

LETTERS AS PROSTHETIC: A READING OF SUBASH CHANDRAN'S A PREFACE TO MAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Subash Chandran's novel *A Preface to Man* through the theoretical lens of Alison Landsberg's "prosthetic memory," extending its application beyond mass cultural mediation to explore intimate, interpersonal trauma transmission. While Landsberg's concept originally focused on how individuals acquire deeply felt memories of unwitnessed events through mass media encounters, this analysis demonstrates that prosthetic memory formation can occur through personal communication, fundamentally altering the subjectivity and identity of recipients. The study analyzes the epistolary exchanges between protagonists Jithendran and Ann Marie, revealing how letters function as memory prosthetics that externalize, transmit, and internalize traumatic experiences across the boundaries of lived experience. Jithendran serves as a traumatic memory encoder, channeling inherited ancestral violence through 365 letters, while Ann Marie becomes the decoder who transforms from an autonomous Christian woman into a bearer of Hindu familial trauma she never directly experienced. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's trauma theory and concepts of "empathic unsettlement" and "proxy survivorship," the paper illuminates how this memory transmission creates new categories of victimhood that blur the boundaries between victim and witness, self and other. Ann Marie's psychological transformation—metaphorically described as a fish trapped in a bowl of artificial reality—demonstrates the profound costs of prosthetic memory attachment, where recursive reflections between memories and reality fragment the self and create lasting psychological dependence on mediated trauma narratives.

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