

WILLING SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF, HERE, NOW

Stuart Hall, In Memoriam

- *To transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.*
 - --Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*
- *In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will.*
- --Karl Marx, *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*

Two pieces of practical advice. Like Aristotle in the *Poetics*, Coleridge is giving advice on how to sell poetry. And Marx cautions against basing all analysis on people's sense of things; rather should one investigate what worldly factors produce that sense. One is talking about producing a certain willingness in the readership. The other is saying that willingness is produced by material conditions bigger than the personal will. For Coleridge, the determinant is spiritual. For Marx, social. Let us call this the remote presuppositions of my argument

Nimai Lohar is an illiterate man in his mid-fifties. He sang a song from which I have quoted the concluding semi-refrain a number of times. He understands the gist of the song well, partly because the vicious rural education system has not ruined his natural intelligence. I can relate it to Kant's inauguration of modernity.

After the talk "Margins and Marginal Communities," where Nimai was the final example leading toward an imaginative training for epistemological performance in well-placed academic humanities persons like myself, a brilliant former student of mine, now tenured professor at a great university, kindly remarked to me, in response to my regretful statement that "I did not have time to read books anymore," that the fact that I had produced the talk in one sleepless night, for that very lack of time, made him think that I was "self-generating" these days. That is of course an absurd remark. It did, however, make me realize that my lack of scholarship, like Nimai's lack of literacy, has kept intact a certain ability to think connectively on the spot. I speak in self-praise, but I intend to use this as yet another example of how my attempts to learn from those who have been cognitively damaged by my own class and caste has taught me many things about myself and the world. This also brings redress for my inability to undertake a specific piece of writing – the one you are reading – for another brilliant former student, for some time now a tenured professor at a great university. I had wanted to make myself a Coleridge expert

for him. This was taking forever as I prepared myself in the nooks and crannies of a busy life. The conversation reported here made me say to myself: "why, write it as you think it; you will never be a Coleridge scholar."

Ankhi Mukherjee has recently described Henry Vivian Derozio in "Postcolonial Responses to the Western Canon."¹ Derozio is an icon of the college where I was trained in English literature. On the first day of classes, our brilliant professor Tarak Nath sen instructed the handful of English Honors students in the great history of the study of English literature at our college, Presidency College, now Presidency University. Derozio, student and chair and an inspiration to many of the young students of the new emerging middle class, was himself a Eurasian claiming India, and teaching Byron as a "contemporary," a "freedom fighter." In 1957, we thought of ourselves as the holders of that tradition and it was into British Romanticism that we stepped, inspired.

My initial response to Coleridge, therefore, was as uncritical as such a legacy would suggest. Yet, that very "uncritical" response could lead the immediately postcolonial intelligentsia to claim at once and also a version of what we would today call global citizenship, a fiction, of course. By contrast, by the time it was possible to write a history of postcolonial critique, postcolonial theory had acquired a proper name and the legitimate liberal goal could indeed be described as follows: "Postcolonial responses to the canon signify a historical becoming, the third person of dialogue becoming first and second person."² The cusp generation of English honors students in Calcutta, by my stereotype of my biographical past, escaped this bilaterality and today limps toward a diversified globality through the British Romantics as originary conditioning of the unconditional. I am folded together (com-plicit), not just face-to-face with, Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Donna Landry's book made me contextualize them some, as all the usual Euro-British to and fro about the Romantic imagination, Romantic irony, and the like, had not.³ In the meantime, I had moved to the US and my advisor, Professor Paul de Man had said, in a class discussion, that one literalized the metaphor to use it in politics. This is perhaps not the most theoretically astute

¹ Ankhi Mukherjee, "Postcolonial Responses to the Western Canon," in Atto Quayson, ed., *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

² Mukherjee, "Postcolonial," p. 774.

³ Donna Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside: Hunting, Walking and Ecology in English Literature 1671-1831* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). "Not production, but consumption and pleasure, recreation and retreat, were the goods associated with the countryside" (p. 2).

remark but, as a maxim it has stuck with me since the early sixties. This essay may, perhaps, be an example of that hardy perennial.

My earlier dealings with teaching the Romantics is recorded in “The Double Bind Starts to Kick In.”⁴ I can now relate this account to that trajectory. In the initial phase of that teaching, by way of the “strong imagination” as the *mochlos* of the ethico-political, I was perhaps on the way to “literalizing the metaphor.”⁵ Earlier I had tried to save the emergence of the “esemplastic imagination” as the symbolic disclosing the subject Coleridge’s relationship to the imaginary.⁶

Today, as I work closely with the subaltern, the double bind of the imperial, conditioning the unconditional, has become intolerable. Its mark is left in the longest “unread” quotation in *Aesthetic Education*, a passage from the second edition of Wordsworth’s “Preface” to the *Lyrical Ballads*, with which Coleridge had been troubled for reasons that can be linked to mine, and indeed to Jacques Derrida’s reasons for criticizing Michel Foucault’s *Madness*.⁷

In a recent issue of the *Publication of the Modern Language Association of America* [PMLA], Forest Pyle has described my method in *Aesthetic Education* as “concentrated itinerancy.” I was wondering as I wrote this piece in this necessarily erratic way, if the piece could literally be an example of what Pyle saw when he marked the unread Wordsworth text. In that same issue, Benjamin Conisbee Baer refers to the “hurricane lantern.” It is indeed by the light of a hurricane lantern that I write these words. My text begins to resemble Coleridge’s as the ridiculous the sublime. The only book I carry with me is the Norton Critical Edition of Coleridge.⁸ I will speed read the *Biographia* extracts because my essay is past press deadline. I will read “a willing suspension of

⁴ Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012), p. 97-118.

⁵ Derrida, “Mochlos; or, the Conflict of the Faculties,” trans. Richard Rand and Amy Wygant, in Richard Rand, ed., *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 31.

⁶ Spivak, “The Letter As Cutting Edge,” in *In Other Worlds: Essays in the Politics of Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987), pp.3-19; the Lacan reference is generally to the “Discourse of Rome,” in Bruce Fink, tr. *Ecrits* (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 197-268.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 31–71.

⁸ *Coleridge’s Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi et. al. (New York: Norton, 2004); page references cited in text.

disbelief" as an open bit of method-description in the general socius. Derrida had suggested in *Glas* that, when a passage is cut from the text and launched alone, the cut, as wound, bleeds. History has healed the wounds of this particular venerable passage.

I work in the politics of culture, an elitist partially made over by the subaltern. Call this fieldwork.

We never paid any attention to the fact that Coleridge thought of himself as representative of cultured humanity. Of course, everyone is obliged to do it, some are punished for it. The imperialists did it and negated the possibility that subject peoples could, although the latter did so in a restricted space away from the colonized bourgeoisie.⁹ I now understand that this is why I so insist that learning to read the literary text is practice for the ethical. We extended to the texts of British literature the unconditional hospitality of the ethical, saying yes to the enemy. That we did not theorize it this way means nothing, of course.

Yet what I must also notice today is that Coleridge's assumption of the autobiographical subject as representative is nothing if not historicized. The fact that it is in the structure of an excuse of a special kind, a defensive excuse against unjust critics, both conditions the unconditioned voice of the representative man of letters, and rehearses the excuse at each time of reading.

This is the frame, remembering what we had not noticed as good Bengali students, immediately post colonial, of British Romanticism, at an elite college, within which I read the message in a bottle, now authorless. If I cannot be scholarly, I can give a reality check. I am not Auerbach in Turkey.

My current department has not had a Romanticism specialist for some time. Post colonial is on the decline. All is global. The major periods are Renaissance (politically correct name "early modern") and Victorian. The colleagues are tremendous. But, excellent learning and personalities apart, this distribution spells globalized Eurocentrism. I wanted to teach the undergraduate methods class this year. I was, with great tact, eased out. Kicked upstairs. At my time of life, it is okay to be a global keynote specialist. But I cannot be allowed to introduce the new generation to the useful moral dilemma of the greatest period in the history of the modern world in its production of what has been diagnosed as imagined communities, dominance without hegemony; British

⁹ This is perhaps what Ranajit Guha leaves unspoken in *Dominance Without Hegemony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Romanticism, comparable only to the effects of French literature on the great practitioners of negritude, Leopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire.

Biographia Literaria ends on the invocation of what I will call primary faith, and that is where I will begin: "where the eye of Reason has reached its own Horizon; and that Faith is then but it's continuation. . . . the upraised Eye views only the starry Heaven which manifests itself alone" (552), Kant's example of what some of us call planetarity:¹⁰ "The former view of a countless multitude of worlds annihilates as it were my importance as an animal creature, which after it has been for a short time provided with vital power, one knows not how, must again give back the matter of which it was formed to the planet it inhabits (a mere speck in the universe)." It is interesting that Coleridge does not refer to the unconditional moral law, which would give Kant the comfort of being human.¹¹

It is possible to read this omission as part of the many signals in the text of the *Biographia* that it will undermine the unexamined confidence of the representative man, of which "The Letter As Cutting Edge" was already aware. The last moment of the literary biography invokes a faith that travels where the human is in planetary proportion. By contrast, specifically "poetic" faith seems to use the version of the self-conscious will of the everyday in a reading public, which has a less than secondary relationship to the grand will, containing the individual will, which Coleridge describes, again and again, in words like the following: "This principium commune essendi et cognoscendi, as subsisting in a WILL, or primary act of self-duplication, is the mediate or indirect principle of every science; but it is the immediate and direct principle of the ultimate science alone, i.e. of transcendental philosophy alone" (477-478). Since this will in the readership clearly involves a choice to suspend, one may even suggest that Coleridge is going towards the will related to Kant's "mere reason:" *Willkür*: "the faculty of choice (*Germanice*, Willkühr)" (480). I would like to suggest that, today, to save the text without excusing it, or its historical symptomatology, we can turn it around here and substitute the fact that this final passage is, indeed, disarming; no self-duplicating here. (This will be a transactional reading for, as the use of similar images of the eye upraised towards faith – see, for example,

¹⁰ Emily Apter, ed. *The Untranslatables* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2014), p. 1218-1225.

¹¹ "The second, on the contrary, infinitely elevates my worth as an intelligence by my personality, in which the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animality and even of the whole sensible world, at least so far as may be inferred from the destination assigned to my existence by this law, a destination not restricted to conditions and limits of this life, but reaching into the infinite" (Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, tr. Mary Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), p. 133.

“Religious Musings” (1794), lines 80 following – the planetary, in Coleridge the almost-cleric, can often be tamed into the supernatural.)

“Willing suspension of disbelief” is a description of the kind of superior tolerance practiced by the colonial period to produce *Weltliteratur* and today practiced in the name of metropolitan multiculturalism in the face of dragon festivals and the hijab. And if we suspend disbelief controlled by this small group, it is not what poetry deserves or calls forth by Coleridge’s own account – “a rationalized dream dealing out to manifold Forms our own Feelings, that never perhaps were attached by us consciously to our own personal Selves” (605). In other words, I am trying hard to learn to read Coleridge from Coleridge – by noticing that he restores to Wordsworth the real meaning of the word “real” as Wordsworth speaks of using the real language of men. It is in that spirit of restoration that I focus on “faith,” and “belief” as suspension of disbelief.

Coleridge was deeply competitive with Wordsworth. His efforts at restoring specifically Wordsworth’s discourse does not of course offer a way out of ideology. In other words, it does not stop him from giving the customary “Brahmin” superstition about the world being held up by the tortoise, etc “We might as rationally chant the Brahmin creed of the tortoise that supported the bear, that supported the elephant, that supported the world, to the tune of ‘This is the house that Jack built’.” Just as, education into tolerance does not stop Coleridge’s 21st century Norton Press editors from explaining this absurdity simply as an undocumented “Hindu legend” (438). Even as we are in a peculiar competition with Coleridge, can we use the restorative technique we learn from him? What if we, like Mary Prince with the abolitionists, used, as we did so long ago, the best of Coleridge’s convictions about faith and read the actual text of the *Satapatha Brahmana*, where the double shell of the living tortoise is invoked as a metaphor holding the two absolute horizons of the created universe – explained thus in the body of the scriptural text of 600 BC giving ritual detail, translated by Max Müller, himself an adroit practitioner of withholding the willing suspension of disbelief when he moved, as it were, from fetish to Eucharist.¹² It is a small moment, a footnote, quite unimportant – and that I think is how one looks at the unwitting marginal moments that betray ideology. (No use bringing a complaint of underdemonstration. A single moment gives the lie.) We note

¹² *The Sacred Books of the East*, tr. Julius Eggeling, Vol 41, *Satapatha Brahmana* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, 2005), p. 389. I could not get to the Sanskrit text as I was rushing from Calcutta to Lucknow. My thanks to Moinak Biswas and Shibaji Bandyopadhyay for tracing the translation.

this and find, in the major text, means to neutralize historical auto-immunity, neither accusing, nor excusing, entering the protocols as painstakingly as we had, there at Presidency College, then in the immediately post colonial fifties. It helps us confront our specific predicament here, now: the fragile morality of a certain class that does not today understand that legalized secularism, at best based upon the convictions of a class specific to a certain civil society, is slipping away because ensconced, again at best, in dominance without hegemony. The model of developing means of redress, by no means guaranteed of success, is to say yes to the enemy and trump the charge. Under the sign of the hurricane lantern, yet nurtured by the British Romantics, I have proposed the birth of a sub-discipline in *Readings*:

I began with borders in my childhood and youth, and continue with them in my present as Indian. Partition, the McMahon Line. I move into the performative contradictions of an Indian Comparative Literature, relating it to the performative contradictions of global capital: a borderlessness that must preserve borders – the tradition of English-in-India being put to work for regional languages. I propose a supplementary relationship between the two, “the literary” introducing the dangerous element of the incalculable. I offered a reading of Yeats within the narrative of Byzantium [as here Coleridge within German Orientalism], relating it again to the current Turkey-Greece minuet [as here the loss of secularism upon the faith-belief shuttle]. Throughout, I insisted that a training of the imagination for literary reading produces a flexible epistemology, which can, perhaps keep saving our world.¹³

The disbelief that can be willingly suspended is the colonial ticket to world literature. What we are dealing with here is belief that comes in to usurp center stage of fragile reason, untrained in imaginative activism, in the difficult task of shifting desires to reconstruct objects of knowledge. Medicine and/or poison, poetry and /or violence. “Faith,” forever irreducibly imbricated with its *Nebengeschäfte*, cannot be used as a weapon.¹⁴

¹³ Spivak, *Readings* (Kolkata: Seagull, forthcoming). This passage is at the end of the Introduction.

¹⁴ *Nebengeschäft* is translated “secondary occupation.” From Kant’s examples, it is clear that he means the reduction of faith to bargaining for salvation. Kant, from within his faith, keeps primary faith separate from these secondary occupations, in a colonial world; Derrida considers them irreducibly imbricated (“Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” in *Acts of Religion*, tr. Gil Anidjar, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 40-101).

It is then that we can begin to notice further signals in the text: most prominently, that the subject's representative humanity, philosophically unconditional, is not only conditioned by a porous history, but also dependent upon iteration, legitimate and illegitimate: "While I in part translate the following observations from a contemporary writer of the Continent, let me be permitted to premise, that I might have transcribed the substance from memoranda of my own, which were written many years before his pamphlet was given to the world; and that I prefer another's words to my own, partly as a tribute due to priority of publication; but still more from the pleasure of sympathy in a case where *coincidence* only was possible"(442). Colonial knowledge occupies a special corner there, descriptive of all knowledge; determined by iteration, rather more complicated than mimicry.

This is the task of the teaching of the British Romantics today, the gifted first generation ideologues trying to find a way out of capitalism and the bad future even as the earlier group – not all of course, but our focus is Coleridge -- opposed the Jacobins attempting to demolish feudalism and the bad past. The turning of mere reasonable belief into faith is a malaise shared by both sides today. (Let us keep in mind that we are not translating the Anglo-Saxon word "faith" into the many languages where, something like that word faith, politically mobilized, can unleash its havoc.) The legitimation of that turn is operated by any globally sanctioned organization – on a chain of displacement from the colonizers' "civilizing mission" – that recommends "faith-based" solutions to global violence and greed. On an altogether less ironized register, they operate the same loosening of the bind of Kant's practical reason that Coleridge elaborates in his version of the big will, by calling it an "a priori principle, the will, or practical reason" (480). Here we see Coleridge himself as a productive misreader, historically symptomatic, of Kant's critique, distinct from Schiller. If Schiller had turned the asymmetrical human interest of critique, committed to mistake, into chiasmus and balance; Coleridge, also going for balance, chooses not the figurative but the scientific; not chiasmus but equally opposed forces mediated by a third thing, thus linking it with what he perceives as the Newtonian description of the real as material: "It will then remain for us to elevate the Thesis from notional to actual, by contemplating intuitively this one power with its two inherent indestructible yet counteracting forces, and the results or generations to which inter-penetration gives existence, in the living principle and the process of our own self-consciousness"(485). Where the obligation to assign freedom and cause determined Kant's practical reason as part of the programmed *Anlage* of

the impossibility of the subject's access to pure reason, itself perhaps a "mistaken" view, and so on indefinitely, in Coleridge, the big will "supposedly" accesses freedom and cause, not only not as an underived mistake, but not even transcendently deduced, but simply on into the transcendent; it is this scenario that is productively transgressed for us in the last metaphor of the *Biographia*. The task of the reader, in a certain sense starting within English departments, is to perform the transgression.

It is here that Coleridge's securing, in Book I of the *Biographia*, of his voice-consciousness as that of the representative man, necessarily defined by the representative culture of Europe, by way of a consistent stream of iteration, described as such, even using the word "plagiarism:"

In this instance, as in the dramatic lectures of Schlegel to which I have before alluded, from the same motive of self-defence against the charge of plagiarism, many of the most striking resemblances, indeed all the main and fundamental ideas, were born and matured in my mind before I had ever seen a single page of the German Philosopher; and I might indeed affirm with truth, before the more important works of Schelling had been written, or at least made public (447).

For readers in general, let whatever shall be found in this or any future work of mine, that resembles, or coincides with, the doctrines of my German predecessor, though contemporary, be wholly attributed to him: provided, that the absence of distinct references to his books, which I could not at all times make with truth as designating citations or thoughts actually derived from him; and which, I trust, would, after this general acknowledgment be superfluous; be not charged on me as an ungenerous concealment or intentional plagiarism (448).

Such passages and more can be studied and used by the scholarly student not only as an account of a fault to be reprimanded with no embarrassment, for genius can have license; but rather as a performative model for the conditioning of unconditional learning as knowledge. I have made clear that I never was and never can hope to be, in my declining years, anything like a scholarly student. As a reality check of literary criticism today, I am reading "willing suspension of disbelief" or "poetic faith" as a dry run for a scholar to enrich, to show in detail that what balances the claim to representativeness, indeed to genius, so that future readers can turn the text around more proficiently, again and again, and make it useful in many contexts: future Freud's productively misreading Sophocles. When the words belief and faith are tied together in ways that Coleridge's mere description, message in a bottle, a survivor message, would guarantee to be "poetic," poetry is demoted from its superior place in the rest of his discourse. A mere contrast between "sciental

reasoning” and faith – “sacrificing the *life* of faith to the cold mechanism of a worthless because compulsory assent” – whereas “a good heart so naturally begets the belief”; can lead to a backfiring of a willing suspension:

The extreme difficulty, and often the impossibility, of finding words for the simplest moral and intellectual processes in the language of uncivilized tribes has proved perhaps the weightiest obstacle to the progress of our most zealous and adroit missionaries. Yet these tribes are surrounded by the same nature (456, 457, 503).¹⁵

¹⁵ Coleridge speaks fulsomely of his senior contemporary at Christ’s Hospital, Thomas Fanshaw Middleton, who became the first Bishop of Calcutta, “[h]is episcopacy was . . . the first establishment of Protestant episcopacy in India” (Charles Webb Le Bas, *The Life of the Right Reverend Thomas Fanshaw Middleton, D. D., Late Bishop of Calcutta*, London: Rivington, 1831, vol.1, p. vi, hereafter cited as CWLB, with page reference following; Coleridge reference 383-384). He came to love Calcutta in his own way, calling it “the most surprising place in the world” (CWLB 468) and was focused on the idea that an English education rather than conversion was more appropriate for the Indian “natives,” who were regularly treated differently from the “natives” of Africa. (This diversification of Imperial policy was already accessible to W. E. B. Du Bois, as evidenced in his “The Negro Mind Looks Out,” in Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, New York: Arno Press, 1938) pp.392-397.) His reasons, however, were the natives’ “mental infancy,” “the incapacity of the native mind, in its present state, for extracting the rudiments of true religion from the rudiments of the mere perusal of the Scriptures” (CWLB 154). In other words, there was no “willing suspension of disbelief,” or a superficial “poetic faith,” which would have to be manipulated by the natives themselves, according to Coleridge’s model, available when the question was a “faith” with a proper name, as today: “ We pray for truly Christian politicians today. But we especially pray for the society from which our politicians come, and for the church. We pray that the church will teach the truth of God’s word, namely the gospel of Jesus Christ which is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). Changed behaviour does not come from the outside. Wilberforce knew that it is changed hearts that lead to changed lives,” posted online recently by the Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon, in praise of William Wilberforce’s fight against slavery – subject of a recent film – ignoring his opposition to Eurasians preaching in native languages. I am reminded of Frederick Douglass’s ambivalence towards John Brown. The “natives” religious tolerance was dismissed as “imbecilic,” “a gigantic superstition . . . which admitted that various modes of faith might be acceptable to the Almighty; and which, therefore, was perpetually undermining our allegiance to the sole majesty of the everlasting Gospel” (CWLB 171). In 1817, Middleton was supportive of the opening of Hindu College (later to become Presidency College, now Presidency University, where, our introduction into English honors by way of Henry Vivian Derozio has been described in the text). However, his comments on the seeming lack of opposition to the college were as follows: “they cannot comprehend what is the use of knowledge which is not lucrative and as for public spirit, it is a thing foreign to their constitution. Indeed, if they had anything of that sense about them, we should not be the lords of India. . . Their utmost efforts of wisdom are but a short-sighted cunning. . . . The teaching of English is the best thing that can be done” (CWLB 475). How, then, are we to negotiate this double bind between Derozio and *Murray’s Grammar* (CWLB 474)? Indeed, my primary and secondary education, under the extraordinary genius of subaltern converts, which I have often acknowledged as formative – including in “Many Voices,” my Kyoto Prize acceptance speech, in 2012 – followed from Bishop Middleton’s Diocesan initiative: “The native Christian is a necessary link between European and Pagan” (CWLB v.2, 19). I do not think this leads to the mistaken conclusion of an essential pre-human psychology shared by all “natives,” as I have urged in my review of

Kant did indeed inaugurate modernity by binding free will, rewriting fatalism by a rearrangement of the desire for philosophy, which desired the danger of the entire mistake, declaring free will by determined necessity, leaving fatalism unguarded in the *longue durée* of history.¹⁶ That counter-intuitive mark of the modern largely misfired. What took its place was the race-class-determined binary opposition of free will and fatalism that runs our world today, with the so-called abstract workings of capital running a deconstruction.

For the rest, the task is for the readers of the future. Forest Pyle had pointed out that I had not read the long Wordsworth passage in *Aesthetic Education*. I hope, by these reading notes, with nothing but memory and the Norton Critical, I have done a bit of reading for him and just slipped in under the extended press deadline.

There is no room here to expand the unimportant moment of the reference to the woman's obligation not to step out into the public domain –

Vivek Chibber's book, where the author mistakenly assumes that this was also the assumption of the Subaltern Studies historians (Spivak, "A Penny for the Old Guy," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, forthcoming). It is rather the danger that I discuss in the body of my essay, of the possibility of political mobilization when belief and faith are established as either allies of a race-and class-fixed reasonableness, or placed in a binary opposition with reason. It is only in that way that we can explain the current controversy in India over censoring Wendy Doniger's book: "Penguin Books India has said this week that it will [destroy all available copies](#) of the 2009 book by the Indologist Wendy Doniger, [The Hindus: An Alternative History](#), as part of a court settlement," with "the Hindu group Shiksha Bachao Andolan (Save Education Campaign). . . . Batra, who filed the suit, is . . . the head of the Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan, the educational arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the brains of the Hindu right. The spokesman of the Hindu right's cultural wing, Prakash Sharma, called him a "senior and revered figure, who has always fought against elements that pollute the minds of our youth". The party of the Hindu right, BJP, believes that it will win the national elections this year, with its prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi leading it to victory. Alongside the court cases of people such as Batra has been a chilling breeze through the media as owners have begun to cull editors who have been critical of Modi," (Vijay Prashad, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/feb/12/wendy-doniger-book-hinduism-penguin-hindus>); even as, on **13 Feb 2014**, the US India Political Action Committee (USINPAC), the leading advocacy organization representing over 3 million Indian Americans in the US appreciated the meeting between US Ambassador to India Nancy Powell and BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi. I draw your attention to Vinay Dharwadkar, "Censoring the Ramayana" (PMLA, 127.iii, May 2012), where it is, after all, one of the English-educated Indians residing abroad who is able to take a stand against this sort of Hindu fundamentalist violence, finally quoting a poet writing in Hindi: Kunwar Narayan. I believe, the "problem," complicit here with the "solution," is the hospitality lodged within the very definition of democracy, which is forever open to unmarked views, as Dharvedhkar himself notes: "Hindu fundamentalists coexist with us, as they take advantage of a modernity that they can neither ingest nor disgorge and thrive in the institutions of a secular democracy without which they would not exist but that they hate sufficiently to destroy" ("Censoring," 445). The solution is a persistently educated electorate, not simply the right to information – we are back to Bishop Middleton, and the task of saying "yes" to the enemy – imperialist and fundamentalist -- the move toward unconditional ethics where I began.

¹⁶ Foucault hailed Kant as the inaugurator of modernity for a somewhat different reason ("What Is Enlightenment?" in *Political Writings*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.54-60.).

with the representative cultural reference to Boccaccio – too incidental, unimportant to the edifice.¹⁷ Nothing much to be done here but monumentalize, and, of course, acknowledge that, like many good men of his period and later, Coleridge can feel a specific wrath against class-marked female misery. The ideological framework is too haphazard, the results of critical analysis too predictable. Our feminist work is with the subaltern and cannot enter these enclosures.

Pradeep Bhargava, the Director of the G.B. Pant Institute for Social Science Institute at the University of Allahabad, could not understand last week how I could be working on the British Romantics while I was so engaged in coping with ungeneralizable subalternity in western West Bengal. Reader, inhabit the fracture, and know that it is deepest and least accessible in gender. Let an unfamiliar belief flood you as the first step in productive imaginative unease. Whatever you can willingly suspend will not protect you, or only protect you, against the organic obsessions of globality.

(I had offered to write on “willing suspension of disbelief” long before a copy of the PMLA article where Pyle pointed out the unread Wordsworth passage appeared in my e-mail inbox. As I move toward the final steps of this piece, I realize that it is becoming a response to a refusal to read, indicated by a former student, whom I think I had taught already when he was a brilliant sophomore, and one of the things that we co-discovered was indeed the unblemished and strong Romantics. What I am about to report will be even more Coleridge-like. The good Bishop of Calcutta died delirious at fifty-three (CWL v.2, p. 368).

Sometime in the late nineties, I woke in the pitch darkness of the coffin like bedroom at Jonara hamlet in Purulia district, with a sentence in English ringing in my head: “human rights are predicated upon the failure of both state and revolution.” I was able to use this at a conference Princeton (unmarked on my cv) closely following this event, but thought nothing of the coincidence. Over the years, the subaltern work began to approach the elite work. The first such public intervention was “Righting Wrongs.” It took me some time to understand that that piece was based on false evidence, because I had been taken in by the anthropologic feudalism of the local benevolent landowner and the complicit metropolitan writer. Directives for producing writing came more and

¹⁷ The passage from Boccaccio on Dante, quoted and approved on Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, eds. (Princeton University Press, 1983), v.1, p. 229, n.1, refers to woman as a “suspicious animal” and counsels philosophers against marrying. Given Coleridge’s personality and circumstances, let us just put it down to experience being counted as representative and leave it at that.

more between sleeping and waking. I thought this happened to everyone – perhaps it does – and also put it down to the lighter sleep of an aging person. Until, a little before I was slated to speak at the Poulantzas Institute in Athens, an invitation which made me feel terrifyingly responsible, a full-fledged solution came to me between sleeping and waking, to the extent that, when I woke up, I wrote it down and gave it the filename “Poulantzas Dream Take.” Dream intervention of the sort has increased, and comes most of the time when I am in Calcutta or in the villages, but not invariably. Interestingly, there is now an occasional continuity between the same dream, broken but carried on through the night – sometimes even later. Just a couple of weeks ago, because I was taking good care to put my elite house in order before I hit my subaltern house – I could get only two hours of sleep, between three and five in morning. The next afternoon, trying desperately to keep awake after having supervised two school sessions, as I gave additional training to the teachers and supervisors from both schools, suddenly a dream phrase intervened – “a box of cards,” – making absolutely no sense in the context of what I was saying to my class. I explained the dream-phenomenon, and, always remembering that Freud had suggested that we produce daydreams to interpret, said that this perhaps had something to do with the nature of the gamble in attempting to learn how to train people my own caste and class had cognitively damaged millennially.

Now that I am ready to go through the notes I made on rereading the extracts from the *Biographia* included in the Norton Critical, I had a night full of the repetition of the “same” dream. I wrestled all night with the task of explaining the willing suspension of disbelief to a presumed audience who could only approach it through a Hindi film song. I am not quite sure of the title of the film, since I had first seen famous Hindi films only at Lincoln Center – after the re-writing of Hindi cinema as “Bollywood,” comparable to the cultural upgrading of marijuana in my adolescence. We were not allowed to watch Hindi cinema in the '40-s and '50-s – since we were educated in “good literature” (and a bit of “good” cinema, Bengali and English) – for me, English poetry, for all of us siblings Rabindranath Tagore’s music and poetry – mostly music – and songs for Kali, and the inevitable “classical music” – North Indian vocal performance. The interesting thing was that the song, repeatedly remembered, in dreams and half-dreams last night, came from the Lincoln Center experience of Bollywood, metropolitan post colonialism if you like, and ran, sung, in the film by a female voice, addressed to a future lover in the second person intimate: “I know what you said and I also know what I heard.” In other words, someone who has solved

the colonial exploitation of provoking momentary poetic faith -- the willing suspension of disbelief. No, I know the difference between my understanding and your statement.

This, then, was music that I had only heard a couple of years ago at Lincoln Center, in Hindi, the national language, not my first. But, behind it, is its Bengali translation, sung by a well-known male singer in the first person singular, a favorite of my parents, a song that I have known since those darkened afternoons in Calcutta when my father was alive -- listening to a weekend music-by-request program on the radio. This song, which I was not remembering in the dream, but ran to the same tune, goes "my beloved did not give me his/her heart [and mind -- the Bengali word is *mono*], but only took it." Another description of "the willing suspension of disbelief," extracted as the unconditional ethical, with no entry into the powerful and giving mindset -- dominance without hegemony. The teacher's refusal to read was caught between two unevenly distributed translations, of the tune, not the sentiment; literally no more than *Bestimmung* -- tuning. I began to understand with what anguish Derrida had insisted in *Rogues* that no redress for the global malaise would come from Kant, for whom both self and world were "as if"-s. A new enlightenment must be devised, and its holders must learn how to "translate."¹⁸

So, no, I will not be taken in by a poetic ruse "willingly to suspend disbelief." And, I must also say, I will not be taken in by the promise of a "historical materialism" as a formulaic description of the relationship between will and social production, even as I work at the material determinations of epistemology. I will attend upon the new task, com-plicit in dreams, which has already broken the outlines of an acceptable essay on Coleridge.)

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¹⁸ Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 121, p. 159.