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The name of the vast and complex personality of Rabindranath Tagore and the word “border” seem almost oxymoronic. Any kind of limit or attempt to limit it is disregarded in a natural and massive overflowing of any restraint or obstacle. As a human, Tagore belongs equally to the 19th century, as he was born in 1861, and to the 20th, as he passed away in 1941. At the midpoint of his life, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1913), becoming the first Asian Nobel Laureate. Writings of all kinds have never ceased to accumulate regarding his works and personality and they seem to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration for scholars and the large public.

What this remarkable collection of essays brings is a fresh view on Tagore’s figure as a whole. For over a century scholars and researchers from different cultures and domains have recomposed Tagore’s figure into a new and original perspective. What could be noted is the passion of this collective international and interdisciplinary work team, made up of ten women researchers out of eleven. The editors, Mihaela Gligor, from the Romanian Academy in Cluj-Napoca, and Elisabeta Marino, from the University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, courageously brought to light sparkling glimpses of the immense legacy that Tagore continues to perpetuate today in an ever changing and challenging world culture.

The title contains *in nuce* a nuance and at the same time a promise that only a contemporary consumer of culture can benefit from enclosed in the word “influence”, which for the international reader is inevitably associated with what today can constitute the professionalized and much sought-after figure of the social media “influencer”. We can assume that what influencers are today was represented on an entirely different scale in terms of content quality by exotic and complex figures like Tagore, who emerged from the restless and deep waves of a Bengali

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culture quasi-unknown to the Western world, all the more so as it was dominated by British colonial civilization.

We suppose he wasn't the only one of his kind in his historical context, but he was certainly the only one who managed to transcend his limits, cultural determinisms and boundaries: another well-chosen word present in the title – "border". To capture in a given historical moment Tagore's personality and his influences on universal culture, the most appropriate word is therefore enclosed in the concept of "beyondness". Any attempt to stabilize his legacy in time and space must therefore be sought "beyond", in unbounded time and space into an unhindered realm. These unlimited possibilities make the traces Tagore leaves behind across time and human civilization not only multiple and fluidly spread, but also inexhaustible, in a continuous and autonomous mechanism of self-regeneration, utterly versatile whatever the cultural and historical context may be.

This seems to be the key to reading this volume, making it one of the most adapted to today's needs and interests on the matter of the scientific community. The accent on his fervid and dynamic life, rather unusual for his times, is one of the meanings of his going *beyond* "narrow domestic walls", not only by the universality of his works, but in the most concrete way, as an almost adventurous traveller, which enriched and added value to his personality.

The editors' aim is explicitly offered in an essential *Introduction* as that of celebrating Tagore's genius and his complex life. "His songs (*Rabindrasangeet*) were linked to his paintings, his plays to the arts of spectacle, his poetry to his drama, his life to his philosophy, his personal beliefs to Indian religions and traditions, and his existence to his Shantiniketan School." (p. 1) "The hallmark of his genius is that his works transcend the barriers of time, geography, language, and cultures," (p. 1) and this is exactly the purpose of this volume which "brings together researchers of Tagore's life and passionate readers of his works." (p. 1)

The first chapter, "Cultural Transfer, Rabindranath Tagore's Travels and Travel Writing", by Fakrul Alam, from the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, deals with Tagore and Cultural Translation and Transformation very much aware of the cultural transfers embodied in Tagore's life and works, bearing across the world the importance of fluid cultural values: "Transforming the arts and crafts of his people, as well as his own work, was among his priorities." (p. 5) In a subchapter, Fakrul Alam pertinently brought to light "Some Theoretical Considerations About Cultural Translation" underlying the "cultural transfer" transcending "national and

language boundaries” and its inherent power of “intercultural transformation” that is “how texts were not just linguistically but also culturally transformed during their travels” (p. 7) and how they would be adapted to local contexts. Like Stockhorst,¹ he sees this as “the triumph of an approach to translation allowing changes to the original therefore favouring the target culture”. (p. 7) The author underlines “Tagore’s attempt to recapture in English the mood that led to some of his best poetry and led him to adopt «domesticating» strategies for them. He wanted to find a way of representing his thoughts and feelings that involved transferring the linguistic and cultural elements of the original works into English from the Bengali.” (p. 8) Tagore’s endeavours of “cultural translation as hybridization”, bridge-building, not as diasporic, but unconditioned transposition of a text across cultures and languages, and eventually and if needed, even genres, were utterly successful. “The English *Gitanjali* poems were received with almost universal praise immediately after their publication, and have clearly succeeded spectacularly as unique translations.” (p. 9) As a matter of fact, they brought him a Nobel Prize for Literature.

Alam looks deeper into Tagore’s complex personality. He describes Tagore’s pan-Indian cultural research and vision, his thoughts upon Western civilization which he considered dynamic and fertilizing for the old but rather static Eastern, deepened into a cultural kind of inertia and the necessity of the constant cross-fertilization between East and West. He imagined therefore a place where such fertile exchanges can take place: the Visva-Bharati University, continuing the Shantiniketan School project, envisioned as a “Site of Cultural Transfer and Cultural Translation”, a place for *Maitri*, that is “universal sympathy, both intellectual and emotional” and where a “great universal culture of the mind” is possible, a “locus of enlightened thought and cultural transformation” (p. 17) in opposition to the cataclysmic war which could be foreseen at the end of the thirties.

“The Travelling Fictions. The English Stories of Rabindranath Tagore”, the second chapter of the volume, written by Radha Chakravarty, from Ambedkar University Delhi, praised writer, critic, and translator, brings to light some of Tagore’s short fiction as a pioneer of the genre in Bengali where he left a lasting influence. Considered among the most relevant, “the stories enact multiple border crossings, at cultural, historical, social,

¹ Stefanie Stockhorst, *Cultural Transfer Through Translation: The Circulation of Enlightened Thought in Europe by Means of Translation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010).

psychological, linguistic and literary levels” characterized by “their location in-between cultures, geographies, histories and literary traditions”. (p. 22) Accordingly, “they also problematize the popular Western stereotype of Tagore as the mystical prophet from the East and his sanctified image in Bengal as the revered «Gurdev»”, (p. 22) which is another recurrent theme especially among the Bengali authors of this volume.

The chapter adds some relevant and little-known details of his life as a short story author: “Tagore’s first Bengali story, “Bhikharini” (“The Beggar Woman”), was published in 1877, when he was only sixteen, and his last was a draft dictated from his deathbed in 1941. But it was from 1891 onward that he really began to experiment with the form, when he was sent to manage the family estates in East Bengal, living on a boat on the river Padma. [...] Tagore began to produce narratives inspired by the everyday joys and sorrows of ordinary people, initiating the democratization of Bengali fiction” (p. 23) introducing new elements to the genre originating in his eclectic upbringing, the heterogeneous literary traditions, myth, folklore, history, classical literature, nature, politics and personal experience.

Quantitatively, according to the author, Tagore’s writings run to more than 3,200 pages and comprise poetry, fiction, plays, essays, lectures, letters and other miscellaneous works. Many are translations and rewritings of his Bengali texts. Some are collaborative translations. In these works his philosophy and mysticism are embedded, therefore the author considers that the re-popularization and study of his artistic work would help raise social awareness and balance the widely spread one-dimensional stereotypes of Tagore abroad and in India as “mystic poet” or “Wise man from the East”, isolated from the immediate reality. His activism through his texts targets and spreads his theories against male-dominated society, the lifeless education system ridiculously focused on the practice of learning by rote, the social hypocrisy against the “Untouchable”, the narrowness of militant nationalism and the sterility of tradition if kept unfertilized by the new.

As in the previous chapter, the author touches the sensitive theme of self-translation and “domestication” of his works to the English language in order to reach the universal reader. It seems that despite what it is commonly known according to which he decided to translate his own words because he was not satisfied with previous translations made by others, he was just as unhappy and insecure of his own work. “Tagore’s anxieties about his own command of the English language, the responses of his

foreign readers and the dilution of local nuances in his self-translations into English” (p. 29) made him feel the disjunction between regional and international like an open sore. He falls into despair regarding the quality of his final artistic production in any other language, due to the untranslatable character of his works and he feels he is forced to simplify to the bone and to even abridge his original texts, getting a poor result with “cracks and gaps”. He says: “In my translation I timidly avoid all difficulties”, and even “I know I am misrepresenting myself... to the Western reader”, and finally and desperately admits that “I have done gross injustice to my original productions partly owing to my incompetence and partly to carelessness”. (p. 29) It almost seems he gets the Nobel Prize not for his literature, but against it!

Indeed, such texts demand an intercultural approach by the reader and find their way through the universal consciousness into “World Literature” by mixing local and foreign ingredients, moving freely in the vast and intricate territory of arts syncretism and transcreation as public domain, cherishing the absolute freedom of linguistic and cultural transposition into a space of intercultural dialogue.

“The Transnational Solidarity and Cultural Appropriation as Parallelism between DuBois and Tagore” is the title of a more historical and descriptive fourth chapter written by Elisabetta Marino. The declared intention of the author is to shed light on the complex relationship between Rabindranath Tagore and W.E.B. Du Bois, an African American sociologist, civil rights activist, historian, teacher, and one of the founding members of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), established in 1909. She sets the focus on skin colour and the race problem, even if differently articulated, and the evolution into a post-national cosmopolitanism of both activists. After receiving the Nobel Prize in 1913, Tagore travelled all over the world giving lectures and meeting his public. “The Cult of Nationalism was among the speeches in his repertoire: his ideas on the limits of nationalism and his advocacy for cosmopolitanism began to circulate widely in the United States, possibly reaching Du Bois and other intellectuals. [...] His anti-militarism and harsh critique of nationalism stirred a torrent of unfavourable reactions.” (p. 36) The author also cited an embarrassing diplomatic incident which saw Tagore as a direct victim of the Immigration Quota Act implemented in the US in 1924 against nonwhites coming from Asia.

Apparently, Du Bois had similar interests as Tagore, since in his seminal “Address to the Nations of the World” delivered during the first

Pan-African Conference held in London, in July 1900, he stated that “the problem of the twentieth century [was] the problem of the colour line” looking up to India as an “anti-colonial example, a herald of modern politics”, and at the same time presenting the analogy between British imperialism and American racist oppression. Accordingly, in his view, “the colonized subjects of the Raj and African Americans were fellow «coloured» peoples struggling against white supremacy.” (p. 37)

Another analogy Marino makes is the system of caste as used in the public discourse by both militants fighting for equal racial rights, but with different aims. “His [Du Bois’] detailed description of the practices of segregation was meant to present «a true picture of the caste situation in the United States»”, a statement where caste stands as a synonym for racial discrimination. Tagore himself often associated caste and race, when delving into the problems of American society. (p. 38) Nevertheless, Marino draws attention to the instrumentalization and manipulation of Tagore’s works and ideas, especially after his death. Whereas Tagore distances himself from nationalism, there were cases like that of Lajpat Rai, a friend of Du Bois, who, by means of clever selections of his works, tried to manipulate the context when presenting Tagore as a “fervent and zealous patriot [...], overlooking his large body of anti-nationalist writings. Hence, far from being a cosmopolitan humanist, the champion of religious and intellectual freedom, Tagore was fetishistically featured in *Young India* as a living embodiment of Indian national identity”. (p. 38) Furthermore, Du Bois himself used Tagore’s figure as a “great, new voice representing the coloured races” as a sharp instrument to fight his ideological and political battle and, as Marino shows, Du Bois successfully continued doing that in public discourses even after Tagore’s death.

The conclusion of Elisabetta Marino’s chapter is that there is no doubt Tagore exercised a “pivotal and enduring influence” on Du Bois, but their ideas and militancy were not always aligned. On the contrary, they often gave different meanings to similar concepts. Such research clearly shows the importance of reconstructing human relationships in the cultural history of ideas.

Eleonora Olivia Bălănescu, from the University of Craiova, brings forward another aspect of the multifaceted and “Krishna-like” portrayal of Tagore: that of the methodist for alternative teaching. Tagore’s “Educational Paradigm and Its Relevance to Modern Teaching” might be one of the most relevant chapters of the volume, as the theme of education has never ceased to be considered of utmost importance at all

times, and probably even more today, due to the over technologized and somehow environmentally artificial era children are forced to study in. As Bălănescu shows, Tagore is an ardent supporter not only theoretically, but also in the most pragmatic way, and active promoter of contact with nature (guided-)education, far from the “classical” rigid-ruled system, with learning by rote methods, which very much dominated 19th and the 20th century education all over the world.

Bălănescu presented some facts regarding the experimental school that Tagore founded at Shantiniketan (“abode of peace”): “Established in 1901 in Bengal’s rural area, on a property that his [Tagore’s] father had bought with the aim of turning it into a place of meditation and prayer, Shantiniketan is the living proof of Tagore’s vision of a school located in the heart of nature, where students could learn in the open air, freed from the physical and emotional confines of formal classrooms. After 18 years, this institution grew into a university, Visva-Bharati [Communion of the World with India], as a logical progression in Tagore’s philosophy of education. The motto that he chose for the university – *There Where the Whole World Unites in a Nest* – reveals his project of an academic curriculum that would blend India’s huge cultural heritage with the knowledge of the West.” (p. 49)

Actually, the three educational establishments that Tagore founded – Shantiniketan School, Visva-Bharati University and Sriniketan campus – represent as so many phases of Tagore’s educational view or rather “philosophy” of education which he expressed in writings and talks on the matter all over the globe. Tagore openly admitted his resentment of textbooks, as unable to fully develop the child’s intellect and soul and to guide him to fulfil his physical and emotional needs, to discover the world’s treasures, inner values, and a sense of life as a well-rounded person. School is seen as sheer “calamity” against which “child-nature protests with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment”. (p. 51) He saw the Indian school as a trivial “education factory, lifeless, colourless, and dissociated from the context of the universe” and, continues Bălănescu, “which used discipline to repress children’s delight in expressing their God-given gift of enjoying the world”. Education in the classroom makes “children sit like museum specimens, deprived of their natural freedom, isolated from real life and forced to feed their mind on unbearable lessons”. (p. 51)

Tagore’s clearest opinion upon the matter is that conventional schooling is nothing other than “One of man’s most cruel and wasteful mistakes”. Bălănescu also encapsulates in a phrase Tagore’s idea on where a proper education should take place, like in an *ashram*, a free open-air

school in old India, where “Freedom was considered an essential aspect of education because it gave children the possibility to learn subconsciously and intuitively, to take initiative and ultimately to become more independent and self-reliant” (p. 51) in close contact with nature where nature itself is the best teacher.

Bălănescu makes reference to the Romanian poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga, whose approach to life is also an intuitive, and not a rational one, able if not to fully understand, at least to get closer to the mystery of God’s own handiwork and innermost truth. This mystical approach to education is dogma-free, with no imposed curriculum, or religious teaching whatsoever, as “that was part of students’ daily life in a place governed by devotion and intimate communion with God: «It[religion] is the truth of our complete being, the consciousness of our personal relationship with the infinite; it is the true centre of gravity of our life.»” (p. 53) This type of education also implies labour done within the community, meant to reveal the “true freedom of mind” derived from “the sympathy for nature and service for man”, a superior type of awareness which opens the door to an “even higher freedom, a freedom from all racial and national prejudice”. (p. 58)

Conclusively, the right answer to “What is a teacher for?” would be: “to help learners learn;” that is, to create “the conditions in which they might be able to learn”, (p. 57) to develop skills like problem solving and values like critical thinking, self-sacrifice, team spirit and resilience, as well as to refine the instruments for reaching freedom and individual enlightenment together with spiritual unity with mankind, and last but not least, love and kinship with nature with pro-environmental behaviour. Even if the general tone of the chapter led the reader to Bălănescu’s silent criticism against formal educational systems around the world, while favouring Tagore’s, the final word is a positive and encouraging one: “Modern school curricula also integrate subjects and activities designed to cater to students’ spiritual needs. Although education systems continue to prioritize knowledge acquisition and assessment, there are classes, such as art, music and drama, which encourage learners’ self-expression in various creative fields.” (p. 55)

Additional revelatory research belongs to Uma Das Gupta, historian and Tagore biographer. It describes and analyses the relationship and the kinship between two Indian figures who were giants of human civilization, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. Her research is based principally on the exchange of letters from 1912 to 1940, but

also involves a third figure, that of Charles Freer Andrews, “an Anglican priest and Christian missionary who came to India in 1904 to teach at St. Stephen’s College in Delhi.” (p. 65) “He became a close friend of Tagore and Gandhi and decided to leave his missionary position and move permanently to teach in the Shantiniketan School, which Tagore had founded in 1901 for an alternative education. But with a turn of events in December 1913, Andrews went to South Africa to help in Gandhi’s work at Gokhale’s request and with Tagore’s support.” (p. 65)

The “Background Thoughts” regarding pursuing and attaining the final goal of the country’s freedom from being a subdued colony, were a surprising alternative to the usual universally known fight back tactic was: that of “*ahimsa*” towards the opponent, that is a withdrawal in the face of any kind of violence, no hate, nor physical or psychological harm against another human not even against the worst enemy, even if that would imply self-suffering and self-sacrifice. As Tagore wrote to Andrews, “We have to build a seat for the one God revealed to all human races standing in the heart of this struggle”. (p. 64) Das Gupta underlines that “their ideals for independence were made of a fearless courage in the face of temporal power, and a deep empathy for all men” (p. 64) in the spirit of *ahimsa* as the state of self-purification and perfect love for any human being. Gandhi asserted: “An intellectual acceptance of the existence of God does not make one a believer. To believe in God but not to love people is a contradiction in terms. Faith implies truth and love” (p. 65) – of any person, as a very image and creation of God.

In comparison with the Du Bois / Tagore tandem of ideas described in a previous chapter in this volume, the Tagore / Gandhi example reflects a much higher level of achieving equality and the brotherhood of men. As Das Gupta concludes, if one looks beyond the myths and legends that have surrounded such iconic personalities as Gandhi and Tagore, whose biographies and hagiographies have turned them into superhuman beings, one would surprisingly find deep agony concerning the problems of their times and debates and actions on extremely tangible matters far from the accepted sanctity of their portrayals. Their everyday vulnerability as humans subjected to others’ and to their own scrutiny seems so far away from the purity of their heart and peace of mind. Nevertheless, History has justified their legacy and what Das Gupta suggests is that they gained their places among the most iconic figures of all times by perseverance, faith, and life and death struggles boldly undertaken till the very end.

The seventh chapter of the volume, written by Mihaela Gligor, deals with the philosophical and religious beliefs of Tagore, a *sui-generis*

syncretism blended into “The Mysterious Inner World”, as suggestively designated by the author. Gligor makes some “Remarks on Representation of Religion in Rabindranath Tagore’s *Sādhana*, and *The Religion of Man*” and gives the reader a tantalizing glimpse into Tagore’s own “infinity”. Gligor finds Tagore’s religion “warm, human, and emotional” and she considers it, along with Amartya Sen, to be also strong and consistent, in direct connection to the tragic events, like the sudden death of his wife and of some of his children, that marked his human existence and made him deeply devoted to God. There are no gaps or boundaries between Tagore’s works and his spiritual life; they are communicating vessels, only with different accents and nuances. On this principle, Gligor writes: “If *Gitanjali* contains the best of what the poet Tagore could offer, we can say without reservation that *Sādhana* is the most complete testament of the prophet Rabindranath Tagore. *Gitanjali* and *Sādhana* were written in a time of maximum artistic evolution.” (p. 76) “*Gitanjali* spoke about love, faith, nature, and it revealed the inner universe of Tagore as a poet.” (p. 77) At the same time, “in *Sādhana*, Tagore explored in detail the fundamental harmony of existence, as he had seen it, as a poet. Thus, *Sādhana* can be considered the basis of his vision of the world, as well as a starting point in life, which served as a frame of reference for his artistic creation, the world of his art.” (p. 77) Art and religion are different expressions of the same meaning, as Tagore himself admits: “To me the verses of *Upanishads* and the teachings of Buddha have ever been things of the spirit and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth; and I have used them, both in my own life and in my preaching”. (p. 77) Tagore’s attitude towards religion and arts is that of a Rishi, a religious poet, as he asserted, more than once: “My religion is essentially a poet’s religion.” (p. 80)

Religion seen as a spiritual experience, away from dry dogmas caused Tagore to be seen as “a mystic *par excellence*”, Gligor writes. “The essays of *Sādhana* expressed a point of view through which man reached the faith, and this made it possible for him to lead a perfect life [...] a great book of life as it is seen, experienced, and lived by the poet.” (p. 77) His views on religion and its unity with the arts were described in *The Religion of Man*, a collection “which comprises the Hibbert Lectures delivered in Oxford, at Manchester College, during the month of May 1930”, and is quoted by Gligor: “My religion is a poet’s religion, and neither that of an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian. Its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channel as does the inspiration of my songs. My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has

my poetical life". (p. 80) He also declares that his mystical thoughts were very much influenced by the Bauls of Bengal, a sect of wandering village singers, living a simple obscure life, with no temples, no rituals, nor traditions, no norms either, but just spontaneous inspiration which mixed street arts and devotion to an unseen and unrepresented God, envisioned as a cosmic force which enables the manifestation of *dharma*, the "truth of the Eternal Man".

But what exactly is essential to Tagore as a religious man? The answer is "man in communion with God, through ritual, devotion, and contemplation", (p. 78) as Gligor summarizes. "The achievement of an existence in which man coexists on the same level with divinity was the purpose of the religion for which Tagore militated." (p. 78) These instruments of the religious man: ritual, devotion and contemplation, as mentioned, give the mortal man the possibility to go "beyond borders" into the "real", which is the truth, and escape the manifestation of the tangible, which is deceit, and therefore, the very cause of deception. Religion as seen in *Sādhana* is very much linked to everyday life and the historical and cultural context. "The real misery of man lies in the fact that he cannot really go out of himself. He must free himself from this slavery of ignorance. This is the concentrated message of the Buddha's teachings, the wisdom of the Upanishads, or the Vedic poets, and also the message of Jesus, to which Tagore referred, and emphasized the need to put aside pride in the knowledge of the soul and of the self", (p. 79) Gligor writes. The Chapter concludes with some inspired lines from Tagore's last poem from *Gitanjali*, in which the direct speech to the Universal Spirit shows a personal relationship with the Unseen and the Almighty with an almost Christian touch and dimension of a prayer: "In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet... let my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee." (p. 83)

Digging into the depth of Tagore's eclectic and nevertheless coherent expression, inevitably one finds the "Mukti" concept, life-transforming freedom. Halina Markewicz, from the Jagiellonian University, Kraków, whose research focuses on Indian Literatures, Indian Philosophy and Religions, and the History of Oriental Studies, quotes Tagore in the title of her 8th chapter of the book: "All broken truths are evil". Freedom can be found in truth. The joy of the real and freedom of mind which man can achieve is the main focus of this essay. The opposite is greed and the supreme desire to fool oneself and the others, and thus become *ātmahanojanāh*, "spiritual suicides" that lost their freedom and ignore the

art of living. Once again, aesthetics and metaphysics, but also ethics are blended together in the essence of Mukti.

Tagore seems to raise the aesthetic experience to the level of the mystic “unity of truth” affirms Markewicz, and she continues “the experience of the highest aesthetic pleasure of an individual viewer intensifies and strengthens as a result of the synergy of experiences of all individual recipients, and at the same time reaches the level of a transpersonal, abstract essence of aesthetic experience, from which all subjective conditions are eliminated. It is thanks to this mechanism that individual consciousness « expands », and co-creates, together with others, transpersonal, essential, and thus common awareness of all participants of the event”. (p. 92) If the aesthetic experience and the truth become inseparable and if they belong to the same field of understanding and if art experience is not separate from life itself, therefore very much connected to ethics, then the religious man embodies at the same time the sage and the priest, the poet and the philosopher altogether and interdependently is able to reach the level of “disinterested joy” as the highest form of freedom of mind. On the other hand, if this is good and God, at the same time, any broken, incomplete, distorted truth is the opposite or the negation of truth, the un-truth, the un-real that is evil by default. Markewicz also presents what Tagore proposes as “pairs of opposites”: knowledge and ignorance, finite and infinite as a *coincidentia oppositorum*, coincidence of opposites. “In the classical Advaita Vedānta *avidyā*, ignorance is what makes emancipation impossible. Ignorance is an a priori epistemic mistake of superimposing (*adhyāsa*) the unreal upon the real” (p. 93). Therefore, she concludes, in Tagore’s view, “evil is not to be found in the world, but in broken or half-truths of man about the world”. (p. 94)

The following two chapters of the book are interconnected and deal with the presence of women and women’s voices in Tagore’s literature, the 9th chapter, in poetry – a postcolonial perspective, while the 10th chapter, in the short story *The Laboratory* (1940). This is a major theme to remain innovative and actual at different times. The 9th chapter is an essay written by Bashabi Fraser, from Edinburgh’s Napier University. It focuses on “The subaltern position of women, their familial and social silencing [...] in private and public spaces in postcolonial terms”, (p. 98) the female protagonists in selected poems by Rabindranath Tagore in his collection, *Punascha (Postscript)* contextualized in the familiar Bengali world. The marginalized voices are moved from the periphery to the centre of poetic expression, a sign of utter modernity, echoing Tagore’s concern relating to

women's position in the world. The close and careful exegetics of literary fragments of Tagore offers the possibility of entering into Tagore's artistic and ethical world, to better understand his view over the tangible world he lived in, where women, still needed an external voice to speak on their behalf from an alienated universe parallel to the male-dominated world which was then considered as relevant and worthy.

The discourse on women is completed by Paromita Mukherjee, from Amity University Kolkata. Here the character Sohini, who embodies feminine power, challenges and succeeds in changing tradition, and goes beyond what the society she accidentally was born in offered her – the status of a lover, wife and mother. As the author characterizes it, "Sohini is a rare combination of strength, intellect, shrewdness, and feminine guiles", at the same time "she has an unwavering devotion to her late husband's dream". (p. 111) Mukherjee affirms that the late Tagore's artistic creation stirred serious debates among exegetes and readers, as such a combination of feminine force was unheard of, or maybe considered unsuitable for the Punjabi woman stereotype, with those elements of strangeness, even foreignness. "Through Sohini, Tagore has created a model that breaks the barriers of caste, language, class, and religion and strikes a perfect balance between intellect and emotion", (p. 112) says the author considering, just as Julia Kristeva affirms in *Strangers to Ourselves*, that people find it problematic to accept or welcome strangers because they themselves are unable to accept their own strangeness. Sohini is not the Indian woman of Tagore's times, but rather the future woman that Tagore envisages for his own country, and projects beyond borders, into the universal and modern womanhood. But this construct is not easy to achieve in a patriarchal universe like the Bengali one, where women themselves are the carriers of tradition. Reforms and the new freedom are made and destined for men. The only hope for women relies in the very thin and fragile layer of middle-class, educated women. Besides, it seems that "pure womanhood" is challenged in this text, offering instead the mirage of the "new woman". The dual and seriously divided traditional Indian world made up of opposites such as private and public, inner and outer, material and spiritual, female and male, meets a huge challenge here.

The fight for freedom and the nationalistic movement slowed down the emancipation of women, as the British colonists were considered a menace to the traditional Indian way of being in the world, which had a specific and inflexible place for women. Therefore, it was not an easy task to "incorporate women's struggle for emancipation into the nation's struggle for independence". (p. 114) While the bourgeois emancipation

was against the system of “caste, polytheism, idolatry, animism, purdah, child-marriage, sati and more, seeing them as elements of a “pre-modern” or primitive identity”, (p. 114) the fervid nationalistic feelings that animated India in the late 19th century struggled to bring India to a *status quo ante* British occupation and to its traditional values. Tagore himself, over decades, transformed his view about women. The female identity found in this last short story shows an extraordinary evolution, alongside the history of his nation itself, towards the New Age.

The last chapter of the book is “Cinematographic Adaptations of Rabindranath Tagore’s Short Stories – Between Reality, Lyricism and Visual Poetry”, written by Daniela Rogobete, from the University of Craiova. She focuses on the visual aspects of Tagore’s artistic works, starting with the short stories, with their “exquisite imagery, narrative technique and lyricism”, which has been already described as difficult to translate. Cinematography seems therefore a much better way to “translate” into images and gestures what different languages were not able to transfer from one to another, a less intrusive technique of “domestication” of the texts. Rogobete introduces such techniques: “Translation”, “Transcreation”, “Transposition”, closing this volume in a circular fashion, back to its initial and recurrent major theme: Tagore as a unique, untranslatable genius, but still very much a generous spirit whose wisdom and artistic seeds are spread all over the world. “A poem”, Tagore claims in an interview given in 1916, “cannot be translated, it can only be relived in a different atmosphere.” (p. 127)

Rogobete’s opinion is that “if English translations often failed to do justice to Tagore’s impressive short fiction, if there was always something inevitably lost in translation, then there must have been a fair chance this “something” might be restored and recuperated through images”. (p. 128) She analyses the three most important adaptations of *Kabuliwala* (1957; 1961; 2017) a highly representative work of Tagore, “a deeply lyrical and profound ethical short fiction”. (p. 134) Tagore was a fervent cinema lover and was fascinated by the infinite possibilities this medium could offer, above all by the self-sufficiency of cinematographic techniques. His works of arts inspired generations of film directors and producers who transposed his works. “The first adaptation of one of his stories was filmed in 1923 (*Manbhanjan*) whereas the 1932 *Natir Puja* remains the only cinematographic production of his 1926 dance-drama, with Tagore himself as a director.” (p. 128) The vitality of Tagore’s works is emphasized by flourishing cinematographic adaptations even after his death. “Hungry Stones” (as Kshudhita Pashan, 1960, dir. by Tapan Sinha, in Bengali;

Lekin, 1991, dir. by Gulzar, in Hindi), “The Postmaster” (Teen Kanya, 1961, dir. by Satyajit Ray; Postmaster, 2016, dir. by Srijon Bardhan), “Kabuliwala” (adapted for screen in 1957 and directed by Tapan Sinha, in Bengali; in 1961, Bimal Roy, in Hindi; in 2017, Deb Medhekar, in Hindi). Many of Tagore’s short stories were adapted for TV in serialized forms and broadcast in India such as the 26-episode show Stories by Rabindranath Tagore broadcast in 2015 by the Epic Channel, directed by Anurag Basu (Season 1) or Robi Thakurer Golpo, transmitted on Colours Bangla in 2015 and directed by Abhijit Guha and Rudeshna Roy.

Kabuliwala had three posthumous cinema adaptations, due to its richness in universal “themes of parental love, friendship beyond cultural and ethnical boundaries, oblivion and remembrance, and of the redemptive dimensions of innocence and hope”. (p. 129) The author offers conclusions and reasons for this short story’s popularity on the screen at different times and by different people: “Even if departing from the initial story in a loose adaptation, this film truly remains in the spirit of Tagore’s fictional world, highlighting ethical values and emphasizing deeply human emotions in a successful attempt to visually translate it. It is a celebration of storytelling”. (p. 133)

In conclusion, there is much more unity in this volume than can be envisaged at first glance. Once the academic or the curious reader finishes the last line he knows and feels a remarkable sympathy for the gigantic figure of Tagore, who definitely needs new approaches and renewed reading. His art needs different “consumers” in different cultures and times for it is one of those rare cases of a self-regenerating engine powered by universal symbolism. As the editors of this volume posit, “this volume is the perfect example of his prolific and versatile personality, inspiring people from different countries and bringing them together in a «song offering» of his character.” (p. 1) It is an excellent instrument not only for connoisseurs, but especially for those who wish to take further steps into the immense, “prolific and versatile” personality and legacy of Tagore as first and foremost a Bengali genius and ultimately a universal one.