

Introduction: On the Lessons of Balachandra Rajan

To have a friend: to keep him. To follow him with your eyes. Still to see him when he is no longer there and to try to know, listen to, or read him when you know that you will see him no longer – and that is to cry.

– Jacques Derrida ('The Taste of Tears,' 107)

LIFE: *L'ALLEGRO*

Born in Toungoo, Burma in 1920, and schooled as a boy in Madras, Balachandra Rajan went on to distinguish himself at the University of Cambridge, initially as an undergraduate student of economics and then as a graduate student of English literature. While at Cambridge, he was actively involved in the Quit India Movement. Living an often impoverished existence in England, Rajan would discover a wealth of ideas, both in himself and in the writings of others. Upon taking his PhD in 1946, and publishing the first of his masterworks, *'Paradise Lost' and the Seventeenth-Century Reader* (1947, 1962, 1967), he attempted to secure an academic appointment in an unapologetically racist climate, no doubt made more intolerant by a ruinous war and its aftermath. Moreover, although Britain had helped to defeat the Nazis, it had 'lost' India. In these politically charged circumstances, Rajan discovered that a demonstrably brilliant new scholar who happened to be South Asian had nowhere to go but home. Home he went, with reluctance, although both the man and his home had undergone enormous transformations in the meantime. In 1948, he joined the Indian Foreign Service and became a member of India's Permanent Mission to the United Nations (1950–57). It was during his sojourn in New York that his wife, Chandra Rajan, gave birth to their precious daughter, Tilottama. Rajan would also represent India on several international bodies, including UNICEF and the International Atomic Energy Agency. After thirteen years of public service, he returned to academe, first at the University of Delhi, where the Department of English was but three years old. Rajan was appointed Professor and Head of the Department (1961–64) and then Dean of the Faculty of Arts (1963–64). After a stint as Visiting Professor at the University of Wisconsin (1964–65), he made his way to Canada, first as Professor in the Department of English at the University of Windsor (1964–65), and then as Senior Professor in the

Department of English at the University of Western Ontario. Life in the then sleepy little city of London, Ontario, was not without terrific challenges for both him and Chandra, but it was also a time of tremendous scholarly activity, beginning with the publication of influential books on Milton (*The Lofty Rhyme: A Study of Milton's Major Poetry* [1970]) and Eliot (*The Overwhelming Question: A Study of T.S. Eliot* [1976]). For these and other scholarly accomplishments, he was the recipient of many prestigious honours, including the Royal Society of Canada's Pierre Chauveau Medal (1983) for exemplary contributions to the humanities.

Rajan remained at Western until his retirement and promotion to Professor Emeritus in 1984, which marked an unwelcome retreat from university affairs, but one that was at the time mandated by law. He was arguably at the height of his intellectual powers, and there was still a great deal to say and do. I was his doctoral student during this period, and remember that my teacher's critical imagination was so bracingly active and alert that I could hardly keep up with him. But my alma mater's loss was academe's gain. In the latter part of his scholarly life, his thinking and work saw a remarkable efflorescence. Rajan's earlier interventions had pursued the otherworldly coherence of the *oeuvres* of Yeats, Milton, and Eliot, respectively, but his subsequent research turned to seemingly antithetical theoretical and aesthetic questions. If these were fresh woods and pastures new, they were located in hitherto undiscovered countries of literary history. After publishing his sweeping account of incompleteness and open-endedness in English poetry (*The Form of the Unfinished* [1985]), he composed a series of essays that affirmed the self-revising rather than self-confirming energies that ripple throughout Milton's poems. That project culminated in *Milton and the Climates of Reading* [2006], a book that defamiliarizes its subject in ways that are still being taken up. Acting on fascinations that he had long harboured, he also published a ground-breaking study of the different ways that British literature conjures a subaltern India (*Under Western Eyes: India from Milton to Macaulay* [1999]). In this book, we become aware of 'the deep entanglements of English imperialism in the early stages of its self-articulation' (3). But *Under Western Eyes* also announces Rajan's disagreements with certain elements of post-colonial critical practice that were then in ascendance. He was always an independent thinker, but also a dialectical one, unusually alive to the times and in a rigorous dialogue with others. As various infirmities encroached upon him, Rajan continued to think and write about Milton with characteristic lucidity and forcefulness. He did not live to complete his last essay, a discussion of *Paradise Lost* that I am grateful to have the opportunity to publish here. Parsing that essay, I cannot help but recall T.S. Eliot's phrases from *Little Gidding*, the very poem about which Balachandra and I had our last

conversation.

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time. (*Collected Poems*, 222)

After a lengthy illness, Balachandra Rajan passed away on a cold and clear winter night, the 23rd of January 2009.

In his tartly annotated 'Chronology,' K.B. Gulati, a family friend and one of Rajan's students at the University of Delhi in the 1960s, fills in more biographical details. The bibliography that is also included in this memorial volume supplements that 'Chronology' by providing a more or less complete record of Rajan's publications. Such accounts and accountings of course fail to do justice to his extraordinary life and work. But they hint at the range and complexity of his experiences, and help explain the cosmopolitanism of his intellect. The shifting and purposive trajectories of his work tell us that he was always schooling himself in the possibilities of literature as much as teaching others. The 'Chronology' outlines the story of a man who lived several lives, in radically different locales. It evokes his unremitting intellectual curiosity, while also remembering how, for a long time, he and his family lived an itinerant life, not without precarity, moving among continents and between worlds. Long before 'globalization,' 'Empire,' and 'Multitude' became familiar words in humanistic scholarship, the Rajan family lived amid the effects of their ebbs and flows.

Rajan may not have been born to be a government official, but the fact that he executed those offices with the same determination, integrity, and fair-mindedness that he brought to academic life says a great deal about his staunchness and his sense of duty. Others have suggested that his experiences at Cambridge scarred him forever,¹ but in the more than thirty years that I had the pleasure of knowing him, I saw very little evidence of such trauma. What happened at the start of his academic life, which turned out to be the first of two commencements (not unlike Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which begins in a storm, and then begins again in the wake of a storm), was unforgivable and unquestionably painful. The historian of Christian-humanism and Master of Jesus College, E.M.W. Tillyard, who was Rajan's supervisor at Cambridge, should be ashamed for not having done more when he was in a position to have done more. But Rajan was not a man who returned unthinkingly to the past to relive its wounds. Perhaps it was working in such close

¹ See, for example, Sauer (231).

quarters with the boundlessly productive nature of English literary history that taught him the importance of invention, process, and growth. Or perhaps the principle of non-violence at the heart of *satyagraha*, the principle of steadfastness and sacrifice with which his budding political life was informed in the 1940s, gave him the strength to make a kind of peace with himself through many of the years that followed. In any case, if the shunning at Cambridge shaped his life, it did so in ways, I would argue, that were as formative as they were deformative. His wit and ironically playful sensibility seem to have indemnified him against becoming a morbidly sorrowful or distrustful man. If anything, it was subsequent tribulations – of the sort that anyone living a long life must endure – that would leave more indelible traces. If he experienced the colonial indignities of his youth as permanently harmful, he hid them very well. Or, as is much more likely the case, he metabolized these experiences, translating them into the qualities of character that were familiar to those of us who had the honour of his company. The man who knew so much about *Lycidas*, and who wrote about it in ways that suggested that he inhabited the poem's losses rather than read about them from afar, also knew something about the work of mourning. If there was a melancholic side to him, it was more in the ancient mode of the pensive scholar than in the modern one of the aggrieved psyche.

So it is telling that the 'Autobiographical Fragments' that are published here return us to this difficult period in Rajan's life, but in ways that do not bear the telltale signs of trauma. They do not obsessively repeat past experiences in a broken voice, but hold them away, at a pleasing and ironic distance, the better to affirm the futures that Rajan saw, after the fact, coded into them. It was those experiences that contributed to his lifelong allegiance to reasonable rather than exclusionary forms of dissent. They sharpened his sensitivity to injustice, and to the subtle forms that violence can take under the mask of civility. The depth and longevity of his loyalty to the principles and the practices of independence can be measured by his later insistence that poems can protest – and sometimes *should* protest – even the designs of their own authors. 'The poem,' Rajan says in the moving Afterword of *The Form of the Unfinished*, 'can be seen as threatened by its creator and as gallantly asserting its natural inchoateness against the tyranny of its logocentric parent' (309). That a poem could not only be different from itself, but in an oppositional relationship with its own author, had a profound impact on my own intellectual development, one that shapes my thinking to this day. In other words, Rajan's experiences at Cambridge did not lock him up, but gave him important keys to his own future and to the futures of others whom he schooled. The failure of his teachers to advocate on behalf of their outstanding student taught him to be a humane educator, at once welcoming and interrogative, a teacher whose generous scholarly

conduct modelled a way of academic life for several generations of scholars. Respected and admired by his students, Rajan was an intellectual mentor whose magnanimous spirit was matched only by his calmly detached demeanour. Detachment is not the same thing as disengagement: this is an eventful distinction, one that he once discussed with me in a conversation to which I turn at the end of this Introduction. Here let me emphasize that, in Rajan's hands, detachment was a mode of non-violent protest, while disengagement was a form of militant exclusion.

Rajan taught powerfully and he taught by example. Among the many generative effects of his teaching was this: his classroom persona prevented students, an unusual number of whom became professors, from retreating into the uncharitable forms of discipleship that have plagued at least one other great thinker in Canada. Cambridge, despite itself, encouraged him to be a free thinker but not single-minded. His students learned that lesson too. The fact that his doctoral work on Milton, the heroic champion of self-determination and consequential choices, was published during the same year that India won its independence cannot go unnoticed, and certainly did not to him or to those who knew his work. That conjunction of life and work taught him what he then taught us – that history does not simply need to repeat itself, not while conscientious minds discover ways to think and act otherwise.² From that long-ago time, he grasped that literature and criticism that are worthy of those names are not the victims of circumstances, but bear a complex witness to them. They are in a complicated colloquy with their own age, and the ages to come. They admonish and offer respite, imagine new futures, and recreate rather than consolidate relationships with the past. While at Cambridge, Balachandra Rajan kept his mind and interested eyes on many matters. It was an inclination toward others and otherness that only intensified with experience. His intellectual hospitality fed his searching intelligence, which in turn led to arguments whose effect is to remind us that our close readings may never be close enough.

2 My phrasing here recalls remarks made by my colleague and friend, Henry A. Giroux. I regret that the two scholars never met each other, for although they come from different scholarly worlds, I think they would have had a great deal to talk about. Giroux:

Critique is far from negative. In fact, at its root is an affirmation of noble democratic principle that people can hold ideas, social relations, institutions, and values accountable, and that individuals have distinct obligations to connect criticism with the ability to both think and act otherwise in a democracy that is never finished or complete. As John Dewey and many others pointed out, in a democracy our first obligation is to question and our second obligation is our willingness to care for others ('Higher Education Under Attack: An Interview with Henry A. Giroux').

Rajan's scholarly legacy is ample and still unfolding, yet he left behind very little unpublished work in his well-worn study in the house on Regent Street. There are several explanations for the sparseness of these remains. It was in his careful nature to write only when he had something to say, and to say that in print. He was extremely adventurous in thought but controlled in his compositional practice. He never used a computer, and so there is no mazy archive of files, folders, and subfolders of the sort that haunts subsequent generations of scholars. Moreover, in the last years of his life, he often said that he had written most of what he had wanted to write. Until nearer the end, I was never sure if those kinds of remarks were instances of the topos of modesty. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that he had brought everything that he could into print, given the circumstances and the frailties of age. But a quarter century ago, I distinctly recall him saying that he had 'one book left in him,' namely *The Form of the Unfinished* . . . and we know how far off the mark that claim was. He could on occasion be an artfully unreliable narrator of himself, yet another reason to read his 'Autobiographical Fragments' with great care. Whatever the reason, Rajan's *Nachlaß* is very modest. But it is suggestive. There is a loosely bound sheaf of exquisite poems, each painstakingly written out in his own hand, and all dedicated to his beloved wife, Chandra. A portion of one of those poems forms the epigraph to *Under Western Eyes*. Its figures resonate with those found in verses from the *Rig-Veda* that Chandra translated, and that form the Postscript to *The Form of the Unfinished*. A circuit is thereby formed, linking life, love, and work. Rajan once said that his penmanship was as inscrutable as 'Linear B' (the syllabic script used by the Mycenaean Greeks [*Lofty Rhyme* viii]), and I have his almost illegible commentary in the margins of graduate essays to prove it. But the words of this quarto of poems are crisply legible, as if his handwriting had been brought to its senses by the respect and affection for 'the Shining One' to whom they are addressed. He bequeathed these poems to his long-time friend and colleague, Ross G. Woodman, who he knew would know what to do with them.

The other unpublished materials come in the form of an all but complete draft of a short essay, 'The Double Hermeneutic of *Paradise Lost*,' and two numbered 'Autobiographical Fragments.' These three texts are published here for the first time. The fragments return us to the genesis of Rajan's passion for Milton. They are differently inflected accounts, but each confirms his early commitment to a scholarly life. What drives their respective narratives is that this commitment is made in the midst of temptations and distractions against which Rajan must assert himself. The first fragment tells the story of the inhospitable academic setting in which he came to study Milton. One of the things we learn is that sometimes a university education happens despite the university

in which that education occurs. The second fragment begins by retelling a favourite story about the circumstances that catapulted Rajan into delivering his first public speech on behalf of the Quit India Movement, a speech for which, it seems, he had 'nothing prepared.' Although written with a high degree of economy, the account feels slightly dream-like, perhaps because embarrassing scenes of exposure and unpreparedness form the familiar stuff of nightmares for over-achievers and academics. As it turns out, Rajan's address is an unexpected success, not despite but because it is delivered as a jeremiad. Yet the story of this achievement is hardly underway before Rajan's story takes a revealing turn. 'While urging the British to quit India,' Rajan says, 'I also began the study of Milton.' So much in his life depends upon that interceding comma, which joins and overlaps two worlds of meaning at the same time that it recalls the pinnacle of choice that lies between them. The form and even the syntax of Rajan's narrative is characteristic of the reality that it also commemorates. To recall words from *The Lofty Rhyme*, 'It is expressive even in the see-saw of its balance upon the fulcrum of its own caesura' (65).

Paradise Lost was of course the masterpiece with which Rajan began his extraordinary journey as a thinker and scholar, so it is fitting to think of him returning to the text whose pressing significance and formal powers had in truth always remained with him. Perhaps more than any other early modern scholar, Rajan taught us that *Paradise Lost* is unique in remaining loyal to its difficult theological principles while also morphing in the world in which it is read. 'The Double Hermeneutic' circles back to this generative tension in Milton. The essay captures qualities that energize all of Rajan's work. To say that his draft remarks are learned is hardly to begin to acknowledge the deeply and widely informed place from which they are written. The sparing diction has the uncanny effect of making every sentence feel weighty. The essay fully inhabits the climates of reading *Paradise Lost* that it both inherits and to which it contributes something new. In manuscript, the essay includes a scattering of notes toward a bibliography. But having a formal scholarly apparatus hardly seems necessary, since every sentence in the essay is recognizably in dialogue with Milton criticism, both new and old. Other features stand out as quintessentially Rajanian: the elegant turns of phrase compete with a certain declarative purposiveness, as if responding aesthetically to the symmetries of Milton's art while also remaining answerable to the compulsive forcefulness of the poem's arguments. Together and in tension, these two impulses capture the mind of the reader and the writer in action. The essay feels effortless and even self-deprecating, even though we know that it is not. These are qualities that always gave Rajan's work a certain delightful *sprezzatura*. His focus remains Milton's seventeenth-century, and yet the pressures of the present day make

themselves felt. Sometimes the differences between these two times and places serve to bring out the differences that troubled and activated Milton's world. At other moments, but especially at those where the stakes are highest, Rajan makes it all but impossible to determine whether he is speaking of Milton's warring world or of ours. 'The life and death choices before us are determined by a matrix from which there is no escaping,' Rajan writes. In the midst of that elemental indeterminacy we assume the task of making judgements that will have enormous but not always foreseeable consequences. We are cast into a contingent and self-devised life that is our birthright and our burden: 'The right to choose has been supplanted by the impossibility of not choosing, the unending task of discriminating the truth from its cunning resemblance.'

As Rajan argues, Milton is the quintessentially theological poet, not in the sense of versifying doctrine, but in drawing deeply upon the narrative and figurative resources of poetry as a way of making that doctrine legibly and convincingly human. A kind of brinkmanship characterizes *Paradise Lost*, which demonstrates its wincing fealty to the fiat of a monolithic heaven, violently purged of resistance, not to condemn the weakness and heterogeneity of the human condition but much rather to confirm this condition as the only world in which responsibility, justice, and right reason can have any real meaning. The density and 'livingness' – to use Rajan's unique coinage – of the poem's world is the writerly incarnation of that human, all-too-human *milieu*. The implication for the poem's reader is stark and imposing: to remain indifferent to the poem's summons to wrestle with its overwhelming questions is to ignore the substance of who we are. Therein lies the truly transgressive spirit of Milton's epic. The poem possesses an unusual 'capacity to reconsider itself,' as Rajan argues elsewhere (*The Form of the Unfinished* 122). But it takes a 'double hermeneutic,' attuned simultaneously to worldly and celestial perspectives, for that spirit to be authentically felt and understood. The poem emends its inclinations and investments, on-the-go, as it were, and expects us to embrace and create a world, against all odds, informed by an analogous sense of precarious revisionary possibility. A 'hermeneutic of commitment,' alien and arduous, jostles with a 'hermeneutic of suspicion,' which happens to be the default interpretive stance of contemporary criticism. Momentous choice is at the formal and thematic centre of a poem that paradoxically obliges the reader to make a decision: do I pretend only to behold the poem, or do I also identify myself as beheld by it? In this way, notwithstanding the abject political and moral failures of his own time, failures which appear to substantiate the suicidal destructiveness of *homo sapiens*, then and now, Milton refuses to disavow history, just its unavoidability. Perhaps only Immanuel Kant, in his late work, inhabited such a threatened precipice without giving up on the

capacity for human beings to make rational judgements and to do well. In a more secular age that he helped bring into being, Kant too looked squarely into the abyss of a 'war of extermination' (96), as he put it, while also insisting that human beings might still choose right reason over death. From the worldly perspective that is also *Paradise Lost's* world, what happens next is not known; the hill of truth is craggy and steep, and as we make our way about it, ruinous annihilation cannot be definitely ruled out. The poem gives voice to the perplexed cry of the struggle to be human, scrabbling along that slope, even as it seeks to articulate the all but unfathomable divine context in which that cry is to be heard. As Rajan suggests, *Paradise Lost* insists in its reading, in its uniquely irrepressible call to be read, that we are not the impassive spectators of what we witness happening there, even though that panoptic distance is the presumed subject position of scholarship itself. Rajan's wager is that to read the poem as it needs to be read, we must engage – rather than explain away – its 'anticipations and remembrances,' its narrative 'mirrorings,' 'layerings,' and 'self-revisions.' In doing so, readers find themselves answerable to the worlds of difference and decision that the poem stages and unfolds, not apart from but a part of the adversarial universe it makes real through the supremacy of its fiction. The poem queries itself, in earnest of its readers bringing the same self-questioning powers to bear on their own readings of the poem. Rajan does not exempt his work from such reconnaissances and reconsiderations. Far from it. The cause is just; the objective is doing justice to Milton. It is, as he once said to Joseph Wittreich, 'a question of letting not making Milton matter.'³

Balachandra Rajan was not given to making autobiographical gestures in his work, even if – as Ross Woodman argues in his contribution to this memorial volume – the Postscript to *The Form of the Unfinished* announces the depth of the connections between his scholarship and his cherished family, and cordially asks us to consider the always important ways in which work is a part of life. The two 'Autobiographical Fragments' published here are therefore exceptional, each offering glimpses into Rajan's early days as a scrutinizing thinker in 1940s Britain, half-concerned that he will find himself on the radar of English officialdom ... and half-worried that he won't. Both fragments return us to a kind of scholarly primal scene, the moment of his birth as a student of literature and of

3 In the epigraph to his contribution to this volume, Wittreich cites Rajan's personal correspondence to him (22 July 2006):

Milton matters enormously in a literary education because of the forcefulness with which he addresses any location in history and any climate of reading I don't think we make Milton matter by incarcerating him in the cocoon of his own time and discourse It is a question of letting not making Milton matter.

something that is more than literature. And yet neither text is merely personal or 'academic' in nature. Indeed, the fact that they are each clearly set-pieces, both highly stylized and self-stylizing, is the first sign that they are more than private remembrances committed to paper. The impersonality of their droll wit is the vehicle with which Rajan joins the vicissitudes of his intellectual beginnings to the larger social and political world in which he is immersed. As self-titled 'fragments,' their form gives narrative shape to the stories of hard-won autonomy that they tell. As Rajan says toward the conclusion of *The Form of the Unfinished*, it is important to acknowledge 'the fragment's self-reliance, its right to significance without incorporation' (309).

In these carefully crafted reminiscences, the world is at war. Rajan labours to invent himself abroad at the moment that India struggles for independence, a constellation of the social and the psychic that makes the fragments feel both autobiographical and allegorical. Although his experiences are unique, one also gets the sense that he speaks for many others who found themselves in similarly complicated situations, as members of an educated subaltern class who not only live among the colonizers but also dwell in the colonizer's homeland. They observe the revolutionary ferment in India from afar, agitating for change as guests of their imperial hosts. They teeter on the threshold of a brave new world that is their concern and that is also partly of their own making. The circumstances that Rajan evokes are at once inauspicious and surprisingly generative, but recalled with a comic touch that connects these fragments in tone and texture not to the sobering twilight of his novel, *The Dark Dancer* (1957), but rather to his gently satirical book, *Too Long in the West* (1961). They tell a story that brings a wry smile to Rajan's face: he was instrumental in giving Milton back to English literature by liberating him from British parochialism, and he did so during the very years that India won its independence from the motherland, thereby becoming mother to itself. The two forms of liberation address each other across Rajan's *oeuvre* in ways that we may never be in a position fully to parse.

The setting for both fragments is the University of Cambridge, where, as a student from India, Rajan finds himself at odds with the place, and not only because he is greeted with incredulity and suspicion. Unbeknownst to him, the New Criticism's star has been rising. William Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's 'The Intentional Fallacy' is still three years away,⁴ but already their 'mantra,' as Rajan calls it, is being recited by the coalition of the willing: pay attention to 'the words on the page,' and only to the words on the page. 'What words on which page?' Rajan mischievously asks: 'The 1667 or the 1943 page?' Cambridge is such an odd school,

4 See Wimsatt and Beardsley.

steeped in tradition yet curiously fallow, intellectually. It gets worse. His passive aggressive supervisor initially allows him to pursue a topic on the history of poetics from Aristotle to Dryden that he knows will amount to nothing. Milton thus emerges as Rajan's primary interest only latterly, without encouragement from his instructors. But there is yet another problem. The young man lands in England during a time when Milton has been deemed by T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis to be mostly a dead dog, an anachronism unworthy of modernism and modernity. Non-specialist readers today might find that nadir in the great poet's cultural capital hard to fathom. But the important point is that, at the time, Rajan did too. As he says, at Cambridge he quickly discovered how the literary mandarins felt about Milton in '1943.' But rather than crushing Rajan's intellectual aspirations, the poet's contemporaneous reception (in the mode of rejection) prompts another, far more fruitful question: what was it like to read him in '1667'? The rest, of course, is scholarly history, beginning with Rajan's dissertation (from which he calved '*Paradise Lost*' and *the Seventeenth-Century Reader*) and leading, finally, to the query that excited his later work: How might situating Milton in his contemporaneous readership throw into relief what remains unread and yet to be read in him? 'A nation so tardy in catching up with cultural changes could scarcely offer itself as fit for independence,' Rajan remarks of his time at Cambridge, ruefully looking back on his own naïveté while at the same time adopting the voice of empire to mock its inability to understand the significance, much less the future, of its literary patrimony. As the student will come to grasp, it is not his intellectual powers that are undeveloped, but his sense of the politics of literary studies. He feigns blaming his less than up-to-date understanding of the great English thinker on his old-fashioned education in India, but it is by encountering Milton from the 'outside' that enables Rajan to begin to understand him anew and to help ensure that he has a future. He was hardly alone in undertaking that risky revisionary labour. With typical generosity, Rajan points out that elsewhere – remote from the imperial centre – Milton studies was showing new signs of life. In Canada, Arthur E. Barker had published *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma* (1942), a book Rajan immediately recognized as 'a blockbuster.' More than William Blake was being reanimated in downtown Toronto while, across the rest of the world, armies clashed by night. 'It could well be the Milton book of the century,' Rajan notes, graciously leaving it unclear whether he is remembering what he thought then or does to this day. That he and Barker would eventually become colleagues at the University of Western Ontario is a happy coincidence that Rajan leaves politely unsaid.

In what is perhaps the most compelling moment in these brief autobiographical fragments, Rajan recalls struggling to participate more vocally

in the Quit India Movement while he pursued his doctoral studies. He admits to being petrified by the prospect of addressing a live audience. For those of us who heard him give lectures in class or present papers at colloquia, the idea of Rajan being 'terrified of public speaking' seems, to say the least, highly improbable. Could the fellow Rajan recalls be the same person who, near the end of his life, gave an unforgettably impassioned talk on *Samson Agonistes* at the University of Toronto, not in spite of his by then evident physical frailty but precisely *because* of it? But of course the times change and, in Rajan's case, the times changed the man. Surprising himself, he finds his voice at the Corn Exchange (the performance venue that sometimes doubles as an examination hall at Cambridge, a space whose mixed use nicely suits the purposes of Rajan's story), while vigorously denouncing Britain's culpability in starving India of its capacity for autonomy. Or perhaps it is the case that the voice finds him. In the heat of the moment, the prospect of India's independence quickens Rajan's resolve, and he moves unexpectedly from being an intellectual working for the cause to becoming a public intellectual. The space between 'the civilized quiet of some common room' and 'the raucous atmosphere' of the political sphere is not an uncomplicated one to traverse. Like Wordsworth crossing the Simplon Pass, Rajan does so almost without knowing it. Rajan's emphases in the fragment are telling: in his memory, in the memory that he chooses to preserve and share with us, he is not an accomplished rebel, born fully-formed from the head of the Quit India Movement, but a dissenter who struggles with the relationship between deeds and words. The cause is right, but thoughtful adherence to it is tangled, and never not in process, or a work in progress, if it is to remain thoughtful. Among the complications at hand, one that Rajan inscribes into his autobiographical fragment, is that he is also a graduate student who is immersed in his studies – and not any student but one of preternatural concentration. What goes without saying in the recollection is that he is of necessity pulled in two directions – one political, the other scholarly – that are not necessarily compatible, but not unconnected either. Without for a moment undermining the importance of the demands of the Corn Exchange, the fragment ends by affirming his faith in 'the civilized quiet' of the 'common room' that he and his visiting friend, Ernest Sirluck, create. While he learns to speak up about Indian independence, he is also discovering that he has something important to say about Milton, even if English audiences are not yet ready to hear it, and even if Rajan's future as an academic is very far from certain. A champion of liberty and self-determination from another age greets Rajan's own experiences and those of India's. Milton studies will eventually win the contest for his commitments, if it is a contest, but it is impossible to believe that the mixed genesis of that scholarly endeavour did not leave

its own inexpugnable mark. Perhaps never again in Rajan's life will the end of well-doing and well-knowing coexist in such a fecund and volatile state. Under the normative and mutually corroborating gaze of both the British literary establishment and the apologists for English colonialism, he begins to evolve into the non-conformist thinker who we remember and honour today. A biographical-intellectual nexus is formed that will activate his work in different ways for the rest of his life: the way-faring intelligence's struggle to find a fit audience; the desire to do justice to the energies that connect the centre and the periphery; the power of language to winnow truth from its cunning resemblance; the capacity of the Great Argument to carry the day.

The world is at war. That war is on Rajan's doorstep, a fact made flesh and blood by the unforeseen arrival of the soldier, Sirluck, who, like so many Canadians of that generation, Ross Woodman among them, had interrupted his studies to fight the Axis powers. Sirluck will also go on to become a renowned Milton scholar, but in Rajan's memory he is the shadow of peace and the pursuits of the mind that futurity casts upon the present – a present that is otherwise consumed by total war and mass death. To relieve his 'loneliness' at Cambridge, Rajan had forged a long-distance friendship with Sirluck, with whom he exchanges English scholarly books for hard-to-find Canadian ones. We begin to see how, for Rajan, the republic of letters was always already a conversation across boundaries. Arthur Barker's monumental book is the first to be delivered into Rajan's hands – a propitious arrival, to be sure, surpassed only by the unexpected visit of Sirluck himself, who drops by Rajan's flat on his way to combat. An air of unreality characterizes this earnest encounter. Unrecognizable in his Canadian army uniform, Sirluck appears out of nowhere, like an apparition. His wonderfully suggestive name adds to that magic, as if he were an allegorical figure drawn from faerie lands forlorn. Yet the truth is that he is real in an unreal time, because he is possessed, like Rajan, by a faith in knowledge at the brutal world-historical moment when that faith is most to be tested. As Rajan tells the story, he had expected a visit by the English authorities, given his fiery Quit India speech, but these days in his life will prove full of surprises. He is arrested instead by something quite different, namely Sirluck's irrepressible desire to convene a graduate seminar on their beloved poet.

'The time is long past when a soldier on the eve of battle pauses to discuss Milton with a scholarly colleague,' Rajan concludes with a sardonic mixture of regret and exhaustion that is hard to pin down. The parochial state of English academe and the imminence of Indian independence dominate the foreground of Rajan's autobiographical fragments, but Sirluck's sudden coming and Rajan's concluding sentence together remind us that the stories they tell unfold against the backdrop of war – the war that Sirluck will fight and miraculously survive, and

the wars to come, including the violent conflicts between India and Pakistan in the wake of partition, the subject matter of *The Dark Dancer*, the first of Rajan's two novels. Although stagily humorous in tone, the second autobiographical fragment asks a terribly sobering question: What are poets for in a time of dearth? And what of the learned ones whose singular privilege it is to write about poetry, and to teach others how to read it? The world is at war and will continue to be at war. Rajan knows this. Many years later, it will be the prospect of yet another armed conflict, this time between India and China, that prompts his decision to leave the Indian Foreign Service and to return to academe. That memory undoubtedly informs the one that he records for posterity. At Cambridge, war has not – at least, not *yet* – utterly destroyed the possibility of a life of the mind. Many, far too many futures are snuffed out, but others struggle to be born. Sirluck is like a message sent from times to come, but whether they will be better times is not yet evident. Like Rajan, he is something of a stranger in a strange land. He too lives a life of productive contradictions: a Jewish intellectual born in a predominantly Mennonite Saskatchewan village, he has made his way to the University of Toronto to study literature in the tradition of Christian-humanism.⁵ In the falling dark, the message he bears is hard to decipher, but Milton's light and life helps. The past arrives in the uncanny form of the future, demonstrating a conflation of temporalities that Derrida will call *l'arrivant*. The two friends huddle together against the gathering storm, not knowing if they will meet again or what shape the world will be in if they do meet. The succour that Sirluck brings, so matter-of-factly, so improbably, imprints itself on Rajan's imagination. And he returns the favour, comforting a man of peace who must now kill or be killed. Amid these extremities, we are invited to see that exchanging books at a distance is not quite the same thing as embracing ideas in the flesh. We grasp not only that classrooms can materialize anywhere but also that education is inimitable – fragile, yes, and irreducibly improvisational, but also inimitable. It was always possible that the books that Sirluck and Rajan sent to each other would not arrive, just as there was always a chance that the two men could have missed each other, each heading in such different directions. But they *do* meet, and the memory of that colloquia, of the near miraculousness of its having taken place, fills Rajan with pleasure and promise. In spite of all, Sirluck and Rajan become each other's student, convoked by Milton's tutelary spirit. There are many lessons to be learned, but one stands out: ideas *matter* because they are neither abstractions routed through information systems (for which postal communication, here, as

5 See Sirluck's felicitous autobiography, *First Generation: An Autobiography*.

in Derrida,⁶ stands as an apt figure) nor treasures stored safely away in the archives, but lived and consequential things, a part of the heat and dust of the world. Rajan responds to these lessons by feeling them in the heart and along the blood. 'My respect for Toronto deepened into affection,' Rajan fondly recalls, long before setting foot in the country that he would eventually call home.

WORK: IL PENNEROSO

Understanding is fissured and the presence of this fissure is the safeguard of the understanding rather than its betrayal. The meetings which take place across that fissure should be based upon or succeed in constituting a dialectic of difference rather than negation. At the same time there are restrictions placed upon openness – restrictions which maintain the possibility of form – because openness is to be thought of not simply as the result of a contest between equal and divergent forces but more fundamentally, as one of the contestants.

– Balachandra Rajan (*The Form of the Unfinished*, 308)

Ross G. Woodman was Balachandra Rajan's closest friend in the Department of English at the University of Western Ontario, a true fellow-traveller, even if the worlds that they traversed were wildly dissimilar. Their separate intellectual itineraries, literary interests, scholarly archives, professional worries, pedagogical practices, theoretical inclinations, to say nothing of their unique temperaments (both larger than life, but larger in wonderfully unlike ways), made them antipodes of each other. Because opposites attract, they forged a long-lasting friendship, rooted in their unqualified respect for each other. It is in the spirit of that friendship that Woodman writes his memorial essay. Woodman's focus is *The Form of the Unfinished*, a book that 'sums up the intellectual form of Balachandra Rajan's scholarly life, a life devoted to what may best be described as the main body of English poetry stretching from Edmund Spenser to Ezra Pound.' To Rajan's masterwork, and to the psychic and intellectual circumstances in which it was conceived, Woodman brings a psychoanalytically inflected form of mythopoeic criticism with which he has been experimenting for some time, the results of which are evident in two recent books, *Sanity, Madness, Transformation: The Psyche in Romanticism* (2005) and *Revelation and Knowledge* (2011).⁷ Woodman

6 The exigencies and automaticity of postality are important questions in Derrida's work, but the *locus classicus* is *Envois*, the first part of *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*.

7 In idea and execution, Woodman's two most recent books are unusually counter-intuitive and thus brimming with interpretive risks. The University of Toronto Press should be complimented for having the courage to take on that wager, even as Duke

explores the partially displaced and partially announced ways in which Rajan's thinking about lyric, narrative, and the literary imagination is in dialogue with cognate questions that his wife, Chandra (a noted Sanskrit scholar), and his daughter, Tilottama (Canada Research Chair and Distinguished University Professor at Western), also explore, albeit in intellectual registers that could hardly be more different. The underlying assumption of Woodman's essay is that Rajan's work bears witness to who he is, and never more meaningfully than in the book that he dedicated to his wife and whose Postscript is a translation of a passage from the *Rig-Veda* that she translated. As Woodman notes, it is a passage that reproduces figures that Rajan elsewhere uses to proclaim his love for Chandra, thereby forming gossamer connections between husband and wife, work and life. In each of their respective projects, and each in their own way, Woodman suggests, Balachandra, Chandra, and Tilottama wrestle with what Derrida calls 'the passion of the origin' (*Writing and Difference* 373), which Woodman understands as a longing for the poetic self to recall itself, a desire that activates narrative only for it to realize that it is dissolved, diffused, and dissipated in and by narrative. What's revealing is not only how differently the three Rajans respond to those disseminating energies, but also how, out of those differences, they created a scholarly constellation that is larger than the sum of its parts. Woodman begins by speaking of the triangular nature of that meeting of minds, but by the essay's end, we realize that the setting of his remarks is fourfold in nature because it implicates Woodman himself. All four thinkers demonstrate that ideas are what they are not despite but precisely because of the fact that they remain endlessly revisable by life and by what lives on.

Like Ross Woodman, D.M.R. Bentley was a long-time friend and colleague of Balachandra Rajan. It is not telling a tale out of school to say that Rajan had but a modest feel for the contours of either Victorian or Canadian literature, fields to which David Bentley has made influential contributions. I dare say that what Rajan knew of these disciplines and histories came largely from working alongside Bentley in the Department of English at the University of Western Ontario. Bentley's substantial essay on the poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti zeroes in on what Rossetti calls the 'inner standing-point,' a phrase that names the

University Press deserves our praise for choosing to publish Rajan's *Under Western Eyes*, a book that one other university press, improbably enough, found to be too out-of-character, too distant from what they imagined or rather insisted was Rajan's proper scholarly domain. As Derrida argues ('Vacant Chair'), scholarship is fundamentally censorious of itself, in close collaboration with the extra-mural pressures to which it is also subjected. Although honoured by the profession for their originality as thinkers, both Rajan and Woodman wrestled with these intra-mural pressures to conform.

capacity for poems to educate the imagination of their readers by folding them into the characters and settings of their worlds, including – and perhaps especially – worlds that are not only strange and estranging but also resistant to conclusive explanation. In this way Bentley's essay honours Rajan's suspicion of readings that are remote from a poem's embroilments, notwithstanding the significant differences between Milton's Protestant poetics and Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic. As Rajan notes in 'The Double Hermeneutic of *Paradise Lost*,' readers whose 'disposition is to act as an umpire while the participants to a dispute provide their opposing arguments' miss the very wager of the poetic act. Bentley concurs. Rossetti encourages the reader to adopt an 'inner standing-point,' understood as inducing a state of *Einfühlung* or feeling-into, feeling-inside, and feeling-one-with in which an audience finds itself immersed in the poem's world—and this includes that world's indeterminacies, and the ways in which it resists an irritable reaching after fact and reason. By design, the poem invites the reader 'to enter an other and to absorb that other into one's self in a dialectic that involves both an abandonment of critical distance or spectatorial detachment and a temporary egress from the narrow confines of self and an opening of space within the self for the alterity that has been felt-into.' As Bentley suggests, Rossetti's poetics of involvement did not happen all at once, but evolves through forms of experimentation that help spur the artist's growth. Through an attentive reading of the controversial poem 'Jenny' (spoken in the voice of a conflicted man and the prostitute whom he has hired), Bentley demonstrates that the ongoing debate about the poem's significance attests to 'the diverse and complex reactions of the speaker to the "situation" in which the poem places him and the "inner standing-point" in which it places the reader.' Not unlike Milton's Adam, Rossetti's speaker must be taken on his own terms if the poem in which he uniquely lives and breathes and has his being is to be read in its informing historical and aesthetic setting.

'Generic uncertainty,' Rajan argues, is 'an act of creative subversion in which the true poem overthrows the establishment exercise' (*Form of the Unfinished*, 106). Can the same be said about other forms of art? As Linda and Michael Hutcheon note in their contribution to this volume, Rajan was a great lover of opera, and had once proposed that the three of them write an essay on 'operatic India.' Regrettably, that collaborative effort never took shape, but the Hutcheons' essay honours Rajan's desire to see the question of empire, India, and opera pursued with rigour and imagination. Philip Glass and Constance Dehong's strange and estranging 1980 opera, *Satyagraha*, is their focus. Based on the story of the awakening of Mahatma Gandhi's dissident imagination in turn-of-the-century South Africa, the opera would appear to be ready-made for a post-colonial interpretation. And yet the Hutcheons make a

good case for seeing and hearing *Satyagraha* otherwise. As they argue, the opera is 'more para-colonial than postcolonial.' In ways that the Hutcheons unpack, *Satyagraha* is a performance that is *beside-itself*, as if aesthetically unhinged by the Great Argument that is its *raison d'être*: Gandhi's goodness, his faith in the purity of the mind, the power of self-denial, and the inimitability of the inner voice. If there is radical evil loose in the world, as Schelling and even Kant had argued, and if that 'positive' diabolical force threatens to nullify the understanding, then why not a radical goodness, equivalently deranging in its origins and effects? That is *Satyagraha's* query and its hazard. It is a text whose counter-operatic features ensure that its primary fascination – the futures of peaceful difference – emerges not so much within the opera's *mise-en-scène* as alongside it, as the conceptual after-image of its unconventional staging. (The fragility, irrepressibility, and otherness of Gandhi's notion of non-violence, it is worth noting, is also an important theme in Rajan's novel, *The Dark Dancer*.) Moreover, in attempting to represent this turning point in Gandhi's life, Glass and Dehong strive to create an opera that eschews the exoticizing impulses with which the genre is often imbued, especially when India and an imagined 'East' are evoked.

Had the opera succumbed to those impulses, a post-colonial reading might well have been warranted. But in their pointed absence, the opera calls for a revisionary reception, one that acknowledges the imperialist pretext for *Satyagraha* without reducing it to that pretext. We could say, after Tilottama Rajan, that a post-colonial reading – like all forms of pragmatic anthropology – risks reducing knowledge to the ground of the social and the civil, thereby obscuring the audacious radicalism of Gandhi's ideas, their resistance to positivistic forms of understanding.⁸ The existence of *satyagrahis* in South Africa is not irrational – although many of Gandhi's detractors said so – but other-than-rational, and that makes its operatic conjuring enormously challenging. As a para-colonial rather than post-colonial project, *Satyagraha* urges us to recall that Gandhi's ideas about freedom of conscience and the inner capacity to make moral choices, not to mention his pointed disavowal of 'Gandhism,' puts him at odds with both British imperialists and Indian nationalists. His non-conformist ideas

8 See Rajan's argument about the limitations of scholarly practices that make the social and the cultural the primary measure of knowledge (which she calls, after Kant's late work, 'pragmatic anthropology'). Such practices preclude tarrying with radically other modalities of thinking of the sort that Continentally inflected theory affirms and that a dominant strand of cultural studies disavows ('In the Wake of Cultural Studies: Globalization, Theory, and the University'). See also her discussion of the limitations of post-coloniality, and of the impetus behind being identified as 'post-colonial' ('On [Not] Being Postcolonial').

have powerful political consequences and origins, to be sure, but the opera's gamble is that they are irreducible to political forms of knowledge. Indeed, for Glass and Dehong, they stretch – to the point of breaking – the very thought of the political. Strictly speaking, politics – post-colonial, or otherwise – is beside the point *vis-à-vis satyagraha*, possibly in the same way that it is for Levinas's radical notion of ethics, and the obligations of the face with which the French philosopher also identified peace.⁹ How then to create an operatic form that is answerable to this pacific excess? As if in a self-imposed challenge, worthy of the Great Soul's asceticism, the opera disavows the key conventions of opera: its narrative is ritualistic and nonlinear, for example, and its stage action and libretto text are unaligned. What Walter Jackson Bate says of Keats's *Fall of Hyperion* applies to Glass and Dehong's portrait opera: 'the closest possible struggle with the subject is promised, and one that will involve the form itself' (588). Amid that difficulty and clamour, paradoxically, we move from shadowy type to Gandhi's truth, namely *satyagraha*.

Joseph Wittreich's essay returns us to Milton, and to the elementally Rajanian question of the poet's complex reception history. Recalling Rajan's argument that 'Milton's major poems call on each other to comment on and to help in defining the others' ('To Which is Added *Samson Agonistes*,' 82–83), Wittreich parses not only the degree to which, 'through intertextuality and topology, echo and allusion,' *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* 'are irrevocably allied,' but also how 'their alliance prods commentators . . . into defining and redefining their relationship.' As Wittreich argues, this evolving conversation within the canon and between the canon and its readers is closely tied to how the poems were assembled and disassembled in successive editions of Milton's work. 'Publication history,' he observes, 'is yet another window on interpretation, as well as a platform for re-interpretation.' As the three poems are by turns adjoined and separated in print, their already existing formal and thematic relationships and hierarchies, emphases and lacunae, are analogously excited, suppressed, and translated. The differences *between* the poems both activate and respond to differences *within* the poems, as if Milton's *oeuvre* was always caught in the act of writing its own literary history. Reading Wittreich's intricate historical analysis of the poems' various permutations and combinations, one starts to wonder if the 'double hermeneutic' for which Rajan calls is sufficient. We may need to imagine interpretive strategies that are more multiple in kind. Moreover, as the interdependence between *Paradise*

9 For a discussion linking the radical nature of Levinas's notion of obligation and the question of peace, see Derrida's *Adieu To Emmanuel Levinas*.

Lost, Paradise Regained, and *Samson Agonistes* is adjusted, the very image of Milton as poet, thinker, and epic visionary also changes. The shifts in the contours and meaningfulness of his body of work mean that 'Milton' is always in process. But far from abandoning the poet to a purely relativistic universe of interpretation (does anyone ask Stanley Fish's question – 'Is There a Text in this Class' – anymore?), this readerly churn affirms what Wittreich is unembarrassed to call 'the mystery and majesty' of the man. No matter which way we turn, Milton remains always before us, and we after him.

In her contribution to this volume, Barbara Lewalski explores how Sidney, Spenser, and Milton characterize literature's performative ability to move others. 'How in their own literary works,' she asks, 'do they distinguish the moving power of poetry from the more direct persuasive appeals of rhetoric?' She makes a convincing case for the ways in which Milton's 'supposition ... that good literature might help produce a reformed culture' looks back to the complicated example of Spenser and perhaps Sidney, for whom the matter was a pressing concern in both their poetics and their poems. In effect, their writing helps move a younger Milton, shaping his trust in language to transform members of his quarrelsome aristocratic audience and to urge them to practise better virtues. *Comus* is the text that most vividly captures that confidence in the educated imagination's capacity to educate other imaginations, including those that are challenged to the point of imbecility. With royalty, it was ever thus. But as Lewalski points out, after the Restoration, Milton is a sadder and wiser man. Historical circumstances had once stimulated his confidence in poetry's capacity to make things happen; now they threaten to destroy it. Milton lives to see some of his friends and revolutionary associates 'executed by the horrific method of hanging, drawing, disembowelling, and quartering.' We are reminded that the murderousness of state-sponsored torture poisons the heart and destroys the mind, in whatever age it happens. Milton worries that his words will lead not to well-doing but quite the opposite, to utter indifference or worse, killing sovereign force. Yet as Lewalski suggests, all three thinkers share an irrepressible pedagogical faith, a humane and uninsurable commitment – humane *because* uninsurable – to representing 'a baffling, complex world in which virtue is difficult to understand rightly and even more difficult to practice.' Notwithstanding their importantly different poetic practices and conceptions of poetry, Sidney, Spenser, and Milton are unwilling to locate themselves outside of history; instead, they create fictions that limn the contours of a history of which they are a part, and that, arguably, we have not yet exhausted. Lewalski concludes her essay by evoking the brave willingness of Milton's epic vision to hold a mirror up to human nature, and thus to represent 'the complex challenges, difficulties, and value of human freedom,

moral responsibility, capacity for growth and change, and love.' It is impossible not to think that she is, after Milton's example, moved to conjure a vision of our own arduous era. Rajan begins 'The Double Hermeneutic' by pointing out that 'Milton lived in a society that was fervently Christian and we live in worlds that are ostentatiously secular.' And yet what joins those worlds is the public intellectual's belief in the educability of others, the very wager without which, I dare say, the task of the teacher and the work of reading itself would be impossible.

This memorial volume is truncated. Although texts most often marshal the resources for their own conclusions from within themselves, at other times, and this is one of them, they are abruptly brought short by forces about which they may have keen insights and with which they have an agonistic relationship, but over which, finally, they have little control. With an irony that Rajan would surely have appreciated, the collection honouring his life and work thus takes on the form of the unfinished. Srinivas Aravamudan's reprinted essay, 'East Indies and West Indies: Comparative Misapprehensions,' was slated to conclude the collection, pointing readers toward the question of the histories of empire (which includes the histories of empire's representations) that informed much of Rajan's last work. Because of unexpected copyright problems associated with the dissemination of scholarship on 'third-party sites,' that essay cannot appear here. It is available elsewhere, albeit for a price.¹⁰ Rajan passed away on the threshold of a brave new world of intellectual property rights and less than open access, but as a close and careful reader of Book II of *Paradise Lost* he would have recognized that world's inhumane quality, and its defensive disregard for memory and history. Yet even in its absence, Aravamudan's essay deserves being evoked and engaged, not only because of its own evident scholarly merits, but also

10 See Aravamudan ('East Indies and West Indies'). Readers without access to university periodicals collections that include the journal in which Aravamudan's essay was first published may purchase a copy of the essay from Taylor & Francis. Aravamudan summarizes his contribution thus:

This paper discusses how the comparison of the East Indies and the West Indies has generated misapprehensions over several centuries. The stakes involved in comparing these two distinct areas may become clearer when examining their joint imperial legacies, even though our knowledge thereby gained can never be entirely accurate. Comparative studies of vastly different areas need to focus on temporality as well as on a dominant logic of spatiality. This paper analyses previous attempts to compare East Indies and West Indies, by Christopher Columbus, Athanasius Kircher, Daniel Defoe, and Richard Madden, and discusses what can be learned from the mistakes made in each of these cases, which range from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Comparisons of the East Indies and the West Indies are revealed to be just as much about willed, imaginative, and projective identifications in the past as about hardcore social and cultural reality seen from today's perspective.

because it speaks compellingly to problems that excited Rajan's critical imagination. Aravamudan and Rajan knew each other, and drew considerable sustenance from each other's writings. Speaking from the vantage point of quite different generational contexts and research histories, they reviewed each other's books with unusual circumspection and rigour,¹¹ using these opportunities to advance the other's exploration of colonial and post-colonial thought, the history of which we have yet to supersede.

Aravamudan's contribution had its origin in a panel that Rajan chaired at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association. His essay responds to Rajan's growing fascination, in the latter part of his life, with the often under-discussed differences between how imperial practices are imagined and conducted. Rajan brings considerable hermeneutical pressure to bear on those differences in a range of his last writings, including his contributions to *Milton and the Imperial Vision* and *Imperialisms: Historical and Literary Investigations, 1500–1900*, each co-edited with Elizabeth Sauer, and in his last monograph, *Under Western Eyes: India from Milton to Macaulay*. It is in the spirit of that work that Aravamudan considers 'the evolving trajectory' ('East Indies,' 291) of historical comparisons between the East Indies and the West Indies. Focusing on remarks by Christopher Columbus, Athanasius Kircher, Daniel Defoe, and Richard Madden, Aravamudan demonstrates how different figural threads organize fantasies of 'the Indies,' forming the loom on which the entanglements of an archipelagic Occident and the Orient are woven. But beyond these illuminating local readings, Aravamudan's essay is quickened by a larger meta-critical impulse that is recognizably Rajanian. Comparisons 'that seem nonsensical from today's perspectives,' he argues, 'are immensely intriguing for the manner in which they reveal the complex relations among reality, desire, and knowledge' (292). His essay in effect calls for a symptomatic reading of the imperial comparativist gesture, a reading that is attentive to the telling elisions and misprisions that quicken the globalizing cultural imaginary. His intervention is therefore historical without necessarily being historicist; that is to say, Aravamudan eschews adopting a loftily removed and supposedly clear-sighted perspective from which to judge those comparative understandings of the East and West Indies simply as anachronistic misunderstandings. The comparativist gesture is never utopic. It is always made from a particular place and time, and in earnest of normatively mapping that place and time's relationship to other places and times. As he suggests, a blithely positivist cultural history that ignores its own situatedness risks casting 'the comparer

11 See, respectively, Rajan ('Review of *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688–1804*' and Aravamudan ('Review of *Under Western Eyes*').

into the arms of an imperialism, or a neocolonialism of another kind, one which almost always claims to establish a rule of order that is more benevolent, equitable, and reasonable than that which obtained before.' In a turn that Rajan would have appreciated, Aravamudan notes that just such 'neocolonialism' 'is the mode of the U.S.A. as the twenty-first-century imperialist hyperpower' (294). Histories of imperialism remain centrally important critical endeavours, but, as Aravamudan explains, they cannot ignore the degree to which they remain not only structurally comparative but also inherit a long history of normative gestures and obsessions through which we are still living. Notwithstanding recent claims that 'Empire' now supplants empires, we do not live in a post-imperialist world, no more than we live in a post-racial or post-historical one. Comparativism, with its attendant fantasies and desires, goes all the way down.

PEACE: *ADIEU*

The license to kill is fortified by the assumption that the life of a single servant of God is worth the life of a thousand citizens of otherness.

– Balachandra Rajan, 'Samson Hath Quit Himself/Like Samson' (8)

For a long time, for a very long time, I feared having to say goodbye to Balachandra Rajan.¹² And for that reason, I cleaved ever more lovingly and circumspectly to his ideas and to his teaching, to the example of his generous scholarly demeanour, and to the friendship that we forged and shared for so many years. I was and I am to this day Balachandra's student, and although he did me the enormous courtesy of treating me as a colleague and as a fellow-traveller from the instant that I completed my dissertation with him many years ago, and no doubt for some time before, I always happily experienced my camaraderie with him as his pupil – his by turns wayward, dissenting, and dutiful pupil, to be sure,

12 This section of the Introduction is a slightly revised version of an address delivered at the memorial held on 20 March 2009 at the University of Western Ontario. That address was subsequently published as 'Genius of the Shore: Honouring the Life and Work of Balachandra Rajan,' *South Asian Review* 30.3 (2009): 45–54. I gratefully acknowledge permission to reprint those remarks.

In rhetoric and sentiment, my refrain recalls Jacques Derrida's turn of phrase in 'Adieu':

For a long time, for a very long time, I've feared having to say *Adieu* to Emmanuel Levinas. I knew that my voice would tremble at the moment of saying it, and especially saying it aloud, right here, before him, so close to him, pronouncing this word of *adieu*, this word *à-Dieu*, which, in a certain sense, I get from him, a word that he will have taught me to think or to pronounce otherwise (200).

but his pupil nevertheless. Only recently I was discussing with my undergraduate theory students the felicitous complexity of the mentoring relationship between Socrates and Plato, and in the course of that conversation I confided something to them about the experience of my own mentor: even though the day eventually came when I began to address Balachandra familiarly as 'Bal,' in my mind I always said something else, namely 'Dr Rajan.' In his gentle and compelling presence (to remember and to recast something Heidegger once said of the ancients), I may have spoken his name in Greek but I thought it in German. Indeed, few things have given me greater pleasure in my scholarly life than befriending Balachandra as my teacher, and that is why to this day I am honoured to refer to him, as I do to his colleague, Dr Ross G. Woodman, as my supervisor. Perhaps that is not a very fashionable thing to admit, not in a scholarly milieu that puts so much emphasis on forming oneself as an autonomous academic subject, and thus on the ritualistic slaying of one's father or fathers. But Balachandra always did teach his students to be at odds with everything fashionable, intellectually speaking. I live in hope that he forgave me this indulgence, this insistence that I remain, as it were, after class, my only explanation being Michel de Montaigne's: I imagined him this way, and hardly imagined him in any other way, because it was him, because it was me.¹³ He was first my respected teacher, then my friend as my teacher, and one of the many, many things that he taught me was how truly to be friends with one's instructor, and to make teaching and learning the enduring and enduringly fruitful source of a loving friendship.

But as Jacques Derrida argues, becoming a friend means doing nothing less than the impossible. It means dwelling with the vulnerability of the loved other, and enduring the unhappy chance that you will lose that friend before losing one's own life. Remembering Paul de Man, a dear comrade and esteemed colleague from whom he never ceased learning, Derrida remarks: 'It suffices that I know him to be mortal, and that he knows me to be mortal – there is no friendship without this knowledge of finitude' ('Mnemosyne' 29). I first felt this intimation of my teacher's mortality as a doctoral student, more than a quarter of a century ago, when I interviewed Balachandra for *The Gazette* – the student newspaper at the University of Western Ontario – on the occasion of his being awarded the Royal Society of Canada's prestigious Pierre Chauveau Medal for contributions to knowledge in the humanities. In that interview, I asked him about remarks that he had made in a recent lecture describing the two generations over which Ezra Pound's *Cantos* had been written, remarks that I found to be at once illuminating about the subject at

13 Montaigne: 'If you press me to say why I loved him, I feel that it cannot be expressed except by replying: "Because it was him: because it was me"' (212).

hand, and moving because they seemed to reveal something about my professor's current state of mind. 'Another war is fought to make war impossible,' Balachandra had said ... and if I close my eyes, I can hear him unfolding those measured and purposive sentences again:

Another war is fought to make war impossible. Mass communications bring the world to our doorstep while the loneliness of the individual intensifies within the global village. The proliferating technologies which we have invented erect and proclaim stereotypes to which we must conform and by which, if necessary, we are to be re-invented. The capacity of the human race for destructiveness multiplies a billionfold.¹⁴

Professors sometimes wryly note that students remain oblivious to the fact that their teachers grow old while they – the students – seem to remain ageless, like figures on a Grecian urn, but I remember hearing these words and realizing, as if never before, that my beloved teacher was himself a creature of time and of the times, and that he was not only describing the world as exhausted and in jeopardy, but also that he was himself exhaustible, vulnerable, and mortal. Lamely – I blush to remember this moment now – lamely, I said: 'surely the years that you describe in these sentences cover your own lifetime and paint a saddening picture.' Balachandra's response to my impudence and naïveté was as telling as it was thoughtful, and if anyone has ever proven the truth of Northrop Frye's observation that teachers learn to substitute patience for heroism it was Professor Rajan. Without for a moment disowning his grievous thoughts, or their palpable autobiographical resonances, Balachandra responded to my inquiry by insisting not on the calamities of the present, which he had plainly identified as *his* present, but much rather on the importance of rejecting nihilisms of all kinds, and in particular the annihilation of the humanities in the face of what he called 'the disciplines of utility and production.' In other words, he made of this encounter a scene of teaching and learning in which professing literary studies in the falling dark meant not the abstention from responsibility but its very reason for being. 'What the humanities must do,' he said to me, his voice rising in intensity, 'is to make people reflect a little more deeply on what constitutes them as persons, and on the extent to which their own views of their reality and identity as persons are conditioned by the technologies with which they are enveloped.' 'There has to be a definition of the human,' he continued, 'that stands apart from what we have surrounded ourselves with, and which isn't derived from the political technological production-oriented world which encircles us and which is fed back into our own sense of ourselves. I don't think that

14 Cited in Clark (9).

disciplines which are utility and production oriented are capable of this kind of understanding,' he concluded. 'In present circumstances such an understanding would really have to arise out of an act of detachment from the environment. I would prefer to say detachment and not disengagement . . . withdrawal rather than severance. Severance is not something I would in any way wish to support.'

'Detachment, not disengagement.' The very words tolled me back to my sole self, as if awakening me from a dogmatic slumber about what it meant to be a public intellectual. They awaken me still. Perhaps that is the lesson that Balachandra leaves most vividly with me as my teacher and my friend, and that so palpably characterizes his work, early and late. Here the humanities classroom, which is to say the space of learning that Balachandra tirelessly created and recreated with every word that he wrote, every sentence that he published, every paper that he read, here the humanities classroom is not abandoned but affirmed, not an evasion of history but a principal location from which to refuse its necessity. Classmates often marvelled at Balachandra's prestigious power to recite volumes of poetry by heart, and I wouldn't be honest if I didn't say that I too was mesmerized by those performances. But in truth what always struck me much more was what Balachandra *did* with that poetry – the illuminating power and integrity of his analyses, never a claim that was not won and hard won, as well as the humane quality of his readings, their worldliness, their encouraging alchemy of sobriety and delight. And we should not forget the 'ethic and politic consideration' that he brought to these alien texts, texts whose otherness he refused to reconcile to the demands of the present at the same instant that he urged them to speak more forcefully to it. 'Detachment, not disengagement.' It was his capacity as a thinker for whom the humanities mattered that made me swoon, but with this difference: it brought me to my senses.

For a long time, I feared having to say goodbye to Balachandra Rajan. And never more so than during those arresting moments when his texts, which to my mind grew ever more beautiful and pointed, more pressing in their sparseness and candour, turned toward something like autobiography. Let me briefly evoke one telling example. In a landmark essay first published in 1999, Rajan worries Milton's complicated allegiance to the 'condemnation of the havoc wrought by empire builders' ('Imperial Temptation,' 100). Up until the concluding pages of his argument, the scholar's focus has been on the intricacies of *Paradise Regained*, and on the political unconscious by which the poem is troubled, and which in turn troubles the rest of Milton's *oeuvre*. Then the essay makes a most interesting swerve, suddenly pulling the reader from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. In that instant we realize that this has been Rajan's point all along, and that the analysis of *Paradise Regained*, as

richly detailed and urgent as it is, has been destined to illuminate the vicissitudes of the author's – and our own – present. 'Milton's writing takes two different routes across the terrain of imperial history,' he notes. 'The routes come together in the peripeteia of the colonial classroom, with the teachers imparting one lesson and the students learning another. A particular incident comes to mind' (106). The 'incident' that comes to mind may well be 'particular,' but it will here be recalled in a manner that feels curiously generalizing and anonymous, as if absorbed from the *Zeitgeist* of the Indian subcontinent and channelled through Rajan's inimitable prose. As the story that he is about to relate makes clear, the 'incident' in question is somehow at once autobiographical and biographical, personal and political; it summons a memory that is his, but not his alone.

The windows of the classroom look out on a beach. A political demonstration is beginning to form itself on the yellow, mud-flecked sands in front of the catamarans and fishing boats. The lecturer, armed with Verity's influential notes, instructs the students on the classical strain in Milton. If he has one eye on the demonstration he may point to the limitations of 'immortal hate' and the 'study of revenge.' The students find these limitations effaced by the crowd's non-violent behaviour as it faces a lathy charge by the police (106).

With its combination of naturalism and staginess, Rajan leaves undetermined whether this is a historical scene that is invented or an event that he witnessed (or knew others had witnessed), but he does so in the context of an essay that has steadfastly put to us the role of invention in testifying to history. The tableau thrums with ironic expectation, capturing the instant when the climates of reading begin to undergo a sea-change. Whose story is this? What genius of the shore, touched by violence, loss, and changefulness, but holding those qualities at a clarifying distance, speaks these words? Parsing these apparently simple sentences allows us to read them in the spirit of Balachandra's intellectual courage, and as an example of what could be called his late style. Style was a term that he taught me to think, use, and teach without a trace of embarrassment; against all odds, he always insisted that 'style' was not a four-letter word. It was that emphasis on form, presentation, genre, and technique that laid a kind of groove in my thinking. He taught me to pay rigorous attention to 'what the form helps us to think' (as he says in one of his last essays), including the 'turning of the form against itself,' and perhaps most evocatively of all, now, more than ever, 'the form of the unfinished.'¹⁵ Had we the time, I would have unpacked these self-effacing phrases, this little school-room allegory, with some of

15 Both of the latter phrases come from Rajan's forthcoming essay, 'Ludlow Revisited.'

the patient subtlety that characterizes Balachandra's own readings. We might, for example, have considered the vivid threshold setting of the moment as it unfolds on the water's edge, a scene that is dreamily bucolic and forebodingly post-lapsarian, a scene of transformation as much as contrast, in which the manhandling of literature by a mostly oblivious teacher is aligned with the fury of the police – but without quite saying that they are indistinguishable either. If I had the time, we could discuss how at this very moment, in this work, Balachandra sees fit to break the momentum of his scholarly thinking, because sometimes the momentum is not the most important thing, and perhaps it is not the thing at all. By arresting his discussion of *Paradise Regained* with this memory, if it is a memory, the Milton scholar repeats in the narrative of his own essay the very interruption that he describes as having once happened on the seashore – as if he were compelled to return to a scene of personal, national, and aesthetic tribulation that he cannot and will not forget. The fact that the tableau permits us to identify its author with both the confused lecturer and the distracted students is itself revealing, reminding us that even at the height of his career Rajan was the first to say that he had much to learn, and that he was, in effect, still in the process of looking up from his edition of Milton, and taking in the poet's worlds, past, present, and to come.

If we probe this scene further, it may even function as a kind of screen-memory for a more distant element of Rajan's biography. This indeterminate distance between the classroom and the seashore, the students and the protestors, the teacher and the students, puts to us that while Rajan was in the midst of crafting his first monumental book on Milton, he wrestled with the question of how to integrate the academic part of his life with his role in the Quit India Movement. He did so both out of necessity – he was intensely immersed in his studies – and as a result of a certain scholarly temperament that was as yet unsure of how to negotiate the space between poems and events, scholarly civility and civil disobedience. We know – and he knows that we know – that the political and cultural history of colonialism in the sub-Continent would subsequently come to play a much more pressing role in his scholarly writing (it was already the most significant theme of his two novels), so I think that Rajan demonstrates remarkable candour when he quietly confesses, as I think he does here, that over his long life he has found himself on both sides of the classroom, 'imparting one lesson' and 'learning another.' In other words, from the vantage point of his *fin de siècle* present, Balachandra uses this scene as a means to look back at a past that was on the threshold of an extraordinary future, both his and that of a generation of Indians. Here the private space of the classroom is unexpectedly over-run by the lesson of history – over-run, but not destroyed, because the lesson that is being taught is not only about the frailty but also

about the irrepressibility of peace, non-violent dissent, and right reason. The non-violence of the classroom and the non-violence of the crowd find an unexpected affinity, even as Rajan's vignette values them in different ways and holds them apart with such pointed irony. Indeed, the scholarly essay in which this 'incident' is cached confirms that poetry cannot not be taught, and this includes the most canonical texts, no matter what is happening in the streets, if for no other reason that there are poets whose deepest significance lies in their willingness to denounce poetry that refuses to resist its imperial temptations. It is Rajan's enormous insight to have seen, in his final analyses, that Milton was one of those poets. 'In waging war against his own splendid excess,' Rajan concludes, the English poet 'problematizes at the deepest level a necessity which continues to perplex us: to achieve the extinction of empire not simply in our ideological commitments, but in the language we write and which writes us as we write it' ('Imperial Temptation,' 109). Literary education is arguably the single cultural location in which this dialectic of writing and being over-written is subjected – or should be subjected – to the most rigorous analysis, and this includes an analysis that is perhaps too quickly called 'political.' Under the pressure of the history of which it is ineluctably a part, the education happening in Rajan's lecture hall is compelled to expand and complicate itself, to be itself and something else again, if it is to thrive and be meaningful in a world undergoing changes after which there is no turning back. 'Detachment, not disengagement.' Rajan does not suggest that the coming world will be without classrooms; but when the times catch up with education, we can be assured that education will never be the same because of it. On this beach, with its 'mud-flecked sands' and fishing boats, the day is like wide water without sound – and on that day the teacher becomes the student, even if he is not yet prepared for that mutation; and the student becomes the teacher, and specifically the teacher of teachers – which is to say the exemplary role that Balachandra himself so vividly played for me, as he did for so many other scholars.

For a long time now, I feared saying goodbye to Balachandra Rajan. At the visitation in London not long after his death, one of Balachandra's colleagues and long-time friends read Chandra Rajan's incandescent translation of the passage from the Rig-Veda with which *The Form of the Unfinished* concludes. I'm not afraid to say that her words were then a balm to me, and helped to allay the perturbations of my mind. As I heard those gorgeous cadences read aloud, words that meant so much to Balachandra, more perhaps than he could ever have himself said in words, and as I thought about how those verses hint at the wondrous possibility that there is no creation without a questioning intelligence to parse its mysteries, I imagined Chandra toiling carefully over their design and significance – and I thought of how far these phrases of

light had travelled, from India to Canada, from Sanskrit to English, and from ancient times to our sorrowful present. She had made this translation, this voyage between worlds, possible, and I was grateful as never before for what she had freely given us, the way in which their improbable yet extraordinary presence captured something of the many translations – joyful, burdensome, unfinished, and mortal – that had quickened and defined Balachandra's own life: diplomat and scholar, east and west, war and peace, husband and father, reader and writer, student and teacher, mentor and friend. As I sat there, I was thinking too of the last time my wife, Tracy Wynne, and I spoke with Balachandra, after he had been moved to Victoria Hospital, not two weeks before his passing. From Toronto, we arrived in London just ahead of one of those terrific winter storms that sometimes bear down on the city. We knew it was coming, but even then its ferocity caught us by surprise. Safe inside the hospital, as the snow began to swirl in anonymous arcs outside the window of Balachandra's room, we sat close by and chatted quietly for an hour or so about any number of things. He spoke with enormous fondness and concern for his wife and of course for his daughter. He asked me to watch out for them, and this I promised to do. He spoke too about his formative days at Cambridge, as the war came to its end, and that led in turn to a conversation about T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which Balachandra argued should be read as a war poem, written both amid and against the trauma of a burning, riven world. In that instant, I heard Balachandra's remarks as a kind of metaphor of his life, his way of teaching me about the vulnerable solaces of literature to be proclaimed against the struggles of finitude. Once more I found myself in his absorbing classroom, and the lesson that he taught me was that it mattered a great deal to him that he was alive when he died.¹⁶ I looked into his eyes and he looked into mine, and we paused there for a moment, the silence broken only by the sounds of the gathering storm outside. I grasped his hand, and in that quietness he graciously let me believe that our parting was well met, as well as could be in this world, which is all the world that is. 'Hurry up please, it's time,' the charge nurse said. And so Tracy and I left, filled not only with concern about Balachandra's evident discomfort but also with immense pleasure in having seen him, and having once again felt his knowing and thoughtful presence in our lives.

For a long time now, I have feared saying goodbye to Balachandra Rajan. With love and respect, and in the presence of his cherished daughter, who is close at hand, and his treasured wife, who is also near, even at

16 Recalling remarks by D.W. Winnicott, Anatole Broyard's makes a case for continuing to think and write in the wake of his impending death. This labour is, as he says, 'to make sure I'll be alive when I die' (30).

this great distance ... with measureless love and respect I embrace his memory, and say goodbye to him now.

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