between Tagore's 'people' and Smith's 'nation' – grounded in what Smith calls 'ethno-symbolism' – is striking.[23]

A second contrast concept utilised by Tagore to draw his distinctions between the activities of the nation state and the life-world of society is 'politics'. As E. P. Thompson rightly points out, Tagore was the founder of an 'anti-politics' who, 'more than any other thinker of his time, had a clear conception of civil society, as something distinct from and of stronger and more personal texture than political or economic structures'.[24] When political civilisation prevails, Tagore wrote,

> nations live in an atmosphere of fear, greed, and panic, due to the preying of one nation upon other [sic] for material wealth. Its civilisation is carnivorous and cannibalistic, feeding upon the blood of weaker nations. Its one idea is to thwart all greatness outside its own boundaries. Never before were there such terrible jealousies, such betrayals of trust; all this is called patriotism, whose creed is politics.[25]

There is confusion afoot, Tagore says, when equating the idea of 'nation' with 'people'.[26] It leads to 'a hopeless moral blindness'.[27] The 'ideal of the social man is unselfishness' whereas that of the nation is selfishness.[28] Hence, extolling the virtues of the nation means that 'the moral foundation of man's civilisation is unconsciously undergoing change', such that 'we find men feeling convinced of the superior claims of Christianity, because Christian nations are in possession of the greater part of the world. It is like supporting a robber's religion by quoting the amount of stolen property'.[29] It is the cult of nationalism, Tagore believes, that allows us to celebrate the nation even though 'what we see in practice is that every nation who [sic] has prospered [materially] has done so through its career of aggressive selfishness either in commercial adventures or in foreign possessions or in both'.[30] Tagore's point is not that the body he calls 'the people' is entirely innocent; 'we must admit that evils there are in human nature and they come out in spite of our faith in moral laws', he says. But the advent of the nation as understood in the modern West provides both vehicle and ideology for the accentuation and acceleration of the more negative, selfish, competitive spirit of man. '[W]hen

this idea of the Nation, which has met with universal acceptance in the present day, tries to pass off the cult of selfishness as a moral duty . . . it not only commits depredations but attacks the very vitals of humanity'.[31]

Tagore implicitly points to the power of the national ideal to generate action and self-sacrifice when he claims that the problem with nationalism is that it teaches that 'the nation is greater than the people'.[32] This is interesting because Tagore claims it is precisely the 'power of self-sacrifice' and the 'moral faculty of sympathy and co-operation' that constitutes 'the guiding spirit of social vitality'.[33] Some nationalists – and indeed some analysts of nationalism – have argued the opposite position: that it is the ideal of nationhood that can inspire the individual to greater ends than he or she alone could achieve. In Benedict Anderson's famous example, it is the seductive emotional power of the 'tomb of the unknown soldier', in which the principle of sacrifice – in anonymity, and on behalf of 'the people' – becomes a core ideal of the modern imagined national community.[34] Others have pointed out the way in which the national community has been integral to the moral bonds and shared risks underpinning modern welfarism.[35] But for Tagore, by contrast, the fetishisation of national form is ultimately opposed to the spirit of self-sacrifice. This is so because nationalism leads the people 'to ignore the moral law *which is universal* and uses it only within the bounds of its narrow sphere'.[36]

This, in an important sense, is the crux of Tagore's critique of the modern nation. He is, as we have seen, an insistent universalist. Moral truth is one and omnipresent: hence any 'external' organisational form which seeks to contradict that truth is a 'moral offence'. It is the nation state, for Tagore – in dividing humankind – which most aggressively presages this sin. Tagore's objective, of course, was not to provide a theory of nations and nationalism. Rather, it was to make an intervention in India's evolving, proto-national public sphere: to offer an assessment of the global historical context in which he found himself, based on a moral and spiritual vision and providing a 'message', both to India and to the West. But the point that Tagore makes about nations and the division of humankind is more than just a casual observation, and in fact resonates with the kind of theories of sovereignty and nationhood that had emerged in nineteenth-century Europe, which – as Andrew Vincent has pointed out – 'literally envisaged the state as a real person, in the sense that all its powers were self-derived, qua sovereignty and personality'.[37] The use of the idea of personality here is interesting, and we should recall Tagore's emphasis on the notion of a Personal God as a core facet of a monistic world view in which God's presence in the world is through the creative impulse of Personal Man towards unity. If the modern notion of sovereignty – with its territorialised, bounded divisions – is indeed a 'principle of individuation'[38], then Tagore would see the nation state as an impediment to communion between God and Man.

The philosophical grounding of anti-nationalism

In the development of Tagore's argument about nationalism, we see the now familiar distinction between the internal and the external. Where humanity is

living, it is guided by 'inner ideals'.[39] Tagore then uses an interesting analogy, claiming that 'the idea of the nation is the professionalism of the people'.[40] Professionalism is 'the region where men specialise their knowledge and organise their power, where they mercilessly elbow each other in their struggle'.[41] Such professionalism must not be allowed 'to assume complete mastery over the Personal Man, making him narrow and hard, exclusively intent on the pursuit of success at the cost of his faith in ideals'.[42] It is precisely this kind of competitiveness that Tagore sees as being inherent in the modern idea of the nation. The organisational and disciplinary capacity of the modern nation is intimately bound up with the state, and Tagore's position was one in which the entire world of politics and bureaucracy is rejected in favour of a 'spontaneous' life-world based on the 'social regulation of differences on the one hand, and the spiritual recognition of unity on the other'.[43] But where does this Tagorean position come from?

As Kalyan Sen Gupta notes in his *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, 'while he [Tagore] was . . . receptive to ideas associated with the Bauls and Sufis of Bengal, as well as to Hindu Vaishnavism[44] and to Buddhism, it was always the *Upanishadic* endeavour to relate everything to a single ultimate reality [that stands behind the world of everyday experience] to which he remained most faithful'.[45] In Tagore's interpretation, as we saw in Chapter 2, this ultimate reality consists of a supreme power which is both immanent in the universe and also responsible for sustaining and regulating it. Given the name *Brahman*, it represents a universal 'world soul', which Tagore himself referred to as the Infinite Personality.[46] From this springs an obvious moral imperative: 'if each of us belongs to the universal soul, if the same infinite is equally present in all of us, then we ourselves are at bottom identical or one with each other . . . [and] recognition of this paves the way to openness to others, and generates in us love and concern for our fellow beings'.[47] This means that, for Tagore, 'our basic commitment to the good of others is grounded in an intellectual, philosophical understanding of the nature of reality'.[48] Yet again we see that the modern European theorisation of sovereignty – upon which the modern nation state is parasitic – as residing in a legal personality is diametrically opposed to the structure of Tagore's thinking.

The key distinctions to be drawn between Tagore's position and the classical position developed in the *Upanishads* are thus ontological. For the *Upanishadic* thinkers, the ultimate monistic reality that gave rise to a conception of human 'oneness' was a matter of metaphysics. Whilst one can certainly establish a reading of Tagore's position which is similar to this *Upanishadic* perspective, what is more significant is that, for Tagore, such 'oneness' that represents an 'Infinite Self' or 'Infinite Personality' is to be *experienced*, not merely deduced. It is not a matter of rational argument. Instead, as Tagore put it in *The Religion of Man*, 'reality in all its manifestations reveals itself in the emotional and imaginative background of our mind. We know it not because we can think of it, but because we directly feel it'.[49]

As I suggested in Chapter 2, this 'emotional background' is part of an alternative theory of human nature that is central to Tagore's philosophy and, by extension, his anti-nationalism. It is based on the speculative insight that the

phenomenology of love is more central to the human condition than that of antagonism. This insistent aspect of our being is what Tagore called the 'Personal Man', man in an unalienated condition. 'It is the Personal Man', Tagore claimed, 'who is conscious of truth, beauty and goodness', and 'it is almost a truism to say that the fundamental light of this world of personality is Love'.[50] But Tagore should not be judged as a thinker whose conception of love was merely aesthetic or abstract. In an important and extended letter to C. F. Andrews, written in 1918, shortly after he returned to Shantiniketan from his tour of the United States, Tagore explained his ideal of love as realised in the social world.

> We must keep in mind that love of persons and love of ideas can be terribly egoistic and that love can therefore lead to bondage instead of setting us free. It is constant sacrifice and service, which alone can loosen the shackles. We must not merely enjoy our love (whether personal or ideal) by contemplating its beauty and truth, but give expression to it in our life's work.[51]

The idea of life's obstinate antagonism to the ideal recalls the importance of *maya* in Tagore's philosophy, and gives us a sense of why he has been referred to as *maya yogi*.[52] The path towards truth is not a straightforward one. Man as man is far from perfect, and life itself presents myriad obstacles, but the ultimate truth of love and the compulsion towards unity is, for Tagore, a primary force. As he expressed it in poetic form,

> Let the veil of 'I' fall apart
> And the pure light of consciousness
> Break through the mists
> Revealing the everlasting face of truth.[53]

The sense of oneness – in marked contradistinction, we might say, to the modernist idea of alienation – is in fact a pressing aspect of our everyday being. This recalls the previously referred to unalienated existence of the Shantal tribespeople: 'look at the aboriginal *Shantal* women around our *ashram*', Tagore wrote to Andrews in 1918: 'in them, the ideal of physical life finds its perfect development, only because they are ever active in giving it expression in work'.[54] Tagore sees the individual life as an always incomplete endeavour: a human being 'is aware that he is not imperfect but incomplete. He knows that in himself some meaning has yet to be realised'.[55] As Sen Gupta puts it, '[i]t is in the conviction, founded in direct experience, that a person is not a discrete, "isolated" being and may only realise his or her true nature through identification with the whole universe, that the essence of Tagore's spirituality resides'.[56] The realisation of this unity becomes part of the work of human existence. Indeed, for Tagore, it becomes its overriding purpose, and constitutes what might be called a kind of 'frontierism of the self', ever pushing the boundary of the individual outwards.

This leads to what Sen Gupta calls the '*leitmotif* of the location of a person . . . [being] outside the narrow confines of a self or ego'.[57] For Tagore, this movement

beyond the self has both an aesthetic and a soteriological aspect. It is by stepping outside of ourselves that we can be 'saved' from ourselves. 'I strive', Tagore once explained to one of his most famous students, 'for a rare salvation', which is 'the salvation of oneself from one's own self'.[58] It is also in doing so that we realise the harmonious nature of the whole. As Tagore put it,

> [i]n the night, we stumble over things and become acutely conscious of their individual separateness, but the day reveals the greater unity which embraces them. And the man whose inner vision is bathed in an illumination of his consciousness . . . no longer awkwardly stumbles over individual facts of separateness in the human world, accepting them as final; he realises that peace is in the inner harmony which dwells in truth, and not in any outer adjustments.[59]

What Tagore sees as a human essence – the movement towards unity – lies in the so-called 'surplus' to which I referred in Chapter 2. Man experiences this surplus in his creative, spiritual self, which takes him beyond the individualistic and pragmatic concerns of biological necessity, and can be experienced and manifested 'in many spheres of human life: in our fellowship with other persons, in artistic endeavour, in religion, and in our harmony with the natural world'.[60] Tagore's theory of human nature is thus grounded in man as a creative being, which means that 'our imagination makes us intensely conscious of a life we must live which transcends the individual life and contradicts the biological meaning of the instinct of self-preservation'.[61] This creativity is not something which can be isolated, but must be shared in order to be realised and this, in turn, has significant implications for Tagore's approach to the idea of freedom. For Tagore, freedom is not a negative quality, not concerned with independence, but rather with inter-dependence.

> One may imagine that an individual who succeeds in disassociating himself from his fellows attains real freedom, inasmuch as all ties of relationship implied obligation to others. But we know that . . . in the human world only a perfect arrangement of interdependence gives rise to freedom. The most individualistic of human beings who owe no responsibility are the savages who failed to attain their fullness of manifestation . . . only those maintain freedom . . . who have the power to cultivate mutual understanding and cooperation. The history of the growth of freedom is the history of the perfection of human relationships.[62]

What the above discussion suggests is that Tagore's position draws a clear distinction between the nation as a nation state on the one hand – with its fetishisation of territory and boundaries, its machine-like bureaucracy and its politics, which narrow the sphere of human life and encourage inter-national competitiveness and intra-national homogenisation – and society on the other. The avowal that the nation state is hostile to the true 'social man' is a position that can be derived from Tagore's readings of the *Upanishads* and his own phenomenology of the everyday.

Whether one agrees with Tagore's critique of the nation, it is, I suggest, systematically linked to the other central elements of Tagore's philosophy. Moreover, it owes nothing of any substance to external intellectual or philosophical trends. Tagore's ideas concerning the alienation engendered by the politics of the state versus the unalienated life-world; his juxtaposition of state and politics with society and religion; his critique of the utilitarian basis of modern nationalism; and his belief that love forms a foundation for a theory of human nature could all be shown to have affinities with, variously: Marxism, anarchism, Romanticism and Christian theology. But the important fact is that for Tagore, none of his ideas were in fact derived from these sources. If affinities could be established, all the better, Tagore might say, for it merely confirmed his belief in 'universal truth'. But Tagorean anti-nationalism was almost exclusively borne out of Indian philosophical and theological traditions, and from autochthonous historical experience. In the next section I aim to show how this mature post-*swadeshi* position on the nation fed into Tagore's debates with Gandhi over the nature of the freedom struggle.

Arguing with Gandhi

Gandhi and Tagore met for the first time in Shantiniketan in February 1915, but Tagore's awareness of Gandhi and his activities in South Africa had developed from about 1913. As we know, C. F. Andrews had, since late 1912, been resident at Tagore's *ashram* in Shantiniketan. In late 1913, Andrews set sail from Calcutta to Durban where he hoped to learn more about Mr Gandhi – not yet *mahatma*, for the appellation would be given by Tagore – and make a contribution to his struggle for the rights of Indians in South Africa. It was via the pen of Andrews that Tagore's interest in Gandhi developed, and in 1915 Andrews facilitated a visit to Tagore's *ashram* by boys from Gandhi's Phoenix School. But it was not until 1919 that their correspondence would take the vital and critical form that made such a major contribution to the development of Gandhi's thought, a fact apparently missed by much postcolonial writing on Gandhi.[63]

1919: The Rowlatt Act and the Amritsar Massacre

By 1919, those hoping for a genuine post-war reform programme had been disappointed by the limited imaginings of the Montagu–Chelmsford proposals, and then humiliated by the draconian Rowlatt Act passed in March 1919, which undermined basic civil liberties in the mistaken – though all too widely held – belief that popular movements could be controlled by state repression. It was at this juncture that Gandhi rose dramatically to national prominence and hence came to Tagore's attention. Gandhi's *satyagraha* in March and April – directed against the Rowlatt legislation – had prompted unprecedented levels of popular involvement in political struggles, far removed from the elite musings of the Indian National Congress. It had also led to various outbreaks of violence, and for Tagore – as for Gandhi – this was a cause of grave concern.

Gandhi had asked Tagore, in a letter written on 5 April, for a public declaration of support for the *satyagraha*. In response, Tagore wrote to Gandhi on 12 April with a prophetic warning: 'our authorities have shown us their claws', he said, '[and the] power of good must prove its truth and strength by its fearlessness, by its refusal to accept any imposition which depends for its success upon its power to produce frightfulness and is not ashamed to use its machines of destruction to terrorise a population completely disarmed'.[64] Moreover, 'power in all its forms', he wrote, 'is irrational – it is like the horse that drags the carriage blindfolded. The moral element in it is only represented in the man who drives the horse. Passive resistance is a force which is not necessarily moral in itself; it can be used against truth as well as for it'.[65] Tagore refused to see the idea of non-cooperation in a positive light *simply* because it was non-violent. He instead placed his emphasis on the subjective intentionality of those carrying out the act. This position was entirely consistent with Tagore's idealism. *Satyagraha* was not an end in itself: its moral value depended on the ends to which it was directed and, crucially, the motivations for its invocation. Likewise, Gandhi's sense of *ahimsa* as 'active love' also placed an emphasis on the intention of the agent. For both Tagore and Gandhi, the ideal of love – equated with and intimately linked to notions of God and Truth – was central to their ideas of individual and social agency. Tagore's parting words in this letter of April 1919 were therefore not an endorsement of Gandhi's non-cooperation movement, but rather a message in poetic form; Tagore's contribution to what he called Gandhi's 'noble work'. The final stanza of the poem contains much of the philosophical essence that would guide Tagore's response to Gandhi's enactment of non-cooperation as a means of resistance to colonial rule.

> Give me the supreme courage of love, this is my prayer – the courage to speak, to do, to suffer at thy will, to leave all things or be left alone.
>
> Give me the supreme faith of love, this is my prayer – the faith of the life in death, of the victory in defeat, of power hidden in the frailness of beauty, of the dignity of pain that accepts hurt but disdains to return it.[66]

April 1919 had seen Gandhi-inspired *satyagraha* across the Punjab, and it had also seen widespread violence in which a number of Europeans had been killed. On 13 April, Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer gave his response. In command of some 90 troops, he ordered his men to expend all the ammunition they had into a large crowd gathered at the Jallianwala Bagh, a walled garden in the north of the city of Amritsar. The firing was reported to have lasted for 10 minutes. The result was the death of 379 unarmed civilians, with a further 1,137 injured.[67] During the course of the Hunter Committee – set up to investigate what we now know as the Amritsar Massacre – Dyer stated that had he been able to make use of the two mounted machine guns at his disposal, he would have. In the event, the narrow walled lanes that provided the limited entry and exit points from the garden prevented him from doing so. But his intention was clear. 'If more troops had been at hand', he told the Hunter Committee, 'the casualties would have been

greater in proportion'. Indeed, '[i]t was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowd'. His desire was to produce 'a sufficient moral effect, from a military point of view, not only on those who were present but more specially throughout the Punjab. There could be no question of undue severity'.[68]

For Gandhi, the lesson was all too clear. In March, he had publicly declared that 'whether you are a *satyagrahi* or not, so long as you disapprove of the Rowlatt legislation you can join [us]'.[69] Numbers and impact were what Gandhi was seeking. But as the course of the *satyagraha* unfolded Gandhi quickly realised that the use of mass public protest and non-violent methods was potentially subject to aberrations on the one side, which in turn had the potential to, as Tagore put it, 'beget evil on the other'.[70] Gandhi made his public admission of guilt in Ahmedabad on 14 April, where he said, in light of the recent turn of events, 'a rapier run through my body could hardly have pained me more'.[71] In a letter written on 19 April, he may well have been referring directly to Tagore's warnings about the irrationality of power when he said that 'I at least should have foreseen some of the consequences, specially in view of the gravest warnings that were given to me by friends whose advice I have always sought and valued'.[72]

1919–1922: non-cooperation and swadeshi

Although Gandhi was chastened by the consequences of his *satyagraha*, it only furthered his resolve to ensure that future non-cooperation had better leadership, which would in turn require the strengthening of a network of properly inducted *satyagrahis*. The non-cooperation movement of 1919–1922 was thus more organised and strategic. It sought to utilise *swadeshi* as an expression of non-cooperation, an approach which involved the boycotting of foreign produced goods, particularly textiles. It involved not only the boycotting of such goods but also their public, symbolic destruction through burning. In addition, Gandhi called upon India's youth to boycott government schools and so resist what he saw as its programme of indoctrination. These actions – with Gandhi as the ideological and spiritual inspiration – provoked a series of fascinating exchanges between Tagore and Gandhi, played out in the pages of *The Modern Review*, and Gandhi's own journal, *Young India*.

The opening gambit appeared as a set of three letters from Tagore to C. F. Andrews published in *The Modern Review* in May 1921. In them, Tagore expounded at great length on what he saw as the key failing of Gandhi's movement: the instrumentalisation – and hence corruption – of the ideas of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* via the boycott of education and the burning of cloth. Tagore was also deeply concerned by the implications of this approach for India's stance in regard to the 'outside world'. Continuing his trend of endorsing the moral stature of Gandhi as a man and as a leader, he wrote that 'it is in the fitness of things, that Mahatma Gandhi, frail in body and devoid of all material resources, should call up the immense power of the meek'.[73] But he then goes on to question the very meaning of *swaraj* in what he deems to be its Gandhian sense: his answer is that Gandhi's idea of *swaraj* (as an end) is only *maya*: 'it is like a mist, that will vanish

leaving no stain on the radiance of the Eternal . . . we may delude ourselves with . . . phrases learnt from the West, [but] *swaraj* is not our objective'.[74] Tagore may have been a *maya yogi*, struggling towards truth through *maya*, but *maya* itself could not be an aim, objective or end.

Tagore then turns to his specific concerns regarding non-cooperation, claiming that '[t]he idea of non-cooperation is political asceticism'. 'Our students', he said, 'are bringing their offerings of sacrifice to what? Not to a fuller education, but to non-education'.[75] For Tagore, withdrawing students from the educational structures that existed and offering them no education at all represented 'the anarchy of a mere emptiness', by which he said he was not tempted.[76] Gandhi's response, entitled 'The Poet's Anxiety', praised Tagore for his 'exquisite jealousy of India's honour'. Gandhi in fact shared with Tagore the belief that freedom, *swaraj*, was not to be gained at any price nor by any means; freedom gained by the wrong means was not freedom at all. *Swaraj* was about a process – the journey or the 'experiment', as Gandhi would commonly refer to it – not simply destination. But unlike Tagore, Gandhi stressed the *dharmic* side of non-cooperation. For Gandhi there existed a duty to actively resist evil, not only a duty to do good and – in a strikingly gendered passage – he claimed that '[n]on-cooperation is a protest against an unwitting and unwilling participation in evil . . . Government schools have unmanned us . . . they have made us what we were intended to become – clerks and interpreters'.[77]

In another *Modern Review* essay entitled 'The Call of Truth', published in August 1921, Tagore picks up on the theme of the *charka*, the spinning wheel that now sits proudly at the heart of the Indian Republic's flag as an enduring emblem of independence.[78] For Gandhi the *charka* was both a symbol of, and means to freedom. His call to all Indians – including the poet – to take up spinning for 30 minutes a day symbolised solidarity with the poor and the downtrodden. 'When all about me are dying for want of food' he wrote, 'the only occupation permissible for me is to feed the hungry . . . Hunger is the argument that is driving India to the spinning wheel. The call of the spinning wheel is the noblest of all. Because it is the call of love. And love is *swaraj*'.[79] Gandhi's belief in the *charka* was both moral and materialist. In a concluding attack on Tagore – ever susceptible to charges of otherworldliness and poetic sensibility – Gandhi suggested that he had 'found it impossible to soothe suffering patients with a song from Kabir', a reference to the fifteenth-century Indian poet whose work Tagore had recently translated and published in London. 'The hungry millions ask for one poem', Gandhi continued, 'invigorating food. They cannot be given it. They must earn it. And they can earn only by the sweat of their brow'.[80]

Tagore's objections to what he later called Gandhi's 'cult of the *charka*' were easily misrepresented as being explicable in terms of a lack of interest in the plight of the masses. It is worth remembering at this point that, in addition to founding a school and an international university in Shantiniketan, Tagore also founded a centre for rural reconstruction in West Bengal and as a *zamindar* he encountered rural poverty and was concerned with its amelioration. Such concern may well have been grounded in a patrician's sense of *noblesse oblige*, but this should not

blind us to the role played by Tagore's religious and social perspective. Tagore repeatedly expressed his belief that love must be active love, expressed within a social context. Tagore was equally convinced, like Gandhi – and contrary to what Bhikhu Parekh calls 'the largely negative meaning given to *ahimsa* in Indian traditions' – that *ahimsa* should be expressed in an active, compassionate form.[81]

But Tagore's concerns in fact ran deeper, and related to the many problems he felt were inherent in the *charka* movement: homogeneity, regimentation, loss of diversity and the loss of creative thought. For Tagore, the real problem with the *charka* was essentially the same as that with the state, bureaucracy, military, commercial organisations and conventional educational establishments: they regulate, discipline and control, and as such they hinder the realisation of 'truth' in man, which lies in his creative aspect. As Tagore put it in *The Call of Truth*,

> [i]t is admitted that European military camps and factories are stinting man, that their greed is cutting man down to the measure of their own narrow purpose, that for these reasons joylessness darkly lowers over the West. But if man be stunted by big machines, the danger of his being stunted by small machines must not be lost sight of.[82]

As so often, Tagore uses a metaphor to make his point, in this case the idea of a beehive: '[f]rom our master, the *Mahatma*', Tagore says, 'we must learn the truth of love in all its purity'. But, 'the science and art of building up *swaraj* is a vast subject'.

> Its pathways are difficult to traverse and take time. For this task, aspiration and emotion must be there, but no less must study and thought be likewise. . . . Why should he [Gandhi] not say: Come ye from all sides and be welcome. Let all the forces of the land be brought into action, for then alone shall the country awake. Freedom is in complete awakening, in full self-expression . . . but his call came to one narrow field alone. To one and all he simply says: 'spin and weave' . . . when nature called to the bee to take refuge in the narrow life of the hive, millions of bees responded to it for the sake of efficiency . . . the call to the case of efficiency is well enough for the bee. The wealth of power, that is Man's, can only become manifest when his utmost is claimed.[83]

Such regimentation may have befitted the bee for the sole purpose of producing honey, but in exchange for such efficiency and direction of purpose the bee 'accepted the loss of sex'.[84] Stretching his analogy somewhat, Tagore claimed that 'any country, the people of which can agree to become neuters for the sake of some temptation, or command, carries within itself its own prison-house'.[85] Tagore saw no reason why all Indians should be engaged in the same activity, and indeed felt this was a denial of the manifest diversity of human talent, thereby inhibiting the full expression of the human capacity for freedom.

Means and ends

At this point, what can we say about the differences between Tagore and Gandhi? The stereotypical explanation of their relationship is one that has, in all its dimensions, thrived on binaries: the handsome poet and the bespectacled, *khadi*-clad *mahatma*; the aristocrat and the (self-styled) subaltern; pro-West, anti-West; apolitical, political; modern, non-modern; and so on. In fact, they agreed on many issues at a foundational level.[86] But where Gandhi favoured direct action through non-violent means to force an end to British rule and to free Indians from their subjection in both body and mind, Tagore opposed almost every single one of Gandhi's practical applications of the principles of *satyagraha*. Theirs was a disagreement about means and ends.

In a 1921 letter to C. F. Andrews in which Tagore sets down some of his initial reflections on non-cooperation, Tagore referred to his son Rathindranath, a close follower of politics and an ever-present confidant. He mentions that 'R [Rathindranath], in support of the present movement, has often said to me that passion for rejection is a stronger power in the beginning than the acceptance of an ideal'. 'Though I know it to be a fact', Tagore continues, 'I cannot take it as a truth'.[87] He goes on to explicate this point via an interpretation of the history of India's spiritual development.

> Buddha kept silent all through his teachings about the truth of *Om*, the everlasting yes, his implication being that by the negative path of destroying the self we naturally reach that truth. Therefore he emphasised the fact of *dukkha* (misery) which had to be avoided and the *Brahma-vidya* emphasised the fact of *ananda* (joy) to be attained. The latter cult also needs for its fulfilment the discipline of self-abnegation, but it holds before its view the idea of Brahma, not only at the end but all through the process of realisation. Therefore, the idea of life's training was different in the *Vedic* period from that of the Buddhistic. In the former it was the purification of life's joy, in the latter it was the eradication of it. The abnormal type of asceticism to which Buddhism gave rise in India revelled in celibacy . . . but the forest life of *Brahmana* was not antagonistic to the social life of man, but harmonious with it.[88]

As we have seen, Tagore's religious philosophy is one premised on a radical affirmation of the ideal of love. As he put it, 'no, in its passive moral form is asceticism and in its active moral form is violence . . . the desert is as much a form of *himsa* as is the raging sea in storm', for 'they are both against life'.[89] This is then linked clearly to Tagore's stance *vis-à-vis* the West: 'I believe in the true meeting of the East and the West. Love is the ultimate truth of the soul. We should do all we can, not to outrage that truth, [but instead] to carry its banner against all opposition'.[90] Gandhi's response to this Tagorean position was to repeat his clear and direct *dharmic* injunction: 'Non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as co-operation with good'.[91]

Both Gandhi and Tagore agreed, then, that freedom was the ultimate aim, but in Tagore's eyes, Gandhi's *swaraj* placed too much emphasis on politicised forms

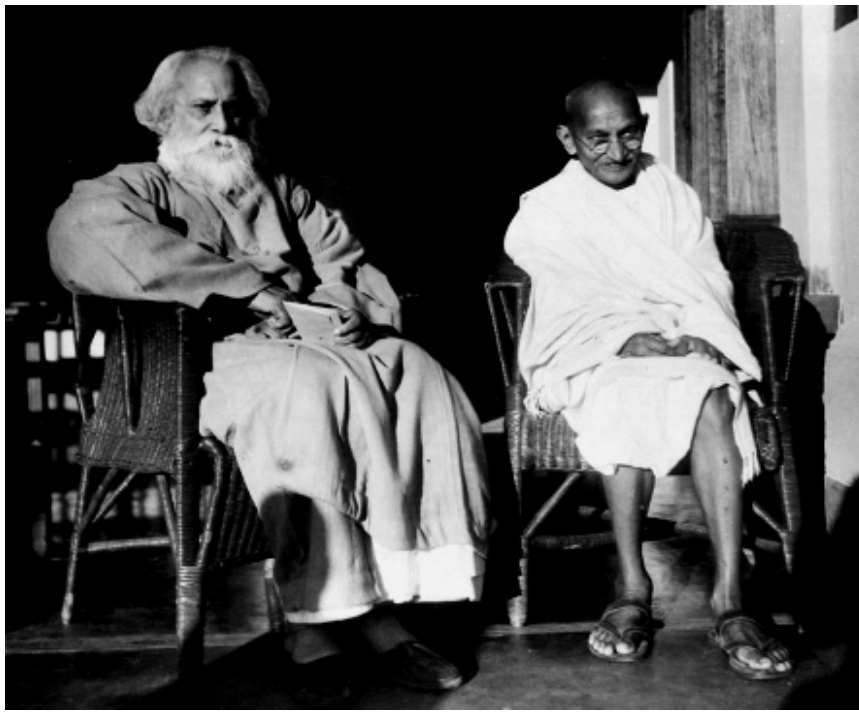

Plate 2 The Mahatma and the poet in Santiniketan, 1940, not long before Tagore's death. Their dialogue was tempestuous and profoundly influential for both men. Ultimately their bond was built on deep admiration and affection. (Photo courtesy of Rabindra Bhavana, Santiniketan.)

of nationalism as the means by which it would achieve this end: Gandhi may not have claimed to be a political leader, but he played the game of politics. Tagore's argument was that despite naming freedom as his ultimate aim, in essence Gandhi's *satyagraha* was motivated by negative intentions, even hatred in some cases. It would naturally bring out violent and dark forces. As understandable as these may be, motivating men – or even allowing for the possibility that they might be motivated – by negative forces could not lead to what Tagore had called 'the revealment of light'.

Class, caste and ideology

To focus on the external dimensions of India's unfreedom was to miss the fact, as Tagore saw it, that freedom lies 'within'. Gandhi believed this too, but he reveals in himself a far more materialist frame of mind when he argued that he had difficulty, 'in imagining the possibility of a man having nothing but a bit of flint . . . for lighting . . . his matchlock ever singing new hymns of praise and delivering to

an aching world a message of peace and goodwill upon earth'. 'A plea for the spinning wheel', Gandhi had said 'is a plea for the dignity of labour'.[92] Again Gandhi, as was his often mischievous nature, allows himself to taunt Tagore, who could easily be portrayed as far removed from the travails of the poor.[93] But can Tagore's position be adequately critiqued in terms of caste and/or class? Is Tagore's idealised vision of India the indulgent and aloof perspective of a wealthy landowner who may have never laboured a day in his life? Is Tagore's spiritual aesthetic merely an expression of his class consciousness and indifference to the plight of the Indian peasant?

The argument can easily be made. Towards the middle of the 1920s and certainly by the 1930s, a 'post-Tagore' period began to consolidate itself in Bengali literary society. The main focus of criticism was upon what fellow poets and writers saw as Tagore's apparent lack of interest in matters political, and more specifically social. The realism of Western modernists was admired as a cutting edge by means of which a poet or writer living and working within the colonial modernity of twentieth-century Calcutta could dig into the nitty-gritty of everyday life. Realism in literature became the twin of social reform in politics, illuminating the conditions that provided the impetus for the reform agenda underpinning India's Gandhian-inspired nationalism. Tagore's place in the new social realism was an unsettled one. Although novels such as *The Home and the World* sought to deal with the social world of modern Calcutta, the messages were complicated; often seemingly ambivalent about aspects of Indian social life. But from the perspective of intellectual history – if recovering past thought for its own sake is one of its objectives – then far more is lost than gained by deploying such politicised categories against Tagore.[94]

I have already referred at some length to the importance Tagore placed on social endeavour. In light of this it is hard to sustain the charge of a callous indifference to the poor. Moreover, on the specific issue of caste and social reform, both Gandhi and Tagore adopted ambivalent positions. In spite of his well-known opposition to untouchability, Gandhi in fact wrote and spoke frequently in support of *Varna* and of caste, though he drew a distinction between the two. *Varna* was a simpler fourfold division of society into a priesthood (*Brahmin*), a warrior cadre (*Kshatriya*), a commercial or business group (*Vaishya*) and manual labourers (*Shudra*). 'The law of *Varna*', Gandhi wrote in an essay – also partly directed at Tagore – 'is intimately, if not indissolubly connected with birth, and the observance of the law of *Varna* means the following on the part of us all of the hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers in a spirit of duty'.[95] Gandhi concluded that 'our failure to follow the law of *Varna* is responsible both for our spiritual and economic ruin'.[96] And although he drew an aggressive distinction at times ('Down with the monster of caste that masquerades in the guise of *Varna*. It is this travesty of *Varna* that has degraded Hinduism and India'[97]), he could be equally defensive of the system.

> We in India have evolved caste: they in Europe have organised class . . . if class helps to conserve certain social virtues, caste does the same in equal, if

> not greater, degree. The beauty of the caste system is that it does not base itself upon distinctions of wealth [or] possessions . . . caste is but an extension of the principle of the family.[98]

Not only is '*Varna* the best form of insurance for happiness and for religious pursuit', Gandhi had claimed, but also 'a *Shudra* who acquires the qualities of a Brahmin may not be called a *Brahmin* in his birth . . . and it is a good thing for him not to arrogate a *Varna* to which he is not born'.[99]

Tagore's response to these kinds of assertions was economistic, and in a generic sense liberal. He saw it as highly inefficient for people to be allocated to occupation by virtue of birth and felt that the persistence of hereditary occupations was destructive of an innovative quality of mind. The idea of *Varna*, Tagore claimed, where some were assigned lowly, and others high, occupations according to a hereditary principle, restricted human freedom. At present, Tagore said, the ideals, education, training and attitude of mind associated with castes such *Brahmin* and *Kshatriya* were 'nowhere to be found'.[100] '[T]his has come to mean that each caste must at all costs follow its traditional rules; which, again, in practical effect, is reduced to this, that the fixed external observances must be kept up, without reference to their significance or utility.'[101] To make improvements, even in the products of manual labour, 'the application of mind is necessary'.[102] When that is 'destroyed by hereditary pursuit of the caste avocation, man is reduced to a machine, and can but keep on repeating himself'.[103] This theme of the clash between man and machine is thus a constant Tagorean trope, shaping his perspective on the founding organisational principles of modernity – nation and state – as well as economic activity and education. But it also reached down to his attitude to society, custom and religion: the ultimate good for Tagore was the freedom to realise the 'inner truth' of man, and anything that prevented this – including the thoughtless and unquestioning repetition of dead custom – was to be resisted.

Compulsion and individual freedom

When Gandhi visited Tagore's Shantiniketan school in 1915, he cajoled the students and teachers, largely against Rabindranath's will, to learn about self-help by enactment: that is, by cooking and cleaning for themselves. As Judith Brown puts it in her biography of Gandhi, 'the experiment was short-lived. But it demonstrated that wherever Gandhi went, even where he was most welcome and at home, his critical eye was on people's habits and relationships, and he could not rest content without attempting to reform according to his own ideals'.[104] This vignette takes us towards the problem of compulsion and individual freedom which lies at the heart of the disagreement between Gandhi and Tagore over nationalism and the very nature of politics. As I have suggested, Tagore felt that the pursuit of *swaraj* that made Western political forms its objective, and which was motivated by negative forces (contempt for the British, the destruction of cloth and so on) was unacceptable. Tagore was deeply concerned with individual freedom too, which was 'the final goal of a fully and completely lived human

life'.[105] It was the inner self, and specifically self-realisation through the freedom of self-creation, that was central to the human experience. To this end, he deplored the compulsions of instrumental rationality. Humans also expressed themselves in the world of work and labour. But, as I referred to in Chapter 2, Tagore felt that it was the inner sphere of the *creative impulse* – the 'abundance' or 'surplus', that wealth of creative capacity and fund of emotional energy – which takes the human beyond the realms of a mere concern with self-preservation. Tagore did not ask humans to abandon their social identity, for the truth of love was, as he repeatedly states, expressed through cooperation and unity. But the sphere of the inner self must also be defended if we are to avoid alienation from our true nature.

It was out of this concern that much of Tagore's fear of Gandhi and his movement came. In a letter sent to C. F. Andrews as early as July 1915, Tagore made the following striking claim: 'only a moral tyrant like Gandhi can think that he has the dreadful power to make his ideas prevail through the means of slavery'.[106] It is fitting that Andrews' biographer titled his work *The Ordeal of Love*, because Andrews' love was not an ordeal for him alone: Tagore often found his attentions cloying and suffocating. But he was devoted to Gandhi and Tagore in equal measure and desperately wanted the two to see eye to eye. So much so that when he came to publish Tagore's comments in his 1928 *Letters to a Friend* he removed all reference to Gandhi and left only the 'tyrant' in abstract form. The original letter is preserved in the Shantiniketan archives, and it is to this letter that I refer here.[107] It suggests to us that in spite of Tagore's obvious admiration for Gandhi; in spite of the fact that it was Tagore himself who first gave Gandhi the name of *mahatma* – the 'great soul' – he held deep reservations about Gandhi's intentions. 'It is absurd', Tagore wrote 'to think that you must create slaves to make your ideas free'.

> There are men of ideas who make idols of their ideas and sacrifice humanity before their altars. But in my worship of ideas I am not a worshipper of *Kali*. So the only course left open to me when my fellow-workers fall in love with form and fail to have complete faith in idea, is to go and give my idea new birth and create new possibilities for it. This may not be a practical method, but possibly it is the ideal one.[108]

The creative capacity of the individual inner sphere was thus held in constant tension with the demands of the social, external world. I would suggest that Tagore's depiction of Gandhi as a 'moral tyrant' betrays his own fear not simply of demagogues, but of mass politics in general. It is the regimentation of individual behaviour in the process of the nationalist struggle, not simply the oppressive power inherent in the end goal of the nation state, that Tagore sees as inimical to freedom. Where Gandhi claimed that his non-cooperation movement was 'altering the meaning of old terms, nationalism and patriotism, and extending their scope',[109] Tagore rejected the terms altogether.

So far, I have sought to establish that Tagore held a coherent position that rejected the modern Western nation state as an organisational political form on the

grounds that it was detrimental to the social world in which man could realise his true inner freedom. Tagore's position is more complex than the too-frequently recycled remarks about Tagore the 'nationalist poet' suggest. It comprised a radical, extremist interpretation of *ahimsa* or 'active love' and a form of philosophical idealism that – in Tagore's eyes – ruled out some of the most carefully thought through moves towards non-cooperation made by Gandhi. What I want to show in the concluding section that follows is that, whilst Tagore's analysis of the nation state and nationalism ultimately entailed the outright rejection of one of the core pillars of a Western modernity, Tagore also held a deterministic theory of historical evolution which had structural affinities with much nineteenth-century philosophy of history, which itself was a central tenet of the philosophical discourse of Western modernity. But, though idealist in its orientation, unlike Hegel Tagore proposed that the coming age was one in which Asia – and specifically India – would take centre stage in the process of world historical development.

The lessons of India's history

Tagore is quite explicit that the nation state has no meaning in an Indian context. 'Take it in whatever spirit you like', he says, 'here is India, of about 50 centuries at least, who [sic] tried to live peacefully and think deeply, the India devoid of all politics, the India of no nations'.[110] It is in Tagore's presentation of Indian history – derived largely from readings of religious texts – that we begin to feel a clear assertion of cultural and spiritual superiority. Whilst Tagore holds to a 'universal truth', it emerges that for Tagore that truth has, thus far, been expressed most fully and clearly in Indian history, and this makes India of vital importance in World History, for India's history contains within it the possibility of steering a course between the darkness of the present age: a global modernity predicated on nationalist-imperialist expansion on the one hand, and a derivative anti-colonial nationalism. In this sense it was not only the case that Tagore's particular brand of universalism required the radical rejection of liberal individualism and utilitarian, positivist rationality in favour of collective social life and 'spiritual truth', but also that a different historical vision of the world's present situation and future trajectory had to be grasped.

In 1913, whilst Tagore was spending his second summer in England, he published 'My Interpretation of India's History'.[111] This essay, along with 'Race Conflict' (1912), advanced an interpretation of the historical juncture in which Tagore found himself which would be reiterated in numerous subsequent publications. As Tagore put it in his 1922 book *Creative Unity*[112] 'the most significant fact of modern days is this, that the West has met the East'.[113] As early as 1913, he was emphatic that the way in which this 'fact' of modernity would produce a positive outcome was by the West recognising, and learning from the 'genius of India' (a long standing theme prevalent in the Bengal Renaissance, which Tagore takes as a truism).

Referring to the *Mahabharata*, Tagore wrote that 'this book may not satisfy the modern European definition of history, but it is truly the history of the Aryans: it

is a nation's [as in "a people's"][114] self composed natural story'.[115] Indian history shows that India's 'mind' is unified by its 'orientation to that one final Truth, breathed in its *Gita*, the spirit of . . . vast unspeakable oneness'.[116]

> Through all its lucidity and mystery, its consistency and inconsistency, there always lurks the deeper perception that Truth embraces *all*, that there is *one* point where all agree . . . the *Gita* shows how every aspect of human activity is completed and perfected when it is joined to the Vast, the Complete, the Universal.[117]

Tagore's theme is that Indian history is replete, *par excellence*, with examples of how the realisation of 'inner truth' behind the veil of the external world leads to the realisation of a greater unity. As well as the *Mahabharata*, Tagore drew freely on the *Ramayana* for the purposes of constructing his interpretation. He used, for example, the story of Lord Ram's efforts to conquer the non-Aryan peoples in pursuit of his abducted wife Sita. Ram was able to win over the monkey god Hanuman to help him in his search, and in this parable Tagore sees some of the core truths of Indian history. 'Ram', Tagore says, 'conquered the monkeys not by a stroke of policy, but by inspiring them with the religion of personal devotion . . . [t]hus, Hanuman's devotion raised him into a God'.[118] He juxtaposes politics, policy and war – the instrumental rationality of the state – with the life-world governed by religion: '[i]t was by religion alone . . . [that] Ram conquered the non-Aryans and gained their devotion. He did not extend his empire by defeating them by force of arms'.[119] This is the lesson of Indian history, and it is in these ideals that we 'see the interaction of expansion and contraction, individuality and catholicity in India'.[120]

The ascendancy of religion is one theme in Indian history; the other is the capacity for the accommodation of difference. In India, the Aryan contact with the Dravidian 'formed a marvellous compound, which is neither entirely Aryan nor entirely non-Aryan'.[121] The combining of the Aryan and Dravidian elements was an 'eternal quest for the harmonising of these two opposite elements' which had 'given to India a wondrous power. She has learned to perceive the eternal amidst the temporal, to behold the Great Whole amidst all the petty things of daily life'.[122] This vision of Indian history was also a restatement of Tagore's dichotomy between societies that find the basis of their power in the realm of the state and politics on the one hand, and on the other, at the level of society and religion. Contrasting Asia as a whole with the West, Tagore sees in Asia a limited role for the state which has meant that, 'both in India and China the social system was always dominant, and [the] political system stood below it. Both the countries protected themselves by the collective power of the society'.[123] As Tagore put it elsewhere, 'the West survives by protecting the state, while our country lives on socially regulated conventions free from any state intervention'.[124] Tagore's position is that in India, whereas

> [k]ingdoms have risen and fallen . . . the country survived because it was self-sufficient and able to meet its people's economic and spiritual requirements.

> The country had always belonged to the people, while the king was only a relatively insignificant figurehead. In the politically oriented country, the heart lies in the political system: if it collapses, this means the death of the country. It is in this way that Greece and Rome met their end; the countries like India and China have survived in spite of political revolutions, since their souls are anchored in a stable society.[125]

Examples of this kind of thinking are omnipresent in Tagore's English language essays and books from about 1911 onwards, and they also feature heavily in his correspondence with C. F. Andrews as Tagore carefully explains, during the course of their evolving relationship, the purpose of his mission in the West and his antagonism towards Gandhi's practice of non-cooperation. As Tagore wrote to Andrews in 1921,

> India ever has nourished faith in the truth of spiritual man, for whose realisation she has made innumerable experiments, sacrifices and penance, some verging on the grotesque and the abnormal. But the fact is, she has never ceased in her attempt to find it even though at the tremendous cost of material success. Therefore I feel that the true India is an idea, and not a mere geographical fact. I have come into touch with this idea in faraway places of Europe and my loyalty was drawn to it in persons who belonged to different countries from mine. *India will be victorious when this idea wins victory*.[126]

It hardly need be said that this is not Rankean history, but in an important sense it makes little difference whether Tagore's vision of India's past could or could not be substantiated. Tagore's history was about narrative and the elucidation of moral truths. Its facticity was not what was at stake. His was an idealised version of the past – deployed in philosophically idealist terms – at a crucial juncture in Indian history for strategic purposes. This tells us a great deal about his self-consciousness as an historical agent, intervening in debates about an evolving Indian sense of selfhood, as well as contributing to a cross-cultural, trans-imperial public sphere. Tagore's vision foregrounds India as an iconic emblem of a de-territorialised world in which manifest human difference can be managed through the realisation of the underlying unity behind the world of appearances. But he knew full well that this vision did not fit the actual circumstances in which he lived.

The small and the great: imperial ambivalence?

Nationalism – brought together by the centrality of politics within the nation state – was the driving force behind the regimentation and lust for power that Tagore saw as leading to the 'death of humanity' in the West. Tagore's 1917 *Nationalism* – based on lectures delivered in America during some of the most atrocious battles on the Western front – does not actually pay explicit attention to the war, but the backdrop of imperialistic capitalist expansion and militarism permeates the book. In Tagore's dramatic depiction,

> when, with the help of science and the perfecting of organisation, this power begins to grow and brings in harvests of wealth, then it crosses its boundaries with amazing rapidity. For then it goads all its neighbouring societies with greed of material prosperity, and consequent mutual jealousy, and by the fear of each other's growth into powerfulness. The time comes when it can stop no longer, for the competition grows keener, organisation grows faster, and selfishness attains supremacy.[127]

It was the competitive sense of nationhood that was behind the quest for ever greater territorial acquisition that he saw as the root cause of empire, the scramble for Africa and the 'Great War' of 1914–1918. In this sense it is not the case that Tagore 'confused' nationalism and imperialism.[128] Tagore's point was that the shift away from a social-religious form of life towards a state-political form – which embodied the transitions from 'peoples' to 'nations' – inevitably led to the aggressive, competitive and acquisitive practice of imperialism. To posit an analytical corollary between nationalism and imperialism is, in itself, nothing exceptional; nor is it to confuse the two. Moreover, whilst Tagore would find no affinity in terms of presuppositions, his explanation resonated with the standard Marxist analyses of Tagore's day, which posited the capitalist quest for new markets as the engine of imperial expansion and thus the cause of war between the Great Powers.[129]

For Tagore, the Western nation is a modern organisational form linked to the emergence of instrumental rationality and symptomatic of a 'modern age'.[130] What was clear from Tagore's perspective was not simply the strong distinction between Eastern and Western historical experience, but also the relative inferiority of the West. As Tagore put it, 'the teaching and example of the West have entirely run counter to what we think was given to India to accomplish'.[131] What seems to have confused so many of Tagore's readers and interpreters is that he could hold this view, and simultaneously insist that 'Europe too has a soul', and '[w]hen we discover Europe's spiritual core, we will discover its inner reality – something that is neither materialistic nor simply of the intellect, but is sheer joy of life'.[132] Was he for or against the West? It is not until one sees that Tagore held the question to be an entirely facile one that we can put his wider philosophical perspective into context. It should be clear by now that Tagore could hold both positions because his distinction between the real and the ideal allowed him to engage critically with the West without essentialising it. His philosophical position, which claimed that 'when we mistake the outward for the ultimate, we can neither perceive the soul nor feel happy about accepting the outward',[133] allowed him to see in the West different streams of thought and practice, some negative and destructive and some positive; in Tagorean language 'truthful and spiritual'.[134]

With this in mind, we should consider the frequently repeated error in the secondary literature in which critics suppose that Tagore vacillated in terms of his attitude towards the West. In 1941, the last year of his life, Tagore wrote an essay entitled 'Crisis in Civilization', in which he expressed a deep scepticism about the liberating potential of certain (increasingly salient) aspects of Western modernity.

> We have for over a century been dragged by the prosperous West behind its chariot, choked by the dust, deafened by the noise, humbled by our own helplessness, and overwhelmed by the speed. We agreed to acknowledge that this chariot drive was progress, and that progress was civilisation. If we ever ventured to ask 'progress towards what, and . . . for whom?' it was considered to be peculiarly Oriental . . . [yet] of late, a voice has come to us bidding us to take count [sic] not only of the scientific perfection of the chariot but of the depth of the ditches lying across its path.[135]

It has been argued that this final statement from Tagore, written shortly before his death, represents some kind of revelatory moment in which 'Tagore disabused himself of the civilisational supremacy of the West'.[136] But Tagore had never believed in any such thing. He had merely held that truth was not the preserve of any particular group of human beings. He had been as critical of the West at the turn of the century as he was in the last days of his life. As William Radice has quite rightly pointed out, 'Crisis in Civilisation' – what he calls 'Tagore's final bitter statement on the world' – did not represent a final realisation or a *volte-face*.[137]

But there is further complexity to Tagore's position that needs to be examined. That Tagore had ever been a fierce critic of *some aspects* of the West is clear. But if we are to accept that he had all along been a fierce critic of the West, and of empire, then it is difficult to make sense of a number of essays published in *The Modern Review*, which develop some of his most controversial arguments. Interestingly, some of the key essays – for example 'The Future of India' (1911); 'My Interpretation of India's History' (1913)[138]; 'The Nation' (1917)[139]; 'The Small and the Great' (1917); and 'Thou Shalt Obey' (1917) – are excluded from Sisir Kumar Das' *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*. This is surely not incidental. If not, this illustrates the fact that in large part today's world remains bifurcated by the legacies of imperialism and its counterpart, anti-colonial nationalism, with texts such as these either too ambivalent or too controversial to be admitted into the canon on either side. Tagore's essays that express a refusal of this division – essays that castigate the empty, soulless civilisation of the West whilst simultaneously chiding Indians for their narrow-mindedness and their failure to embrace the 'beauty of spirit' coming from the 'great Englishman' – continue to be marginalised. This will not help us to gain a better historical understanding of Tagore, nor – bearing in mind the potential value of Tagore's ideas in the postcolonial present – will it assist us in recognising the unconventional ways in which he confronted the predicament of modernity.

In 'The Small and the Great', Tagore refers to the 'small Englishman', who 'wields the weapon of obstruction' and 'is intoxicated with power, and out of touch with the life of India' on account of 'layer upon layer of accumulated official tradition'. To him, 'India is but a government or Mercantile office'. He is contrasted with the 'distant Englishman', who 'by reason of the free atmosphere of Europe is able to escape the illusions of blind self-interest and can see India with a breadth of vision'.[140] As with Tagore's rendering of Indian history, it is not

the accuracy of the picture so much as the spirit behind the vision that matters. In another essay, 'Thou Shalt Obey' – essentially a critique of what Tagore saw as an 'Indian habit' of blindly following tradition – Tagore makes further distinctions between different representations of 'Britain', the 'Englishman' and 'the West'. Referring to the brutality of government in India and the violent backlash it wrought from the growing force of militant Indian nationalism, Tagore insisted that 'we must bring about a compromise between the secret shame of the bureaucracy and our open defiance'. He pointed to the double standards of imperial rhetoric and reality: 'the West boasts of democracy today. I have no wish to stir up the repulsive mire which is still so plentiful beneath the surface glamour of the Western peoples'.[141] But he insisted that 'England came here as the responsible representative of European civilisation', and if '[t]he message of that civilisation is the word she has plighted', then '[t]his, her only title to empire, shall be glorified by us. We shall never let her forget that she has not crossed the seas to slice India up into fragments'.[142]

Tagore held that 'in spite of all risk of error or mischance we must have self-government'. He did not wish to sit in the waiting room of history. But *self*-government required paying attention to the self. If the British Empire was to have a positive effect in India – and Tagore believed it could[143] – then the same ideal of self-government or autonomy must be applied, by Indians, to their own social practices. Tagore bemoaned the invocation by his contemporaries of '*Kali yuga*', in which 'the intellect of man is [seen as] feeble and liable to make mistakes if left free, so that we had better bow our head to *Shastric* conjunctions'.[144] What was required was mutuality: 'where we are greater, where we are brave, where we are self-denying, devoted and reverential, there we shall find ourselves in touch with the best in our rulers'.[145] Perhaps most provocatively, Tagore asserted that 'the weak can be as great an enemy of the strong as the strong of the weak'.[146]

When we read these essays, Tagore's controversial legacy becomes all the more clear. But – as embarrassing as they no doubt seem in some respects – they are entirely consistent with Tagore's radical worldview. His point was not that he felt the British Empire brought good governance, law and order, or railways. It was that whoever so ruled India was – at the political level – a matter of little importance. A concern with politics – what Tagore acerbically called the 'begging method', which he felt even Gandhi was engaged in – was not simply a distraction, it was anathema to the social-spiritual core of India. In this regard, Tagore adopted a view of Indian history which suggested that India 'belongs' to no one. He spoke of 'the Supreme Architect who is ever building human society wider and wider from a narrow centre to a vast circumference', and claimed that 'it is a mistake to imagine that God's court attaches any importance to the question as to who will own India, – you or I, Hindu or Musalman or any other race that may set up its dominion here'.[147] Don't be under the illusion, he says, that 'when the case is finally decided, one party – Hindu, Musalman, English or any other race – will get a full decree and set up its banner of ownership on the land'.[148] What Tagore required from India was for it to 'mark out the middle path of truth' and to 'know of a verity that it is idle mendicancy to discard our own and beg for the foreign'.

At the same time 'we shall feel that it is the extreme abjectness of poverty to dwarf ourselves by rejecting the foreign'.[149]

The menace of mimicry

Tagore felt that anti-colonial nationalism was in essence an aspiration to mimic the very *worst traits* of Western civilisation. Returning to the comparison between Tagore and Gandhi, Gandhi also understood that political, state-seeking nationalism could not be an end in itself, and so built his vision of a future India not on the Western nation state model – which would finally come to fruition under Nehru – but as a rural society of self-governing communities. On this much Tagore and Gandhi agreed. But Tagore went further. To motivate the masses on the basis of rejection – on the basis of a negative attitude, of boycotts and burnings – meant that Gandhi was trying to buy freedom at what Tagore called a 'cheap price'. Calling to mind not Gandhi, but the ironies of the *swadeshi* movement, Tagore wrote that

> [t]he boycott of Manchester . . . had raised the profits of the Bombay mill-owners to a super-foreign degree. And then I had to say: 'This will not do, either; for it is also of the outside. Your main motive is hatred of the foreigner, not love of country.' It was then necessary for our countrymen to be made conscious of the distinction, that the Englishman's presence is an external accident . . . but that the presence of our country is an internal fact which is also an eternal truth.[150]

In this vein, Tagore had long held that 'alien government in India is a veritable chameleon. Today it comes in the guise of the Englishman; tomorrow perhaps as some other foreigner; the next day it may take the shape of our own countrymen'.[151] Alien government was 'government by the nation', presently conducted by 'small Englishmen' but in some possible future imposed upon India by nationalist leaders of limited vision. 'Alien government' gave primacy to the state and to politics and was a force resistant to the unfolding of the ideals embedded in Indian history.

But what does this mean for the idea of anti-colonial resistance, or for nationalism in its political form? Gandhi had a clear theory *and* practice of resistance. Tagore rejected Gandhi's methods. So how is freedom to be achieved in the Tagorean sense? Tagore's essential point is that social and political action should only be realised in terms of its adherence to universal truth. Universal truth cannot – by definition, of course – be restricted to family, community, society or nation. It must include a love of humanity. For this reason nationalism cannot be a means of achieving freedom, for its exclusivism and territorial chauvinism is the very negation of what Tagore claimed to be the highest moral law: the unity of man.

For Tagore, then, the method by which India would escape its tutelage was via a recovery of its own traditions: a recovery of self. Tagore's philosophy – grounded in the phenomenology of a spontaneous, creative, affective bond of the social world – constituted a kind of imagining which rested, as previously mentioned, on

a particular interpretation of India's history, and was not only a critical intervention in the debate surrounding an emergent Indian nationalism (whether Tagore liked it or not) but also related to what 'Indian civilisation' could offer to the world.

Tagore did not waver from his critique of the modern nation and the ideology of nationalism. His wrath was reserved for Indians and the British alike, and he was a consistent defender of what he saw to be the truth, which bore no relation to caste, creed or nation. Thus, even after the Amritsar Massacre, which prompted Tagore's impassioned renunciation of his knighthood in disgust, he wrote to C. F. Andrews: 'Let us forget the Punjab affairs, but never forget that we shall go on deserving such humiliation over and over again until we set our own house in order. Do not mind the waves of the sea, but mind the leaks in your own vessel'.[152] At the height of the non-cooperation movement, and in spite of the extreme brutality of the British response, Tagore still declared that Gandhi's 'pugnacious spirit of resentment' was 'a mere emptiness of negation'.[153] Even more so than Gandhi, Tagore rejected the political in favour of the social and religious. He deplored the instrumentalisation of Gandhi's thought and action, lamenting the 'worldly-wise men [who] cannot get rid of the idea of utilising the *mahatma* as a secret and more ingenious move in their political gamble. With their minds corroded by untruth, they cannot understand what an important thing it is that the *mahatma*'s supreme love should have drawn forth the country's love'.

Despite his extreme demands and his obvious ambivalence towards Gandhi's political personality, Tagore often exhibited – outwardly at least – enormous belief in Gandhi's ability to lead India in what he saw as a moral direction, the direction of self-realisation. In light of Gandhi, Tagore had said,

> what has happened in India is nothing less than the birth of freedom . . . the gain by the country of itself. In it, there is no room for any thought as to where the Englishman is, or is not. This love is self-expression. It is pure affirmation. It does not argue with negation: *it has no need for argument*.[154]

This can clearly be seen as an attempt by Tagore to sidestep not only the problem of nationalism but also that of politics itself. 'The way of bloody revolution', Tagore added, 'is not the true way, a political revolution is like taking a short cut to nothing'.[155] This may have been Tagore's answer to the 'two vital questions about the search for liberation in our times' that Ashis Nandy sees as being prefigured by Frantz Fanon's work: 'namely, why dictatorships of the proletariat never end and why revolutions always devour their children'.[156]

India at the centre

But the idea that the birth of India's freedom is 'self-expression', which has 'no need for argument' is also, in a deeper sense, the expression of a central element of Tagore's philosophy. Freedom is already immanent in the world. It is there because God is there. All that is required, Tagore says, is the realisation that this is the truth.[157] This argument is couched both in idealistic terms and in the language

of determinism. Although Tagore sees a strong role for human agency in advancing or retarding the progress of history, History has its own prevailing logic. What is quite noticeable (and potentially quite confusing) is that having declared that 'where the Englishman is, or is not', is of no fundamental concern, Tagore also saw the fulfilment of an historical telos in the presence of the English in India. The key to making sense of this is that Tagore demanded a focus on 'internal truth' as distinct from 'external form', whilst the struggle with external form (*maya*) was often a necessary pathway to truth.

In his 1911 essay 'The Future of India', he wrote that 'the English have battered down our shaky door and entered our house like the messengers of the world's Feastgiver in order to kindle among us the new energy'.[158] This appears at first sight to be a familiar Orientalist trope in which the West awakens the East from its slumber with its scientific, 'active' bent of mind. Tagore continues in the same vein: 'the English have been sent (by the Most High) on a mission, viz., to prepare that India which sprouted in the Past and is now developing its branches towards the Future'.[159] But then there is a surprising twist. We do not find India awakened by England, but rather England, in a cosmic vision of humanity, absorbed by India.

> India is the India of all humanity, – what right have we to exclude the English from that India before the time is ripe for it? . . . those who will one day be able to say with perfect truth '*we* are India, *we* are Indians,' all (whether Hindus, Muslims, Englishmen or any other race) who will join that undivided vast 'we' and be incorporated within it, – they and they alone will have the right to order who should stay in India and who should go out of it.[160]

The determinism of Tagore's view is further elaborated. Contact with the English must 'bear its true fruit' and 'we must fulfil the purpose of our connection with the English'.[161] If we 'turn our face aside, if we isolate ourselves, if we refuse to accept any new element, we shall still fail to resist the march of Time, we shall fail to impoverish and defraud Indian history'.[162] In 1913 he iterated the same point: where 'India always seeks for the one amidst many' history may have 'strewn her path with insurmountable barriers', but 'her genius is sure, by its native power, to emerge successfully'.[163] Indian history 'has no less an object that this, – that here the history of man will attain to a special fulfilment and give an unprecedented form to its perfection, and make that perfection the property of all mankind'.[164]

What becomes clear is not simply that Tagorean philosophy is grounded in the ideal of universal man, but that India itself, its civilisation and its history, lies at the centre of an unfolding historical ideal. It is expressed fully and clearly in the following extract from one of Tagore's 1917 lectures on nationalism, given in the United Sates, which is worth quoting from at length.

> Our only intimate experience of the nation is the British nation, and so far as government by the nation goes, there are reasons to believe that is it is one of the best. Then, again, we have to consider that the West is necessary to the East. We are complementary to each other, because of our different outlooks

> upon life, which have given us different aspects of truth. Therefore if it be true that the spirit of the West has come upon our fields in the guise of a storm, it is, all the same, scattering living seeds that are immortal. And when in India we shall be able to assimilate in our life what is permanent in the Western civilisation, we shall be in a position to bring about a reconciliation of those two great worlds. Then will come to an end the one-sided dominance which is galling. What is more, we have to recognise that the history of India does not belong to one particular race, but it is the history of the process of creation to which various races of the world contributed – the Dravidians and the Aryans, the ancient Greeks and the Persians, the Mohammadans of the West and those of Central Asia. Now that at last has come the turn of the English to bring to it the tribute of their life, we neither have the right nor the power to exclude them from their work of building the destiny of India.[165]

The 'multicultural' reading of Indian history reminds us of the important theme of 'unity in diversity' and the inherent interconnectedness of the particular and the universal that formed the basis of Tagorean philosophy. We know that for Tagore 'individuality is precious, because only through it can we realise the universal', but this intuition is given weight and meaning by Tagore's reading of history and identity.[166] It was, for example, the central issue explored in *Gora*, one of Tagore's most powerful novels, in which the eponymous protagonist is forced to finally renounce his Hindu chauvinism having learned that he is no Hindu, but the child of Irish parents killed during the Rebellion of 1857. As Radha Chakravarty has put it, '[i]ronically, it is in losing everything that had previously marked his sense of identity – nation, caste, religion, parentage – that Gora become free to claim his identity as a true Indian'.[167] The message of *Gora* is that, as Rustom Bharucha has perceptively and persuasively argued, Gora illustrates the 'birth of an unconstituted self; indeed, a self that both Gandhi and Tagore realised was necessary for *swaraj*'.[168] Not a 'politically determined self, but an inner self, akin to God (or Truth, as Gandhi preferred to name it), ready to embrace the universe'.[169] As discussed in this chapter and in Chapter 1, the core philosophical insight of a creative inner self, understood as part of a higher, monistic creative Personality or God, consistently forms the basis for Tagore's critique of the nation and his theorisation of identity.

So, despite Tagore's rejection of 'the way of bloody revolution', which has made it all too easy to dismiss him as a 'moderate', he followed the trajectory of his philosophical position on identity to extreme conclusions. As I have aimed to show, Tagore was even more uncompromisingly and radically idealistic than Gandhi, insisting that in the realisation of its true self – its realisation of unity in diversity – India's

> fight is a spiritual fight, it is for Man. We are to emancipate Man from the meshes that he himself has woven round him, – these organisations of National Egoism . . . We, the famished, ragged ragamuffins of the East, are to win freedom for all Humanity. We have no word for Nation in our language.[170]

For Tagore, the nationalist movement of the 1920s and 1930s placed India in a vertiginous position with much to gain, but equally much to lose. The drive for self-determination and for 'national self-respect' was, according to Tagore, 'making us turn our faces towards the world and demand political authority, but . . . also making us turn our faces backwards to our country and demand that in all religious, social and political, and even personal matters we do not move one step against the Master's will.' This, he felt, was in some respects 'an impossible task: to keep one of our eyes wide open and the other one closed in sleep'.[171]

Akin to numerous other postcolonial theorists, Tagore held that the practice of imperialism had severely debilitated European civilisation.[172] It was a corrupting force, and had degraded the coloniser as much as the colonised. This was a position Gandhi had articulated in *Hind Swaraj* as early as 1909. But, on the basis that Truth was to be found in the foundational human experience of love, cooperation and harmony, Tagore held that overcoming the colonial situation should not be attempted by any method other than a self-referential renaissance that did not make petition or resistance to the colonial power its means, nor the imitation of Western political forms its end. Tagore refused the simple binaries of modernity and tradition, imperialism and nationalism that we continue to rely upon for our intellectual shorthand. I have a good deal of sympathy for Gandhi's position throughout his exchanges with Tagore, and it is surely a major shortcoming of Tagore's position that unlike Gandhi he appears to have little appreciation of political economy or, more specifically, the way in which economics might determine the structure and character of civil society.

That being said, it is surely a diminution of our historical and theoretical knowledge if we lose sight of the historical context in which Gandhi worked out his ideas on non-cooperation and *swaraj*. This was a dialogic ideational context of which Tagore – frequently overlooked by commentators on Gandhi's political thought – was a very important part. In this sense recovering Tagore can also help us to better understand Gandhi, a reminder that a fuller picture of the intellectual history of any historical period requires actors and ideas to be situated within a wider framework of interaction. Above all, the Tagore–Gandhi debates enable us to appreciate the alternative spatial dimensions of modernity, and the richness of the intellectual history of the development of what might be called parallel modernities in which key historical problematics have been driven by the expansion and impact of Western modernity upon colonised societies, yet where the terms of reference, questions and answers to those problems cannot be understood in terms of their connection to originary concepts in European metropoles.[173]

Part II

Colonial and postcolonial encounters

4 Cross-purposes

Tagore, W. B. Yeats and 'Irish Orientalism'

> What an excitement it was, the first reading of your poems, which seemed to come out of the fields and the rivers and have their changelessness![1]
>
> W. B. Yeats, *The Golden Book of Tagore*

> Damn Tagore. We got out three good books, Sturge Moore and I, and then, because he thought it more important to see and know English than to be a great poet, he brought out sentimental rubbish and wrecked his reputation. Tagore does not know English, no Indian knows English.[2]
>
> W. B. Yeats to William Rothenstein

> 'Why should India', he said, 'be always thinking of peace – *shanti*? Life is a conflict.'[3]
>
> W. B. Yeats, in conversation with Abinash Chandra Bose

Thus far, we have looked at Tagore's intended purpose in communicating with Western, Anglophone audiences and examined his ideas concerning nation, nationalism and the West. These ideas provided the philosophical basis for Tagore's attempts at constructive engagement. I now want to pursue the theme of Tagore's interactions with Western intellectuals, looking at some of the key individuals involved. In other words, I aim to examine how for Tagore was able to put his philosophy of East–West communion into practice.

As perhaps the most famous of Tagore's Western interlocutors, W. B. Yeats often features in biographical commentaries on 'Tagore and the West', most specifically regarding Tagore's visit to Britain in 1912 and Yeats' role as 'midwife' to Tagore's Western reputation. It is almost universally assumed that Tagore recognised in Yeats a common poetic genius, and that Yeats, in turn, recognised Tagore as a 'great poet'.[4] This is a somewhat problematic perspective in a number of ways. Ganesh N. Devy suggests that when Yeats first met Tagore, he 'was already a famous poet, a known leader of the Irish literary movement'.[5] But Yeats was yet to fully establish himself as the pre-eminent poet of his time, a status that would not come until at least the publication of *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1917), and perhaps not even until *The Tower* (1928).[6] This makes Yeats' recognition of Tagore in 1912 not quite as significant as some critics would have it, where Yeats

sometimes appears to speak for the entire Western literary establishment.[7] It is also worth bearing in mind that in 1912, although Tagore was aware of who Yeats was, he was unacquainted with his work.

More significant, however, is the absence of a contextualised account of Yeats' interest in India as it stood in 1912, how he came to 'know' the East and precisely what, in Yeats' eyes, Tagore represented. In fact, Yeats' comprehension of 'the East' was not only limited, it was also wrought by his encounters with Theosophy, which can hardly be seen as an objective or comprehensive 'introduction to the Orient'. Yeats' knowledge of Tagore was embarrassingly vague. He confesses in his introduction to the 1913 edition of *Gitanjali* that 'though these prose translations from Rabindra Nath Tagore have stirred my blood as nothing has for years, I shall not know anything of his life, and of the movements of thought that have made them possible, if some Indian traveller will not tell me'.[8] The traveller with whom Yeats engages in dialogue about Tagore is a 'distinguished Bengali doctor'[9], whose identity remains unknown, as does the level of his expertise in Bengali literary culture. As Mary Lago has commented, 'most persons, including Yeats, had little accurate information about the sources of his [Tagore's] philosophy [or] of the social and cultural forces that had influenced him and his work'.[10] I have attempted to provide such background in Chapter 1 of this book, but, as we saw in Chapter 2, Yeats, Pound and other London-based intellectuals were unaware of the complex and often conflictual situation in which Tagore found himself in his native land. The purpose of this chapter is to dig a little deeper into the Tagore–Yeats encounter and to get a better sense of the reasons why – despite superficial similarities and some early public pronouncements of mutual admiration – the relationship failed to develop in a fruitful direction. The interaction between the two, and its historical legacy, needs to be seen within this context, instead of idealising an instance of interaction that was far more superficial than is often recognised, or simply taking Yeats' recognition as an indication of Tagore's merit.[11] Hence, whilst tracing transnational and cross-cultural networks, we still need to be critical as to what they actually constituted, and how they should be read. Disentangling Tagore from recycled platitudes invoked when discussing the relationship between the two is another step towards clarifying and delineating the distinctiveness of Tagore's historical role.

Commonalities and contradictions

As has been widely documented, Yeats and Tagore were born into familial, social and even historical circumstances that had certain similarities.[12] Tagore's birth in 1861 preceded Yeats' by just four years, and although separated by vast continents and societies distinct in culture and socio-economic development, there are some similarities in terms of the contexts in which they were raised. Both men grew up in the shadow of austere, dominant and dissenting father figures, with Yeats' Protestant and Tagore's *Brahmo Samaj* inheritance placing both at odds with the mainstream of their emergent national cultures.[13] The cultural context of

both Bengal and Ireland in the late nineteenth century bore the characteristics of revival, and these left their mark upon the two poets.

It was this sense of renewal and regeneration that was a source of inspiration in their early years. Both were attuned to the importance of tradition for the expression of their creative impulse, and it is accurate to say that it was 'in the balance of influence from the past and individual creativity that the unique quality of each can be found'.[14] Yeats' notion of Irishness and his critique of 'English materialism' was indicative of an intellectual tradition that evinced a similar duality, espousing both parochial and universal concerns. Yeats' motivating interest in Theosophy and 'the East' was in part a product of his rejection of what he saw as the materialism of nineteenth-century English political and social thought; and hence English cultural life.[15] This animated his cultural nationalism, and the idea of recovery deepened his sense of affinity with certain guru figures such as Mohini Chatterjee, Tagore and Shri Purohit Swami.[16] But Yeats also enjoyed intimate connections with, and took inspiration from thinkers and critics who espoused a similar 'anti-modern' philosophy from within the confines of the imperial metropole. His position is at once inside and outside, and required adopting shifting identities.

In an Irish setting, freeing Ireland from the grasp of the English was not simply about changing governments: it was about internal transformation of the self. In this regard the parallels with Tagore are obvious. Colonial resistance required throwing off the materialist and positivist shackles that had been placed upon the minds of the Irish. But these shackles were constraining civilisation itself. Again, the particular and the universal are brought together, making the emancipation of the oppressed the vehicle for universal liberation. In this respect, Tagore's use of mysticism and religion in his poetry became a focal point for Yeats, as did the supposed 'unity of culture' that Tagore represented. In essence, Tagore was instrumentalised by Yeats: he came to represent aspects of a forgotten past that Yeats sought to resurrect for his own cultural nationalist purposes. In doing so, Yeats made some fundamental errors of judgement and engaged in oversight and misrepresentation.

There is an evident temptation in the literature to explore the 'effect which Tagore had on Yeats' thought and work after their historic meeting' through a list of common themes and images which 'can be made to fashion an imaginary dialogue'.[17] This seems to be a problematic methodology. It is easy to romanticise this so-called meeting of minds, since it does constitute an interesting example of multi-directional intellectual exchange between East and West: a kind of subaltern narrative of cosmopolitan, enlightened engagement across cultures.[18] Yet if what brought them close to each other was an 'apparent affinity between the Celtic mood and Indian mysticism', this affinity was indeed more 'apparent rather than real', and the parallels cannot be taken too far.[19] Irish revivalism was – to a substantial degree – developed in opposition to the scientific, 'instrumental rationality' of the post-Darwinian, positivist era, which was strongly identified in Ireland as an 'English', 'colonial' worldview. By contrast, in general terms it is correct to say that the leaders of the Bengali renaissance were never

straightforwardly 'tainted by a hatred for England' and that 'renascent Bengal was broader in outlook than rebellious Ireland'.[20]

In many respects, both Tagore and Yeats would move beyond the intellectual shackles of nationalism: Tagore, as discussed at length in Chapter 3, was a vehement and articulate opponent of it, and Yeats increasingly pessimistic about its possibilities.[21] But it is at this point that the distinct differences between the two men become clearer. Yeats' life was marked by the extremes of his esoteric encounters and interest in the occult, as well as his involvement in formal national politics in Ireland. It is Tagore who is often remembered today as the mystic dreamer, and it is partly Yeats who shares the responsibility for that error. Yet the reality was startlingly different. Tagore's apparent mysticism was assumed on account of his belief – which, as mentioned in Chapter 1, he shared with his father – in the primacy of vision and intuition over formal religious dogma. This was, we might say, an aspect of his poetic mind. But Tagore was also a deeply practical man and this practical engagement cannot be equally said of Yeats, despite his time as a senator. And yet, even allowing for this kind of active, pragmatic work on Tagore's part, Tagore eschewed 'politics' in the conventional sense. Whereas Yeats' politics drifted further into the arena of the national – and to the right of the political spectrum – Tagore, following his experiences of partition, moved ever further in the direction of the anti-national, anti-state and anti-political.

A passage to India: Theosophy and mysticism

Use of the term 'theosophy', meaning 'wisdom concerning God or things divine', dates back to the ancient Greeks. It was revived during the seventeenth century and became popular again in the late nineteenth. Theosophy is widely understood as attempting to base 'knowledge of nature upon knowledge of the divine', seeking 'a knowledge of nature profounder than is obtained from empirical science, and contained in an esoteric tradition of which the doctrines of the various historical religions are held to be only the exoteric expression'.[22]

The Theosophical Society was formally created in New York in 1875 by the colourful and enigmatic Russian *exilée* Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) – also known as Madame Blavatsky – along with Colonel Henry S. Olcott (1832–1907) and W. Q. Judge (1831–1896). Its headquarters were moved to Adyar, near Madras, in 1882, after which Blavatsky and her devotees travelled throughout India, gaining notoriety and followers amongst both Indians and Europeans. During the later 1880s and the 1890s it had active and well-attended societies in both London and Dublin. Born in the Ukraine in 1831, Blavatsky had travelled through much of the East, including, she claimed, Tibet where she is said to have received inspiration and authority from the *mahatma* or 'masters' of the Great White Lodge, an occult sect located somewhere in the Himalayas. Blavatsky wrote several books drawing on this wisdom, including *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), both in two volumes. The 'professed objects' of the Theosophical Society were: to form the nucleus of a universal brotherhood; to promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern literature, religions, and sciences;

and to investigate the unfamiliar laws of nature and the faculties latent in man. Of these three, the only item to which members were formally required to subscribe was the first, the ideal of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, 'without distinctions of race, creed, sex, caste or colour'.[23]

The intellectual contours of the Society were thus marked from the start by a universalist vision of humanity and egalitarian principles. Its teachings emphasised the idea of an immanent and evolving spirituality, in which the universe constitutes 'One Life', coming to consciousness through a diversity of forms. This core teaching, Theosophists argued, constituted the 'divine wisdom', the esoteric truth of all religions, philosophies and scientific systems that had best been preserved in the great spiritual traditions of the East. As Raymond Schwab argues in his 1984 study *The Oriental Renaissance*, the purpose of romantic, speculative religious movements such as Theosophy was to explain all religion in terms of some kind of underlying pantheism.[24] Theosophy's primary interest was in the idea of a *philosophia perennis*, a term coined by Leibniz and popularised by Aldous Huxley in the early twentieth century. A classic example of this genre was Edouard Schuré's 1889 *Les Grands Initiées*, in which a number of luminaries belonging to various civilisations – including Rama, Krishna, Hermes, Moses, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato and Jesus – are listed as 'great initiates' into the primordial tradition.[25] The similarities between this perspective and that of Keshub Chandra Sen, as discussed in Chapter 1, are symptomatic of this cross-cultural tendency in nineteenth-century religious thought.

In the broadest terms, then, the aim of the Theosophical Society was to uncover the fundamental affinity between East and West as embodied in 'universal truth'. Joy Dixon has argued in *Divine Feminine* that the syncretising impulses behind movements such as Theosophy were 'distinctively colonial'. Central to Theosophy's brand of Orientalism was its belief that esoteric practices could recover – 'from beneath their exoteric accretions' – forms of knowledge that had fallen into decay.[26] In terms of scholarship on India, this kind of romantic Orientalism was, of course, a key component of the idea of a 'fall' from the *Vedic* 'golden age', which Ronald Inden, among others, has argued was a core narrative underpinning the colonial, Orientalist study of the East, making India an object of inquiry and thereby legitimising British control and interference.[27] And yet, Theosophy could also form the basis of a critique of imperial, English, British or Western (depending on perspective and interpretation) cultural life and social organisation, and form the basis for advocating greater respect for non-Western religious and cultural traditions. As with the appropriation of an 'Orientalist' perspective by nineteenth-century intellectuals in Bengal, starting with Rammohun, the Orientalist discourse had varying applications, not all of which can be straightforwardly associated with a Western body of controlling and disciplining 'power knowledge'.

The popularity of Theosophy during the late Victorian period and into the early twentieth century has a number of explanations. Many of those who were attracted to Theosophical thinking moved in 'anti-modern', romantic intellectual circles; for example, followers of William Morris and others who bemoaned the mechanistic and alienating materialism of modernity. Theosophy's focus on the 'wisdom

of the East' embodied in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions appeared to offer a corrective to the travails of modern life by bringing to light the inner wisdom of a civilisation still apparently connected to its spiritual past. Intellectuals who called themselves modernists between 1890 and 1930 were in 'revolt against positivism, rationalism, realism, and liberalism', something lost in the 'stark opposition between Enlightenment reason and the "posts" in vogue today'.[28] At a different level, Theosophy also represented an attempt at bringing together religion and science, in particular to accommodate newly dominant ideas concerning evolution, by positing the spiritual evolution of man as a correlate of biological evolution. In spite of its speculative and mystical focus, the movement also sought to adapt to the new scientific methodologies of the post-Darwinian, positivist, late Victorian climate by including elements of experimental magic and occult within its esoteric sections – something which Yeats was particularly keen on.

At the same time, what the historian of religion Olaf Hammer calls the 'Esoteric Tradition', of which Theosophy was an important part, engaged its adherents in a process of identity formation that may have appealed to Victorian notions of self-help and self-improvement. The tool for improvement was, as Hammer puts it, the presentation of various exotic cultures as 'possible Others to use as mirrors in which to judge the success or failure of our own lives'.[29] In this sense of self-analysis and self-criticism, both at an individual and societal level, much of the fascination for Keshub in the 1870s can be traced to the 1880s and 1890s interest in Theosophy.

Nation, religion and class

These factors go some way to explaining the popularity of Theosophy in *avant-garde* circles in late Victorian England. But in the case of Ireland, and Yeats' specific involvement with Theosophy, a number of both general and particular points need to be made. According to Frank Tuohy, 'Theosophy promised much [to Yeats] because of its all-inclusiveness'.[30] The Irish attraction to Theosophy reflected, perhaps even more intensely than elsewhere, the anti-materialist and anti-modern thinking that made it popular in the colonial metropole. But in Irish terms it also included an *anti-colonial*, anti-English dimension. It is important to stress this side of Yeats' early interest in Theosophy since, as Edward Said put it, Yeats was a national poet who articulated the experiences and aspirations of a people living under colonialism, and 'who belongs in a tradition not usually considered his, that of the colonial world ruled by European imperialism during a climactic insurrectionary stage'.[31] He was, Said adds, 'an exacerbated example of the nativist phenomenon, which flourished as a result of the colonial encounter'.[32] Said goes further: Yeats' nationalism, and the Irish experience more broadly, testified to 'a new phenomenon: a spiral away and extrapolation from Europe and the West'.[33] In response to this, Stephen Howe comments that,

> leaving aside the rather basic fact that Ireland is by most reckonings part of Europe and rather far West, if any one theme, apart from the violence in the

> north, has dominated contemporary Irish life it is not an 'extrapolation from' but an increasing economic, political and cultural *integration* with the rest of Europe.[34]

Whilst this is most probably true, Howe's criticism says more about the post-Treaty (and more specifically post-Second World War) period than that of Yeats' late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century romantic nationalism. This, more interestingly, *was* intertwined with such a 'spiral away' from the West, but in more complicated and historically particular ways than Said's slightly curtailed discussion conveys.

In the Irish case, the interest in Theosophy was intimately linked to the idea of nation building and a form of 'self-recovery'. For Yeats, the mystical was contrasted with the material, and so provided a framework for the contrast between an idealised Irish past in which a 'unity of culture' pertained, and a sullied English present in which an unthinking materialist and positivist intellectual climate prevailed. The following extract from a speech made in New York in 1903 is revealing.

> In Ireland, the two ways of looking at things, to a very great extent, take the form of Irish civilisation on the one hand and of English civilisation on the other. And we who are struggling to keep alive Irish civilisation and drive out this new English civilisation are really striving to keep alive the old poetry of the world; and I think it is much the same wherever you find a national movement in any small country – you will find there an old picturesque conception of life; [the] conception of a life that made refinement before any of the multitude struggling thought [sic] of that modern, utilitarian, commercial civilisation which has been organised by a few great nations.[35]

Seen within this context, Yeats' Theosophical thinking was symptomatic of Celtic revivalism and its significance lies in its linking of a romantic, anti-modern intellectual project to an anti-English, anti-colonial agenda. In other words, Theosophy, mysticism and Eastern spiritualism were tools employed as part of a project of Irish self-definition in opposition to an English 'other'. In this respect, Yeats' engagement with India offered two types of transcendence central to the national and nationalist predicament of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Ireland. Firstly, it presented a possible escape from the constraints of History, providing the imaginative context within which Yeats could recreate the present through the reinvention of the past. Secondly, central to any nationalist project in Ireland, of course, was the problem of religion. Again, here, Theosophy offered an escape route. Both Selina Guinness and Susan Johnston Graf have drawn attention to the ways in which the Dublin Theosophical Society provided a forum to pursue the desire – shared by important contemporaries of Yeats such as George Russell (Æ) and James Cousins – to transcend the sectarian divide in Ireland.[36] Eastern spiritualism was seen as a repository of the kind of 'unity of culture' that had also existed in Ireland before both the incursions of modernity, and also the schism

within Christianity. As Joseph Lennon has put it: 'with Indian philosophy as a subject, Yeats was free from that very Irish dilemma – sectarian politics'.[37]

The link between Theosophy, mysticism and the nationalist impulse was important to Yeats even in the mid-1880s, but it was only part of the story. As John Carey has argued, the fashion for esoteric modes of spirituality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had as much to do with class as it did with nation.[38] The rise of the middle classes, for Yeats, was one of the negative social developments that had disrupted the supposed anterior unity of culture that existed in Ireland. If bourgeois liberalism was the negative force, Yeats was often uncertain about the best way to counteract it, and 'throughout his life, Yeats' early involvement with William Morris and early interest in socialism warred with his later preference for a society founded on aristocratic and hierarchical principles'.[39] Even during these years, then, and especially during the period of his Theosophical studies, the type of nationalist thinking being developed by Yeats rejected, according to Seamus Deane, 'the hard questions of modernity, class, economics and government for the misty totalities of the spiritual and racial essence, of an imagined aristocracy and peasantry'.[40]

Yeats' early, and passing interest in socialism developed when his family moved to London in the late 1880s, where they lived in Bedford Park between 1887 and 1889. It was in the summer of 1887 that Yeats had met Madame Blavatsky, and during this two-year period he would spend time at William Morris' 'Sunday gatherings'. Roy Foster notes that Yeats 'adopted Morrisite communism . . . and gave it up quite suddenly because of the Morris circle's attitude to religion'.[41] As Yeats recalled it himself: 'they attacked religion . . . and yet there must be a change of heart and only religion could make it. What was the point of talking about some new revolution putting all things right, when the change must come, if come it did, with astronomical slowness?'[42]

Yeats was not alone in seeing religion – especially in its esoteric form – as a way out of the modern predicament. John Carey argues that 'when [Yeats] joined the Hermetic Students of the Golden Dawn in 1890, it was part of a widespread revival of occultism, centred on Paris, which answered [an] intellectual craving for a source of distinction and power that the masses could not touch'.[43] Yeats' drift towards an 'aristocratic' political outlook can be seen in these early tensions. But such sentiments were prevalent in much of the later modernist movement, with T. S. Eliot's 1948 *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* being a prime example. Before Eliot, D. H. Lawrence had proclaimed that 'the great mass of humanity should never learn to read and write'.[44] It was certainly very much present in Yeats' mind by 1939 when he wrote *On the Boiler*, in which he argued that 'sooner or later we must limit the families of the unintelligent classes . . . improvements in agriculture and industry are threatening to supply everyone with the necessities of life', and so remove 'the last check upon the multiplication of the masses'.[45]

If we recall that since 1900 Tagore had been involved in setting up a school, a university and a centre for rural reconstruction and development, it becomes clear just how different Tagore's intentions were from those of Yeats and some of the

latter's fellow modernists. Mary Lago shares this perspective when she notes rather caustically that 'while the Hermetic Society and the Theosophical Society spent their time and energy in metaphysical argument, the *Brahmo Samaj* . . . succeeded in founding schools, refining the essence of Hinduism, and preserving some of the best elements in Indian culture'.[46] Moreover, 'Yeats never seemed to comprehend the vastness of the gulf between his mysticism and that of Tagore'.[47] In contrast to his Anglo-Irish counterpart, 'Tagore's mysticism . . . had nothing to do with magic. It had no private mythology'.[48] In short, there were profound differences between the political and intellectual culture of Tagore's Bengal and Yeats' Anglo-Irish world.[49]

The handsome Mohini Chatterjee

Yeats became interested in Theosophy around Easter 1885. His friend Charles Johnson, then still at High School, had travelled to London to interview the Theosophist writer A. P. Sinnett and on his return introduced Theosophy to Dublin. A craze began, much to the chagrin of Yeats' headmaster who saw many of his most promising students touched 'with the indifference of the Orient to such things as college distinction and mundane success'.[50] A year later Mohini Chatterjee, an Indian envoy sent to Dublin by Blavatsky, was busy charming many of the Theosophically minded young men of Dublin, not least Yeats himself, who throughout his life showed a strong attraction, perhaps even a certain weakness, for the 'guru figure'. Chatterjee had originally trained as a lawyer in Calcutta and joined the Theosophical Society in Madras in the early 1880s, where he quickly established himself as an articulate defender of the faith.[51]

By all accounts, Chatterjee was (another) charismatic and physically attractive man (in the Keshub mould), and he certainly left a deep impression on Yeats. It is worth remembering that at the time he met Chatterjee, Yeats was still a relatively young man, and hence this first encounter with an Indian 'sage' proved formative. In his *Autobiographies* (1955), Yeats recalled Mohini Chatterjee as a 'handsome young man with the typical face of Christ', proving yet again that despite his aristocratic pretensions, Yeats was not above the hackneyed phrases of the gossip columns.[52] He had picked up the theme of Chatterjee's appearance in an earlier essay, 'The way of wisdom', published in *The Speaker* of 14 April 1900, in which Yeats described him as sitting, 'beautiful, as only an Eastern is beautiful, making little gestures with his delicate hands, and to him alone among all the talkers I have heard, oratory, and even the delight of ordered words, seemed nothing, and all thought a flight into the heart of truth'.[53] The description here is suggestive of the idea that Yeats saw Mohini Chatterjee as an aesthetic object rather than a dialogic counterpart. Certainly, Yeats was keen to listen to Chatterjee, but his feelings of simultaneous seduction and apprehension are revealed in further comments in the essay:

> Alcibiades fled from Socrates lest he might do nothing but listen to him all his life, and certainly there were few among us who did not think that to listen to

> this man who threw the enchantment of power about silent things, and at last to think as he did, was the one thing worth doing.[54]

The fact of being drawn to the spiritual 'otherworldliness' of the guru figure is a recurrent trope in Yeats' interactions with Chatterjee; and also with Tagore. Yeats' interest in Chatterjee, in his Theosophical ideas and in the wider sphere of Indian philosophy and religion was fashioned by this supposed passive–active, East–West dichotomy which, as I have suggested, cut across an emergent – and in many ways imagined – Irish–English divide.

Yeats' passion at this stage was for experimental magic and stirring ritual, over and above the reflexive attainment of spiritual enlightenment. Expressing his dissatisfaction with the latter, Yeats wrote in his memoirs that 'after I had been moved by ritual, I formed plans for deeds of all kinds. I wished to return to Ireland to find there some public work: whereas when I returned from meetings of the Esoteric Section I had no desire but for more thought, more discussion'.[55] Yeats had always struggled at a personal level with what Roy Foster calls the 'over-articulate positivism' of his father, but he retained a desire for experimentation and interrogation in contrast to the apparently more passive and contemplative art of mysticism as practised in the East.[56] This perception on Yeats' part persisted: 'You Indians', Yeats would tell Abinash Chandra Bose in 1937, 'are after the abstract. I like the concrete'; to which the young scholar replied, with great equipoise (and possibly no little patience): 'there are different strands in Indian life'.[57]

Though he moved in Theosophical circles throughout the later 1880s and much of the 1890s, Yeats remained a formal member of the Society for less than two years. Having joined the Esoteric Section of the Society in 1888, he engaged in occult research based on experimentation, but was to end his membership by 1890, displaying his protestant nature in opposition to alleged exhortations from Blavatsky that he desist from criticising the Society. As Joy Dixon has demonstrated, there is no reason to assume that Theosophy as religious practice constituted a turning away from the world.[58] But Yeats decided that the kind of spiritual practice and contemplation he believed was advocated by Theosophy could never constitute an end in itself. He would come to interpret Tagore through a similar problematic: contemplation versus action. In considering Yeats' later interpretation of Tagore it is thus important to note the influence of Mohini Chatterjee and the way in which his presentation of Theosophy and Indian philosophy accentuated Yeats' fears of the pitfalls of the passive and contemplative (characteristics of 'Indianness' which he would rather clumsily generalise and read into Tagore).

Vedanta for the Western world

P. S. Sri argues that although Mohini Chatterjee had come to Dublin to spread the word of Theosophy, he in fact ranged far more widely across Indian philosophy, and his teaching during this period should be seen as going beyond the confines of esoteric mysticism. Sri argues that during his lectures in Dublin during 1885 (the period when Yeats was most under his influence) Chatterjee had communicated

the philosophy of *Vedanta* via talks on the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the philosophical teachings of Shankara, but that, crucially, he had misrepresented the nature of that philosophy.[59] In particular, Sri claims that Chatterjee must have suggested to Yeats that the existence of *maya* – the world of appearances that masks the underlying reality – meant that the world itself was an illusion.

As discussed at some length in Chapter 1, Shankara's *Brahman* – the ultimate reality – is masked and distorted by *maya*, the world of appearances, but *maya* has its basis in *Brahman*.[60] This is necessarily so since Shankara's *Vedanta* was based on monism. Human individuality or ego is also part of the world of appearances – *maya* – and it is through the transcendence of the self that we achieve enlightenment and rejoin the ultimate reality of *Brahman*, hence avoiding the cycles of rebirth. Sri suggests that 'Shankara's assertion that the ultimate reality of *Brahman* can be concretely experienced is in consonance with the teachings of the *Upanishads*'.[61] It seems, however, that either Chatterjee's presentation or Yeats' reception led to certain misunderstandings. Yeats understood Chatterjee's *Vedanta* to mean that the world was an illusion, and that one must give up all desires, even the desire for liberation since 'even . . . [this] was no better than our other desires'.[62] Sri suggests that this idea can be traced in some of Yeats' writings during the period, such as *Quatrains and Aphorisms* (1886):

> Long thou for nothing, neither sad nor gay;
> Long thou for nothing, neither night nor day;
> Not even 'I long to see thy longing over',
> To the very-longing and mournful spirit say.[63]

For Yeats, *Vedanta* appeared to teach that if the world was merely an illusion, and only the Self real, then the pursuit of not only desire but indeed all worldly action was illusory, and hence pointless. One must, therefore, 'reject the world as shadowy and insubstantial, eschew all action and pursue the Self by diving deep into one's own being'.[64] It is easy to see how, from such a perspective, Yeats might conclude that – having listened to the Brahmin (that is, Chatterjee) – 'all action and all words that lead to action were a little vulgar, a little trivial'.[65] As Sri suggests, however, '[a]ny serious student of Indian philosophy can immediately perceive that these ideas that Yeats absorbed from Mohini Chatterjee plainly contradict the perceptions of the *Vedanta*'.[66]

> The *Upanishads*, the *Gita* and Shankara do not reject the world as illusion; they merely point out that the world is appearance, and urge one to penetrate this world-appearance to the underlying reality of the Supreme Being. Nor do they counsel one to inaction; instead, they encourage one to practise self-surrender and lead a life of detached action.[67]

Though hardly excusable, it is also easy to see how Yeats came to view this emphasis on a turning away from the supposedly illusory world as indicative of an 'Indian approach'; i.e. that the same paradigm could be applied to other Indian

thinkers. This is, of course, not the only philosophical teaching that Yeats took from Chatterjee, but I suggest that it was both significant and formative, for it is a recurrent theme in Yeats' comments on India and Tagore.

The function of the other

I have suggested that Yeats was attracted to the Theosophical idea of a universal mind accessible through esoteric practices or visions to the 'man of genius'. This fitted with his ideas about aristocracy and the role of elites. Yeats' need for spiritual belief was also fed by his view of his own poetry as a 'cry of the heart against necessity' and what he saw as the barbarism of the 'liberal bourgeois' world.[68] Another significant driving force behind his interest in Theosophy, the Orient and more specifically India, was his desire to instrumentalise them in the quest for a recovery of an authentic sense of 'Irishness'. Ultimately, then, the function of the spiritual and cultural 'other' that Yeats found in Theosophy was to reawaken a national consciousness that also spoke of greatness and exceptionalism. Yeats, and other revivalists such as Æ, believed that Ireland held a special place within the culture of Europe, which it would once again lead: 'out of Ireland', Æ wrote to Yeats in 1896, 'will arise a light to transform many ages and peoples'.[69] 'Instead of thinking of Judea as holy, we should [think] of our own land as holy', Yeats wrote in his memoirs.[70] The way in which Theosophy, or Indian spiritualism broadly defined, was thus directed towards culturally chauvinist ends was in contradistinction to the ostensibly internationalist and egalitarian outlook underlying the stated aims of the Theosophical Society. (Although, it should be added, the Theosophical movement was – quite obviously – deeply marked by the class, race and national power relations that it professed to transcend.) At the same time, and perhaps in part because his interest was not fed by a genuine quest for understanding, but merely a search for 'stimuli', Yeats also appears to have appreciably misunderstood some aspects of Indian philosophy, particularly concerning the idea of the reality of the world and the need for action versus spiritual contemplation. Such misunderstandings would have unfortunate consequences for the way in which Yeats interpreted Tagore, and since he held considerable cultural capital in London during the period in which Tagore rose to fame, his interpretation of Tagore – correct or incorrect – was influential.

What is significant, it seems to me, is that just as Yeats would declare that in Tagore's poetry 'the West' had 'met its own image', so would the Theosophical movement claim an essential universality of mankind. But such intimations of affinity are in themselves essentially quite vague and ephemeral. In neither case does this superficial sense of unity adequately capture the way in which 'the East' and its representatives such as Tagore were actually perceived. In this sense, the commonly held idea that Indian mythology and philosophy were influential in the making of Yeats' literary character and laid the foundations for a positive reception of Tagore's work in 1912 seem to miss a great deal of the historical context, and in so doing somewhat misjudge the real nature of this encounter.[71] For Yeats, 'the East' did not *simply* constitute an exotic and backward civilisational 'other'.

The status of 'Indian culture', or the Tagorean poetry that it produced, 'belonged' to Yeats in the sense that he identified with it and sought to hold it up as a model. But in so doing he still made use of it in ways that ran counter to many of the actual messages that were being transmitted.

What Tagore sought from Yeats was understanding and recognition in the fullest and widest sense. Not personal recognition as such, though this may have been part of the equation, but – in a Tagorean formulation – an appreciation of the cultural value of India and its civilisation as one aspect of that greater universal spirit which had its ultimate basis in God. Tagore's was a remedial message, a call to move beyond the nation towards the universal: and it was also a call to action, not merely reflection. Ultimately, this failed in the case of Yeats for reasons of misapprehension. This failure, I suggest, was founded on the instrumentalisation of India and its 'gurus' or 'sages' for the purposes of a project of cultural revival that was in fact wholly Eurocentric – in the sense that Yeats' engagement with 'otherness' is comprehended in terms of the schism within Western culture – and often culturally chauvinist. Contrary to almost all of the existing literature on the Tagore–Yeats encounter, it had little to do with mutuality or an authentic meeting of cultures.

Time, tragedy and history

In his most detailed writing on the poet Yeats – and as if to prove that he could match the Western Orientalist's ability to romanticise that which is foreign – Tagore referred to what he saw as the centrality of tradition in his Anglo-Irish counterpart's writing, which had been absorbed in 'the most natural way'.[72]

> His intimacy with this world [the ancient lore of Ireland] is intuitive, he has felt it in his life. It is not with him a cultivated study . . . He could not have communicated this experience in the manner established by modern poetry because modernity is not really freshness, it is something worn out by repeated use. [Great poetry] does not respond to the new. It is like fire hidden under the ashes. This fire is older than ash but it is ever new. The ash is new but it is lifeless.[73]

In interpreting Yeats in this way, Tagore placed his finger directly on the crux of Yeats' relationship both with India, and with Tagore himself as a representative of 'Indian civilisation'. Yeats and Tagore agreed that much of what had come to pass as 'modernity' constituted – to extend Tagore's analogy – a cold hearth. But the fire that Tagore speaks of in this quote is 'ever new'. It burns within, and provides the possibility for man to recreate himself *in the present*.

One of the supposed key affinities between Yeats and Tagore which has been recently cited is their adoption of a 'cyclical' perspective on historical time.[74] This is accurate to the extent that both men saw historical periods as having core qualities in terms of social, cultural and religious life; qualities which would define periods of great achievement and equally account for their decline. These qualities

may pass away and return in cyclical periods. But, as alluded to in Chapter 1 and explored at greater length in Chapter 3, Tagore held a subtle and yet distinctively progressive view of historical time. He saw, indeed, his own time as one offering an unprecedented opportunity for a meeting of the races and a progressive realisation of the deeper nature of human unity. To reiterate the simple and yet fundamental point, the *conditions* of progress lay in present circumstances: immanent critique was historically possible. These circumstances may lead to a revival of certain desirable attributes of past historical periods, but Tagore was definitively not 'revivalist' nor reactionary in this sense. There was much that was not only sufficient, but also necessary about the age in which Tagore lived for the achievement of any future progress.

At the same time there is much in Tagore's writings that refers to the idea of progress as a possibility that must be striven for: in other words, he sees man as having choices and being able to seize opportunities. Consider his comments on the nature of Buddhist and post-Buddhist Hindu society, of which Tagore has the following to say:

> [T]he confusions and upheavals which characterised the Buddhist age left behind them, in the succeeding Hindu society, a residue of fear. An attitude of deep suspicion towards innovation and change began to prevail. Under such conditions of constant panic, society can make no progress . . . [c]ertain dynamic qualities must be retained along with the static, or else society will contract in its own conservatism and be doomed to a living death. Post-Buddhist Hindu society built a barrier of prohibitory measures in order to shield itself from external influences and preserve whatever of its own was still left, and India's place of glory was lost to her in consequence.[75]

The emphasis is on the possibility of progress, always to be achieved through an open, outward-looking condition. History is structured, but structural opportunities must be seized. It is for this very reason that Tagore could speak of colonialism and the function of the British Empire in India as progressive, if Indians responded to it in the right way.

For Yeats, by contrast, it was definitively a turn to the past that held the key to change. It was only the embers of a pre-Christian, Celtic Ireland that could shine a light on the present. In speaking of nationalism, and of Irish civilisation in opposition to an 'English civilisation', Yeats said that

> [t]he national movements are not detached outbreaks of race pride. They are part of the Great War, of a war of the past and the future, of a noble past that tries to keep itself unchanged, hoping, perhaps vainly, the deluge will begin some day to fall, that the dove will some day return bringing with it the green bough.[76]

As I have already argued, in Yeats' eyes India embodied an ancient store of wisdom that could feed and stimulate this revival. As we know, Yeats would write

that in Tagore's *Gitanjali* 'we have met our own image . . . our voice as if in a dream'.[77] These were the remnants of past states of mind, aspects of culture and collective 'mentalities' rather than biological traits. The 'image' that Yeats referred to was not a present one, but a past 'self', a form of collective cultural life that had been, but was no longer.

A static East

As we have seen, Yeats' mysticism was grounded in a fascination for the occult, 'a fascination which infected many in Europe and America in the late nineteenth century'. But, as Mary Lago has argued, '*Gitanjali* fell so easily into Yeats' and the West's stereotype of Eastern mysticism that it crowded out interest in the other aspects of Tagore'.[78] Here, I am very much in agreement with the emphasis that Mary Lago places on content over form. Rather than put Yeats' lack of interest in the later Tagore down to the poor quality of Tagore's post-*Gitanjali* translations – an explanatory factor that many commentators refer to, and which irritated Tagore himself far more than it did Yeats – I think it is more revealing to recognise the significance of the *intellectual dissimilarities* between the two men, and the ongoing misconceptions on the part of Yeats.

'Just as we fight and make money and fill our heads with politics', Yeats wrote in his memoirs, 'Mr Tagore, like the Indian civilisation itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity'.[79] Yeats' rudimentary error was to assume that he could read into selected aspects of Tagore's poetry a general philosophy of calm, and I have proposed that this was the consequence of his early Theosophical influences and the introduction to Indian philosophy that he received at the hands of Mohini Chatterjee. This led Yeats to make assumptions about India and Tagore being apolitical, removed from the 'illusory' material world and directed towards a transcendent spiritual contemplation, as opposed to concrete social work. What is striking is just how little effort Yeats made to become better acquainted with the intensely political and social conflicts that engorged Indian and Bengali life during the early twentieth century.

Of Tagore's later works, it appears that Yeats read very few indeed. There is a passing reference to Tagore's autobiography: 'it is a long time since I have written to you, but you have not been out of my thoughts, your "Autobiography" especially has been a great pleasure'.[80] Of *The Home and the World*, published in English in 1919, Yeats remarked that it reminded him of the situation in Ireland, reinforcing the sense of what Elizabeth Cullingford refers to as Yeats' 'dangerous habit of seeing the whole world through green-tinted spectacles'.[81] But looking through the dwindling correspondence between the two men following the *Gitanjali* episode, it appears that Yeats is almost entirely uninterested in Tagore's work in Shantiniketan, in his philosophical essays and even in his later prose work, save to say that he wrote to William Rothenstein around 1935 that he would return to 'the question of Tagore' because he has published 'in recent years, and in English, prose books of great beauty'.[82] The fact is, however, even though at

this late stage Yeats was preoccupied by the so-called 'problem' of Tagore, he did not in fact 'return' to it.

In a lecture given in 1893 Yeats claimed that 'the Greeks and the Indians are an idealistic people, [and] this foundation is fixed in legend rather than history'.[83] For Yeats, Tagore embodied a kind of ahistorical fantasy that recalled the ancient worlds of Greece or Byzantium, and through which Yeats could seek out a rediscovery and renaissance of his own mystical pasts. In conceptualising Tagore and India thus, Yeats appears to have agreed with both Hegel and Marx, who saw Indians as a prime example of a 'non-historical' people, those unfortunate souls outside of history's European engine room who, lacking agency, do not 'make their own history'. To the extent that Tagore was required to fit in with this kind of analysis – and in the eyes of Yeats and others he clearly was – his reputation suffered. Tagore was perceived by Yeats in one-dimensional fashion, and was ultimately cast aside as a bore on account of this uni-dimensionality. In reality, he deviated very far from the stereotype, but these deviations were ignored. The legacy of Yeats' misinterpretation of *Vedanta* as positing an illusory world is strong here. India, with its 'changelessness' – to which Yeats refers in his letter published in *The Golden Book of Tagore* (1931), quoted at the beginning of this chapter – is removed from the flow of history altogether. Europe is the centre of political and social change: India becomes an aesthetic adjunct to the world.

The corresponding idea to this non-historical changelessness is the notion that in Tagore there was no sense of conflict, of tragedy or of evil. Yeats in fact made this criticism often and widely: it was not only directed at Tagore. Elizabeth Cullingford suggests that Yeats felt that the 'return of evil [was] part of the pattern of history', and that he criticised Shelley, Ruskin, Morris, Wordsworth, Emerson and Whitman for all lacking 'the vision of evil'.[84] (If one is to be wrongly criticised, then at least be criticised in good company.) But for Yeats this growing anxiety, this mounting sense of a contradiction in his own nature and outlook between the philosophy of calm and the reality of conflict in the world was becoming an ever more prominent theme. Following the barbarity and senselessness of the First World War, he would feel this even more strongly. In his poem *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen* Yeats expresses the sense of horror thus:

> Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
> Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery
> Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
> To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;
> The night can sweat with terror as before
> We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
> And planned to bring the whole world under a rule,
> Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.[85]

Such emotions and thoughts were characteristic of a generation which, in Yeats' own words, 'has survived the Romantic Movement . . . and saw it die'.[86] Yeats' mood was shared by many of his fellow literary modernists.[87]

But Yeats had in fact wrongly stereotyped Tagore as a poet of 'innocence' and 'simplicity', for whom 'the birds and the leaves seem as near to him as they are near to children'.[88] This image satisfied both his preconceptions and his desire to transcend or escape modernity via immersion in 'other-worldliness'. And yet, having heavily contributed to the misplaced construction of such an identity for Tagore, Yeats proceeded – rather outrageously, it has to be said – to condemn Tagore for this supposed innocence, his lack of a sense of 'conflict', and above all 'tragedy'. In a very revealing conversation that Yeats had with Abinash Chandra Bose at Riversdale in June of 1937, Yeats – who was apparently in an 'excited mood' – opened the conversation by telling Mr Bose and his companion – Dr W. F. Trench, Head of the Department of English at Trinity College Dublin – that Mr Bose's friend Tagore wrote 'too much about God'.[89] 'I have fed upon the philosophy of the *Upanishads* all my life', Yeats went on, 'but there is an aspect of Tagore's mysticism that I dislike. I find an absence of tragedy in Indian poetry'.[90] Conflating the issues of translation and medium with content, he added that 'Indians should write in Urdu or Bengali . . . let Tagore cast off English'.[91] In the same conversation, Yeats posits that 'you Indians' are after the abstract, whereas he, Yeats, likes 'the concrete'.[92]

After Mr Bose points out that, contrary to his perception, India was 'already torn between conflicting creeds', the conversation turned towards the Hindu–Muslim 'communal problem'. The young Bose asked Yeats for a 'message to India', to which Yeats replied: 'Let 100,000 men of one side meet the other. That is my message to India, insistence on the antinomy'.[93] Bose concludes his account, telling us that Yeats then 'strode swiftly across the room, took up Sato's sword, and unsheathed it dramatically and shouted, "Conflict, more conflict" '.[94] The persistent theme here is of India's passive acceptance of change in the world. Yeats, by contrast is struggling to achieve mastery, and this involves both tragedy and struggle. In this, the idea that Tagore lacks a sense of evil and of conflict feeds into the nature of historical time: Yeats seeks to reconnect with the past of Ireland, and for him India – fixed, static, unchanging and essential in its 'unity of culture' – represents a storehouse into which he can make occasional raids for inspiration and succour.

The 'real Tagore' (as far as such a thing exists) was markedly different. Moreover, the irony is that some of the essential traits that Yeats ascribed to Tagore were in fact more applicable to Yeats himself. As Mary Lago has persuasively suggested, 'despite their apparent similarities, the basic difference between Yeats and Tagore lay in their concepts of time'.[95] Whereas Yeats saw time as the fearful 'hand of death, a relentless force against which no mortal can stand', Tagore conceived of time as the 'herald of life', and a 'process of renewal'.[96] In contrast to his Anglo-Irish contemporary, Lago argues, Tagore may not have always viewed this renewal without a sigh 'but he was neither afraid nor hopelessly resigned to the changes wrought by time',[97] a difference in which, as Mair Pitt has put it, 'Tagore emerges as the poet of change, Yeats as the poet of the eternal present'.[98] In fact, for Tagore, 'change is to be accepted – welcomed even, for it is the very stuff of life'.[99] Yeats, by contrast, pleads to escape the ever-changing: his

Sailing to Byzantium (1928) recalls a lost past into which Yeats escapes from the 'permanent revolution' of modernity. Tagore asks: 'Is it beyond thee to be glad with the gladness of this rhythm? To be tossed and lost and broken in the whirl of this fearful joy?'[100] When Tagore asked this question he was not, contrary to Yeats' interpretation, proffering a philosophy of surrender and extrication from the world of reality. In fact, a more appropriate interpretation is to see these lines as further evidence of Tagore's optimism that the present might yield a progressive future. Tagore, whom the West has seen throughout the twentieth century as the dreamy mystic, is, according to Lago, 'the true realist, for he can accept life as it is'.[101]

Cultures in contact: an assessment

As R. K. Dasgupta has insightfully written, 'a modern poet of the West could scarcely believe that poetry that was not a rapture of distress could be the right kind of poetry for the modern man'.[102] Tagore's poetry often evoked a 'picture of an abundance of hope and joy which to the European poet of the tragic generation would almost necessarily seem incredible'.[103] In a related sense, commenting on Yeats' poetry, F. R. Leavis wrote that 'it exhibited for us the inner struggle of the nineteenth-century mind in an heroic form'. Heroic, 'and because of the inevitable frustration and waste, tragic'.[104] Yeats discovered in *Gitanjali* the poetry of 'the heart turning towards God' which was also poetry 'of the finest kind'. But 'as a poet belonging to the European tradition he could not feed on such poetry for long'.[105]

The kind of indifference displayed by Yeats towards the wider corpus of Tagore's work, with all its contradictions, is – when placed in a proper historical context – to some extent unsurprising. Yeats' interest, as with the interest of other modernists in so-called 'primitive' or non-Western literary and art forms, was first and foremost aesthetic. For this reason, 'writers and artists rarely moved beyond the superficial, self-consciously cosmopolitan level of citation or questioned the continuing existence of colonial hierarchies'.[106] Moving beyond this, Elleke Boehmer asks a very pertinent question: can the cosmopolitan connections and instances of 'cross-border inter-subjectivity' evidenced by encounters such as that between Tagore and Yeats be seen to have 'impinged on . . . metropolitan cultural practices in any recognisable way'?[107] If these can be traced, as Boehmer suggests they might, it remains in the realm of the aesthetic. Boehmer posits the possibility that the 'pared-down poetry Yeats was beginning to write' could be seen as a reaction to 'Tagore's devotional poetry in the *Vaishnava* tradition of intensely personal spiritual longing', which 'Yeats could identify with but was seeking to divest himself of'.[108] But if this is so, it may be necessary – in thinking about ambivalences and disturbances at the level of the aesthetic or the discursive – to remember that Tagore was aiming at something more: i.e., the transformation of the moral relationship between coloniser and colonised.

The problem for the Yeats–Tagore relationship was that – on the basis of his limited and misdirected education in Theosophy and Indian philosophy – Yeats

assumed that the devotional *Vedantic* poetry of *Gitanjali* was all there was to Tagore. But it was not the only Tagore. As we know, he also published numerous essays, philosophical works and novels, most of which were largely ignored by the likes of Yeats.[109] In the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* published in 1936, Yeats included seven poems from Tagore (a high proportion, suggesting the enduring legacy in Yeats' mind) but, in an anthology covering the period 1892 to 1935, these seven poems were selected from two books published in 1913. What is fundamental is that the Tagore of *Gitanjali* was all that Yeats, and many others moving in romantic, modernist circles, *wanted* to know, for it served their purposes at the time. What is less forgivable is the extent to which Yeats goes on to condemn Tagore for being that which he was not. Yeats commented that Tagore 'wrote too much about God', without 'asking himself if to say that the Psalms of David were a little too pious was sound criticism'. Furthermore, he claimed to resent Tagore's supposed vagueness, 'without any critical qualm about his [own] *The Vision*'.[110] It may have been that for Yeats, Tagore represented not a different, 'other' civilisation but the two sides of his own, deeply conflicted self.

From Orientalism to 'colourless cosmopolitanism'

After his schooling in Theosophy, Yeats would later approach the Tagore of *Gitanjali* as an equal, heaping praise upon him. But, as Elleke Boehmer has written, we cannot fail to recognise Yeats' 'unmistakeable Orientalism' in his notion of 'an East suspended at an earlier, simpler and more intuitive stage of civilisation'.[111] Yeats' 'latent Orientalism', to borrow Said's phrase, manifested itself in his interpretation of *Vedanta* as a philosophy of calm and as a form of escapism from the humdrum of modernity. At the same time, Yeats feared the seductive nature of such a philosophy, and its failure to recognise the 'true' nature of the world, based in conflict. Ironically, having contributed towards Tagore's image in the West as a romantic, mystical poet detached from the world of reality, it was Yeats who sailed off to Byzantium, taking up residence, as Mary Lago puts it, in an 'ideal time and place in the past'.[112] The doubleness of Yeats' approach to Tagore reflects Homi Bhabha's idea that the colonial subject is not simply the object of colonial power (we might recall Yeats' idea of inviting Tagore to join the committee of the India Society in 1912 as being a piece of 'wise imperialism'), but is also the object of paranoia and fantasy.[113] Yeats' encounter with Tagore was always self-referential, and in accepting this we also need to accept that in this case, Tagore's ambitions for a more complete sense of mutuality and recognition remained unfulfilled.

Nevertheless, we can still detect a limited form of multi-directional influence that at least challenges what Edward Said called 'the fundamentally static notion of identity' at the core of cultural thought during the colonial period.[114] 'Self' and 'other' were not entirely rigid and monolithic entities: there were instances of the transgression of these boundaries at the level of culture and ideas. But it is not convincing to present Yeats and Tagore as poets and philosophers of East and West, constituting a single community of equal and equally admiring minds,

striving together for a new kind of cosmopolitanism. There is simply too much conflict and too much contradiction between the two for this perspective to be credible.[115] Such notions may have pleased the Theosophically-minded Orientalists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but in the case of Yeats and Tagore, it has a very weak basis in terms of historical evidence. If anything, their relationship betrayed the potential hollowness of a cosmopolitanism that Tagore would later refer to as 'colourless' and 'vague'. Whilst this was certainly true of the very earliest response to *Gitanjali*, this chapter has been an attempt to broaden our historical view, and if what I have proposed is valid, then Lennon's view requires qualification.

Disabling difference

The sense of affinity and sameness between Yeats and Tagore, the sense of being at odds with certain aspects of modernity – as experienced both in Dublin and in Calcutta – may have opened up the possibility for channels of communication and inter-cultural dialogue; but we need to move beyond this and ask questions about the substance of the encounter. What is crucial is that when examining historical examples of cross-cultural, trans-national exchange and influence, we retain a critical eye as to the power relationships that such exchanges expressed. It is important to note, then, the romanticised view of Tagore-as-mystic enabled figures such as Yeats to effectively insulate themselves from anything else that Tagore might have had to say, which may have been more disturbing. Tagore's strident critique of nationalism did not appear to warrant the attention of Yeats at all. As Stephen Howe suggests, for Yeats, it remained Ibsen's Norway and Wagner's Germany that were 'classic examples of cultural nationalist revival'. Others focused on the nationalisms of Italy and Greece, but only 'a few Republicans . . . evince[d] a more meaningful engagement with Indian and other colonial questions'.[116] Essentially, whereas European culturalist and nationalist movements were credited with the properties of action – existing within and shaping the present – India in the mind of Yeats was static, unchanging and thus essentially fixed in the past. Its inspirational qualities lay not in its contemporaneity but as a reminder of a forgotten European past. In the eyes of Yeats India remained, as both Hegel and Marx had decreed, non-historical.

Tagore is not credited by Yeats as an agent in the arena of anti-colonial politics or even anti-colonial thought. The fact that Tagore was an anti-colonialist, an anti-nationalist and simultaneously proclaimed the European impact on India to be partly progressive was perhaps too complicated a distinction to be realised and acknowledged. Yeats was deeply moved by the poems in *Gitanjali* because he felt that they exhibited a deep affinity, a 'Unity of Being' arising out of a 'Unity of Culture'. But they could not sustain him for long because he could not make another man's or another civilisation's 'Unity of Being' his own. 'The fascination of what's difficult', Yeats wrote, in a 1910 poem of the same title, 'Has dried the sap out of my veins, and rent/Spontaneous joy and natural content/Out of my heart'.[117] In light of this, it is tempting to suggest that even before he had met

Tagore, he had implied he may not be able to make the necessary leap across the cultural divide.

As the years went by, the Tagore–Yeats friendship, such as it was, dwindled. Tagore remembered Yeats for his assistance with *Gitanjali*, and for the excitement of the London summer of 1912. By 1916 Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory, with a note of irritation: 'I find myself overwhelmed with work – introduction to book of Japanese [plays] for my sister – two books of verse by Tagore to revise for Macmillan who has no notion of the job it is'.[118] There is little contact between the two – at least very little that survives in the archives – until 1931, when Yeats, complaining of bad health, declined to contribute to the *Golden Book of Tagore* (then later revised his position), but wrote, 'I therefore want to tell you that I am still your most loyal student and admirer'. That this was patently false was not lost on Tagore.[119] He wrote to Yeats in 1935: 'I know you have entered into an epoch of life which is vague to me and distant, but I shall always remember the generosity of your simple and sensitive poetic youth which exercised in my mind a profound attraction for your genius'.[120] In so doing he acknowledged the divergent paths they had taken.

Much of the literature on Yeats' relationship with Tagore has over-emphasised the depth of their affinities. Their relationship was complex, but the idea that there was in fact any profound influence of one poet upon another is hard to sustain beyond a few textual references. Certainly, Yeats' approach to Tagore was to instrumentalise him: he, or 'India' became a kind of box of delights that could be raided for the purpose of cultural renewal in Europe. To this extent, issues such as the poor quality of the translation work carried out on Tagore's post-*Gitanjali* period seem insignificant compared to the failure of Yeats to engage with Tagore in such a way as to allow what Bhabha has called the other's 'historic desire' and his 'own institutional and oppositional discourse' to be heard and comprehended.[121] Theirs did indeed seem to be a context in which Tagore was ultimately 'never the active agent of articulation'.[122] The issue is, however, whether Bhabha's insight counts in all cases of such interaction. It has a certain relevance in the case of Yeats, but he was one of two figures who would claim the authority to represent Tagore to the West. The second such figure was Edward J. Thompson. In addition, C. F. Andrews – although less prominent and less influential (at least in metropolitan circles) – was also a key individual in terms of our understanding of Tagore's relationship to 'the West' (in a macroscopic sense) and to his relations with particular 'westerners'. It is to Thompson's 'difficult friendship' with Tagore and to Andrews' 'ordeal of love' that I now turn.

5 Acts of atonement

Tagore, C. F. Andrews and E. J. Thompson

> I become more and more surprised to see how far higher, in reality, our European civilisation stands now than the East, India or Persia ever dreamed of. And one is glad to *realise* how these Hindus are horribly decadent and reverting to all forms of barbarism in all sorts of ugly ways. But this fraud of looking up to them – this wretched worship-of-Tagore – is disgusting . . . it is ridiculous to look East for inspiration . . . one always felt irked by the East coming-it over us. It is sheer fraud. The East is *marvellously* interesting, for tracing our steps *back*. But for going forward, it is nothing. All it can hope for is to be fertilised by Europe, so it can start on a new phase.[1]
>
> D. H. Lawrence, 1916

If Yeats and others moving in romanticist cultural and intellectual circles had fetishised the East and made Tagore its exemplar, this would not last long. Tagore was aware of the inadequacy of his post-*Gitanjali* translations now being undertaken under time pressure. He was also beginning to realise that for deeper cultural and intellectual reasons, whilst *Gitanjali* may have resonated with many Western readers, it would be difficult to evolve his voice in such a way as to show that it had more than one tenor.

Troubling cosmopolitanism

In early January 1913, following Ezra Pound's requests to Tagore to send more translations, Tagore wrote: 'I do not know the exact value of your English words. Some of them may have their souls worn out by constant use and some others may not have acquired their souls yet'.[2] Tagore was rapidly beginning to irritate Pound, not least because he was bearing much of the burden of receiving further translations.[3] These were made by Tagore himself, and sent to his new literary friends in London whilst he was on his winter tour of the United States. Various letters were being sent from Tagore to William Rothenstein, who essentially remained his chief literary adviser, but letters were also sent separately to Yeats and Pound. Another figure, Arthur Fox Strangways – a founder member of the India Society and a friend of Rothenstein – was helping Tagore in his dealings with the Macmillan publishing house. Both men being of the 'Indianist' category that I

referred to in Chapter 2, they had a more sincere and well-intentioned disposition towards Tagore, as an Indian, and indeed displayed far more tolerance with regard to Tagore's frequent letter writing and concern over his work and its reception.

Tagore was, however, beginning to test the patience of Yeats over the issue of translation. As Dutta and Robinson note in their *Selected Letters*, conflicts had already begun to emerge between Tagore's English contacts, with Fox Strangways and Yeats disagreeing over context and Yeats then coming into indirect contact with another of Tagore's English friends, this time the Shantiniketan-based C. F. Andrews. Andrews was no literary critic and although he knew Bengali he was not especially proficient. Nevertheless, during October 1912, just prior to Tagore's departure for America, Andrews had persuaded Tagore to make changes to the proofs of the forthcoming India Society limited edition of *Gitanjali* (the first English publication). When Yeats heard news of this, he warned Tagore that 'the amateur is never to be trusted'.[4] Tagore's reply was rather sheepish.

> I am very sorry for some corrections made at the instance of Mr Andrews in *Gitanjali* when it was too late to submit them to you. I am so absolutely ignorant of the proprieties of your language and Mr Andrews was so insistent that nervousness drove me to those corrections. I do hope you will take the trouble of once going over the proofs of the second edition and make all the restorations necessary.[5]

More important than these minor irritations over translation was Ezra Pound's scepticism in respect of Tagore's philosophical outlook. Pound was the first to voice the same judgments concerning 'tragedy' that Yeats would later express, although neither man would reach the levels of contempt that D. H. Lawrence exuded. Following meetings between Pound and Tagore in London during the summer of 1912, Pound had written to a friend that in Tagore's company he felt like 'a painted Pict with a stone war-club'.[6] By the April of 1913, just one month after the publication of an adulatory essay in the *Fortnightly Review* – in which he compared Tagore's poetics to 'the poetic piety of Dante'[7] – Pound would write privately that Tagore's poetry (at least in translation, which was all he could know) amounted to just 'more Theosophy'.[8] Perhaps more substantial was his assertion – in the same letter – that 'Tagore's philosophy hasn't much in it for a man who has "felt the pangs" and been pestered with Western civilisation'.[9] Such scepticism as to whether Tagore's philosophy could really connect with the pained and tragic persona of 'modern man' was something that set in early amongst the Bloomsbury group. As discussed in Chapter 4, the early years of the Yeats–Tagore relationship already suggested the limitations of a narrow cosmopolitan 'republic of letters'.[10] For both Yeats and Tagore, the possibilities of coexistence within the elite cultural spaces enabled by imperialism quickly receded, and each of the protagonists sought refuge in their preconceived notions of cultural difference.

The 'politics of friendship' and the 'pluralisation of individuals'

We come back, then, to the problem of the politics of friendship which has constituted Tagore's practical approach to creating change between coloniser and colonised. The empirical, social sense of a politics of friendship that I am applying to the material presented in this chapter, which has a more prosaic meaning than Derrida's deconstructionist usage of the term, is implied by Raymond Williams' idea of the 'pluralisation' of individuals. Williams' argument, which I referred to in the Introduction to this book, seems germane to an understanding of the limitations of Tagore's cosmopolitan politics of friendship, as evidenced by the Yeats–Tagore encounter. Williams' core insight is that the inherent liberalism of the Bloomsbury approach is shared across a very wide spectrum of political persuasions, and what unites them is the limitations that this places on the scope for radical political change. As Williams put it, the idea of the pluralisation of individuals becomes a central tenet of 'bourgeois ideology', thereby maintaining the status quo in the face of superficial disagreement and contestation.[11] And those who claimed the pluralisation of individuals as 'the only acceptable social direction' would quickly denounce the radicals who proposed deeper, faster revolutionary change as stepping across the line between 'civilised' and 'uncivilised'.[12] But whereas Williams refers to the border between civilised and uncivilised within the class structure of the European metropole, Tagore ultimately constituted not simply a subaltern class, but a civilisational other, inferior on account of his (wrongly) alleged inability to understand the truth of the human condition, grounded in tragedy and conflict.

However, if Tagore's initial contact with figures such as Yeats and Pound led to the emergence of points of criticism and ultimate rejection, theirs were not the only efforts at cross-cultural communication or the creation of cosmopolitan social spaces. C. F. Andrews and Edward Thompson pursued a different approach: a politics of friendship that others within metropolitan cultural and literary circles sometimes professed (one recalls E. M Forster's famous remarks on friendship across national borders), but were rarely able to extend across the cultural boundaries of East and West. Andrews and Thompson lived in India, learned Bengali and spent long periods of time in Tagore's cultural world. More significantly, they held a desire to effect a Christian-inspired political reconciliation between East and West, India and Britain.[13] Motivated by the Christian idea of atonement, their concerns went well beyond the level of the aesthetic. Like Tagore, they sought a change in the moral basis of the colonial relationship. Was this kind of approach capable of augmenting a different kind of cosmopolitan encounter?

C. F. Andrews: atonement as transformation

C. F. Andrews was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1897 and briefly held a fellowship at Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he taught at the Clergy Training School. In August of 1900, Andrews' university friend Basil Westcott, who had been teaching at St Stephen's College, Delhi, died from cholera. Coming

shortly after the death of C. H. Prior – the Cambridge tutor to whom he had been close – Andrews felt the loss of Westcott very deeply. The profound capacity for love and devotion to those with whom he became intimate – which would later manifest itself in his relationship with Tagore – was already much in evidence. When he was invited to replace Westcott and become the Principal of St Stephen's College in 1903, he accepted the offer with little hesitation and eventually set out for Delhi in February 1904. Prior to his departure for India, he held relatively orthodox views on colonialism, and in politics 'Andrews still held to the conservatism . . . of which Joe Chamberlain had made Birmingham a fortress. His ideas on imperialism were undeveloped . . . [and] the war in South Africa did not cause Andrews to revise his view'.[14]

Andrews was one of the first Englishmen to build a strong relationship with Tagore, whom he met in London in the summer of 1912. Andrews was in Birmingham visiting his ailing mother, with whom he had an intense emotional bond, but he soon headed to the capital in an effort to meet the poet of whom he had heard so much. His chance came on 7 July, when he was invited to Tagore's *Gitanjali* reading at William Rosenstein's Hampstead residence.[15] After meeting Tagore, Andrews published an article entitled 'An evening with Rabindra' in the Calcutta-based *Modern Review* of August 1912. He wrote, concerning the evening in Hampstead, that he was 'aware of a slender figure passing rapidly across the room . . . and I knew by the beautiful face (which I had seen in portraits) that it was Rabindra Babu himself'. The continuation of Andrews' article is telling: 'all the while' he adds, 'there was also the glad exultation that my own country was doing homage at last to the genius of India, revealed through her greatest living poet'.[16] Andrews' sense, in 1912, was that British–Indian relations could be repaired by paying due respect to Indian culture and civilisation. Atonement, for the early Andrews, simply meant recognition and respect for India's cultural and artistic achievements. Such a perspective with regard to Tagore was widespread in 1912 and 1913. Honouring him was seen as not simply just in terms of his literary merits, but as Yeats had put it, it was also a piece of 'wise imperialism'.[17]

The problem of translation and communicator

As I have suggested in regard to Yeats and Ezra Pound, there were deeper, more structural reasons why Tagore's impact on Western readers after 1913 was not as significant as the reception of *Gitanjali* had promised. Nevertheless, the quality of his translations was, from the very beginning, a major concern for Tagore. In early 1914 Tagore persisted in asking Andrews to correct his English translations. He wrote to Edward Thompson – already a competitor for Tagore's attentions – that if translations were not to be made by Tagore himself, 'the next best thing is to work with some Englishman who has literary abilities. I have every hope that Andrews will be willing to help me in this work when he comes back from England . . . he knows very little Bengali but I know Bengali well enough to supply this deficiency'.[18]

But by the end of 1914 Andrews was ill in both body and mind and had severely tested Tagore's patience. His emotionalism was becoming something of a barrier and his literary abilities were in doubt.[19] On 3 November, Andrews wrote to Tagore, 'I seem to have added one failure to another'.[20] Upon his return to Shantiniketan in December, his failure to integrate into the *ashram* was clear: 'he had not made a success of his English classes; he could not master Bengali; he felt he was a burden to Rabindranath'.[21] What this suggests is that Andrews – as a 'communicator' of Tagore to Western audiences – had significant limitations. His deep sense of personal devotion to Tagore compromised his relationship with the poet because Tagore craved independence and solitude as much as he may have craved recognition. Tagore's love for Andrews was not in question, but as intellectuals there existed an oceanic gulf between them.

Andrews was credited with a number of the translations that comprised the 1916 collection entitled *Hungry Stones and Other Stories*, but with time Andrews focused less on translating and more on allowing Tagore to 'speak for himself'. Andrews had high hopes for the message that Tagore could send. This tendency had been evident back in 1912 when he tried to scotch plans for a Yeats-authored introduction to Tagore's work. 'I have written to Mr Rothenstein about the introduction', he told Tagore, and 'I wish [it] were more worthy of the poems. I read it over again yesterday in the train and it was altogether unsatisfying and very superficial . . . I wonder if in the popular edition they could stand by themselves without any introduction at all. That is what I should wish'.[22] Andrews' belief was no doubt naive, but it was honestly held: Tagore's 'giving . . . [of his] heart in its simplicity to [his] fellow men in the West . . . [would begin] to break down barriers'.[23] The primary publications arising out of this approach were edited collections of Tagore's letters such as the 1924 *Letters from Abroad* and 1928 *Letters to a Friend*. These, as well as *Thoughts from Tagore*, published in 1929, gave further credence to the unfortunate and already obstructive idea of Tagore as the Eastern 'poet-seer'. Both were books published with the full consent of Rabindranath himself, but they may well have done more harm than good, presenting his ideas in aphoristic, decontextualised form. Andrews heavily edited the letters, removing many of their more controversial aspects, and in so doing reducing the complexity of Tagore's character.[24]

And yet, it is important to be cautious about Andrews' responsibility for the manipulation of Tagore's reputation and the possible misrepresentation of his ideas. Both E. P. Thompson and Nilanjana Banerji seek to place a good degree of the blame for Tagore's declining reputation on the shoulders of C. F. Andrews, thereby removing some of that same burden from Edward J. Thompson. Similarly, William Rothenstein's 1932 letter to E. J. Thompson in which he claims that Tagore's 'vanity' had 'become ridiculous', adding that he 'blame[d] Andrews, who has encouraged it', suggests a degree of influence and authority that is hard to support with evidence.[25] As I have already mentioned, Tagore himself was sceptical about Andrews' ability as a translator. At the same time – despite such accusations of vanity – Tagore was tired of the sycophants who surrounded him, and impatient even with his friends if they exhibited similar tendencies. In a letter

to Willie Pearson in 1920, Tagore revealed some of his frustrations: 'you have got into some conventional habits', he said, 'such as calling me "Gurudeb" and making "pranam" to me [i.e., touching Tagore's feet]. Drop them. For I know there are occasions when they hurt you and for that very reason you are truly discourteous to me. You know I never cared to assume the role of a prophet or teacher; I do not claim homage from my fellow beings'.[26] He was similarly impatient with Andrews and, as Tagore's biographer Krishna Dutta has noted, in search of 'the sharp critical faculty that all great artists must have', Tagore 'looked in vain' to Andrews for 'the reserve and restraint of some of his truly gifted friends in England'.[27]

Even when Andrews took it upon himself to put forward direct examples of Tagore's work, his impact was somewhat limited. Andrews' intention was to rebalance the colonial relationship by facilitating the positive influence of the East on the West. Atonement had to be something more than just gesture. Andrews wanted genuine engagement and a will on the part of the Western 'self' to embark on a critical examination in the face of the Eastern 'other'. Playing a role in presenting and communicating Tagore's thought – even simply as an editor and promoter – was one purposeful action that Andrews could take. In *The Bookman* of December 1928, we find an advertisement for Andrews' *Letters to a Friend*, which introduces the reader – so the publisher tells us – 'in a very personal way . . . to the deepest thoughts of the East about Europe and America, and throw[s] light on some of the most difficult problems of India [sic] – and many are the lovely incidental things [sic] in these letters – descriptions, poems, reflections'.[28] Clearly this presentation by the publisher fits with all the accusations levelled by critics of Andrews, such as E. P. Thompson, regarding his representation of Tagore to the West: i.e., that Andrews merely succeeded in reinforcing the idea of the sage-mystic with anodyne words of wisdom, anecdotes and insights, all of which amounted to little more than a fashionable shelf filler. The phrase 'incidental things' is perhaps most telling, suggestive as it is of something unsystematic. But what is far more striking, in fact, is just how little interest there was in Andrews' publications: in the contemporary press and periodicals, it is hard to find any trace of the three edited collections of letters and passages from Tagore. *Letters from Abroad* (1924) was put into print through a minor publishing house in Madras, which could be seen as part of an explanation for its relative neglect. But the lack of interest from critics in the latter two – C. F. Andrews, *Letters to a Friend* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928), and C. F. Andrews (ed.), *Thoughts from Rabindranath Tagore* (London: Macmillan, 1929) – is indicative of a wider decline already under way. This absence of critical attention is thus further evidence against the argument that it was Andrews who spoiled Tagore's Western reputation.

Personal devotion and an 'Eastern Christ'

A second, and in many ways more interesting move made by Andrews was to intensely personalise his idea of atonement as self-reform and reconfiguration. From

1914 onwards Andrews based himself at Tagore's *ashram* in Shantiniketan to pursue his spiritual development. In 1919 he renounced his Anglican ministry, and in later years exchanged his linen suits and clean-shaven appearance for a long, flowing Tagore-style robe and full beard. Abandoning his affiliation with the colonial power also meant a change in personal habits and appearance. Above all, however, his atonement was acted out through his devotion to Tagore. As evidence of this, there is a quite moving letter – undated but most probably written long after the heady summer of 1912 – to be found in the Tagore Papers at the Rabindra Bhavana archive in Shantiniketan.[29] The letter says a great deal about Andrews' character and the power of his personal sense of desire. In the letter, he evokes the strength of his own feelings as he recalls the night he first met Tagore. 'It was your English poems that I fell in love with', he says, 'they flooded my whole mind and soul and body'.[30]

> You were so shy: you shrank out of sight – 'anywhere – anywhere, out of the world' – so that when the evening was over I had still only a very imperfect

Plate 3 CFA, Christ's Faithful Apostle. Andrews' love for Rabindranath ran very deep. At times this undermined his value to Rabindranath as an interlocutor, though they remained steadfastly loyal to each other until the end. (Photo courtesy of Rabindra Bhavana, Santiniketan.)

> idea of your face and could not recall it. I had this one impression – a shrinking figure, frail and worn and very pitiful – and I did pity you, and all the mother in me went out to you in a yearning kind of way. Once or twice I went timidly up to you, but felt that I had failed . . . When the evening was over I had almost forgotten you in the wonder of your poems. I had no room for anything else. I was literally intoxicated. I hardly knew what was happening to me, or what was going on around me . . . I went out onto Hampstead Heath alone. It was a clear, soft moonlit night. I had the latch-key with me of the house where I was staying, and I remained out under the sky long into the night, almost till dawn was breaking'.[31]

As the letter continues (and it is very substantial, perhaps some 2,000 words in length), it develops an increasingly suggestive sense of interiority – an autobiographical, even diary-like quality – as it becomes fully confessional.

> And then, when I did see you at last a second time, alone in your own house, this joy of expectation was more than fulfilled. For then I fully knew, as I had not fully known at that first meeting – why should I not say it quite simply? – how beautiful you were . . . Since that day when I first saw your face and looked into your eyes, it has ever been thus with me, and a hundred thousand times over I have repeated it to myself. It is not your beauty alone, but the vision of beauty that has come to me through you.[32]

If one of the tasks of the historian is to empathise with the historical object – to try as far as possible to think with it – then manifestations of love, including sexual love, present significant challenges of interpretation. The assumptions of our time, it seems to me, are so engrained that it is difficult to 'un-think' them. It is tempting, still, to read into this letter – and indeed numerous other letters – that Andrews was essentially 'in love' with Rabindranath. If this is true there is no evidence whatsoever that it was reciprocated. There are letters between the two in which Andrews raises the subject of marriage, and in a 1915 letter from Willie Pearson – their mutual friend and Shantiniketan colleague – to Tagore, Pearson mentions the name of a 'Miss Dutt', an Indian Christian whom Andrews had considered marrying.[33] But he never did marry. The Theosophist James Henry Cousins, who met Andrews in India, commented in his autobiography that Andrews had 'confided in me that what he had always wanted was a wife'. 'I had a private idea', Cousins adds, 'that what he needed was a husband, for he appeared to be a big hearted woman who had got mixed in his incarnation'.[34] Perhaps more meaningfully, for Andrews, Tagore represented an alternative vision of the sublime, a Christ-like object of veneration, who – because Tagore could be fused in Andrews' mind with India itself – offered the possibility of atonement through the inversion of the received racial, cultural and religious hierarchies established by the exercise of colonial power.

What is interesting is the extent of Andrews' transgressive nature. He had a deep reverence for the feminine, which, as I alluded to earlier, may have stemmed

from the tremendous love he felt for his mother. His worship of femininity – especially that found in men – was perhaps a corollary of the idea of the 'manly Englishman and effeminate Bengali', but it involved a reordering of values.[35] Andrews had, for his time, radical ideas on women's rights, calling for the ordination of women into the Anglican clergy in 1940. In a pamphlet entitled *The Good Shepherd*, he wrote that 'just as in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek', so also 'in Him there is neither male nor female . . . no subordination of one sex to the other'.[36] His refusal of the binary of self and other that facilitated the domination of West over East through the political form of colonialism extended to gender relations, and was acted out at the deepest levels of Andrews' personal life. In politics, too, Andrews identified himself very strongly with India over Britain, and not only elite Indians like Tagore and Gandhi but also the cause of the humblest workers. By 1916, following Andrews' research into indentured labourers in Fiji,[37] which he presented to Congress and which caused a political storm in India, Andrews effectively decided, as Hugh Tinker puts it, that 'a free India could have no place in the British Empire'.[38] It is for this reason that even today Andrews is one of the best-remembered Englishmen in India. As E. P. Thompson put it, albeit a touch sardonically, 'only those who, like Charlie Andrews . . . adopted without reserve the "Indian point of view" could be trusted'.[39]

But Andrews always sought to connect the personal, the political and – naturally, for an ex-missionary – the religious. He engaged increasingly with the spiritual basis of Hinduism and Buddhism and drew heavily upon Tagore's knowledge of religion and philosophy to pursue an ongoing project on the Eastern and Western leanings of Christianity. This culminated in the 1932 publication *What I Owe to Christ*. In the numerous exchanges between Tagore and Andrews on the nature of Christianity, Andrews wrote of 'a more organic conception of the higher religions' based on a 'moving thought, which has come to me almost in the light of a new discovery . . . to find out from my own actual experience how much the old ethical and spiritual ideal of India itself (the Hindu–Buddhist ideal) is the distinctive note in Christ's own life, which marks him off from the Old Testament and from St Paul'.[40] He asked Tagore,

> Would you agree with me that St John is far more congenial to your Hindu mind than St Paul? The Sermon on the Mount ideal repels us. We either neglect or ignore it. On the other hand, we make a strange mixture of our old Roman classical stories and our Jewish history, and frame our ideals of conduct on *that* . . . An Indian student once said [to me] – 'Sir, if I told an Englishman that he would "inherit the earth" he would be flattered and pleased: but if I told him he should be "meek" he would be insulted!' . . . We have this old, hard, aggressive Jewish and Roman view of life running in our very blood.[41]

Andrews' project was to 'Easternise' the West via a re-examination of the history of Christianity, drawing out the supposedly forgotten 'Eastern Christ'. It was, perhaps, less syncretic and more oriented towards the recovery of a lost essence:

less concerned with combining elements than reconfiguring on the basis of fresh experience and an alternative paradigm. Leaving aside the very obvious essentialisation of East and West implicit in Andrews' perspective, we can nevertheless see that he had a constant yearning for a move beyond atonement-as-gesture towards a transformative encounter, which involved a deep struggle to come to terms with his faith, and to reconcile the hopes and dreams that he had brought out to India in 1904 with the despoiled realities of a nominally Christian empire.

Thompson: atonement as critical engagement

Edward John Thompson's idea of atonement was, like Andrews', simultaneously deeply personal – effected on an individual basis – and macroscopic in its ambition to bring India and Britain towards reconciliation. But whilst Thompson was a man with a similar background to Andrews, he differed markedly in terms of temperament and intellectual disposition.

Thompson came from Wesleyan missionary stock. Both his father, John Moses Thompson and his mother, Elizabeth were missionaries in south India, and although he was born at Hazel Grove near Manchester, it is said that Edward's earliest memories were of 'mission compounds and Madras beaches'.[42] But his arrival in rural Bengal in 1910 had not come about easily. In 1898 he entered Kingswood School in Bath and in 1900 passed the Junior Cambridge exams with distinction. In 1901 he took the English and Literary Prize. But Thompson's family was relatively poor and by 1902 he had withdrawn from the Sixth Form and was working as a clerk at a bank in Bethnal Green. As a consequence, his early educational promise was not fulfilled and he was unable to attend university.[43] After belated and failed attempts to gain access to Oxford, Thompson was largely self-taught, and this appeared to instil within him a sense that things of genuine substance were the product of hard work. It also gave him a persistent and profound sense of being an outsider, something which his illustrious historian son E. P. Thompson made much of in *Alien Homage*, the book he wrote about his father's relationship with Tagore.[44] So, if Thompson senior were to avoid a life of relative poverty and intellectual sterility he had to escape the bank, and the only real option available to him was the Ministry. He was ordained in 1910, and in the same year was sent to teach English at the Wesleyan Mission High School and College at Bankura, a small provincial town in what is now West Bengal. He taught there until 1922, save for the period 1916 to 1919 when he was a chaplain with the British Army in Mesopotamia.

He had first met Tagore in Calcutta in October 1913, shortly before Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize. From the very beginning his relationship with Tagore was a great struggle. Thompson had written to his mother on 30 October that he had 'waded many rivers, cycled over 30 miles' to reach Tagore in Shantiniketan, only to eventually arrive at midnight and find that Rabindranath had gone to Calcutta.[45] He caught up with him there shortly afterwards. During their meeting Tagore invited Thompson to visit him in Shantiniketan, and promised to be in residence. Thompson duly did so, and his visit coincided with the arrival, on 14

November, of a telegram notifying Tagore of his Nobel Prize. Preserved in Thompson's notebooks is an account of this day, and it is suggestive of Thompson's attitude, for he was keen from the outset to move beyond the façade of hero worship and delve deeper into the complexities of Tagore's life and work. According to Thompson, the Shantiniketan schoolboys 'went mad' for although 'they didn't know what the Nobel Prize was', they nonetheless 'understood that the *gurudeb* [great teacher] they adored had done something wonderful' and they 'formed ranks and marched around the *ashram* singing their school song'.[46] These celebrations, according to Thompson, saw 'a frenzy of worship seize them and they, one after the other, threw themselves down and touched his [Tagore's] feet . . . all masters, boys, servants'. Thompson states that amidst all of this he remained 'an Englishman', who held 'stern contempt for the fools who pretend they are Easterners'.[47]

The superficial contrasts in terms of style and appearance are symptomatic of their deeper differences. Thompson's schoolmaster reserve stands in counterpoint to Andrews' emotionalism. Likewise, Andrews' robes and beard contrast fittingly with the three-piece suit and tie that Thompson sports on the cover of Mary Lago's biography. Thompson did not propose to atone for empire by adopting Indian customs, nor by proclaiming the superiority of the East. Thompson was unable, politically, to move beyond the idea that India should achieve dominion status within the empire. He desperately wanted to find some kind of meaning in the imperial project, and specifically the encounter between Britain and India, as opposed to simply consigning it to the dustbin of history.

What Thompson offered by way of atonement was something he felt was within his grasp to offer: a 'fair hearing' and 'sound criticism'. The intellectual exchange between Thompson and Tagore began from 1914, when Tagore was still obsessed by the quality of his translations. As mentioned earlier, Tagore was at this point becoming aware of both the impatience of genuine poets such as Yeats and Pound and the intellectual shortcomings of someone like Andrews. As a man who was living and teaching in Bengal – and learning its language – Thompson represented a middle way. Throughout 1914, Tagore had asked Thompson to improve the 'diction and rhythm'[48] of some of his translations. E. P. Thompson's *Alien Homage* picks up on what he saw as the unjust treatment of his father's efforts at cultural dialogue, and in particular the use of Thompson senior by Tagore's most eminent English language translator, William Radice, as a 'foil to his own work'.[49] E. P. Thompson suggests that 'with the aid of a hostile letter from Tagore to Rothenstein . . . [Radice] places Thompson [senior] in a pillory before the public in such a way as to lay the responsibility for Tagore's long misrecognition at his door'.[50] Whilst this was undoubtedly not Radice's intention, E. P. rightly points out that his father was in fact responsible for only a very small amount of translation work, and much of what he did translate was not even acknowledged.[51] Before Thompson headed to Mesopotamia in 1916, he had already fallen out of favour with Tagore. Both Thompson and Andrews were jealous of Tagore's time and attention, and Thompson saw Andrews' hand in his rejection. He wrote to a Bengali friend in 1921 that Andrews was 'beneath contempt in terms of judgement (& intellect

generally)'. 'I can't understand', he continues 'how R. ever got humbugged into his ecstatic exaltation of him'. Of himself, Thompson remarked that he had 'always refused to worship indiscriminately', but nervously asked, 'I wonder if R. will have anything to do with me when he returns?'[52]

Biography and criticism

Excluded from the intimate Tagore circle and unable (like Andrews, though for different reasons) to make his contribution through translations, Thompson pursued a different tack, and embarked on a full-scale critical biography of Tagore, aiming to represent what he saw as the complexity of Tagore's poetry, as well as his social criticism, which had been largely neglected up to this point. Writing to his wife about his forthcoming *Rabindranath Tagore: His Life and Work*, published in 1921, Thompson suggested that 'Andrews fondly imagines that I am putting together a rapt gazing at the master's face. There will be a few shocks. I'm aiming at something bigger – a real contribution to the truth'.[53] What animated Thompson's actions was his belief that 'the world must pay Indian civilisation the only compliment worth having, that of criticism by the best standards that sifting time has given us'. The biography was intended, he wrote to his wife, 'to give the West a pukka view of Rabi at last & give Bengali a criticism of its stuff by universal standards'.[54] Thompson's assumption was that judgement by so-called 'universal standards' was what was desired by Tagore.

In England, Thompson's first book was generally well received, without making too much of an impact. The favourable review in *The New Statesman* suggests that Thompson's intention of presenting a so-called 'pukka view' had not entirely missed its mark. The review notes with approval the range, depth and variety of Tagore's writings and claims that 'not the least discerning of Mr Thompson's pages are those in which he considers Tagore as political thinker and prophet'.[55] But the seeds of potential discontent on Tagore's part were also present in some of the reviews. A 'short notice' in *The Outlook* picked up on the issue of translation and commented that '[u]nfortunately poetry is always untranslatable, though it may be remade into other poetry; and Tagore is never quite a poet when he writes in English'.[56] A review in *The Aberdeen Daily Journal* further exacerbates the problem.

> Among other noteworthy points in Mr. Thompson's study are his analysis of Tagore's English style, and his revelation of the manner in which the poet inadequately rendered his Bengali poems into English by changing them from full-length imaginative pictures into mere wisps of song. A comparison, exceedingly striking, is afforded by the juxtaposition of one of Tagore's own *Gitanjali* 'translations' with a full translation by Mr. Thompson of the original Bengali poem.[57]

At a time when Tagore was becoming ever more fretful about the so-called 'translation problem', Thompson was assuming an authoritative position which

certainly exceeded the role that Tagore had envisaged for him at this stage. *The Nation and Athenaeum* is happy to credit Thompson with a deeper knowledge both of Bengali and of Tagore than any other European of his time.

> He [Thompson] knows the astonishing corpus of Tagore's work in Bengali, and he has applied this reading to the making of a capital little book, which we do not hesitate to commend as the best informed, the brightest, and the most illuminating exposition of a great Indian that has been presented to the English public in our day.[58]

In her edited collection of the Thompson–Tagore correspondence, Uma Das Gupta quotes Thompson's wife, Theodesia, who recognised that the 1921 book was 'a risk', but added that Thompson's 'courage [in writing the book] was matched by the magnanimity and understanding of his friend [Tagore]'.[59] Das Gupta continues that Thompson's book had a positive effect on Tagore, who engaged in some degree of self-criticism, not least with regard to the quality of his translations. She concludes that 'Tagore was definitely not pleased with Thompson's first *Tagore* (1921), but he was definitely not angry'.[60] Not angry, perhaps, but Tagore was concerned. 'While reading it [*Rabindranath Tagore: His Life and Work* of 1921]', he wrote to Prasanta Mahalanobis, 'I found myself constantly thinking – the way the *sahib* describes the atmosphere of my life and works is a construct of his own preconceptions and lack of knowledge'.[61] Clearly Tagore did not share the same sense of confidence in Thompson's ability to judge as Thompson – and his favourable reviewers – did. The use of a race distinction here is striking. Let us remind ourselves that the fundamental purpose of Tagore's work since 1912 had been based around the idea of 'Universal Man' and a meeting of the races. Yet here, faced with an unsatisfactory hearing, Tagore distinguishes Thompson not merely as an inadequate commentator on his work, but as a *sahib*, an inadequate *white* commentator. Others were far more aggressive and open in their condemnation. The philosopher Brajendranath Seal, who had previously encouraged Thompson's work, cut off all communications with him. Thompson was privately brash in his response. 'The Tagore book has sent the Bengalis hopping mad, according to reports. They are v. sore about what I say as to their narrowness of experience. Heavy attacks are being prepared. "Let them rave". What did vex me was a shabby & ungenerous letter from Seal, to whom it is dedicated.'[62] He later wrote to William Canton that his 'old friendship with Seal has wrecked on this book'.[63]

Certainly there was no public condemnation of Thompson by Tagore in 1921, but Tagore's misgivings were present and would resurface. Thompson's efforts at communicating Tagore to the West had tapped into the deep ambivalences running through Tagore's mind during this period. Tagore himself had embarked on his mission to the West as part of a project of cultural exchange and enlightenment, and yet he was constantly fearful – with a private, but deeply felt sense of superiority – that much of the subtlety of his writing and his thought would be lost on most Western readers. Tagore wrote to Thompson from New York in November

1920, giving his permission to include Thompson's own translations in his 'forthcoming book', i.e., the 1921 biography. He went on: 'I have not the power to do it [translate] myself and I must not keep away others from attempting it who have the power'. Finally he asked: '[c]an you take up *Gora* [a Tagore novel, published in Bengali in 1908–1909] yourself or find some competent person who can undertake it?'.[64] But by 1922, after the publication of Thompson's study, Tagore wrote to Thompson to say he now felt that 'translating a poem is doing it wrong'. 'Can you ever imagine', he asks, 'the best passages of Keats, Shelley or Wordsworth in Bengali?'.[65]

At the same time, Willie Pearson was persisting in his efforts to translate *Gora*. It was eventually published by Macmillan in 1924, translated jointly by Pearson and Surendranath Tagore, Rabindranath's nephew who had been the principal translator of the 1919 Macmillan edition of *The Home and the World*.[66] Throughout the period 1921–1924 Tagore's private correspondence displays his anxiety about *Gora*, which Tagore knew posed greater difficulties for his English readers than some of his previous work had done. As Dutta and Robinson point out, unlike *The Home and the World*, the setting of *Gora*, in the Bengal of the mid-1870s, is 'completely alien' and makes 'no concessions' to those unfamiliar with this world.[67] In 1922 he wrote to Pearson concerning the *Gora* translations that: 'English readers have very little patience for scenes and sentiments which are foreign to them; they feel a sort of grievance for what they do not understand – and they care not to understand whatever is different from their familiar world'.[68] Tagore proposes that the translations should only appear in an abridged version, to which Pearson responds:

> Think of what a terrible misfortune it would have been if the novels of Tolstoy, of Turgenev, of Dostoevsky had been abridged in the way that you abridged for example your *Glimpses of Bengal* . . . let it [the translation] appear after revision by yourself in *Modern Review* and then leave Macmillan's reader to decide what is best for England.[69]

Tagore's efforts at communicating his work and ideas in English were becoming increasingly complicated and conflicted in his own mind.

Back in England, Thompson was beginning to recognise the faults of his first book. In 1924 he wrote to a friend, 'I understand why my Tagore annoyed them [Bengali intellectuals, especially Brajendranath Seal], and I marvel that they bore with me in my Indian days. We *are* a gauche, crass lot'.[70] But essentially he was undeterred and began work towards an expanded 1926 version of his study, this time entitled *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist*.[71] In the book, Thompson made it clear that he believed the suppression of proper criticism was not natural, for 'we are not guests in their country', although he did add, 'as we shall be some day'.[72]

The precise reasons for Tagore's different responses to the 1921 and 1926 studies are not clear, though there are a number of possible reasons. The 1921 version was shorter (112 pages), whereas the 1926 version was far more substantial

(329 pages) and received greater critical attention in England. Moreover, in 1921 Tagore was uncertain about the idea of translation and engaged criticism, but still clung to a degree of optimism.[73] By 1926 he was far less sanguine, and Thompson's second book may have provided the rude awakening he had feared. Moreover, there was a sense in which the British critical reception saw Thompson's book as a definitive work, thereby potentially exacerbating Tagore's anger at what he saw as Thompson's still inadequate Bengali, and still too limited knowledge of Tagore's literary world. But it also indicates a deepening sense of failure in terms of the wider mission to communicate Tagore's work to Western audiences.

In terms of reviews of the 1926 book in England, *The Birmingham Post* claimed that 'Mr Thompson is so sincere that he brings forward a series of grounds of strongly adverse criticism; but he also presents the other side',[74] thereby suggesting the uniquely objective nature of Thompson's work. *The Times Literary Supplement* called Thompson's book 'generous and judicial',[75] and the reviewer in *The Nation and Athenaeum* – despite claiming to be entirely unmoved by Tagore's work – still proposed that Thompson's book represented 'a complete apparatus for studying Tagore's life, views, and artistic achievement'.[76] *The Inquirer* of November 1926 went further in this regard.

> It may be confidently asserted that no book is likely to supersede this in the near future, either as a store of information and reference for the English student or as an analysis of Tagore's genius and methods . . . Not least among the reassurances of the book is the author's obvious awareness of the weaker and less attractive, as well as the stronger and nobler features of the immensely varied work on which he has bestowed so much scholarly study.[77]

A review in *The New Statesman* of February 1927 continued the theme, suggesting that *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist* was 'the only basis available to the Western reader for a general estimate of Tagore as a man of letters and an intellectual influence'.[78]

It may well have been Thompson's elevation by English reviewers to the status of the leading authority on Tagore's work that most riled the latter. Certainly, taking the two books together – and despite his aforementioned barbs against Pearson and Andrews for excessive praise – we can say that when Thompson's effort at criticism and serious engagement came, it was not at all well received by Tagore. Following the 1926 publication, Tagore let loose his feelings. In a furious letter to William Rothenstein, he called Thompson's *Poet and Dramatist* 'one of the most absurd books . . . I have ever read dealing with a poet's life and writings'.

> All through his pages he has never allowed his readers to guess that he has a very imperfect knowledge of Bengali language which necessarily prevents him from realising the atmosphere of our words and therefore the colour and music and life of them . . . For those who know Bengali his presentation of the subject is often ludicrously disproportionate.[79]

In Thompson's defence it has been suggested that Tagore had misunderstood Thompson's intentions: Thompson was 'responding to Tagore not as an Englishman assessing an Oriental but as an individual and a poet appreciating another individual and poet'.[80] In an extension of this point, E. P. Thompson attempts a partial defence of his father's position: 'if Thompson's over-formal and over-self-confident critical standards are to be faulted', he suggests, 'these are the same standards he sought to bring to his criticism of English poetry'.[81] But the point was that such critical standards were essentially Western standards masquerading as universal ones, and when it came to criticism of his work, Tagore was happy to portray Thompson as an uncomprehending outsider.

Let us not forget that Thompson's first book was published just two years after the Amritsar Massacre, at a time when nationalism was very much on the rise and sensitivities were high. E. P. Thompson acknowledges this later in his *Alien Homage*, when he discusses the issue of nationalism and points out that 'the very tone of the *ex cathedra* critic, pretending to speak for universal literary standards, was offensive when it came, not from a *cathedra* but from an Englishman'.[82] By the mid-1920s Thompson assumed judgement to be his right. Faced with the criticism that he apparently sought, Tagore recoiled in horror at its inadequacy. Having embarked upon a project of cultural communication Tagore now feared that biography and literary criticism were at least as likely to produce incomprehension as direct translation. More significantly, it cannot be denied that despite Tagore's best intentions (and perhaps his better nature), Thompson's work provoked feelings of racial and cultural – if not essentially national – sensitivity. In a letter to Rani, the wife of Prasanta Mahalanobis, in 1927, Tagore spoke of Thompson's 'insolent self-assurance' and of his being 'flippant' and 'dogmatic'. Moreover,

> where the Bengali language is concerned, if he [Thompson] forgets that this language is mine, that much of it I have shaped with my own hands, then the only reason for it I can think of is that he is an Englishman and I a Bengali . . . On the one hand there is his utterly shallow acquaintance with our language, and on the other his profound contempt for our country.[83]

What is particularly noteworthy is that – beyond the technical problems of translation – 'Tagore proceeded to polarize the issues by giving them a larger communal and political dimension'.[84] The barriers between races, which Tagore had hoped to overcome, kept rearing their ugly heads. It may have been this realisation, above all, that so hurt Tagore.

Thompson's other India writings

On Thompson's part, now standing low in Tagore's esteem, he pressed ahead with efforts to realise the idea of atonement in a wider sense. Referring to the approximate Sanskrit equivalent of the word 'atonement', Thompson asked, 'why does Andrews keep havering about the necessity of our doing *prayaschitta*?'.[85] Writing not of Amritsar but of the legacy of the 1857 uprising, he continued:

> I'm afraid I feel too bitterly about it. I'd like as an individual Englishman, to do my bit of *prayaschitta*, if I could . . . I don't seem to have got home to you how deeply I feel about the matter. It's obsessed me of recent months. I've thought of very little else . . . You and I hitherto have been very distinct moderates . . . but now I'm becoming a left-winger pretty fast.[86]

Thompson had a healthy predilection towards self-mockery, but he was not, in any sense, becoming a 'left-winger'. Nevertheless the result of this obsession was his 1925 *The Other Side of the Medal*, a critique of the established historiography of the Indian Mutiny, and an attempt to correct the 'balance sheet'.

In the book, Thompson pointed to the way in which memories of the Mutiny had created a number of myths that the British were now living by. He took issue with how 'our histories and our novels have proceeded on certain clearly marked lines'.

> There is the Indian, 'half-devil and half child', docile, patient, capable of a dog-like devotion, given to a mysticism and brooding contemplation, and yet with all these good qualities liable to perversion into a treacherous seditionist or blood-thirsty fanatic . . . [then] there is the Englishman, silent, efficient, inflexible, just, dispensing to each his deserts. It is not strange that Indians should be restive under such a portrayal.[87]

The purpose of *The Other Side of the Medal* was precisely the kind of atonement-as-gesture that Thompson had in mind, and it was intended to becalm a troubled political relationship. He was explicit and fervent that 'it is not larger measures of self-government for which they [Indians] are longing, it is the magnanimous gesture of a great nation, so great that it can afford to admit mistakes and wrong-doing, and is too proud to distort the facts'.[88] From what is, at best, an extreme misrepresentation of India's political situation in 1925, Thompson then begins to exhibit a propensity towards self-persuasion. 'There is no commoner word on Indian lips today than atonement', he confidently declares, in the absence of any evidence. 'England, they say, has never made atonement; and she must do it before we can be friends. The word in their minds is the Sanskrit *prayaschitta* usually translated as atonement, but it means rather a gesture'.[89]

However incorrect this perspective was, Thompson believed it to be true and he acted accordingly. In 1924 he had written and published a play called, simply, *Atonement*, which was a precursor to his book on the Mutiny and explored themes of forgiveness and grievance. But in it the Indian characters, whilst protesting the injustices of the British, also accept a British right to rule and prerogative to act. Atonement was a healing act that would stabilise the *status quo* without transformation of the political and ideological structures that had brought its instability into being. Well into the 1930s Thompson continued to publish on Indian history, co-authoring, with G. T. Garratt, *The Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule* in India, a publication which was intended for an American audience. Consequently it adopted a defensive tone, suggesting the apparent good that the British Empire had brought to India, whilst simultaneously trying to be fair-minded about its

downsides. But in 1930, Thompson had called the idea of Indian independence 'absurd and immoral' and he never fully reconciled himself to the idea of a complete severance.[90]

In addition to his historical monographs, Thompson also published between 1927 and 1938 three novels – *An Indian Day, A Farewell to India*, and *An End of the Hours* – which represent another aspect of his attempt to come to terms with the inevitable end of Empire. These novels are interesting less for their literary qualities and more for the semi-autobiographical content and the discussion of themes that could be said to represent reflections on the differences between himself and Andrews. Two of the main protagonists are English missionaries who allow themselves to identify with India and Indians to markedly differing degrees. On the one side we have Alden, stiff and acerbic, who is a foil for Findlay, a man who is drawn more deeply towards Indian spirituality and suffers less from the simultaneous attraction and repulsion that so conflict Alden. It has been pointed out already that Alden is a character through whom Thompson conducts a remarkably candid and thorough self-examination, but the recognition of his own limitations is also perhaps marked by sympathy for the character of Findlay, who eventually takes to living with Indians and giving service to the people.[91] This could be seen as a representation of Andrews. But whether Findlay is Andrews or not matters less than the significance of Findlay's capacity to move beyond the boundaries of his own culture and to identify himself fully with Indians. This symbolised, in Benita Parry's words, 'Thompson's dream of Britain's entry into India's soul, a symbiosis realised through his serving the people by humble participation in their lives, together with a liberating power of transcendence'.[92] But, it has to be said, if this was Thompson's dream, he was self-aware enough to recognise the personal barriers that stood in his way. He was, let us remember, contemptuous of the fools who pretended to be Easterners.

Despite all the criticisms and rejections, Thompson was deeply loyal to Tagore until his death, often castigating him in private but steadfastly supporting him in public. He slowly began to rebuild his relationship with Tagore, who himself had perhaps mellowed a little by the 1930s. Like Andrews – and indeed like Tagore himself – Thompson placed a very high price on friendship. For this reason, it has been suggested by E. P. Thompson that Thomson senior's prejudices and partialities should not simply be read within the 'imperialist' framework. 'In his own self-understanding', E. P. argued, 'it was rather that historical contingencies had brought about cultural, personal and intellectual associations between two nations, which should not be lightly thrown away'. The question was, 'after all this anger and ambition, what would remain?'.[93]

Enduring divides: class, race and religion

So, how are we to evaluate these encounters, these different acts of atonement, and what can be said about the implications of the Andrews–Thompson–Tagore triangle for a trans-national politics of friendship? To begin with, we should distinguish between the two forms of atonement that Thompson and Andrews enacted. The Christian idea of atonement has a range of meanings, from the idea

of a quick absolution from sin through ritual or gesture to a much deeper and more transformative catharsis, perhaps ultimately represented by the death of Christ. The various dictionary meanings of the word are also useful, moving from atonement as the 'settling of differences' or the 'reparation of wrong', to the idea of atonement as a condition of 'being at one with others'.

Whilst Thompson longed for British–Indian relations to be healed, it was essentially with the intention of saving the empire. He would offer what he saw as the honourable gift of tough but fair-minded criticism and frank recognition of past wrongs. This was atonement of the gestural kind, though it would be fiercely unfair to describe it as tokenistic. Thompson's relationship with Tagore placed him in a compromised position, and in the partisan inter-war period a book such as *The Other Side of the Medal* represented a bold move. But he did not aim at a reconfiguration of political power relations. Nor did Thompson possess the personal qualities that would allow for a reinvention and transgression of any 'self–other' colonial divide, even if a sublimated desire may have been vicariously acted out through the Andrews-like characters in his novels. Andrews was a more fluid character, rejecting fixed, ascribed differences given by religion, culture and the political and social norms he inherited. He pushed across the boundaries of both personal and political difference. Thompson may well have sympathised with Indian grievances, but he was all too often trapped within a colonial paradigm. As Benita Parry has put it, he represented 'the paradox of moral conscience joined with ineradicable paternalist postures'.[94] Moreover, whereas Andrews was able to surrender his affiliation and give himself over to India wholeheartedly, Thompson's attraction to India was highly selective. It was easy to admire an intellectual of such standing as Rabindranath Tagore, but Thompson often exhibited repulsion and disgust at aspects of everyday Indian life. In 1927 he wrote a review of Katherine Mayo's infamous denunciation of Hinduism, *Mother India* (published that year), in which he commented that 'there is no place for squeamishness when we come to the Hindu doctrine of women. Hinduism is beneath contempt [one of his favourite pejoratives] in its worship of the male and its sex obsession generally'.[95] Another example of tough criticism, perhaps.

In spite of E. P. Thompson's best efforts to portray his father's love of Bengali nature and the simple rural folk he encountered on his travels – no doubt genuinely felt – Thompson senior also happily ridiculed the 'timid' and 'dumb' creatures he came across, and had a merry time with his correspondents relaying the 'howlers' that his Bankura students would make in his English classes. Harmless enough, it could be said. Thompson, it should be noted, also liked to poke fun at his own Bengali. But I would suggest that his comfort with ridiculing Indians was a corollary of his insistence on a right to criticise, and was in fact indicative of a deeper anxiety which allowed space for highly divergent attitudes towards Indians of different rank. Evidence of this can be found in the fact that Thompson was not averse to violence when it came to the lower orders. I quoted earlier from a 1912 letter Thompson had sent to his mother describing his arduous journey to Shantiniketan in search of Tagore. The letter is printed in E. P. Thompson's book

about his father, but it is truncated. The E. P. version ends with Thompson senior having 'waded many rivers', arriving at 2 a.m. to find that Tagore was in Calcutta. The original continues, 'the chap in charge seemed to be dead-drunk and I was soon raving. There was no oil, no drinking water. The fellow moaned in Hindustani and we had quite a long interview; in the course of it I smacked his head twice'.[96]

One can only speculate whether, at a personal level, Thompson's own insecurities led to this kind of behaviour. E. M. Forster had mentioned Thompson in a list of 'Public Bores' drawn up in 1927 as 'Edward Thompson of Boar's Hill itself'. 'Though', Forster added, 'he cannot be counted among true boars until borne in silence'.[97] And with regard to the Thompson–Andrews–Tagore triangle, E. P. Thompson notes, with some degree of disdain, that C. F. Andrews had an 'imperial and missionary background more pukka than Edward Thompson's'.[98] In fact, he says, a Wesleyan missionary, at the back of beyond in Bankura, was 'something non-descript, perhaps low caste'.[99] In support of this position E. P. Thompson cites a letter written in a condescending tone by Tagore to William Rothenstein: 'he [Thompson] has been a schoolmaster in an Indian school and that comes out in his pages too often in his pompous spirit of self-confidence even in a realm where he ought to have been conscious of his limitations'.[100] As E. P. Thompson suggests,

> Tagore wrote in the confidence that elite was confiding to elite, subtly assimilating the English contempt of the 'babu' with upper-class scorn. The Methodists, like the Baptists, were rank outsiders to the Establishment, at a time when even the seditious C. F. Andrews could, with his pukka Anglican and educational credentials, still have an audience with Lord and Lady Hardinge.[101]

These divisions around class thus held a double meaning. The conversation of elite to elite – the aspiration to pluralise the civilised individual through a politics of friendship – underwrote the possibilities of culture-contact between Indian and Englishman, Tagore and his interlocutors. At the same time class was a primary point of conflict and condescension, both within metropolitan circles and ultimately from Tagore to some of the 'lower'-class men who took it upon themselves to communicate Tagore to the West: the schoolmaster and the missionary. Where conflicts of interest arose, as Raymond Williams had intimated, the class barrier could easily be re-invoked in order to mark the distinctions between comprehending and uncomprehending, qualified and unqualified. Contrary to its utopian pretensions, then, the politics of friendship can also be seen – in some concrete historical circumstances – manifesting itself as a reactionary phenomenon, another example of a last-gasp attempt by the old elites – the dying intellectual priesthoods, standing above the national – to shore up their common bond against the rising, muddy tides of nationalism and mass politics. And at the same time we see evidence of ambivalence and tension between the status of the intellectual as a cross-cultural agent and the intellectual as a representative – and indeed sometimes the defender – of the national-cultural position.

The cross-cultural relations of elite to elite were still, as has been shown, frequently mired in the insistent discord of cultural misunderstanding, defensive barriers and indeed occasional naked chauvinism.

Where does this leave Andrews, the so-called 'saintly Englishman'? Leela Gandhi has suggested that a politics of friendship, as in the case of Andrews and Tagore, offers a vision of an 'ethico-political practice of a desiring self inexorably drawn toward difference'.[102] In so doing, she takes issue with what she calls the 'subtle determinism' of Homi Bhabha's insistence on the inevitability of 'hybridity', 'mimicry' and 'in-betweenness', claiming that the 'anti-colonialism manifested in the utopian politics of friendship, offers scope for greater inventiveness . . . manifesting a desire not only for dissolution but for the inauguration of new and better forms of community'.[103] But Andrews' transgression could be interpreted in a different way. It could be seen not as 'trans-national' or 'trans-cultural', in the sense of something shared across boundaries, but as requiring a complete crossing over. Not as a movement above or beyond the national, but as a move in effect reinforcing the very same. In this sense Andrews' encounter with Tagore involved *personal* transformation, but also required the rejection of one form of identity as part of the acceptance of a new, other form. If this is so, then the process of transformation re-inscribes the divide. In fact, both the 'crossing over' required by Andrews *and* the melancholic sense of loss experienced by Thompson were the consequences of a resurgent divide between coloniser which may have been softer in an earlier, pre-nationalist and more liminal imperial age.[104] This interpretation has to be complicated, however, by the enduring presence of Christianity as a mediating force. The liberal yearnings of fulfilment theology, in which, rather than denunciation of the 'heathen', Christian writers and missionaries sought intimations of Christ in the religion of the Hindu are evident in the work of both Thompson and Andrews, but were taken much further by the latter's search for the 'Eastern Christ'.[105] Fulfilment theology, which – as shown in Chapters 1 to 3 – had struck such a distinctive note in the responses to Keshub and Tagore – allowed Christianity to retain its central place in the forward movement of World History, and even in a watered down version, at this very late stage in imperial decline (a stage at which the liberal project of empire had evidently failed) it can be seen as a last refuge for those who were unable or unwilling to move beyond the potentialities of that earlier, more optimistic historical moment. And yet, in response, faced with what he saw as inadequate representation by Thompson, Tagore put this down to the fact that 'being a Christian Missionary, his training makes him incapable of understanding some of the ideas that run all through my writings'.[106]

What emerges, then, from the historical accounts of the relationship between Tagore and his Western interlocutors presented in Chapters 4 and 5 – Tagore's relationships with Yeats, Pound, Andrews and Thompson – is a degree of uncertainty regarding the emancipatory claims of a trans-national 'politics of friendship'. The cosmopolitan elites of the republic of letters presented themselves as inhabiting an autonomous social space, in contradistinction to the corrupt and manipulative forces of imperialism and nationalism, and yet their associations

were often beset by the very conflicts of class, race, religion and nation that they were supposed to transcend. As individuals, Thompson's and Andrews' life histories offer insights into the conflicted personal narratives of inter-war liberalism, and the ambivalences of 'end of empire' cultural and intellectual networks. But whether – even in the gentle, loving and all-embracing form of C. F. Andrews – they offer visions of a new kind of postcolonial politics remains an open question.

6 Rabindranath redux

Tagore and the postcolonial world

> The perplexity is that in any series of events that together form a story with a unique meaning we can at best isolate the agent who set the whole process into motion; and although this agent frequently remains the subject, the 'hero' of the story, we can never point unequivocally to him as the author of its outcome.
>
> Hannah Arendt[1]

As discussed in the Introduction to this book, the initial thinking that gave impetus to this project on Tagore related to particular things that had been written about him, but also to historiographical and theoretical trends and perspectives that have marginalised his place in our postcolonial historical imagination. In this concluding chapter, I intend to return to some the problems relating to postcolonialism as a field of inquiry seeking to analyse the colonial past and the encounter between 'the East' and 'the West'. More specifically, I wish to think about the idea of modernity and the categories deployed by some postcolonial theorists to develop their analyses of modernity, imperialism and postcoloniality.

My intention in writing this book has never been to disparage politically engaged critique in favour of a spurious objectivity. Where I have advocated methodologies of historical inquiry that point away from postcolonial theory in its late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century incarnations and towards an intellectual history approach, broadly defined, it is with the idea that a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of past thought and practice is necessary to enable us to reflexively assess our own assumptions in the present, and thereby critically re-revaluate our own political languages and practices. But the monolithic idea of 'modernity' in common usage amongst postcolonial theorists and historians over the past two decades or more has tended to marginalise agency and obscure those historical actors and narratives that cannot easily be accommodated within the broad binary structures that postcolonialism ironically professes to undermine, and yet upon which it frequently relies for its polemical power. In the postcolonial search for 'subaltern agency', intellectual or cultural elites have often been fingered as intellectual collaborators with Western power knowledge, and Tagore is one such casualty. But a global intellectual history of modernity – and of parallel and counter-modernities – should not

always be seen through the paradigm of imperfect copies or misconceived applications of Western ideas.[2]

This final chapter thus begins with a discussion of the idea of modernity. It then provides some examples of the way in which the application of postcolonial categories has led to the misrepresentation of Tagore and his ideas, and ends by reflecting on some ways in which Tagore might remain of relevance to our postcolonial present.

The idea of modernity

'Modern' is a term with varied historical meanings. From Augustine's rejection of paganism to Renaissance humanism's fusion of the ideals of antiquity and Christianity, the Latin *modernus* was used to distinguish a given approach, intellectual trend or theology from that which had preceded it. The term 'appeared and reappeared exactly during those periods in Europe when the consciousness of a new epoch formed itself through a renewed relationship to the ancients – whenever, moreover, antiquity was considered a model to be recovered through some kind of imitation'.[3] In this sense, 'modern' tended – and in many ways still tends – to be applied simply to anything that is, or would like to be seen as, new.

In eighteenth-century Europe, when a new understanding of the term modern was coming to pass, 'modernity' had achieved – in the eyes of some – a new sense of both permanence and totality. The idea of being modern by looking back to the ancients 'changed with the belief, inspired by modern science, in the infinite progress of knowledge and an infinite advance towards social and moral betterment'.[4] Modern society thus referred to 'the kind of societies we lived in, whether in the eighteenth or twentieth century,'[5] not merely to trends or developments to be distinguished from others, but to the holistic nature of an economic, political, social and cultural system – capitalist, constitutional, rational and, moving from nineteenth to twentieth centuries, increasingly secular.

Jürgen Habermas has characterised modernity as a 'radicalised consciousness' which 'freed itself from all historical ties'.[6] In this sense, the advent of modernity constituted more than just the dissolution of the spell of classical European traditions. New levels of contact with non-European societies through the process of conquest, expansion and interaction had contributed to an ongoing process of Europe coming to 'know itself'. The idea of self-knowledge or awareness conjures up the modern ideal of being freed from the constraints of unthinking tradition and superstition. But the development of a new sense of 'self' also involved encounters with difference, which affirmed Europe's own sense of its supposed distance not only from the ancient and medieval periods it claimed as its own, but from anything that had gone before. In one reading then, modernity can be understood as

> a European phenomenon, but one constituted in a dialectical reaction with non-European alterity that is its ultimate context. Modernity appears when Europe affirms itself as *the 'centre' of a World History that it inaugurates*;

> the 'periphery' that surrounds this centre is consequently part of its self-definition.[7]

In other words, 'the West' defined its modernity through a process of contrast with 'earlier and other'.[8] Two core working concepts of modernity were rationalism and utilitarianism, and in so far as Europeans found the non-European world lacking in these, 'it rejected not just its own past but all other cultures that did not measure up to its self-understanding'.[9] The self-conscious subordination of both European and global precedents to the achievements of the new age is thus a distinctive characteristic of a version of modernity defined in Eurocentric terms.

At the most macroscopic of levels, this interpretation makes imperialism central to our understanding of the modern West's self-imaginings, in which the Americas, Africa and Asia provided the physical space for the reification of an idealised European civilisation, projected outwards via the economic, military and bureaucratic power of the modern European nation state. John Stuart Mill's essay *Civilisation* (1836), which drew distinctions between savagery, barbarism and civilisation, and brought geography and history together in what Robert Young has called a 'generalised scheme of European superiority that identified civilisation with race', highlighted the way in which modernity, with its ideas of development and progress 'define[d] civilisation through difference, against a hierarchy that invokes the state of other, historical or non-European societies.'[10] The coevalness of modernity and the age of empire meant that modernity became synonymous with the West, which showed the 'sharpest contrast' with what had come before, and what could be shown to be different: to modernise was, and in many ways remains, to Westernise.[11]

Post-Enlightenment rationality

It is this notion of modernity writ large that has led to the totalising assertion that 'modernity is a global condition', which 'affects all our actions, interpretations, and habits, across nations and irrespective of which civilisational roots we may have or lay claim to'.[12] For historians, a major issue at stake is not whether this description of modernity is 'true' or not, but whether as a conceptualisation it deepens our understanding of the past, which, insofar as our understanding of the past always informs our understanding of the present and future, makes it a matter of concern for the human sciences more generally.

A basic starting point in terms of taking apart this totalised version of modernity is the recognition of European modernity's double nature, both 'rationalist' and 'romanticist'. Although modernity in the West was undeniably marked by a Eurocentric 'rationalist episteme' – founded on the notion of 'modernity-as-universalist-reason' – it also contained a prominent 'romanticist episteme', which existed in periodic, recurrent tension with its dominant partner. Whilst stressing that the boundaries between the two are far from distinct, Thomas Blom Hansen has argued that 'modernity was never a coherent project, and Enlightenment rationalism was neither unified nor uncontested'.[13] In fact,

> [m]odernity, which is the name we *ex post* give to the effects of contingent historical combinations of disjunctive economic, social and cultural processes in Europe from the seventeenth century onwards, was almost from the outset marked by a split intellectual horizon. Rationalist classicism and romantic historicism emerged as competing epistemological fields, partially overlapping, feeding upon each other, while simultaneously hardening each other's stances.[14]

And yet, when an essence of modernity is identified in political and postcolonial theory, this is often seen as the new forms of knowledge that came to prominence during the Enlightenment, and the cult of Reason that is referred to in shorthand as 'post-Enlightenment rationality'. The scientific developments of the late seventeenth century had given rise to the idea that nature was itself rational (that it was ordered and regulated by a set of laws) and led to the application of scientific method to the study of man and society. Man was unique amongst the natural world for his self-consciousness: his capacity to think, and to think about thought. But ideas were not autonomous or divine. Instead, they were the product of man's ability to process information about the material world through his senses.[15]

Blom Hansen's position is of profound relevance in a postcolonial world in which too much of the theoretical literature still depends on the notion of the West as an undifferentiated historical construct. The Cartesian split between the 'knowing subject' and the 'known object' comes to be seen as the epistemological basis of a singular post-Enlightenment modernity. In poststructuralist theory and much of the postcolonial theory that takes inspiration from it, this epistemology has been identified as the basis of the disciplining and controlling nature of modern (often colonial) 'governmentality'. In its postcolonial guise, Western modernity is argued to be an all-pervasive phenomenon, and in order to maintain this notion, a reverse essentialisation of the West has also taken place: a type of Occidentalism that has come to countervail Orientalism. A caricature version of modernity portrays the will to imperialism as the demon child of Enlightenment. But, as Fred Cooper has suggested, 'it is not so clear what anyone should do next, once one has located colonialism as post-Enlightenment rationality's evil twin'.[16] From this perspective, common to a great deal of postcolonial work, much historical intellectual activity passes from our view. As Robert Young has put it, 'the Enlightenment' interest and enthusiasm for different cultures – usually imperial ones such as India, China, Persia, Egypt, Rome and Greece – could also provide 'a means of achieving a cultural distance from which a writer such as Montesquieu, or Swift, could construct an ideological critique of contemporary Europe'.[17] Romantic writers after Rousseau 'turned to primitive or popular culture for the ground of their ideological interrogation of European civilisation, and this represents the first signs of a turning inward of European culture, of the exploitation of an inner division in which it began to be set against itself'.[18] In other words, global intellectual histories of East–West culture contact are far more complex and messy than the postcolonial reading often implies.

In his recent study *Enlightenment Against Empire* (2003), Sankar Muthu takes to task – from a different angle to Blom Hansen – the prevalent understandings of

the Enlightenment (in its singular form) or 'the Enlightenment project', which Muthu sees as 'a movement or a project demonised by some and extolled by others'.[19] Contrary to the dominant discourse in the contemporary social sciences, Muthu's intellectual history reveals that certain Enlightenment thinkers – his three case studies are Rousseau, Diderot and Kant – were in fact stridently anti-imperialist. Muthu's contention is 'that "the Enlightenment" *as such*, and the notion of an overarching "Enlightenment project" simply do not exist'.[20] What postcolonial theorists and historians often refer to as 'the Enlightenment' is, thus, like modernity, often a very one-sided version, and Muthu convincingly suggests that the prominent stereotype of Enlightenment and modernity as solely universalistic and rationalist is a limited, and limiting, one.[21]

Historicism and history

A particularly salient aspect of the postcolonial critique of modernity is the idea that the practice and philosophy of history are implicated in the disciplining power of Western knowledge production. According to Ashis Nandy, 'the peripheries of the world often feel that they are victimised not merely by partial, biased or ethnocentric history, but by the idea of history itself'.[22]

> [F]or the moderns, history has always been the unfolding of a theory of progress, a serialised expression of a telos which, by definition, cannot be shared by communities on the lower rungs of the ladder of history. Even the histories of oppression and the historical theories of liberation postulate stages of growth which, instead of widening the victim's options, reduce them.[23]

The theme of historicism is of some importance in the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty who claims that historicism is

> the idea that to get a grip on things we need to know their histories, the process of development they have undergone in order to become what they are. Historicism itself promises to the human subject a certain degree of autonomy with respect to history. The idea is that once one knows the causal structures that operate in history, one may also gain a certain mastery of them.[24]

But the idea that historicism should be understood in terms of a 'process of development' or 'causal structures' is misleading to say the least. Amongst the range of meanings of the term historicism in Western historiography we can find precisely that 'hermeneutic tradition . . . [that] finds thought intimately tied to places and to particular forms of life', which Chakrabarty admires in the work of Heidegger.[25] To this broad historicist camp we might add a whole range of historians and philosophers from Vico through Herder to Croce; R. G. Collingwood; Michael Oakeshott; the intellectual historians J. G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner; Michel Foucault or the New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt. What connects this eclectic mix of names is that they place a great deal of emphasis on context and

the complexity of a given historical period, often narrowly defined and sometimes studied synchronically rather than diachronically. In fact, this version of historicism is the more commonly understood meaning of the term, at least within the discipline of history itself, and it is often contrasted with philosophies of history that are abstracted, teleological and deterministic.[26] Even Ashis Nandy suggests that he 'need hardly point out' that within the modern idea of history there is an anti-determinist, anti-teleological view that 'has survived as a latent – and, one is tempted to add, unconscious – strain'.[27] So why does Chakrabarty present such a narrow view of historicism?

In the endnotes to his discussion of historicism there is an interesting reference to Karl Popper. At the end of a list of sources, Chakrabarty tells his readers that he has not chosen 'to discuss Karl Popper's formulations on "historicism", as his use of the term has been acknowledged to be idiosyncratic'.[28] In fact, however, Chakrabarty's and Popper's use of the term shares a certain affinity, whereby historicism in its determinist, teleological guise represents an enemy of freedom. From radically different standpoints, they both refer to historicism in order to critique the idea of 'prophecy' in social and historical theory, particularly in Marxism.[29] What Popper and Chakrabarty hold in common, it seems, is a desire – for the purposes of mounting a polemical attack – to ignore the different usages of the term historicism prevalent within the historical and social sciences for the purpose of ideological critique. This can be seen as but one example of the tendency in Chakrabarty's *Provincialising Europe* to 'contribute to the asymmetry [of power] he rightly deplores by focusing his attention on what he calls a "hyper-real" Europe instead of taking on a more historical, more provincial Europe'.[30]

Many of the generalisations about modernity, Enlightenment and historical consciousness that I have sketched in this chapter so far – and which commonly feature as the object of critique in postcolonial discourses – were quite obviously held, not only by influential political philosophers or cultural critics, but also by a large proportion of the political and bureaucratic elite who were in the business of running empire. It is not this that is in question. The issue is that the postcolonial projection of a one-dimensional, historically 'flattened' modernity, Europe or 'West' encourages the postcolonial gaze to see imperialism writ large only as a set of rigid divisions and binaries that make the internal divisions within East and West, the various structures of thought, networks and interactions that did, in fact, occur, less visible. In other words, the postcolonial tendency towards 'provincialising Europe' by 'essentialising Europe' forecloses our appreciation of the ways in which historical actors sought to break down the division between West and East, Reason and Culture, Modernity and Tradition.[31] What I wish to do now is move away from the level of general critique and back to Tagore as a concrete historical actor, and to provide some examples of how postcolonial presuppositions have led Tagore's thought and his historical agency to be distorted. I am aware that Tagore is beginning to feature more widely in postcolonial criticism, but I wish to focus on two prominent *Subaltern Studies* historians and intellectuals who have written more specifically about Tagore's historical role and his relationship to modernity.

Subaltern Studies readings of Tagore

I stressed in Chapter 2 of this book that when Tagore embarked on his voyage to the West in 1912 he did so with a strong sense of purpose and agency. But what emerged from my discussion of Tagore's critique of nationalism in Chapter 3 is the extent to which he – contrary to much of the received wisdom – also departed with a deep belief in the superiority of Indian civilisation's 'social-religious model' over the West's 'political nation-state model'. But Tagore's position, and the kinds of terminology and concepts that he deploys, renders problematic the distinctions brought forth by the postcolonial indictment of discourses of power based around ideas of modernity, post-Enlightenment rationality, historical laws and so on. The comparison made in Chapter 3 between Gandhi and Tagore is of relevance here, for Gandhi has figured prominently in much postcolonial literature, especially that dealing with Indian history and strategies of anti-colonial resistance.

In Partha Chatterjee's penetrating discussion of 'Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society', he claims that Gandhi held moral beliefs that 'never seemed to lose that almost obdurate certitude which men like Tagore, or even Jawaharlal Nehru, found so exasperating'.[32] Here we see a familiar contrast of the two men in terms of disposition. But as I argued at length in Chapter 3, Tagore's criticisms of Gandhi were based not on a rejection of certitude or the idea of truth *per se*, but on the basis of a counter-conception of truth which claimed that any attempt at force or destruction was in fact the negation of a higher truth: that the creative essence of the individual self was an expression of a universal, creative Personality, that is God. In Gandhi's words, the problem India faced was this: 'that we want the English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger's nature but not the tiger'.[33] The only way forward was to 'render the tiger undesirable'.[34] But Tagore stubbornly rejected what he saw as a confrontational, vindicationist notion of a 'master–slave' relationship. For him, universal truths were, and would be intimated from a variety of cultural or civilisational perspectives. It was India's special genius to have recognised and realised this historically. Power and politics must give way to truth, and must not be fetishised for instrumental gain. Tagore dreaded 'tyrannical attempts to create goodness', but *not* in any straightforwardly European liberal sense.[35] Tagore's 'truth' was contained in the statement that 'all true ideas must work themselves out through freedom', for 'it is absurd to think that you must create slaves to make your ideas free'.[36] Contrary to Partha Chatterjee's interpretation of Gandhi and Tagore's differing temperaments, Tagore was not to be outdone in the obduracy stakes by Gandhi, and it may well have been Tagore's radical idealism, his absolute faith in the primacy of spirit, that 'exasperated' Gandhi, more than Gandhi's moral certitude exasperated Tagore.

We then see Chatterjee make a more substantive contrast between Tagore and Gandhi which seeks to situate the two in the context of 'post-Enlightenment thought', with Tagore placed within a 'romanticist' paradigm and Gandhi moving beyond its reaches altogether. Chatterjee makes a strong case for *not* seeing Gandhian politics as explicable in romanticist terms because, unlike romanticism,

Gandhi's ideas and practice were 'not conceived at all within the thematic bounds of post-Enlightenment thought'.[37] Gandhi was not

> seriously troubled by the problems of reconciling individuality with universalism, of being oneself and at the same time feeling at one with the infinite variety of the world. Nor was his solution one in which the individual, without merging into the world, would want to embrace the rich diversity of the world in himself.[38]

Chatterjee's contrasting example is the 'modernists' of Gandhi's time, 'perhaps the most illustrious of these being Rabindranath Tagore'.[39] It is certainly true that all of the problems that Chatterjee thinks preoccupied romanticism, which they did, also preoccupied Tagore. But then at the level of generality in which Chatterjee presents these themes they also preoccupied any number of pre-modern social, political and religious thinkers. Instead of probing Tagore's writings to justify his characterisation, Chatterjee argues that 'Gandhi shared neither the spiritual anguish nor indeed the aestheticism of these literary romantics of his time'[40] and here, on the basis of well-worn platitudes concerning Tagore – poet, aesthete, romanticist – Chatterjee's Tagore–Gandhi thread ends.[41]

But, as I argued at length in Chapter 3, Gandhi juxtaposed with Tagore is a construction of false opposites, set up on the basis of differences that were less significant than their points of agreement, and too often thoughtlessly reproduced through the secondary literature.[42] Moreover, the acceptance of an opposition in which Tagore is caricatured as the 'modernist' has meant that Tagore's position – which, as I have argued, was in many ways even more radical than Gandhi's – has been suppressed. When Chatterjee states that the consequence of the violence in the Punjab in 1919 was that Gandhi came to a 'new realisation . . . of the fundamental incompatibility of political action informed solely by a negative consciousness with the procedural norms of a bourgeois legal order', he might also have pointed out that Tagore came to very similar conclusions at a much earlier stage.[43] In fact Tagore did not need to be prompted by British brutality to realise an alternative conceptualisation of Indian freedom. At a time when Gandhi was in South Africa, using British law to fight discrimination against Indians but simultaneously proclaiming his loyalty to the Empire, the experience of *swadeshi* in Bengal had already led Tagore towards a well-developed, radical reinterpretation of the freedom movement that rejected the instrumental rationality of bourgeois politics and did, indeed, stand outside the bounds of *European* modernity, rationalist and romanticist.

The categories of modernism and romanticism recur in Dipesh Chakrabarty's work, and they raise the further issue of Tagore's derivativeness. A common post-colonial assumption in this respect focuses on Tagore's critique of utilitarianism as being derived, at least in part, from European romanticism. Given the overwhelming presence in Tagore's intellectual, religious and philosophical lineage of autochthonous sources, which have been discussed at some length in this book, especially Chapter 1, it seems strange that Chakrabarty needs to tell his readers

that 'students of European romanticism will not be surprised at . . . [Tagore's] critique of utility'[44] and that 'Tagore . . . obviously derived much from European romanticism'.[45] Chakrabarty does make reference to a variety of influences on Tagore – the *Upanishads*, 'Sanskrit aesthetics', Tagore's 'own philosophy, based on the *Upanishads*, about the existence of a transcendental or cosmic sense of play' (*jiban-debata*).[46] But the thrust of the essay is that we should note Tagore's 'appeal' to romanticism. In fact, because Tagore wrote an essay in 1925 expressing his distance from utilitarian perspectives, and in so doing made reference to Keats' 'Ode to a Grecian Urn' we are asked to accept the conclusion that

> [t]here is no doubt that the Tagorean move of transcending the historical in order to be able to see an India already worthy of admiration owes a debt to European romanticism and to its mentalist categories. His reference to Keats and his critique of 'utility', as well as his spiritual/material distinctions, mix Vedantic thought with European romanticism.[47]

But Chakrabarty does not provide a historical explanation of precisely how that influence was supposed to have been transmitted or manifested. Understanding how or why cross-cultural references are made – what the author really intended and how formative those interconnections actually were in the genesis of his ideas – would point towards a more historicist (as in contextualist) approach.[48] Instead, Tagore appears functional for the purposes of making a wider argument about Western influence on the intellectual and cultural outlook of the Bengali intelligentsia. But surely it is a diminution of Tagore's perspective – indeed of Tagore himself – if we do not allow him to make reference to English or other European poets or writers, to point out his appreciation of their work, and the affinities between his interpretation and theirs, without thereby inferring that Tagore's ideas must have at some point originated in an intellectual context which is alien. The danger here is that it appears that my intention is to posit Tagore as something pristine and authentic, untouched by the West; something that Chris Bayly has warned against.[49] This is not my intention but, despite Bayly's caution, a reading of a given intellectual's writings and sources should lead one to consider the balance and weight of his influences. I have argued throughout that Tagore developed his ideas in an historical context profoundly marked by the colonial encounter, but what I wish to stress is the ironic fact – ironic because he is so often seen as a Westernised figure – that Tagore was far more wedded to his own indigenous traditions than many of his contemporaries. One starts to 'provincialise Europe' in surprising and unrecognised places.

To sum up this brief discussion, then, it seems a somewhat limited interpretation that seeks to place Gandhi outside the framework of what is loosely termed 'post-Enlightenment thought' and sees Tagore as a 'modernist' or 'romanticist' counterpoint. What is striking about Chatterjee's account is that he does not illustrate the way in which Gandhi's ideas were developed within the context of a debate with Tagore about the nature of freedom. The problem is not simply that Tagore is conspicuously absent from Chatterjee's analysis: Tagore appears, but as

a foil for that which Gandhi was supposedly not. The Gandhian self is constructed around a Tagorean other.[50] Both Chatterjee and Chakrabarty prefer very large generalisations about Tagore rather than critique of Tagore's writings, but, through the material I have presented and the arguments made throughout this book, I have tried to argue that this postcolonial construction of Tagore-as-modernist, Tagore-as-romanticist who had read Keats and so imbibed European romanticism is one that is vastly over-simplified and largely unsupported by any meaningful discussion of textual or archival evidence. I have also tried to indicate some of the methodological and theoretical presuppositions that have led some historians towards unhelpful characterisations of Tagore and discouraged them from a more detailed historical analysis of his actual writings, life and thinking. Where Tagore was served so badly (for entirely different reasons) by his early interlocutors such as Yeats, Pound, Andrews and Thompson, the legacy of this complex historical figure has been further undermined by some his encounters in the postcolonial present.

Parallel modernities, future orientations

As I have stated at various points in this book, it has never been my intention to reiterate Tagore as the great prophet from the East. As we saw in Chapters 4 and 5, this approach has done enough damage already. Instead, I have defended a kind of intellectual history that seeks to recover the complexity of past thought on the grounds that much of it is inherently valuable for its own sake. At the same time, I believe it is important to consider the relevance of this past thought in the present. The significance of Tagore, it seems to me, certainly does not lie in unthinking veneration or in utilising him as a straw man for postcolonial critique. Instead, we should consider how we might think with, against and beyond Tagore in making sense of the postcolonial world. We need not only study past thinkers because they appear to offer us answers, and dismiss them if they do not. Rather, we can take as much from the questions that their thinking provokes, as we can from the answers that they may or may not provide. As Rustum Bharucha has suggested, Tagore's 'enduring significance could lie in the fact that he compels us to reformulate the existing questions . . . [and] makes it harder for us to think by denying us easy alternatives and glib solutions'.[51]

Tagore's vast corpus of writings and practice – which covered rural reconstruction and development at Sriniketan, the philosophy of education realised via his Bolpur School and Visva-Bharati University, ecology, science, aesthetics and literature – constitute concrete responses to the problematics posed by the advent of British imperialism in India, but equally to problems that had arisen in European metropoles in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and had become, via imperialism itself, global in nature: the contradictory relationship between Man and Nature, the effects of technology on human creativity, the power of the modern bureaucratic state, individual and collective identity, creativity in modern pedagogy. In his time, Tagore spoke to global problematics and a global audience, and asked whether it was possible to be selective about different aspects of

European modernity, particularly when much of what had come to be seen as modernity in India had been imposed under the conditions of empire. In other words, can a deconstructed modernity be analysed, rebutted and adapted, whilst holding on to the creative tension in the emancipatory narrative that has constituted its central contradiction: the possibilities of freedom and reason coupled with the realities of power and domination. Tagore certainly believed it was possible to pursue such a goal, and his under-recognised achievement was to make a contribution to the critique of a modernity fundamentally shaped by European social and political developments from epistemological and cultural grounds that were non-European, but also made claims to universality. In so doing, he transcended peripheral-oppositionist positions and decentred the response to the 'problem of modernity'. Tagore can thus be seen as an example of how the theory and practice of certain intellectuals operating in a colonial environment resisted and continually complicated the definition of modernity, thereby undermining totalising assumptions.

Once scholars – especially in Western universities – move beyond recalling Tagore as a 'third world nationalist', the mystic poet of *Gitanjali* who won the Nobel Prize, was briefly feted by W. B. Yeats and then renounced his knighthood in protest at Amritsar, there may be wider recognition that Tagore's life and work constitute a rich site for research in history and theory. In other words, we can hope for further critical consideration of the particular ways in which Tagore's thought and life remain relevant to our postcolonial present; not as sage or prophet, not as a thinker who ought to be canonised over and above any other thinker, but as a historical figure whose thought and action constituted a complex and often contradictory intervention in a moment of profound historical importance: the end of European imperialism and the beginning of a post-imperial world in which the modern European nation state became a universal model of political community. By way of conclusion, then, there are three aspects of Tagore's thinking and practice that I would like to revisit: his critique of political nationalism, his positing of man's creative essence, and his politics of friendship.

Nationalism and 'global unity'

Tagore's critical evaluation of the nation state, his rejection of nationalism as a response to imperialism, his unforgiving criticism of Gandhi's non-cooperation, his 'anti-politics' and his avowal that he would never 'commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man'[52] were ways of refusing – of stepping outside – the logic of a totalised 'colonial modernity', which a derivative anti-colonial nationalism merely reinforced. Tagore's criticisms of India's social and religious conservatism or his claim that 'the best Englishmen are the best specimens of humanity' were his way of thumbing his nose at all those who succumbed to the disciplinary logic of nationalism.[53] Tagore credited Gandhi with a model of resistance that sought 'to make the country our own by dint of our own creative power', but for Tagore this had to be achieved through constructive engagement.[54] Non-cooperation was too much like the 'begging method' of the Indian National Congress which Tagore

frequently mocked. Tagore refused the ontology of a universalised European nation state and, as discussed at length in Chapter 3, he had understood very well that nationalism in the West worked along the same homogenising and disciplining logic as did industrial society itself; a historical moment in which, as Ernest Gellner memorably put it, everyone becomes 'both a mamluk and a clerk'.[55] In other words Tagore saw nationalism as a political ideology predicated on the existence of a society and culture in which all members are interchangeable, homogenised entities. But whereas Gellner theorised nationalism as the product of objective historical forces, Tagore sought a conscious intervention around the belief that state-seeking nationalism was not the only available response to imperialism.

Tagore's monistic spiritual perspective – derived largely from the *Upanishadic* insistence on the essential oneness of the universe – provided the basis for his philosophy of history. Tagore argued that human history involves movement between unity and separation, expansion and contraction. But crucially there is a progressive, as opposed to merely cyclical, trajectory. The essential oneness of the universe is, for Tagore, the underlying reality and truth that guides the movement of history. Hence, the movement towards unity must be stronger than the movement towards separation. Thinking specifically about the age of imperialism, Tagore claimed that the 'British Nation' had 'come to India as the messenger of the spirit of the age' (a familiar trope, it ought to be said, of nineteenth-century Orientalism in both the West and the East).[56] The world, as Tagore put it, 'is an ever-moving multitude advancing towards an idea, [and therefore] all laws must have one principle of harmony. This is the law of creation'.[57] In this sense, Tagore sees history as a kind of revelation: 'Freedom is true when it is the revelation of truth'.[58] Truth and freedom were immanent in the world by dint of God. His faith is in 'the Infinite Personality whose light reveals itself through the obstruction of darkness'.[59] 'Our fight', Tagore claimed, 'is against this darkness, our object is the revealment of the light of this Infinite Personality in ourselves. This Infinite Personality is not to be achieved in single individuals, but in one grand harmony of all human races'.[60] Couched in the language of religion, Tagore was unreservedly deterministic about the unfolding of human history.

Reading Tagore's 1917 essay on 'The Nation' (conspicuous by its absence from Sisir Kumar Das' edited volumes), we can begin to put his ideas about historical expansion, contraction and assimilation into a broader context. In 'The Nation', Tagore wrote that 'the conquest of evil will never be a fully accomplished fact, but a continuous process in our civilisation, like the process of burning in a flame'.[61] What is required is that 'the positive ideal of goodness keeps pace with the negative in completeness of attainment'.[62] The advent of the nation state marks one period of contraction. It is a markedly negative setback in this 'continuous process' of 'the conquest of evil', but it is neither definitive nor final.[63] The essay still resonates with a positive, progressive outlook. There is always scope for what Tagore calls 'strenuous effort'.[64] There is a role for human agents, to advance or retard the ultimate movement towards expansion. If there were not, then Tagore's mission in the West would have been pointless. But where agents might shape their present, there were still larger forces at work. 'Nationalism', Tagore wrote, 'is the training of a

whole people for a narrow ideal'.[65] In light of this 'we cannot but hold firm the faith that this age of nationalism, of gigantic vanity and selfishness is *only a passing phase in civilization*' and look forward to 'the coming age of the true spirit of freedom'.[66] Almost as a pre-emption of the obvious temptation to label Tagore 'neo-Hegelian', Tagore's philosophical idealism involved the categorical disavowal of the Hegelian state as the embodiment of the ideal. Moreover, in counterpoint to Hegel's profoundly Eurocentric philosophy of history, Tagore places India at the centre of an unfolding idea. As I sought to demonstrate in detail in Chapter 3, in Tagore's vision it is India that is afforded the central World Historical role.[67]

India had no word for nation, Tagore claimed. It remained a living representative of a higher social order, but was in danger of losing its own self in the process of a potentially pyrrhic victory in the 'freedom struggle'. In Tagore's post-*swadeshi* formulation, he gave primacy, as Andrew Sartori has put it, to 'the ancient Vedic texts and long-lost forest ashrams of India's high tradition, as one privileged moment in a cosmopolitan history of striving for universal human self-realisation'.[68] In his alternative conceptualisation of freedom, *pace* Chakrabarty, there is a palpable lack of any appeal by Tagore to Europe, romanticist or otherwise. Ranajit Guha – who in his later work has treated Tagore in a markedly different way to some of his *Subaltern Studies* colleagues – has shown that the historical imagination was central to Tagore's reading of Indian civilisation, past, present and future.[69] Tagore's historical perspective could never be associated with the empiricism of modern historiography, indeed he was explicitly critical of the 'pedantic historians' who tried to force him out 'out of the centre of . . . [his] creativity as a poet'.[70] And yet, as Guha says, Tagore's search for *suchana* in history – which Guha tells us is a word that can be read as 'inauguration' or 'commencement' or, more interestingly still, 'to disclose what is unknown or not quite explicit' – was an attempt to 'retrace a development to its source and let it show up in its history'.[71]

So, where Tagore had analysed nationalism in the modernist language of social science, his attempts at an intervention to divert the course of history away from the universalisation of the European nation state had recourse to both history and religion as sources for what should be seen – with hindsight at least – as creative utopian imaginings. In other words, as I have stated at various points throughout this book, Tagore's sources for his critique of nationalism and the inspiration for his mission to connect with Western cultural figures across national borders came not from Europe but from Indian history and Indian religion, specifically the *Upanishads*. In the Tagorean terms I explored at length in Chapter 1, it was the ideal – or more specifically a conception of God – that constituted the basis for a critique of the real. Specifically, if God is immanent in the world, the presence of *maya* – the evidence that the world was in a creative process of becoming – means that God both constituted the world as it is, *and* provided for the possibilities of its transcendence.

In fashioning contemporary critique, Tagore's creativity and innovation with regard to the past – unlikely to satisfy the professional historian – nonetheless has resonance for a postcolonial world that is beginning to engage with the idea of post-secular philosophies and the possibility of religion as a source for immanent critique and a counter-ideology to the arguable nihilism of both postmodernism

and liberal market utopia.[72] For example, the reappraisals of Marxist orthodoxy that have taken place in the second half of the twentieth century have returned to the ways in which Marxism itself – the definitive immanent critique of bourgeois capitalism and ostensible opponent of religion – originated out of a moral-religious vision of Man which its subsequent manifestations as scientific determinism overshadowed.[73] And in thinking about modernity, counter modernities and the articulation of subaltern agency and discourse, it is worth remembering that the vast majority of the non-Western world continues to function, epistemologically and morally, within a religious paradigm of one kind or another. This raises questions about how far secular intellectuals are able to speak for 'the subaltern'.

Creativity as an essence and the limits of Tagore's idealism

In the face of Tagore's idealistic determinism, one has to state the blindingly obvious fact that Tagore's vision did not come to pass. The global movement towards unity was not predetermined, except perhaps in one sense: the integration of a global capitalist economy. But despite his evident failure to engage with this vexed problem – not least the tendency of capitalism towards forms of monopoly and homogenisation that Tagore would presumably have deplored – we should also acknowledge that Tagore held interesting ideas about human creativity that have implications for a critique of contemporary capitalism.

Tagore's philosophy contained a theory of human nature which said that Man has an essence. That essence was to be found in his desire – beyond instrumental rationality, beyond calculations of interest – to express a foundational impulse: a creative, active love, which leads us to bonds of unity with our fellow men. Crucially, for Tagore, man had to realise himself in the social world.

> Man's highest creation is his society. It has its innumerable conveniences for him, but its true worth is in the highest expression of himself which he finds in it. Therefore it is in its ideal perfection that society is of ultimate value to man.[74]

Although the origins of this central plank of Tagore's philosophy are to be found in the monistic *Vedanta* of Shankaracharya, Tagore *intended* to reject metaphysics. The atomised individual, cut off from his fellow man, was in a state of alienation. This was true in the context of the philosophy of *Vedanta*, for monism is predicated upon ultimate unity and coherence. But the desire, the 'frontierism' of the individual man always seeking out his being-in-the-world was 'true' for Tagore *because we feel it*. Moreover, this realisation of religious, metaphysical truths in the world of the everyday is a special attribute of India.

> Some modern philosophers of Europe, who are directly or indirectly indebted to the *Upanishads*, far from realising their debts, maintained that the *Brahmo* of India is a mere abstraction, – a negation of all that is in the world. In a word, the Infinite Being is to be found nowhere except in metaphysics. It may be that such a doctrine has been and still is prevalent within a section of our

> countrymen. But this is certainly not in accord with the pervading spirit of the Indian mind. The practice of realising the presence of the Infinite in all things has been carried farther in our country than it has been anywhere else.[75]

It was from the starting point of religion – both pre-dating and standing outside modernity – that Tagore developed a vision of the moral life that enabled him to critique a certain version of modernity.[76] But at the same time, his rejection of metaphysics in favour of a phenomenological grounding of that moral vision meant that the seeds of an alternative future were supposed to be found in the present, in the everyday.

Tagore's interpretation of the impulse to sociability was not just naively positive or even merely benign. '[T]hrough pressure of need, allurement of temptations, or tyranny of circumstances it may prove to be the opposite', Tagore wrote.[77] In fact

> society may conspire to rob man of his freedom of conscience reducing him to an automaton . . . of his freedom of intellect forcibly keeping him foolish and feeble in his ideas and practices . . . or of his freedom of humanity, turning him into an appliance for the production of power and things.[78]

Tagore was fully aware that society *as constituted* was often a negation of human freedom for, as he put it, man 'cannot realise freedom internally unless he can set it free externally'.[79] It is here, then, that we start to see the limits of Tagore's insistence on the ontological reality of unity. Both his cosmic vision of a world moving towards expansion and assimilation – rather than the narrow contraction of the age of nationalism – and his idea of the creative spirit of the individual personality realising his or her freedom in social communion and creative engagement, thereby realising the creativity of the Infinite Personality of which each individual is part, were confounded by the world as Tagore actually found it. For example, Tagore turned away from nationalism, from *swadeshi samaj*, because the reality of its Hindu and male chauvinism – analysed so acutely in *Gora* – negated Tagore's ideal of unity in diversity. With regard to the international stage, confronted with the inadequacy of the critical comprehension by metropolitan audiences, Tagore's pain and disillusionment were evident. In a different context, in remarking that man can become an 'appliance for the production of things', Tagore showed he appreciated the alienation of labour under capitalism. As Sartori has perceptively argued, Tagore believed that the man 'who is immersed exclusively in such action quickly mistakes accumulation as the real purpose of work, forgetting that it is in work, as the creative activity of self-expression, that man realises his spiritual nature'.[80] In a 1920 essay on 'Construction versus Creation', Tagore wrote that 'construction is for a purpose'.

> [I]t expresses our wants; but creation is for itself, it expresses our very being. We make a vessel because water has to be fetched. It must answer the question why. But when we take infinite trouble to give it a beautiful form, no reason has to be assigned. It is something which is ultimate; it is for the reali-

> sation of our own spirit which is free, which is glad. If, in the works of our life, needs make themselves too domineering, purposes too obtrusive, if something of our complete humanity is not expressed at the same time, then these works become ugly and unspiritual.[81]

Faced with the reality of the everyday, the here and now, unable to locate that non-instrumentality that he prized so highly, Tagore often turned away from man as he found him either towards vision of unalienated lives, such as the Shantal tribespeople around Shantiniketan or the Bauls of Bengal, or to a hypostasised unity of being that found its true expression only in historical or metaphysical vision. The progressive, emancipatory possibilities of Tagore's *maya* were lost amidst a nationalist will-to-power and the grinding materiality of capitalism's historical advance.

The value of Tagore in the present is thus not grounded simply in the coherence or otherwise of his philosophy, which frequently came unstuck against the realities of social and economic life in twentieth-century India. Tagore was so much more than a poet or philosopher, and projects such as Shantiniketan and Sriniketan were concrete manifestations of his belief that 'when my fellow-workers fall in love with form and fail to have complete faith in idea', the only option is 'to go and give my idea new birth and create new possibilities for it'.[82] It seems unhelpful to take up a 'for or against' position on Tagore, and in this sense, the relevance of Tagore in the present lies in the richness and power of his thinking and his imaginative recourse to history and religion that provided the impetus for emancipatory narratives in which – despite apparent failure – the real and the ideal were held in constant, creative tension.

Politics in modernity and post-modernity

Following on from this revisiting of some of Tagore's core ideas, I would like to add a brief and final note on his practice and suggest why this may also be of relevance to our postcolonial world. Tagore rejected the idea that we could speak of 'one West'.[83] If 'Europe' or 'the West' were in fact thus, it is not at all obvious how the intellectual and cultural spaces opened up that provided for Tagore's phenomenal rise to fame in 1912 and 1913. At the outset of this chapter I gave examples of the way in which Western modernity has, from the beginning, contained within itself the seeds of contradiction and ambivalence that have provided the grounds for interactions with non-European peoples. This has always occurred under asymmetric relations of power, but it has nonetheless occurred.

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, Tagore's connections with politically liberal and culturally *avant-garde* figures in early twentieth-century England were very significant to him at a personal level and also in terms of his attempts to realise the universalism inherent in his philosophy. Tagore shared in the belief that the trans-national, trans-imperial friendships he established were intended to be pathways to a more enlightened future. As we have seen, Tagore's philosophy was not liberal in a Western sense. I referred in Chapter 4 to Yeats' misunderstanding of Tagore's 'philosophy of calm'. At an aesthetic, philosophical and theological level Tagore espoused no such thing. Tagore's critique of nationalism and his advocacy of an

anti-politics, focused on societal and spiritual renewal, shared much of the radicalism we so easily associate with Gandhi. But with regard to his mission in the West Tagore was engaged in a form of praxis that was decidedly liberal, and this limited his ability to challenge the political status quo in terms of the imperial relationship between Britain and India. Tagore's approach centred around the role of the individual, and it ultimately exhibited the elitism and fear of a demotic culture that is but one of the paradoxes of modern liberalism.[84] The liberalism of Tagore's politics of friendship was a surface manifestation of a deep structure that, far from dividing East and West, far from being confined solely to a bourgeois moment, can be seen as part of a universal elitist, Brahminical (in the loose sense of the word) culture. I argued in Chapter 5 that Tagore's belief in the pluralisation of the civilised, elite individual was nothing exceptional. Still, this limitation underpinned Tagore's conflicts over political practice with Gandhi and certainly underwrote much of the critique of Tagore by Indian socialist writers and activists in the 1930s and onwards. Although Tagore had sound philosophical grounds for his rejection of what he saw as the negative and destructive aspects of Gandhi's *swaraj*, one cannot help but notice Tagore's recurrent fear of the irrationality of mass politics, as evidenced for him by the post-1905 *swadeshi* movement in Bengal. In other words Tagore was happy to valorise Indian village life or speak in idealised terms of a popular and immanent 'unity in diversity', but unlike Gandhi he was not willing to ride the tiger of mass political mobilisation.

If a modernist liberal politics of friendship ultimately resulted in failure – washed away after the First World War by the surging currents of nationalism, Fascism and Communism – the postmodern fetish for the 'trans-national' or the 'post-national' constellation displays, in some respects, a similar tendency towards elitism and a disjuncture between 'intellectuals' and 'the masses'. As Tony Pinkney has put it, with postmodernism's 'attack on modernist universalism, elitism and formalism' has come what we might call the 'attractively "ecological" moment of postmodernism, its decentralist openness'.[85] Despite its complex philosophical underpinnings, postmodernism has always held strong demotic implications in its efforts to undermine modernist master narratives and the power structures of class, gender, race, nation and empire embedded therein. Yet the obvious elitism of postmodern or postcolonial theory (on account of its language) and also postcolonial practice (on account of the Ivory Tower and hyper-mobile lives of many of its practitioners) should also be a cause for self-examination on all our parts. In other words, politics in post-modernity may evidence some of the same weaknesses as did the previous, modernist incarnation of a transnational politics of friendship: elitism and a disjuncture between those elites and the travails of the labouring masses, East and West, which become problems at the level of theory rather than practical politics.[86]

Both despite and because of the incursions of global capitalism in its accelerated financial and commercial phases, the politics of collective identity, group belonging and nationalism show no signs of abating. From India to Europe and beyond, the politics of nationalism is manifesting itself in complex ways. In this context, Tagore's marginalised legacy, both in terms of his thinking about identity and in terms of what I ultimately see as the failure of his 'politics', seems more relevant today than ever before.

Notes

Preface

1 J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 4.
2 Ibid., p. 4.
3 It has been my good fortune that Tagore had very legible, and also very beautiful handwriting.
4 Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
5 C. F. Andrews, *Letters to a Friend* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928).
6 Uma Das Gupta (ed.), *A Difficult Friendship: Letters of Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore, 1913–1940* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).
7 Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume 1* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994); Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume 2* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996); Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume 3* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996); Nityapriya Ghosh (ed.) *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume 4* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007). It should be noted that this collection supersedes both Amiya Chakravarty (ed.), *A Tagore Reader* (London: Macmillan, 1961), and Rabindranath Tagore, *Towards Universal Man* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1961).
8 Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates between Gandhi and Tagore, 1915–1941* (New Delhi: National Book Trust India, 1997).
9 Kundu, Kalyan, Bhattacharya, Sakti, and Sircar, Kalyan, *Imagining Tagore: Rabindranath and the British Press, 1912–1941* (Calcutta: Shishu Sahitya Samsad, 2000).
10 Ernest Rhys, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biographical Study* (London: Macmillan, 1915); Edward John Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore: His Life and Work* (Calcutta: Association Press, 1921); Edward John Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926); Vincenc Lesný, *Rabindranath Tagore: His Personality and Work*, trans. Guy Mckeever Phillips (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1939); Mary Lago, *Rabindranath Tagore* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976); Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), which is in many respects the most comprehensive and critical; Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology* (London: Picador, 1997); Uma Das Gupta, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).
11 Krishna Kripalani, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962); Krishna Kripalani, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (Calcutta: Visva Bharati, 1980); Krishna Kripalani, *Tagore: A Life* (Delhi: National Book Trust, 1986).

12 Mary Lago, *Imperfect Encounter: Letters of William Rothenstein and Rabindranath Tagore, 1911–1941* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).
13 William Rothenstein, *Men and Memories: Recollections of William Rothenstein – Part Two* (Montana: Kessinger, 2005).
14 Edward Palmer Thompson, *Alien Homage: Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993). As I discuss in Chapter 5, E. P.'s attempt to finger Andrews as the culprit for 'ruining' Tagore's reputation in the West doesn't quite stand up to scrutiny.
15 Hugh Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love: C. F. Andrews and India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
16 R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, Volume I – The Apprentice Mage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, Volume II – The Arch Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Joseph M. Hone, *W. B. Yeats, 1865–1939* (London: Macmillan, 1942).

Introduction: Tagore, imperialism and a global intellectual history

1 Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 13 March, 1921: from Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates between Gandhi and Tagore, 1915–1941* (New Delhi: National Book Trust India, 1997), p. 61.
2 David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773–1835* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969). David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979). Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).
3 Roy was, of course, influential in the colonial metropole in the early nineteenth century, but his fame did not match that achieved by Rabindranath. Others such as Keshub Chandra Sen were also very well known and drew much attention at the time of his visit in 1870.
4 Krishna Kripalani, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (Calcutta: Visva Bharati, 1980), p. 260.
5 This one was written by a student and friend of Tagore, and an accomplished journalist and writer. Originally published by Oxford University Press in 1962, it was republished by Visva Bharati in 1980 and The National Book Trust of India in 1986 and has enjoyed a wide readership.
6 'My Golden Bengal' was written by Tagore in 1906, during the height of the resistance to Lord Curzon's partition of Bengal. It reflected a brief and unrepresentative period of patriotic fervour on Tagore's part.
7 Ramachandra Guha, 'Why Tagore? A Thinker of Universal Reach Has Been Turned into a Local Hero', *The Telegraph (Kolkata)*, 2007: http://www.telegraphindia.com/1070707/asp/opinion/story_8014881.asp. Cf. 'Travelling with Tagore', Introduction to Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2009).
8 A prominent example, which I turn to in Chapter 3 when discussing the ideas of Gandhi and Tagore, is Partha Chatterjee's essay on Gandhi in Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (London: Zed Books, 1993), pp. 85–130.
9 Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and B. W. Young, *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History, 1750–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 1, my emphasis.
10 This brings to mind Inayat Khan's remark in Tagore's play *Atonement*: 'History or fiction, why distinguish? Both are the same when an Englishman writes of India'. Edward J. Thompson, *Atonement: A Play of Modern India in Four Acts* (London: Ernest Benn, 1924), p. 99.

11 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978). Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993).
12 For a recent restatement of this position see Robert Irwin, 'Said's Shadowy Legacy', *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 May 2008.
13 Said, *Orientalism*, op. cit., p. 3.
14 Ibid., p. 204.
15 Ibid., p. 3.
16 The root of this philosophical problem lies in Said's insistence on 'totality': that is, the dependence of his argument on the notion of a complete, homogenous, total entity called 'Orientalist discourse'. This totality is equivalent to a 'West', which Said rather unproblematically both sees as an homogenous entity, and yet identifies his critical consciousness with it. As Robert Young suggests, 'if, as a critic, [Said] does succeed in being outside the system then it has not, by definition, been totalised'. Robert J. C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 177. Cf. Homi Bhabha, 'Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism', in Francis Barker *et al*. (ed.), *The Politics of Theory* (Colchester: University of Essex, 1983), pp. 199–200.
17 The essay was originally produced in 1988 as a Field Day pamphlet and later published as Edward Said, 'Yeats and Decolonisation', in Fredric Jameson and Edward Said, ed. Terry Eagleton, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), See p. 72.
18 Ibid., p. 72.
19 Ibid., p. 73.
20 Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Macmillan, 1917).
21 The book at least appears in the notes. See Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, op. cit., p. 352.
22 Incidentally the same essay was also included in Said, 'Yeats and Decolonisation', op. cit.
23 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, op. cit., p. 264.
24 Said, *Orientalism*, op. cit., p. 204.
25 John Gascoigne, 'The Expanding Historiography of British Imperialism', *The Historical Journal*, 49/2 (2006), p. 577.
26 Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (London: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 3, 13.
27 Ronald Robinson and Jack Gallagher, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 6/1 (1953), pp. 1–15.
28 Ronald Robinson, 'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism', in E. R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe (eds), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London, 1972).
29 Alan Lester, 'Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire', *History Compass*, 4/1 (2006), p. 125.
30 Ibid.
31 See David Lambert and Alan Lester, *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 3–8.
32 David Fieldhouse, 'Can Humpty-Dumpty Be Put Together Again? Imperial History in the 1980s', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12/2 (1984), p. 16.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 This basic point is developed in enormous detail in two volumes: P. J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688–1914* (London: Longman, 1993), and P. J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction, 1914–1990* (London: Longman, 1993).
36 For an extensive overview see Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, op. cit.

37 Fieldhouse, 'Can Humpty-Dumpty Be Put Together Again? Imperial History in the 1980s', op. cit., p. 17.
38 Stephen Howe, 'David Fieldhouse and "Imperialism": Some Historiographical Revisions', in Peter Burroughs and A. J. Stockwell (eds), *Managing the Business of Empire* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), p. 221.
39 Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, op. cit., p. 34.
40 One of the earliest commentators to pick up on this shortcoming was Sadik Jalal al-'Azm. See Sadik Jalal al-'Azm, 'Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse', *Khamsin*, No. 8 (1981), pp. 5–27. Cf. Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), p. 214. For a particularly acute commentary on Said see Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 422–432.
41 Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, op. cit., pp. 15–16.
42 Ranajit Guha, 'Preface', *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 6.
43 David Feldman, 'Imperial Dimensions of Anglo-Jewish History', paper given at the *Reconfiguring the British* seminar (Institute of Historical Research, London, 2005).
44 Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Historical Imagination, 1830–1867* (London: Polity Press, 2002); Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National and the Postcolonial, 1890–1920: Resistance in Interaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Antoinette Burton (ed.), *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); David Lambert and Alan Lester, *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c. 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
45 Stephen Howe, 'When – If Ever – Did Empire End? Recent Studies of Imperialism and Decolonization', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40/3 (2005), p. 599. Cf. David Cannadine, "Big Tent" Historiography: Transatlantic Obstacles and Opportunities in Writing the History of Empire', *Common Knowledge*, 11/3 (2005), esp. pp. 389–392.
46 C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 1.
47 Ibid., p. xxi.
48 Catherine Hall, 'Review of C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914*', *Institute of Historical Research: Reviews in History*: http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/hall.html2005
49 Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, op. cit., p. 30.
50 Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995).
51 Intellectual history is a field that has struggled to gain proper recognition until relatively recently, and the Sussex and Cambridge 'schools' of intellectual history have done much to raise its profile and importance. However, it is certainly not only figures from within these schools who recognise – as Terry Eagleton has done – that 'once [a] work is severed from the author's historical situation, it is bound to appear miraculous and unmotivated'. See Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 64. Similarly, the preoccupation of historians such as C. L. R. James with 'the relation between the personality and history, between agency and structure, between individual creativity and moments of fundamental change in human society' is one that cuts across discrete methodological boundaries and political persuasions. See David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 39. Pushing the boundaries of intellectual history into the field of imperial history means building on theoretical

foundations laid by Quentin Skinner and others. In the Indian context, it means taking works such as Tapan Raychaudhuri's *Europe Reconsidered* (1988) as a pioneering example, following the lead given by the contributors to the special issue of *Modern Intellectual History* on 'An Intellectual History for India', and building on the brilliant if (or because) idiosyncratic theoretical and contextual work done by Andrew Sartori, which restores the central Marxian impulse towards a social history of ideas. See Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 8/1 (1969), pp. 3–53, plus his enormous output of groundbreaking work thereafter. See also Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, op. cit.; various articles in *Modern Intellectual History*, 4/1, Special Issue: An Intellectual History for India (2007); and Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). The significance of Raymond Williams for the work of Andrew Sartori constitutes an interesting symmetry, since it was Williams' book *Keywords* that incurred the fire of Skinner's deadly pen in the earliest developments of a Skinnerian intellectual history.

52 Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, op. cit., pp. xxi–xxii.

53 Gyan Prakash, 'Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography', *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 32/2 (1990), p. 384.

54 The issue of translation is explored in depth from a literary point of view in Nilanjana Banerji, 'The Other Side of the Raj: Representations of Colonial India in the Writing of Edward John Thompson', D.Phil. (University of Oxford, 2002).

55 Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), p. 19.

56 Bayly, 'Afterword', op. cit., p. 166.

57 W. B. Yeats, 'Introduction: Gitanjali' (1912): from Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume I* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994), p. 38.

58 Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Papermac, 1991), p. 5.

59 The Western political tradition has been profoundly marked by the foundational concept of identity, and we have been encouraged to seek our identities through membership in undifferentiated groups such as family, clan, nation and, latterly, class. From Derrida's deconstructionist perspective all such 'natural' categories are ultimately dependent on language and are therefore discursive conventions. Thus in Derrida's usage the politics of friendship becomes a utopian vision of possibility beyond such discursively policed identities. Derrida's critique certainly has affinities with Tagore at least in terms of vision, though not in method. Derrida's 'politics of friendship' is developed as a response to the work of Carl Schmitt and the latter's insistence on the binary of friend/enemy as a foundational, transcendental possibility for politics *per se*. See Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (London: Verso, 2005).

60 C. F. Andrews to Tagore, 14 January 1914: Andrews Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.

61 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 1980), p. 165.

62 Ibid.

63 Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume I*, op. cit., p. 29.

64 Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 11.

65 Ibid. Cf. John W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 277.

66 Ezra Pound to Harriet Monroe, 22 April 1913: in D. D. Paige, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907–1941* (London: Faber, 1982), p. 19.

67 Rabindranath Tagore, 'World Unity: Poet Tagore's Mission', *Free Press of India*, Bulletin 3, 22 March 1925, p. 1.

68 Which 'West' am I speaking of here? In Tagore's case, 'the West' means both a modern, bureaucratic colonial manifestation operating in India, and a 'West'

represented by its minor, suppressed and marginalised cultural and intellectual forms in the metropole.

69 Ashis Nandy, 'The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self', *Bonfire of Creeds: The Essential Ashis Nandy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 153–233.

70 Even though I am self-consciously adopting an intellectual history approach to my study of Tagore, and I share with Stefan Collini the view that past thought ought to be of interest for its own sake, the politics of imperialism and the postcolonial world make the contemporary relevance of Tagore of the highest importance. Cf. Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 108–109.

1 Religion and reform: Tagore's nineteenth-century inheritance

1 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Religion of an Artist' (1936): from Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), p. 687.

2 *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979).

3 Bhabatosha Datta, *Resurgent Bengal: Rammohun, Bankimchandra, Rabindranath* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 2000), p. 129.

4 Mahasweta Sengupta, 'Translation, Colonialism and Poetics: Rabindranath Tagore in Two Worlds', in Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (eds), *Translation, History and Culture* (London: Pinter, 1990), p. 14, original emphasis.

5 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Great Indians: Mahatma Gandhi, Ramana Maharshi, Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Rabindranath Tagore* (Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1949), p. 98.

6 Datta, *Resurgent Bengal: Rammohun, Bankimchandra, Rabindranath*, op. cit., p. 102, my emphasis.

7 Saumyendranath Tagore, *Rammohun Roy: His Role in Indian Renaissance* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1975).

8 Friedrich Max Müller, *Biographical Essays* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1884), p. 13: quoted in Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (New York: SUNY Press, 1988), p. 199.

9 Cf. Tagore, *Rammohun Roy: His Role in Indian Renaissance*, op. cit., and Datta, *Resurgent Bengal: Rammohun, Bankimchandra, Rabindranath*, op. cit.

10 Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, op. cit., pp. 199–200.

11 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Ideals of Education' (1929): from Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three*, op. cit., p. 611.

12 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Autobiogrpahical: Talks in China' (1924): from Uma Das Gupta (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore: My Life in My Words* (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2006), p. 5.

13 'We must not forget that a world-consciousness reached the corners of Bengal. It was there that Ram Mohan founded a religion for all humanity. That was the dawn of Bengal's renaissance. The melody of that world-consciousness is our song – the song of man's future.' Rabindranath to his son Rathindranath Tagore, 28 October 1916: in Das Gupta, *Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 182.

14 J. T. F. Jones, 'Hindu Religious and Social Reform in India', in A. L. Basham (ed.), *A Cultural History of India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 367.

15 R. C. Majumdar, *On Rammohan Roy* (Calcutta, 1972), p. 40.

16 Sumit Sarkar, 'Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past', in V. C. Joshi (ed.), *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1975), p. 63.

17 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, op. cit., p. 11. Cf. Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773–1835* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969), pp. 196–201 and 236–252. For more general examples of Western scholarship on Indian intellectual history influenced by Saidian (and hence Foucauldian) ideas see Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000), and Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002). If Kopf's position on Rammohun is correct, Rammohun sits uncomfortably with Gyan Prakash's insistence – referred to in the Introduction – that 'Orientalism was a European enterprise from the very beginning. The scholars were European, the audience was European; and the Indians figured as inert objects of knowledge'. Prakash, 'Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography', p. 384.

18 'I think it fair to say that the construction of India in terms of this and other failures represents a foundational view. While it highlights the paradoxes of "renaissance" in a colonial context, the interpretation of these events as aborted or failed modernity defers the conclusion of the modernization narrative but does not eliminate the teleological vision. We are thus led to see the "third worldness" of India in its incomplete narrative and unfulfilled promise, which invites completion and fulfilment.' Prakash, 'Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography', op. cit., p. 396.

19 Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, op. cit., p. 200. For further discussion of the influence of Enlightenment ideas on Rammohun's thinking see pp. 207–216.

20 Nehru's cosmopolitan, progressive reading of Indian history owes an obvious debt to both Rammohun Roy and Rabindranath Tagore. He notes with approval that Rammohun was 'more than a scholar and investigator; he was a reformer'. Of Tagore, Nehru wrote that '[i]t was Tagore's immense service to India, as it has been Gandhi's in a different plane, that he forced the people in some measure out of their narrow grooves of thought and made them think of broader issues affecting humanity. Tagore was the great humanist of India.' Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 315, 340. Elsewhere Nehru wrote that although 'Gandhi came on the public scene in India like a thunderbolt shaking us all, and like a flash of lightning which illumined our minds and warmed our hearts', Tagore's influence was, by contrast, 'not so sudden or so earth-shaking for Indian humanity'. And yet, 'like the coming of the dawn in the mountains, it crept on us and permeated us. I belong to a generation which grew up under his influence.' Nehru also recalled Tagore's famous conversation about Rammohun with Romain Rolland, in which Tagore said that Rammohun 'realised that a bond of spiritual unity links the whole of mankind and that it is the purpose of religion to reach down to that fundamental unity of human relationship, of human efforts and achievements'. Nehru's point was that what Tagore said of Rammohun 'applies to Tagore himself'. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (ed.), *A Centenary Volume: Rabindranath Tagore, 1861–1961* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1961), p. xiii.

21 Cf. Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, op. cit., p. 15.

22 Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, op. cit., p. 199.

23 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, op. cit., pp. 12–13.

24 Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, op. cit., pp. 207–208.

25 Ibid., p. 199.

26 M. Monier-Williams, *Religious Thought and Life in India* (London, 1883), p. 479: quoted in Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, op. cit., p. 199.

27 Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, op. cit., p. 199.

28 Datta, *Resurgent Bengal: Rammohun, Bankimchandra, Rabindranath*, op. cit., p. 14. This position had been developed as early as his *Vedantasara* of 1815. Cf. Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, op. cit., pp. 210–211, who points towards the idea of Rammohun's 'democratisation of theology' being linked to an analysis of the 'decay and degradation' of Rammohun's own age.
29 Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, op. cit., p. 205. Produced roughly during the three centuries following the end of the *Vedic* period – *c.* sixth–third centuries bce – the main theme of the *Upanishads* is that of the Supreme Spirit or *Brahman*. They commonly represent the philosophical elements of the orally transmitted *Vedic* body of thought, specifically the *Brahmasutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Upanishadic* philosophy is also known as *Vedanta*. The *Adi* or original Shankara – also known as Shankaracharya – lived during the eighth century ce, possibly from 788–820. He was the first known Indian philosopher and religious reformer to consolidate the teachings of the *Upanishads* into an *Advaita* or non-dualist Hindu doctrine.
30 Devendranath Tagore, *The Autobiography of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore*, trans. Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi (London: Macmillan, 1914), p. 72.
31 Ibid.
32 Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, op. cit., p. 221.
33 Ibid., p. 221.
34 This also set *Brahmoism* apart from the Theosophical movements of the later nineteenth century. Scepticism towards 'spiritual' movements aiming for the lowest common denominator was passed on from Debendranath to Rabindranath.
35 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, op. cit., p. 193.
36 Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 300.
37 Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, op. cit., p. 217.
38 Rosinka Chaudhuri, 'Hemchandra's Bharat Sangeet (1870) and the Politics of Poetry: A Pre-History of Bengal Nationalism?' *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 42/2 (2005), p. 217.
39 Ibid., p. 216.
40 Keshub Chunder Sen, *Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia: Being the Substance of a Lecture Delivered ex-tempore in the Theatre of the Calcutta Medical College on Saturday, 5 May, 1866* (Calcutta: Indian Mirror Press, 1869).
41 Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, op. cit., p. 225.
42 Ibid., p. 225.
43 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, op. cit., p. 176.
44 Ibid., p. 176. It should be noted that Kopf uses 'nationalism' in a non-technical sense, which might be better characterised as 'national sentiment'.
45 Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (2nd edn; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 32.
46 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, op. cit., p. 184.
47 Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Calcutta* (London: Phoenix, 1998), p. 209.
48 Ibid., p. 209.
49 Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, op. cit., pp. 19–23.
50 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, op. cit., p. 294.
51 Ibid., p. 290.
52 Ibid., p. 187.
53 Kopf portrays nationalism as a 'perennial identity crisis' which 'inhibits the further development of the adult personality'. Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, op. cit., p. 188. It has to be said that Kopf's treatment of nationalism is somewhat blasé.
54 Stephen N. Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China, and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 26.
55 Literally 'well mannered', *bhadralok* refers to the middle and upper middle class educated Bengali who evolved as a distinct social group under the British Empire.

56 Tagore, 'The Religion of an Artist', op. cit., p. 687.
57 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, op. cit., p. 288, my emphasis.
58 Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), op. cit., p. 120.
59 Ibid., p. 120.
60 Ibid., pp. 121–122.
61 Rabindranath Tagore to the Prince of Tripura, April 1902: quoted in Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 133.
62 Ibid., p. 135.
63 Ashis Nandy, 'The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self', *Bonfire of the Creeds: The Essential Ashis Nandy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 203.
64 Julius Lipner, 'A Case-Study in "Hindu Catholicism": Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861–1907)', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, January 1988, pp. 33–54: quoted in Nandy, 'The Illegitimacy of Nationalism', op. cit., p. 200.
65 Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 135.
66 Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya: quoted in Nandy, 'The Illegitimacy of Nationalism', op. cit., p. 212.
67 Ibid., p. 212.
68 Chaudhuri, 'Hemchandra's Bharat Sangeet (1870) and the Politics of Poetry: A Pre-History of Bengal Nationalism?', op. cit., p. 217.
69 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Swadeshi Samaj', 1905: quoted in Chaudhuri, 'Hemchandra's Bharat Sangeet (1870) and the Politics of Poetry', op. cit., pp. 217–218. 'Swadeshi Samaj', best translated as 'indigenous society', was an address given in Calcutta in 1901, but not published until 1905.
70 Nandy, 'The Illegitimacy of Nationalism', op. cit., p. 213. Cf. Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, op. cit., p. 97.
71 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, op. cit., p. 212.
72 Rabindranath Tagore, *Four Chapters*, trans. Rimli Bhattacharya (New Delhi: Srishti, 2002), pp. 138–139. Julius Lipner notes that 'the report of this episode generated much controversy (Tagore was accused of maligning Upadhyaya the radical patriot through the depiction of some of his characters), and was omitted in subsequent editions of the publication'. Julius Lipner, *Brahmabandhab Upadhyayaonary* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 379.
73 Rabindranath Tagore, *Towards Universal Man* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1961), p. 136. This passage is quoted in Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, op. cit., p. 298, but is incorrectly referenced as p. 137.
74 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Keshub Anniversary Address', 9 January 1910: quoted in Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, op. cit., p. 299.
75 Ibid., p. 298.
76 Ibid., p. 299.
77 Ibid., p. 307.
78 Kalyan Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 9.
79 N. K. Singh, *Encyclopaedia of Hinduism: Volume I* (Anmol: New Delhi, 1997), p. 1592.
80 Datta, *Resurgent Bengal: Rammohun, Bankimchandra, Rabindranath*, op. cit., p. 95.
81 What Tagore shared with his father was an insistence on the primacy of intuition and insight in religious matters, but he did not share his desire to place either texts or religious organisations to the fore. The *Upanishads* are in any case widely held to be records of religious experience rather than prescriptive and comprehensive doctrines. See N. K. Singh, *Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*, op. cit., p. 1593.

82 William Cenkner, 'Tagore and the Aesthetic Man', *International Political Quarterly*, 13/2 (1973), pp. 230–231.
83 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (London: Macmillan, 1918), p. 53.
84 R. D. Bhattacharya, 'Personal Man and Personal God: The Tagorean Conception Revisited', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 15/4 (1975), p. 425.
85 Ibid., p. 432.
86 Ibid., p. 430. Cf. Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., esp. Chapter 5.
87 Bhattacharya, 'Personal Man and Personal God: The Tagorean Conception Revisited', op. cit., p. 430.
88 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Religion of Man' (1930): from Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three*, op. cit., p. 131.
89 Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 11.
90 Radhakrishnan, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 18. Cf. Basant Kumar Lal, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), p. 64. 'Every individual has his own individual peculiarities on account of which he is different from other individuals. These constitute his individual characters. But he also has a nature which he shares with all and on account of which he has a feeling of kinship with every other individual.'
91 Bhattacharya, 'Personal Man and Personal God: The Tagorean Conception Revisited', op. cit., p. 435.
92 Ibid., p. 435.
93 Ibid., p. 435.
94 Ibid., p. 435.
95 The 'Bauls of Bengal' are famous minstrels, known for their syncretic religious practices.
96 Uma Das Gupta, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 13.
97 Lal, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 52.
98 Ibid., p. 13.
99 William Radice, 'Introduction': Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 24.
100 Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 14.
101 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Gitanjali' (1912): from Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume One* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994), p. 68.
102 Ibid., p. 14.
103 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Religion of Man' (1931): from Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three*, op. cit., p. 164.
104 Cf. Lal, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 50.
105 Datta, *Resurgent Bengal: Rammohun, Bankimchandra, Rabindranath*, op. cit., p. 102.
106 This passage is included in C. F. Andrews, 'Letters to a Friend' (1928): from Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three*, op. cit., p. 254 (i.e. as a letter sent from Tagore to Andrews). However, at Rabindra Bhavana it is to be found as Rabindranath Tagore to Willie Pearson, 10 March 1918: C. F. Andrews Papers, Rabindra Bhavana. The important thing here is obviously Tagore's meaning, but these discrepancies are further evidence of my earlier point regarding the unreliability of certain edited collections of Tagore's work, not least *Letters to a Friend*.
107 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Religion of Man' (1930): from Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three*, op. cit, p. 102.
108 Ibid., p. 102.
109 Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 29 July, 1915: C. F. Andrews Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.

110 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Man' (1937): from Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three*, op. cit., p. 202.
111 Ibid., p. 202.
112 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Religion of Man' (1930): from Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three*, op. cit., p. 131.
113 Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal*, op. cit., p. x.
114 Ibid., p. 1.
115 I take Ernest Gellner's definition of nationalism as 'a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent' to be one of the most useful in terms of understanding the political power and particularity of nationalist ideology. See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p.1. I return to this at some length in Chapter 3.
116 Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1901).
117 See Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885–1947* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 106–125 for an overview.
118 Although it is important to note that some in Eastern Bengal benefited from the partition and hence favoured it.
119 *Swadeshi* corresponds to ideas of self-sufficiency and a preference for the indigenous over the exogenous. Closely related to the Gandhian idea of *swaraj* (literally 'self-rule'), the *swadeshi* movement in Bengal in 1905 included the kind of boycotting of British goods and services that Gandhi would later employ, but also utilised violence in a way that Gandhi would completely reject.
120 'Ends and Means', Speech given in Calcutta, 25 May 1908: from Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 152.
121 Nandy, 'The Illegitimacy of Nationalism', op. cit., p. 224.
122 Ibid., p. 224.
123 Ibid.
124 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Future of India', *The Modern Review*, 9/3 (1911), p. 242.
125 Ibid., p. 242.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 W. W. Pearson, *Shantiniketan: The Bolpur School of Rabindranath Tagore* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), pp. 18–19.
131 Datta, *Resurgent Bengal: Rammohun, Bankimchandra, Rabindranath*, op. cit., p. 129.

2 England and the Nobel Prize: Tagore at home in the world

1 Robert Bridges to E. J. Thompson, 20 April 1913: Ms. Eng. c.5275, folio 21, Correspondence Files, E. J. Thompson Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
2 Rathindranath Tagore, *On the Edges of Time* (Calcutta: Visva Bharati, 1958), p. 97.
3 Rabindranath Tagore to Indira Devi, 6 May 1913: Krishna Kripalani, *Tagore: A Life* (Delhi: National Book Trust, 1986), p. 123. An alternative translation can be found in Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 117.
4 Nirad C. Chaudhuri, 'Tagore and the Nobel Prize', *Illustrated Weekly*, 11 March 1973, p. 1029.
5 Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 161.
6 Das Gupta, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 62.

7 Ibid., p. 62.
8 Ibid., p. 62.
9 Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters*, op. cit., p. 89. Cf. Das Gupta, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography*, op. cit., p. 60, and Kripalani, *Tagore: A Life*, op. cit., pp. 122–123.
10 Sengupta, 'Translation, Colonialism and Poetics: Rabindranath Tagore in Two Worlds', in Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (eds), *Translation, History and Culture* (London: Pinter, 1990), p. 59.
11 Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters*, op. cit., pp. 90, 97–98.
12 India Society, *Proceedings of the London India Society, 1910* (London: India Society, 1911), p. 8.
13 Ibid., p. 8.
14 Rothenstein made some nine portrait drawings of Tagore in 1912 and some of these are on display at Tate Britain and The British Museum.
15 Tagore, *On the Edges of Time*, op. cit., p. 100. Cf. Mary Lago, *India's Prisoner: A Biography of Edward John Thompson, 1886–1946* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), p. 72.
16 William Rothenstein, *Men and Memories: Recollections of William Rothenstein – Part Two* (Montana: Kessinger, 2005), p. 249.
17 Mary Lago, *Imperfect Encounter: Letters of William Rothenstein and Rabindranath Tagore, 1911–1941* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 17.
18 Rothenstein, *Men and Memories: Recollections of William Rothenstein – Part Two*, op. cit., p. 262.
19 Translation of a Bengali letter from Tagore to his niece Indira Devi: from Mary Lago, 'The Parting of the Ways: A Comparative Study of Yeats and Tagore', *Indian Literature*, 6/2 (1963), p. 4.
20 Lago, *Imperfect Encounter*, op. cit., p. 168.
21 W. B. Yeats, 'Introduction: Gitanjali' (1912): from Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume I* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994), p. 38.
22 Ibid., p. 40.
23 The date of the reading is given as 30 June in Hugh Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love: C. F. Andrews and India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 56. In Kalyan Kundu, Sakti Bhattacharya and Kalyan Sircar, *Imagining Tagore: Rabindranath and the British Press, 1912–1941* (Calcutta: Shishu Sahitya Samsad, 2000), p. 625 it is given as 7 July. The necessary confirmation that it did indeed take place on 7 July is to be found in Tagore's son's account of their time in London. See Tagore, *On the Edges of Time*, op. cit., pp. 101–103. (Edward Marx is correct to say that 10 July Trocadero event was probably the most important date in terms of the press and the wider public. See Edward Marx, *The Idea of a Colony: Cross-Culturalism in Modern Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), p. 69.)
24 Rothenstein, *Men and Memories: Recollections of William Rothenstein – Part Two*, op. cit., p. 264.
25 Ibid., pp. 264–265.
26 Ezra Pound, 'Rabindranath Tagore', *The Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 99, March 1913, p. 571.
27 Ibid., p. 574.
28 Ibid., pp. 575–576.
29 W. B. Yeats to Edmund Gosse, 25 November 1912: W. B. Yeats Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana. Cf. Allan Wade (ed.), *The Letters of W. B. Yeats* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), pp. 572–573.
30 'Yeats imagines you as applauded by a unanimous populace.' Not so, Tagore said, for 'as a matter of fact, I have been an unpopular poet. They say we Tagores are not like other Bengalis but are like a separate nation'. E. J. Thompson's transcript of his

conversations with Rabindranath on 14 and 15 November 1914: from E. P. Thompson, *Alien Homage: Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 113.

31 'Introduction': Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar, *Imagining Tagore: Rabindranath and the British Press, 1912–1941*, op. cit., p. xv.
32 Ernest Rhys, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biographical Study* (London: Macmillan, 1915), p. 13.
33 Ibid., pp. 8–10.
34 Kripalani, *Tagore: A Life*, op. cit., p. 130.
35 'Introduction': Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar, *Imagining Tagore: Rabindranath and the British Press, 1912–1941*, op. cit., p. xvii.
36 Kripalani, *Tagore: A Life*, op. cit., p. 128.
37 Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar, *Imagining Tagore: Rabindranath and the British Press, 1912–1941*, op. cit., pp. 79–80.
38 William Canton to Edward Thompson, July 1913: Ms. Eng. c.5279, folios 45–46, Thompson Papers, Bodleian. Cf. Lago, *India's Prisoner: A Biography of Edward John Thompson, 1886–1946*, pp. 74–75.
39 Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar, *Imagining Tagore: Rabindranath and the British Press, 1912–1941*, op. cit., p. 70.
40 Ibid., p. 71.
41 Ibid., pp. 155–157.
42 Rabindranath Tagore to Thomas Sturge Moore, 17 February 1914: Ms. 76, folio 95(i), Sturge Moore Papers, Senate House. Cf. Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters*, op. cit., p. 138 and Amiya Chakravarty (ed.), *A Tagore Reader* (London: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 21–23.
43 Tagore to William Rothenstein, 18 November 1913: Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters*, op. cit., p. 131. Cf. Lago, *Imperfect Encounter*, op. cit., p. 140.
44 Tagore to William Rothenstein, 4 April 1915: Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters*, op. cit., pp. 161–162 and Lago, *Imperfect Encounter*, op. cit., pp. 194–196.
45 Ibid., pp. 194–196.
46 R. K. Dasgupta, *Rabindranath Tagore and William Butler Yeats: The Story of a Literary Friendship* (Delhi: University of Delhi, 1965), p. 20.
47 W. B. Yeats, *Selected Criticism*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Pan Books, 1976), p. 18.
48 Rothenstein, *Men and Memories: Recollections of William Rothenstein – Part Two*, op. cit., p. 301. The original manuscripts of the *Gitanjali* translations are now held at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
49 William Canton to Edward Thompson, 17 December 1913: Ms. Eng. c. 5279, folio 92, Thompson Papers, Bodleian.
50 Cf. Lago, 'The Parting of the Ways: A Comparative Study of Yeats and Tagore', op. cit., p. 4: 'In the summer of 1913 *Gitanjali* brought Rabindranath the Nobel Prize'.
51 Kjell Espmark, *The Nobel Prize in Literature: A Study of the Criteria Behind the Choices* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1991), p. 136, my emphasis.
52 I was informed by the archivist at the Nobel Library, Stockholm, at the time of my researches there that the accessions and borrowing register for this period had not been requested by any researcher before.
53 Horst Frenz (ed.), *Nobel Lectures: Literature, 1901–1967* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1969), pp. 127–128, my emphasis.
54 Bo Svensén, *Nobelpriset I Litteratur: Nomineringar Och Utlåtanden, 1901–1950: Vol. I, 1901–1920* (Stockholm: Swedish Academy, 2001), p. 305.
55 Ibid., p. 305.
56 Ibid., p. 305. The quotations are taken from von Heidenstam's letter to Erik Axel Karlfeldt which is published in Volume 1 (1901–1920) of Bo Svensén's 2001 edited

volume *Nobelpriset i litteratur: Nomineringar och utlåtanden, 1901–1950* (The Nobel Prize in Literature: Nominations and the Nobel Committee's Reports, 1901–1950). Verner von Heidenstam's letter reads as follows: 'Allt förena sig till en helhet af djup och sällsynt andlig fägring. Den karleksfulla och innerliga religiositet, som genomtränger alla hans tankar och känslor, hjärtats renhet och stilens ädla och naturliga höghet.' The English translations in the main text are by Nicholas Henderson-Young.

57 Per Hallström, 'Rabindranath Tagore' (Nobel Library, Stockholm, 1913). Unlike Hallström's second report on Tagore, dated 29 October, the first report has not been published in translation and is only available in Swedish at the Nobel Library archive. In the first report Hallström wrote: 'absolute okunnig I detta sprak . . . arven I indisk litteratur'. English translations in the main text are again by Nicholas Henderson-Young.

58 Per Hallström, 'Tagore and the Nobel Prize', *Indian Literature*, IV (1961), p. 14.

59 Tagore, *On the Edges of Time*, op. cit., p. 108.

60 I have been unable to verify whether or not Tagore had read Du Bois: 'the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line'. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Raleigh, NC: Hayes Barton Press, 1968), p. 28.

61 Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews, January 1913: C. F. Andrews' notebook, C. F. Andrews Papers, Rabindra Bhavana. The original letter has been lost, but a draft was copied by Andrews into his notebook. There is a further typed copy of the same letter in the Andrews Papers which is misleadingly titled 'From Charlie to the Author'. That the letter is in fact from Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews is evidenced not only by the subject – which matches that of Tagore's lecture and later essay in *The Modern Review* – but also by the confident tone of the letter. Andrews did not address Tagore in this way at any point during their relationship, and certainly not in these early exchanges. The final confirmation comes from the fact that Tagore also makes reference in this letter to one of Andrews' previous letters, dated 12 December 1912.

62 Rabindranath Tagore, *The Crescent Moon* (London: Macmillan, 1913), p. 363.

63 As Keshub put it, '[y]es, we have seen the light of a New Dispensation. Asia, mother of many dispensations, has given birth to another child, and its birth-festival shall be celebrated amid great rejoicing . . . But why should I of all others be selected as the spokesman of the New Dispensation? Yet it is not I that speak, but we . . . It is my Church that speaks through me'. 'We Apostles of the New Dispensation', Keshab's oration at the Town Hall, Calcutta, 22 January 1881: from Keshub Chunder Sen, *Keshub Chunder Sen's Lectures in India* (Calcutta: The Brahmo Tract Society, Second Edition 1886), p. 345. I am grateful to John Stevens for this reference.

64 Rothenstein, *Men and Memories: Recollections of William Rothenstein – Part Two*, op. cit., p. 267.

65 Lynn Zapoustil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 1.

66 Ibid., p. 165.

67 M. D'Acosta to the Abbé Gregoire, 8 November 1818: from Mary Carpenter (ed.) *The Last Days in England of the Rajah Rammohun Roy* (Calcutta: R. C. Lepage & Co., 1866), p. 34.

68 Ibid., p. 37.

69 Rammohun Roy, Extracts from the *Monthly Repository*, Vol. XIV, 1819, pp. 561-569: from Mary Carpenter (ed.) *The Last Days in England of the Rajah Rammohun Roy*, op. cit., pp. 31–32.

70 Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 10 May 1921: from Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), p. 304. Infamously, Gandhi had taken a very different view. During the exchanges that took place in the 1920s between Gandhi and Tagore about the freedom struggle and the role of Western, or English, culture in Indian life which are discussed in detail in Chapter 3 – Rammohun became a point of contention amongst

many. 'One thing, and one thing only, has hurt me', wrote Gandhi, and that is 'the Poet's belief, again picked up from table talk, that I look upon Ram Mohan Roy as a "pigmy" [sic]. Well, I have never anywhere described that great reformer as a pigmy much less regarded him as such. He is to me as much a giant as he is to the Poet. I do not remember any occasion save one when I had to use Ram Mohan Roy's name. That was in connection with Western education. This was on the Cuttack sands now four years ago. What I do remember having said was that it was possible to attain highest culture without Western education.' M. K. Gandhi, 'The Poet and the Charka't, from *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: Volume 33* (New Delhi: The Publication Division, Ministry of Education and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1966), p. 200. In this quote Gandhi refers to his 'Speech at Mass Meeting, Cuttack' of 24 March 1921, a report of which by the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* can be found reprinted in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: Volume 22*, op. cit., p. 460. The report states that '[r]eferring to the backwardness of Orissa, he [Gandhi] remarked that though the English-knowing people in Orissa were comparatively backward the masses were never so; the masses were far ahead'. This is the only context in which one can imagine the infamous Rammohun 'pygmy' statement being made. There is no direct mention of Rammohun at all, which is unsurprising since, as a nationalist newspaper, the *Patrika* would have obviously declined to include unfavourable remarks about a key figure in the Bengali intellectual canon.

71 Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain*, op. cit., p. 165. On Bhudev see Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (2nd edn; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 27–104.

72 Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998), p. 36.

73 For a brilliant discussion of the emasculation of the Bengali male through British discourse see Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

74 Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire*, op. cit., p. 37.

75 Ibid., p. 38.

76 Meredith Borthwick, *Keshub Chunder Sen: A Search for Cultural Synthesis* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1977), p. 100: quoted in Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire*, op. cit., p. 37. Cf. Friedrich Max Müller, *Biographical Essays* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1884), p. 74.

77 As Majumdar had written to Max Müller in 1881, regarding his 'science of comparative theology', 'the Fatherhood of God is a meaningless abstraction unless the unity of truth in all lands and nations is admitted. And the brotherhood of man is impossible if there is no recognition of the services which the great peoples of earth have rendered unto each other.' Pratap Majumdar to Friedrich Max Müller, 20 August 1881: from Max Müller, *Biographical Essays*, op. cit., pp. 145–146.

78 Keshub Chunder Sen, *Keshub Chunder Sen in England: Diary, Sermons, Addresses & Epistles* (Calcutta: Navavidhan Publication Committee, 1938), p. 79.

79 Evidence from the English press of 1870 was presented by John Stevens in his paper 'Again had Eastern prophets set us free: Keshab Chandra Sen and the conflict between Matter and Sprit in mid-Victorian Britain', *Bharat Britain: South Asians Making Britain, 1870–1950*, conference held at the British Library, 13–14 September 2010. His forthcoming PhD thesis in preparation at UCL Department of History promises to make a major contribution to our understanding of Keshub's reception in England.

80 Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire*, op. cit., p. 39.

81 Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain: Anglo-Indian Encounters, Race and Identity, 1880–1930* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 194.

82 Mohini Chatterjee was part theosophist, part *Vedantic* guru who was feted in Dublin, notably by W. B. Yeats. I return to this at some length in Chapter 4.
83 Swami Vivekananda was born Narendranath Dutta in Calcutta in 1863. In his younger years he was a member of the *Brahmo Samaj* before becoming a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, founder of the Ramakrishna Mission. Vivekenanda would later be a pioneer of neo-Hinduism in India and especially in the West, including most famously in the United States.
84 P. C. Majumdar, *Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen* (Calcutta: Nababidhan Trust, 1931), p. 142: quoted in Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire*, op. cit., p. 38.
85 Ibid., p. xxvi.
86 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My Interpretation of India's History: I', *The Modern Review*, 14/2 (1913), pp. 113–118, and Rabindranath Tagore, 'My Interpretation of India's History: II', *The Modern Review*, 14/3 (1913), pp. 231–236.
87 Tagore, 'My Interpretation of India's History: I' (1913), p. 113.
88 Ibid., p. 113.
89 Ibid., p. 113.
90 Ibid., p. 113.
91 Ibid., p. 113.
92 Tagore, 'The Future of India', *The Modern Review*, 9/3 (1911), p. 240.
93 Ibid., pp. 240–241.
94 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 13: quoted in Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 138, emphasis original.
95 Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar, *Imagining Tagore: Rabindranath and the British Press, 1912–1941*, op. cit., p. 131.
96 Ibid., p. xvii.
97 Rabindranath Tagore, 'East and West' (1935), in Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), p. 350. This text is taken from letters sent to the English Professor of Classics Gilbert Murray. However, at Rabindra Bhavana it also exists as an undated letter to C. F. Andrews. Cf. Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews (typed copy), undated: C. F. Andrews Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.
98 Ibid., p. 350.
99 Tagore, *The Crescent Moon*, op. cit., p. 363.
100 Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews (typed copy), undated: C. F. Andrews Papers, Rabindra Bhavana. This is a continuation of the letter to Andrews and the text does not appear in the Gilbert Murray version published by Sisir Kumar Das. Instead it forms part of Rabindranath Tagore, 'India and Europe' (1930), in Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), p. 621.
101 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: Coleridge to Orwell* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987), p. xviii: quoted in Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 42.
102 Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, op. cit., pp. 42-43.
103 Ibid., p. 47.
104 Ibid., p. 47.
105 Ibid., p. 47.
106 Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, op. cit., p. 21.
107 This was W. B. Yeats' off the cuff remark. Cf. Dasgupta, *Rabindranath Tagore and William Butler Yeats: The Story of a Literary Friendship*, op. cit.

3 On nations and empires: Tagore's debates with M. K. Gandhi

1 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Rabindra Rachanabli': quoted in Kalyan Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 13.
2 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Spirit of Indian Religion' (1923): from Nityapriya Ghosh (ed.) *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume 4* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007), p. 281.
3 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (London: Macmillan, 1918), p. 242.
4 The instances of this are simply too numerous to cite, but consider the following quote, which even when attempting to praise Tagore misrepresents his position. In an article on Hans Cohn's liberal nationalism, Ken Wolf claims that 'Cohn praised Tagore's nationalism as one "of freedom and not of domination", built on service to justice and truth'. This displays all the typical characteristics of an inattentive reading of Tagore's work which must be recognised as either patently incorrect or emptying the term 'nationalism' of any of its analytical value. Ken Wolf, 'Hans Kohn's Liberal Nationalism: The Historian as Prophet', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 37/4 (1976), p. 662.
5 Prasanta Mahalanobis to E. J. Thompson, December 1921: quoted in E. P. Thompson's Introduction to Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Papermac, 1991), p. 12.
6 Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poet*, op. cit., p. 23.
7 Ibid., p. 22.
8 For the former label see Harish Trivedi, 'Nationalism, Internationalism and Imperialism: Tagore on England and the West', in G. R. Taneja and Vinod Sena (eds), *Literature East and West: Essays Presented to R. K. Dasgupta* (New Delhi: Allied, 1995), p. 172. The latter is used in Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (London: Zed Books, 1993), pp. 99–100.
9 Cf. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, 'Tagore and the Nobel Prize', *Illustrated Weekly*, 11 March 1973, p. 1029, and Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 161.
10 E. P. Thompson, 'Introduction': Tagore, *Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 7.
11 Ibid., p. 51.
12 Anthony D. Smith, 'Nations and Their Pasts', *Nations and Nationalism*, 2/3 (1996), p. 359.
13 Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), p. 174.
14 Tagore, *Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 51.
15 Ibid., p. 55.
16 Ibid., p. 49.
17 Ibid., p. 51.
18 Ibid., p. 51.
19 Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 50.
20 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Nation', *The Modern Review*, 22/1 (1917a), p. 1. Cf. Rabindranath Tagore, 'Creative Unity' (1922), in Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Two* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1999), p. 548.
21 Tagore, 'The Nation' (1917), op. cit., p. 1. Cf. Tagore, 'Creative Unity' (1922), op. cit., p. 548.
22 Ibid.
23 For a discussion of ethno-symbolic approaches to the nation see Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 170–198.
24 E. P. Thompson, 'Introduction': in Tagore, *Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 14.
25 Tagore, 'The Nation' (1917), op. cit., pp. 1–2. Cf. Tagore, 'Creative Unity' (1922), op. cit., p. 550.

26 To reiterate, the relevance of Tagore's formulation to the debate between Gellner and Smith is pertinent. Gellner accepted that the modern nation had its roots in pre-modern ethnies, but tried to stress the qualitatively different nature of the modern nation which distinguished it from its antecedents. Tagore – for very different purposes – is making exactly the same point in his distinction between 'nation' and 'people'.
27 Tagore, 'The Nation' (1917), op. cit., p. 2.
28 Ibid., p. 2.
29 Ibid., p. 2.
30 Ibid., pp. 2–3.
31 Ibid., p. 3. Cf. Tagore, 'Creative Unity' (1922), pp. 550–551.
32 Tagore, 'The Nation' (1917), op. cit., p. 3. Cf. Tagore, 'Creative Unity' (1922), op. cit., p. 551.
33 Tagore, 'The Nation', op. cit., p. 3.
34 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2nd edn; London: Verso, 1991), p. 10.
35 David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
36 Tagore, 'The Nation', op. cit., p. 3, my emphasis. Cf. Tagore, 'Creative Unity' (1922), op. cit., p. 548.
37 Andrew Vincent, *Nationalism and Particularity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univesity Press, 2002), p. 26.
38 Ibid., p. 27.
39 Tagore, 'The Nation' (1917), op. cit., p. 1. Cf. Tagore, 'Creative Unity' (1922), op. cit., pp. 548–549.
40 Tagore, 'The Nation', op. cit., p. 1.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Tagore, *Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 48.
44 *Vaishnavism* is a school of Hinduism in which followers worship Vishnu (the second of the Hindu Trimurti of Brahma (creator), Vishnu (preserver) and Shiva (destroyer)). Popular worship is generally through Vishnu's avatars, namely Rama and Krishna. In the contemporary world it is now most closely associated with the Hare Krishna movement and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON).
45 Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 9.
46 As discussed in Chapter 2, Tagore's Infinite Personality is derived from the *Advaita Vedanta* notion of 'non-duality'.
47 Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 9.
48 Ibid., p. 10.
49 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Religion of Man' (1931): from Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), p. 128.
50 C. F. Andrews, 'Thoughts from Rabindranath Tagore' (1929): from Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), pp. 27–82.
51 Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 10 March 1918: C. F. Andrews, 'Letters to a Friend' (1928): from Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), p. 254.
52 Mair Pitt, *The Maya-Yogi and the Mask: A Study of Rabindranath Tagore and W. B. Yeats* (Salzburg: University of Salzburg, 1997). Cf. R. D. Bhattacharya, 'Personal Man and Personal God: The Tagorean Conception Revisited', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 15/4 (1975), pp. 425–438.
53 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Arogyo: Poem 33', *Rabindra Rachanabli, Vol. 3*: translated and quoted in Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 11.
54 Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 10 March 1918: from Andrews, 'Letters to a Friend', op. cit., p. 254.

55 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Religion of Man', (1931), op. cit., p. 57.
56 Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 11.
57 Ibid.
58 Rabindranath Tagore in conversation with his young follower, Maitreyi Devi: from Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 12.
59 C. F. Andrews, 'Thoughts from Rabindranath Tagore' (1929), op. cit., p. 76.
60 Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., pp. 13–14.
61 Tagore, 'The Religion of Man' (1931), op. cit., p. 53.
62 Ibid., p. 164.
63 In Robert J. C. Young's 498-page *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), there is an extensive chapter on 'Gandhi's Counter-modernity', which makes no mention of Tagore save for a passing reference to Tagore's relationship with Yeats.
64 Rabindranath Tagore to M. K. Gandhi, 12 April 1919: from Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 216.
65 Rabindranath Tagore to M. K. Gandhi, 12 April 1919: from Dutta and Robinson, *Selected Letters*, op. cit., p. 216.
66 Ibid., p. 218.
67 These are the official statistics. Unofficial estimates range considerably higher.
68 'Report of the Committee [Hunter Committee] Appointed by the Government of India to Investigate the Disturbances in the Punjab, etc.', Parliamentary Papers, Cmd. 681, London, HMSO, 1920: quoted in Purnima Bose and Laura Lyons, 'Dyer Consequences: The Trope of Amritsar, Ireland, and the Lessons of the "Minimum" Force Debate', *boundary 2*, 26/2 (1999), p. 203.
69 M. K. Gandhi, speech at Trichinopoly, 25 March 1919: quoted in Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, op. cit., p. 104.
70 Tagore to M. K. Gandhi, 12 April 1919: from Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters*, op. cit., p. 216.
71 M. K. Gandhi, speech at Ahmedabad, 14 April 1919: quoted in Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, op. cit., p. 105.
72 M. K. Gandhi to Swami Shraddhanand, 17 April 1919: quoted in Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, op. cit., p. 105.
73 Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 2 March 1921: from Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poet*, op. cit., p. 55.
74 Ibid.
75 Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 5 March 1921: from Dutta and Robinson (eds.), *Selected Letters*, op. cit., p. 260.
76 Ibid.
77 Mohandas K. Gandhi, 'The Poet's Anxiety': from Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poet*, op. cit., p. 66.
78 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Call of Truth' (1921), in Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), op. cit., pp. 412–425.
79 M. K. Gandhi, 'The Great Sentinel' (1921): from Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poet*, op. cit., pp. 88–89.
80 Ibid., p. 91.
81 See Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse* (rev. edn; New Delhi: Sage, 1999), pp. 120–154.
82 Tagore, 'The Call of Truth' (1921), op. cit., p. 422.
83 Ibid., p. 421. A conversation between the two men on the same subject, which took place in Shantiniketan in September 1921, is reported to have ended in the following light-hearted fashion: 'Well', said Gandhi, 'I can see my request for your help is almost hopeless. If you can do nothing else for me, at least you can put these Bengali *bhadralok*

to shame by getting them to do something practical. Gurudev, you can spin. Why not get all your students to sit down around you and spin?'. They laugh, as Tagore replies: 'Poems I can spin, Gandhiji, songs and plays I can spin, but of your precious cotton what a mess I would make!' The conversation is reported to have taken place between Tagore and Gandhi, with only C. F. Andrews present, in Shantiniketan, early September 1921. An account of the conversation was given by Tagore to Leonard Elmhirst, the agricultural reformer and friend of Tagore, and published in Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., pp. 239–240.

84 Tagore, 'The Call of Truth' (1921), op. cit., p. 421.
85 Ibid., p. 421.
86 See Tapan Raychaudhuri, 'Gandhi and Tagore: Where the Twain Met', *Perceptions, Emotions and Sensibilities: Essays on India's Colonial and Postcolonial Experiences* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 141–151.
87 Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 5 March 1921: from Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters*, op. cit., p. 259.
88 Ibid., pp. 259–260.
89 Ibid., p. 260. *Himsa* (harm, violence) is often translated as the opposite of *a-himsa* (non-harm, non-violence). However, unlike Western theories of negative liberty as in, for example, Hobbes, 'non-harm' or 'non-violence' was not understood by Gandhi or Tagore to mean freedom from harm or interference. *Ahimsa* is better understood as active compassion or love towards fellow human beings.
90 Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 5 March 1921: from Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters*, op. cit., p. 261.
91 Gandhi, 'The Poet's Anxiety' (1921), op. cit., p. 67.
92 Mohandas K. Gandhi, 'The Great Sentinel' (1921): from Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poet*, op. cit., p. 89.
93 Even if his 'poetic licence' gave an excuse for others to dismiss his opinions, it also brought a degree of freedom which those engaged in the pragmatics of everyday politics didn't enjoy.
94 The dangers of doing so are best encapsulated by George Lukács' comical article 'Tagore's Gandhi Novel', in which he claims that the freedom fighter Sandip in *The Home and the World* is supposed to be Gandhi, and that the novel amounts to nothing more than 'a pamphlet – and one resorting to the lowest tools of libel'. George Lukács, 'Tagore's Gandhi Novel', *Essays and Reviews* (London: Merlin Press, 1983).
95 Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Harijan*, 28 September 1934: from Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: Volume 6 – the Voice of Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1968), p. 475.
96 Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 24 November 1927: from Gandhi, *Collected Works*, op. cit., p. 479.
97 Ibid., p. 479.
98 Mohandas K. Gandhi, 'Caste vs. Class': from Om Prakash (ed.), *Encyclopaedic History of Indian Freedom Movement* (New Delhi: Anmol, 2001), p. 95.
99 Mohandas K. Gandhi, *My Varnashrama Dharma* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), p. 57.
100 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Shudra Habit' (1927), *The Modern Review*, 41/3 (1927), p. 274.
101 Ibid., p. 274.
102 Ibid., p. 274.
103 Ibid., p. 274.
104 Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 98.
105 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My Interpretation of India's History: II', *The Modern Review*, 14/3 (1913a), p. 233.

106 Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 7 July 1915: C. F. Andrews Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.
107 Interestingly, the letter is left out of Dutta and Robinson's *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, possibly on the grounds that the editors did not want to replicate the material included in Andrews' *Letters to a Friend*. However, as I have already pointed out, Andrews is not a reliable historical source.
108 Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 7 July 1915: C. F. Andrews Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.
109 Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poet*, op. cit., p. 63.
110 Tagore, *Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 50. See also Tagore, *Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 51, 'we, who are no nation ourselves'.
111 Published in two sections in consecutive issues, it had originally been written in Bengali in 1912.
112 Rabindranath Tagore, *Creative Unity* (London: Macmillan, 1922a). Subsequent references are to Tagore, 'Creative Unity' (1922): from Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Two* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1922), pp. 493–569.
113 Tagore, 'Creative Unity' (1922), p. 532.
114 There is confusion in terms of Tagore's presentation of his own ideas, especially in essays in *The Modern Review*. Often the translator uses 'nation' when the sense that Tagore intends is 'people'. This complicates things when Tagore explicitly positions himself against the idea of nation as 'nation state' and the associated ideology of nationalism, but then uses phrases such as 'national life', or refers to 'the nation's' quality or power or history. I will attempt to make Tagore's intended usage clear where necessary.
115 Tagore, 'My Interpretation of India's History: II' (1913), p. 232.
116 Ibid., p. 233.
117 Ibid., p. 233, italicisation, capitalisation and ellipsis all original.
118 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My Interpretation of India's History: I', *The Modern Review*, 14/2 (1913b), p. 117.
119 Ibid., p. 117.
120 Ibid., p. 117.
121 Tagore, 'My Interpretation of India's History: II' (1913), op. cit., p. 233.
122 Ibid., p. 233.
123 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Kalantar', Rabindra Rachanabli: translated and quoted in Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 39.
124 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Swadeshi Samaj': translated and quoted in Sen Gupta, op. cit., p. 40.
125 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Kalantar', Rabindra Rachanabli: translated and quoted in Sen Gupta, op. cit., p. 39.
126 Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 13 March 1921: from Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poet*, op. cit., p. 61, my emphasis.
127 Tagore, *Nationalism*, p. 51.
128 This claim is made in Trivedi, 'Nationalism, Internationalism and Imperialism: Tagore on England and the West', op. cit., p. 173.
129 Perhaps the most prescient was J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (revised edn.; London: Archibald Constable & Co., 1905), which heavily influenced Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1948). For a more recent synopsis see E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875–1914* (London: Abacus, 1995), Chapter 13 ('From Peace to War'). For a decidedly non-Marxist interpretation see J. A. Cramb, *The Origins and Destiny of Imperial Britain and Nineteenth-Century Europe* (London: E. P. Dutton, 1915), p. 95: 'The Civic, the feudal, or the oligarchic State passes into the National, the National into the Imperial'.

130 Tagore, 'Creative Unity' (1922), op. cit., pp. 538–543.
131 Tagore, *Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 49.
132 Rabindranath Tagore, *Towards Universal Man* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1961), p. 162.
133 Ibid., p. 162.
134 'We must first of all remind ourselves that wherever there is some good, there must be spiritual strength behind it . . . if we see any progress in Europe, behind it indubitably is the power of the spirit; it cannot be the creation of dead matter.' Ibid., p. 161.
135 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Crisis in Civilisation' (1941), in Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), p. 714.
136 Trivedi, 'Nationalism, Internationalism and Imperialism: Tagore on England and the West', op. cit., p. 172.
137 William Radice, 'Review of Manjula Bose (ed.) *L.K Elmhirst, 1893–1993* and R. K. Dasgupta, *Our National Anthem*', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 60/1 (1997), p. 164.
138 Sisir Kumar Das includes a revised version of this essay, re-written by Tagore following comments from Dwijendranath Tagore. Rabindranath Tagore, 'A Vision of India's History' (1923), in Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), pp. 439–458. The earlier version is more useful, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, for understanding Tagore's reason for embarking on his mission to the West.
139 Parts of this essay are included in *Creative Unity* (1922), but in a truncated and sanitised form.
140 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Small and the Great', *The Modern Review*, 22/6 (1917b), p. 597.
141 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Thou Shalt Obey', *The Modern Review*, 22/3 (1917c), p. 339.
142 Ibid., p. 338.
143 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan wrote in 1918 that 'Empire in the sense of the Federation of the free, is the ideal of Britain, and it has a hearty approval and sympathy of Rabindranath Tagore, as of all right-thinking men'. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (London: Macmillan, 1918), pp. 268–269. The author published the book with Macmillan and noted in the Preface (p. vii) that 'the poet has been pleased to express his appreciation of this interpretation of his philosophy'.
144 Tagore, 'Thou Shalt Obey' (1917), op. cit., p. 332.
145 Ibid., p. 337.
146 Ibid., p. 337. Earlier, Tagore had written: 'we are responsible for the failure of the English to fully unfold in India whatever is best in their race . . . we must gain strength of every kind; then only can the English give us that which they have come here to impart. So long as they despise us, our union with them is impossible, and we must again and again return empty-handed from their doors.' 'If we say that India has stimulated to an extreme the Englishman's cupidity, haughtiness, cowardice or cruelty, then it will not do to cast the blame for it on the English, we must bear the major portion of the offence.' Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Future of India', *The Modern Review*, 9/3 (1911), p. 243.
147 Tagore, 'The Future of India' (1911), op. cit., p. 239.
148 Ibid., p. 239.
149 Tagore, 'My Interpretation of India's History: II' (1913), op. cit., p. 236.
150 Tagore, 'The Call of Truth' (1921), op. cit., p. 413.
151 Ibid., pp. 413–414.
152 Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 7 September 1920: from Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters*, op. cit., p. 237.
153 Ibid., p. 237.
154 Tagore, 'The Call of Truth' (1921), op. cit., p. 418.

155 Ibid., p. 416.
156 Ashis Nandy, 'The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self', *Bonfire of Creeds: The Essential Ashis Nandy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 451–452.
157 In this sense – though I am not suggesting any kind of 'influence' – Tagore's position has a great deal of affinity with the Christian idea that man's salvation has already occurred through the sacrifice of Christ. All that is required is for it to be recognised as the truth.
158 Tagore, 'The Future of India' (1911), op. cit., p. 240.
159 Ibid., p. 240.
160 Ibid.
161 Ibid.
162 Ibid., pp. 240–241.
163 Tagore, 'My Interpretation of India's History: II' (1913), op. cit., p. 236. This sense of history as progressive realisation was entirely missed by many of Tagore's Western interlocutors, notably Yeats, who – quite wrongly – saw Tagore as a representative of a static, unchanging Eastern world and as a thinker who evidenced the stereotypical West–East, active/passive dichotomies. In Chapter 4, I discuss at length just how false – and indeed ironic – this perception was.
164 Tagore, 'The Future of India' (1911), op. cit., p. 239. This idea would recur again and again: e.g., in 1923, Tagore claimed that 'it is the function of India owing to her experience of this racial problem within her own area, to begin this wider work of racial reconciliation throughout the world'. See Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Race Problem and India' (1923): from Nityapriya Ghosh (ed.) *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume 4* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007), p. 289.
165 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Cult of Nationalism': quoted in Literatus, 'Rabindranath Tagore in America', *Modern Review*, 21/6 (1917), p. 666.
166 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Individuality' (1923): from Nityapriya Ghosh (ed.) *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume 4* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007), p. 277.
167 Radha Chakravarty, 'Introduction' to Rabindranath Tagore, *Gora* (1910), trans. Radha Chakravarty (New Delhi: Penguin, 2009), p. ix.
168 Rustom Bharucha, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okukura Tenshin* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 64.
169 Ibid.
170 Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 2 March 1921: from Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poet*, op. cit., p. 55. With regard to Tagore's 'universal message' and bearing in mind the origins of Tagore's thought discussed in Chapter 2, Tapati Dasgupta turns back to Tagore's *Brahmo* inheritance and specifically to Keshub: 'how deeply Keshub Chandra Sen's ideas influenced Rabindranath's thinking is difficult to say, but the virtual identity of their idea that Asia had a message for the West could scarcely be a coincidence'. Tapati Dasgupta, *Social Thought of Rabindranath Tagore: A Historical Analysis* (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1993), p. 8.
171 Rabindranath Tagore, speech to a Calcutta audience, 1917: translated and quoted in Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man*, p. 9.
172 'The greatest danger is when Europe deludes herself into thinking that she is helping the cause of humanity by helping herself, that men are essentially different, and that what is good for her people is not good for others who are inferior. Thus Europe is gradually and imperceptibly losing faith in her ideals and weakening her own supports.' Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 11 July 1915: Andrews Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana. As Stephen Howe has put it, the idea of 'a fundamental incompatibility between the spirit of liberty at home and dictatorial rule in the colonies, and that only by dismantling the Empire could the British return to their own better traditions and values, was common to anti-colonialist thinkers from Gandhi to C. L. R James or George Padmore . . . imperialism, on this view, was not merely a symptom of British

liberalism's and later socialism's alleged domestic shortcomings, but was their main course.' Stephen Howe, 'Internal Decolonization? British Politics since Thatcher as Post-Colonial Trauma', *Twentieth Century British History*, 14/3 (2003), pp. 287–288.

173 Cf. Partha Mitter, 'Decentring Modernism', *The Art Bulletin*, 90/4, December 2008, pp. 531–548.

4 Cross-purposes: Tagore, W.B. Yeats and 'Irish Orientalism'

1 Ramananda Chatterjee (ed.), *The Golden Book of Tagore* (Calcutta: Golden Book Committee, 1931), p. 269.
2 Allan Wade (ed.), *The Letters of W. B. Yeats* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), pp. 834–835.
3 R. K. Dasgupta, *Rabindranath Tagore and William Butler Yeats: The Story of a Literary Friendship* (Delhi: University of Delhi, 1965), p. 22.
4 Louise Blakeney Williams, 'Overcoming the Contagion of Mimicry: The Cosmopolitan Nationalism and Modernist History of Rabindranath Tagore and W. B. Yeats', *The American Historical Review*, 112/1 (2007), p. 69.
5 Ganesh N. Devy, 'The Indian Yeats', in Toshi Furomoto *et al*. (eds), *International Aspects of Irish Literature* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1996), p. 99.
6 A 1913 'referendum' on the 'three greatest living English poets in order of excellence' held by the *Journal of Education* placed Yeats 10th, with Rudyard Kipling in 1st place. See press cutting in E. J. Thompson Papers, Bodleian, MS Eng. c. 5279, folio 56.
7 For example see Hirendranath Datta, 'Tagore and Yeats', *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, XVII/1 (May–July 1951), pp. 29–34.
8 W. B. Yeats, 'Introduction: Gitanjali' (1912): from Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume I* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994), p. 38.
9 Ibid., p. 38.
10 Lago, 'The Parting of the Ways: A Comparative Study of Yeats and Tagore', op. cit., p. 5.
11 This lamentable tendency – of which Tagore himself would have thoroughly disapproved – is to be found in some Bengali commentaries, which are happy to equate passing flattery on Yeats' part as confirmation Tagore's greatness. For example see Datta, 'Tagore and Yeats', op. cit., and Kripalani, *Tagore: A Life* (Delhi: National Book Trust, 1986).
12 Academic explorations of the Yeats–Tagore relationship include Datta, 'Tagore and Yeats', op. cit.; Lago, 'The Parting of the Ways: A Comparative Study of Yeats and Tagore'; Harold M. Hurwitz, 'Yeats and Tagore', *Comparative Literature*, 16/1 (1964), pp. 55–64; Dasgupta, *Rabindranath Tagore and William Butler Yeats*, op. cit.; Pitt, *The Maya-Yogi and the Mask: A Study of Rabindranath Tagore and W. B. Yeats*; Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890–1920: Resistance in Interaction*, Chapter 5; Joseph Lennon, 'Writing across Empire: W. B. Yeats and Rabindranath Tagore', in Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit (eds), *Rabindranath Tagore: Universality and Tradition* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), pp. 213–29; Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), Chapter 6; Edward Marx, *The Idea of a Colony: Cross-Culturalism in Modern Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), Chapter 5; and Williams, 'Overcoming the Contagion of Mimicry', op. cit.
13 Tagore's father would feature prominently as the 'King of the Dark Chamber' in the novel of that title, published in English translation in 1914. See Rabindranath Tagore, *My Reminiscences* (London: Macmillan, 1917), p. 102.
14 Pitt, *The Maya-Yogi and the Mask*, op. cit., p. x.
15 I refer specifically here to English life, leaving aside the obvious fact that many of the chief offenders in Yeats' eyes were Scottish.

16 Mohini Chatterjee was an influential and charismatic theosophist in Dublin in the 1880s. Shri Purohit Swami was a Hindu ascetic who collaborated with Yeats on translations of Hindi texts in the 1930s.
17 Pitt, *The Maya-Yogi and the Mask: A Study of Rabindranath Tagore and W. B. Yeats*, pp. 45–49.
18 Louise Blakeney Williams – in her 'Overcoming the Contagion of Mimicry', op. cit. – is particularly keen to stress the common nature of their cosmopolitanism. Her points in this respect are well made and very thought-provoking, but in general the article suffers from over-emphasising the similarities between the two men and underplaying their conflicting perspectives.
19 Dasgupta, *Rabindranath Tagore and William Butler Yeats: The Story of a Literary Friendship*, p. 26.
20 Datta, 'Tagore and Yeats', p. 29. Cf. Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal*.
21 Cf. Williams, 'Overcoming the Contagion of Mimicry', op. cit.
22 See entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
23 Revised statement of the general objects of the Theosophical Society, 1885. For further discussion of the evolution of the objects see Grace F. Knoche, 'Our Directives: A Study of the Evolution of the "Objects of the T. S." from 1875 to 1891', *The Theosophical Forum*, October 1947, pp. 582–587.
24 Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).
25 Olaf Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 62.
26 Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 11.
27 Inden, *Imagining India*, op. cit.
28 Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (London: University of California Press, 2005), p. 20.
29 Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, op. cit., p. 121. Hammer notes the similarities between Anthony Giddens' idea of identity formation in late modernity as a series of self-critical and reflexive choices and the Theosophical interest in the development of the self as an 'incomplete project'.
30 Frank Tuohy, *Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 33–34. As P. S. Sri points out, though Yeats was attracted to Theosophy, 'he was troubled by the fact that this accumulated wisdom of the centuries had been revealed to the world in New York through the flamboyant and autocratic personality of Madame Blavatsky'. P. S. Sri, 'Yeats and Mohini Chatterjee', in Warwick Gould (ed.), *Yeats Annual No. 11* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 73. Sri adds in parentheses that Yeats still admired her. Cf. R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, Volume I – the Apprentice Mage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 62.
31 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 266.
32 Ibid., p. 275. Stephen Howe rightly suggests that Said's attempt to fit Yeats within this framework was 'more than a little procrustean'. Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 134
33 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 288.
34 Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*, p. 135.
35 W. B. Yeats, 'Four Lectures, Edited by Richard Londraiville', in Warwick Gould (ed.), *Yeats Annual No. 8* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1902–04), p. 86.
36 Selina Guinness, ' "Protestant Magic" Reappraised: Evangelicalism, Dissent, and Theosophy', *Irish University Review*, 33/1 (2003), pp. 14–27, and Susan Johnston

Graf, 'Heterodox Religions in Ireland: Theosophy, the Hermetic Society, and the Castle of Heroes', *Irish Studies Review*, 11/1 (2003), pp. 51–59.

37 Lennon, 'Writing across Empire: W. B. Yeats and Rabindranath Tagore', p. 217.

38 John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939* (London: Faber, 1992).

39 Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. viii.

40 Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1880–1980* (London: Faber, 1985), Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. Cf. Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*, p. 115.

41 Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, Volume I – The Apprentice Mage*, p. 64.

42 W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 148: quoted in Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, Volume I*, op. cit., p. 64.

43 Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939*. p. 71.

44 D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (Arc Manor LLC: Rockville MD, 2008), p. 66. Cf. Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, op. cit., p. 15.

45 W. B. Yeats, *On the Boiler* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1939): quoted in Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, op. cit., pp. 14–15.

46 Lago, 'The Parting of the Ways: A Comparative Study of Yeats and Tagore', op. cit., p. 9.

47 Ibid., p. 6.

48 Ibid., p. 8.

49 When referring specifically to Yeats, I use the term 'Anglo-Irish', following the convention of Roy Foster.

50 Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, Volume I*, op. cit., p. 45. Anyone who is even vaguely acquainted with the exam and qualification of assessed culture of India would find this statement deeply ironic.

51 Sri, 'Yeats and Mohini Chatterjee', op. cit., pp. 61–62.

52 Yeats, *Autobiographies*, op. cit., p. 92: quoted in Sri, 'Yeats and Mohini Chatterjee', op. cit., p. 62. Cf. Terence Brown, *The Life of W. B. Yeats* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 34.

53 Sri, 'Yeats and Mohini Chatterjee', op. cit., p. 62.

54 *The Speaker*, 14 April 1900: quoted in Sri, op. cit., p. 62.

55 W. B. Yeats, *Memoirs*, ed. Denis Donoghue (London: Papermac, 1988), p. 27.

56 Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, Volume I*, op. cit., p. 50. Cf. Lago, 'The Parting of the Ways: A Comparative Study of Yeats and Tagore', op. cit., p. 6.

57 Abinash Chandra Bose was a young Bengali scholar working on aspects of mysticism in the East and West and was in Dublin at the time for research purposes. His fascinating account of his meeting with Yeats is recorded at some length in Dasgupta, *Rabindranath Tagore and William Butler Yeats: The Story of a Literary Friendship*, pp. 18–24. Extracts of the conversation are also to be found in Joseph M. Hone, *W. B. Yeats, 1865–1939* (London: Macmillan, 1942), pp. 458–459.

58 Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England*, op. cit.

59 Sri, 'Yeats and Mohini Chatterjee', p. 65.

60 Bhattacharya, 'Personal Man and Personal God: The Tagorean Conception Revisited'.

61 Sri, 'Yeats and Mohini Chatterjee', op. cit., p. 65. In Chapter 1, I argued that Tagore's more idiosyncratic interpretation posited that the world of *maya* is linked to a Personal God, and to His as-yet-incomplete work in the world, hence the centrality of creativity to God and Man.

62 'The Pathway': W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works in Verse and Prose: Volume VIII* (Stratford-on-Avon: Shakespeare Head Press, 1908), p. 195.

63 W. B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1958), p. 172. The same lines are quoted, and the same reference made to Mohini Chatterjee, in Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, Volume I*, op. cit., p. 85. Cf. Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History*, op. cit., pp. 255–262.

64 Sri, 'Yeats and Mohini Chatterjee', op. cit., p. 66.
65 'The Pathway': Yeats, *The Collected Works in Verse and Prose*, op. cit., p. 196.
66 Sri, 'Yeats and Mohini Chatterjee', op. cit., p. 67.
67 Ibid., p. 67.
68 Letter to Katharine Tynan: from Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, Volume I*, op. cit., p. 70.
69 George Russell, *Letters from Æ*, ed. Alan Denson (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1961), pp. 17–18.
70 Yeats, *Memoirs*, op. cit., pp. 123–124.
71 Cf. Amartya Sen, 'Rabindranath Tagore', *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), p. 46.
72 Rabindranath Tagore, 'W. B. Yeats': from Dasgupta, *Rabindranath Tagore and William Butler Yeats*, op. cit., p. 4.
73 Ibid,. p. 4.
74 Williams, 'Overcoming the Contagion of Mimicry', op cit.
75 'Society and State': from Rabindranath Tagore, *Towards Universal Man* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1961), p. 63.
76 Yeats, 'Four Lectures, Edited by Richard Londraiville', op. cit., p. 86.
77 Yeats, 'Introduction: Gitanjali' (1912), op. cit., p. 40.
78 Lago, 'The Parting of the Ways: A Comparative Study of Yeats and Tagore', op. cit., p. 6.
79 Ibid., p. 41.
80 W. B. Yeats to Tagore, 24 April 1917: W. B. Yeats Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.
81 Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*, op. cit., p. 66.
82 W. B. Yeats to William Rothenstein, (probably) 7 May 1935: from Wade (ed.), *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, pp. 834–835.
83 W. B. Yeats, 'Nationality and Literature', a lecture given to the National Literary Society, Dublin in 1893: from John P. Frayne (ed.) *Uncollected Prose of W. B. Yeats: Volume I* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 274.
84 Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*, op. cit., p. 119.
85 W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1994), p. 176.
86 W. B. Yeats, *A Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 6.
87 As T. S. Eliot wrote in a letter to E. M. Forster, 'the war crippled me as it did everyone else'. But the malaise ran far deeper, evidenced by Eliot adding that 'The Waste Land might have been just the same without the war'. T. S. Eliot to E. M. Forster, 10 August 1929: Forster Papers, King's College Cambridge.
88 Yeats, 'Introduction: Gitanjali', op. cit., p. 41.
89 There appear to be two versions of this conversation recorded. The first, offering only short extracts, is recorded in Hone, *W. B. Yeats, 1865–1939*, op. cit. The above quote is from p. 458. The second extended account is to be found in Abinash Chandra Bose, 'My Interview with W. B. Yeats', in R. K. Dasgupta (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore and William Butler Yeats*, op. cit., pp. 18–24. Clearly, as an historical source, this cannot be seen as a completely trustworthy account of what Yeats said. However, given that the discussion was conducted in the presence of Dr Trench and, as far as I am aware, its general accuracy has not been challenged, I am awarding it a degree of seriousness.
90 Hone, *W. B. Yeats, 1865–1939*, op. cit., p. 459.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid., p. 459.
94 Ibid., p. 459. The sword reference is presumably to Junzo Sato – a Japanese diplomat and admirer of Yeats – who, when Yeats met him in Portland, Oregon, whilst on a lecture tour in 1920, had presented him with a 500-year-old Samurai sword.
95 Lago, 'The Parting of the Ways: A Comparative Study of Yeats and Tagore', op. cit., p. 33.

96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
98 Pitt, *The Maya-Yogi and the Mask*, op. cit., p. 50.
99 Ibid., p. 54.
100 Rabindranath Tagore, *Collected Poems and Plays of Rabindranath Tagore* (London: Macmillan, 1936), p. 33.
101 Lago, 'The Parting of the Ways: A Comparative Study of Yeats and Tagore', op. cit., p. 33.
102 Dasgupta, *Rabindranath Tagore and William Butler Yeats*, op. cit., p. 30.
103 Ibid., p. 31.
104 F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1942), p. 41.
105 Dasgupta, *Rabindranath Tagore and William Butler Yeats: The Story of a Literary Friendship*, op. cit., p. 29.
106 Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890–1920*, op. cit., p. 174.
107 Ibid., pp. 170–171.
108 Ibid., pp. 198–199.
109 Referring to recent works by Tagore that had impressed him, c. 1920, Yeats mentioned only *My Reminiscences* and *The Home and the World*. See Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 225.
110 Bose, 'My Interview with W. B. Yeats', in Dasgupta, *Rabindranath Tagore and William Butler Yeats*, op. cit., p. 32.
111 Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890–1920*, op. cit., p. 194.
112 Lago, 'The Parting of the Ways: A Comparative Study of Yeats and Tagore', op. cit., p. 24. Yet in *Gitanjali* we find Tagore very much in the present: 'Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.' See Rabindranath Tagore, 'Gitanjali' (1912), in Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume One: Poems* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994), p. 68.
113 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004).
114 Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p. xxviii.
115 I find it difficult, even, to wholly endorse Joseph Lennon's claim that 'Yeats was not merely interested in Tagore; he was deeply affected by Tagore's visions and persona'. See Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, op. cit., p. 267.
116 Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*, op. cit., p. 58.
117 Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, op. cit., p. 75.
118 W. B. Yeats to Lady Gregory, 10 April 1916: from Wade (ed.), *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, op. cit., pp. 611–612.
119 W. B. Yeats to Tagore, 7 September. Tagore's reply, 4 October: W. B. Yeats correspondence files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.
120 Tagore to W. B. Yeats, 16 July 1935: W. B. Yeats Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.
121 'However impeccably the content of an "other" culture may be known, however anti-ethnocentrically it is represented, it is its *location* as the closure of grand theories, the demand that, in analytic terms, it be always the good object of knowledge, the docile body of difference, that reproduces the relation of domination.' See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, op. cit., p. 46.
122 Ibid.

5 Acts of atonement: Tagore, C. F. Andrews and E. J. Thompson

1 D. H. Lawrence to Lady Otteline Morrell, 24 May 1916: from James T. Boulton and George J. Zytaruk (eds), *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence: Volume II, 1913–1916* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 608, emphasis original. Cf. Krishna

Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 199.

2 Tagore to Ezra Pound, 5 January 1913: from Krishan Dutta and Andrew Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 103.

3 Pound claims this was only at Tagore's instigation: 'God knows I didn't ask for the job of correcting Tagore'. See D. D. Paige, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907–1941* (London: Faber, 1982), p. 19.

4 W. B. Yeats to Rabindranath Tagore, 9 January 1913: from *Visva Bharati Quarterly*, 30/3, p. 163.

5 Tagore to W. B. Yeats, 26 January 1913: from Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters*, op. cit., p. 105.

6 Ezra Pound to Dorothy Shakespear, 4 October 1912: from A. Walton Litz and Omar S. Pound, *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear: Their Letters, 1910–1914* (London: Faber, 1985), p. 163. Cf. Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters*, op. cit., p. 102.

7 Ezra Pound, 'Rabindranath Tagore', *The Fortnightly Review*, 99/March 1913, from which I quoted at various points in Chapter 2.

8 Ezra Pound to Harriet Monroe, 22 April 1913: from Paige, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, op. cit., p. 19. Strangely, this is frequently misquoted as 'mere Theosophy': the subtle change in emphasis is of some importance.

9 Ezra Pound to Harriet Monroe, 22 April 1913: from Paige, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, op. cit., p. 19.

10 The idea of a republic of letters was, of course, an attempt to create a social space in which Diogenes' 'citizen of the world' could actually reside, when in fact a citizen of the world can equally be deemed a citizen of no place at all. Diogenes Laertius is thought to have coined the word 'cosmopolitan', answering, when asked where he came from, that he was a 'citizen of the world'.

11 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 1980), p. 165.

12 Ibid.

13 Benita Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries: Studies on India in the British Imagination* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 153.

14 Hugh Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love: C. F. Andrews and India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 12.

15 Andrews was invited by H. W. Nevinson, a friend of Rothenstein's whom Andrews met at the Congress of Universities of the British Empire. See Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love*, op. cit., p. 56. Tinker gives the date of the reading as 30 June. It was actually 7 July. Cf. Rathindranath Tagore, *On the Edges of Time* (Calcutta: Visva Bharati, 1958), pp. 101–103.

16 C. F. Andrews, 'An Evening with Rabindra', *The Modern Review*, 11/2 (1912), p. 228.

17 W. B. Yeats to Edmund Gosse, 25 November 1912: W. B. Yeats Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana. Cf. Allan Wade (ed.), *The Letters of W. B. Yeats* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), pp. 572–573.

18 Rabindranath Tagore to Edward Thompson, 18 February 1914: Ms. Eng. c.5318, folio 30, Thompson Papers, Bodleian. Cf. E. P. Thompson, *Alien Homage: Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 17, and Uma Das Gupta (ed.), *A Difficult Friendship: Letters of Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore, 1913–1940* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 76.

19 Cf. Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters*, op. cit., p. 155.

20 C. F. Andrews to Tagore, 3 November 1914: from Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love*, op. cit., p. 98.

21 Ibid., p. 98.

22 C. F. Andrews to Tagore, 6 October 1912: Correspondence Files (English), Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana. Incidentally, Andrews was not alone in holding this opinion: the influential art critic A. K. Coomaraswamy wrote to Dinesh Chandra Sen (a professor

of Bengali literature at the University of Calcutta) in 1912 that 'the people who really matter – those for instance who have so cordially welcomed Mr Tagore's little book published for the India Society – are quite able to appreciate a good translation of any true poet without much introduction.' A. K. Coomaraswamy to Dinesh Chandra Sen, 31 December 1912: Misc. Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.

23 C. F Andrews to Tagore, 14 January 1914: Andrews Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.
24 One of the most striking examples is the deletion of Tagore's reference to Gandhi being a 'moral tyrant', as referred to in Chapter 3.
25 William Rothenstein to E. J. Thompson, 18 May 1932: Ms. Eng. c. 5311, folio 39, Thompson Papers, Bodleian.
26 Rabindranath Tagore to W. W. Pearson, 13 December 1920: from Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 230.
27 Ibid., p. 196. This is a point entirely missed by Krishna Kripalani in his saccharine biography of Tagore, in which Andrews features as 'the saintly Englishman'. Krishna Kripalani, *Tagore: A Life* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 144.
28 *The Bookman*, December 1928, p. 119.
29 From the archival evidence, it is impossible to know whether the letter was either sent or received.
30 C. F. Andrews to Tagore, undated (and possibly unsent): Correspondence Files (typed copies), Andrews Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.
31 Ibid. The description of their meeting is in contrast to his description of the same evening in the aforementioned *Modern Review* article discussed in Chapter 2.
32 C. F. Andrews to Tagore, undated (and possibly unsent): Correspondence Files (typed copies), Andrews Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.
33 William Pearson to Tagore, 5 October 1915: Correspondence Files (English), Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.
34 Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 194–195, note 22.
35 Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).
36 Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, op. cit., p. 18.
37 C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson, *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji: An Independent Inquiry* (Allahabad: C. Y. Chintamani, 1916).
38 Hugh Tinker, 'C. F. Andrews', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).
39 Thompson, *Alien Homage*, op. cit., p. 104.
40 C. F. Andrews to Tagore, 2 March 1914: Andrews Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.
41 Ibid.
42 Mary Lago, 'Edward John Thompson', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).
43 Mary Lago, *India's Prisoner: A Biography of Edward John Thompson, 1886–1946* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), pp. 17–20.
44 Thompson, *Alien Homage*, op. cit.
45 Edward Thompson to Elizabeth Thompson, 30 October 1913: Ms. Eng. d.2670, folio 33, Thompson Papers, Bodleian. Cf. Thompson, *Alien Homage*, op. cit., p. 1. The E. P. Thompson version is truncated, a point that I pick up below.
46 Uma Das Gupta, 'Appendix A: Tagore Learns of the Nobel Prize', *Alien Homage: Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 114.
47 Tapati Dasgupta, *Social Thought of Rabindranath Tagore: A Historical Analysis* (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1993), pp. 114–115.
48 Ibid., p. 109.

49 Thompson, *Alien Homage*, op. cit., p. 30.
50 Ibid., p. 30.
51 Ibid., pp. 19–20.
52 Edward Thompson to P. C. Mahalanobis, undated (probably January 1921): from Thompson, *Alien Homage*, op. cit., p. 33.
53 Edward Thompson to Theodesia Thompson, 20 September 1920: Ms. Eng. c.5357, folio 146, Thompson Papers, Bodleian. Cf. Das Gupta, 'Appendix A: Tagore Learns of the Nobel Prize', op. cit., p. 34.
54 Edward Thompson to Theodesia Thompson, 9 November 1920: Thompson Papers, Bodleian. Cf. Thompson, *Alien Homage*, op. cit., p. 39.
55 *The New Statesman*, 14 January, 1922: from Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar, *Imagining Tagore: Rabindranath and the British Press, 1912–1941* (Calcutta: Shishu Sahitya Samsad, 2000), pp. 354–355.
56 *The Outlook*, 28 January 1922: from Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar, *Imagining Tagore*, op. cit., pp. 355–356.
57 *The Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 13 February 1922: from Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar, *Imagining Tagore*, op. cit., p. 356.
58 *The Nation and Athenaeum*, 25 February 1922: from Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar, *Imagining Tagore*, op. cit., pp. 356–357.
59 Theodesia Thompson's Notes: Ms. Eng. c.5363, folios 156–188: Thompson Papers, Bodleian. Cf. Das Gupta (ed.), *A Difficult Friendship*, op. cit., p. 25.
60 Ibid., pp. 25–26.
61 Rabindranath Tagore to Prasanta Mahalanobis, September 1921: from Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 176.
62 E. J. Thompson to William Canton, 5 October 1921: Ms. Eng. c. 5277, folio 156, Thompson Papers, Bodleian.
63 E. J. Thompson to William Canton: quoted in Harish Trivedi's 'Introduction' to Edward John Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. a12. Ramananda Chatterjee, the editor of *The Modern Review*, was equally incensed, whilst Prasanta Mahalanobis sought to play a more conciliatory role. See Das Gupta (ed.), *A Difficult Friendship*, op. cit., pp. 23–31, and Harish Trivedi in Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist*, op. cit., pp. a12–a15.
64 Rabindranath Tagore to E. J. Thompson, 17 November 1920: Ms. Eng. c.5318, folio 112, Thompson Papers, Bodleian. Cf. Das Gupta (ed.), *A Difficult Friendship*, op. cit., p. 124.
65 Tagore to Thompson, 16 April 1922: Thompson, *Alien Homage: Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 48.
66 Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World*, trans. Surendranath Tagore (London: Macmillan, 1919). Rabindranath Tagore, *Gora*, trans. W. W. Pearson and Satyendranath Tagore (London: Macmillan, 1924).
67 Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., pp. 154–155.
68 Rabindranath Tagore to W. W. Pearson, May/June 1922: W. W. Pearson Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana. This anxiety was nothing new. He had written, with similar fears, to Yeats in 1915: 'The Bengali book on the reminiscences of my early days is a difficult piece of writing to translate into English. The atmosphere and everything in this book is so foreign for an Englishman that very few readers, I am afraid, will be able to enter into its spirit.' Tagore to W. B. Yeats, 31 August 1915: from Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology* (London: Picador, 1997), p. 169.
69 W. W. Pearson to Rabindranath Tagore, 15 June 1922: W. W. Pearson Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana. For the historical record, it is worth noting that, as far as the archive suggests, Tagore sanctioned the translations, albeit without a ringing endorsement. 'The typewritten part of your translation I have read and also

some portion of your manuscript', he wrote to Pearson on 22 July 1922. 'On the whole it is alright'. See Rabindranath Tagore to W. W. Pearson, May/June 1922: W. W. Pearson Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana. By the end of 1923 it is Andrews who is charged with seeing the project through: 'I have seen Macmillan and *Gora* will be coming out in January. Mr Macmillan himself, whom I saw, has read through the proof and has been greatly impressed by the book'. C. F. Andrews to Rabindranath Tagore, 24 November 1923: Andrews Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.

70 E. J. Thompson to E. W. Thompson (no relation), 26 June 1924: from Dorothy Thompson (ed.) *The Essential E. P. Thompson* (New York: The New Press, 2001), p. 274, emphasis original.
71 Edward John Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926).
72 Ibid., p. 278. Cf. Thompson, *Alien Homage*, op. cit., p. 104.
73 Although it is highly unlikely that Tagore would have read the article, a similar 'not too late' sentiment was expressed in a *Guardian* article of 1921, which suggested that 'Mr Tagore has put on this garb for us [the mystic], because we seemed to expect it of him and to like him in it. So we must try to convince him somehow that we like him in spite of it; for perhaps it is not yet too late for him to take it off again'. *Manchester Guardian*, 7 December 1921.
74 *The Birmingham Post*, 5 November 1926: from Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar, *Imagining Tagore*, op. cit., p. 446.
75 *The Times Literary Supplement*, 18 November 1926: from Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar, *Imagining Tagore*, op. cit., p. 450.
76 *The Nation and Athenaeum*, 20 November 1926: from Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar, *Imagining Tagore*, op. cit., pp. 451–452.
77 *The Inquirer*, 6 November 1926: from Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar, *Imagining Tagore*, op. cit., p. 447.
78 *The New Statesman*, 12 February 1927: from Kundu, Bhattacharya and Sircar, *Imagining Tagore*, op. cit., p. 456.
79 Rabindranath Tagore to William Rothenstein, 20 April 1927: quoted in Thompson, *Alien Homage*, op. cit., p. 40–41. Cf. Lago, *Imperfect Encounter*, op. cit., pp. 320–321.
80 Banerji, 'The Other Side of the Raj', op. cit., p. 57.
81 Thompson, *Alien Homage*, op. cit., p. 41.
82 Ibid., p. 81.
83 Rabindranath Tagore to Rani Mahalanobis, 8 April 1927: quoted in Harish Trivedi's 'Introduction' to Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist*, op. cit., p. a19.
84 Harish Trivedi's 'Introduction' to Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist*, op. cit., p. a19.
85 E. J. Thompson to E. W. Thompson, 26 June 1924: quoted in Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries*, op. cit., p. 163.
86 Ibid.
87 Thompson, *The Other Side of the Medal*, op. cit., p. 29: quoted in Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries*, op. cit., pp. 163–164.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries*, op. cit., p. 154.
91 Ibid. Cf. Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, op. cit.
92 Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries*, op. cit., p. 176.
93 Thompson, *Alien Homage*, op. cit., p. 104.
94 Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries*, op. cit., p. 155.
95 E. J. Thompson, *The Nation and Athenaeum*, 30 July 1927: quoted in Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries*, op. cit., p. 160.

96 Edward Thompson to Elizabeth Thompson, 30 October 1913: Ms. Eng. d.2670, folio 33, Thompson Papers, Bodleian. Cf. Thompson, *Alien Homage*, op. cit., p. 1.
97 E. M. Forster, 'Commonplace Book': quoted in Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, op. cit., p. 151.
98 Thompson, *Alien Homage*, op. cit., p. 3.
99 Ibid., p. 9. The word 'moffusil' is of Arabic origin and refers to a place away from the city or urban centre.
100 Tagore to William Rothenstein, 20 April 1927: quoted in Lago, *Imperfect Encounter*, p. 321. Cf. Thompson, *Alien Homage*, op. cit., p. 9. In fact, Tagore's letter is far more cutting that Thompson's son, understandably, wishes to make clear. I shall pick this up in what follows.
101 Thompson, *Alien Homage*, op. cit., p. 9. Much has been made of Andrews' personal contacts with elite figures in the British administration such as Hardinge, but Lord Hardinge was Viceroy of India only from 1910–1916.
102 Gandhi briefly touches upon the figure of C. F. Andrews as part of an analysis of what she calls 'affective communities'. She argues that the 'utopian politics of friendship' died in 1872 when Engels wrote his *Socialism: From Utopia to Science*, in which he scoffed at the 'eclectic . . . mish-mash of . . . critical statement, economic theories, [and] pictures of future societies'. See Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*, op. cit., pp. 17–18.
103 Ibid., p. 6.
104 Benedict Anderson's idea of the 'imagined community' is most useful for reminding us that the national community is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign, and it is with such limitations (and exclusions) in mind that we need to think about the practice of a liberal politics of friendship in the age of nationalism.
105 The most up to date work looking at fulfilment theology is Hayden J. A. Bellenoit, *Missionary Education and Empire in Late Colonial India, 1860–1920* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007).
106 Rabindranath Tagore to William Rothenstein, 20 April 1927: quoted in *Thompson, Alien Homage*, op. cit., pp. 40–41. Cf. Lago, *Imperfect Encounter*, op. cit., pp. 320–321.

6 Rabindranath redux: Tagore and the postcolonial world

1 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), p. 185.
2 Cf. C. A. Bayly, 'Empires and Indian Liberals', in Catherine Hall and Keith McClelland (eds) *Race, Nation and Empire: Making Histories, 1750–2011* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 74–93.
3 Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity Versus Postmodernity', *New German Critique*, 22/Winter, Special Issue on Modernism (1981), p. 4.
4 Ibid., p. 4
5 Krishan Kumar, 'Modernity', in William Outhwaite and Tom Bottomore (eds), *Twentieth-Century Social Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 391.
6 Habermas, 'Modernity Versus Postmodernity', op. cit., p. 4.
7 Enrique Dussel, 'Eurocentrism and Modernity', *boundary 2*, 20/3 (1993), p. 65, emphasis original.
8 Kumar, 'Modernity', op. cit., p. 391.
9 Ibid., pp. 391–392.
10 Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 35, referring to John Stuart Mill, 'Civilisation', *Dissertations and Discussions, Political, Philosophical and Historical* (London, 1836).
11 Kumar, 'Modernity', op. cit., p. 392.
12 Björn Wittrock, 'Modernity: One, None, or Many? European Origins and Modernity as a Global Condition', *Daedalus*, 129/1 (2000), p. 59.

13 Thomas Blom Hansen, 'Inside the Romanticist Episteme', *Social Scientist*, 24/1–3 (1996), p. 61.
14 Ibid.
15 Norman Hampson, 'Enlightenment', in William Outhwaite and Tom Bottomore (eds), *Twentieth-Century Social Thought*, op. cit., p. 195.
16 Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (London: University of California Press, 2005), p. 54.
17 Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, op. cit., pp. 36–37.
18 Ibid., p. 37.
19 Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 259.
20 Ibid., p. 264.
21 It should be noted that the tendency to essentialise Western modernity is obviously not limited to the postcolonial field. Muthu in fact has in his sights the philosopher John Gray who has written that 'just as the category of civilisation is a central element in the enlightenment project, so . . . the idea of barbarism is integral . . . since it encapsulates the enlightenment repudiation of the irreducible plurality of cultures in favour of the assertion that all civilisations are, or will be exemplars of a single model. John Gray, 'After the New Liberalism', *Social Research*, 61/3 (1994), p. 726: quoted in Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*, op. cit., p. 262.
22 Ashis Nandy, 'Towards a Third World Utopia', *Bonfire of Creeds: The Essential Ashis Nandy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 463.
23 Ibid. The way in which histories of national liberation have been collusive with the history of European modernity is, of course, one of the points around which the *Subaltern Studies* collective took a political stance on the writing of history.
24 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, op. cit., p. 247.
25 Ibid., p. 18. The paradox of utilising a Heideggerian hermeneutic tradition as part of a project of provincialising Europe seems unresolved.
26 For a classic account of historicism see Friedrich Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook* (London: Routledge, 1972). I am grateful to Avi Lifschitz for reminding me of this source. From a different angle, in his discussion of historicism Raymond Williams points to the ongoing controversy between those who hold to theories of historical determinism and 'those who continue to regard history as an account, or a series of accounts, of actual past events, in which no necessary design, or, sometimes alternatively, no necessary implication for the future, can properly be discerned'. See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1988), p. 147.
27 Nandy, 'Towards a Third World Utopia', op. cit., p. 463, note 45.
28 Ibid., p. 265, note 264.
29 Cf. William Outhwaite, 'Historicism', in William Outhwaite and Tom Bottomore (eds), *Twentieth-Century Social Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 261. Chakrabarty's reference to a historicism that promises a 'certain degree of autonomy' seems to be an acknowledgement of the emancipatory claims, but the equally salient restrictions, of the Marxist historiography which marked the early trajectory of the *Subaltern Studies* collective, the kind of Marxism that allowed Sumit Sarkar to be a member of the early movement.
30 Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, op. cit., p. 31.
31 Chakrabarty had already anticipated this line of criticism when he claimed that 'Liberal-minded scholars would immediately protest that any idea of a homogenous, uncontested "Europe" dissolves under analysis', though this doesn't seem to constitute a very adequate response. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, op. cit., pp. 27–28.
32 Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 100.

33 Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 28.
34 Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, op. cit., p. 21.
35 Tagore, *My Reminiscences* (London: Macmillan, 1917), p. 128.
36 Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 7 July 1915: Andrews Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.
37 Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, op. cit., p. 99.
38 Ibid., p. 99.
39 Ibid., p. 100.
40 Ibid.
41 Chatterjee has written two essays on Tagore's ideas of nation and nationalism in Bengali: *Rabindrik nation ki?* ('What is Tagore's nation?', published in 2003) and *Rabindrik nation prasange aro du-char katha* ('A few more words on Tagore's nation', published in 2004). However, for the English-speaking world – for whom Chatterjee rightly remains a highly influential thinker – the references to Tagore in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* constitute the only accessible judgements we have. Despite the fact that Ashis Nandy has written one of the most probing and insightful books about Tagore's nationalism, the Gandhi–Tagore nexus is treated similarly by him. Nandy claims that Tagore and Gandhi – like all other 'Afro-Asian reformers' – had tried to grapple with and reconcile 'three basic sets of contradictions or oppositions: that between the East and the West; that between tradition and modernity; and that between the past and present'. In the case of Tagore, these oppositions are primarily dealt with in the realm of 'high culture' – that is, within India's classical Sanskrit traditions – albeit 'leavened on the one hand by elements of European classicism, including aspects of the European Renaissance, and on the other by India's own diverse folk or little traditions'. In other words, in Tagore's world, 'modernity had a place', whereas in the case of Gandhi, 'resolution of the contradictions was possible primarily within the little traditions of India and the West, and occasional imports from Indian and Western classicism, *but almost entirely outside modernity*'. See Nandy, 'The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self', in *Bonfire of Creeds: The Essential Ashis Nandy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 153–154, my emphasis.
42 For example, Harish Trivedi's essay on Tagore, part of which deals with Gandhi, is based on recycling established positions rather than examining primary sources. Trivedi quotes Nehru's comment that 'no two persons could differ so much as Gandhi and Tagore', but does not probe into the primary materials to substantiate Nehru's rather misleading interpretation. It is more than incidental that the Nehru quotation is taken by Trivedi from Krishna Kripalani's biography which, as I have suggested at various points in this book, is one of the most flawed biographies of Tagore in circulation, stressing Tagore's alleged, though unsubstantiated, Western leanings in a wholly unwarranted and unqualified way. See Trivedi, 'Nationalism, Internationalism and Imperialism: Tagore on England and the West', in G. R. Taneja and Vinod Sena (eds), *Literature East and West: Essays Presented to R. K. Dasgupta* (New Delhi: Allied, 1995), p. 174, footnote 11.
43 Ibid., p. 105.
44 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, op. cit., p. 169.
45 Ibid., p. 174.
46 Ibid., p. 176.
47 Ibid., p. 176. Passages in Chakrabarty's fascinating essay deal with Tagore's idea of 'piercing the veil of the real', that is seeing behind the world of appearances in order to imagine a different India. According to the notes provided by Sisir Kumar Das and Sukanta Chaudhuri, Tagore's use of the phrase 'lifted the veil' could be attributed to Shelley's 'A Defence of Poetry', in which Shelley refers to the power of poetry which 'lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world'. They also point out that Tagore used

the metaphor in his memoirs, *Jibansmriti*. See Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Writings on Literature and Language* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 399.

48 In a parallel though related field, the work of Partha Mitter on 'influence' and modernity in art is of much relevance here. See Partha Mitter, 'Decentring Modernism', *The Art Bulletin*, 90/4, December 2008, pp. 531–548.

49 'It is pointless to search for an authentically British or Indian intellectual'. C. A. Bayly, 'Empires and Indian Liberals', in Catherine Hall and Keith McClelland (eds), *Race, Nation and Empire*, op. cit., p. 90.

50 In his much richer and textually-grounded analysis of Tagore, Nandy admits the limits of this approach, at least implicitly, when he complicates his own division between Gandhi and Tagore by saying that 'despite being a modernist, Tagore began to make less and less sense to the modern world in his lifetime. He ended as a critic of the modern West and, by implication, of modernity' (although Nandy still tends to falls back on pre-given categories). See Nandy, 'The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self', in *Bonfire of Creeds*, op. cit., p. 154.

51 Rustum Bharucha, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okukura Tenshin* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 110.

52 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Crisis in Civilisation' (1941): from Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1941), p. 726.

53 Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 10 April 1921: from Dutta and Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 517. This statement, of course, is not to be read as 'better than' but 'among the best'.

54 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Call of Truth' (1921): from Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume Three* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), p. 417.

55 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 99.

56 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Thou Shalt Obey', *The Modern Review*, 22/3 (1917), p. 339.

57 Rabindranath Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 13 March 1921: from Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poet*, op. cit., p. 59.

58 Ibid., p. 60.

59 Ibid., p. 61.

60 Ibid., p. 61.

61 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Nation', *The Modern Review*, 22/1 (1917), p. 2.

62 Ibid., p. 2.

63 Ibid.

64 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My Interpretation of India's History: I', *The Modern Review*, 14/2 (1913), p. 113.

65 Tagore, 'The Nation' (1917), op. cit., p. 2.

66 Ibid., p. 2, my emphasis.

67 As Radhakrishnan put it, Tagore's position was that 'the chance for Europe after the war lies in her adoption of the ideals of the East'. See Radhakrishnan, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit., p. 281.

68 Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 188.

69 Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 75–94.

70 Ibid., p. 77.

71 Ibid.

72 For an overview of recent development see Philip Blond, *Post-secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998); and for an example of the creative contemporary exchanges around these kinds of post-secular philosophical problems see Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or*

Dialectic? edited by Creston David (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009). On the relevance of religion in enabling the development of a self-consciousness that defies the logics of modernity or, more specifically, bourgeois liberalism, see Alasdair Macintyre, *Marxism and Christianity* (London: Duckworth, 1995).

73 Macintyre, *Marxism and Christianity*, op. cit. See also Gareth Steadman Jones' 'Introduction' to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002), which speaks of 'the religious prehistory of communism', pp. 9, 21. Cf. Terry Eagleton, 'Introduction' to Jesus Christ, *The Gospels* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. vii–xxx.

74 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Construction versus Creation' (1920): from Nityapriya Ghosh (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume 4* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007), p. 471.

75 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Relation of the Universe and the Individual', *The Modern Review*, 14/1 (1913), p. 4.

76 Quite obviously, religion was also the basis for the Hindu nationalism of Bankimchandra, Sri Aurobindo and others; a 'Hindu nationalism' that was steadfastly rejected by Tagore. But on their part the subsuming of religion into the framework of a modern 'state-seeking' nationalism blunted the pre-modern radicalism of *Advaita Vedanta* by making religion subservient to a process of dividing mankind.

77 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Construction versus Creation' (1920), op. cit., p. 471.

78 Ibid.

79 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Spiritual Realisation Through Action' (1910): translated and quoted in Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, op cit., p. 184.

80 Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, op cit., p. 185.

81 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Construction versus Creation' (1920): from Nityapriya Ghosh (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume 4* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007), p. 471.

82 Tagore to C. F. Andrews, 7 July 1915: C. F. Andrews Correspondence Files, Tagore Papers, Rabindra Bhavana.

83 'I do not believe that Europe is occupied only with material things. She may have lost her faith in religion, but not in humanity. Man, in his essential nature, is spiritual and can never remain solely material. If, however, we in the East merely realise Europe in this external aspect, we shall be seriously at fault.' Rabindranath Tagore, 'India and Europe' (1930): from Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume Three* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), p. 621.

84 Modern liberalism betrays its scepticism and fear of 'the people' through the very institutions of representative democracy, designed as much to exclude them from as to include them in real decision making.

85 Tony Pinkney, 'Modernism and Postmodernism', in William Outhwaite and Tom Bottomore (eds), *Twentieth-Century Social Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 391.

86 For a particularly excoriating account along these lines see Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

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