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*“Lead kindly light, amidst the encircling gloom
Lead there me on”*

Cardinal Newman.

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Editorial

The Literary Journal this year focuses on two areas, both equally exciting. The critical writings carried in this issue are largely centered around Post-Colonial Literature, with poets like Derek Walcott and Allen Curnow as subjects of appraisal.

As time passes new literatures in English come into being, as Australians, Africans, West-Indians, Asians and New Zealanders find a literary voice. Complementing this interest therefore, is the focus on our own third world voices - the creative writings of our own students.

Literary activity in English must after all be alive and well at a modest level, before masterpieces can be written. We are all a part of this phenomenon of Caliban learning the language of his masters. In a way, therefore, we may say, that this issue is all about 'the Empire writing back'.

The Unhistoric Story : Predicament of the New Zealand Poet with Specific Reference to Allen Curnow

*I, Time, call down, condense, confer,
On the willing memory the shape these were :
I, more than your conscious carrier,

Am island, am sea, am father, farm and friend;
Though I am here all things my coming attend;
I am, you have heard it, the Beginning and the End.*

(TIME)

Allen Curnow's poetic career spans a good half of a century and is, in some ways, an effective index of the shifting thematic concerns in New Zealand poetry. While the corpus of verse from New Zealand resists the prescriptive or even the descriptive, the highly individualistic streams do converge at certain strategic points and certain common issues. There is, for instance, an abundance of littoral, bucolic and temporal imagery in the poetry of this archipelago, where no single point is more than 110 kms. away from the sea; where extremities of temperature are unknown; where the livestock outnumber people.

New Zealand suffered a handicap in that History and Geography denied it a fair share of the sense of drama that informs the creative consciousness of most other Commonwealth countries.

The New Zealander's predicament is, therefore, a peculiar one. His geography doesn't give him a sense of rootedness or clearly defined historical experience which is the wealth of the African writer. Neither does his geography give him the chance to create history like the bush in Australia or the test of survival in Canada.

Eminent poet and critic, Vincent O'Sullivan, says "In a milieu with not only fewer of the usual pressures, but the actual absence of such pressures at work upon him, even a very minor poet, may find that simply to adapt is to construct".

The New Zealander's consciousness would seem to be one that is basically "informing the void" - (to borrow a phrase from the early Twentieth Century New Zealand poetess Miss Baughan). It is a consciousness that is called upon to perceive and shape absences.

Although New Zealand officially ceased to be a colony in 1907, the colonial hangover permeated, with only a few exceptions, all of the literary output during the first two or three decades of the Twentieth century. Vincent O'Sullivan observes, "As New Zealand approached its official centenary (1940), Allen Curnow's was the voice to take up the complexities of a people for whom history continued to hold more reserved decisions than it did certainties — He turned to his country's past with a feeling of entailed involvement; to its present with the conviction-at times begrudged-that his reality as a man was here, or not at all".

Curnow, in his early works sought out 'Time' and 'Landscape' as effective aids to the New Zealander's quest for a national identity. Curnow was the poet who popularised the concept of "the local and special". He held that the New Zealand writer must be regional in order to be international.

Curnow's treatment of Time reveals the wholly original and incandescent nature of the spirit behind the poetry. It includes personal memoirs, variations of the pastoral theme, historical themes and "unhistoric stories".

In "Landfall in Unknown Seas", a poem written on "The 300th Anniversary of the Discovery of New Zealand by Able Tasman, 13 December 1642", Curnow makes an unequivocal statement:

*Always to islanders danger
Is what come over the sea;*

(This is completely justified in "The Unhistoric Story".)

The discovery of New Zealand was possibly more a case of serendipity. So New Zealand remains something basically undefined; a landfall in unknown seas by-passed by Time and History. The opening lines of "Landfall in Unknown Seas" say:

*Simply by sailing in a new direction
You could enlarge the world.*

But was it really so simple

*To go and to be gazed at going
On a fine morning, in the Name of God
Into the nameless waters of the world*

The rather presumptuous ritual of giving "seas to history and islands to new handzardous tomorrows" and the "sudden exhilaration" upon sighting land are countered by the

*Clash of boats in the bay
And the day marred with murder.
The dead required no further
Warning to keep their distance;
The rest, noting the failure,
Pushed on with a reconnaissance
To the north; and sailed away.*

This momentous historical event has, since, become a "chapter in a schoolbook, a relevant yesterday".

"The Unhistoric Story" is an undisguised attack on the predatory forces which appropriated the coast, not before drenching it with blood.

Captain Cook, "Spider, Clever and fragile", did not sail away like the Dutchman. Instead,

*The roving tentacles touched, rested,
clutched
Substantial earth, that is, accustomed
haven
For the hungry whaler.*

What happened eventually was "something nobody counted on". The power of the musket, the pioneering efforts, "the pilgrim dream", all became a "rubble-rattle at Time's glacial push". This was a landscape that made a travesty of colonisation;

*Vogal and Seddon howling empire from
an empty coast*

*A vast ocean laughter
Echoed unheard, and after
All it was different, something
Nobody counted on.*

This idea is treated with wry humour in "House and Land". Old Miss Wilson, with her claims to an aristocratic lineage (albeit on the distaff side), is an anachronistic presence in a landscape that preaches an easy, natural Socialism. The "site of the original homestead" and the

old lady's silver tea pot alike are vestiges of a colonial past. The historian, in his naive scholarliness records,

*The spirit of exile —
Is strong in the people still.*

This is, at best, a half-truth. While there is a deliberate dissociation from the "people in the colonies", there is an unconscious attempt at local assertiveness: an attempt to belong by possessing the land. The old lady fears, not without reason, that "the house might fall": the wilderness is slowly but surely reclaiming the land, and the house with it. The quintessential New Zealand labourer-represented by the cowman and the rabbit - is who survives in this natural order.

"House and Land" brings up questions as regards the validity of history, and the role of the historian. Here we find landscape is timescape. Landscape is history. And the historian.

For this reason the pastoral mode has long been regarded a natural means of perceiving the landscape. In pastoralism there is, by default, a suspension of Time.

Any sense of clock time or calendar time in the New Zealand consciousness is a by-product of colonization; one imported with the Europeans. New Zealand poetry often presents a problematic engagement between this sense of imported time and the timeless quality of what is essentially a pastoral landscape. Once again it is the natural order which triumphs over the artefacts of a jaded civilization. So the New Zealander attempts to write an unhistoric story; to write of an experience outside time. So too Cumow juxtaposes New Zealand's natural ahistoric sense with an overwhelming

consciousness of a closed world where Time's fingerprints can be seen on "Old provincial council buildings"; "the skeleton of the Great Moa"; the homestead. Time comes back full circle in the poem "Self Portrait", wherein a childhood photograph acquaints him with "all he could not keep". Is there then something of a crisis in Pastoralism? Is this an uneasy timelessness? We see in the poem "Eden Gate" how

*Scampering children woke the world
Singing Happy Doomsday over all the
green willows
Than sprang like panic from the crotch
of the cold
Sappy earth.*

Indeed there came a point in New Zealand's history where she ceased to be

The world's end where wonders cease

The islanders, stationed hitherto at the outpost of civilization, discovered that isolation became exposure. The nuclear testing off the coast of New Zealand raised several considerations not all of which were ecological. Added to this the failure of Socialism elsewhere in the world. The poets could no longer be content with just defining a national consciousness. In the poetical output of the latter half of the twentieth century, there is a gravitation towards the Universal.

It may be noted that as in the past (ie.) the discovery and subsequent colonization of New Zealand this sense of history is also one that has been imposed on the island. Thus, along with the quest for a National identity, for something that was uniquely his, the New Zealand artist of the Post-Modern era is vastly pre-occupied with the quest for Self.

What lends unity to all of the verse Curnow has ever written, is the philosophic nexus: the metaphysical speculations; the concern with what happens when "there are no more islands to be found".

*Who navigates us towards what unknown
But not improbable provinces? Who
reaches
A future down for us from the high shelf
Of spiritual daring?*

In Curnow's later poetry, particularly the volumes "An Incurable Music" (1979) and "You will know when you get there" (1982), "A comprehensive metaphysical vision dominates". Dr. Simpson observes that whereas Allen Curnow had once set out to introduce the landscape to the language, Curnow's range had extended over the years spatially and temporally. In other words, there is a patent gravitation towards the Universal through the medium

of the Self, as probably contrasted against the subtle philosophic speculations of the earlier poems. To quote Trevor James,

The person of the sailor in the earlier poetry has become 'the traveller' of the global village as in 'Moro Assassinato'.

*All the seas are one sea,
the blood one blood
and the hands one hand.

the tales are all one tale
dead men tell, the minor
characters the living.*

Where at one time Curnow could admirably speak of "the stain of blood that writes an island story", he lately demonstrated that it is the stain of blood that writes the human story. A story that cannot perhaps somehow exist within history.

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III B.A. Literature

Defining a New Vision of Reality The Poetry of Derek Walcott

'The truly tough aesthetic of the New World neither explains nor forgives History.'

(Derek Walcott in *'The Muse of History'*)

'A smell of dead limes quickens in the nose, The leprosy of empire.'

(Ruins of a Great House.)

*'... The surf has razed that
memory from*

our speech, and

a single raindrop irrigates the tongue.'

(‘Origins’.)

The writers of the countries of Africa, India, the West Indies and other islands of the Caribbean, have to contend with the problem of redefining identity. After years of literature born out of colonial tension racking the minds of writers, they find themselves, today, encountering a New World, germinating from

*'... the awe of Adam
at the first bead of sweat.'*

(New World.)

This New World is, in Walcott’s terms, a ‘... new Eden, in the ark’s gut.’ (New World.) The writers of ‘New Literatures in English’ can no longer be called writers of ‘Commonwealth Literature’. They are now describing new perspectives on the past, present and future. Instead of complaining bitterly, and holding onto (negative elements of) the past, new writers must possess and express ‘an elation which sees everything as renewed.’ (The Muse of History)

Noble Prize Laureate Derek Walcott, true to his world, manages to remain uniquely West Indian, simultaneously ‘black’ and ‘white’ — he is a product of

the New World which both Adam and the Serpent recreate, the Second Eden. Considering his parentage, one might say he is truly representative of a ‘mixed race’, fruit of a colonial past. Walcott might be of mixed ancestry, but he is an authentic writer because of his successful expression of a new literature in English. He conveys universal sentiment through a mixture of French, English and West Indian dialect. In particular vocabulary, he evokes universal meanings:-

*'Days I have held,
days I have lost,
days that outgrow, like daughters,
my harbouring arms.'*

(‘Midsummer, Tobago’.)

In his poem, ‘Origins’, Walcott intersperses his view of islands still in the Colonial daze, with vibrant, rhythmic, almost chant-like verse which seem to be spoken by a native Oracle. While the poet is wrapt in the ‘sensuous’ pictures of

'Clouds, vigorous exhalations of wet earth,

.....

*Unveiling like mist, the wound of the
jungle,'*

The Seer envisions the West Indians - and on a higher plane, the native Africans and Indians-liberated from the chains of 'their long / Colonial languor'. In 'Origins', Walcott recognises both the Oracular and the ordinary. Both are aspects of the poet himself. Both are necessary for the poet to see comprehensively. The ordinary man sees the sea and surf as an incomprehensible, but powerful force. To the Oracle, the sea becomes a metaphor for the unending flow of time which brings and erases memory. What the Ordinary persona perceives, the Oracular persona interprets and understands, thus completing the perception fully.

The Sea is a central motif in Island Literatures because it is ever-present. It encompasses the author's mind just as it surrounds the islands themselves. The poet says

'this love of ocean that's self-love'

(Codicil)

is inescapable because he discovers affinities with the sea which cannot be ignored or taken for granted. His 'old wrongs' do not leave him, and like the waves, 'tire of horizon and return.' Therefore, instead of getting imprisoned in this ongoing process of setting out to sail (to the horizon) and returning, the poet fashions a new language-a new literature, which can always liberate him, however difficult it might be to do so. He learns that

'to change your language you must change your life'

(Codicil)

This is the real need of the writer of New Literature in English: to alter the language of Colonialism, to fashion a new tongue expressing a new kind of life that

is more and more a-colonial:-

*'My race began as the sea began,
with no nouns, and with no horizon,
with pebbles under my tongue,
with a different fix on the stars.*

.....

*A sea-eagle screams from the rock,
and my race began like the osprey
with that cry,
that terrible vowel,
that I !'*

(Names)

Even the stars in the dark sky are cast in a new mould of perspective. To the damned little Arabs they are 'fireflies caught in molasses'. It is an original, a-colonial perception.

Walcott has this originality in his employment of the sea as a motif and metaphor. In 'Preludes' he speaks of

'the steamers which divide horizons' —

the sea is the medium through which foreign ships with their cargo of 'borders', 'boundarises', 'natives' and 'aliens' arrive. In 'The Harbour', he is 'Braving new water in an antique hoax'. The poet is transported to an intensely sensitive awareness of the life around him, by his close association with the sea in 'The Castaway'. The sheer impact of a 'seascape.' Without 'the morsel / of a sail' is overwhelming. From the fickle surf to the polyp and sea-louse, everything becomes alive and tangible. The sea-world and the world of the island are blended together. The dog's feces becomes coral; the 'clenched sea-wood' is 'white as a man's hand'. A new 'genesis' is in motion.

This 'genesis' implies fresh viewpoints and a new way of understanding reality. Walcott, in his poetry, moves perceptibly from the colonial to the universal. He

redefines everything he speaks of - islands, the sea, a verandah, love, religion — and they alter, and therefore constitute a new reality.

The literature of the past, then is like old Miss Rossignol, who is

'In a black shawl harnessed by rusty brooches'

but once 'knew silk / coursing a green estate in gilded coaches'. (Tales of the Island). Such a person, such a literature, was once valid. There is a constant need, through, to revalidate literature, and reality through literature. What is applicable or valid to a certain Age may not be so for a following Age. Each writer of an Age formulates a fresh reality that is the pivot around which all perspectives evolve. It is,

*'The time ...
when, with elation,
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door . . .
you will love again the stranger
who was your self.'*

('Love after Love').

When in 'Sea Canes' Walcott cries, 'Half my friends are dead', one hears the echo of ages of lonely cries of millions of people who have all trod 'a banquet-hall deserted'. In his perception of the sea-canes, which flood him with memory, he is able to go beyond this loneliness:

*... out of what is lost grows something
stronger
that has the rational radiance of stone,
enduring moonlight, further than despair,
strong as the wind, that through
dividing canes*

*brings those we love before us, as they were
with faults and all, not nobler, just there.*

This ability to transcend to a higher level of meaning is itself a revalidation of reality. It no longer binds the poet or obstructs his way to a deeper awareness. In fact, it is the springboard to such a state of being. Walcott has spotted the horizon - the panorama of an expanded vision. He has learnt

*'the silence of the deepest buried love is
the one silence,
and whether we bear it for beast,
for child, for woman, or friend,
it is the one love, it is the same,
and it is blest
deepest by loss'.*

('odjob, a Bull Terrier'.)

The poet goes through life, experiencing, redefining and expressing. When all experience is 'done', that in itself becomes an experience and he begins to 'unlearn feeling'

('Winding Up')

Poetry is more than an outlet for Walcott. It is an expression of a uniquely Caribbean experience, which invests with universality the islands and the sea which makes islands of them. He has begun on a voyage — from the old to the new, the colonial to the Universal. It is a voyage unique to him and his Age. He is the Bard with the 'clouded eyes' playing on taut rain, who will sing a new 'Odyssey', for now, 'Helen's hair' is 'a gray cloud / Troy, a white ashpit / by the drizzling sea.' ('Map of the New World'). The battles are new kinds of battles. Even the sea is a new sea, renewed by fresh torrents of rain.

*'At the end of this sentence, rain will
begin.*

At the rain's edge, a sail'

('Map of the New world'.)

The rain is the fruition of the poet's perception of life and landscape, reality in its fullest form. It is, the 'Map of the new World'.

To Walcott, America's Muse is a
'Chalk-thin miner's wife with
knobbed elbows,
her neck tendons taut as banjo strings,
She who was once a freckled
palomino with a girl's mane
Galloping blue pastures.....'

(*'Upstate'*)

One sees what was once the 'New World' - America - is now no longer so. There is therefore a changing order of things, and each generation must crystallise its own value systems, standards and interpretations of history - in short, it's own reality. The old Muse of the old 'New World', nevertheless, is indispensable. Walcott finds himself 'falling in love with America'. He must

*'... put the cold small pebbles from the
spring
upon my tongue to learn her language,
to talk like birch or aspen confidently.
I will knock at the widowed door
of one of these villages
where she will admit me like a broad
meadow,
like a blue space between mountains,
and holding her arms at the broken elbows*

*brush the dank hair from a forehead,
as warm as bread or as a homecoming.'*

(*'Upstate'*)

The past is necessary. In his embrace of the Muse, he assimilates the past, and out of this is brought into being the Muse of Now, of the New World, of New Literature.

Inspired by such a Muse, Walcott writes—

*'Till those black forms be angels white
And Zion fills each eye.
High overhead the crow of night
Patrols eternity.'*

(*'Pocomania'*)

Walcott engenders new versions of reality and gives new dimensions to old cliches. With him one comprehends.

*'... in the salt chuckle of rocks
with their sea pools, ... the sound
like a rumour without any echo,
of History, really beginning.'*

A history freed from the 'Leprosy of empire', a history born from 'a single raindrop irrigating the tongue.'; a history of today.

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“SUCH A LONG JOURNEY”

The Motif of Change in Rohinton Mistry's Novel

The journey motif is one shared by much of commonwealth writing and can be seen as one way of expressing the focus on history - the progress of a nation or culture through time and the focus on identity - the progress of an individual to knowledge and maturity. Mistry uses both narrative and metaphor to explore the changes in the process of the “journey” and links the themes of history and personal progress in a unique and often comic way.

In keeping with the epigraph from Eliot's poem, he certainly starts out at the “worst time of the year”, with a Paris Bank clerk significantly called Noble in a Bombay besieged with municipal corruption, a belligerent Shiv Sena, inflation, war and the constant assault on physical and mental health by deteriorating physical amenities. Gustad Noble's far from idyllic existence is to be further threatened with the breakdown of the most personal relationships that of father and son, friend and friend, husband and wife, and professional dangers.

However, something is not quite right with Gustad even before the trouble begins. He has an aversion for light, both “earthly and celestial” as the narrator informs us [Page 11] and has thus not removed the “Black out” paper from his windows since the war with Pakistan nine years ago. This was also the year of several changes in his life and in the country. Chou - En Lai's “betrayal” of Nehru sends Nehru into a destructive mood and the country on to the path of corruption, prices rise and continue to do so, Gustad breaks his hip to

save his son and is miraculously rescued by his friend.

The darkness that Gustad willingly lives in from this year, 1962, onwards, is a symbol of many things but chiefly of a comfortable and secure but eventually delusive existence that has to give way to the present with all its trials and uncertainties. The Movement of the novel is essentially towards Gustad's surrender to light and his emergence from darkness.

The darkness is on one level, the persistence of memory, which cannot be translated into reality, yet functions as a background that makes the degradation of the present even more sharply felt. Memory in some cases becomes a disabling force, distorting Gustad's power of judgement. His attempt to recapture the merriment of his childhood by buying a live chicken backfires completely. It disrupts the routine of the present so that hidden tensions surface and the evening ends in a violent fight. This movement is repeated in the novel - the attempt to revive old relationships as with Jimmy, Dinshawji and Malcolm Saldanha, and to realise long held ambitions as with Sohrab results in complications arising out of changed circumstances.

The idea that attachment to the past can also be desirable is less evident but certainly present in the novel. His grandfather's furniture has proved it is not just a fond relic of the past by continuing to be useful into the present, even as an air raid shelter. Of far more value is its defining function, the sense of rootedness and wholeness, it gives Gustad. He says of

his grandfather's tools (pg. 293) "What did it mean when a hammer like this was passed from generation to generation?. It meant something satisfying, fulfilling at the deep centre of one's being. That was all. No need to wrestle further with the meaning of the words". His grandfather's character is again more than a relic. Narrating stories about him to Darius (Pg 293-294), Gustad is unconsciously constructing the only possible defence against the pressure of events - character and integrity. The last scene in the novel, where Gustad is the only person willing to carry the simple minded, lame Tehmul's body into the building and say prayers for him is significant in this context.

Miss Kutpitia's story presents in a more bizarre way, the same theme of the limited relevance of the past. She quite literally lives in the past, attempting to "mend and fix" (pg 283) time's ravages by refusing to proceed mentally from the day her nephew Farad died. Her liberation from grief comes when fire destroys her cobweb filled inner rooms and she realises (Pg 219) "All that was healing and life giving in her treasures had already been drawn forth by her, leaving feathery husks too insubstantial to feed the flames."

The journey motif thus works as a process of redefinition - the redefinition of the relevance of the past to the realities of the present.

The quote from Firdausis "Shah Nama" in the epigraph now gains its significance. It reads "He assembled the aged priests and put questions to them concerning the kings who had once possessed the world. "How did they", he inquired "hold the world in the beginning and why is it that it has been left to us in such a sorry state? And how was it that they were able to live free of care during

the days of their heroic labours? This is not a futile indictment of the past and its consequences but a genuine question that is answered partly in the course of the novel. Mistry does not explore the colonialist bogey, emphasising instead - character, and relationship at the personal level. This may explain Mistry's technique of presenting what might be called the "anecdotal" view of history and politics. Wherever politics is discussed in the novel, which is very often, it is discussed not in abstract "political" terms, but in concrete terms, in terms of the characters and personalities of those in power, and in terms of feelings and instincts familiar to the average human being. Thus, the strategy of war is illustrated with cups, saucers and breadknives, the political scenario is traced to relationships within the Nehru family, and the whole situation of the Bangladesh war is captured in Peerbhoy Panwalla's hypnotic tales that mix fantasy and fact in a far more entertaining manner than the newspapers do.

The journey as a process of recognition, of Gustad's acknowledgment of the forces that circumscribe his power to influence events is evident enough in the novel. This recognition is accompanied by a new realisation of the preciousness of the ties of family, friends and community in a world of conflicting causes. Tradition is a positive value in the novel - Gustad's meticulousness about Paris customs and rituals is as much an indication of this as the constant reference to his grandfather. However, here again, a process of finding the right balance is at work. The Tower of Silence controversy is outlined in unmistakably satirical notes, as is the sadhu's protest against cow slaughter. Religious identity is seen in increasingly personal terms, as at the last rites of Dinshawji' when the incomprehensible

words of the Zend Avesta nevertheless affect Gustad deeply with their music, becoming a source of spiritual and psychological harmony. The shift of religious identity from an observed system of belief to a source of calm and loyalty to one's fellow beings is another aspect of Gustad's journey.

The process of redefinition invariably involves letting go of old certainties and securities and facing the present with all its chaos. The six feet high compound wall around Khodadad building is a metaphor for these shifting lines between personal integrity and the capitulation to larger forces. The wall is on one level, indicative of the insularity of the community. The breaking of the wall at the end of the novel can be seen as the end of this insularity. On another level, the wall is a metaphor for the whole human desire to be distinct, unassailable and secure from the pressure of events.

The novel, and the journey ends on an unambiguous note. The conflict over the wall has resulted in death and violence, and defeat for those who oppose its destruction. The symbol of Gustad's insularity from the larger forces controlling his life, of the security of communal identity and also of Gustad's power over his environment, is broken. His prayer cap, a similar symbol, is trampled over and muddied. He drops it on his grandfather's teak desk and does what he had been intending to do but had somewhat forgotten - that is - to tear off the paper that has blacked out the truth for nine years of secure, if dusty ignorance. And, like the frightened moth that flies out freed, to accustom himself to what Rabindranath Tagore in the epigraph to the novel calls "new country revealed with its wonders."

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Tradition and Discontinuity in Postmodern Fiction

As a description of contemporary experience, postmodernism is a term that embraces in its ambit all the invigorating if confusing and somewhat chaotic theories of culture, art, literature and society that abound at the close of the twentieth century. With its distinctive stress on pluralism and the authenticity of a variety of experience, postmodernism underlines the possibility of the coexistence of many truths, of the legitimacy of other voices and other worlds thus absolving art and literature of any sense of absolutism in terms of vision and in the expression of human experience. As David Harvey points out, postmodernism "privileges heterogeneity and difference as liberative forces in the redefinition of cultural discourse. Fragmentation, indeterminacy and intense distrust of all universal or "totalizing" discourses are the hall mark of postmodernist thought." [Harvey, p.9]. Thus, the widest possible definition of culture becomes feasible, without in any way trivializing it, and in fact art and literature are vested with a new element of eclecticism and catholicity which challenge the indispensability of older and more traditional values.

While fragmentation and ephemerality are some of the facets that are associated with the postmodern condition, this does not imply that there is any lack of depth in terms of insight or in the comprehension of experience. Instead in the postmodernist acceptance of plurality and fragmentation is a tacit challenge to certain universalizing notions that dominated the earlier decades of the century. This shift in sensibility and the seemingly chaotic and disjointed expressions of experience have led critics to often assume that there exists a "crisis" in current cultural and literary theory. [Collier and Geyer-Ryan, p.2]. While there is little

doubt that the astonishing amorphousness evident in postmodern cultural and literary expression has caused an intellectual ferment that clearly sets the last few decades quite apart from the preceding period, the onslaught of heterogeneity is very deliberate and it seeks to authenticate the validity of all types of experience, challenging yet again the weighty bulwarks of modernism that regulate discourse and expression from hegemonistic and monolithic cultural viewpoints.

The positive expressions of modernity including its contributions to the progress of human knowledge, the growth of a rationalist and scientific temper and its emphasis on unbounded individual creativity were often harnessed in an attempt to create ideal social orders. The concomitant thrust of modernization in the arena of international politics and economics resulted in the "universalization" of global culture. However, the negative and reactionary aspects of the modernist movement particularly in the years between the wars and after the horrors of the Holocaust shattered the initial optimism that marked the project of modernity. The angst and alienation that is evident in the work of Franz Kafka, Albert Camus or Jean Paul Sartre revealed that the transcending faith in linear progress and absolute truths that marked the modernist movement ever since the Enlightenment was shattered by the perception of a world that turned upon itself and its own beliefs in despair and emptiness. The search for the essence of humanity foundered in the sea of meaninglessness, and artists, writers, philosophers and poets sought the way out through the complex web of the avant-garde, through myth and symbol and allusiveness in expression.

The resistance to the hegemony of a modernism that ensconced itself almost as the "establishment" aided by liberal capitalism and imperialism began in the late sixties when the various counter-culture movements came to the fore. These stressed an anti-authoritarian world view and encouraged iconoclastic expression and as David Harvey says, "the movement of 1968 has to be viewed ... as the cultural and political harbinger of the subsequent turn to postmodernism". [Harvey, p.38] The postmodern rhetoric as it abounds in art, literature and culture emphasizes the shift from the perception of a dominant and singular reality to the coexistence of many and radically different realities that may collide, interpenetrate and yet express a validity of their own. Thus art and literature in particular become a matter of signs and meanings and individual interpretation with everything falling within the ambit of their discourse.

Further, to deal with the moral crisis of the times thrust upon the world by the reversals of modernity, boundaries between art and science, philosophy and language, culture and literature are totally dissolved. This destabilization of watertight systems has been hastened by the postindustrial age of instantaneous electronic communication. Most postmodernists are for example captivated by the new possibilities for information and knowledge production, analysis and transfer. [Harvey, p.49]. The critic philosopher Lyotard suggests that the advent of postmodernism lies at the heart of a dramatic social and political transition including a radical perception of language coding and communication. He states that the social bond which is linguistic is not woven with a single strand but with an indeterminate number, a network of language games. Similarly, the postmodern thinker Michel Foucault also attacks the concepts of meta-language or meta-theory

through which all things may be represented. [Harvey, p44]. Foucault's ideas about the relationship between power and knowledge are also central to postmodernist theory especially his close scrutiny of the micro-politics of power which had a great impact on the various social movements mounted by minority groups over the last couple of decades.

The postmodern defiance of any unified representation of the world and its insistence on fragmentation and differentiation is also clearly reflected in contemporary fiction. In an interview with Ian McEwan, Milan Kundera points out, "the history of the novel is a mirror of man's history" [Bradbury, p.220]. Despite its hoary history as a traditional genre, the novel is in form and content affected by the ethos of the times and is moulded by the politics and the socio-cultural mores of the age. As Iris Murdoch has observed, "in morals and politics we have stripped ourselves of concepts. Literature . . . can give us a new vocabulary of experience, and a truer picture of freedom". Contemporary fiction therefore seeks to do just this following the spirit of the age and in the wide variety of directions in which it expresses itself there is plenty of evidence of the liberating influence of postmodernism.

While the emphasis thus far has been on the sense of departure from modernist writing, in many ways this age has its roots in the past and postmodernism does express a sense of continuity in some cardinal aspects of contemporary fiction. This paper attempts to identify the roots of postmodernism in the preceding era as well as to examine the discontinuity and break from modernism as is evident in contemporary fiction.

In the underlying philosophy of the so called project of modernity is the commitment to the idea of progress and a break with the irrational aspects of tradition which is also much in evidence in

postmodernism. This has its roots in the 18th century, in the age of Enlightenment which signaled a similar radical break with the medieval mind set and espoused rational theories of natural forces and human happiness. This secular expression sought the demystification of knowledge and reworked social systems to aid individual progress and human excellence. It reflected what is "a cosmic movement" in literature—the rejection, the questioning and the assimilation through transformation [but never directly] of some of the crucial features of the age just gone by, and the same apocalyptic vision is also present in postmodern writing. For instance postmodern writers ranging from Vladimir Nabokov and Samuel Beckett right through to Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Gunter Grass all grapple in unique individual ways with some of the most basic issues that have haunted the human mind ever since the beginning of the century.

In spirit as well as in substance, these newer writers also deal with the same issues although they reject many of the propositions posited by their forbears. In some cases there is a clear evidence of a shared philosophical world view; for instance it is not difficult to perceive the links between the minimalist expression of Samuel Beckett and the angst and alienation of Franz Kafka. Similarly the literary themes and techniques of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf echo strongly in the work of novelists like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie. Joseph Conrad's heart of darkness and Eliot's wasteland can be glimpsed in the works of contemporary fiction writers, writers as diverse as Milan Kundera and J.D. Salinger whose investigations of human experience presuppose a skepticism in relation to many conventional systems of thought. In the delineation and perception of individuality and in the depiction of protagonists in contemporary fiction the idea of the hero as

rebel is something that is also carried over from the earlier decades of the century. In many ways the hero is really the anti-hero who, in the words of novelist Saul Bellow is labouring "to maintain himself, or perhaps an idea of himself [not always a clear idea], he feels the pressure of a vast public life which may dwarf him as an individual while permitting him to be a giant in hatred or fantasy. In these circumstances he grieves, he complains, rages or laughs. All the while he is aware of his lack of power, his inadequacy as a moralist..." [Bradbury, p.55]. The world of the twentieth century with its death camps, its threat of nuclear annihilation, racial brutalities and the weight of money power is perhaps not very different at the close of the century than it was at the beginning.

Although by and large the postmodern tradition of expression is distinctly different from the modernists use of language in that a tight and identifiable relationship is conceived between what is said and who it is said to, the postmodern experimentation with language, communication and the content of expression can be traced to an earlier fascination with language pushed to an extreme in recent decades. Lyotard for example frequently employs the ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein to illuminate the condition of postmodern knowledge. [Harvey, p/46]. This earlier concern with language games and the flexibility of words and their meanings is continually reflected in postmodern fiction. The movement to "capricious textual enjoyment" [Collier and Geyer-Ryan,p.1] postulated by Roland Barthes who began with looking at language as a complex system of coded semiotic meaning also has its roots in the modernist period, in the work of James Joyce for example, and in the fictional experiments of Virginia Woolf.

Elements of continuity are also in evidence in postmodern culture and society as reflected in contemporary fiction. The modernists' pre-occupation with the city and the large metropolis as the stage upon which power is made and unmade, the nerve centre where human lives are acted out is paralleled in the postmodernists' involvement in the city. Bruce Chatwin's Prague or Jonathan Raban's London are the dramatic and labyrinthian theatres where tragedy, happiness, and human relationships are worked out. There are also more than a series of stages, they seem to live and breathe with a life of their own.

In setting out postmodernism's discontinuity with the modernist era it is interesting to look at some of the large schematic differences drawn up by the critic Ihab Hassan. He posits features such as form in modernism as opposed to anti-form in post modernism, purpose, design, hierarchy, art object or finished work, totalization, centering, interpretation and the signified in opposition to play, chance, anarchy, process or happening, deconstruction, dispersal, against interpretation and the signifier. [Hassan, p.91]. This pluralism and restless energy abounds in postmodern fiction particularly in modes and frameworks that are no longer categorizable. Elements of surprise, ingenuity and indeterminacy are employed in novels like "One Hundred Years of Solitude" and "Midnight's Children", that is the technique of magical realism to get to the heart of the matter, to reconcile individual life and the burden of history without sacrificing the essential truths of human experience.

Contemporary writing also dispenses with much of the traditional sense of realism, and as Malcolm Bradbury points out, "its dense and habitual sense of character and plot, setting and atmosphere, chronological and historical time. It probes deeper into

consciousness, individual and collective, looking outward at a world that seemed less a clear material substance than a place of random time and chaotic history and ... pluralized awareness ..." [Bradbury,p.4]. Inherited codes of realism even from the modernist era which itself was involved in a great deal of experimentation is eschewed by many of the newest writers like Bruce Chatwin or Ian McEwan or Toni Morrison whose expensive and exciting investigations into the art of fictional expression take the contemporary novel into new realms of existence.

Fictional expression also constantly questions some of the great edifices of modernity, including the subversive discourses of radical thinkers like Marx and Freud. This discontinuity from the modern tradition is in many ways a sharp reaction to the humanly created horrors of the twentieth century: the spectre of nuclear annihilation, the Nazi death camps, the ugly expressions of Fascism, racial prejudice and injustices and the horrific abuse of science. In "The Unbearable Lightness of being" and "The Book of Laughter and Forgetting", Milan Kundera questions the dogma of oppressive political systems and the abuses of power as exemplified by repressive communist rule. The fragile lives and loves of human beings trapped by history, by totalitarianism are investigated through the medium of the novel which Kundera believes "can say something that can't be said any other way". [Bradbury,p.217].

Postmodern fiction thus emphasizes the pluralisms of the world as opposed to the moderns commitment to dogma of various sorts. Although it was the element of radicalism which signalled modernism's own break with the past, it failed in many ways to give expression to "otherness" or take into cognisance the possible instability of systems as expressed by contemporary fiction.

Postmodern fiction pays close attention to other worlds and other voices that have in the words of David Harvey, "too long been silenced". [Harvey,p.42]. The voices of women, gays, blacks and colonized peoples whose histories have also been buried is heard with a new zest and emphasis in contemporary writing. The tremendous energies of Black American or Afro-American literature as exemplified in the fictions of Alice Walker or Toni Morrison represent a new and vibrant reclaiming of society and the politics of our times by postmodern literary expression. Black feminists acknowledge the pain and conflict of their histories and personal lives, but in true postmodern style do not expect a denouement, and as Toni Morrison puts it, "there is a conflict between public and private life, and it's a conflict that ought to remain a conflict ..." [Walder, p.330]. Similarly feminist writers grapple with the postmodern condition and define their world view through the changed "structure of feeling" as is clear in the work of writers like Fey Weldon or Margaret Drabble.

As contemporary writing is also profoundly affected by the theories of deconstruction initiated by Derrida, and new notions of reading texts have emerged, cultural life is also viewed as a series of intersecting texts. So too, intercultural experiences particularly the assertion of multi-ethnic identities finds expression in postmodern fiction. What has emerged is basically a rebellion against a particularly "English canon" and the case for hearing the voices of writers from the decolonized world who while claiming their own heritage and

history nevertheless have a stake in the English language and its literature. The seemingly boundless energies of our own crop of writers beginning with Salman Rushdie and down to Amitav Ghosh and Vikram Seth rediscover the language and their own rootedness with a sense of easy reclamation that makes their work universal without compromising on their own experiences of their culture.

Thus collage, montage and pluralism to go back to the ideas of Derrida, form the primary modes of postmodern discourse. The inherent heterogeneity and fragmentation of postmodern expression heightens the intensity of conscious human experience by allowing the widest understanding of experience without insisting on the domination of unitary modes of discourse. More than any other literary form, fiction offers the greatest flexibility to express this great sense of variety and plenitude that is the hallmark of this postmodern age. The new international tradition of writing whether it deals with women's voices, the voices of the oppressed and marginal people or the mass caught up in the maelstrom of urban living reflects the genuine need to define and comprehend the experiences of our age. In the most crucial ways, postmodernism has broken with the age of the moderns and the cultural and literary discourse of these last decades of the twentieth century in establishing a tradition and authenticity that is unique and distinct with a powerful aesthetics of its own.

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A Semiotic Decoding of Umberto Eco's The Name of The Rose

(Paper presented at the University Seminar on Post-Modernism)

The good of a book lies in its being read. A book is made up of signs, which in their turn speak of things. Without an eye to read them, a book contains signs that produce no concepts; therefore it is dumb

(*The Name of the Rose* 478)

"The text is nothing else but the semantic - Pragmatic production of its own Model Reader" (Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, intro 10). All Post-modern literary theories assign the primary role to the reader, so much so that a text becomes Post-Modern not only because of the devices used by the author to create the text as a baffling piece of art, but also because the reader may treat any text as a maze of many issues "trying to grasp his meaning amid the floating signifieds" dangling between the "instability of the text and the unavailability of determinate meanings".

Umbert Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1984) can be semiotically studied, as Eco has brilliantly encoded the salient theoretical principles of semiotics as fictional events in this novel, thus encoding it as an illustration of his theoretical master-piece *A theory of Semiotics* (1979) which is a post-modern, post-structuralist theory. Being a murder mystery to a casual reader, a medieval historical romance to a historian, a satire on the Medieval church to a theologian, it becomes a meta-semiotic fiction to the critical perception of the Model Reader.

Every work of art is essentially a system of signs and semiotics explores the various possible means of producing meaning through sign-function, which in

turn, arises from the correlation of codes. Ferdinand de Saussure in *Course in General Linguistics* (1915) and Charles Sanders Pierce in *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Pierce* (1931-58), have laid the foundation for the theory of Semiotics. On this foundation has been constructed the vast field of Semiotics by various language scholars like Charles Morris, Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco.

Saussure's concept of 'signifier' and 'signified' has been transferred to semiotics, as a semiotic sign too produces meaning through signification. The arbitrary nature of sign, its differential quality, synchronic and diachronic study of signs and syntagmatic and paradigmatic relation of signs are the paramount linguistic principles propounded by Saussure, that have been borrowed by the semiotic field.

Structuralism has also contributed to the theory of semiotics by introducing the principle of systems and relations. In semiotics, a sign can produce meaning only when it is studied in relation to all other signs of a system or syntagm. The semioticians look at the world from a different perspective and by considering everything as a system of a signs, the chaotic jungle of things can be programmed into different systems.

Semiotics is such a vast ocean that it touches two extreme poles. At one pole, it is becoming a theoretical and scientific discipline and at the other pole it flows unchecked into every object of the universe, both significant and insignificant. Semiotics stretches "our concepts of language till it includes non-verbal areas." As Julia Kristeva says,

Nobody just talks. Every speech act includes transmission of messages through the language of gesture, posture, clothing, hair style, perfume, accent, social context etc., over and above, under and beneath, even at cross-purposes with what words actually say. (Quoted in Hawkes 125)

This all encompassing nature of semiotics is the reason for its wide popularity.

But, for an analysis of *The Name of the Rose*, we are concerned with the theory of codes and the theory of sign-production and Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics* is the scientific work that fulfils this need.

Eco's idea of codes is related to sign-function. "Sign-function is made possible only through codes and codes provide the rules for the generation of signs".(Eco, *Theory* 49).

"When a code apportions the elements of a *Conveying System* to the elements of a *Conveyed system* the former becomes the expression and the latter becomes the *content* (48)". These two elements are called 'functives' and when there is a correlation between two functives, a *sign function* is born. The same functive, by entering into another correlation can produce a new sign-function.

Codes already exist in society in the form of social knowledge, derived from

social practices and beliefs. These codes are already internalised in our minds and during the process of interpretation they emerge to the surface to decode the message.

Formation of codes is "encoding" and interpretation of codes is "decoding" in semiotics. A literary author needs competence of codes to encode a text. The reader also needs competence of codes to decode the text. While decoding, sometimes the reader has to exercise overcoding, undercoding or face the problem of aberrant decoding.

As far as *The Name of the Rose* is concerned, the decoding can be done at two different levels. The plot of the novel itself is replete with multifarious sign-systems that have been encoded by different characters consciously or unconsciously. These signs are decoded by the hero, brother William of Baskerville. At another level, the text itself can be considered a sign encoded by Umberto Eco, and it is the task of the reader to decode this system of signs bringing to the text her knowledge of semiotic theory, and her inter-textual knowledge.

Set in a rich Benedictine Abbey, in the Italy of 1327, *The Name of the Rose* has an enthralling murder mystery for its plot. William of Baskerville, the Franciscan monk is assigned the duty of unraveling the mystery behind the death of Adelmo, a monk. William willingly grasps this opportunity to utilise his semiotic capability for detective purpose. As he is tracking down the murderer, working his way through signs, a series of murders occurs. The monk - semiotician-detective, plunges into the adventure and finally arrives at the truth.

A semiotician's task is to pick out the systems of signs inherent in an event and

then to decode them. So, William, has to encode a series of sign systems. The main sign-system, the murder mystery has been encoded by Jorge, the blind old monk, using a very unconventional code. His weapon is a poisoned book that would kill the readers. Jorge firmly believes that certain books are not to be read, lest they corrupt the human mind. Such books have been kept in "Finis Africae" a secret chamber in the library. This room has a special book, in which an Arabic, a Syriac, a Latin and a Greek text are bound together. The fourth book is the second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*. As Jorge believes that laughter is a sin, he condemns Aristotle for having elevated laughter to the level of art. Many monks, of the abbey, with their lust for knowledge, hunt for this book, So Jorge, with a brush spreads a poisonous glue along the edges of *Poetics* and whoever reads it should moisten the fingers with the tongue, to flip through the sticky pages. Thus, the reader poisons himself, but only "to the extent that he wanted to read" (545).

Being a monk, William has internalised religious knowledge and this comes to the surface and interrupts the task as he proceeds with decoding. After the death of Adelmo and Venantius, the two monks, an old monk Alinardo gives a clue to William that the deaths occur according to the pattern of the seven trumpets of the Apocalypse as recorded in "The Revelation of John the Divine of the Bible". William assumes that "a single diabolical mind, using the Apocalypse as guide has arranged the three disappearances" (304). But this decoding is wrong and there is a confusion of codes caused by religious belief.

When the apocalyptic code misdirects him, William creates another set of codes

by drawing hypotheses from signs. By closely observing the locations of death and the signs on the dead bodies, he formulates hypotheses through the methods of induction, deduction and abduction. This finally proves to be the correct decoding procedure and he traps the murderer.

The mystery of the murder has a direct relation to the mystery of the library. The library has been constructed as a labyrinth so that "certain forbidden books can be kept away from the reach of the monks, except the librarian. To confuse and to mislead the intruders, many deceptive devices are set within the labyrinth. A special architectural code has been used for the construction of the chambers and a linguistic code, a mirror code and a herbal code are the other codes within the code. William decodes all these tough codes step by step and finally manages to enter the 'finis Africae' where the murderer Jorge waits for him with the poisoned book. In the ensuing melee that arises between Jorge and William the library accidentally catches fire ignited by a spark from the lamp. The library is reduced to ashes though William escapes.

The Name of the Rose which is "a tale of books" (Preface, *The Rose* XIX) is itself a sign of books, of knowledge, of the word, the world and of semiotics. Though Eco claims that he has written the book, "out of pure love of writing" prodded by the seminal idea: "I felt like poisoning a monk" (*postscript* 130) he has encoded it as a conscious demonstration of the theory, as a meta-semiotic fiction, Eco has chosen a murder mystery as it also can be unraveled through semiotic methods. The methods of encoding and decoding, overcoding, under-coding and aberrant decoding, unlimited semiosis, idea as sign and every other semiotic principle is illustrated and

intertwined with the plot. With the formula provided by William as a model, and armouring oneself with Eco's *Theory*, the semiotic lesson can be learnt by the reader of *The Rose*, that has been built in the vast laboratory of his critical studies and politico-cultural activities of over two decades" (Lauretes 15). This makes *The Name of the Rose* a meta-critical fiction.

The non-referential nature of signs is a basic semiotic principle. When William cannot decipher the secret code, "The hand over the idol works on the first and the seventh of four" which conceals the key to the "Finis Africae" he tries to find a fact external to the code, a referent of the signs which is outside the sign. He has forgotten how language refers to itself. Later, due to a chance comment altered by his friend Adso, William finds out that "the first and the seventh of four" means the "Q" and the "r" of the word "quatuor" which means four. So these two letters should be pressed, to open the door. William finally realises that the code gives self-referring clues, directing his attention to the internal components.

The middle ages as a system of signs, with paradigmatically selected signs, arranged in a syntagm, has been recreated by Eco in *The Rose*. One perspective reveals the medieval period as a sign of artistic beauty. The other dimension of the medieval period, the dark era as a sign, has different signifieds. The abbey is projected as a sign system of this dark era, with its heterogeneous mixture of signs. William attempts a restructuring of these codes, but he fails, as the codes get totally destroyed in the process. The sins of that age could be purged only in a fiery conflagration yet, from destruction arises the Phoenix-birth of the modern age and hence it is only a transition.

In "Towards a New Middle Ages", Eco diachronically relates the signs of the middle ages to those of the modern age. The heretical movements such as the Fraticelli and the Catharists are similar to the modern cult called "People's Temple". The desire for martyrdom of the monks has assumed the form of desire for mass-suicide in the cults. In Eco's opinion the monastery resembles the American University Campus.

William and Jorge, the hero and the villain, are also signs. William is the sign of all possible features that a semiotician should possess. He advocates change towards the modernisation of culture, through disruption of old codes and formation of new ones. This semiotic attempt is shattered by the blind Jorge who is averse to any kind of cultural change. So, his knowledge is used to conceal knowledge and to commit a semiotic sin of poisoning the text, thus terminating the process of encoding and decoding signs.

Yeager in "The Poisoned Text" comments that the clash between William and Jorge is not over mere words but over the world itself, because in *The Rose* "word and world are one". By eating the word, that is, Aristotle's *Poetics*, Jorge becomes "the vocative absolute" to use Derrida's words (Lauretis 22). Words should be used carefully and the poison of the book is a warning to critics "to handle a living idiom" with caution.

In *The Rose* William finally utters in despair, "I should have known well that there is no order in the universe". If William the semiotician, has not succeeded in discerning an order in the universe, does Eco suggest that semiotics has failed to create a pattern to systematise the heterogeneous elements of the universe? But William confesses, "I have never doubted

the truth of signs. Also; they are the only things man has with which to orient himself in the world. What I did not understand was the relation among signs". If the study of signs is pursued in the proper way, without the interference of external elements, within the system of signs, then the truth of signs can be discovered.

But what is truth? If semiotics is 'a theory of lies' and if the novel is "a premeditated lie" can a theory of lie be successfully used to find the truth of a created lie (a fiction)? But truth according to semiotics is not the historical truth, but the semiotic cultural truth. Truth is only a sign and the book is only a sign of signs and everything is reduced to a sign. "Truth exists only as a unicorn, in a world of fantasy" (*The Rose*). The mission of semiotics is also "to make people laugh at the truth" by proving to them that truth is nothing but a system of codes. Semiotics can convert a truth into a lie and a lie into a truth by the dexterous manipulation of codes. Thus *The Rose* deconstructs itself.

After the library of the abbey has been reduced to ashes, the young Adso returns to his native place. Years later as an old man he visits the site of the ruins, and from the rubbles of the library, picks up scraps of parchment. From these relics, he

can reconstruct memories, which for him is "a kind of lesser library, a symbol of the greater, vanished one : a library made up of fragments, quotations, unfinished sentences, amputated stumps of books" (*The Rose* 609 nb). This reconstructed library is *The Rose* itself, narrated by Adso. So though *The Rose* might have withered, it lives internally as a name in *The Name of the Rose*. Thus the deconstructed text is reconstructed.

The title of the novel *The Name of the Rose* itself is a sign of semiotics and has a meta-semiotic function. Eco has consciously encoded it to create ambiguity as "a title must muddle the reader's ideas, not regiment them" (Postscript 3) *The Name of the Rose*, *The Title*, is a sign with multiple meanings. A reader, with intertextual knowledge is reminded of "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet", "A rose is a rose"; "O my love is like a red red rose"; Dante's "mystic rose" and many other literary situations, engulfing her in an 'implosion of meaning'. The title is again repeated by Eco, at the end of the novel, 'stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus'. This Latin verse is from 'De Contemptumundi' by Bernard of Morlay, a twelfth century Benedictine. It means that the rose exists as the name of the rose; whatever we grasp, whether in our minds or with our hands, the things we grasp are naked names.

The Name — The Rose — The Name of The Rose.

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Is Shashi Deshpande a Feminist ?

On being asked to describe the post Independence Indian woman in her interview to this writer, Shashi Deshpande ironically said that women have yet to gain independence since they continue to be "colonised by men". Haunted by a myriad facets of this "colonisation" the novelist is impelled to present "the childless widow, the deserted wife, the scheming woman", "the clever girl taken out of school because she got engaged" & "the ugly girl" who cannot find a match, in her fiction. (Dhawan 5:34) It is from this "claustrophobic world of women" that the heroines of her major novels Indu from *Roots and Shadows* (RS) Dr. Sarita from *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (DHNT) and Jaya from *That Long Silence* (TLS) seek an escape route.

Since she consciously talks of the rights, dreams, suffering, and problems of women she is a feminist writer. Yet her portrayal of women is always balanced - if women are weak, vulnerable, and dependent they are also brave, powerful, even scheming and devious. She rises from "the narrow confines of feminist problems" constantly exploring the need for human relationships and interdependence.

Deshpande repeatedly returns to the need to liberate men and women from constricting moulds imposed by society. While men are also victims in contemporary Indian middle class Brahmin families which is Deshpande's fictional milieu, women suffer to a greater extent. The role model that a woman has to emulate is of Sita, who in patriarchal societies, nullifies her selfhood to become a footstep - following shadow. As Prabhati Mukherjee explains, every girl is groomed on the idea that womanhood is tantamount

to wifehood and motherhood, never personhood. Since every Hindu parent's primary religious duty is to marry one's daughter off propitiously, marriage literally becomes a sword of Damocles. (Kakar 71) Severely constrained by such an ideal Deshpande's heroine Saru is even disallowed from playing in the sun lest she becomes dark and thus lower her potential in the marriage market. At 24, Mini is burdened by the guilt of not being able to find a match. Since she is uneducated marriage alone can provide her a secure life after her parents' death.

Once married the average woman's life is reduced to household drudgery. Jaya notices that "cooking and clearing up had been exclusively female operations". Any attempt at involving the boys is scorned, surprisingly enough by the women themselves.

To the heroine who represents the average educated middle class woman, education also becomes a constraint, since she is expected to be a "Shakuntala in skirts". (Shirwadker) Deshpande attempts to right this picture. In her novels we see the heroine aiming to be wife, mother and a career woman. Ironically, while she is supposedly a guest in her parental home she becomes the new pillar of the family. Deshpande's novels therefore lend themselves to a feminist reading. Some of these feminist motifs will be handled in the ensuing pages.

Rosemarie Tong in her book *Feminist Thought* isolates several types of feminism of which aspects of Liberal, Radical, Existential, Social and Cultural Feminism may be traced in Deshpande's fiction.

Liberal Feminism which has the closest resemblance to Deshpande's ideas, stresses the need for a just, compassionate, and free society where individuals can exercise their autonomy and maintain an independent identity:

Liberals agree that the less we see of Big Brothers in our bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens, recreation rooms, and nurseries the better. We all need places where we can among family and friends shed our public personae and become our 'real' selves. (Tong 12)

Since women are conditioned by their predominantly oppressive gender roles, their individualism is severely repressed and they live out a role. Most feminist theories expand on the dichotomy between sex and gender. Sex, Tong explains, is biological while gender is the socio-cultural identity imbibed by every individual in a community through myths and legends, which raise gender identity "to a universal status". This cultural encoding of a person even determines the profession he/she should follow. Thus, Saru is a doctor, not a surgeon, Indu is a free lance feature writer and not a hard core reporter, and Jaya sits at home turning out stories for a women's magazine.

Culture has also decreed certain qualities as masculine and feminine respectively. Femininity is synonymous with passivity, dependence, indecisiveness and self-sacrifice, while masculinity which is the norm in patriarchal societies is associated with ambition, independence, and rationality (Palmer 1989). Hence, any woman who "feels masculine" i.e. displays autonomy/rationality as against dependence/emotional behaviour is considered to be a freak and is forced to don a mask of weak femininity to be socially accepted.

Another idea emphasised by liberal feminists is the narrowing of a housewife's outlook on life. John Stuart Mill in his *The Subjection of Women* explains that society maintains double standards that hurt women. Most "feminine" virtues are actually "negative character traits". Two typical "feminine" traits are helplessness - an ostensibly negative characteristic and unselfishness - an ostensibly positive trait:

Women's concerns are confined to the private realm, the typical woman is preoccupied with her own concerns and those of her immediate family. She overestimates her family's wants and needs and underestimates those of society in general. (Tong 20 - 21)

Her unselfishness supposedly a womanly virtue becomes a kind of "extended egoism". A housewife will go to Herculean heights to further her husband's career or see that her children get settled in life but the "typical wife's and mother's charity begins and ends at home". (Tong 21) Mill stressed that it is more important for women to promote the welfare of society.

Many of the above ideas can be traced in Deshpande's works. In 'Suhasini' and 'Gitanjali' we see how women get entrapped by character traits. Jaya and Smita - Saru's friend - metamorphose into Suhasini and Gitanjali respectively, after traditional arranged marriages. In fact, the custom in some Hindu communities of changing the bride's name symbolises this encoding process, thus Jaya who stands for Victory becomes Suhasini "one who smiles/laughs pleasantly", a typical pativrata smiling even in the face of adversity. Jaya soon becomes a split person, "a two-in-one-woman".

Jaya realises that femininity constrains her personality, especially after marriage. Her fits of temper were family jokes before her marriage, but to Mohan anger makes a woman 'unwomanly'. Indu recalls being frank and outspoken but after her marriage she learns to say what Jayant wants to hear. She even represses her passion because Jayant prefers passive women. Another "womanly virtue" which is encouraged is silence. Mohan admires his mother's silence in the face of his father's ill treatment, as a sign of toughness, whereas Jaya rightly understands it as "despair so deep that it could not get articulated" (Dhawan 5:151). Mohan's sister also remains silent about her uterine cancer. As J.S. Mill explains "Womanly virtues" are actually "negative character traits".

Deshpande's heart reaches out to unemployed, uneducated women who know no way of emerging from their cultural cages. In her interview to Vanamala Viswanatha she explains that these women "are literally trapped" and "scared to get out of family relationships". Gitanjali has no option but to be a housewife. Even as she beguiles herself into thinking that she is a contented wife the romantic mask slips when she cannot exercise her freedom to buy a relative a gift and is forced to borrow some money from Saru. Gradually, Gitanjali's mental outlook narrows, her life has very little connection with the outside world and she enjoys its limitedness, laughing over obscene married women's jokes.

That the ideal housewife is only a selfish island in society is explicated in the sparrow story in TLS. The sparrow, a perfect mother, tends to her fledgling's needs all the while ignoring the poor wet crow asking for shelter at her door. As Indra Bhatt explains, the sparrow "does

not wish to look out side" but feels "safe looking after her children". (Dhawan 5:159) It is true that the crow is careless in not being self reliant, but the sparrow is heartless in neglecting a co-member of society. She is even cruel because after frying the chappattis she carelessly asks the crow to warm himself by sitting on the hot skillet, and the crow dies. Jaya later wonders if her daughter is the sparrow and her son the crow.

The same idea is reiterated in RS in Sunanda atya's thoroughly selfish behaviour - she tends to her immediate family's needs but ignores those of the joint family. Indu realises that her aunt is cunning, selfish and devious, "Yet, how could she have been otherwise? As a child she had learnt that, being a female, she could neither assert, demand nor proclaim" (RS 146).

Betty Friedan explains that women are trapped within the "feminine mystique" which convinces them that being a wife and mother is their ideal goal. Life becomes monotonous and frustrating because it has little connection with the outside world. Gradually, without having any outlet to their frustration they turn it against each other. Indu watching her aunts squabbling over Akka's jewels comments: "It's this kind of a living, I thought. Living too close, too entangled with one another. So that if you move, you're bound to hurt someone else. And if they move, they hurt you" (RS 145). Like Friedan Deshpande feels that wifehood and motherhood should not become institutionalised. To Viswanatha she says : "This is what I have tried to convey in my writings. What I don't agree with is the idealisation of motherhood.... The false and sentimental notes that accompany it". It is because of this that Jaya feels that she is merely following what

“Simon says” and Saru calls herself a “Ventriloquist’s Dummy”.

While Liberal Feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft feel that equal education and opportunities can help reduce women’s oppression Deshpande is able to see the problems that this change has brought about in India, where a woman’s profession is treated at best as a hobby, even by her husband. To Mohan, Jaya’s career as a writer is a status symbol to preen about at parties. When Jaya writes a starkly honest story about the power games between a husband and wife Mohan is hurt because his colleagues may attribute the marital discord in the story to Jaya and Mohan’s married life. Jaya resorts to a false name a defense mechanism common to women’s writing - and uses Kamat’s mailing address, initially but later gives this also up because “I had been scared - scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardising the only career I had, my marriage” (TLS 144).

In fact Deshpande believes that unless society’s attitude changes a woman’s successful career can cause more harm than good to her marriage. Saru, a doctor obviously earns more than Manu, an assistant professor in a second rate college. Manu a victim of patriarchally sanctioned roles feels that he is no longer the head of the family, he is only ‘Mr. Sarita’ and becomes sadistic. Like Liberal Feminists, Deshpande too believes that men are “fellow victims of the sex role conditioning” (Tong 4).

Like them she too rejects a simplistic women-are-the-victims-theory. In fact some of her women characters are just the opposite. Thus Akka, a childless widow becomes the ‘female patriarch’ of her family because of her wealth. Saru’s mother also wields the rod of authority in

her house alienating her husband from his family and reducing him to a dummy.

Sarita too realises that she has destructive forces in her. It is her indifference to Manu’s deflating ego that forces him to be violent with her. Hence she says: “who is the victim and who is the predator? Are the roles so distinct, so separate? Or are we, each of us both?” (DHNT 159).

Radical Feminists demand a total uprooting of society since, to them it is a miasma of patriarchally created problems. While Deshpande does not endorse this she too believes that patriarchal codification of motherhood is stultifying. In *Of Woman Born* Adrienne Rich, a Radical Feminist explains that men have controlled women as child bearers and child rearers insisting that motherhood comes naturally, instinctively to a woman when in actual fact it is learned. Women are moreover supposed to be the embodiment of patience and unconditional love especially in handling their children. Any woman who does not want a child is treated as abnormal, the woman herself begins to wonder if she is a “monster”. This idea is seen very poignantly in Deshpande’s short story ‘Death of a Child’ where the heroine is pregnant for the third time in 4 years. Fearing that her life will be completely bound by her child’s needs she decides to abort it. Her husband is shocked that his wife, a Janani, a mother and giver of life should want to annihilate the foetus. Nevertheless he reconciles to the fact and is very supportive during the abortion. Ironically, it is the heroine who feels guilty for murdering her child and is haunted by its ghost.

Indu also wants to postpone motherhood, “I will have no child that is not wholly welcome”, she says but is

constantly nagged by her family for the delay.

Tokenism and Female bonding, two crucial ideas associated with Radical Feminism can also be traced in Deshpande's works. Rich describes a token as a privileged educated woman who instead of viewing patriarchal society from a critical distance sanctions them in an indirect way. The *Feminist Dictionary* says that the token woman "often unwittingly pleases her masters by selling out her own kind" (Kramarae and Treichler 452). She is encouraged to think that she is different and special and so loses contact with the other women around her especially those who are less privileged than her. Rich emphasises that the aim of every privileged woman should be to reach out to other women. This is "female bonding" which leads to the "solidarity and empowering of women", (Blood, Bread and Poetry 1) In writing the Seetha stories, Jaya becomes a token because the stories are "light humorous pieces about the travails of a middle class house wife. Nothing serious oh no, nothing serious" (TLS 149). Jaya's stories undermine women's experiences as non serious and endorse the patriarchal view that women's problems are "too distanced from real life, real problems". Kamat's description of the token Jaya as "plump, good humoured, pea brained but shrewd" woman also fits Suhasini, Gitanjali, Sunanda Atya and Seeta - all house-proud insulated wives who skim over life and perpetuate the male image of woman.

Towards the end of the novel Jaya does reach out to other women. This idea of female bonding can be seen in all of Deshpande's major novels. Indu helps within her family by bringing her childless widowed aunt home and helping in Mini's marriage. Saru the doctor becomes the

healer of innumerable female problems. Saru's profession becomes a means of "bonding" herself to women, "perhaps, she thought, I should come and stay here, where I can be of so much use" (DHNT 107).

Jaya's help is both physical and metaphoric. She helps Jeeja her poor maid servant and the latter's family by rendering her son timely medical help. She also helps in a metaphoric way, as an artist by ending "that long silence" of women. By writing about women and their problems she affirms that women are worthy of attention. In this Deshpande resembles the Existential Feminist Simone de Beauvoir's idea that women suffer because men consider themselves to be the Self and women the other. This is seen in TLS, in Ramukaka's family tree which traces ancestors for almost 200 years but ignores all the women in the family whether daughters or daughters-in-law, though the women like Aji have "single-handedly kept the family together" (TLS 143).

What Jaya writes and what we read as the novel TLS is her efforts to articulate the silence of women down the ages.

There are also traces of Cultural Feminism and Social Feminism in Deshpande's novels. Palmer explains that Cultural Feminists are "inward looking" and stress the need for spiritual and psychological liberation. Cultural Feminists continue 'de Beauvoir's theory of otherness and emphasise that a woman's sense of Otherness must first of all be uprooted from her inner self. External improvement of a Woman's lot is not at all enough. Thus both Jaya and Saru feel guilty about being heads of their families. Jaya realises that she has been voluntarily speaking prakrit instead of Sanskrit.

Although Deshpande's novels lend themselves to a feminist analysis she is predominantly a humanist. She never evokes sympathy for a character simply because she is a female. In many ways it is women who oppose change, thus Indu recalls how her grand mother was ostracised by caste widows in the community for not shaving her head. Secondly, the most evolved, often androgynous characters are men like Kamat, Naren and Old Uncle.

What is admirable in Deshpande is her avoidance of the extreme stance taken by some Western Feminists. In her fiction it is never a question of man OR woman but man AND woman. This is because she believes that women are still part of society, and the family is its principle unit.

What is necessary is a re-organisation of values and mores so that women are not considered subordinates but co-workers with men. Hence her heroines return both to the joint family and their husbands with renewed hope. They realise that compromise is the way of life. The heroines struggle goes on with the hope that better times will come. It is apt therefore to conclude with Jaya's lines:

We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even for long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: Life has always to be made possible (TLS 191).

J. Bhavani,
Research Student

CHILDHOOD MOMENTS

Unrhymed Iambic tetrameter

*The time when I was young and free
When I came tumbling down the stairs
No one would scream if I spilt food
They laughed when I slipped off the chair
My skirt that hung above my knees
A cap that never stayed on me
A lollipop that messed my face
That sticky grin my mouth would give
My dad would hug me close and smile
The time he carried me to school
When mom would pack my snack for break
And she would cry and let me go
But I would bravely run across
And come back loving mommy more
Those times are clear and always near
They are the days I cherish most.*

S. Srividya, II M.A.

Valley Surge

*My memories: the sugar coated lime;
the patch work art on denim skirts; the sway
of scottish beats; the silent moonlight night;
the classic raga of the moon; a cool
and quiet holiday; the milkmaid tins
with biscuits sweet; my modern art upon
the wall; beneath the banyan tree all dance;
the luscious flowers, valley green amidst
the blooming gulmohars and sugar cane.*

Shalini Rao, II M.A.

NOSTALGIA

*My eyes are closed and time runs back into
The days of long ago. I remember :
The rough, wet kiss of little pups; around
The fire roasting maize; moist window panes
Of morning hours to trace designs with care
Dark corners under table tops to hide
And seek by turns; the pricking rain upon
My face; the pony trotting me to school;
The weighing down of umbrellas under
The falling snow; the mewling ball of fur
In grass; my birthday doll with blinking eyes;
The beating drums of Buddhist monks amidst
The morning drowsiness; the crunching of
The fallen leaves beneath our trekking feet
These memories I cherish most for they
Are like the sun amidst the clouds of life.*

Jayashree K., II M.A.

Children of A lesser God ?

"Cadet 6197", barked the adjutant. "Yes, Sir!" replied a chirpy voice from the back. The contingent turned around to see a young boy hardly out of his teens in ill-fitting dungarees snap to attention "Yusuf Khan, Sir !", he replied.

Those were the pre-independence years and to be listed in the Royal Indian Army was a prestigious issue. My name was Shankar Srinivas and I came from good Brahmin stock from the great Indian south. For centuries my ancestors had been land lords and I was the first to break the tradition and join the fighting ranks. For the next nine months I would be known in the academy only as "Cadet 6198."

Our tight lipped British Officers welcomed us. ".....Nice to see you gentlemen here. I will now brief you on your daily routine. You will all rise by 05.30 hrs and have p.t. and cross-country from 06.00 hrs to 07.00 hrs. After which will follow breakfast at 07.30 hrs and then drill for 2 hours. You will then diligently master the history of war and artillery tactics and then onto lunch..... your day will end at 22.00 hrs with the Last Post. And I can guarantee you it will be 36 weeks of ABSOLUTE HELL!" That was Captain Hamilton, our adjutant one of the best officers I have worked with, always in an immaculate uniform with a dignified bearing.

We were showed around the academy, the stables, the lecture halls, the mess and the firing range. We were then shown to our quarters and the white men were rather disgusted to see a number of weeping mothers and sisters bid farewell. Fortunately the orthodoxy of my family prevented the women-folk from travelling this far.

My room had two tables, two basins, two beds and two cupboards. I soon discovered that my room mate, and for the rest of my life my soul mate was Cadet Yusuf Khan. In his boots and beret he only came up to my shoulders and said that his grand father had been the diwan to the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Jafar II !! I laughed at his imagination and he looked hurt. "Well, lets go down for dinner", I said trying to avoid his eyes. A long queue had already formed and Yusuf complained at the quality of meat. As for me I sat nit picking the salad and curds.

Soon after dinner the Last Post was sounded and not a soul stirred. We all had a long day ahead. First we had a gruelling 5 hrs cross-country and Yusuf for all his small physique took the lead. For years cadets from other academies only saw his mud splattered back as he went on to become the inter-services champion. Even on the firing range there wasn't a soul as good as him.

It was only in the class-rooms that I reigned monarch. There wasn't anyone who could beat me in history and artillery. I attributed it not to my brains but to my interest in the subject. Our subjects were handled by the commandant Lt. Gen. Kane and in the class-room he was an absolute terror.

Yusuf, I learnt was a man who would give his life for a friend. My Brahman conscience and his Muslim guilt did not deter us from becoming inseparable.

On Sundays we had this ceremony called the "Mandir March" It was devised to inculcate in us a spirit of secularism and

unity. We visited all places of worship this day and made offerings and prayers.

It was somehow all so different. In my childhood I was taught never to talk to any Sudra let alone befriend a boy of another creed. And so the days passed, days of hard work, of camps in the great outback, Yusuf's impertinence which often ended in his cleaning the lavatories as punishment, of my hopes and loves, of the girls we planned to marry.

Six months were soon up and it was time to say good by. On the day of the passing out parade we realised joyously that both of us were commissioned into the same regiment - the Rajputana Rifles. I passed out as the all round best cadet and was presented the sword of honour. Yusuf got the trophies for the cross-country and best firer.

We were hardly in the Rajputana Rifles for three months when Mountabatten's plan for complete transfer of power hit us like a bomb. General Claude Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief of the British Royal Army was a broken man. The army he had nurtured and grown to be one of the best in the world was to be torn in two.

Yusuf and I hardly spoke all evening. It was to be the end of a long and glorious friendship, all to satisfy the wants of our leaders. That night I wondered how to face life without this 5 feet 4" pile of dynamite who in many ways was my mentor, guide and friend of my soul.

The day after was August 14th. We had to report for our new duties on Aug 16th - so the 14th would be our last day together.

Dinner was an elaborate affair with mounds of biriyani and chicken and lamb

gravy. Even our tight lipped officers joked and mingled freely with us. They had all packed their bags and were ready to go. In his farewell speech our commanding officer wished us all the best in the fervent hope that both the new armies — India's and Pakistan's would always rise to the occasion and live up to the traditions of the now extinct Royal Indian Army. There was tumultuous cheering by the ever boisterous Sardarjis and the 'Thambis' as all Madrasis were called, broke into a haunting melody and we all filed out to the flag mast. As the Last Post was sounded to the lonely call of the bugle the Union Jack was lowered, as the curtains came down on the empire on which the sun had never set. Even in the most defiant of Indian hearts there was a tiny splinter of sadness at something which was passing away forever.

Independence was a national holiday, of course, so I accompanied the truck carrying my many friends now in the Pakistan army to the border in my jeep. Yusuf was mostly silent during the journey. We had hardly spoken of our relationship. What had happened to all the hopes and dreams we had shared?

The Radcliffe line it was time. Cruel reality had returned. I fished out a thread-bare mala from Kashi, which I had long since stopped wearing and placed it around his neck. My eyes brimmed with tears. Yusuf looked at me shyly with embarrassment. All he had to give was a small framed photograph of the Kaaba. "I'll treasure it always", I said. He just nodded, sentiment and nostalgia almost choking him. The truck was starting. This was the beginning of the end.

"Shankar" he said. I just hugged him and felt his little body shudder with sobs. Then he suddenly disentangled

himself and without looking back disappeared over the western horizon.

Years passed and I had nothing left of Yusuf but memories and gratitude for the marvellous times we had.

* * * * *

It was the late autumn of 1971 and I was by then Major in my regiment. I had married the girl of my dreams and had fathered two lovely girls. It was then that I was summoned to active duty on the war-front in the cold Himalayan north against Pakistan.

It was December 31st and I was commanding the siege of a bridge 23 miles north of Basamulla. In the dark, biting cold the morale of my men miles away from home was low. We lay awake in the darkness oblivious to every small sound.

Suddenly a shell struck the bridge and the rubble buried half my men. Only a few survived and we all crawled in different directions in the darkness. I was crawling cherokee-wise to the nearest exit camp when a stray bullet hit my leg and out of blood-loss and sheer shock I lay still, caring not whether I lived or died. Someone came and kicked me. "This one is living," I heard him say in Pushtu. I then blacked out.

The next thing I remembered was the glare of harsh lights and a bucket of icy water being thrown on me. I was tied to a chair and I continued to retch until I had nothing left in me to throw up. Men were questioning me but all I heard was the distant murmur of voices. I might as well die I thought. The will to survive in me had gone.

The men made way for their officer-commanding and in the darkness all I saw was a short silhouette. I then blacked out.

When I came back to my senses it was dark, only a short man in a black goatee was present.

Then realisation dawned. "Yu..... Yusuf" I croaked. He just walked upto the chair, undid my knots and led me clandestinely to his jeep parked near a shack.

I saw him heading East of the pole star.

I lay on the floor of the jeep scared and almost dead. Yusuf didn't say a word as we drove past all the check points. We reached the barbed wire fence, the mountains rising majestically beyond. The jeep stopped among the bushes.

"Go, go," he said "and may Allah be with you". I looked at him with eager gratitude. He had changed no doubt, but how could I thank this brother of mine for having spared my life. I ran, ran blindly towards India, my India.

I saw him turn his jeep and I watched concealed behind bushes. Then it happened. A bullet whizzed past me and hit him. The jeep spluttered and then stopped after a few metres. My Yusuf Khan was dead.

No it could'nt be. It was all a matter of seconds. No it was'nt true. Out of exhaustion and grief I fainted.

* * * * *

I was in hospital surrounded by my loving family and some day I would tell them the reason I was alive. I cared not whether we won or lost the war. It had taken away the one man I had loved most in the world.

* * * * *

Give Peace A Chance

*For a steadfast mind without fear and guilt
For a heavenly paradise to be built
Let love enhance.*

*For true understanding in mutual reverence
For sincere conversion and repentance
Let humanity advance.*

*For a tireless striving towards perfection
For the birth of heavenly redemption
Give peace a chance.*

J. Padua Christine, III B.A.

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