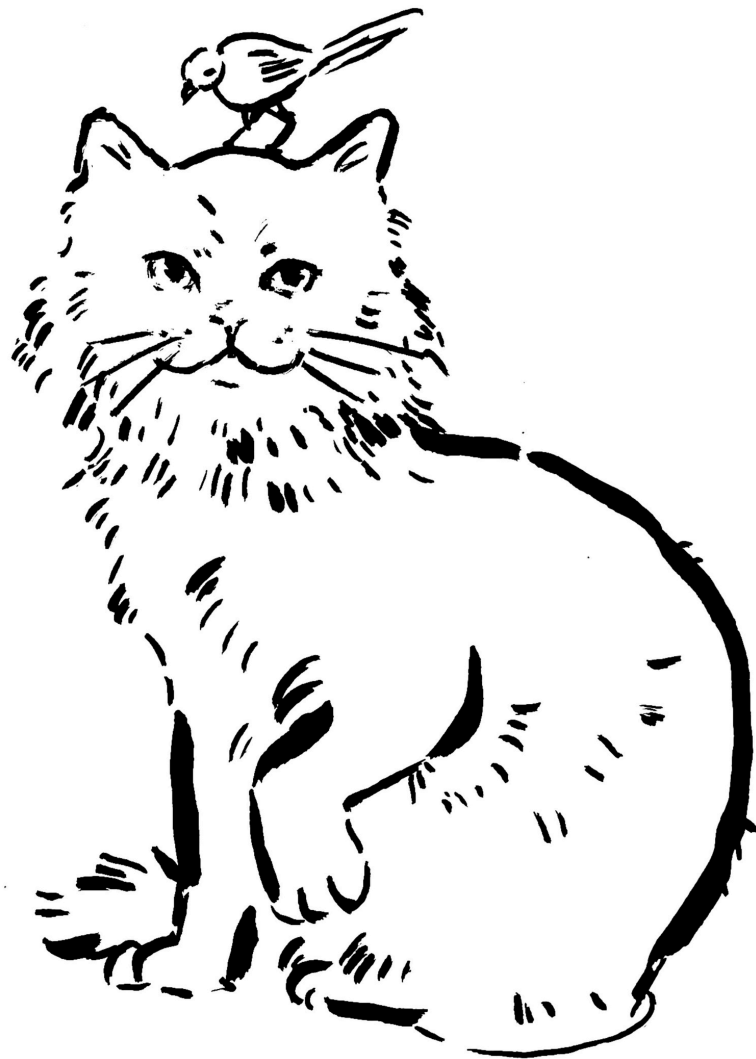
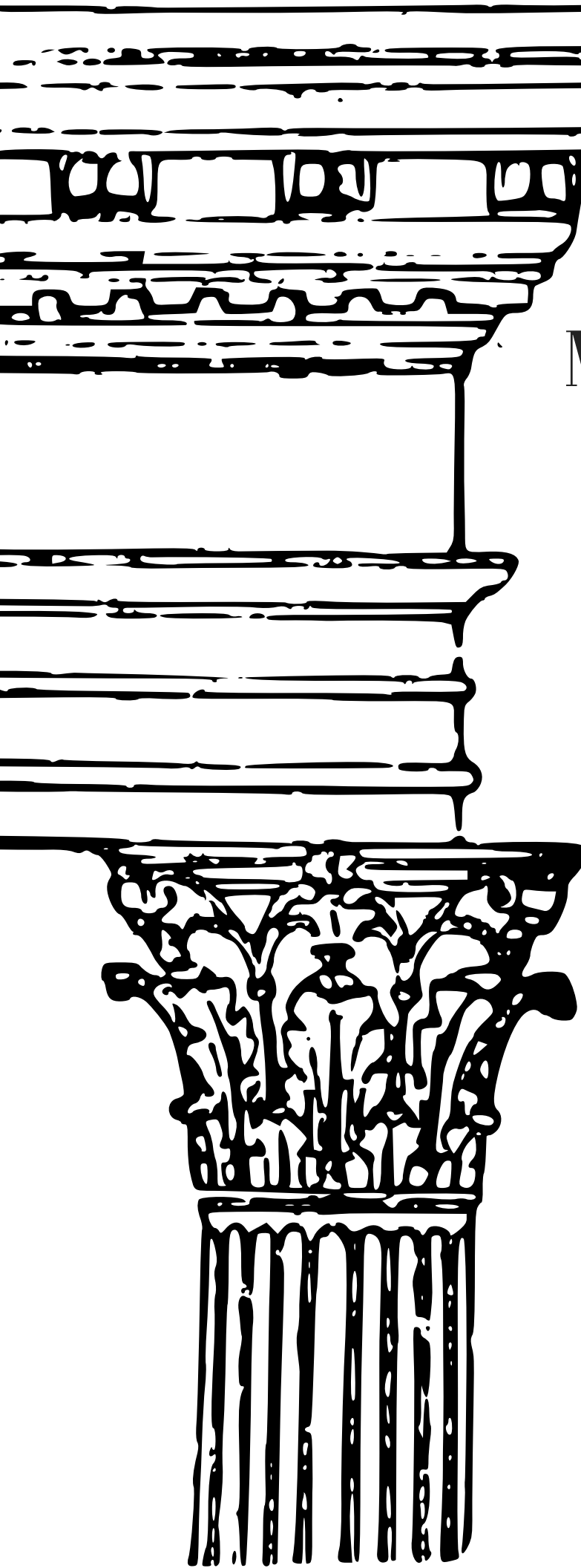


MONOGRAPH

YEAR 5. VOL. 3



A STUDENT LED MAGAZINE FOR THE ARTS



MONOGRAPH

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Editor's Note

Homegrown Archives

By Shayeri Das

*There's been a slight misuse of the
substance*

By Ritobrita Mukherjee

Curse of Yagyaseni

By Adrijaa Chakraborty

Binary Death

By Anuraag Das Sarma





Editor's Note



We all house dreams.

When Monograph began in late 2020, the entire team decided to share in a collaborative dream that was equal parts naive and hopeful. We were all starting our respective academic journeys then, and yet we found a way to balance this pursuit of ours with our personal plans for the future. We kept it running, and we will keep it running for many, many years to come.

Last year, however, was challenging. Post-graduate degrees, work, research, all the different fields we give ourselves to, overwhelmed us. We remained hopeful, starting the political series of op-eds that enjoyed moderate success, focusing on our relationship with Writers Workshop, hosting concerts, a quiz, and more. But Monograph, to us, felt stagnant. We were unable to balance it in a way that would have made our younger selves proud. What then of the future? What then of the collaborative dream? The team grew as we tried to incorporate more ideas, but multiple visions often stagger the mind. We were left breathless by the end of it, unsure of ourselves and of the magazine's future.

It was then, at this burnt-out junction of artistic pride, that we realised our failings. While the team grew, we did not afford the same privilege to the magazine. It was stuck with an identity it could no longer connect with. So what does Monograph grow up to be? What have we learned in these four years?

Well, we have a list. A long list of changes that need to be incorporated, mistakes that need to be fixed, and visions that need to be curated. This requires time and dedication, and we fully intend to provide it with the attention and care it deserves. I am not saddened to announce this three-month hiatus. Instead, I am hopeful. Not only are we changing the website to reflect the personality that Monograph has come to occupy, we are introducing seasonal themes to the magazine. We are bringing back interviews and changing the structure of our organisation to suit Monograph's needs. We will continue to work tirelessly over the coming months to deliver on everything that we initially set out to do, and request your patience and support through those months. If you would like to be a part of this transition, we are always looking for writers, designers, and web devs.

Our Instagram page will continue to be active over the hiatus and we shall continue to accept submissions, however the submissions this time will have to adhere to a theme that we will soon specify and go over in detail. The current website will also be up and we will continue to sell Writers Workshop books on it till the new version is up. Thank you for your support and see you in April.

Anuraag Das Sarma
Editor In Chief
Monograph





HOMEGROWN ARCHIVES

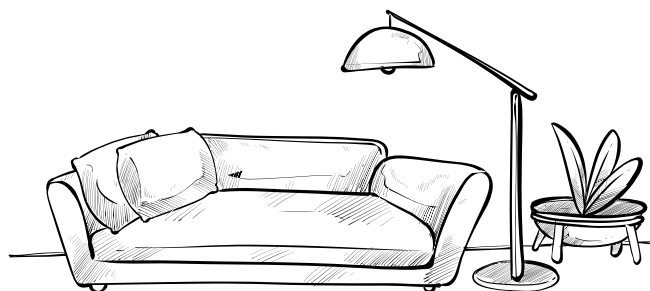


SHAYERI DAS

It is always a little challenging to rationalize the archival peril in recovering the domestic scene of a late Thursday lunch- tiger prawns cooked in coconut milk, bowlfuls of steamed rice and a detectable raw mango pudding sourced from a generous neighbour- to, in other words, fall back on the generative function of a memory-system grafted on shifting home-city geographies to narrativize and subsequently revoke what I suppose is a spatial amnesia about the sense of being ‘at-home.’ The affordances offered by these long-disbanded homescapes open up a rogue space of archiving- of objects rarely behaving appropriately in the operational space of the archive, evading arbitrary categorizations, slipping ever-so-often into a lover’s songbook, into the last verse of the predawn azaan wafting across the empty fairground. Occasioning the turbulent rupture of self-history and self-mythology. Self-reference, even.

How does one talk of ‘home’?

In my hunt for a definition, I keep falling back to these peculiarities- on an assortment of landscapes, soundscapes and their associated quirks, rather than the situated physical space of a conventional suburban, single-family home and its sub-ingredients.



Perhaps the lucid interval of a dreamless medicinal slumber- the comforting fiction of normalcy, the rapid, unmappable erosion of memory and cognition. The memorial excess of a keepsake journal- bus tickets to first dates, conference schedules, and lengthy hand-written notes- the necessary, logical instability of figurative language-

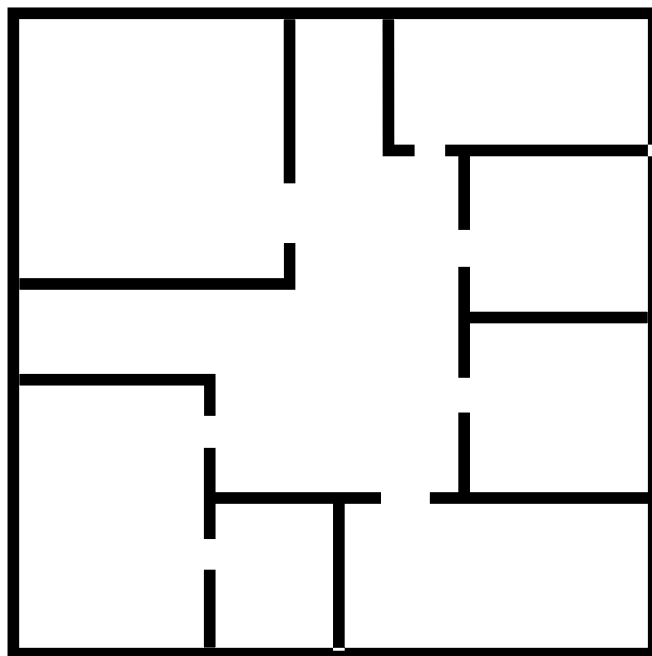
-the content of truth,

and yet

-a rhetoric of error.

Home- caving in to errancy, perhaps?

Not unlike its truant dweller, my 'provisional' homeland is a fugitive archive. Any attempt to "fix" time must negotiate with this nomadic condition, with what it is like to live in the plural- in-between languages, temporalities, intersections, and interactions.





My rather obsessive preoccupation with shifting, sonic geographies, sound maps, and Sufi theology and praxis has recently led me to spend hours listening to archival recordings of faqirs from Sri Lanka, in an attempt to reconstruct, through the spatial qualities inherent to the sound archive, an experiential engagement with the Sufi dargah, as it once existed. While the efficacy of such archive retrieval in terms of scholarly contribution is of course unwarranted, sonic moments like these, I believe, have that phantasmatic quality of an imaginative-hallucinatory disorientation, sometimes therapeutic, sometimes effectively de-mystifying the external, the textual. Yet it religiously evades cartography- shifting across sociolinguistic terrains- Urdu, Tamil, Hindavi, the Delhi Sultanate, Dafer Jailani-across geographies of reverence and demolition.

It is always a little difficult to rectify the precarious instability of my archival space.

Say, a German translation of Attar's "The Conference of Birds," or my first Urdu assignment- 'write a letter to a friend describing your favourite song'—

--can the archive restore me?



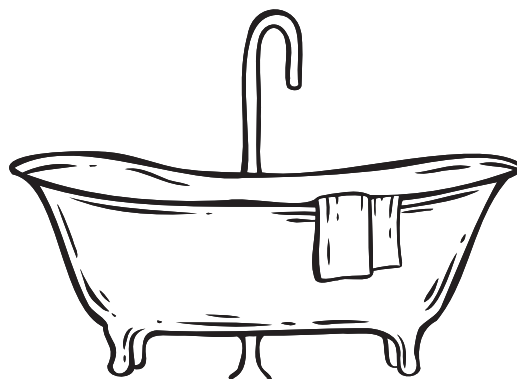


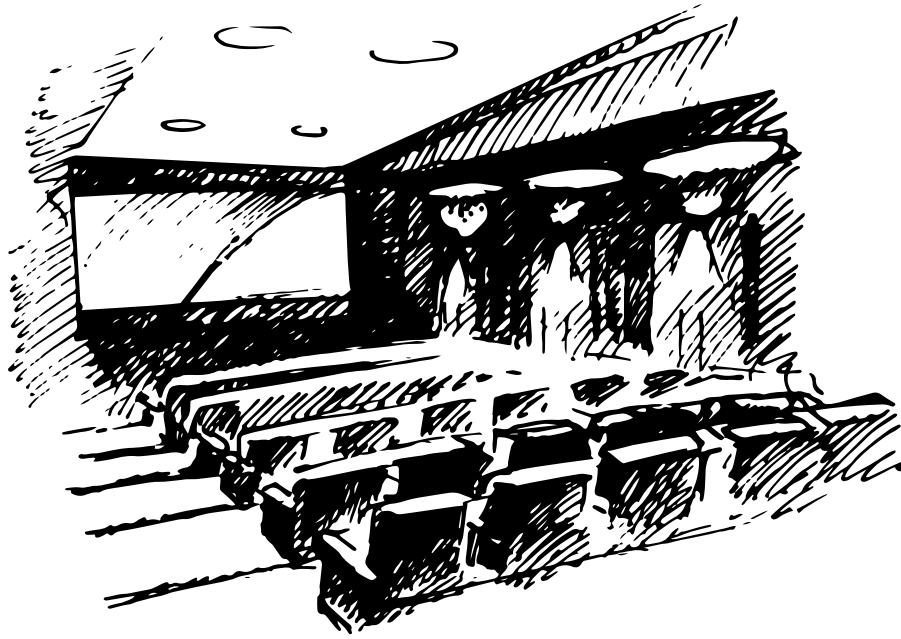
THERE'S BEEN A SLIGHT MISUSE OF THE SUBSTANCE



RITOBRITA MUKHERJEE

To birth from within yourself, a much younger, beloved, attractive version of yourself, may sound like the ideal form of rebirth to many in the age of digital deceit and online immortality; and French director Coralie Fargeat explores the commodification of the female body through the clinical, gorey, and monstrous lens of her 2024 film; 'The Substance.' When the ageing protagonist Elisabeth loses her 'sparkle' to the newly spawned fresh faced Sue, the audience expects to forget about the presence of the faded starlet as suggested by the opening montage of the film which shows how Elisabeth's star on the boulevard gradually fades into obscurity, a portion of the sidewalk no one notices anymore. Fargeat however refuses to allow her audience the comfort of closing their eyes on the bygone 'era' of the individual trying to better herself, leaving Elisabeth's crumpled, naked body on the floor of the same bathroom from which the newly emerged Sue walks out, a sentient sexpot on her way to replace a woman who had once entertained the world, having recently lost 'it' to the ravages of her late forties. This 'it' factor is what the film revolves around, leaving us with two women intertwined in a parasitic folie à deux, where they cannibalise each other in a desperate bid to keep the image of the starlet alive.



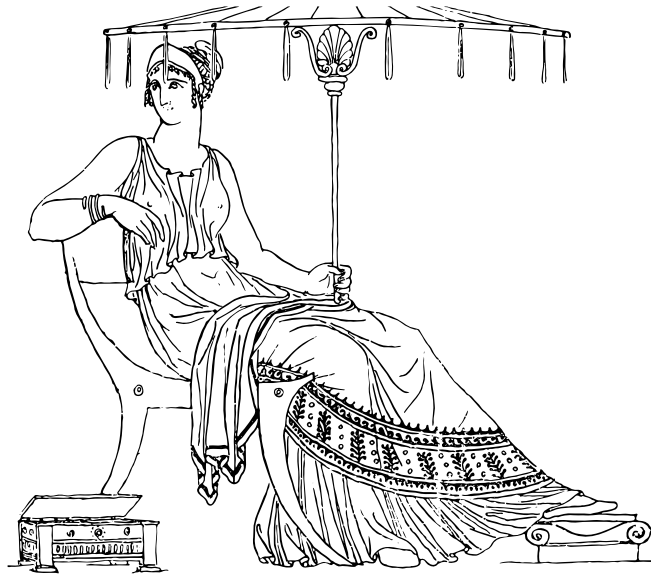


Folie à deux, the shared psychosis between two individuals, becomes a metaphor for the destructive relationship that manifests not between two separate individuals in the film, but within one fractured psyche: Elisabeth and Sue. These two versions of the same woman are locked in a parasitic dance, where each seeks to devour the other to preserve a fading starlet image that society demands. Elisabeth, initially horrified by Sue's emergence, soon finds herself seduced by the younger woman's vitality, seeing in her a chance to reclaim lost fame. Yet Sue is not merely an idealized version of Elisabeth; she is a Frankensteinian creation born of societal pressures, stitched together from shallow notions of youth and beauty. The film's recurring motif of mirrors, often cracked or fogged, underscores the dissonance between these two selves. Each time Elisabeth gazes into a mirror, she sees not herself but Sue—a reminder of the self she has lost and the monster she has birthed. Fargeat uses the concept of time as a weapon in this folie à deux. Sue's presence accelerates Elisabeth's physical decay, as though the younger self is siphoning life from the older. In one harrowing scene, Elisabeth watches in horror as her skin begins to sag and wrinkle in real-time, while Sue, bathed in ethereal light, glows with youthful radiance. This temporal theft underscores the film's central horror: the impossibility of sustaining beauty in a world that equates a woman's worth with her appearance.

The Substance becomes a brutal commentary on the commodification of women's bodies, a process that reduces them to objects of desire and discards them once they lose their 'market value.' Elisabeth's fading career and subsequent descent into obscurity are portrayed with clinical detachment in the film's opening montage, where her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame is gradually overshadowed by newer, younger celebrities. Her body, once celebrated, is now a relic—a portion of the sidewalk no one notices anymore.

This commodification drives Elisabeth to create Sue, a monstrous reflection of societal ideals. Sue is perfect in the way only an artificial construct can be: flawless skin, symmetrical features, and an unsettling aura of eternal youth. Yet beneath this perfection lies the grotesque. Fargeat juxtaposes Sue's outward beauty with visceral scenes of bodily transformation, reminding the audience that beauty is skin-deep and often hides something monstrous. The film's body horror elements draw heavily from the work of Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein**, with Sue as the creature stitched together from fragments of societal expectations. But while Frankenstein's monster seeks acceptance and understanding, Sue exists solely to embody and perpetuate a superficial ideal. Her very existence is a critique of a culture that demands women create and maintain impossible versions of themselves, even if it destroys them in the process.

Fargeat's critique of the commodification of women aligns closely with the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir, particularly her exploration of the "eternal feminine" in *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir argues that women are often reduced to a series of roles—mother, lover, muse—each defined by their relationship to men and society rather than by their individual identity. In *The Substance*, Elisabeth's identity is similarly fractured and reshaped by external pressures. Elisabeth's transformation into Sue can be seen as a literalization of de Beauvoir's assertion that women are expected to become something 'Other' to fulfill societal expectations. Sue is not a person but a projection—a construct designed to fit the mold of the eternal feminine. She is desirable, docile, and devoid of individuality, a blank canvas onto which society can project its fantasies. Yet, as de Beauvoir warns, this transformation comes at a cost: the erasure of the self.



In one of the film's most haunting sequences, Elisabeth confronts Sue in a dimly lit dressing room. The walls are lined with photographs of Elisabeth's past glories, each image a reminder of the woman she once was. Sue, standing before a mirror, begins to tear the photographs from the walls, replacing them with glossy, airbrushed images of herself. The scene is a chilling visualization of de Beauvoir's warning: when women are reduced to objects, they are not only dehumanized but also erased. Fargeat's exploration of beauty as both a source of power and a curse is central to *The Substance*. Elisabeth's beauty once granted her fame and fortune, but it also rendered her disposable once it began to fade. Sue's beauty, though seemingly invincible, is revealed to be a prison—a construct that traps her in a cycle of performance and perfection. In a pivotal scene, Sue stands before a group of producers and executives, her body adorned in a sequined dress that glitters like a second skin. The men applaud her beauty, their faces masks of lecherous admiration. Yet as Sue smiles, a crack appears in her perfect facade—a thin, blood-red line that snakes down her cheek. The men do not notice, too captivated by the illusion of perfection to see the fissures beneath. This moment encapsulates the film's central paradox: beauty, while celebrated, is ultimately unsustainable.

Fargeat's *The Substance* refuses to offer easy answers or comforting resolutions. Elisabeth's crumpled, naked body on the bathroom floor—a grotesque parody of rebirth—stands in stark contrast to Sue's triumphant exit, poised to replace a woman who once captivated the world. Yet the film's final moments reveal that Sue's victory is only temporary. In a chilling final shot, she gazes into a mirror as her flawless reflection begins to crack and distort—a stark reminder that even the most carefully crafted illusions are no match for the inevitable passage of time. Through its exploration of *folie à deux*, the commodification of women, and the monstrous nature of beauty, *The Substance* delivers a haunting critique of a culture that demands women destroy themselves to fit an impossible ideal. Both Elisabeth and Sue are caught in a relentless cycle of creation and destruction, forever chasing an image that can never truly satisfy. Their stories serve as a mirror to our own reality, where beauty is currency, and identity is often reduced to appearance.

Fargeat's film poses a disturbing question: How much of ourselves are we willing to sacrifice for the sake of being seen? And when the illusion finally shatters—when the mirror cracks—what will remain of the woman staring back? In its bleak and unflinching conclusion, *The Substance* forces us to confront the fragile and transient nature of identity in a world obsessed with perfection, leaving us to wonder if the pursuit of beauty is, in the end, a pursuit of self-destruction.





CURSE OF YAGYASENI



ADRIJAA CHAKRABORTY

As I lay on the soil I call home
With hundreds of marks all over my body
I stare at the sky which has dulled by now
All the smoke and fire returned home.

I ponder, deep within the sky
And the roots beneath me.
How they climbed on me
Slashed me open
Built buildings on my bare body.

I layed there shivering,
A hand that has long left my breast, lingers still.

You break walls, you tear our land apart.
You wake up one day and decide you'll conquer the world.
You make countries, you burn homes.
You make your houses from my children's bones.

I let saplings grow on my bare body.
I let rain drench my very soul.

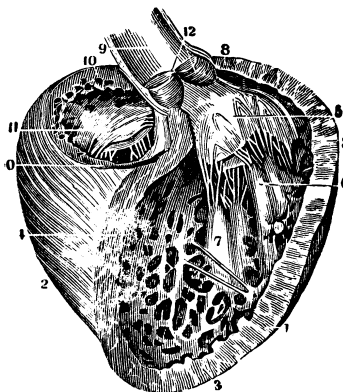


I don't cry tears, I cry blood
And erupt fire on earth.
Garland of skulls I wear
Of all the heads that bent down to lick me.
My hair I wash with your rotten blood.
My roar makes the demons flee.

From Fire I am born
In the earth shall I die.

And one day,
The concrete you build on me
Will eat you alive.

Then,
You shall lay in your city of corpses
Your rotten flesh burned
In the throes of hell.
For each scratch upon my skin
You shall remember: for Helen, Troy had fallen.



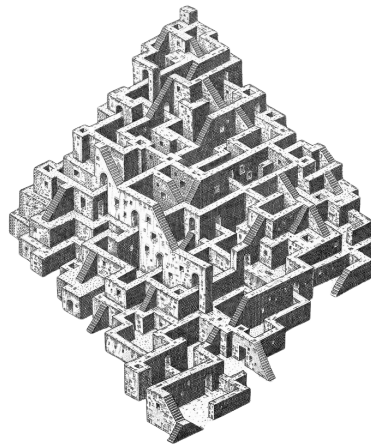


BINARY DEATH



ANURAAG DAS SARMA

Little, little whispers among
 Defeated men drunk,
At the threshold of loss,
 Where time splits and dictates
Direction. Cosmic and linear,
Mother Time, O' Destructor,
Afford us with the divinity-
Of luck, the great equalizer



Where do we go from here
 Never to return? Acyclical
This labyrinth where nothing repeats.
 No motifs, no relief.
The great unknown in darkness rests,
Bares fangs, threatens. I have seen
The face of God, in Babel and again-

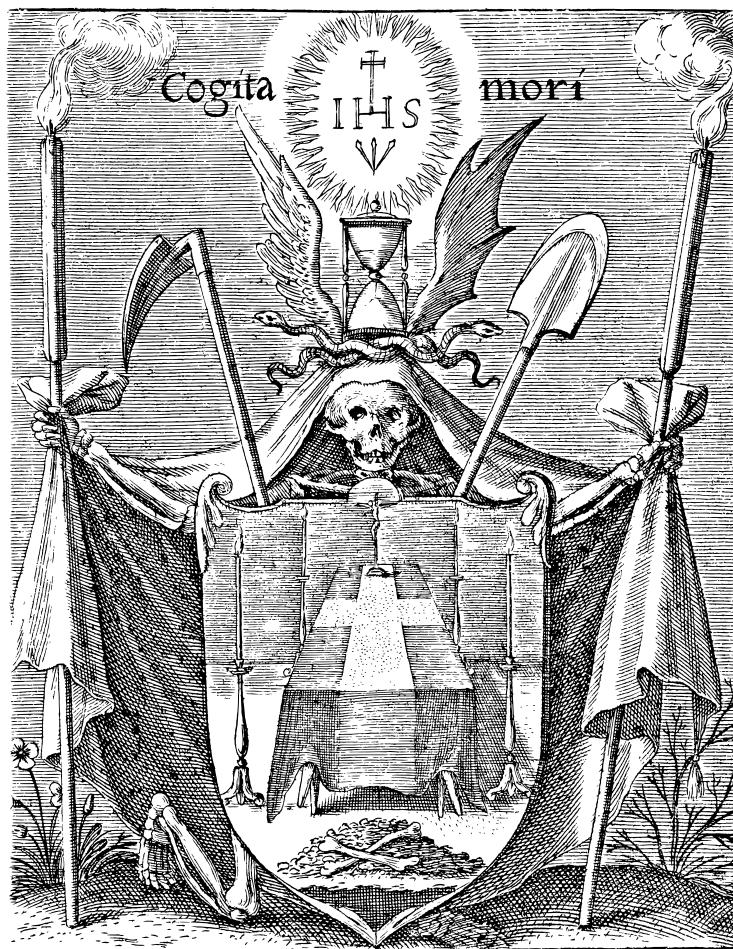
In Jerusalem, trapped. The labyrinth
Does not permit death, I am yet
To find a familiar face at the ghats
Of Manikarnika. He thinks in patterns,
He who created us in his form,
He who churned the oceans,
He who painted the shells in spirals.
The labyrinth makes him mad.

I have seen his eyes dilate-
In fear, he mumbles to himself.
The mad god, the divine dreamer-
Is plagued now by Delphic visions,
Of symmetry in life and death-
Conjuring in circles the flow
Of cosmic time. I have seen him
Prophesize his own return. He
Charts it all in a Mandala.

The actions of a diseased God
Drawn in manic circles and squares.
Repeat the form, repeat the form.
Trace one above another.

Deduce the method
In divine madness,
You who have no
Other.

Other?
Might I dare
Replace the creator?



With abstractions of a mythos-
As Borges did. All of literature
Is one of two, the God leaves,
Or he returns. Never both.
He lives in absolutes.
Must he return? Absence cements
The narrative. Death,
It makes Gods of us all.



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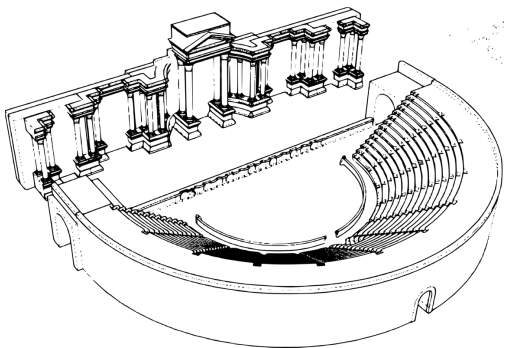
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