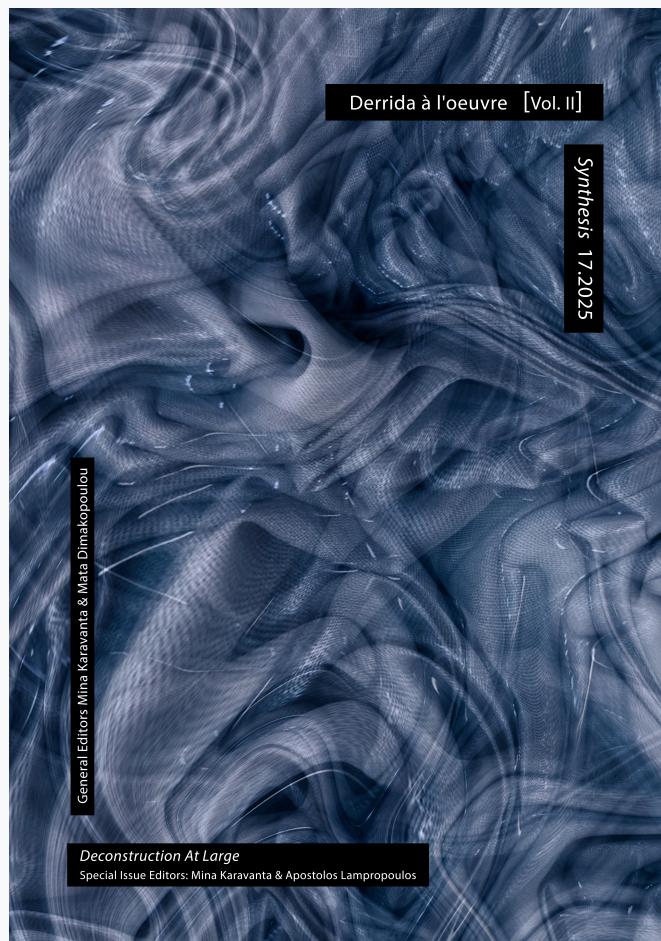


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Derrida à l'œuvre: Deconstruction at Large



Defend the Text

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Defend the Text

R. Radhakrishnan

Abstract

This essay is an attempt to rearticulate the relationship of text to context. Defending the text should not be the same as fetishizing the text. On the other hand, no context is self-evident. In a geopolitical context where some contexts are visible and others occluded or colonized or preempted, the act of reading a text should avoid the pitfall of universalism. The manifesto, Defend the text, needs to be aware that texts may well be indefensible. It all depends on the context, and no context is unique, exemplary, or universal. It must not be forgotten that defending is a polemical exercise, and polemics are prone to reductiveness and overgeneralization. In a world that is yet to encounter a full-blown conversation/contestation between Faith and secular Reason, defending any text at best can only be an honest and vulnerable overture.

“Defend the text.” Who said that? Use quotation marks, or no quotes? Has the text spoken, for itself, in itself, by itself? Is it real merely as performance, or is it intended pedagogically, as truth? Who has been spoken for, in an act of hegemonic representation? Has anything been foreclosed as a consequence? Is it a disembodied voice; an oracle, an *ashareeri*, the bodyless voice? Is there a determinate body as the hinterland of the voice? Is it an “I” body or a “We” body? Or is it a haunting? What about the “nothing” *hors-texte*? Defend “text,” accompanied by which article, definite or indefinite, or no article at all? Is it a command, an edict, an imperative, an exhortation, a plea: universal or

particular, timeless or historical? Is the call ontological, metaphysical, ethical, political, epistemological, or all of the above and even more? Is the authority of the call absolute, autonomous, and autotelic; or is the autonomy relative? If relative, then, relative to what? Is the text its own self sufficient and self-evident context, or is the context in some sense, *hors-texte*, outside the text? Is the defense unconditional and non-negotiable, or is it contingent and vulnerable to circumstance? Is the said or the unsaid text “always already” and *a priori* defensible, or is the jury still out on the verdict? Does it matter what the text actually said, or does the ideological content not matter at all, given the primacy of the text *qua* text? Could the same text be defensible along one axis of jurisdiction and indefensible along another? Is the defense procedural, substantive, thematic, ideological, or all of the above? If all of the above, then, is one of the modes *primus inter pares*? These are some of the questions that inform and undergird this brief response, necessitated by the recent horrific and reprehensible assault on Salman Rushdie.

It certainly makes sense to begin with the publication of Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* and the consequent *fatwa*. What was most frustrating and counterproductive about the whole debate that followed was the fundamental question-begging that formed the basis for the polemics. The antagonists were the secularists and the devout Islamists, and what was at stake was the separation of Church and State, Religion and/or Theology, and Politics and reasons of state. Right away, there is a problem. What indeed is the geopolitical reach of the jurisdiction known as separation of Church and State? In this principled formulation, is the Church universally modular and *ergo*, representative of all religions? Does the separation of Church also enact and promulgate the reality of Synagogue and State, Temple and State, Mosque and State, Gurdwara and State, Fire Temple and State, Monastery and State, Tirtha and State? It is the nature of the antagonism in this veritable *jihad* or “crusades” that is worrisome and intractable. Is antagonism synonymous with enmity, and antagonist with enemy? If enemy, then is the enemy “within” or “without,” to borrow from Gil Anidjar’s profound meditations?

So, why question begging, and here is how and why. In the hostile confrontation between believers and secularists, or should I say, “believers of secularism,” one thing became clear. Each side was quite happy to authenticate, valorize, and legitimate its worldview and perspective as an exercise in existence, but not in co-existence. In other words, each side was quite happy to rely on its own axiology and convictions without any reference to the opponent’s worldview and first principle. Before getting into the horror and the cruelty of the *fatwa*, I think it is important to evaluate and calibrate the nature of the

antagonism. The devout Islamists were quite happy to condemn the text despite even not having read it. The form, the disposition, the rhetoricity, the fictive verisimilitude of the text, the subtle interplay of figural versus representational truth claims within the text, the hermeneutic slippages between Truth and Method, the problematic negotiation between history and primordiality, the secular and the spiritual, the Origin and its identical or non-identical reiterations via historical time, the coeval reciprocal presence of Faith and Doubt, Sacred Text and Apocrypha: these subtleties and profound minutiae mean literally nothing to the apostolic reader. They are literally beside the point. God and his Prophet cannot be doubted, blasphemed, profaned, and made liable to human-historical error. The text has already been pre-judged, and from the point of view of the orthodox believer, rightly so. Such a position can well be recognized as doctrinaire and dogmatic.

But well, how much less dogmatic or less ideological is the stance of the “fundamentalist” secular critic to whom the freedom of the text is all, and the context nothing? Isn’t secular knowledge not also a form of belief, belief in “minimal Reason?” Even if the context were to matter and were real, the secularist gives the text absolute freedom to pre-textualize, i.e., make a pretext of the context and run with it any which way. The two antagonists are flip sides of each other, and the real difference is the *imprimatur* issue: in whose or what name does each one of them anchor his/her truth claim. Even though it would appear that the two are in litigation with each other in the same court of law, they are, in reality, in two different courts, each of them present in the absence of the other, shadowboxing ferociously. There are two discrete first principles at work here: two incommensurable first principles that render impossible any common ground of negotiable and recognizable antagonism. Each does not and cannot recognize the other as antagonist: antagonism without reciprocal recognition. This situation brings to mind the distinction that Frantz Fanon makes between what he calls a dialectically mediated antagonism and one that is non-dialectic. Michel Foucault would term it as the enmity of “pure distance,” a distance not negotiable or traversable by the two parties in the name of a resolution to come. Of course, there is the “*différend*,” as theorized by Jean-Francois Lyotard. What Fanon means by a non-dialectical antagonism is this: the two parties do not share a common ethico-political, epistemological, ontological horizon that functions as an inclusive umbrella that offers antagonism as a value and as a principle of an evolving teleological imperative. Unlike the dialectic, Hegelian or Marxist, which operates as an ongoing thesis, antithesis, synthesis model on the assumption that both the thesis and the antithesis are putting their antagonism to work in the name of

an emerging common, transcendent and overarching goal, the colonizer-colonized situation, Fanon avers, admits of no such antagonistic commonality, in complicity or solidarity, or both. That is exactly why Fanon claims thunderously that the Colonizer and the Colonized are two different species: hence the inevitability of Violence, and it is either you or me.

Of course, it is equally true that the same Fanon makes his uncomfortable peace with Nationalism, in the hope that Nationalism realized the African way will be a genuine rupture from the Nationalism of the Colonizer, and therefore a reliable step on the way to a “new humanism” (not unlike Said’s vision of Palestinian Nationalism as exceptionally non-nationalist). Now, what could Fanon mean by two different species? Is he overstating his case to make a point, in other words, is it more like “the two look like they could be two different species considering what has happened, that is, the ugly and murderous history of Colonialism, but this reality is only historically but not *essentially* true?” Enmity can only be a product of history, not an inevitable expression of genetic, civilizational or inborn order of reality. In other words, something humane and meaningful can come out of an ex-colonizer-ex-colonized collaboration, despite the Colonialist past. He is heightening and rendering the antagonism exorbitant to make a point: a point that remains a blind spot in the 20/20 vision of the secularist. The secularist does not understand, would indeed be horrified to understand, that his secularism is Eurocentric and not universal, and what is even more scandalous, that the secular blueprint is very much a complicit continuation of the Colonialist episteme: a point made differentially by thinkers such as Ashis Nandy, Partha Chatterjee, Talal Asad, William Connolly, Saba Mahmood and others. Need I even point out that the direct and intended consequence of Western Enlightenment for the non-West was the horror of Settler Colonialism: the extermination of the “native brutes” on the basis of the invidious thesis of *terra nullius* and “land without a people,” and the violent erasure of pre-colonial histories, worldviews, and modes of living in the name of the so-called “empty homogeneous time” of the Enlightenment.

What the secular thinker does not get is that the colonized peoples of the world in particular and those othered by western Reason in general, live in the chronic rupture between Home and World. The choice offered to them: Home or World. In Fanon’s language, what is forgotten in the hegemonic formulation of the ontogenetic recapitulation of phylogeny, is the irreducible reality of sociogeny. To rehearse territory that has been covered profoundly in recent scholarship, the fundamental gripe of the non-West has been that the freedom it has been offered has been a burdened freedom, to borrow from

Saidiya Hartman, that the modularity of thought and action provided to them as their own is not and will never be their own, and that they have to envision their ontopolitical liberation as a double thought: as freedom via the political and as freedom from the political. And why is this scenario so twisted and perverted? Not because the non-western mind is pathological, but because the geopolitical situation is perverted and sick. Simply put, geopolitical wisdom has taken the form of a *fait accompli* that has decreed that non-western societies and cultures have forfeited, thanks to the savagery of colonialism, their right to configure and align their own normative versions of politics. In alignment with their own social, ontological worldview, their cosmology, their sense of home. When they become free in the name of the decolonized secular nation-state, they have in fact acquiesced in their chronic derivativeness. Whose imagined community, as Partha Chatterjee would ask in response to Benedict Anderson. They are putatively free politically in the World out there only after having surrendered their home. It is indeed a pyrrhic victory. Indeed, the West has made sure that politics is a western game to be played by the whole world. The roads not taken, the roads that were rudely interrupted and destroyed by colonialism are to be ruthlessly forgotten and “pre-historicized” in the name of the empty homogeneous time of the Enlightenment and its political corollary, the modern nation state and the democracy afforded by capitalist nationalism. Why do I have to score a victory in cricket to be at home in the world, rather than play *kabaddi* meritoriously, non-reactively, and non-competitively to be at world in my home?

Why such an oblique and seemingly ambivalent prologue to a text whose chief objective is to condemn, without qualification or reserve, the recent brutal attack on the person of Salman Rushdie? The reason is simple. Any righteous condemnation of violence, in the very performance of its righteous indignation, also has the obligation to understand where the violence is coming from, and why. In other words, the condemnation cannot afford to rule out violence *tout court* as though violence as such, violence in itself, is alien to the human. Or that, violence by definition is an expression of an intrinsic pathology that is beyond the pale of Reason, causality, and historical etiology. To be violent, *ipso facto*, *de facto*, and *de jure* is to be criminal, irrational, immoral, unconscionable, and inhuman. To put it differently, violence is not a language even if there are substantive and convincing reasons to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that in a particular historical instance, violence is legitimate, appropriate, and indeed well earned by those who have been targeted as objects of violence. Violence typically and procedurally is dealt with in a historically amnesiac, presentist mode, and chastised as a mode of

behavior that is exiled *a priori* from all forms of legitimacy. What I am advocating, in the very heat of the moment of the actual violence, is a double-conscious and audacious response that calls Foul loud and clear and at the same time acknowledges the possibility that behind the violence there may lurk a reason. It is not for no reason that Fanon in his disquisition on Violence acknowledges it on multiple registers, not just cognitive and intellectual, but visceral, nervous, psycho-affective, and behavioral. His point is that the rationale of the colonized cannot afford to be purged of the righteous violence of its anger, indignation, deep sense of violation and outrage. Besides, Fanon is pointing out the unbearable absurdity of the settler colonialist's principled and high-minded, ethico-procedural insistence on objective, universal Reason: the very same settler colonialist who was the perpetrator of an originary violence that settled as Reason.

The point I want to make is that this textual situation has to be submitted to be a double vision: the immediate context in all its immanence, as well as the *longue durée* without which the present situation makes no sense. Take for example the unproven claim that secular reason is more reasonable, more objective, more dispassionate, more disinterested than religious reason. Such an arrogant claim is in fact an amnesiac claim. What has been conveniently forgotten is the fact that the objective plenitude of Enlightenment reason was achieved on the basis of a prior scission: the scission known as separation of Church and State. It is not that the Church had nothing to say about the relationship between Existence and Reason, Being and Knowing. The truth of the matter is that a jurisdiction had to be created to enable the sovereignty of reason and reasons of state, and this necessitated the removal of entire wavelengths and registers from the sphere of the political. Enlightenment reason was nothing if not opportunistic and self-serving. As Foucault would have it, the very history of the production of reason is unreasonable, and *ergo* it stands to reason that Enlightenment reason disallows any kind of genealogical analysis except on its own terms. No wonder then that the entire world of Enlightenment philosophers were appalled and enraged when Martin Heidegger chose to plunge Enlightenment reason back into the quagmire of "pre-judice" and the horror of the hermeneutic circle and the agony of putting the questioner within the question. What was at stake was not reason *per se*, but the sovereignty of instrumental reason in the form of the political ratio and reasons of state. It is not surprising that Heidegger, notwithstanding his deservedly blemished reputation, found favor with a number of Third World theorists. The Heideggerian project of the *destruktion* of the occidental metaphysical onto-theological tradition could be articulated with anti-colonial and

post-colonial projects of resistance and affirmation. There was now available a vestibular relationship between the “other within Europe” and the “other without” of the colonized worlds.

It is this complicity of Reason with the domain known as politics that warrants a multilateral unpacking as well as genealogical analysis. Thinkers as different from one another such as Frantz Fanon and Rabindranath Tagore have made the same point about the hegemonic hold of politics over all of life, and the hegemony of the west in matters political, which is to say, in all of life. What secular thinkers of the West fail to see, an argument made time and again by Partha Chatterjee, is the reality that the non-western subject is chronically stranded between Home and World. The modular construction of the World as Politics has nothing to do with the Home of the African and the Asian. Between the social and the political falls, a shadow, between the social and the political, stands a wall. In Fanon’s terms, in all the glib talk about ontogeny and phylogeny what is forgotten is sociogeny. The life world of the non-west plays no part whatsoever in the formation of global politics. That precisely is why radical visionary thinkers from Africa and Asia have refused to fetishize politics as the *summum bonum* of Existence. Tagore’s *Advaita* based universalism and Fanon’s ontopolitical vision of a “new humanism,” despite their substantive and irreconcilable differences, envision freedom both via and beyond the domain of politics. Not just that, the Rest of the World is still seething with indignation that it has had to accept the universal dominance of settler colonial reason as a *fait accompli*. What happened to all those other roads, those other modes of production and existence that existed pre colonialism? Why is it wrong to want to return to those times? Why should the whole world be condemned to acquiesce in the temporality of the post-colonial while the Settler hasn’t had the decency to apologize, expiate, make amends, recant, and make basic sacrifices to rectify the global imbalance that has been valorized as universal progress?

My point is quite simple. Even as I am in total agreement with the exhortation, Defend the text, I also want to add a caveat, a necessary corollary. Let the exhortation be made with the critical awareness that the location that authorizes the exhortation is a complicit and not an innocent location, which is to say, a specific marked location, and not an unmarked ubiquitous location. The epistemic location is that of a nuanced Western Liberalism that prides itself in proclaiming with ethical grandeur, “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” Whoever the “you” here is may well respond thus: Who in the name of heaven and hell are you to defend me and my right to say what I want to say? Also, who the heck are you to

disapprove of what I say. What galls the “you” here is the ease with which the Voltairean voice which is very much a heated contestant in the agon suddenly disembodies and spiritualizes itself and presumes to speak from a distance that only omniscience can provide and guarantee. An interested and heated participant immaculately morphs into an omniscient and objective persona. What is trivialized and de-substantialized in the process is the relational body of the polemic. Instead, what is legitimated is a politics of tolerance with a built-in hierarchical distance between the “tolerator” and the “tolerated.” The substantive ideological difference, the difference in content between the two perspectives, is bracketed in the name of a superior procedural neutrality.

I would also like to add more nuance to the “defense” of the text by marking and denominationalizing the text. First and foremost, the text is not so vulnerable as to warrant a defensive attitude right away. There is also the dire need, in a world structured in dominance and unevenness, to identify the text as English, French, Hindi, Urdu, Swahili, Tagalog, Shona, Hosa, and on and on, and as western, eastern, northern, southern, national, transnational, cosmopolitan, diasporic, ethnic, regional, subaltern, *dalit*, and so on and so forth. There is no general or generic text, and all texts do not enjoy the same privilege, access, or currency. Most world affairs, including the pathetic exercise of book awards and Nobel awards, function in a state of abject ignorance of worlds within the world that find no place in the cosmopolitan map. For all practical purposes, the Global South may as well not exist when it comes to universal recognition and acknowledgment. In such a situation, it is obligatory to make a categorical distinction between the vulnerability of a specific text and the vulnerability or the lack thereof of the same text, generically or taxonomically speaking. The unpardonable violence meted out to texts like *The Satanic Verses* needs to be understood contrapuntally with reference to the silent violence of sheer non-recognition suffered by multitudes of non-cosmopolitan texts authored in the so called “minor” and “peripheral” languages, dialects, and idiolects. Rushdie is vulnerable, but not “Rushdie.” Conversely, just imagine how a contemporary novel celebrating a return to the regime of the Caliphate would be received in the metropolis. Or for that matter, and this hits close to home in my case, a virulent Hindutva text? Lest I be misunderstood, let me make myself clear. My non-believer standpoint on the Hindutva text would be unambiguously critical and oppositional in the name of a necessary political secularism. But such a perspective will not foreclose an ontopolitical and epistemological interrogation of the unbounded claims of secularism. I would certainly be sympathetic to the endeavor of returning to pre-

colonial “Hindu” possibilities, but such an endeavor has nothing to do with the phobic toxicity of Hindutva.

Debates about texts need to happen in a coeval and relational space. To invoke Edward Said’s notion of the secular, no text operates exclusively in its own secluded identitarian space. The secular is the crossroads where different histories overlap and diverge under different conditions. Any given space is always already conjunctural and intersectional, and texts are both proactive with reference to themselves, and reactive to other texts that are seemingly “without.” The other is already “within,” just as the self is already “without.” The intra-dimension is already in deep touch with, or shall we say contaminated by, the dimension of the “inter.” Consequently, adjudications about the civility or the animosity of specific texts need to be made within a relational and co-existential space. It is always way too tempting to anchor the judgment as well as the moment of judgment in a monologic, monocentric, and autonomous space, all in the name of a non-factional hegemonic universalism. There is no prior obligation that texts should not offend one another or even call into question one another’s right to exist. A good example is the Palestinian attitude to the very facticity of Israel’s existence. Yes, on the one hand, the Palestinian has every obligation to recognize the existence of Israel, and at the same time keep harping on the fact that the Balfour Act and the establishment of Israel is a *reality that should not have been allowed to happen*. Settler Colonialism has the obligation, and Israel is nothing but settler-colonial, not to double down, but genuflect in profound guilt and criminality, and begin to atone for its omnicide.

Should it be “defend the text,” or “defend the intention of the text?”: a question rendered undecidable by the linguistic turn and the subsequent post-structuralist and deconstructionist developments in the history of hermeneutics and critical theory. I am sure by now my readers have guessed where I am headed here: where else but the momentous and evergreen Foucault Derrida showdown by way of Descartes? Let me declare right away that despite my strong Derridean deconstructionist orientation in general, in this instance I am pro-Foucault all the way. This is exactly the site where Foucauldian discourse and Derridean textuality part company. Both thinkers are more than happy to concede that intention is constituted and legitimated linguistically and discursively. The big difference of course is that whereas Derridean deconstruction spirits away the contingency as well as the circumstantiality of history in the name of the ideality of philosophical wisdom, Foucauldian discourse analysis aligns itself with the finitude of history and its epistemic pre and proscriptions. Text and discourse part company. From Foucault’s

perspective, it is possible to hold Descartes and his discourse-function accountable not only to determinate meaning effects but also to specific extra-discursive institutional events and practices. No text is blessed or divine enough to deconstruct itself in perfect anticipation of a perfection to come.

There is a real and substantive difference between defending the text *tout court* and in abeyance of any and all intention and defending the text as the embodiment and expression of a specific intention. Derrida, we know, is “guilty” of granting an exceptionalist status to philosophy as discourse and to literature or literary language as the ultimate “non-frame.” Of cardinal significance here is Derrida’s demystification of Lacan’s psychoanalytic reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Purloined Letter*. Derrida insists that despite its strong anti-humanist thrust, Lacanian psychoanalysis is ideologically guilty of claiming Truth as such as the truth of psychoanalysis. In other words, psychoanalysis “frames” the truth. If only, and this is a typical Derridean move, Lacan had been mindful of the play of language in the text, he would not have imposed the psychoanalytic will to Truth on the radical undecidability of the text. It is literature and literary play that defer closure and the violence of framing. Derrida, quite predictably, will not concede that literature, even in his hands, is but another frame in a *mise en abyme*. Derrida, through a sheer performance of will, valorizes literature as a non-frame.

I have indulged in this little *detour* just to say that my strategy is to defend not just the text but defend the text as intention in a world where intentions as intention effects produce real consequences of hurt, humiliation, misrecognition, and so on. Moreover, intention is not understood exclusively with reference to the consciousness of the intender and his or her egoistic control mechanisms. Intention by definition is susceptible to misrecognition, and this misrecognition is well within the semantics of the original intention. And as I have already argued, even if it can be demonstrated that the text in question is indeed an auto-deconstructive text, it cannot be assumed that this very belief in meaning as deconstruction is universal. It is not and it should not be possible for any system of meaning to operate in a state of hermetic closure. Yes indeed, unfortunate as it may seem, there indeed are schools of linguistic thought that disallow the verity of deconstruction. What is at play here, in the context of the relationship among the many languages that constitute the world and its meaning/s, is a subtle *coup*, a classic performance of legerdemain. Each language or group of languages, in the very act of disseminating its hold on meaning, also tacitly invokes a meta-linguistic edict or imperative. In doing so, it automatically and involuntarily indemnifies itself against alien readings and interpretations. Take for example the famous linguistic turn in

western linguistics. As far as I know, there has been no such turn in the world of South Asian languages. I will mention in passing, and I have written about this elsewhere, that there have been ferocious debates in the contemporary Tamizh scene where scholars and writers have not only asserted that postmodernism is fundamentally alien to Tamizh, but have also gone on to accuse the self-styled postmodern Tamizh writers of denaturing and inflicting epistemic violence on Tamizh. The conflict is not just about languages skirmishing with one another, but about the production of a meta- level understanding of the nature of “language in general” and the application of this understanding to the nature and disposition of each and every language. What is any language as itself, as English, as French, as Gujarati, as Gikuyu etc., and also, what is each Language in all its universality and generality? The question then arises: whence will emerge such a meta- theory of language? If Saussure opines that language is conventional with reference to the signifier and differential, but Kalidasa swears by the thesis that the word and its meaning are in a state of conjugal reciprocal inherence, where is the consensual room for the emergence of a meta-theory?

In the attempt to reach a convenient single standard of normativity for the entire world, there is no reason to betray the fundamental multeity of the world. I would even ask, why the passion for a single universal standard? The only way universality can be administered is by way of hegemonic representation, and who in their right mind would opt for hegemonic closure and not for a never-ending polyglot polylogue? The World has never been and there is no need for it to be ONE. What is needed is the reality of multiple and different overlapping experiences and phenomenologies, and the courage to insist on multiple maps and not a monomaniacal ONE cartography. The cruel one map has been the legacy of Settler Colonialism, a map that is built on the assumption that any reality that existed before the advent of the settler is worthy of extermination. This is not to claim that non-settler and indigenous societies and cultures were innocent or pure. Here is the difference; these societies respected the rationale of coexistence as multiple, hybrid, eclectic. There was no attempt at conversion, no desire to disrespect the other as a precondition for self-respect, no need to realize knowledge as colonization and domination or to constrain and imprison the freedom of coexistence into the freedom afforded by the master-slave dialectic. Not just that, but in doing so perpetuate the allegory of the master slave dialectic as an ontological imperative, rather than understand it critically as a historically perpetrated horror. To put it simply, the terms master and slave would never have been dignified as philosophical categories except on the basis of a lived history that permitted and

pardoned positions such as master and slave. There are no masters and slaves in nature. It has been the self-appointed exceptionalist privilege of Settler Colonialism to mandate the first principles of its own rationale as the intrinsic rationale of Life/Being itself. To reason is to settle in the form of violence and claim autonomy much like the jar in Wallace Stevens's poem.

Yes, indeed and by all means, defend the text, but with the understanding that the text itself is nothing but symptom. The defense of the text is also the defense of the symptom. Understand that the act of defending the text as symptom and symptom as text (in this sense there is indeed "nothing outside the text") does not and cannot transcend the temporality of the symptom or ferry us over and across to the other side of the symptom where normalcy reigns supreme, forever there guaranteed as the future perfect. Absolutely, any form of violence is to be condemned without equivocation, but the backdrop cannot be the universality of Reason. Yes, make ethical judgments without fear or favor but with the understanding that your judgment is not the final word, but an invitation seeking to be judged in a world where coexistence has been renamed as imperial citizenship.

To conclude on an ontopolitical register, the defend the text problematic is but the tip of the iceberg. The underlying problem is that of Universalism, in all its varying ideological garbs and accoutrements: just plain Universalism, assuming that such a formulation is viable, and centric and perspectival configurations such as Hindu Universalism, Islamic Universalism, Christian Universalism, Mystic and Metaphysical Universalism, Marxist Universalism, Capitalist and Commodity Universalism, on and on. Let us face it: the One and the "Uni" are the problem. Universalism is hopelessly and chronically mired in the battle among perspectives and centers. All the more "reason" to abandon Universalism as a bad dream and devote all time and energy to practice relationality without recourse with the understanding that the World itself is nothing but Perspective, and not a transcendent horizon that accommodates perspectival play and provides such play with its teleological/historicist sanction: a thesis that I am working out in my forthcoming book, *The Open and the Imperative of Coexistence*. I guess there is no better way to attempt a conclusion than via references to Fanon, Gandhi, and the *Rig Veda*. Fanon's manifesto towards "a new humanism" that in the very act of espousing Africa as the ideal perspective dissolves the hubris of Afrocentrism and African exceptionalism. Gandhi's vision of a free India as a house with open doors to allow the flow of breezes from all over the world but with the caveat that the house itself not be blown away or be deracinated by the force of all the external currents. Finally, the hymn from the *Rig Veda*, *Aano Bhadra krtavo yantu*

vishwatah/Let noble thoughts come to me from all directions, as Hinduism's interfaith promise of porosity to the rest of the world religions. Each of these formulations takes on the authority of a manifesto but on the basis of an essential and necessary doubleness. The transcendence has to be incomplete for the simple reason that perspective as location cannot be transcended. Africa has to remain African despite the attempted Universalism, Gandhi's house has to be rooted despite the vaunted cosmopolitanism, and the seer who chants the Vedic verse has to decide which thoughts are noble and which ignoble, and moreover give a local *meaning* to the concept "nobility," rather than receive it as a modular fabrication with an alien provenance.

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