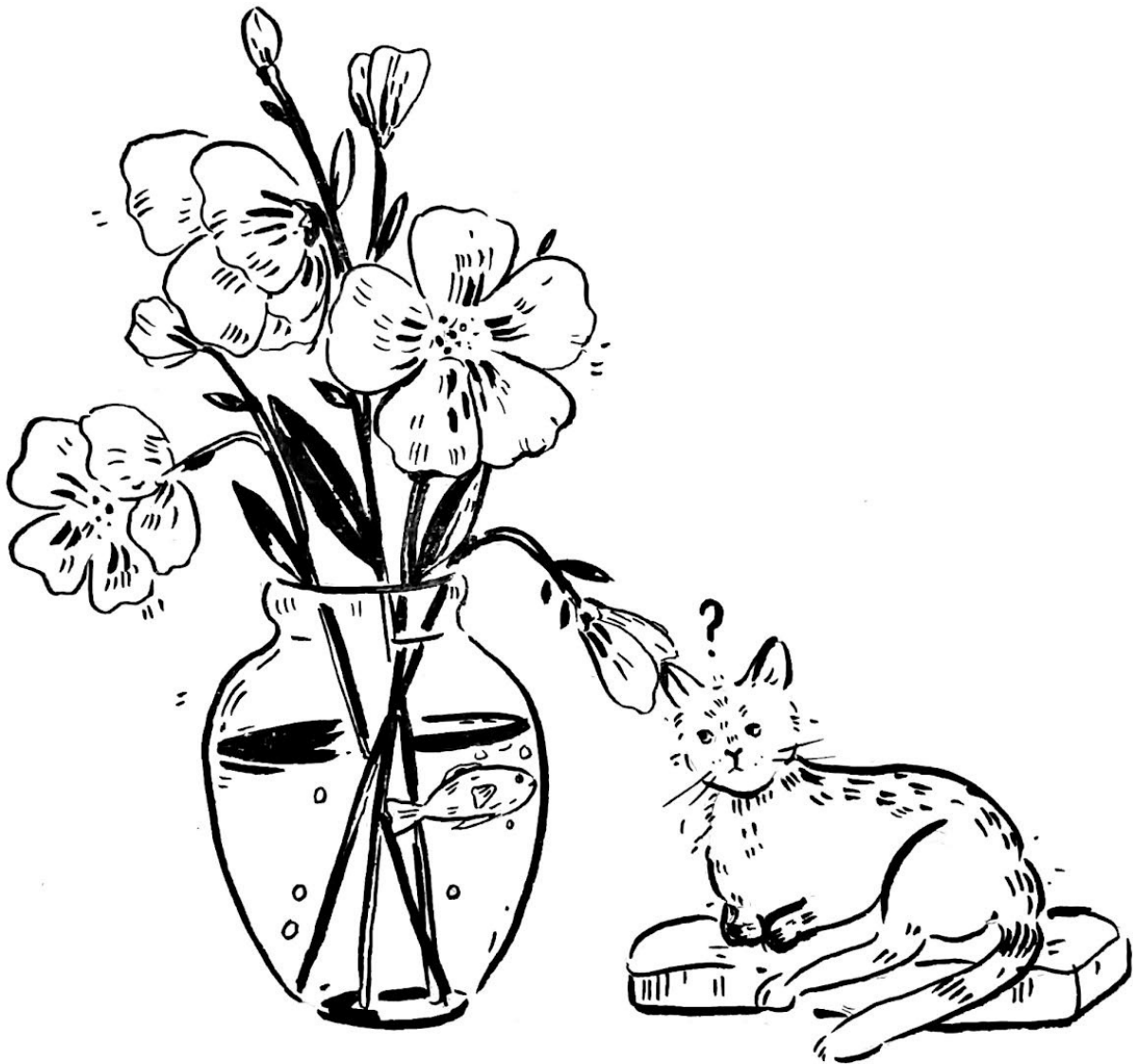
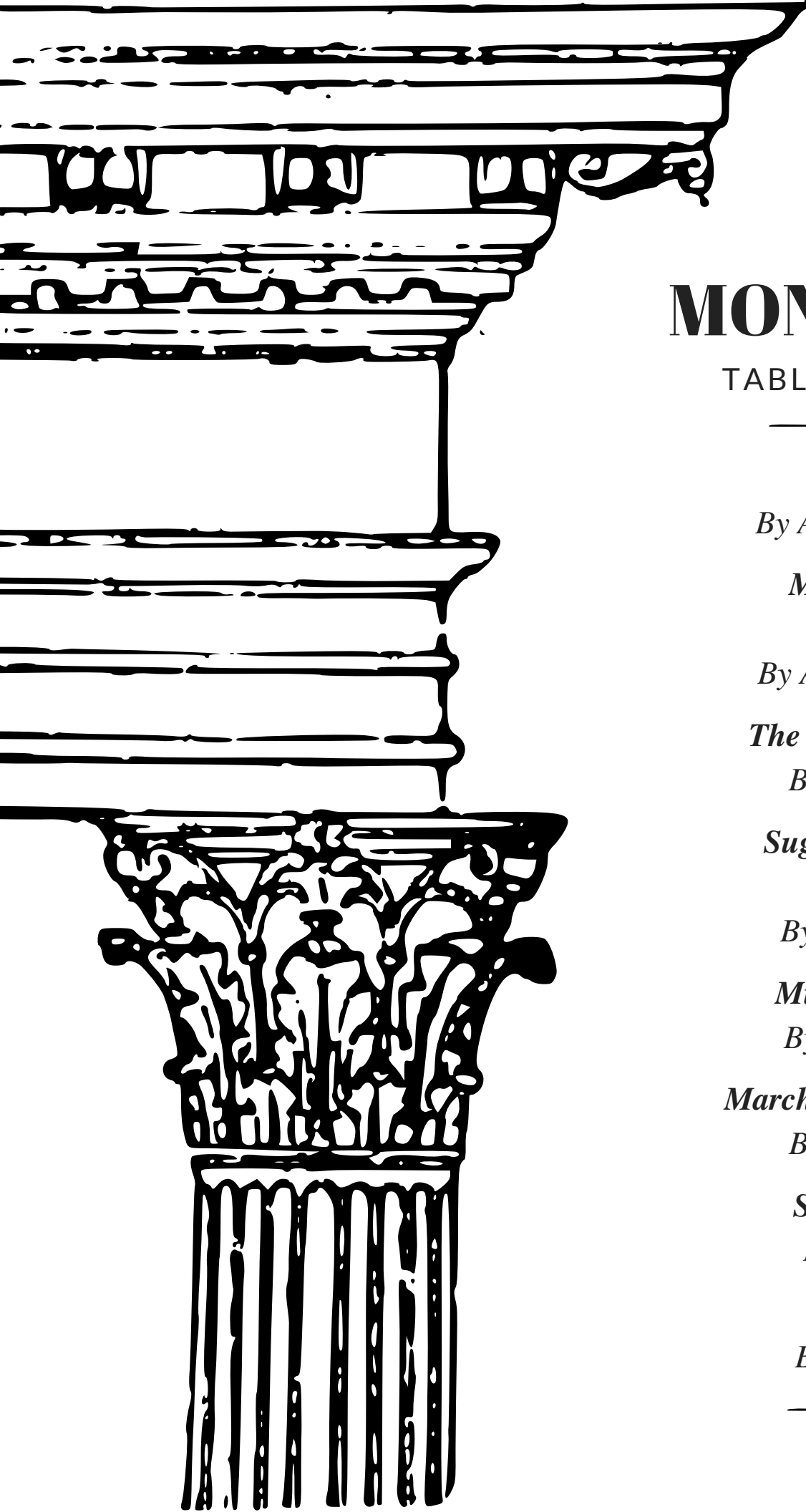


# MONOGRAPH

YEAR 3. VOL. 6



A STUDENT LED MAGAZINE FOR THE ARTS



# MONOGRAPH

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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### *Editor's Note*

*By Anuraag Das Sarma*

### *Modernity & The Modern Man*

*By Ayush Chakraborty*

### *The Theme of Control* *By Prakriti Basu*

### *Sugar That Leaves a Bitter Taste*

*By Ananya Surana*

### *Mirrors of the Mind* *By Sukanya Biswas*

### *March Essay: Vivekananda* *By Aadrit Banerjee*

### *Sometimes, I Lie* *By Nuzhat Khan*

### *Pine Tree State* *By PJ Carmichael*





# Editor's Note



Year 3 Volume 6. The months seem to race by and the more I get used to the work, the more I'm afraid of standing still. We held another concert last month, and plan on holding more this March. We did start out as a magazine, and while that remains our focal point, we have been trying to diversify (too corporate?) into other artistic ventures. We have been working as designers, curators and event managers, but our end goal remains the same- creating, curating and promoting art.

*Anuraag Das Sarma*  
*Editor-In-Chief*  
*Monograph*





# Modernity and the Modern man



AYUSH CHAKRABORTY

*In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"*

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Modernity can be looked at as something that travels and progresses with us as time flows by. For instance, vehicles become increasingly modern as we grow older - the features get better and more improved. In this context, the word 'modern' can be looked at as being similar to 'contemporary', that which belongs to the time period we exist in. This would lead to the interpretation that calling something 'modern' means judging its subjective value. However, when we talk about the 'modern' or 'modernity' in the cultural sense, we mean a collection of movements in art, literature, fashion, and science, all of which has radically altered the consciousness of the human mind - changing the way we think and feel.

In literary history, modernism started around early 1900s, with the onset of what was then called the Great War. The fragmented state of society and that of the mind was reflected in the fragmented story-telling of our Modernist writers. After the war had ended, there was a general sense of disillusionment and alienation within the world and that was reflected in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* -

*Unreal City,  
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,  
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,  
I had not thought death had undone so many.*

But the quintessential work of Modernism was written and published by the same a couple of years earlier and sets the stage for the literary movement in question. The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock takes on the themes of isolation and anxiety through a dramatic monologue that reflects the internal fragmentation of the post-war people. After the war, several parts of the world and their people were left in ruin. The trauma of the war led to severe mental crises amongst the populace and was followed with the tearing down of religious and moral values and the abandonment of faith. This was the “Modern Era” and these were the “Modern Individuals” that Eliot wrote about. The Waste Land was written in 1922, right after the end of the first world war and reflected the disillusionment within the minds of the Modern Man. However, it is The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock that really shows the onset of alienation and dread within the people as a generation entered a period of intense wartime. Written four years before WWI, it puts to words the ever-increasing anxiety of a generation entering a period of unfathomable and unwarranted suffering that promised nothing more than leaving everyone in the dark.

Eliot begins his Love Song with an epigraph from Dante’s Inferno: Count Guido says that he would never express himself if Dante was to return to the world of the living. Since Dante was to remain in hell and would not be able to share his stories with other people, the Count was comfortable speaking about his sufferings without the ‘fear of infamy’. Furthermore, like Count Guido, Eliot’s protagonist – Prufrock – was also in hell; his hell however was on earth itself.

*Let us go then, you and I,*

*When the evening is spread out against the sky*

*Like a patient etherized upon a table;* (lines 1-3, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock)

Prufrock’s hell is a modern city with “half deserted streets” compared to a desolate patient. “This dehumanising imagery” reflects the disorder and the disillusionment within the “mind of Prufrock and the world around him”. His hell is himself and other people. He is eternally plagued by indecision and he is hyperconscious of other people’s impressions of him. Two years before the end of WWII, the French existentialist philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, wrote No Exit – a play that told the story of three individuals who arrive in hell portrayed as a drawing room. At the end of the play, one of them comes to a dramatic conclusion:



*“All those eyes intent on me. Devouring me. What? Only two of you? I thought there were more; many more. So this is hell. I’d never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the “burning marl.” Old wives’ tales! There’s no need for red-hot pokers. HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE!”*

Prufrock isn’t alone in this world; he is aware that he must interact with others. However, his feeling of shame is brought on by the realisation of other’s existence and their gaze. Sartre uses the example of looking at someone through a keyhole in *No Exit* – this act reduces the other to a mere object that produces thrill and, in turn, brings a feeling of shame onto the voyeur. The voyeur looks at themselves in the same gaze they project onto the other, and as a result, feels shame in the gaze of the other. In *The Love Song*, Prufrock’s shame is his ‘realisation’ that he is little more to other people than the physical manifestation of his body. The gaze of the Other reduces him to an object and deprives him of freedom to make a decision. Prufrock is constantly paralysed with the thought of making the wrong choice.

*In a minute there is time*

*For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.* (lines 47-48, *The Love Song* of J. Alfred Prufrock)

From the beginning of the poem, Prufrock is immobilised through his inability to take action. Eliot sets up a juxtaposition in the first stanza. The first line, “let us go” suggests that the poem and its character will move forward in time and space, so to speak. However, the poem lets us down by staying stuck in place: the lines “Streets that follow like a tedious argument Of insidious intent” suggest that there is no correct path to take to go forward; one feels boring and the other threatening. Prufrock’s social anxiety leads to his procrastination. He is unable to make the most basic decisions – about what to wear or eat – and plays out scenarios in his mind where he would take the chance and interact with others. He imagines that he would “descend the stair” and greet his companions but he stops to ask “Do I dare?”. He frets about his outfit and the bald spot on the top of his head, never knowing how to even begin. Trying to make the best choice out of a seemingly endless list leads to making none at all. He thinks that his slightest action would send the universe into turmoil.

Prufrock's hyperconsciousness of his own actions prevents him from communicating. He thinks twice, often more, about the words he is about to say, and after he is done, he decides to say nothing at all. He fails to force any moment to its crisis and as a result, fails to find love. He fails to make meaningful connections with people due to his constant self-doubt, and as a result, the only person he does talk to, is himself. The Love Story is Prufrock talking to himself, or his split-self. All scenarios are inherently playing out in Prufrock's head; he is far removed from the actual world to perform an action (Hussein). He tries to escape his reality by imagining himself as a crab "scuttling across the floors of silent seas".

This brings us to Prufrock's, and the modern individual's sense of isolation. He cannot live according to his own accord. This modern hero's "painful entanglement leads to the utter isolation from the mainstream of society as they want to escape the abrasive reality by hiding themselves" (Hussein). In a practical sense, modernity has connected people around the world like never before. We are mere metaphorical meters away from each other. However, it has also rendered us emotionally bereft. We, the modern people, are perhaps more isolated than humans have ever been. Even within a collective or in public spaces, even in the heart of the busiest cities in the world do we feel completely alone. We inhabit the same spaces as other people but live in entirely different worlds. The world that we live in, is dark and devoid of life. There is no sense of communication, yet tension somehow radiates from within.





# The Theme of Control



P R A K R I T I B A S U

*As found in Sylvia Plath's 'Daddy', 'Tulips', and 'Mad Girl's Love Song'*

‘Daddy,’ was written at the onset of a particularly harsh winter in London in 1962, shortly before her suicide. Her husband, Ted Hughes had just left her for another woman and she was alone with their two children. The repercussions of her trauma and her dwindling control over her life can be perceived throughout the poem.

Plath employs various disparate imageries and metaphors to present the figure of her father to the reader in her poem, ‘Daddy.’ Though the poem is filled with autobiographical elements, scholars are of the opinion that the figure of Daddy is universal, that of a patriarch and a fascist and not a mere reference to Sylvia Plath’s father, Otto Plath, whom she lost at a tender age.

A lucid language is maintained throughout the poem though the vocabulary is frivolous and caustic simultaneously. The poem opens with the speaker declaring that the figure of Daddy does not exercise control over her anymore, also recalling how she had been oppressed for thirty years, ‘barely daring to breathe or Achoo.’ Though the repetition of ‘you do not do’ twice in the very beginning gives the poem the appeal of a nursery rhyme, the seemingly innocent tone is in sharp contrast to how the speaker feels trapped and frightened to even breathe or sneeze. In the stanzas that follow however, the poem gradually starts to lose its child-like appeal. In the following stanzas, the speaker says,

*‘Daddy, I have had to kill you.  
You died before I had time——’*



The speaker's conflicting thoughts about control is clearly observed in these lines. 'I have had to kill you,' suggests how the speaker had 'murdered' her father while the next line paradoxically suggests how she had no control over his death and lost him before she had time. It is not known whether the speaker is sad or angry about his death, whether she feels liberated by his death or regrets not having spent much time with him. Her confusion is also identified in the lines, where she calls him 'Marble-heavy, a bag full of God.' Her father had controlled her life like a powerful, God-like figure but his death led to the memories of him exercising more control over her than ever. However, it is clear that she does not revere the statue and is rather terrified because she calls it 'ghastly.'

Proceeding further, she mentions:

*'In the German tongue, in the Polish town  
Scraped flat by the roller  
Of wars, wars, wars.'*

By harking back to the horrors of the Second World War caused by the Nazis, the speaker equates the figure of her father with that of a staunch fascist, particularly a believer of the Nazi ideologies. The lines illustrate the harshness of an authoritarian regime, further elaborating upon the theme of control. This narrative is gradually built throughout the poem. She equates herself to the Jews who lived in fear of Nazis like her father and describes him having a moustache and bright blue 'Aryan eyes,' in order to fit him into conventional Nazi standards of appearance.

The poem shifts in tone, when the speaker calls her father 'Not a God but a swastika,' gradually letting go of the control he had over her. From a powerful God, her father is reduced to the symbol of the swastika that Nazis identified with. She goes on to say,

*'Every woman adores a Fascist,  
The boot in the face, the brute  
Brute heart of a brute like you.'*



The image of a boot on the face depicts dominance, elaborating upon the theme of control. The speaker also generalises how she feels that every woman is inclined towards falling in love with fascists, strongly implying that women enjoy being controlled by dominating men.

As the poem progresses, it takes a dark turn, as the speaker admits that she attempted to kill herself at twenty, just to reunite with her father. She admits that she herself had created an image of her father in her mind, by saying,

*'I made a model of you  
A man in black Meinkampf look'*

The speaker also says how her father had a love for the rack and screw, which were both torture instruments. Yet, she said 'I do,' confirming her marriage to a similar, brutish man. The poem reaches its crescendo in the last line, where the speaker says, 'Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.' The line implies how the speaker has finally got over her real father's death by making a model of him in her head. It is clearly understood that her memories of him still haunt her life, controlling every aspect of it.

Plath's poem, 'Tulips' depicts a speaker confined in a hospital room. Though she is physically confined, she finds a way to escape within her mental space. In the first stanza, she says,

*'I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses  
And my history to the anesthetist and my body to surgeons.'*

Her words echo her sense of losing control over herself. She has given up her identity and even her body to the nurses and surgeons. The needles that the nurses use to put her to sleep, further helps her succumb to numbness and she starts to lose control further. However, this selflessness helps her get rid of the 'baggage' that the outside world imposed on her. Implying this, she says, 'I am sick of baggage.'

As she sees a picture of her husband and her child, an average reader would think that she is comforted by the sight of it. Unexpectedly, she says, 'Their smiles catch on to my skin, little smiling hooks.' She had found peace in the fact that her 'loving associations' had been stripped away. She was actually nurturing her obsession with death, finding peace in the 'whiteness' of the hospital. The vibrant tulips however, kept thwarting her desires to experience the simplicity brought by death. She says, 'The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me.'

Her loss of control over herself is revealed when she says, 'I have let things slip, a thirty-year old cargo boat.' Thus, all this while, she had been feeling like nothing but a cargo boat, burdened by worldly demands. In order to emphasise how liberated she feels, she even goes to the extent of calling herself a nun, saying, 'I am a nun now, I have never been so pure.'

To the speaker, death seems to be a more liberating alternative to her daily life. The poem, is rather unsettling, as the speaker records her observations, the most bizarre of them being her perceiving her head as a giant pupil noting everything taking place in her room. Plath's obsession with death is greatly evident in this poem. Control, in the poem, is something that her persona voluntarily wishes to lose.

In 'Mad Girl's Love Song,' Plath juxtaposes the ideas of heartbreak and madness, emphasizing heavily on mental illness. The mindset of a very confused persona is presented in the poem and like 'Tulips,' the speaker senses a loss of control over herself. Her dwindling faith in her lover who does not seem to come back to her any more, makes her question herself to the extent of even calling him a figment of her imagination.

The poem opens with the following lines;

*'I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead;  
I lift my lids and all is born again.  
(I think I made you up inside my head.)'*

Though Plath's persona plays on the idea of believing what one sees, she is unsure of her perceptions. The idea of madness runs throughout the poem, as even readers start to question whether the speaker's lover is an illusion after all. The brackets enclosing the last line is symbolic of her being enclosed by the control exercised by the thoughts of her lover. The speaker also uses the recurrent ideas of death and resurrection, corresponding with the opening and shutting of her eyes.

The 'arbitrary blackness that the speaker talks about in the second stanza echoes how empty she feels on the inside, devoid of any certainty over her own thoughts. As the poem progresses, she also admits how she had cherished the love for her beloved, being 'bewitched' and 'moon struck.' However, she goes back to saying that all the while she must have been stuck within her own mind. In the lines that follow, the speaker says,

*'God topples from the sky, hell's fires fade:  
Exit seraphim and Satan's men:  
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.'*

Plath often uses the image of 'God' to almost symbolise Control. In Daddy, Plath equates the figure of her father with God to explain the enormous amount of control he had over her. In this context however, 'God topples from the sky,' symbolising that her control over herself, as well as the control her beloved's thoughts had over her 'topples,' leading her to instability and madness. The concept of hell that had induced fear in the minds of people for ages, seems to 'fade' according to the speaker. As a result of her liberation from control, she seems to be stripped off of any kind of fear.

Later in the poem, she says,

*'I fancied you'd return the way you said,  
But I grow old and I forget your name.'*

Some scholars are of the opinion that in addition to a lover, Plath's persona could have also been talking about her inspiration to write. Her loss of confidence in her own capabilities is evident through these lines. 'Growing old' and forgetting her beloved's name could suggest Plath's loss of control over her ability to remember.

In the last stanza, the speaker claims that she should have loved a creature as frightening as the thunderbird. This shows her desperation and the helplessness induced by the memories of her beloved. She ends the poem by repeating, 'I think I made you up inside my head, almost mocking herself just like she calls herself 'mad' in the title. Madness essentially is a loss of control over one's own actions and thoughts and this idea is presented by Plath to a great extent throughout the poem.





# Sugar that Leaves a Bitter Taste



ANANYA SURANA

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Sometime in the middle of November last year, I was asked to move to Granny's house for the winter. The isolation had been getting to her for a while now, and the bitter Ajmeri winters had only made it worse. 73-year-old and frail, Granny craved some good, old-fashioned human interaction. I was to be the cure for this boredom, even though the two of us had never really exchanged more than 10 words at a time. I was unsure why the rest of my family thought I possessed the ability to charm a cranky old woman only content with cheap gossip and piping hot tea. Or perhaps, it was the fact that I was truly the most dispensable rivaled with the rest of my family. Mother and Granny had always been at odds and had taken the wise decision of never really interacting with one another unless a social situation called for it. Father was desperately trying to make back the money he had had to squander during the onset of the pandemic. My 14-year-old sister was much too young to keep her patience and tongue in check when it came to Granny.

Most of the extended family had dusted their hands off of her the moment they could, leaving me to lay my sacrifice. So, I was parceled off to the sleepy town of Ajmer, with two small suitcases and a backpack on me. My job profile was scant, and truth be told, I was clueless as to how exactly I was to be of service to Granny. Just like that, I found myself in front of a sprawling, old villa in the heart of Ajmer, with an apathetic grandmother and lazy, tired dog awaiting me inside.

Granny lived in an ancestral home, complete with aging teak furniture, a dusty unexplored attic, and a large backyard extending into a fruit orchard. The size of the house and Granny's general posture all screamed affluence. However, the truth was this: somewhere along the family tree, money had trickled away, leaving only the house in its wake. Grandfather had been a respected man and his name still carried as much influence as it had, back in his days. But respect can only do so much, and it didn't always necessarily translate into sociability. The entry gate saw few visitors in, and the back gate was used only by the milkman and Savita Didi.

Didi was my best memory of the 4 months I spent there. Lean, tanned and always sporting a huge grin, Savita Didi was from the small basti on the outskirts of town. She wasn't that far off from my age, only about a year or two older. And yet, our lives couldn't have been more different. At 20, Savita Didi was a mother and wife to two bratty children and one man-child who left her responsible for everything. She ran two households, all by herself and with little interference— one ours, and the other her own. Her husband had half-fried his liver early into their marriage and continued to sponge up the meager funds Granny awarded her at the end of each month.

By contrast, I evidently had a lot less on my plate. Recently I turned 18, and most of my troubles stemmed from a lack of freedom and way too many responsibilities I didn't know how to deal with. Even with the differences, Savita Didi was the only semblance of company I had in this ghost town. Ajmer is sleepy and becomes even more so in the winters. No visitors graced the house and stepping out to find new friends wasn't something I could do before freezing a limb off. So Savita Didi and I fell into our own quiet routine.

Granny didn't like our exchange too much and so all our conversations carried with them the thrill of secrecy. We exchanged whispered stories about high-school beaux and squashed aspirations, all under the roof of the kitchen. You see, throughout the day, Savita Didi was on the move. She scuttled about the house dusting and sweeping and mopping in flurried movements so much so that it was difficult to engage her even in a moment's conversation.

It was only during meal times when you could catch her restricted to just one room. So the kitchen became our designated spot and was host to all kinds of conversations. Over the course of the next month, I grew closer than ever to Savita Didi and her situational company became something I sought out by choice.

While she cooked each meal with meticulous dedication, I explored the eccentricities with which Granny liked to arrange her kitchen. Everything was duplicated, cupboards on either end of the gas stove, each lined with jars and jars of spices, dals, and other flavorants. It was like seeing double— there were two of everything. I reasoned that this may be for ease of reach, and a plot to make sure we never suddenly ran out of essential supplies. It's always good to have spares, isn't it? In hindsight, however, it may be appropriate to tell you that I had absolutely no clue what I was talking about. My skills in the kitchen were limited to boiling water and chopping onions and so it wasn't like I was in the best place to offer my opinions on kitchen arrangements.





It was exactly this that Granny seemed to particularly dislike about me. My mother had raised me as a child and not as a daughter which meant I hadn't been forced into the kitchen at a ripe age. Granny, on the other hand, believed knowing how to cook was one of the many moral responsibilities of a woman. She wanted to remedy my ineptness in the kitchen within the 4 months I had with her. Her solution to it began in a series of small tasks, the first one being her favorite cup of evening tea. Now, Granny was a grumpy person in general, so without her tea, she became insufferable. If I had to impress her, this tea had to be perfect. Armed with a couple of recipes on YouTube and Savita Didi on standby, I entered a turf I'd usually only used for socializing.

There was no way I could trick her with a store-bought mix. Granny was far more experienced than me, both in the culinary arts as well as in finding faults where none existed. I had to make this tea from scratch, and it had to be the epitome of taste. She must sip it and picture the tea lands of Assam, fresh and green. She must sip it and suddenly be revitalized into the exuberant days of her youth. She must sip it and feel overwhelming joy warm her bone-deep, enough to melt her icy exterior. So it began, with grating adrak, crushing cinnamon, grinding elaichi with laung and corn peppers. In went the water, along with the ground spices, ginger, and tea leaves. The water took on a dark, golden-brown color, and bubbled up to a boil. I turned the flame lower, added in a spoonful of sugar, and freehanded the milk into this pot. It was a rich cup of tea, aromatic and fragrant. The mere scent was enough to titillate your senses, or so I thought at the very least. Granny seemed to agree, or perhaps she had the decency to flash me a watery smile after her sip so as to not discourage my efforts. It was only tea after all.

Pleased with myself, I headed back to the kitchen to tell Savita Didi of my victory. Instead, I was met with a worried gaze and trembling hands. She rushed towards me, took a peek at Granny snoozing in her rocking chair, and told me something that would leave me in shock for the rest of my stay there.

I'd used the wrong sugar, she said. I was lucky Granny hadn't found out. Naturally, I was thrown into confusion. Exactly what could be wrong with sugar? Were they not just sugar cane processed into tiny crystals of white? Even then, Savita Didi wildly gestured to a tin box on the right side of the stovetop, while I gazed at the plastic takeaway box that housed the sugar I'd used. With a start, I realized what the double arrangements had meant. It wasn't the smart organizational trick that I'd thought it to be.

Granny liked to keep her food separate from that meant for Savita Didi's consumption. Even sugar, unassuming crystals of white that looked the exact same, no matter what quality they claimed to be, was stored separately. Everything about the cheap, plastic take-out container that the "wrong" sugar was stored in screamed inferiority— as if the ones consuming it were inferior themselves. There was something startlingly different in the two sugars that didn't stem from the nature of the sugar itself, but from the ones who used it. The irony had not gone unnoticed: Savita Didi, who cleaned for us all day, had been branded unclean by a spoonful of sugar. A handful of modest sweetener had become a symbol of centuries-old casteist practices that Granny still mindlessly followed.



The kitchen had been the one place to bring us together, but the fact was that this kitchen arrangement made something clear to Savita Didi every day. Despite the term with which we addressed her— didi, meaning sister, she would never be family. She could never be considered

For me, the kitchen had been a place where I'd finally found a friend, but for Savita Didi, it was a daily reminder that she could never be a part of us. Despite the term with which we addressed her— didi, meaning sister, she would never truly be family, because she would never truly be equal. After all, blood is thicker than chai, even with the wrong sugar, isn't it?





# Mirrors Of The Mind



SUKANYA BISWAS

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## ACT ONE

### **EXT. CEMETERY – DAY**

*WIDE SHOT* of a group standing by a freshly dug grave, all in black attire. Some seem to throw dirt on the casket below, others turn to leave. *CLOSE UP* on a man placing his hand on a woman's shoulder. With an impassive expression on her face, she moves towards the grave. *CLOSE UP* of her kneeling beside it. *WIDE SHOT* of her standing up after a while and walking away, not looking back.

**FADE TO BLACK.  
END OF ACT ONE.**

## ACT TWO

### **INT. PIANO ROOM – FOUR DAYS LATER**

*CLOSE UP* of the woman's hands as she plays the piano. *WIDE SHOT* of her at the instrument, face scrunched up in concentration. She fumbles over notes every now and then.

**FADE TO:**

**INT. BEDROOM – TWO DAYS BEFORE**

*WIDE SHOT of the woman pacing. She stops mid-pace, hands gripping at her hair. She grabs a crystal vase from the nearest table and throws it against the wall. She reaches for a picture frame next. CLOSE UP on them hitting the wall.*

**CUT TO:**

**INT. PIANO ROOM – CONTINUOUS**

*The woman hits more sour notes. PAN SHOT of her playing from the opposite side of the piano, with a frustrated expression. CLOSE UP on her hands as she slams them down on the keys. MEDIUM SHOT of her resting her head on her arms as she slumps onto the instrument. WIDE SHOT of her from the opposite side of the piano, shoulders rising and falling from deep sighs.*

**MAN**

*(O.S.)*

Well, that is an interesting way to end a song. What would you call that kind of stylistic choice?

*She sits up with a jerk. WIDE SHOT of the man leaning against the doorway, smiling gently at his lover.*

**WOMAN**

Death of a piano. Was it not obvious?

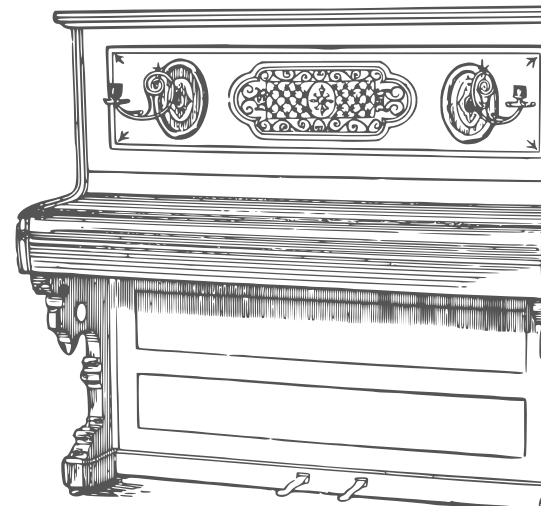
**MAN**

*(softly)*

It was not that bad.

**WOMAN**

Do not lie to me.



**MAN**  
*(whispers)*  
Do I ever?

*CLOSE UP of her looking up at him.*

**FADE TO BLACK.**  
**END OF ACT TWO.**

## **ACT THREE**

**EXT. SHORELINE – DAY**

*CLOSE UP on the waves breaking around the rocks in the shallows, their foam crests becoming chaotic lace over the blue. WIDE SHOT of the woman as she watches it swirl, scrunching her toes from the softness and warmth of the sand still damp from the retreating tide. The man makes his way beside her.*

**WOMAN**  
What do you think when you see the ocean?

*He faces her, his face aglow with the last rays of light before stormy clouds begin to roll in.*

**MAN**  
Water.  
*(pauses)*  
Well, and the mind.

**WOMAN**  
The mind?

**MAN**  
I think our minds are just like the ocean. Oceans can seem turbulent on the surface, with crashing waves everywhere. But as you move below it, there is stillness. A calm and clear stillness for miles and miles.

*She turns to face him.*

**MAN**

Our minds can be as restless as the ocean on a stormy day. However, there is a deep stillness too. Only if you are willing to find it.

**WOMAN**

*(quietly)*

Sometimes, I feel that my mind will never be calm or clear again. Maybe, there is truth in that.

*CLOSE UP on the man's hands as he reaches for hers. She lets him. WIDE SHOT of them clutching onto each other.*

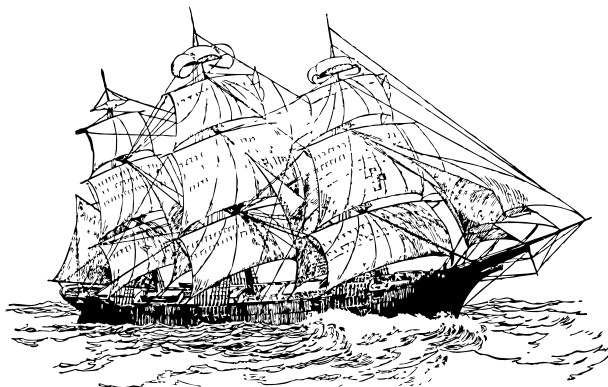
**MAN**

I know you can do this. Even without him. You cannot just walk away; you have to learn to walk with the limp.

*CLOSE UP on the lone tear that races down her cheek. WIDE SHOT of them as they inch towards each other.*

**MAN**

We are only made better at learning and remembering what we fear. It locks us in with our monsters, giving them longer claws. It makes us want to hide in the dark, desperate to survive. But what we do not understand is that it just invents new monsters.



**WOMAN**

How do you survive this then?

**MAN**

*(smiles)*

All we need is a little light to see that the monsters are only clothes in the closet.

*(pauses)*

You just let go.

**FADE TO BLACK.**

**END OF ACT THREE**



**ACT FOUR**

**INT. AUDITORIUM – DAY**

*WIDE SHOT of the woman playing the piano on the stage accompanied by an orchestra as the audience listens, mesmerized. The composition ends and everyone applauds. CLOSE UP of the man sitting on the front row, clapping with tears in his eyes.*

**FADE TO:**



**EXT. CEMETERY – DAY**

*WIDE SHOT of the woman entering through the gates. CLOSE UP of her kneeling beside the grave from before and placing chrysanthemums in front of the tombstone.*

**WOMAN**

I did it.

*(smiles sadly)*

Thank you, Papa. Thank you for everything.

**FADE TO BLACK.**

**END OF ACT FOUR**





# March Essay: Vivekananda



A A D R I T B A N E R J E E

*Arise, awake and stop not until Vivekananda is saved!*  
*Analysing the cyclonic monk and his Hindutva reinterpretation.*

While taking a walk across Delhi University's North Campus one would encounter on the walls of the sprawling University premises, and sometimes hung overhead using thin but durable threads, posters of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the right-wing pan-India student organization affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Other student party posters, and wall murals, such as those of the NSUI or the National Students Union of India (affiliated to the Indian National Congress), Students' Federation of India – SFI (Indian left-wing student organization politically aligned to the ideologies of Independence, Democracy and Socialism) also greet the eyes — and evoke the sense of inhabiting an Indian public university space. However, one particular feature distinguishes the posters of the ABVP from all the rest: the figure of the famous monk standing in his eponymous style with his hands crossed over his chest, his turban creased and fitted to his large forehead, chin held high with a sheer, radiating sense of confidence. Swami Vivekananda! In the posters, Vivekananda (1863-1902) stands almost as though he is the nominated candidate of the Hindutva student wing (and it would be a food for thought to imagine how the monk would have himself reacted to this had he been living today)!

This is just one minute example of how the Swami's image has been redefined by the saffron side, and in the process has suffered a de-contextualisation and ultimately a perversion of meaning. This perversion of the monk's image, and appropriation into the saffron system, reached an all-new level during the celebration of Vivekananda's 161st birth anniversary on January 12 this year. In an event organized in Bishnupur (a city in West Bengal) to pay tributes to this chief disciple of Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886), the BJP MP of the region, Saumitra Khan said: "Swamiji (-ji is added with names and titles to denote respect in India) is godlike for us. He is an icon for the youth ... Modiji dedicated himself to the nation even after losing his mother".

He could have well stopped here, but Khan went a step-ahead, and transgressed all boundaries as he claimed: "Swamiji nabaroope Narendra Modi hoye jonmogrohon korechhen, amar mone hoye (It makes me feel that Narendra Modi is a reincarnation of Swamiji)."

Though the comment drew political criticism from the opposition parties, deep censure of Khan from BJP's inner quarters to save its repute, and presented a chance to the ruling party of West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress, to once again re-emphasize its claim that BJP was a bohiragawto (an outsider) and therefore, could never truly represent the people of Bengal and their aspirations; the comment was just another addition to the long list of such remarks, which have been made with heightened frequency in the recent years, by the saffron camp equating Mr. Modi with Vivekananda. Railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had claimed earlier, for instance, that there was a certain metempsychosis, or a transmigration of Narendra Nath Dutta's (Vivekananda's birth name) soul into the body of Narendra Damodardas Modi.



While junior Union minister of home affairs Nityanand Rai had played similarly with the names, noting that one Narendra (Modi) was fulfilling the dreams of another Narendra (referring to Vivekananda). Despite the statement of Swami Suvirananda, the general secretary of Belur Math that: “According to Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) himself, there would be no one like Swamiji ever again.

Therefore, no one can be compared with Swamiji”, in response to Khan’s incorrect and politically stimulated comparison, Khan had not apologized for his words, and had instead stood his ground citing political competition with the West Bengal TMC government. (Majumdar, Arkamoy Datta. (source: “*BJP MP equates Modi with Swamiji*”, The Telegraph, 13 Jan. 2023)

The ABVP posters in the University campus, or such comments by the representatives of the saffron government, deride and belittle the image of Vivekananda, whose words at Chicago’s World Parliament of Religions in 1893 still echoes across the globe, and his humanitarian actions continue to inspire thousands of people in the nation and beyond. However, this *saffronization* of “one of the main molders of the modern world” (in the words of eminent Western scholar A.L. Basham) is not a recent phenomenon; it has a long and complex history.

*In From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India (2004)*, Shekhar Bandopadhyay while tracing the growth of the Ramakrishna Reformism Movement in the 19th Century that had its roots in the ideas of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the saint at Dakshineswar and Vivekananda’s spiritual master, writes:

“To describe him [Vivekananda] as a revivalist is to ignore the “universalistic” aspects of his teachings. Nevertheless, the fact that he drew inspiration from the Vedantic tradition, followed some of the orthodox Hindu rituals, exhibited an intrinsic faith in the glories of Hindu civilization and nurtured a belief that it had degenerated in recent times made it possible for the revivalists to appropriate him. His evocation of Hindu glory mixed with patriotism, which sought to restore the masculinity of the Indian nation denied to them by their colonial masters, had a tremendous impact on the popular mind.” Therefore, his messages and teachings were conveniently misused and misinterpreted in the nationalist discourse of Bengal during the late 19th and early 20th Century to inspire a militant and exclusivist Hindu nationalism.

This trend had continued in a slower pace after the Independence in 1947 — however, after the BJP’s massive victory at the Centre in 2014, and its strong entry into West Bengal — the state where Vivekananda’s natal home and also the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Belur Math, is located (which particularly makes Khan’s remarks volatile and problematic) — post the 2021 State Assembly Elections, the efforts to paint Vivekananda as a Hindutva figure has gained a renewed vigor.



What the right wing has forever done, as is typical of its efforts to refurbish history, is that it has praised and vehemently upheld the Swami’s invocation of the glorious Hindu past while sidelining his trenchant criticism of the evils of Hinduism such as those of caste system and gender oppression. It has never made any significant effort at reproducing his philanthropic services: take for instance the Covid-19 Pandemic, when banging plates and lighting candles were seen as more important, while none could recollect, let alone act according to the *Plague Manifesto* that the monk had drafted in the wake of 1898 Bengal Plague, which perhaps would have been a more scientific humane step to adopt as the Pandemic wrecked havoc across the nation.

The right-wing thus from its very early phases has morphed Vivekananda into its “patron prophet”, the ideal figure standing hands crossed over his chest at the front of their Hindutva politics; a form of politics, with which perhaps, the lion-monk with his emphasis on his master’s idea of “*joto moth toto path*” — as many voices, so many paths — would have never subscribed to.

For when looking at Vivekananda and his rich oeuvre of works, one cannot miss his earnest appeal to reason, and to a secular spirit — to a form of belief system that is inclusive and appreciative of all differences and diversities.

This is perhaps most beautifully and tangibly represented in the composite architecture of Belur Math (the headquarters of the *Ramakrishna Math and Mission* founded by Vivekananda in 1897), and the “global” musical tune (so described because it includes elements from both Carnatic and Hindustani music, as well elements of Western tunes, and regional songs of India) of *Khandana Bhava—Bandhana* (“Breaker of this world’s chain, We adore Thee” — translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood) that accompanies the evening vesper service of Sri Ramakrishna at the Math premises; both the architecture and the tune had been imagined and composed by Vivekananda himself.

Moreover, the Swami was never a man of esoteric philosophy — he had been forever been a man of action, and it was his actions which replicated his beliefs, and his wisdom. Where is the Vivekananda who worshipped a Muslim girl as *Kumari* (a virgin incarnation of the Mother Goddess in which pre-puberty girls are worshipped on auspicious days as a form of Shakti, the primordial feminine force according to Hinduism) in 1898 at Srinagar’s *Kheer Bhawani Temple*?



Or the monk who would as a child smoke through the hookahs of all castes, and later institute common dining practices, and himself participate in serving and eating food with those who were shunned by the upper-caste Hindu society? Where is the monk who took it upon himself to clean the *bustees* and aid the sick, pledging to sell the acquired land of Belur Math if need be, during the plague that wreaked havoc through Calcutta? Where is the progressive man who, in collaboration with Sister Nivedita (1867-1911), championed the cause of women's education and empowerment in 19th Century Bengal? History has silently forgotten him, buried him deep under the rhetoric of a Hindu-masculine-Brahminical nationalist fervor and youth day celebrations. It has rather created an image of Vivekananda that the man perhaps himself would have never recognized — it is a mirage created by the saffron ecosystem, having conveniently adopted and photo-shopped Vivekananda's ideas as per their own vested interests.

To save Vivekananda from this malaise is the need of the hour, and this can be effected only through an unbiased dedicated scholarship and a critical study of the monk: his life, legacy and works. Until then let his words be our guiding strength as we traverse these difficult steps from ignorance to light, from sectarianism and bigotry to toleration and universal acceptance. Let this be our tribute to the monk!

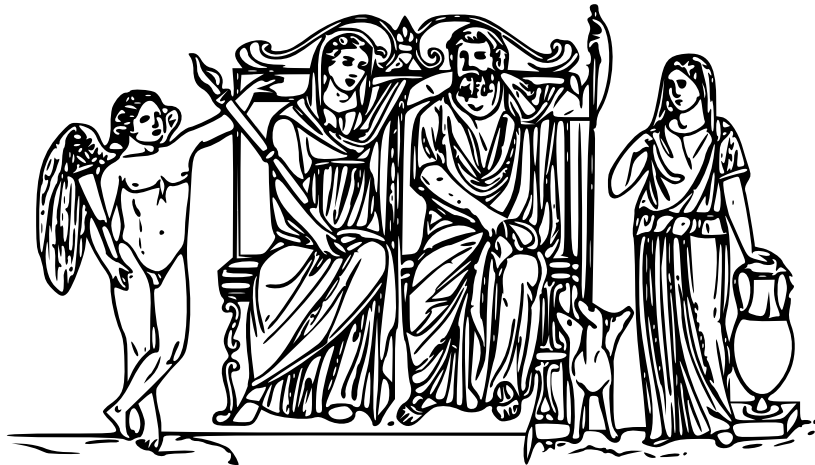




# Sometimes, I lie



NUZHAT KHAN



This world folds  
Itself into a character  
Around my body  
As if to dissolve  
In criminal simplicity  
Is to sprawl in a magnitude  
That a poem cannot hold.

An ancient grief  
Settles on my eyelids  
Opening my youth  
To heart's furtive desires  
Against all rationale  
Warning about a gun  
Plunging into my stomach.

In absence of metaphors  
People will be splintered  
Little hearts butchered  
Under God's direct gaze

Without any second meaning  
Forgiveness will be forgiveness  
And war will be war  
This world shall always be:  
A mottled prison.







# Pine Tree State



P J C A R M I C H A E L

A necklace with jasper pendant,  
nail polish to match the amber

hue, my skull racked and reeling. We went  
to the lighthouse yesterday, watched two

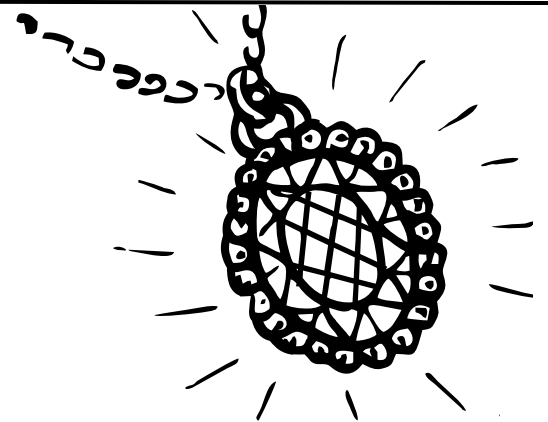
ducks float along the frigid waves,  
took pictures of the immense slate-

grey blanket cast over our heads, the  
blurred line between sea and sky,

misty vision and mental clarity. Picturesque  
(as always) with a photograph of rosy

cheeks, wide smiles, loving arms, and  
bright eyes to remind us of these previous

moments. White paint weathered by ocean  
air, red roof with dormers by the rocky



coastline. The museum and gift shop were  
closed, the remnants of the old fort

still standing on ninety acres adjacent.

(With spirited shivers, we shared warmth

and a view.) Today, we watch jewelry gleam  
in winter sunlight, hold silver and gemstones

in the heat of a toasty home.



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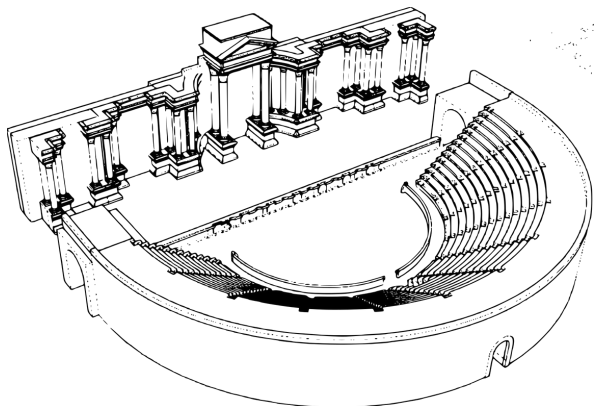
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