Protest Fiction in the Throng of Words

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Our theme for this conference is a demanding one, for we gather to consider twothings – the work of protest in literary writing, and also the *effect* of protest, the aftermath of literary protest, in that enormous, and unequal, and resoundingly unjust world beyond the place of post-war literature. "Aftermath" is a small word, but in the context of our conference title it voices a big political commitment for us all, for it places before us a difficult and possibly dispiriting scholarly question: how can literary writing actually help to effect *genuine* social change? I suspect that most of us who are at this conference today – at last those of us who, like me, are here as literary critics – became readers of literature, and eventually students of it, not out of political commitment in the first instance, but out of something that happened very early in our lives: a desire to change ourselves as *individuals* – that is why we read furiously by torchlight under the bedsheets while Mummy and Daddy pretended to think we were asleep. Now, in sober adulthood, we gather together at this conference under the organizational genius of Drs. Urbashi Bharat, Madhumalmi Akhikari, Usha Kalley, Neelanjana Pathak, their army of energetic and cheerful postgraduate students, and so many others far too numerous to name, because we seek to understand the ways in which literature's tested and proven ability to effect changes at the level of the individual can also effect real change in the interests of a larger human collectivity. What role is there for literary protest, or for protest literature, in the fashioning of genuine equity in human and planetary affairs? Urbashi and her team could not have posed for this conference a more difficult or intimidating question.

I intend my own answer to this question to be ultimately a hopeful one, and so let me begin my argument by attempting

to locate just a small part of the very real difficulty of our conference's organizing question. I begin with my own home continent, but not, I hasten to assure you, my own home country. A recent survey in the United States,[1] conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts, concludes that the incidence of reading in North America has dropped sharply from twenty years ago, especially in 18-24 year olds, and especially in the reading of imaginative fiction. The survey finds that almost half of the adult population of the world's richest nation no longer reads literature of any kind. The survey finds that those Americans who do read literature are statistically identifiable with economic and educational privilege. The survey also finds that reading practice is declining faster in African-American and Hispanic American communities than it is in white ones.

Another recent survey, this one conducted by the United Nations,[2] concludes that of the 4.4 billion people living in the so-called "developing world", 3/5ths live without basic sanitation, 1/3rd without safe drinking water, 1/4 without adequate housing, and 1/5th beyond the reach of basic health services. It is therefore no surprise to learn that the global many – who are everywhere – do not share the literary reading habits of the privileged global few. For the reading of imaginative or literary fiction is built upon the bridge of individualism and self-improvement, and such a bridge must rest on two foundations: the privilege of literacy, and then a social willingness to believe. What the survey shows us is that many in the American underclass, those whose lives are pitched far from the selective enablements of modernity's profit-taking social contract – many of those who do have sufficient literacy for literary reading – are nevertheless *turning away* from the participatory embrace of contemporary literature. What the survey shows is that a new, and almost certainly rational, conclusion is spreading itself within the throng of human

subalternity. Here is what most literary writing teaches: that as an individual you *will* achieve "the good life" through hard-work, rational planning, and belief in a supporting human or higher order. Here is what an increasing number of the socially marginalized are concluding: the lessons of that literature are not worth having. In the stark light of probable human futures, the dream of individual self-determination, the dream of future inclusion in public debate, the dream of social and political agency, the dream of an end to systemic underclass disposability is a fading one. The reading rate is falling in the world's financial centre, and with it falls the global number who decide to place hope in the practice, or in the aftermath, of the phenomenon of protest literature.

The reading survey also shows that the incidence of literary *writing* in the United States is actually going up. More and more wealthy Americans, it seems, want to write imaginative fiction, though fewer want to read it. It is not universally surprizing to discover that Americans provbe to be statistically more active in writing about themselves than they are in reading about others.[3] Aggressive incuriosity in America takes many social faces. Not all of them look exactly like George W. Bush.

And so imaginative fiction, when it protests, may *appear* to speak in the name of the people. But increasingly, so say the statistics, protest literature does not speak *to* them. The literature of protest is far from the madding crowd of human disenfranchisement. And it is lost in a crowd – the crowd of mainstream popular fiction itself, whose primary function in the work of ideology is to secure socially dominant interests *against* the desires of its underclass citizens for real social change. How does commercially successful storytelling displace the potential for social protest? Let me answer this question through the shorthand of Hollywood movies.

The movie always begins with a real social problem.

Something is wrong in American social life. Something ought to be protested. And so in one version[4] of the Hollywood mono-narrative, an idealistic young law student joins a powerful American law firm, only to discover to his predictable horror that the firm's senior partners are not merely venal, uncaring capitalists – this would be tolerable – but also that they are governed by distant but ruthlessly organized criminals. Our hero has now seen the global criminality that lurks behind his home culture's seeming civility, and now they have him trapped, and he can never break free. How can our hero's discovery not register as an obvious allegory of *actual* governmental practice in the United States, where the nation's senior partner, the American president, really does conduct his nation's domestic and international business at the bidding of an elite private sector which amasses unspeakable corporate wealth through the criminal organization of global warfare, as in the invasion of Iraq, and where the non-powerful within the nation, despite their horror at such nakedly obvious truths, nevertheless believe it necessary to support their ruling managers with their votes and with their lives? It is now, at the level of ideology, that the movie which began with something that should have been revealed and then protested, socially goes to work. Our hero, we learn, has succumbed to a brief and careless moment of marital unfaithfulness. In the Hollywood world of potential revelations, *this* is the substantial one, and the *real* problem before the hero is: how can he now win back his troubled and beautiful wife. On come the action scenes. The corporatebad guys threaten the wife's safety, but ourhero is Tom Cruise, no mission is impossible, Tom overcomes the bad guys, and the wife returns gratefully to his muscled and rippling arms. Our final glimpse is of the winsome couple's deliciously redemptive embrace in an unending South Pacific island. As for the socio-political problem the movie began with – there is some tinkering with the corporate management in the law firm, but in the end the American system of profit-

taking proves governmentally restorable, and fundamentally sound.

And this is what the mainstream Hollywood movie teaches: that though a few things are truly wrong in American culture and politics, because of individual action, they can always be put right. What matters most is not protest and its socially efficacious aftermath. What really matters to America is the individual narrative of fall-and-redemption. *That* is the fate of our propensity to protest: it is subsumed within the energies of popular, ideological storytelling. By means of dominant narrative, it is packaged and displaced.[5]

The work of mainstream social narrative is to dissipate the energy of incipient political protest through plotline satisfaction. No wonder that those we most urgently seek to position at the restless heart of an anti-mainstream protest literature are increasingly turning away from the habit of reading. Protest literature, the literature of protest, is becoming lost in a *throng* of politically conservative mainstream narratives, a throng whose work it is to beguile collectivity into individuality, to finesses the productivity of social contradiction, and to overwhelm the possibility of genuine fictional difference through the sheer force of narrative number. That is why I have drawn my title for this paper from something one character says to another in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part II*, as the accused pretends a false innocence in his manifest and long history of deceiving the unpowerful. This, in a nutshell, is the problem for protest literature. "I am well acquainted," says the Chief Justice to Falstaff, "with your manner of wrenching the true cause the false way. It *is* ... the throng of words..."[6]

Mainstream popular fiction is a capturing mechanism, and it charges like a crowd. And if this thronging capacity were not in itself enough to dilute the potential of disobedient literary fiction to effect a genuine social protest, it is also the case that institutional discipline for the formal study of

"literature in English" - the last of the phrases in this conference's difficult and challenging title - this discipline, our discipline, is itself foundationally grounded in the containment of social protest. This is the conclusion Gauri Viswanathan has arrived at through her study of "The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India"[7] – her study of how the discipline of English Literary Studies itself took shape in the context of territorial expansion and conquest, specifically in the pedagogical engineering experiments of the Bentinck administration in the Bengal Presidency during the 1830s. Viswanathan quotes one of the early Anglicists as saying: Only when "we initiate them into our literature, particularly at an early age, and get them to adopt feelings and sentiments from *our* standard writers, [can] we make an impression on them and effect any considerable alteration in their feelings and notions." ("Beginnings", 14). Bentinck's educational architects, Viswanathan argues, "engaged in a minute analysis of [canonical] English texts" in order to arrive at a teachable critical methodology for inculcating into Indian pedagogical subjects - and here she is quoting Charles Trevelyan – the "sound Protestant Bible principles" of Shakespeare, "the "scriptural morality" of Bacon and Locke, the "noble Christian sentiments" of Adam Smith", to subjects who would strenuously object to such covert cultural Christianization were it honestly presented to them in non-secular terms (*Masks*, 85-6). The goal of English Studies, at the moment of its disciplinary origin in the colonial laboratory, was to refashion an administratively necessary but potentially disobedient middle-class into - and here I am quoting, as everyone does, Trevelyan's inevitable brother-in-law Thomas Macaulay - into "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect."[8] A decade later, the now established new discipline of English Studies found its way home to the imperial centre, and there,

from the 1840s onwards, it served in the Working Men's Colleges as a technology for the displacing lower-class demands for political power into the less threatening satisfactions of formal English literary instruction. A decade after that, English Studies provided a surrogate for women's political demands for access to liberal education. Many now argue that the discipline of English Literary Studies has never lost transcended its original purpose of managing colonial, working-class, and feminist protest, and in muting that protest through the manufacture of consent.[9]

There are strong forces at work against the interests of protest fiction, but my argument for this paper is nevertheless a hopeful one about literary protest and its possible aftermaths. For the time period identified in our conference title, the post-war period, is also the postcolonial period — it is the time of the great decolonization of the European Empires from August 1947 forward to this day - and in measuring the effects or the aftermath of the literature of protest, we should not forget that a great many of the nationalist leaders in this global, twentieth-century decolonising movement towards a more equitable human future *combined* literature and politics in their reading and writing of the world. Leopold Senghor, for example, the first president of independent Senegal, arrived at his theory of négritude during the time he writing a postgraduate dissertation on the poetry of Charles Baudelaire. Senghor's collaborator in that theory, the Martiniquian poet Aimé Césaire, engineered the first political step towards national independence for Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guiana and Réunion by arguing before the French National Assembly that the formal status of these islands needed to change now from that of "colony" to that of "department". Kwame Nkrumah, president of the first decolonised African nation, was a distinguished essayist and monograph writer. Nelson Mandela's monograph *No Easy Walk to Freedom* is a model for how literary autobiography can

work in the service of political activism. Pandit Nehru was a distinguished belle lettrist. And Gandhiji himself, or so say his biographers, developed some of the planks for his philosophy of *satyagraha* during his South African years, through his literary writing of writers like Thoreau, Emerson, and especially Lev Tolstoy.

The history of decolonising postcolonialism, in other words, is structurally inseparable from the worldly power of literary writing, and if there is any defining principle at all to that vast and heterogeneous global literature in English we now sometimes call "the postcolonial literatures", it is the certainly the presence of protest itself in the postcolonial literary text. But how protest speaks through literature, how literature speaks through protest - the answer to such questions is not "just there" on the surface of the page. My thesis for this paper is that literary protest is not only alive and at work within literature but is also structurally resident in the real world of political activism. It is muted, it is tricky, it is embedded in and inextricable from what it is that it opposes — my thesis for this paper is that postcolonial literary protest necessarily walks the line, dialectically, *between* identification and dis-identification with the figure of "the people", between recognition as protest literature and unfathomability in literary politics, between accommodation to the dominant and opposition to the oppressive, between speaking from authority and speaking truth to power.

And to make this argument, I want to consider just two small moments of embedded narrative protest. The first moment pertains to how protest works in fiction; the second pertains to the way that fictional principles come to inform non-literary acts of political protest; and I present these two moments to you as the first two premises within the argumentative structure of a categorical syllogism - two critical premises leading to a definitive conclusion. I hope you will

hear something of my own commitment to the discipline of postcolonial critical theory - which teaches that although dissenting messages may be ambivalently positioned, hegemony is never absolute - I hope you will hear *that* methodological commitment in my argument when I tell you, as now I must, that in the categorical syllogism that structures my argument, from the premise of protest in fiction to the premise of fiction in protest, there is no *simple*, and *synthesizing* third term. Protest and fiction comprise an ongoing *dialectic.*

The first premise to my argument derives from a small moment of description in Raja Rao's 1938 novel, *Kanthapura.*[10] The scene is a village protest march that takes place just after the Dandi salt march, but it is not the novel's own voicing of anti-colonial political protest that I want to focus on here. Listen to the way that Raja Rao depicts a protesting *people.* Listen to how a people's collectivity in political protest is being individuated, particularized, situated, and understood. "...[O]ur sari fringes", writes Raja Rao's narrator,

> tied tight to our waists, our jewels hid beneath the earth, with men on the right and children beside us, with drum and horn and trumpet and a cart before us all adorned with lotuses and champaks and mango twigs, and even Pariah Rachanna, we march on and on, and when we come to the village gate Seenu sounds the conch from the top of the promontory, and Vasudev, with his twenty-three Pariahs from the Skeffington Coffee Estates, breaks a coconut before us, and when the camphor is rising before the god, we all bow down in trembling prayer, and when the conch blows again we rise, and with the horn shouting and shining over the ripe valley, we turn Bhatta's empty house and we hurry down to Boranna's toddy grove. (127)

I can make my point best through a simple comparison, this from E.M. Forster's modernist masterpiece, *A Passage to India.*[11] Remember that Forster understood his novel to be

entirely sympathetic to India's decolonising political claims, and remember too that Forster believed his novel ultimately to comprise an answer to the question of why English and Indian subjects, across the divide of Empire itself, could not yet come to a position of cross-cultural mutuality and genuine human friendship. The India he shows us is Europe's shadowy unconscious — the other of Europe's own Self. Adela Quested has renounced her courtroom accusation against Dr. Aziz, and a jubilant crowd takes its sense of political grievance to streets of Chandrapore. Here is how Forster describes people in the act of political protest.

> The tumult increased, and the invocation of Mrs Moore continued, and people who did not know what the syllables meant repeated them like a charm. (237)

> Where was the procession going? To friends, to enemies, to Aziz's bungalow, to the Collector's bungalow, to the Minto Hospital where the Civil Surgeon would eat dust and the patients (confused with prisoners) be released, to Delhi, to Simla? The students thought it was going to Government College.... (235)

> ...the procession could not turn back. Like a snake in a drain, it advanced down the narrow bazaar towards the basin of the Maidan, where it would turn about itself, and decide on its prey.... (236)

> The new injury lashed the crowd to fury. It had been aimless hitherto, and had lacked a grievance. When they reached the Maidan and saw the sallow arcades of the Minto they shambled towards it howling.... The earth and the sky were insanely ugly, the spirit of evil again strode abroad.... (237)

> ...here was a mob, entirely desirous of ... blood, and the orderlies were mutinous and would not help him .... (237)

The 19th social thinker Gustave Le Bon - the father of

the discipline of "social psychology" - believed it a signature of modern politics that the guiding principle behind new social collectives had now become the opinion of crowds.[12] This he saw as the beginning of the end for rational civilization. "Crowds do not reason" (59) , Le Bon announced; "crowds are powerful only for destruction (xviii). "When civilization ... has lost its strength, its final dissolution is brought about by ... unconscious and brutal crowds" (xviii). Le Bon added: "How powerless [are crowds] to hold any opinions other than those which are imposed upon them.... [I[t is not with rules based on theories of pure equity that they are to be led..." (xx). [Crowds] can never accomplish acts demanding a high degree of intelligence" (8) It is here, in this document, in thia originating moment of yet another academic discipline, in Le Bon's agentless politics of crowd consciousness — in this primal fear of the undispersed, where powerlessness is baseness, where protest is mass hysteria — that we must seek the foundations to *Kanthapura*'s small act of voicing a literary protest. The propensity to assign a dangerous anti-intellectualism to the multitude, the persistent need by the powerful to criminalize underclass collectivity, runs like a river through the literature of Western dominance, informing Empires about the many they administer, informing Forster about the impassability of cultural difference; and so it is that Raja Rao's most significant act of protest in the passage I have just read you, resides not in his anti-colonial explanation, magnificent though it is, of why it is that these people march in protest. Raja Rao's resoundingly *dialectical* protest resides it the smaller principles of description - of giving names and separate histories to the throng of collectivity, of locating social differences within the crowd and with its gods, of providing deliberate cartographies to the movements of a protest, of establishing an environment to the group who claim their home. It is not likely that Raja Rao fictionalized protest in Kanthapura in direct rebuttal to Forster's protest in the streets

of Chandrapore, but my premise for this first claim in my syllogism is that the work of protest in literature can reside not only in those noisy proclamations of a speaking truth to power, but also in those embedded moment, where what seems to be nothing more than literary description in a fictional document is in fact an embedded dialogue with one or more of the foundational assumptions of the socially dominant. No-one can deny that protest literature and artwork of the obviously recognizable kind have had astonishing political effects. Mao-Dun's protest fictions in China in the 1930s, South African popular protest poetry in the years before Independence; Sergio Ortega's musical anti-fascist hymn for the Popular Unity Movement in Chile — "el pueblo, unido, jamás será vencido"; "the people united, will never be defeated - all these artworks helped *directly* to produce progressive changes in politics, and the tradition of overt political protest in art and literature continues everywhere in our time. But literary protest, at its everyday level, lives in quieter moments of conceptual resistance. It turns it gaze on the cognitive units of dominant history, it engages those units, it rethinks those units; it describes, to make possible, new ways to imagine life. *This* is how literature, every day, protests the organizing principles for human division, the organizing alibis for ruling-class self-righteousness. *This* form of protest is literature's open secret. You can find it everywhere that people tell their tales.

My second premise pertains to the way that literary meaning informs non-literary acts of political protest, and the story I want to tell you takes me very much closer to home.

In a place called Grouard, in the Canadian province of Alberta, on June 21st, 1999, a group of Métis and First Nation people gathered together in order, as they said, to re-enact and "celebrate" something. This "celebration" is the protest I want to attempt to understand.[13] My argument is that in order to hear protest in the voices of the people, we sometimes must be

readers of ambivalence in the literary, and not just attendants to the commands of plains speech.

Exactly a century earlier than this moment, in the town of Grouard, First Nations and Métis groups from across the Canadian North entered into an infamous contract with Her Majesty the Queen of the Government of the Dominion of Canada. That infamous contract was entitled Treaty 8. "The said Indians", read the Treaty,

> DO HEREBY CEDE, RELEASE, SURRENDER AND YIELD UP ... for ever, all their rights, titles and privileges whatsoever, to the lands included within the ... limits.... [In return], they shall have right to pursue their usual vocations of hunting, trapping, and fishing.... In extinguishment of all their past claims, [Her Majesty] ... undertakes to provide land in severalty to the extent of 160 acres to each Indian ... and agrees to make each Chief a present of thirty-two dollars in cash... to each Headman twenty-two dollars, and to every other Indian of whatever age... twelve dollars.... [E]ach Chief, after signing the treaty, shall receive a silver medal and a suitable flag.... [E]very third year thereafter, each Chief and Headman shall receive a suitable suit of clothing." (Fumoleau, 72)

The Queen's commissioners who came to Grouard in 1899 were accompanied by three other groups. The first comprised Christian missionaries, whose job it was to provide "moral suasion" to First Nations and Métis peoples by assuring them that "your forests and river life *will not* be changed by the treaty, and you will have your annuities as well, year by year, as long as the sun shines and the earth remains" (Leonard, 18) The second of the groups to accompany the Treaty 8 commissioners were the *official* Commissioners for something called "Scrip." Few Métis and Indian peoples in the Treaty 8 area actually wanted individual, exclusive ownership rights to 160 acres of

land in 1899 , for little of the area was actually farmable. They sought only to use this land collectively, for hunting and for gathering. And so the role of this second group, the Scrip Commissioners, was to award Métis and First Nation families with written "scrip" which the they could then redeem for either land or money. The third group to accompany the commissioners comprised a group of wealthy city speculators: these were the scrip "hunters". Their role in Treaty 8 was to spread false rumours about the instability of Treaty scrip, and then to purchase scrip from Native and Métis peoples on the spot, for 1/3rd to ½ of its value.

Treaty 8 constituted cross-cultural theft of unprecedented proportions: the greatest single land-grab in Canadian colonial history. And the moment of Treaty signing itself, in 1899, constituted a profoundly political act of staged theatrical inauthenticity. Few of the individual First Nations and Métis representatives who came to Grouard actually had the authority from their peoples to sign away Native rights. The written and oral versions of Treaty 8 differed in substantial ways. And almost all of the Native and Métis signatures on the parchments – "x's" in the registers – were written by a single hand. And so here has never been any question within Native and Métis collectives that Treaty 8 amounted to this formulation: 324,000 square miles of occupied land, in exchange for paper, a medal, and a flag, and a suitable suit of clothes. So *why*, a century later, in 1999, did Métis and First Nation peoples come together to the historical Treaty grounds *not* for a day of protest against this land theft, but for a national day of commemorative "*celebration*"?

My answer to this impossible question is a very partial one, and it rests on the structure of literary language. This extraordinary act of political celebration needs to read – just as Raja Rao's description of the village protest needs to be read – in its *difference* from its historical antecedent. We need to listen

to how it speaks through something that in plain speech it does not quite say.

For the organizing principle of the 1999 Treaty 8 celebration was this one: everything in the original 1899 Treaty-signing moment would be re-enacted in historical exactitude. Treaty commissioners, scrip commissioners, scrip hunters would be present, in their historically exact costumes. Native and Métis people, dressed in period costume, would receive authentically re-struck medals and wave authentic period flags. The local newspaper reported: "Producersof [the] elaborately-staged re-enactment of the signing of Treaty 8 at Grouard aimed for complete accuracy in their meticulously researched play. They spent months making sure everything was right ..." – "right down to the hats and moccasins." (*Edmonton Journal*, June 23, 1999). This was a moment when government met government, the newspaper explained. *That* is why Native and Métis peoples are celebrating this historical signing today.

But it is a curious kind of inter-government mutuality, a curious kind of cross-cultural friendship, that rests on the exchange of things so unequal. And it is a curious sense of privileged simplification which reports that exactitude in repetition is all that was being said. This assumption of simple reading protocol is *in fact* the way that power operates: through the flattening of nuance, through a deafness to subtle speech. One of the ways that *literary* language, on the other hand, gestures towards a buried or unrealized *otherness* in the structure of speech and writing is through a figure that Aristotle called "catachresis" – a deliberate *mis*naming, an evocation of difference, a way of saying something *else* by naming something wrong. My premise for this second point in my argument is that when Native and Métis people met to re-enact the signing of the Treaty 8 contract in Grouard, in 1999, they did so not *quite* to effect historical exactitude, but to perform a catachresis. My thesis is that complexity in the voices of the

people is the voice of subalternity from the margins of our time.

Two days before the historical re-enactment, on June 19th, 1999, the conservative Premier of Alberta made a two-hour visit to the Kapawe'no reservation near Grouard, and there he gave *back* to Native peoples a symbolic acre of land (*Edmonton Journal*, June 20). And what was this symbolic acre meant to signify? It was exactly here, the premier announced, that a century earlier, the original Treaty 8 agreement was signed. This acre, the Premier announced, would henceforth and forever be owned *jointly* by the Province of Alberta and by First Nations peoples in the Treaty 8 area – their joint ownership a recognition of a new mutuality, a mark of the ultimate justice of history, a symbol of what had finally changed in the history of colonial relations. The Premier, it was reported, was surprised to hear Native Elders tell him that his historical research was in fact ill-founded: Treaty 8 was *actually* negotiated at a grassy flood-plain named Willow Point, a few hundred metres down the road. Willow Point is in the Sucker Creek Indian Reserve: Willow Point is *already* Native land. The non-Native historian whose did the research for the Premier explained later that Native Elders and their oral history had simply got the geography wrong. "It's a classic case," he told the newspaper, "of oral tradition version written archival records". Chief Ray Willier of the Sucker Creek Band responded. "They can't change the fact that it was signed on [Native] soil", said Chief Willier. "They can't change history."

And at the moment of re-enactive celebration itself, it was suddenly noticed that the "specially-made canvas version" of the Union Jack had somehow gone missing from the stage. Two Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers, in period costume, rushed to find a replacement flag, and to bring it to the stage. "It was totally a mistake", replied the play's director, "there was no insult intended", when he was informed by the media that "when they unveiled the play before 2,500 people

on Monday, the British Union Jack was hanging upside-down" (*Edmonton Journal*, June 23, 1999). .

What does it mean when the obviously exploited - the disenfranchised, the disempowered - appeal precisely to the oppressive stabilities of a dividing history in order to signify their continuing rights? How does subalternity figure the *unspeakable* in modernity's forward claims? My very partial reading of this moment of "celebration" is that a complex evocation of otherness comprises an *inalienable* component of the strategy by which a range of disenfranchised peoples signify their inextinguishable entitlement to a politics of the present. My thesis is that political protest, as it is being voiced in our time, speaks not only through the loudness of a demonstrably manifest people, as they take it to the streets and let power know their name. The protest of the people *also* speaks in the language of literature meaning, for the genius of the literary is that it *signifies* what cannot simply be said. The catachresis of meaning that inhabits the celebration I have been speaking about is not something that will translate easily into a declarative statement about what the Métis and Native People of northern Canada now ask for. But it is one way of signalling a persistent and unremitting otherness to a history that speaks of mutuality and justice at the scene of colonial relations. Whatever else that otherness is saying, at minimum it is the recognition that oppression still continues. It is the revealing diacritic of a protest that will not end.

My argument has been that literary protest struggles always to be heard against the noisy throng of socially normative fictions whose ideological work it is to displace a people's propensity to political insurrection into the blandishing satisfactions of narrative recognition. I have argued that some of the academic disciplines that should aid in the globalization of protest literature's interest - like the discipline of English Studies - have historically worked to displace the desire for

social change, and may still do so. I have argued that in defiance of such forces, protest appears everywhere in literature, that it speaks through its embeddedness, its quiet dialogue with the past. And I have argued that literary principles are everywhere at work in the practice of political protest, that protest has its subtleties, and that it speaks in other ways. My goal in this paper has been to open the field of protest and literature - the dialectic of protest and literature - not as a way of preferring one kind of writing over another, not as a way of extolling subtle protest over noisy anger - but as a way of acknowledging the ubiquity of voices that call out for real change in our time, and to acknowledge the forceful carefulness by which the disenfranchised on our planet voice continue to voice their inalienable and continuing power, which is the right to signify dissent. I have attempted to position protest and literature in a dialectical engagement - in a struggle between forces that does not reconcile - for my argument has been that the voice of protest in our present world is the normative voice of humanity, it is the majority voice, it is a voice that is persistent, it is a voice that cannot be contained.

I have spoken through the structure of a categorical syllogism, but the third term is *not* missing: it can only go unvoiced. When protest speaks in subtle language it speaks a world of the unspeakable: the unspeakable poverty of those who fall below free-market inclusivity; the unspeakable many who love meaningfully beyond the reach of dominant thought. But my reading is a ultimately a hopeful one, for within the unspeakable there resides an unending - an unending human commitment to seek genuine social change.

Reference

1. See Charles McGrath, "What Johnny Won't Read", *The New York Times*, Sunday, July 11, 2004, WK3.

2. United Nations Human Development Report, 1998. Reported in "How Wealth Divides the World", *Edmonton Journal*, Jan. 9, 2000, E2.

3. I owe the articulation of this irony to Charles McGrath, *op cit.* He writes: "While the number of people reading literatures has gone down, the number of people trying to write it has actually gone up. We seem to be slowly turning into a nation of 'creative writers,' more interested in what we have to say about ourselves than in reading or thinking about what anyone else has to say.

4. Sydney Pollock, dir. *The Firm*. Paramount Studios, 1993.

5. At the risk of finding myself disasterously outside my own area of expertise, let me nevertheless attempt to connect the social work of Bombay cinema to this basic paradigm of ideological management. Bollywood's prototypic method for defusing social anxiety is to package and displace the real social problem not through the fall-and-redemption narrative but through the story of the return to tradition. And so the gorgeous daughter of the venerable, classical singing-teacher, for example, falls in love with a buoyant NRI singing student who likes Italian opera. Daddy, who doesn't notice, chooses someone else to be her spouse. We are barely on the margins of the actual social issue, and the question is of course a complicated one, but nevertheless, Aishwarya's desire for agency and self-determination in the movie, whatever else it signifies, also stands in for *women's* political agency beyond the reach of patriarchal tradition's inexorable demands. And so Bollywood's first manoeuvre in the work of ideology is to frame the portrait of women's protest, and by extension of Indian feminism, as a limited question on the management of domestic romance. Its second manoeuvre is to refigure the staged encounter between Indian feminism and traditionalism into a win-win situation. And look what happens! The NRI music-student is actually dangerously Europeanized; at heart Salman is unreliable, and even shallow; Aishwarya doesn't really love him at all. The chap she discovers she really is in love with in is in fact the very same traditionalist, respectful older lawyer that Daddy had chosen for her in the first place. There's no problem of denied female agency in *this* Bollywood nation: patriarchal traditionalism in India is ultimately a benevolent force, *and* it is a chimera. Beneath the concluding explosion of celebratory fireworks over the European capital - Prague, though we are meant to think it Florence or Milan — what Indian feminism finally discovers in its recovered secret heart is a desire for a triumphant return to daddy's traditional but renovated Rajasthani palace, which will now comprise feminism's contemporary, middle-class, happily-ever-after home.

Obviously, this reading of director Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (1999) is both incomplete and precarious at the level of its enabling assumption. Nevertheless, a case can be made that part of the ideological work of the movie is to address mainstream viewers' social anxiety about traditionalism's obvious patriarchy, on the one hand, and about a potentially disobedient feminism, on the other, into a manageable social narrative of a daughter and her love-life, and then to dispel that anxiety through the familiar narrative comfort of how tradition bests modernity in the contest, and how East, when the system works, inevitably beats West.

6. Act II, Scene I. And I finesse the quotation for purposes of clarity. "I am well acquainted", says the Lord Chief-Justice, "with your manner of wrenching the true cause the false way. It is not a confident brow, nor the throng of words, that comes with such more than impudent sauciness from you, can thrust me from a level consideration: you have, as it appears to me, practised upon the easy-yielding spirit of this woman, and made her serve your uses both in purse and in person."

7. *Oxford Literary Review*, 9, 1-2 (1987), 2-26. See also Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. New York: Columbia UP, 1989.

8. "Minute on Indian Education" (1835), rpt. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1995. 428-430.

9. The critical literature on the spotted history of the discipline of English Studies is robust and voluminous, but nevertheless, see

Chris Baldick's *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1948-1932* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), and Brian Doyle, *English and Englishness* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

10. Raja Rao, *Kanthapura.* 1938; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1963.

11. E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India,* 1924; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961.

12. Gustav Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind.* 2nd ed. (1895); Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing, 1982.

13. Source documents for the Treaty 8 centennial "celebration/commemoration" are as follows: *Edmonton Journal,* June 20, 1999, p. A1, A16, and June 22, A1, June 23, A1; Brian Calliou, "Celebrating the Legacy of Treaty 8, *Legacy,* May-June 1999, 9-20; René Fumoleau, *As Long as this Land Shall Last: A History of Treaty 8 and Treaty 11: 1870-*1939. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973; David Leonard, "Decision at Lesser Slave Lake 8", Legacy, May-July 1999, 17-19; Patricia McCormack, "A Century of Living with Treaty 8: A Commemorative, Not a Celebratory, Event", *University of Alberta Folio,* June 18, 1999, p. 5; and websites established at the time of the centennial by the Government of Alberta, the University of Ottawa, the Faculty of Law at the University of Alberta, the Canadian National Archives, and the Canadian Assembly of First Nations/Assemblée des Premières Nations.

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