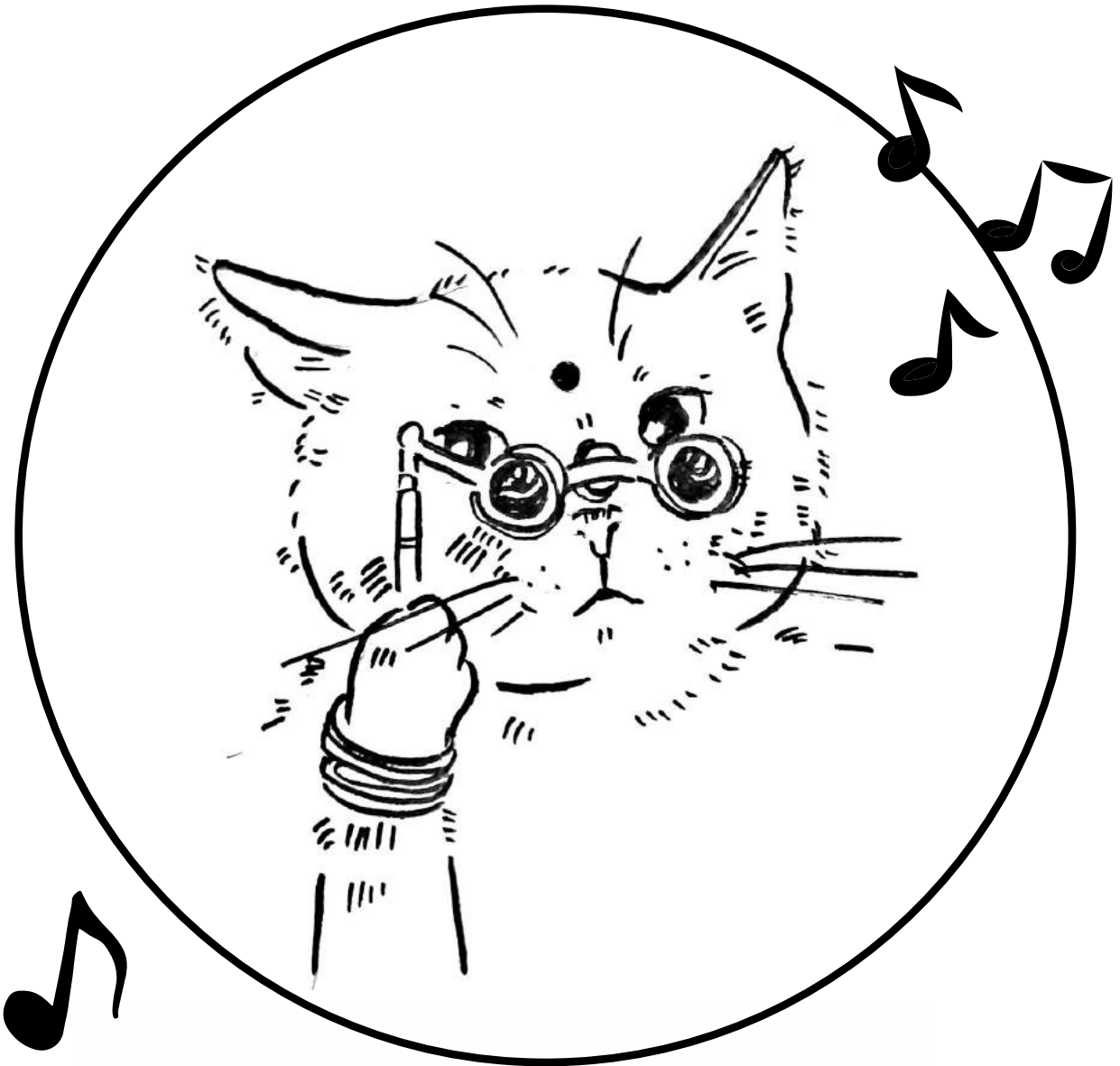


MONOGRAPH

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MONOGRAPH

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editor's Note

By Anuraag Das Sarma

*The Still Sad Music of
Humanity*

By Sushen Mitra

Book Review: Memsahibs

By Aishi Saha

Sultana's Dream

By Rushali Mukherjee

Nostalgia At Dusk

By Ridhima Talukder

halflife

By Sucheta Mitra

Beloved

By Ruchika Dubey



Editor's Note



The first few drops of rain are upon us, giving us a much needed break from the villainous heat-wave that had grasped the city. As April comes to an end I cannot help but (much like every other person I know) quote Eliot's *The Wasteland*:

*Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.*

I sincerely hope you enjoy this issue. Happy reading!

Anuraag Das Sarma
Editor-In-Chief
Monograph





The Still Sad Music of Humanity: Music of Satyajit Ray



S U S H E N M I T R A

In 1948, an unknown journalist named Satyajit Ray lamented the predicament of contemporary Indian cinema in *The Statesman* – “. . . production without adequate planning. . . a penchant for convolutions of plot and counter-plot. . . the practice of sandwiching musical numbers in the most unlyrical situations. . .” He was, at the time, a commercial artist with an English advertising firm, making a name for himself in well-regarded Calcutta circles as a cover designer while writing about his favourite directors on the side. It would still be a year until his famous encounter with Auguste Renoir on the sets of *The River* and seven till the release of *Pather Panchali* but revisiting Ray today, one finds, regardless, a supreme clarity of artistic ideas in his criticism of Indian film all those years ago; ideas that would wash through all his subsequent work.

When interviewed about cinematic styles in later years, Ray would often make a comparison with music and talk about the “musical aspect of a film’s structure” before mourning the tone-deafness of most directors. While his own style has occasioned much scholarly comment, these ‘musical aspects’ of his cinema have remained unexplored. This, of course, refers not merely to the use of sound and music in his films but also a conscious parallel between cinematic structure and musical structure that he attempted to draw.



By the mid-1950s — which is when *Pather Panchali* was made — cinema had reached an acceptable standard of technical sophistication in India. However, in spite of the film industry being a financial colossus with production numbers rivalling those of Hollywood, it suffered from a dearth of inventiveness and creative vigour in its filmmakers with films being formulaic with vapid plotlines, recurring themes and character tropes.³ Punctuating developments on the screen and heightening excitement off it was music, as song-and-dance sequences — trite, melodramatic and transgressing all logic — were strewn carelessly throughout. With the ascendancy of the ‘star system’ producers sought to conveniently replicate an ostensible guarantee for commercial success, as Barnouw and Krishnaswamy write as early as 1963: “big star, eight hit songs, several dances.”

In its early years, the film industry in Calcutta shepherded by the renowned New Theatres set the artistic benchmark for Indian cinema despite not being as prolific as its Bombay counterpart. Even so, the cultural ancestors of all Indian film lie in tradition; in the case of Bengal, these were the folk performances of the Jatra companies that drifted across the countryside staging folk-dramas where prince and pauper alike would burst into song and dance to the delight of audiences.

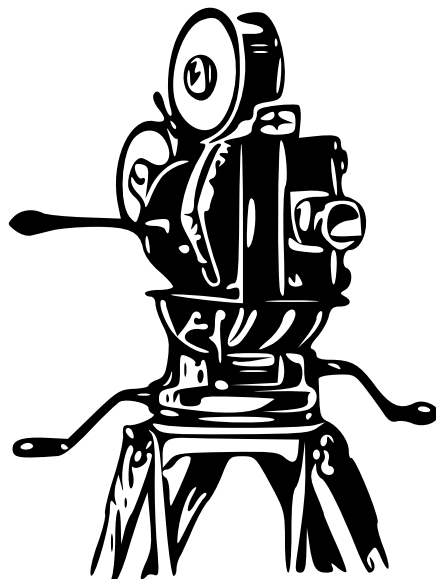
Such was the synchronous tradition that Satyajit Ray inherited, a distinctly ‘Bengali’ one that appreciated polished production while remaining inexpensive and accessible to the public imagination. Remarkably, he was successful in reworking these parallel strands to his tastes, refining aspects of narrative, characterisation and, especially, music without having to sacrifice the box office entirely. In time he would come to commandeer every stage of the production process — writing, direction, photography, design and soundtrack — and perhaps it was this complete, overarching artistry that endeared him to critics and commoners alike.

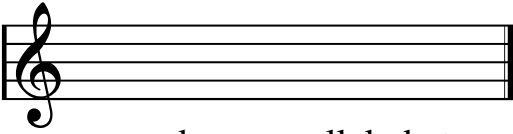
And yet tradition cannot be inherited, as T.S. Eliot famously wrote, but it must be obtained with great labour. One is wholly unsurprised, therefore, to learn that Ray, an artist trained at *Vivsa-Bharati* and a director buttressed by years of carefully studying the *Capras*, *Hustons* and *Eisensteins*, was also first a lover of music. Satyajit was born into an illustrious *bhadralok* family, the son of the venerated Sukumar Ray who wrote about the music of Rabindranath Tagore when in London and the grandson of Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury, who was regularly seen playing the violin and *esraj* for Brahmo prayer-meetings at Jorasanko.

Sukumar did not live to see his son turn four, but Satyajit’s upbringing was typical of the scores of middle-class Bengali families who lived around him in Bakul Bagan and Beltala. Growing up surrounded by Wodehouse, by Homer and weathered copies of Sandesh while his Pigmyphone rattled with worn records of Bach and Mozart, he found himself in a world where East mixed fiercely and fruitfully with the West in art, philosophy and music. As a young man, it was Western classical music that catalysed some of his most influential relationships —with a British RAF employee and friends at Shantiniketan, with his cousin Bijoya whom he would later marry, and finally with the world of film.

For long, he had admired the order of the Classical period, of the beauty in a Haydn concerto or a Beethoven symphony despite the rigidity of its compositional form. In particular, he revered the symmetry of the sonata form, a musical structure usually employed in the first movement of a piece with three broad sections — the exposition where a leitmotiv is introduced, the development where the motif is explored, contrasted or contradicted and the recapitulation which marks a return to the tonic centre with the original motif now enriched and layered. His imitation of the sonata form can be seen on two levels; the actual soundtracks of his films, certainly, but also his plots which must have been loosely inspired by this outline.

Ray consistently compared film with the tonality of Western classical music. In 1965, he contrasted the unwavering harmonic tone of a raaga — “a predetermined mood. . . built up like a temple. . . culminating on a spire of flourishes on upper octaves” — with the meandering tonal variations of a Beethoven symphony “interweaving and progress[ing] through a series of key-changes to a point of culmination.”





Film, he concluded, must resemble Beethoven. Indeed one may even draw parallels between the structure of a classical piece and Ray's structuring of his own work. Some of his more cerebral, character-driven stories like *Aranyer Din Ratri*, a comedy of manners where nothing really happens, can be viewed entirely from this perspective. Ashim, Aparna, Jaya, Sanjoy — distinct musical motifs in a Mozart composition, their relationships and interrelationships — melodic interactions among these motifs, layering, texturing, changing key and mode, complications in plot rising like accelerated crescendos with harmonies and disharmonies, and the final car journey homeward — a coda signalling a subdued return to the tonal centre and bringing with it a harmonic conclusion.

Music is functional to Ray and not decorative. To his contemporaries, songs were meant to be musical interludes between moments in the story and were rarely responsible for furthering it at all. If anything, they were deliberately-placed interruptions to keep audiences entertained and bolster commercial returns. Film-going was meant to be an outing to thrill and distract and extended sequences of singing and dancing fulfilled the public craving for spectacle. Ray's films, on the other hand, are driven by characters rather than revelry and action; and yet, none but two of his characters ever properly sing. Instead his music is connective; his soundscapes complement the plot and provoke deep emotion.

Keya Ganguly furthers this interpretation in her analysis of Ray's films. She draws our attention to a single, seemingly-banal sequence from *Charulata*, the very first of the film where the opening credits fade into the screen and a sitar plucks the tune of a popular song by Rabindranath Tagore, commenting on its intertextual referencing of the source of the film — *Nasta Nirh*, a novella written by Tagore himself in 1901. At the same time, there is a deeper foreshadowing to be found here. The song is about being in step, "ta ta thoi thoi" being the beats taught to dancers, but placed against Charu's circumstances, her being out of step with Amal, her alienation from a glittering mansion in which she finds herself alone, the tune is subtle but ironic commentary. A slight detail but one that, to the conscientious viewer, enhances the perception of the film.



Ray's music, therefore, acts not only as an accentuation of action but also an acceleration of it. It tunes the audience's sensibilities while also performing an important narrative function. The elaborate Hindustani performances in Jalsaghar are the perfect confluence of these emotive and narrative functions. The scenes where Biswambhar reclines regally amidst a retinue of subordinates as a kheyal or a thumri resonates through the shimmering chandeliers of his music room reference recorded historical fact — that the patronage of extravagant, pleasure-loving landowners were critical in the survival and perpetuation of classical artists. Simultaneously, these sequences, when later contrasted with the images of a forgotten, forsaken Biswambhar, paint a sympathetic picture of a man watching helplessly as he fades into obscurity.

Despite his affinity towards Western classical, Ray's stint at Shantiniketan under the tutelage of Tagore had planted in him a fondness for the music of his native land. His fanciful musicals *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* and *Hirak Rajar Deshey*, while surfacing his dexterity with words, are also effective parodies of Indian music styles and moods. The songs further the narrative organically, since they are tales about wandering minstrels, without compromising on the emotional value they hold. Viewers are delighted, for instance, by a terrified Goopy pleading with a tiger to a menacing raaga-inspired melody in *Hirak Rajar Deshey*, while the famous dance of the ghosts in *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* was accompanied exclusively by traditional percussion instruments, each distinct before building up to a rhythmic, pulsating crescendo.

Music is simultaneously within film and without, suspended between the real and the unreal. The viewer knows that in real life music cannot sound out of nowhere; but at the same time it is so irretrievably lost within the tapestry of what is filmic, that it is impossible to suitably dissociate it from the developments on-screen. Ray recognizes this strange power of music to soothe and evoke, and, importantly, its ability to bridge the gap between narrative and perception, conveying an order of sensory experience that mere visuals cannot.

The implication of these intrinsic links with music is that it is almost impossible for such a director to surrender all creative license to an unrelated music composer unless the two are in perfect harmony with each other. Unsurprisingly, there always existed an uneasy distance between the composers Ray hired and him — Vilayat Khan, Ali Akbar Khan although perhaps not Ravi Shankar — and by 1962 he was scoring his own films.

Two years later, he was approached by an American public television service to make a short film in English set in Bengal. He was not altogether comfortable filming in English and being a devoted classicist who deeply valued silent cinema, he seized this opportunity to make a silent film himself. The final film, *Two*, despite being barely twelve minutes long is perhaps the culmination of Satyajit Ray's mastery over sound and music.

The story is simple — two young boys live on the opposite sides of a wall, one in an imperious colonnaded bungalow, the other in a shanty made of scrap metal. The first has everything he wants but is driven to boredom despite this, and when the notes of the slum boy's flute float through the air, he doggedly tries to outdo the other in every way possible. He is almost successful in doing this — parrying his adversary's toy dhol with one of his own, dancing a wild war dance to the other's tribal costume, shooting his kite down with a gun — but only almost. The film closes with a poignant shot that lingers in our memory: the strains of the flute, now deafening, are heard again as the rich boy, secure in his tower of ivory possessions, watches as his lifeless toy robots topple over one another.

In *Two*, Ray submits to the strict rules governing Western classical music unconditionally. The film opens to a monophonic fanfare — a flourish of the organ that heralds a beginning — that leads to a canon. A form based on counterpoint, the leading melody is imitated and harmonised by a classical flute while a piano provides a plain, two-note rhythm. It employs a bright tune based on the major scale and reflects a state of normalcy and comfort from the point of view of the rich boy and is repeated twice after this — both after he has seemingly vanquished the other. This classical symmetry is also maintained with the flute melody of the slum boy: both times his music cuts through the noise of clattering toys, first as the introduction of a new leitmotiv and then as a moving coda. These mirror the call-response relationship between instruments common in many orchestral performances. The violins might introduce a theme, for instance, before the woodwinds respond with harmonies or counter-harmonies. Ray does the same here with his audiences, planting a subconscious idea with a tune before an unexpected repetition in order to trigger a recollection of the past moment, using it to heighten the perception of the present. Musical refrains are scattered throughout — the cadenced beat of the tabla and the hurried drum-roll as they challenge each other to a war of costumes, the slum boy's own cavalier theme that sounds on a high octave while he flies his kite, the shift to a darker, minor key as the sling and the gun are prepared.

Ray also suggests the redemptive quality of music. The slum boy's flute tune is a simple three-note repetition that grows and pulsates with a rhythm that sounds softer and more beautiful than the clamour of the other boy's toys, their shrieking mechanical rattle seeming violent and harsh in contrast. There is a visual metaphor accompanying this too — for all the supposed poverty of his toy dhol and his cheap flute, it is through him that music resounds while the other is no better than a monkey struggling to play tunes. In the end, the metallic cacophony of all the robots in the manor is overwhelmed by the same three notes of the slum boy's flute, now ever-increasing in an overpowering crescendo.

Music, to Satyajit Ray, deepens emotion, evokes mood, and shades character. Perhaps the closest analogue in European art would be Wagner's notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – the 'total work of art,' where myriad art forms are not patched together clumsily but subordinated to a common theme and a common end. Tunes and melodies are introduced in association with a mood or a theme, or perhaps even a character; they are woven in and out of the narrative, developed with harmony and texture, perhaps reintroduced at moments of thematic recapitulation. Bravura singing, senseless spectacle, music as ornament — these have no place in Ray's conception of art; his sensibilities are too subtle, too sophisticated, too refined for that. Indeed, one gets the sense in Ray — as one does in Wagner, in Shakespeare, in the greatest of geniuses, in fact — that the work has been created in a single, miraculous stroke of the imagination, such that not an ounce of story is inessential, not a note of music out of place. Such perfection can be analysed in so many words; it can be admired for its technical ingenuity; it can be dissected, scrutinised, spelled out, and picked apart. But then, after all that is done, one can only fall silent—and let the films speak for themselves.





Book Review: Memsahibs



A I S H I S A H A

Ipshita Nath's 'Memsahibs' is a riveting account of the lives of British women who journeyed to India during the Raj era. In history, as is true in most cases, women's stories are often overlooked and ignored, which is precisely why this book emerges as a very significant representation of a strand of history more than anything else. By 'memsahibs', Nath refers to the large number of British women who flocked to India during the colonial period – their dreams and ambitions, the society that they were a product of, and how exactly their lives were here in the East. She alternates between the perceived romanticism of a life in the Orient and the harsh realities with which these ladies were faced as two sides of the same coin.

Before even landing in India, the memsahibs had to endure the long and arduous journey by sea. Many of these women were sent to India by their families with hopes of finding a husband in the colony. These were the women who had been, for various reasons, shunned by their own social circles back home. Nath reminds us that this was the Victorian era – moral and social codes were stringent in British society at this time. Although many of these memsahibs travelled to India with the hopes of escaping such strict morality, it followed them all the way to the east as well. Socialising onboard was a pivotal activity in which all men and women engaged as otherwise, the journey could be quite drab and dull. However, Victorian morality dictated the mingling of the men with the women to the point where sometimes, women were barred from using common spaces onboard the ship. The fear of scandal was, of course, largely a woman's concern as the severity of propriety and manners were expected from women much more than men. Apart from social concerns, there were other equally if not more pressing matters at sea. The sea journeys during the Victorian period were very uncomfortable and there could be sea-storms on the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean. Nath cites many instances in which women faced grave troubles during such spells of the ocean swelling, or thunderstorms in which they precariously held onto their lives.



After one had endured the journey and landed in India, the memsahibs were presented with the reality of life in the mofussils or remote cantonments. Instead of being placed at the heart of Indian splendour and charm, their quarters were usually secluded from the main bustle of the city, in desolate and rural areas. Their lives in these provincial quarters were increasingly boring. There would only be two or three British families in a provincial area which restricted their social life considerably. During the day they had almost no scope of recreation while their husbands served the Raj. This was not all. Even their seemingly uneventful lives were

presented perils such as snakes and lizards which routinely entered their quarters and gave them quite a fright. Servants were an important part of life in India for the memsahibs. Though the servants took care of almost all household chores, the memsahibs had the task of regulating their behaviour. Apparently, intoxication was a big problem in India at that time as certain drugs and intoxicants were socially acceptable here. Nath here underlines a very important gap in history – she writes that most accounts of such addiction are usually from the perspective of the coloniser and are therefore largely unreliable and unobjective. There is a requirement of more subaltern accounts for us to arrive at a more objective standpoint.

A major part of the memsahibs' lives in India was travel. Most of them were wives of officers of the Raj who would be frequently posted in different cities due to work. This was most dreadful for memsahibs because one, it was difficult to move an entire household multiple times and two, they had no idea regarding the state of their new quarters. Everything was uncertain. Would they get good servants? Would their rooms be better or worse? They would not know answers to these questions until they arrived at their new destination.

Robert Clive established the Indian postal system in 1776 with which came into the existence the dak bungalows, or circuit houses. These buildings were fashioned after the coaching inns of Europe and were largely for the purpose of the British officers and their families undertaking long journeys. These were a welcome respite from the harrows of the road. Dak bungalows, however, acquired a not entirely positive reputation over time. These buildings were not always very comfortable and the furnishing was minimal to say the least.

Sometimes, the servants would have to hold curtains up to provide privacy to the guests. These were not the only hurdles. The fear of ghosts was not entirely without reason. A British woman by the name of Ursula Graham Bower described the supernatural customs of the people inhabiting the jungles of the Naga region in the north-east of India. She herself was never a believer in ghosts but after a few ominous events and sinister appearances, she could not help but succumb to the fear.

There were some who were greatly charmed by the forests and wildlife of the country. One such Emily Eden was addicted to outdoor activities and her husband who was not as adventurous, had to travel extensively due to her wanderlust. Although quite uncommon in Britain, the memsahibs often accompanied their male counterparts on hunting trips, simply to witness the ‘thrill’ of the oriental wilderness and the possibilities it provided. Some memsahibs, like Eden, were quite skilled at hunting, even the more dangerous group of animals such as bears, tigers, wild hogs, leopards. Memsahibs and their husbands also engaged in crocodile-hunting in the more marshy areas. This could prove quite dangerous as sahibs and memsahibs were perfect baits for these creatures who could partially veil themselves and appear suddenly in front of them, jaws wide open. Elephant hunting was not very common – only in case, ‘rogue’ elephants caused destruction in the nearby villages or plots of lands were they hunted.

Things get more problematic at around the time of the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny. Most British records and narratives of this time, written by both men and women, related the cruelty of the Indian sepoys and the torture they inflicted on those that were seen as largely ‘innocent’ – the memsahibs and their children. However, a certain degree of caution is recommended by Nath when reading such accounts as they were clearly hell-bent on portraying the ‘barbarism’ that was thought to be inherent in the sepoys. This poses the same problem that William Faulkner presents in his short story, ‘Dry September,’ where a white woman is allegedly violated by a black man and all the white men of the town are out to hunt the man down to seek vengeance for the woman, but this thirst of vengeance seems mostly driven by racism than anything else. However, as it is with such cases, there is often a lack of objective political correctness as both groups are marginalised by their racial and gender identities, and it is important to consider all nuances to attain an understanding of what might be considered the ‘truth.’

With the turn of the century, matters were beginning to change. The British rule was becoming increasingly unpopular and many memsahibs, even the ones who may have lived their entire lives in India, felt an urge to 'go back' to their homeland. By the 1930s, the Indian Civil Service ranks were filling up with more and more Indians. The Indian National Congress was asking for radical policies, and worldwide, there was a clarion call for liberation. Some memsahibs were sympathetic to the growing national movement, too. They understood the sentiments of the Indian National Army who had been to forced to partake in a war not of their making. It was only natural that they soon turned against their captors, demanding complete freedom and sovereignty.

'Memsahibs' provides a fresh perspective on the colonial history with which we are so familiar and opens up a completely new avenue in reading and understanding the lives of the British in colonial India. It occupies a strange position as the women were colonisers to the land only in relation to their husbands and yet they were identified with the same class of oppressors. These stories provide an understanding of the role of British women in India's colonial history and Nath has, superbly, drawn on tales and references that help construct a whole new India.





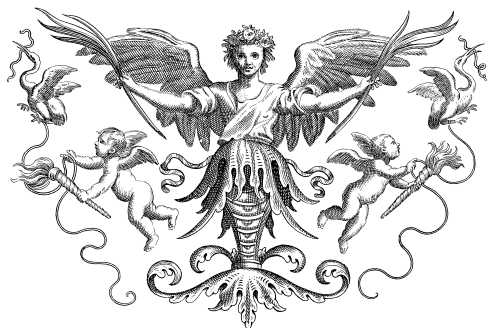
Sultana's Dream



RUSHALI MUKHERJEE

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's work 'Sultana's Dream', cannot simply be categorised as feminist literature, as it is often deemed. Through the depiction of the utopian feminist 'Ladyland' she holds a mirror to the subjugation of women normalised by the present social order, by cleverly reversing the existing norms of gender. Rokeya highlights the problems in the pre-existing condition of society and also provides ways in which, she believes, the state of society can be altered and improved.

Along with being a part of the aristocratic ashraf Muslim community, Rokeya had a tumultuous relationship with her parents who denied her formal education. Her realisation of the self was done through her experience of the fractured customs and restrictions of both her family and society as a whole. Rokeya was denied the chance to learn certain languages, particularly that of English and Bengali, which translated into her having the intense will to not only learn these languages but also promote education of the same. Having to follow the purdah system for most of her early life, she rightfully demonises this discriminatory practice in her work, along with other such unnecessary customs- as shown in 'Sultana's Dream', in a humorous manner, where men are confined to their homes and made to follow the purdah system.



Through the narrative of ‘Sultana’s Dream’ she negates the otherisation of women promoted by society and makes the experience of being a woman more accessible to society at large. Instead of marking a stark distinction between women and men, a phenomenon that is fostered within society, she tastefully bridges the gap between the self and the other, the self being her as a representation of the community of women and the other being the evils of society that uplift men and ostracise the women. One of the primary ways in which she does this is through her stylistic choice of keeping her work simple and satirical which eases the reader through the text and allows one to stay with the story while successfully leaving a lasting impression on the readers, of the harsh reality of the oppression that women face within society. Moreover, owing to the fact that this piece is one of her first works in English, it makes its way to a wider audience transcending both the time and place that it was written in.

Therefore it comes as no surprise that throughout her movements like that of formation of the Muslim Women’s Association and the establishment of educational institutions like the Sakhawat Memorial Girls’ High School, she pushes for self- realisation among women as entities with the capability of breaking off from the domination of men and pushing their limits to stand above the societal practices that bind them.

It is very evident in ‘Sultana’s Dream’ that she speaks out against the practice of keeping women in the zenana, while allowing women to assume the conventionally so-called male roles of leaders, warriors and practitioners in the fields of science and technology. A way in which she bridges the aforementioned gap between the conventions of women and men is through the fact that when she talks about the roles fulfilled by the women of ‘Ladyland’, she does not do away with the traditionally female professions of embroidery and gardening but juxtaposes them with the traditionally male professions. This blurs the line between the notion of gendered careers and propagates the idea of equality among the people in society.



The piece is ahead of its time not just in terms of her degree of self-realisation as a woman but also through the innovations in technology introduced in her story, such as the invention of the hot-air balloon or harnessing solar power. The theme of science being prevalent throughout the narrative brings out how she strongly believes in this discipline in order to counteract the economical and social backwardness prevalent in India at the time this was written by her, rather than a more spiritual, religious or philosophical approach. She believes that the dismal condition of Indian society was caused due to the paucity of representation of women in science and the lack of opportunities given to them to study such disciplines. She focuses on the sustenance of 'Ladyland' through brain power and kindness as compared to physical strength. It is also seen that she supports a democratic political system, as highlighted by the fact that irrespective of the presence of the 'Queen', all decisive power of the land is vested in the 'Prime Minister'. Furthermore, she does not reject the English language as a product of coloniality but rather embraces it as a form of liberation, having been stripped off of the opportunity to learn it in her early life as a mark of oppression.

Rokaiya's 'Sultana's Dream' succeeds in affirming my pre-existing belief of women being subdued by the orthodox social customs of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, the practice of confining women to the zenana being a practice of the high caste Muslims broke my stereotype of the lower caste women having to face the brunt of most social customs in contrast to the open mindedness and modern way of thought of the higher castes. It also made me realise how the definition of evil in society depends on one's social position and experience, the depiction of which is minimal in the case of women- thus making this text a revolutionary one for its time.

As one comes to notice, Rokeya Hossain's position as Bengali Muslim woman is very apparent in how her views guide the spheres of the women's lives she chooses to focus on and the manner in which she does them. Having engaged with the narrative of 'Sultana's Dream' along with a few other biographical texts about her, it begs the obvious question of how her movement for the liberation of women would have been altered if she belonged to a different sex, religious community or caste and what part of the freedom movement would she have chosen to champion for. In conclusion, 'Sultana's Dream', a seminal piece of literature by any standard, transcends the idea of feminism and brings along with it a unique view of modernity, that invokes inconceivable strength and fortitude in the face of systemic oppression.





Nostalgia At Dusk



RIDHIMA TALUKDER

I often stumble upon this dream — A
dream made of orange skies and
purple superstitions.

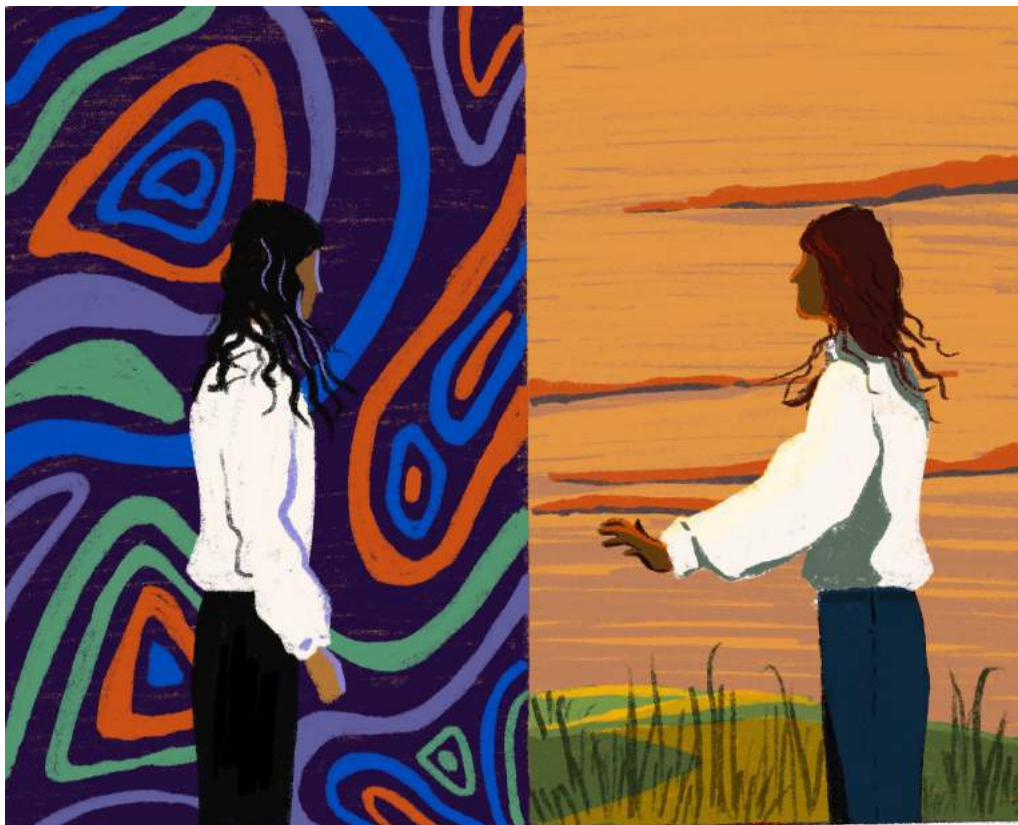


As I find myself amidst the green lusher,
I hear a clock ticking, fading in from
my faraway conscience.



There I remember, a vintage locket
that hung around my neck — trying
to communicate.

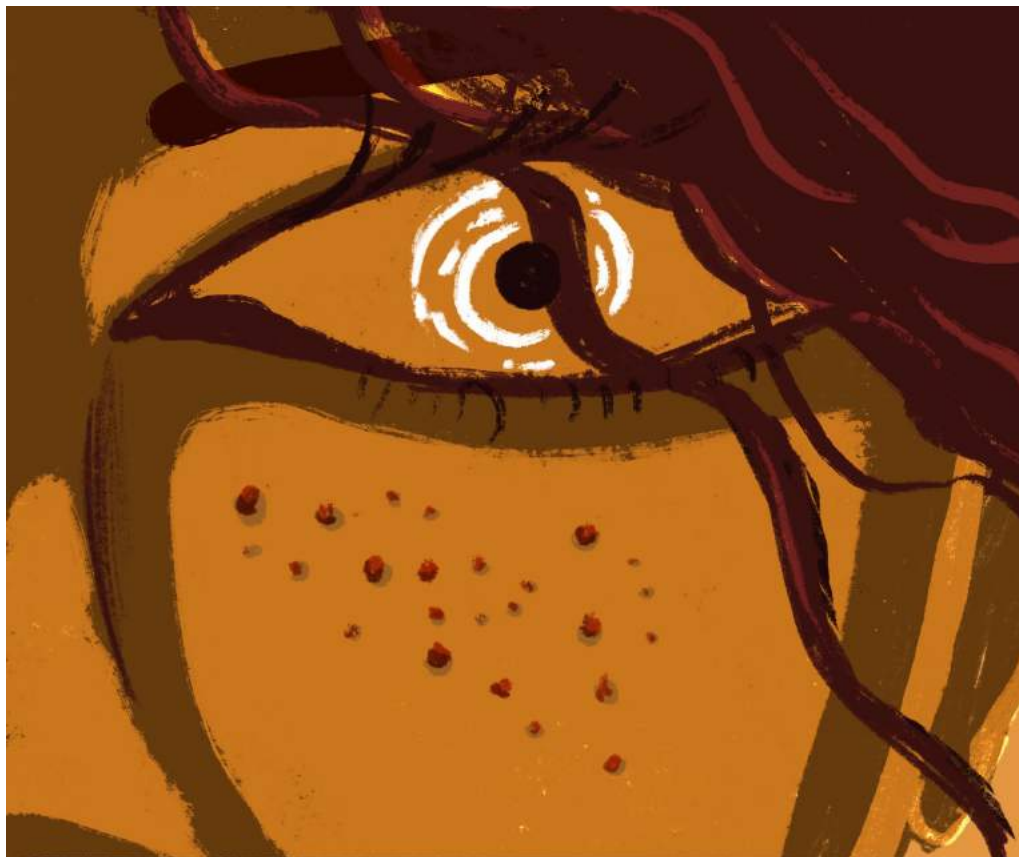
Unable to recall, I hold it under
the sun to identify what she
has to say



There she stood surrounded by the
unhinged catastrophe — waiting to be
rescued from the parallels that were
secured but never crossed.



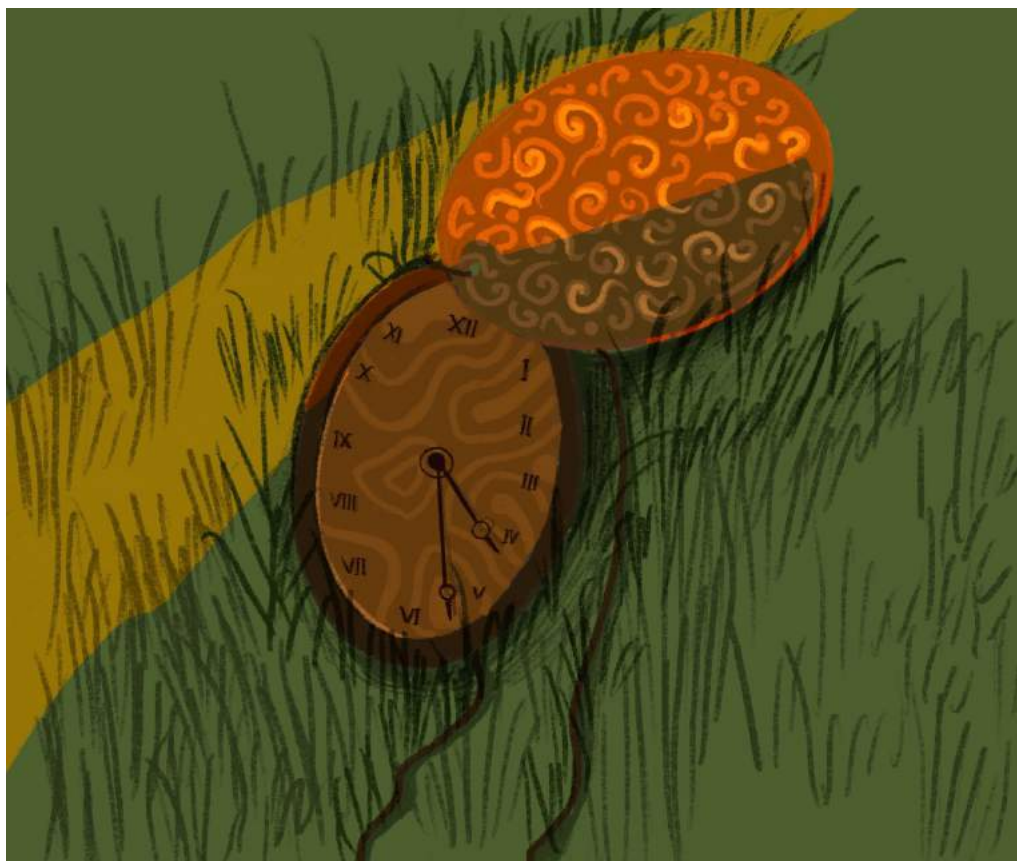
But the moment we reached out to know,
a spark reverberated at the juncture!



With eyes all troubled and illusioned,
I screamed in my mind,
"WHERE DID SHE GO?"

"I FLY, I FALL,
I SIGH IN MY CRY;
UNTIL YOU DO
WHAT I SEEK TO IMPLY."

... there!



Laying on the grass, she knew it was her time.
With her chest open and the hour stuck upon
the summer dusk, she was glistening in that
orange blaze.



halflife



SUCHETA MITRA



PROLOGUE

A tempestuous noise, in the mind of a half man half beast half life

SUBSTANCE

Known by many names

Fish monster

Demi devil

Mooncalf

I live vividly livid in ugly twilights

Born of a witch and raised by a wizard

My path of villainy carved for my twisted feet

Before I could ever crave goodness

Wholeness

A path of my own

Caliban free of past and present-

Caliban azaad, who is he?



RISING CONFLICT

I swing as a pendulum -
Upended evil in mother's eyes
An appendage to humanity in the wizard's
In origin, I am black magic and abhorrent nature
But in civility and language i was nurtured
Alas for the best of both worlds
For they begot a bestial creation
A beast, a man
Na jaanwar na mard
Anjaan nazariye wala iss nagari ka main naamard
A thing of darkness yet too light for night
A speaker of verses, but only in worthless curses
I bleed black witch-blood, that which mother gave to me
Kaale lahu sa behta
Yet the white white man's white white manners lighten it before it falls
I fall midair and stay
Stray.
Suspended.
Upended evil in mother's eyes
An appendage to humanity in the wizard's.
I swing as a pendulum
Neither end can accept me.
Mohini si maa?
Papa Prospero?
please?
I call and I call-
Chillata main, cheekhta main-

CRASHING CONFLICT

From the foam and froth of surfeit sea, Sycorax, it seems, screams

"Laal mere, khoon ki aag mere,

Jag jaa tu iss raakshas-raakh se samundar ki jhaag se ab

Jhukta kyu, jhakhorta kyu angrej ki baat se tu?

Arre Kali ka roop hai tu

Kali ka bana

Kaliban! Caliban!

Kaal-bhaukaal, kaliyug ka sarthaki hai tu!

Danav daitya ki aulaad hai tu

Sangharsh kar safed sangati ke khilaaf mere laal!

Jag jaa tu iss kaale sagar ke jhaag se mere laal!"

Kaale paani ki oor behta chala main

Kali ke saaye mein sawarta chala main

Har taraf mere andhi ka andhiyaara

Andhiyaare ki aankh mein ek akela chala main

But the tide ebbs and flows and pushes me back

Bheekh mangta main maa se

I swim, i swear I pray with it to swallow me whole

But the sea spits me back and I find myself at Prospero's feet

He speaks down,

"Half-calf Caliban!

May vile black tempests

tempt your unkempt soul not

May the corroded womb that cradled you

Cripple your cryptid soul no more

Rage, rage against the dying of the light, son

And remember with fondness

Water with berries and

Worlds of words I welcomed you to

Make your purposes known Caliban!

Speak against sorceries terrible to enter human hearing

And salvation is within reach"



I run towards the land
Yes, I think, yes
Salvation is in the white man's hands
In civility and service there is love to be won
To be stroked and made much of again
Oh joy in the sand beneath my feet
Par faasle par pair fisle mere
Girta, gidgidaata ret pe ghisa chala main
In the darkness of a cave I open my eyes
Confined to a rock, I cannot move
Cheekhne laga uss gehre andhiyaare samundar ke liye
"Son?"

Mother wrestles the wizard
"Arre o firangi!
Son jise kehta hai tu
Shani ka avatar, shaitaan hai wo
Son kehta hai tu jise
Iss kaale kokh ka janma janwar hai wo"
The sea howls back,
Floods my little cave till I cannot breathe

"Hah! You and your janwar gods"
Prospero scoffs
"This complexion you so denigrate
Built in the image of one true god
With all the light of the sun, of day, of the good and holy
All qualities you birthed your freckled whelp unadorned of
And left me burdened to nurture him with"

Na suraj na gagan dikhe mujhe
Iss ghut-ti gufah mein
Chamdi se chipakti mere ye chhoti si jagah
*"What use is your nurture, wizard,
When it made my son all the subjects you have?"*
Angrez ki bhaasha bolti hui paakhandi ye sagar ki
Kaale lehren ne lipta, kuchla mujhe
My bones broken, I swallow salt water.
The cave yields not and my crushed lungs burn
Awaz hothon tak na pohochti meri, saansein thamne ko ai
Earth and sea have so devoured me
Substance-shorn, consuming silence I feel.

RESISTANCE

Maa ne kaha
Jhaag se jagna
But melted into earth and water
Keechad mein ludakta raha
White man was right
Dirty is my being...
Wait.
I am not... dirty....
I AM dirt
Mud and sludge holding roots together.
Water and earth, indiscernible from one another.
I am whole, I am undivided, I am one
Born of aandhi and white sands
I am ugly sludge but unbroken entity.
Oh. I see. My eyes open, now I see.
I am not half and half but a mix
Black-white not separated, but melded and fixed
In your visions of one true colour there was blindness
But in my identity there is power
For I traverse worlds in my wrinkled chameleon skin and-
Voices interrupt my vengeful epiphany
"Everything I have done, I have done in care of thee!"

I fret not too much for the white wizard's white lies
"From mischiefs manifold, I was the one who made you who you are!"
No respect do I have left for a mother, traitor to her own language whose selfishness left me bereft
Standing on the shore, wet sand under my feet
I find I'm sure of my identity.

ACCEPTANCE

As their voices fade and my anger boils to resentment
The two demons inside me I grudgingly accept
For I know that the solid grey of my identity
Would never exist without the black and white in me
Though in her absence
Sycorax's tongue has grown foreign to my own
Her shining dark legacy lives forever on
In my brazen spirit and skin and the sea that gives me life
Though I have no more use for his casual condescension and fearful derogation
Prospero's language I grudgingly accept
For it is the one that makes my purposes known far and wide

My tongue shapes the wizard's script with the soul of my mother.

I am, after all, a creature of spiteful poetry.

AUDIENCE

So to all who listen now:
Yes you.
There is no peace
Where lands meet seas
No quiet
On stormy horizons where the shipwrecked alight
In mixture there is violence
And in separation there is war
Our halved identities leaving us with not one home in the cosmos
You and I are the children of chaos
Yet we forget we are too vast to summarise
Overflowing into both worlds till we seize power to make them capsize
Tempestuous, we are
after all, known by many names
Angrez ki aulaad, nawaab, nirbashita, khotta, khasman khaana, kaafir, bedakhil

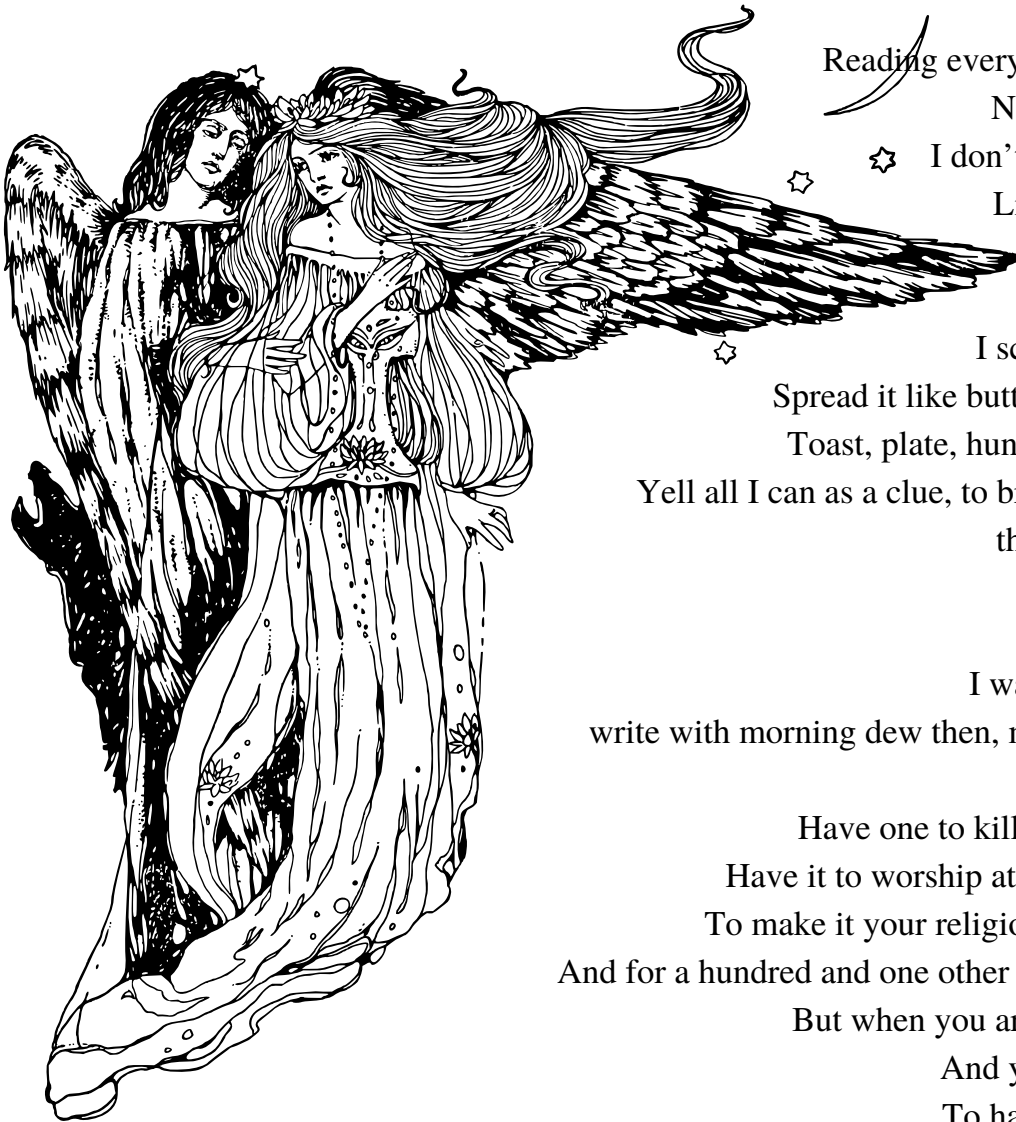
Calibans.



Beloved



RUCHIKA DUBEY



I count how many teeth show,
smiling wide, in front of the mirror,
hopping side to side,
Reading everything he says in fits of passion,
No colour needed, on the cheeks,
★ I don't have to pinch or slap them red
Limbs dance and the heart sways
The head then hits the wall,
the very next day
I scream and shout about my love,
Spread it like butter for him, take it to his mouth,
Toast, plate, hunger, b r e a k f a s t - i n - b e d?
Yell all I can as a clue, to bring his lips to the food of love;
that's out rotting before his eyes.
He does not see it, why? How?
He's blind and wild at will.
I watch as it pours, lean by the sill,
write with morning dew then, my most loved and hated poem:
"To have a beloved is fine,
Have one to kill with love, have it for its smile,
Have it to worship at nights and eat in the mornings,
To make it your religion, to get off breathing its skin,
And for a hundred and one other worthless orgasms of the mind,
But when you are famished in a land of famine,
And your mind and fingers are done:
To have a beloved is fine, but (ouch)
It takes others, to be loved."

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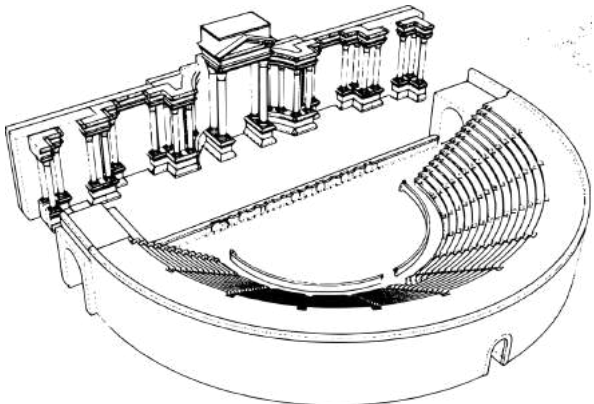
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