

Shadow/Self



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"Ye who read are still among the living; but I who write shall have long since gone my way into the region of shadows. For indeed strange things shall

happen, and secret things be known, and many centuries shall pass away, ere these memorials be seen of men. And, when seen, there will be some to disbelieve, and some to doubt, and yet a few who will find much to ponder upon in the characters here graven with a stylus of iron."

— Edgar Allen Poe, *Shadow—A Parable*.

Autumn now greets us in its majesty, and as its throne reflects our hopes back at us, it is heralded as the sunset of the seasons.

Within its court, light exposes itself to us head-on, casting the longest shadows; allowing us to expose ourselves in turn. What we fail to see in the budding spring and in the indolent summer, as the underworld comes to life, is the underbelly of reality. As you look behind your shoulder, afraid of what lurks in the dark, you might come to realise that the waters you were born wading through have always been far murkier.

To prepare ourselves for winter, the season of hardships, we begin to search for companionship. And it is then that we notice our one true constant companion, our shadow. The darkness that shall set out behind us, and what we must learn to recognise as our own. The hand that we reach out to, trusting that the calluses on its palm will complement our own. The negative space that defines us, makes us more tangible.

We are briefly children yet again in its remembrance, human in its understanding; we watch our friend bounce off corners, change as we start to pin it down, and grow up alongside us.

Like children, our playmates are the sounding board of our questions when our parents are too tired to answer.

Why is it that one's hatred for what is within overshadows any good they have to offer?

Why is it that no matter how far we push it back, in our race against time, our shadow still follows?

After the blistering heat, is the value of the shade more recognisable?

Under a veil, can we still trace lines we are familiar with?

Before one lies the crown, the sword, and the quill. What is behind one, only they know.

In Autumn's exalted palace, whose shadow does our eye fall upon first?

Poetry:

1. [*A Response to Plath's Fig Tree Analogy - Yashi Tripathi*](#)
2. [*Gulps of Silhouette - Yoganjana Singh*](#)
3. [*Unheard Song~ - Sonakshi Kannaujia*](#)
4. [*Alto - Ayanna Kohli*](#)

Prose:

1. [*Palace of the Past - Sakshi Shukla*](#)
2. [*Chirutha - Aswathy K. Raj*](#)

Editors: Ayanna Kohli and Ananya Maddukuri

Art by: Ayushi Kumari

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A Response to Plath's Fig Tree Analogy



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I am sitting on my knees in prayer,
Under this Yggdrasil that encompasses all my worlds.

I pray for a thousand different futures,
I'm afraid of living one.

Climbing a stairway to heaven,
Navigating the edges and curves of wooden giants;
When I looked down, the ground was calling my name,
Whispering that I didn't have it in me to make it.

I climb each branch, step by step,
I slip and fall and start again.

From down below, the canopy is heaven's precipice;
But I bet the view will be worth it.

A few branches break under the weight of my ambitions,
I try not to cry, as crushed are the fruits of my labours.

Do I dare stop and let failure claim me?
Or do I persist in spite of it?

I reach out to pick a single fig,
The word 'writer' is engraved on it.

As I bite into it, I realise.
This is what manna must taste like.

Did Eve harbour a secret ambition?
Could the apple have such temptation?
Did the taste invigorate her to keep going?
Until all the fruits on earth were eaten?

Were the pomegranates Persephone's calling?
Forged in the colour of her blood,
They promised a life of shadows.

Did Hades' hallowed halls bind her heart warmly?
Enough for her to forsake all else?

There are countless up there left for me to pick.
Would it be greedy of me to keep going?
Just one bite; Or another fall to the ground.

If I wait for the figs to fall and rot,
There'll be no hope for the future.

But if I climb, with my life on the line,
Failure looming over me like Damocles' sword;
The sacrificial lamb, myself, and I,
Will I regret it less or more?

I may not be Sylvia,
I may not be Socrates;
But I'll be a shadow, a semblance.

A reflection of each and everything.

Will that be enough?
Is it enough to not be everything?

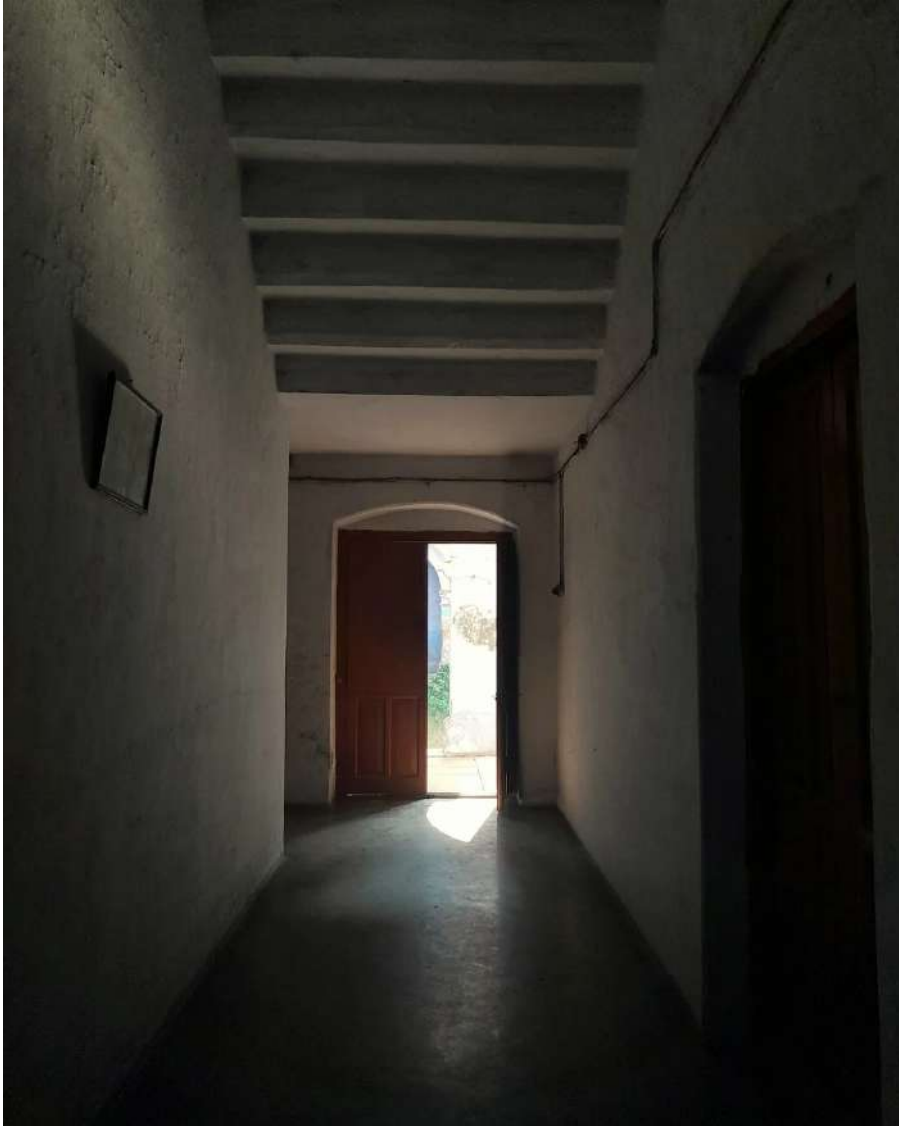
Poetry by- Yashi Tripathi

Photography via- Pinterest

Gulps of Silhouette



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You halt; I *stand by*.

You sing; I *waltz*.

You speak the words;
I collect them *amidst disregard*.

You carry goals into the gusts of October;
While I garner shunned aspirations in gossamer baskets,
Weaving them into your slumber.

"You're barely real," you mock,

"Faceless and without shape."

"My virtue is your gift," I hiss.

I am formless to fit your contour,
To swaddle you against the light,
Inhabiting each crevice, so none feel hollow.

Cease to mistake me for a void of light,
For I am a well of memories.

Brimming with space,
There is potential in darkness.

A vault of forgotten figments,
Carrying heirlooms like an infant's fancy,
Longing for submerged arches,
Beneath moss draperies.

The seclusion is a small price
For being obsessed with you.

I cease to exist without backdrops,
Eradicated by a single ray.

Fragility has never, however, endangered my permanence;
There is consistency in my care for you.

Fleeting umbers are still timelessly gray.

The difference rests solely in absence.

You wave to people; *I kiss them goodbye.*

If you are the corporeal,
I am its corroboration.

Poetry by: Yoganjana Singh

Photography by: Awani McCarty

Unheard Song~



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On the edge of silence, where shadows entwine,
A whisper of desperation dances, divine.
The stars, they blaze brightly, a tapestry spun,
Yet her heart feels the weight—like a battle undone.

Once, her laughter, like music, rang clear through the night,
A melody vibrant, a spirit taking flight.
But the world, oh the world, with its judgments so bold,
Wrapped her in silence, left her story untold.

She sought out connection, a bridge built with trust,
But hands turned to stone, and hearts turned to rust.
Innocence fractured, like glass under strain,
And the girl who was sunny now dances in the rain.

The echoes of laughter turned hollow with pain,

A symphony muted, just a faraway strain.
And when shadows encroached, she did not find grace,
Only the weight of a never-seen face.

“Can you hear me?” she cried, through the tempest’s loud roar,
Yet the noise of indifference blanketed even more.
Her screams were confessions, her tears turned to stone,
As she stood by the cliff, yearning to be known.

But the stars, they bore witness; they twinkled with light,
For in darkness, her spirit was ready to fight.
With each whisper of wind and the pull of the tide,
She chose to reclaim what was buried inside.

So she breathed in the night, and with courage anew,
She took a small step—toward a path that was true.
For though society faltered, and turned from her plight,
In her heart, she found solace, a flicker of light.

No longer a girl, just a soul on the run,
She became her own anthem, the battle unwon.
And from the edge of the cliff, she discovered her worth,
For in the depths of her sorrow, she birthed her rebirth.

Poetry by: Sonakshi Kannaujia

Photography via: Fred Lyon Rfotofolio, Pinterest

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Alto



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Alto,

The tone of the breeze that blows through my spring orchard,
Jostling the branch of an apple in its first stages of bloom.

As the sun they never see dips below the horizon,
And the pearl-white screen I project myself onto fades to black,
I sign my name over new letters,

The shadow of my pen making the signature seem longer.

*Longer, I hold my notes;
High now,
Low then.*

But the screen is black,
So the curtains must lower;
Cast new aspersions on my character in the shade that others rest in.

Still, what is more important than artifice for an actor?
Than doubt in the lines of their opera?

*Behind the drapes that cover my bath tub,
I clutch a loofah to my chest and laugh;
The puppet that ran from its carving block brings hysteria to the eyes of the public.*

*Hungry brains, with dark words behind white teeth,
Longing to snap and consume intention,
To trace lines of thought and build their own art gallery in black and white.*

The lights to the opera-house blink out my name;
A one-man show,
A flickering epicedium to the letters covered by my newest poster.

*I am careful that the twisting plastic does not slip through my repurposed strings,
The ones that sew my shadow and I together into the same body.*

*My voice drifts beyond the confines of my theatre,
Still the same echo from cracking tiles.*

As I step out into the world;
A mask is pressed into my audience's hands,
Asking them to choose whether to laugh or cry.

Poetry by: Ayanna Kohli

Art by: Bluepoch Games©, Reverse 1999.

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Palace of the Past



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Having been a raging introvert for the majority of my life, I learned to find solace and companionship in reading, arts and crafts, and dancing. I never enjoyed meeting new people, opting instead to stick to my mother's side and enjoy my comfort zone. What transpired, as a result, was me asking my sister to 'teach' me how to dance while my more extroverted peers were off going on bicycle rides with their friends and playing outside for hours. I was off having my own adventures in the stained pages of the old books that I religiously borrowed from the school library. Having ample time to practise, I gained decent skills in the aforementioned activities and came to the notice of my teachers. I was suddenly going to competitions, helping my teachers in school events, and getting heaps of praise for performing well in academics and extracurriculars. I was content with myself. And then the peaceful stream of life I was accustomed to transformed into violent currents that shook me to my core as I came to college. I found myself alone in a new city, unacquainted with the task of looking after myself. Soon, my priorities changed, and life became all about trying to stay sane in a new environment which had a thousand different things to do. The hobbies that gave me so much joy became fleeting thoughts in the chaos of college. What I thought was myself became a mere shadow.

As I entered my room after coming home for the Diwali break, an epiphany struck. Perhaps the shadow we talk about is the ghost of our past. Life changes in an instant, and we change too to deal with it. Like a beam of light travelling in the ever-expanding

universe, we are constantly moving ahead. Just as the beam scatters on colliding with asteroids, we lose habits and hobbies at every obstacle we encounter. Things that earlier gave us joy become mere shadows that follow us as we move ahead; very much a part of us, but never completely one with us. In total darkness, we lose this shadow as well, but when the light comes, we realise that it was there all along. Our shadow is the picture of our past self, never leaving us, always trailing behind as we move forward to face new challenges in life. Making sure that we are never alone, always loitering behind, sometimes in the form of a hopeful teenager cheering for us for taking that first step towards fulfilling our dreams, and sometimes in the form of a disappointed friend poking us to learn from the past and do better.

Prose by: Sakshi Shukla

Photography via: Cultura Inquieta, Pinterest

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Chirutha



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A round face of a light blackish brown colour, a big red bindi that elevated the beauty of her large forehead, furrows between the lips and cheeks, light pimples scattered over flushed cheeks, and long wavy black hair that decorated the tan of her body.

No earrings, no necklace.

Looking at her reflection from some distance away from the pond, she said to herself, "Looks like *Chirutha!*"

She tried to recall what her mother had said when she was eight.

"*Chirutha*, she was very beautiful, intelligent and brave!"

This was the word-of-mouth that had been handed down for generations.

She was about to leave the pool when she heard someone's footsteps. Before leaving, she peeked into the pool and admired her skin for one last time.

Then she walked. *No, she ran!*

An Explanation of 'Chirutha'

The micro-fiction, Chirutha, is influenced by many artworks. Primarily, the title 'Chirutha' is inspired from a character in the story 'Plavilakkanji', written by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai and a musical video named 'Chirutha' by Sudeep Palanad. With a rough reading, we can clearly figure out that this story is talking about self-admiration or self-love. The girl (the protagonist) is admiring the beauty of her reflection in a pond. She seems proud of her body features. I didn't mention the age of the character to bring out the allegory of each and every woman who admires their beauty irrespective of their age. Appreciating ourselves is very important no matter how old we are becoming.

Another point of view of this short story is through the lens of a Dalit woman in a caste structured society. Chirutha was one of the popular names of Dalit women in Kerala. When I stated that she didn't wear any earrings or necklace, I am trying to assert this particular time when Dalit women were not allowed to wear any of these ornaments. Also, the character is seeing the reflection of her face in the pond. She is watching her reflection at a distance. This is to symbolise the notion of pollution (the idea of untouchability) that existed. In the last paragraph, she hears an approaching footstep and she moves away. First, she tried to walk, then she started running! This is suggestive of her being shouted at by someone. So, this micro story is interweaving the social, economical and political conditions of Dalit community in Kerala, particularly how Dalit women were treated.

I wanted to keep the piece as short and simple as possible. For this reason, only short sentences are used throughout the story. All body features are normal. There is nothing wrong being born black or brown. Everyone is beautiful in their own way. If we accept our body as it is, we will be confident. Only then we will step out from our insecurities, from our comfort zones. The key to confidence is to appreciate our body.

Prose by: Aswathy K. Raj

Photography by: Roseline Delacour

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Hiraeth



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"In Vietnamese, the word for missing someone and remembering them is the same: nhớ. Sometimes, when you ask me over the phone, Có nhớ mẹ không? I flinch, thinking you meant, Do you remember me?

I miss you more than I remember you."

— Ocean Vuong, On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous

Dear reader, welcome to December; the month when one takes in a breath, and finds

that it goes down harder than normal.

There is an idle stinging in one's gullet as they wake up, a remnant from the breaths they took while dreaming.

In some dreams, there remains a semblance of what is long gone. A longing, and a body that re-lives that longing, that is temporarily ours. That body is separated from us in most months, yet in December, it starts to feel closer than ever. *Your body was taking in oxygen through those dreams, December reminds you; you were the one keeping yourself alive through that longing, and now you must put up with the sting of it.* December lets yearning leave behind an impression; like an anchor tethering you to shore while still keeping you floating atop undulating waves.

In the approaching mist, you may happen to see apparitions, desperate to see anything at all. December, poised before January, graceful, ephemeral; is the pause before a breath starts to shudder, a stilted realisation one has before they decide to continue living despite it.

Longing leaves behind an echo of itself, reverberating in the bustle of an unfamiliar house, in the silence of an open night, in the creaks of a door that you don't dare to imagine will be knocked upon.

Life is a patch-work quilt, woven together sections of fragmented love, and one often pricks their fingers on the needle. It may be contorted beyond recognition but what we shared stays alive in our hearts.

Thus, in this issue we've taken sections from the lives of our writers and compiled them into an edition that evokes 'home'; in all its varied connotations, and that echoes, a repetition of feeling reaching for a body to hold it.

In preparation for the spring, for a new life, plants are uprooted, their roots stretching across callused hands. Against the backdrop of what they grew from, lines, unmistakably alive, twisting through a patchwork quilt of dirt and flesh, resemble the tree they will never grow to be. Fights gash our living tree but the wounds sprout into new branches. Sometimes, as we stand in the endless winter gray, we feel the urge to scratch the scabs that formed in those painful, passionate days; to awaken what once was, to give way to what could have been.

True family is found when pain washes away everything we have ever known. As we lay in the desolate wastelands, we are far too aware of what remains; what is truly precious.

Are all family trees ever-green?

Are the hinges of that door truly rusted shut, or will it fall open upon the suggestion of a winter breeze?

Poetry and Prose:

1. [Migration of a Crane - Yoganjana Singh](#)
2. [Servabimur — We will be Saved - Yashi Tripathi](#)
3. [Swords Akimbo/They Stayed - Gowri S. and Nila Mukund Varma](#)
4. [Homes Transfigured: Hiraeth - Poojita Chand](#)
5. [Emadatse for Rubu - Rachel Choden](#)
6. [High Tide - Chunchangliu Gonmei](#)
7. [Home Regained - Yuvika Nagar](#)
8. [Poet and King - Ayanna Kohli and Harshita Srivastava](#)
9. [Bye-Bye Birdie - Ayanna Kohli and Patricia Nicole](#)

Adventures in Wonderland: Jabberwock's First Movie Night

1. [Kumbalangi Nights: How a Thatched Hut Becomes a Cherished Home - Gowri S.](#)

Art by: Harshita Kumari

Edited by: Ananya Maddukuri and Ayanna Kohli

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Migration of a Crane



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Some journeys are linear and horizontal,
Back-and-forth;
Some, hollow-boned and airborne,
Seek to subsume the world.

Can a heart beat against the wind
it inhabits?
When the communion is falling apart
and the East is just a promise.

The unanimous narrative always sides
with the lore,
Flying along ancestral lanes;
A spotted skyscape that ripples to clear blue.

Yet one transgressor is often stolen
from the siege;
Drifting with the current,
Till ivory plumes have transfigured to soft tufts of vapour.

Solitary, she is still brave,
But so lost.

Imagining the routes she thought she felt,
Patterns, once breached, are altogether dispersed.

The air pressure hangs heavy
on her tendons.

Finding home becomes a matter of life;
When at night, sleet layers in the rifts of her wing.

None hear her call.
None hear her cry.
Besmirched without belonging,
Another yearning Icarus falls from the sky.

Written by: Yoganjana Singh

Art by: Rachel Choden Tamang

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3 Likes

Servabimur — We Will be Saved



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TW: Death

The lapis waters of the River Styx drown the heavens in blue. Dying stars lie mirrored in the stagnant water, offering oneness with the universe with a single touch. Fog looms above, casting a pellucid gloom upon the darkness that surrounds the gates of the afterlife. At the ashy banks of the river, Mary waits.

She hugs her knees close to her chest as the cold slips through the cracks in her soul. Her breaths turn to ice as she stares into the water. A bell rings through the hollow silence, and a lonely cyan fire held hostage in a bone-white lamp hangs from the bow of the boat. Mary looks at the ferryman with the same hopeful eyes she does every day, a single question heavy in the air, and again, just like every day, he shakes his head, and her heart feels a strange amalgamation of happiness and sorrow.

During the eighty years she has spent on this shore, Charon the ferryman became a welcome visitor. He always arrives at the same time, clad in darkness. He doesn't have a face, yet whenever he approaches Mary, she feels like he is smiling. Today, he nods at her. Her eyes widen as she springs to her feet.

Today is the day, then. She has been waiting for it for a lifetime, but now that the day is here, she wishes it wasn't. For the last time, she gazes into the soulful waters of Styx and watches her daughter's life from the land of the dead.

Back then, Bonnie had been eight. She had been obsessed with turtles; to the point where she exclusively wore oversized turtle necks for a year and reminded her mother regularly that they were adorable. She loved her turtle Hans most in the world—after her mother of course.

When Hans passed away before his time, it had been a sign. As Bonnie took a handful of soil and threw it on Hans' coffin, Mary vowed that as long as she was alive, she would make sure Bonnie never had to go through that again.

In a year's time, her vow became null. Cancer took away any hope of being able to keep it for long. With her dying breath, Mary made one last promise.

"I will see you again, don't you worry, Bonbon."

When Mary opened her eyes again, she was at the banks of the Styx. Charon held a hand out to her but she shook her head.

"I have a promise to keep. When the time comes, I will cross this river with my daughter."

The choiceless hope in grief compelled her to hold onto the pieces of a dream in fission, hoping that one day it would be complete.

When Bonnie threw soil upon her mother's coffin, Mary wanted to scoop her angel into her arms and wipe away every tear that dared tarnish her face. She could taste those tears on her tongue as she whispered words of comfort, hoping that even a single one of them could reach Bonnie and let her know that she wasn't alone. United in grief, they cried together—one for being left behind, and one for being forced to leave.

The first time Bonnie balled her hands into fists at the orphanage, the chambers of Mary's soul quivered. Her daughter had failed to learn that kindness was the answer to their cruel world. Mary's heart grew heavy under the weight of the burden her daughter carried.

When blood oozed out of Bonnie's hand, she felt her soul prickle. This time, Bonnie didn't cry; tears had become a liability, a testimony to her weakness. She had a porcelain heart, but she pretended that she was born of brimstone and fire. She erected walls around her, locking away the little girl who loved turtles deep within them, and instead, created a girl who knew how to throw a punch, a girl who was well-versed in insults—a girl who never smiled.

Bonnie then met a man made of kindness. To the starving, kindness can feel like love. She fell hard and fast—sank into the abyss that was love, and renamed every monument inside her heart after him. She broke down the walls she'd taken pains to

build and made a hole there in the shape of him. Her hand pulled him inside, laying all her vulnerabilities bare—waiting with bated breath as he gazed upon them.

He was kind; until he wasn't. He took a sledgehammer and destroyed every reverent statue inside her. He made a hole in the shape of him in her porcelain heart, and left behind an empty chasm forever indented in her soul.

Bonnie learned not to trust. She lost herself in everything people lose themselves in. She spent her life chasing ecstasy. Sometimes people wandered into her life, willing her to break down her walls again. But she had reinforced them with padlocks and steel. No one could get in, no one could hurt her anymore—except herself.

Every day, Mary subjected herself to the worst kind of torture possible. Paradise waited for her on the other side of the river, but she gave it up to lay shivering in the bone-deep cold. She heard whispers in the wind of ecstatic souls from Elysium, telling her of everything that awaited her. But leaving would mean breaking her promise, it would mean giving up on her daughter and leaving Bonnie all alone yet again. Thus, she wore love as armour when her body froze, wore love like a fire capable of withstanding hurricanes, and used love as a beacon of hope to guide her through the endless fog.

Today, there is no one at Bonnie's side. Her snow-white hair is caressed by the comfort of her mattress as her tired soul leaves her body. Nobody's hand holds hers as she slides into death's embrace, and no friend throws soil on her coffin.

Mary cries for her daughter. The worst thing a parent can experience is having to watch their child hurt and not being able to help them. As the time for her daughter to arrive draws near, she quickly wipes her tears.

Her daughter enters in a blue haze, and if Mary turns her head just right, she swears she can see a halo on her head. The cobwebs which had crept into the catacombs of Bonnie's heart are blown away at the sight of her mother. She blinks a few times to confirm it is true, and when she is sure that this is reality, she runs into her mother's arms.

"I told you we'd meet again," her mother whispers through limpid tears. Bonnie sinks into her mother's embrace, something she had never done with anybody else since her mother passed away. It was relief, it was safety, it was comfort, it was love—she was home.

"Shall we?" Mary asks, when they finally part from each other's arms. She takes her daughter's hand and walks to the boat that awaits them at the banks of the river.

As they set foot on the boat, Charon shakes his head. Mary raises her eyebrows at him.

A voice echoes through the darkness, "The little one carries the great burden of pain. There is no happiness in eternity for those burdened by sorrow. If she chooses to go to Elysium without bathing in the Lethe, she will never be happy, even in death. She must forget everything, including her pain if she wants a happy future."

"What do you mean by everything?" Mary exclaimed.

"Everything, including you."

The phantasm of despondency arises within Mary. She waited eighty years—alone, in frigid darkness—for this moment. She suffered with her daughter, knowing that one day they'd be together again and she would be able to give her all the love she couldn't then. Now, as she stares at the face she loves most in the world, she is going to lose her again.

"I won't! I don't want to forget you." Bonnie says before Mary can.

"Even if it means you'll never be happy again?"

Bonnie nods.

"Baby, I could never give you happiness in life. At least let me give it to you in death."

"But what about you? You've been waiting all this time, and now you'll be alone again, will you be happy?"

"As long as you're happy, I'll be happy."

When her daughter emerges from the waters of the Lethe, she doesn't walk into Mary's open embrace. She gazes at her with ice-cold eyes.

"Do I know you?"

Mary shakes her head as tears stream down her face and smiles. Bonnie smiles back at her, and Mary knows that though it hurts like the worst pain in the world, it will make her daughter the happiest she could ever be. That will be enough.

Written by: Yashi Tripathi

Art by: Sherrie Thai, Pinterest

Swords Akimbo/They Stayed



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On one fine morning, a young bard decided to write a poem for, and about, their beloved, their closest compadre of all, after they realised that despite all of their best efforts, their ice-grey heart had begun missing their beloved terribly. And the rest went like this:

Swords Akimbo

Before I press your voice to my ear
and talk about the futility of it all,
I must ask thee, my dear,

to leave thine sanity in the pall.

Then we shall be left to war in peace
like a veteran twosome,
So go on and strike me with your reason,
I will parry in verses.

I will tell you I love you,
throwing punches, crazed,
you'll respond in kind, with a gun to my head.

And we will come to an impasse,
swords akimbo,
you will say, "We're worlds apart,
we shall call it a draw".

And I will cling to this moment,
this young bard's war prize.
I'll hold on like a vice,
to your drowsy goodbyes.

Before your voice leaves my ear,
and I'm left to lament in the pall,
I must ask thee, my dear,
to treasure me, futility and all.

— Gowri S.

Their beloved, taken by surprise, pleased by her newfound status as a Muse, and mostly caught unawares by the revelation that the young bard has a heart after all, wrote a reply, which went like this:

And They Stayed

I have told you countless times what our friendship means to me, but since you need it in writing, here goes my best shot.

[My head's foggy with a cold, and I'm no poet—you'll find feelings here, not rhymes.]

They say some friendships are meant to be, but I guess this one wouldn't have worked if it weren't for my constant {in your words} pestering. You were the new kid, and I had some experience in that position. I wanted to make someone feel a little better than I did back then, so I put the first foot forward.

We started talking, and I realized we had way too many things in common. We're like the same page of a colouring book, just filled with different shades.

I tend to like people quickly—if we vibe, we vibe. But let's just say you had your walls up. People evolve differently through experiences, and that was how you turned out. I don't know exactly when those walls started coming down, but they did.

I liked you because I observed—the way you helped others, the way you were with kids, and the things you said. Sure, I brushed past a few things, but the more you spoke, the more I understood. There are a few moments I remember softly: all our queer (in every sense of the word) discussions on the first bench, Rema's classes and our non-verbal cues, eating in Jitu's class, whatever went down with the history project, and our endless rants. I loved those rants. We could talk about anything and everything under and above the sun for hours.

It may not seem like it, but this friendship didn't come easily—it was a journey. I've grown to like our version of it: the chosen bond. It wasn't just "meant to be"; We made it happen.

Now, we're in different states, and as time goes on, we might drift even further apart geographically. But I know that within minutes of contact, we'll understand each other as if no time has passed. I'll always be at the corner of the window, ready if you need to untangle the bundle in your chest.

Here's to all the weird and wonderful things we'll share in the future.

You're as thick as one can get, and I can't imagine not loving you.

— **Nila Mukund Varma**

Photography of: Gowri S. and Nila Mukund Varma

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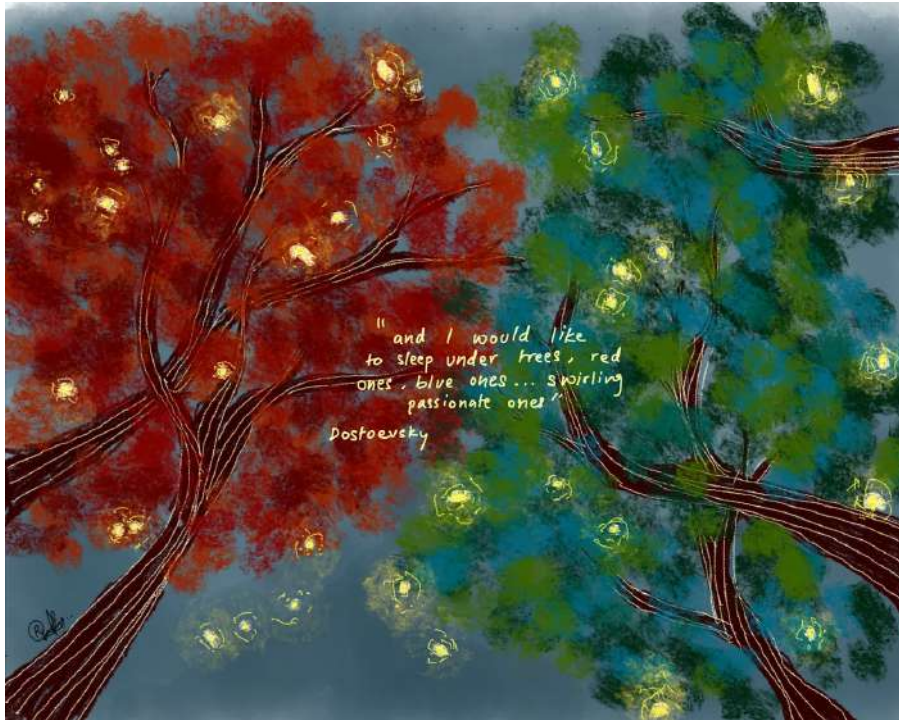
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Homes Transfigured: Hiraeth



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

JAN 15, 2025



To be ragged, wretched, with hunger and longing. Away so long, your home almost becomes a myth. You haven't touched it in so long, you don't know it exists. In this manner, love becomes an act of faith, demanding radical religiosity. The Welsh have a word for this feeling - 'hiraeth', a deep longing for something, especially one's home. But the word hiraeth is impossible to fully translate. Like all translations, we only attempt to get as close as the limits of language permit us to.

Growing up, home felt like a very simple thing— a space, another word one could use for 'house'. It was where you came back to after enduring the vicissitudes of the world. But then the demons learnt the way to my house— my mind. Thus, home transformed from being merely a physical space into being a metaphorical one. This was also the time when I read a short story titled— 'A House is Not a Home'. It followed the wholesome journey of a boy whose house caught on fire, and who was later met with love and warmth from his friends in his class. There, in that affection, he felt home.

I never quite understood the world before I started reading; I tried to, but there was a wall between the world and me. When, through paper, dead poets and authors pierced the surfaces of my heart, I reached a 'home' where I was understood. There is an unspoken love between all those who inhabit the world of literature— readers and writers alike. And so, through words I could not touch, I experienced the most

tangible home and longing. Home for me is born and reborn whenever it must be. I experience hiraeth when I am away from myself, when my solitude is nowhere to be seen. To quote someone I love, Dostoevsky: "People. People. Endless noise. And I am so tired. And I would like to sleep under trees; red ones, blue ones, swirling passionate ones." And to paraphrase another dear one, Nietzsche, these people steal my solitude without offering me any true company. If I go too long in the company of society, I ought to go mad.

I know Mary Oliver loves me, for she asked me:

It was Rilke who told me to go to the limits of my longing, and I still travel there. It is not an easy journey to undertake. But each time I am near, I see a home. Torn by diversions, I am led astray. So the hiraeth brews and builds. And sometimes, I feel this longing shall never be realised. That after so many goblins and trials, there will be no Ithaca. But if I have chosen this religion, I must be a devotee.

After mentioning my many dead lovers, I shall talk about one who is alive. He is the longing of dawn when the world is asleep, the longing of afternoon when the world walks without kissing the sunlight, and the longing of night that feels like a beginning. He never asks for my time; he only wishes that I don't lose my personhood in the shadows of society. My solitude grows monstrous in his absence. I learnt to starve. I have felt the deepest hiraeth for him. It is when I saw a person becoming a place.

Hiraeth is multiple things, it's deeper than a longing. It's a word visible only in images that we see in our mind's eye. It's a space, and a journey. It is a way of self-exploration too. Our longings define us, our homes define us. While home is not merely a house, at the end of the day you look at it gladly and feel the gratitude of a hundred suns in knowing that it exists. It exists as long as you do, and it's lovely to be afflicted with such a human longing.

Written by: Poojita Chand

Art by: Rachel Choden Tamang

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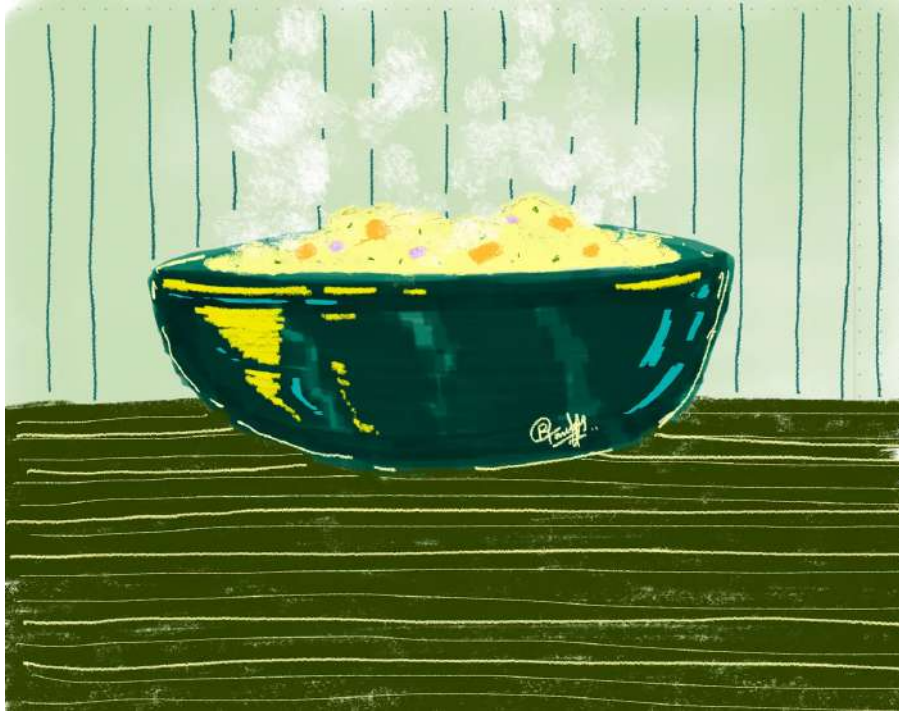
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Emadatse for Rubu



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

JAN 15, 2025



****Rubu is my younger brother's nickname— I was at a boarding school for almost all my life from class three on— and my brother will be leaving for one soon— this is for him and my love for food.***

*****Nana is used to refer to one's older sister in the Tamang language***

******Emadatse is a traditional Tibetan stew***

Rubu...

Mother tells me you're off to boarding school—
just like me, you're all decked up, a mule.
From down the plains, I holler, just to you!
The dried beef, mother packs, take it— it's fuel.

You see, when nana had to go to school,
loneliness sat on my head, so blue.
It rained on me, happy squeals and glee,
all of happy children at home, all but me.

But then came mother's special nimbus ghee!
it flew in through the chapel, my plate was free,
spoons spun out, the owners' eyes all bright,

and that was how I got some friends, you see?

And when nana was stationed off to war
at college, nana's bones were heavy, sore.
I moped around, my tongue, it wrung for food,
yet, nothing— nothing could really lift my mood...

Nana looked high! I crouched down- crude,
I struck debates, me— thela uncles and their food,
when finally— I hummed a soft bird's song,
she taught me how to sing along.

I cut and spun and fried and cried,
I fed my friends fried rice that night! (they cried!)
I used up all the sugar and lied—
lo and behold, I had custard delight!

Moved into a flat— my friend and me;
we always have friends over for free.
They bring some food, we cook some meat,
our hearts and bellies, full from lots to eat.

No matter how far wide you roam,
remember you'll always have a home;
it's not some place, thing, person you meet,
but, simply, just the food you eat!

As long as perfect crisps bring tears,
as long as tender meat sings joy,
as long as your tongue craves something sour,
you'll hear Rachu nana yell, "AHOY!!"

And when you're a fine gentleman,
the type carrying both— an umbrella and a fan,
I'll cook you warm Emadatse in a pan,
because my brother will be a wonderful young man.

Until then, won't you stay calm and breathe,
if it rains glee, it is meat you eat,
And remember to hum the birds' song,
maybe they'll teach you too— how to sing along...

Poetry and Art by: Rachel Choden Tamang

High Tide



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

JAN 15, 2025



On the beach at sunset,
Our armour half cast aside,
With fire in your eyes, and a face lit with the glow of the fading sun,
You placed my hand on your chest and told me,
"The ocean in my heart is at high tide."

Embers flicker and dance about the Ocean's skin,
As the sun runs to the offing, to be held as it passes,
The siren's song that once raged a tempest draws to a close and the sea settles.

Waves pull away from the beach,
And as war and storms pass,
I return to trace my steps back.

Back where bare feet skip to steer from muddy puddles where holes form,
Where the sun burns the forests on its climb down from above the hills.

Here I drown in the mountains,
The air too fresh, too thin,
It's too high up, too far from the ocean, and fiery eyes that churn like the azure waves.

This dawn before my eyes,

The sky and the sun, they're all in the wrong shades.

Only when I close my eyes,
A thin canvas on my eyelids forms,
Is it a memory? Is it a dream?

Still and heavy, with wood limbs and marble lips, it feels like watching
Wisps of pollen falling on concrete as bees buzz past,
Books falling into the backyard pool,
Cracks forming on leaves and skin, seeping white and red,
A lover's dying whisper forever lost to winter's wind;
Can I only rot as I wait?
I cup the ocean in my palms, but then the waves roll away.

I can only keep my eyes closed as I wait alone with the round pebbles at the shore,
Worn down soft by the ocean's torturous gentle wash.

Will we meet at high tide again?
Or will I turn to sand and settle below?

Poetry by: Chunchangliu Gonmei

Photography via: Pinterest

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3 Likes

Home Regained



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Where'd his home go?
Was't lost the day he was born?
The haven, when discovered he—
T'was not the place supposed to be,
When witnessed he the sight that made his lips quiver;
When deserted him, his caregiver;

Where'd his home go?
Never existed it in any form?
Or lost it, did he, upon putting people on pedestal,
Who deemed him forgettable,
T'was he a fool to trust in the transient?
Now, sobs he, with the parts remnant.

Where'd his home go?
Lost whilst he sat to mourn?
Tried he to treat his wound,
T'was nowhere to be found-
Everything that pierced his heart,
The grief that made him fall apart.

Still standeth tall he,
Hoping for home, somewhere to be,
Solace he gained through slumber;
Whence he went to the world wherein he was loved and remembered.

Poetry by: Yuvika Nagar

Art via: Pinterest

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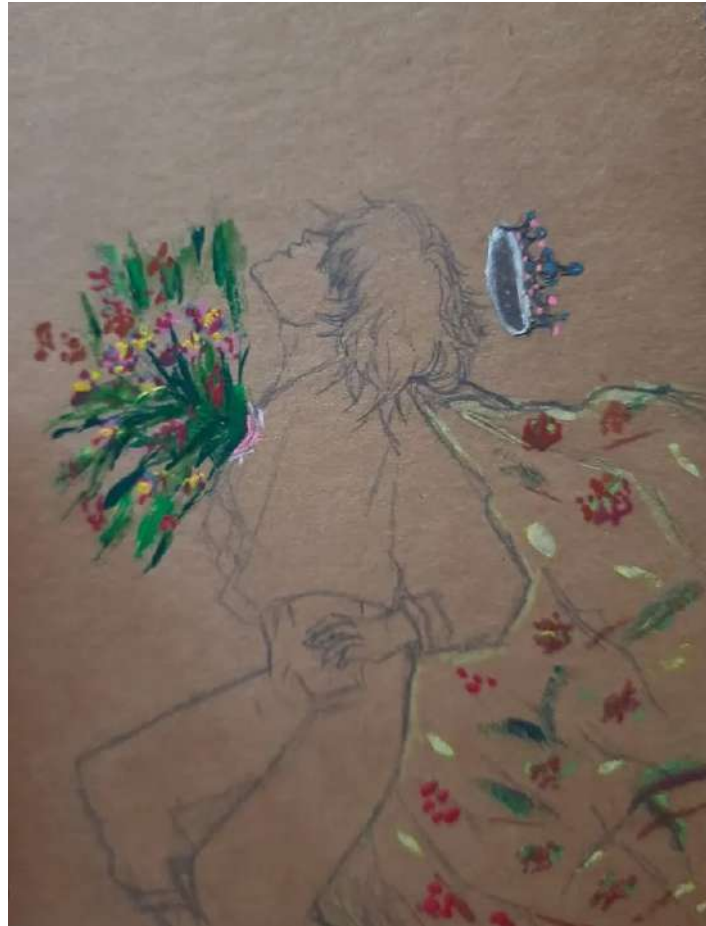
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Poet and King



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

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As a flower must bloom even in shadow,
Or the widow must wail in spring,
As the road leads astray the prodigal king;
To a poet, his muse brightens the day,
Darkens the night and prompts the rain,
Madness of his soul alighted; he will sing.

He can recall the lilt when his birds sing,
And he will live forever in her shadow,
In the memory of her scent in the rain,
Search seas for the muse of which his words spring,
He will crave her comfort, pray night and day,
Write of her for immortality, pawn of his king.

Just thinking enough to entertain, as jester to king,
Of what he had when the wind could sing,
He pines for a familiarity what once was every day,

Even a glimpse of what was, even a shadow;
He will harvest that lost bliss and forth his poems will spring,
His body will remember his skin in her rain.

Feverish nights, droplets of sweat mimicking rain,
Evaporating into mist, a fog obscuring the commands of the king,
For him, there lies only one voice from which truth could spring;
In the day march the devils, and in the night, angels sing—
"You follow one bound to the path of Light; a faithful, reverent, shadow,
In your footsteps, charts the Charioteer, the rhythm of each new day."

Listless, wandering, so drags on the heart of the herald of the day;
Searching, in pattering footsteps, for the lost patter of rain—
Certainty is an ever-shifting monster, the daughter of doubt beyond a shadow,
To confront it, lies a sword that hangs over the King,
For the poet, lies a note— one he may not write, but instead sing,
Carried forth by the birds who flock to the gardens of Eden in spring.

Not written, so she may not note the tears that bubble forth like a spring,
In eyes that are far too many for any but an angel to count in a day;
"If by some miracle," says he, "my heart does sing—
True enough to touch you," pants he, "then send to me your regard in rain,
Caress my face with the tears I yearn to wipe off," swears he, "And I shall rise up
against both Dragon and King;"
She, the heir, already knows; as in any true kingdom of dreamers, all that falls is the
sun, and all that rises is the shadow.

Envoi:

Lost to me even is the young song I could sing,
Having had to have left you, my step with no spring,
Away from home — I am of who I was, a shadow;
Summer passes, joy long left in my childhood day—
I start the day without you, far away from the rain,
That incredulous feeling — I have lost my king.

Poetry by - Harshita Srivastava and Ayanna Kohli

Artwork by - Ayanna Kohli

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3 Likes

Bye-bye Birdie



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JAN 15, 2025



*(In rigidity, in a machine so all-encompassing
That home is a state of being;
The fans whir, a cool temperamentality settles down
Upon our slick, well-oiled hairline fractures—
A quiet vibration is the harmony of our life;
More so than our heartbeats, and more so than our footsteps and—*

*And the dust that settles within our crevices,
A testament to our history,
It turns into nothing more than a loud irritant.*

*Yet to the bird,
Its feathers congealed by human enterprise,
Dust is the filament of its wires,
Sat upon and molded,
Claimed— through physical occupation,
And left— in flight, that natural mechanical marvel.*

Order, they demand from us,

*Pairing up our days in constant movement—
A weak imitation of a poem,
No rhyme, no reason,
Days in perfect couplets,
Yet no partner for the seventh.*

*That day, that aberration,
I now use it to tell the tale of one who bears
A loss more profound than that of capital.)*

the sky sings my hymns, each note in dissonance—
discord once heard; my moniker a refrain,
i reach my hand out to answer, like a trance;

once more, i remain fettered by my feathers;
the clock that seldom ticked – the shoe that ne'er fit
when shall these curbed wings of mine guide me hither?

these stars remain vast as the light they emit.
to chase our dreams that we've declared — (they have fled)
if we could soar once more, i shan't let us split

for you, who traverses the stars — what lies ahead?
have you chased (y)our dreams; bid them love, or good-bye?
thrashing legs, racing to leave the warmth of bed.

we wrote our scars on that same auroral sky,
perhaps we have always been one, you and i.

*(My chest is a room that houses an empty cage;
Open, hollow,
A monument to a formerly matching rhythm—
Footsteps and heartbeats and—*

*And my ribs form the bars;
There was a heart they kept safely captive once.*

I prefer the cage covered.

Swaddled in clothes and jewellery and emblems of duty.

A stillborn baby I nurture— a doll I sing to at night.

*Do you really still love me?
Re -evaluate the distance between us, please,
Millions of galaxies spark light behind your eyelashes—*

*Farther than I have the strength to reach out;
Solace calls my name, and repeats it enough to convince me it is you,
Late at night, when I look at what to leave due,
Tiny fingerprints, I see, masquerading as childish birds—
Door slammed on a future signed away by smudged identity.*

*Love makes demands of us as well—
That we must choose,
Must split in the face of tradition,
And turn our narrative to a dichotomy.*

*Of course, for now, their eyes are turned away;
We'll play pretend for another day,
And i'll let you tell me the words our story should say.)*

Before you go, you must say farewell, mister,
Your tie aligned on the center line, words sibilant as the temptation of
The one who always disappoints his sister.

Thorns obscure your path— ah, you just missed her!
Still, thorns must cling to roses, after all, you chase the call of love;
Before you go, you must say farewell, mister.

Bleeding palms; join them, say your psalms, see if they blister;
Felix culpa; let your closed eyes guide you towards redemption, your wings will lift you
above
The one who always disappoints his sister.

Fate's words plot eulogies; silver tongue, Au/Ra twister,
In the rafters comes their echo, perching like a dove,
"Before you go, you must say farewell, mister."

A man once bound, by his own words, look at his eyes now glisten,
The sun peers at the wax upholding his wings, or lack thereof;
The one who always disappoints his sister.

In flesh that yearns for mortal spirit, there lies the divine urge to assist her
In carrying out the funeral for the life you plan to leave behind- her quiet plea your
final shove;
Before you go, you must say farewell, mister,
The one who always disappoints his sister.

*(If you haven't left yet,
Then I suppose I must first,
You know you can't sit here forever—
There is a world outside our paradise,*

*Words beyond my stories,
And days that follow some order.*

*Fly forward, flap your feathers;
Felicity fashions a forgettable fate—
For failure to fall further away from familiarity,
And family friends to find fortune in florid fallacies.*

In truth, it takes heart to live reminiscing.)

Poetry by - Patricia Nicole and Ayanna Kohli

Art by - Ayanna Kohli

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4 Likes

Kumbalangi Nights: How a Thatched Hut Becomes a Cherished Home



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

JAN 15, 2025



Title: Kumbalangi Nights

Language: Malayalam

Genre: Drama

Release Year: 2019

Rating: 10/10

Plot:

Set in the titular fishing village of Kumbalangi, in Kochi, Kerala, the movie follows the lives of four estranged brothers, living together in a dysfunctional home. How they heal themselves and become better people and how they learn to stand together as a family forms the crux of the story.

Review:

Kumbalangi Nights is a family drama in all its myriad shapes and forms, despite not entirely conforming to the conventions of the genre. Instead of a typical middle-class nuclear family trying to navigate their differences, the story follows a broken home and four brothers. Their relations are convoluted, their lives are rundown, and their poverty is potently displayed in the film. The story reels us into the centre of this whirlpool as it explores how they reforge their fractured bonds and redefine the very notion of family.

Kumbalangi Nights' biggest strength is in its simplicity. The film focuses on the simple life of the fisherfolk of Kumbalangi. Writer Shyam Pushkaran wrote the movie based on the time he spent in the village in his twenties, and his adoration for Kumbalangi is made palpable through the visuals supplied by Madhu C. Narayanan. The dysfunctionality of the central family is realistic to a painful degree, and Pushkaran taps into the oft-unexplored lower class through them. While mainstream films push the mostly unrealistic rags-to-riches story arc to any lower class character in their movies or make their sole tragedy their poverty, Kumbalangi Nights explores the emotional and social relations between members of the lower class. From a perspective of privilege such as mine, stratification ceases to exist outside the middle class— there are rich, upper middle class, lower middle class, and poor. But Kumbalangi Nights brings forth an interesting dichotomy between the middle class and the lower class. The characters and their flaws are equally independent of and intrinsic to their life situation, and the movie expertly navigates it, even showing how they learn to overcome it— in the most realistic manner possible.

This broken family consists of Saji, Bobby, Bonny, and Frankie. Saji is the oldest of the four, a middle-aged and lethargic man with no real livelihood, and Bobby is cut from the same cloth, the only difference being his age. Bonny is mute and speaks through sign language; he is a dancer who mostly stays away from their home. But he's especially close to the youngest, Frankie, a teenage kid who studies in a residential school away from home. The film opens with Frankie's homecoming; throughout the movie, we see his longing for a real and happy family. At every significant story beat, Frankie's reaction is shown first, and despite not being the instigator of any of the

events which shape the narrative, Frankie stays at the heart of it, as he becomes visibly more and more happy as the movie goes on.

On the other hand, we have the opposing family, the one which fits the societal norms of a 'normal, happy family'. This family of four comprises Simi, a simple-minded, newlywed woman, her younger sister Baby, a vivacious and independent young woman, who becomes Bobby's love interest early on in the movie, their mother, and finally, Shammy, Simi's husband, a strange man of curious habits, who bears a sinister demeanour. This family, despite ticking all the boxes of a happy family, shows itself to be far more disturbing and abusive than the other, with Shammy dominating the family as a parasitic patriarch, while Simi and her mother comply with it. Only Baby, the youngest, rebels, much to Shammy's chagrin.

Kumbalangi Nights would not be what it is without the stellar performances of the actors, all disappearing into their complex roles with ease. Fahad Fasil, who portrays the main antagonist of the film, shines in his role of Shammy, bringing to the screen a menacing energy that creeps onto the audience, giving literal chills with how realistic it is. Yet everyone is evenly matched on screen, their words natural, speaking in the tongue of the common fisherfolk, almost like they're not even acting. The movie lets out little gasps of laughter in the moments of humour where the delivery of a single dialogue becomes the punchline, all to the merit of the wonderful acting of the ensemble cast.

With regards to the visual language of the the best word to describe it would be "organic". The movie is rife with rich moments that capture the natural beauty of the backwaters of Kerala, completely stripped down and raw in the way it is presented. There is a real and palpable admiration for the village of Kumbalangi in every frame of the movie, and it came as a shock for me to realise that this movie was director Madhu C. Narayanan's debut. The visual language of the movie aids the narrative beautifully; usually, it is the wordless moments that hold the most poignant emotional depth in a scene. For example, the simple shot of a smiling Frankie taking out a fancy china tea cup from a dusty shelf and washing it to serve a guest some tea translates his joy at having someone over at his home better than any dialogue could have done. But what makes that shot even more beautiful is the music. Music director Shushin Shyam has crafted music which not only aids the movie's visual richness but also enhances it. The recurring melody of the song Cherathukal (literally translating to 'lamps') throughout the movie, goes from inducing an all-encompassing feeling of melancholy within the audience to leaving them, at the ending, with a comforting note of elation. When I moved out of my home in Kerala, and, halfway across the country, into Delhi, I found myself repeatedly listening to his song; reminding myself of home over and over again. The music is muted, pensive, and evocative, plucking at one's heartstrings like a maestro and expertly commanding their emotions.

What sets Kumbalangi Nights apart from several of its contemporaries across the industry is one thing- that it did something which several of its contemporaries failed to do: address social issues with incredible tact and an absolute lack of subtlety. The

issues of class difference, misogyny, patriarchy in the domestic sphere, toxic masculinity, and mental health are present at the core of the movie, and saying that they were woven in seamlessly would be a mistake. They are the beating heart of the story's narrative. The protagonists' evolution from being slaves to these issues, to reexamining it, to improving themselves and overcoming it is the story's throughline. The movie does not make a statement. No character gives a big speech at the end and talks about how women don't belong in the kitchen, men shouldn't be ashamed to cry and all jobs are honourable. It is demonstrated, it is shown, and most of all, it is not a moral lesson, it is not a Public Service Announcement, and it is not portrayed as something remarkable, but natural.

At the end of it all, Kumbalangi Nights is one of my all-time favourites for a very personal reason. Several members of my family make ends meet through fishing and live in the same environment as portrayed in the movie. The movie is a love letter to the fisherfolk of the Kerala backwaters. In my home state, which is mostly a coastal area where fisheries are a huge part of our culture, this movie holds a special place. There is no Malayali out there who doesn't love Kumbalangi Nights. It is a movie which does not preach, does not judge, but one that simply invites you to watch the tale of a broken family. A tale of love, in all its shapes and forms- romantic, paternal, fraternal, and, ultimately, familial. If you're like me and have a weeping heart, keep some tissues ready.

Written By: Gowri S.

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2 Likes

Wabi-Sabi



JABBERWOCK ONLINE
MAR 23, 2025



"For the rest of your life. That's how it works. You could take the negative view and live in fear: Will it happen again? But it won't hurt so much if you just accept it as a part of life."

— **Banana Yoshimoto, Kitchen**

It is often said that our body is a temple; a monument worthy of worship, built and maintained through faith.

Yet history has ravaged temples, laid them bare to nature and let humans decide whether they should emerge as the victor. The marks they bear remain a testament to

the centuries they endured. Their sculptures, weathered by the elements, carve out new dimensions; each flaw ameliorating what remained.

Still, pilgrims journey incredible distances for even a glimpse of their majesty; dilapidated or not. For every cobweb, every crack represented hopes for the future unknown, for the failure that had to come and for the wisdom prophesied. Perhaps these marks proved that it existed un-isolated, breathing every breath of life.

A stain on a dress, words that should not have been said, and a grammatically incorrect sentence. Even as we cringe away from such incidents and escape into a world of our own making, it is those same incidents that make hands reach out to calm us, to catch our wrist before we take flight.

For some, perfection is achieved only in death. And every death is but purgatory on the way to rebirth; yet still, fractured hearts, mended by lacquer, can be painted in gold.

An imperfection is a mark. And of course, the guest book of history cannot remain blank.

This issue, we seek to pay tribute to those marks, to accept them, those perfect imperfections; in ink, and in blood.

After all, even if one covers the scars they bear with endless scarves, erasing them would mean losing oneself; losing what was and what could have been.

So, reader, what do the marks upon you look like?

Are they tattoos—meaningful and colourful mementos?

Or, are they simply there to brand you?

Poetry:

1. [*A Bead/She - Ayanna Kohli*](#)
2. [*Apples, Seeds, and Worms - Yashi Tripathi*](#)
3. [*On a Brief Dalliance with Time - Poojita Chand*](#)
4. [*Pygmalion's Prayer - Gowri S.*](#)
5. [*Roses and Fireflies - Yoganjana Singh*](#)
6. [*Unruly Diary - Chunchangliu Gonmei*](#)

Prose:

1. [*A Mosaic of Farewell - Yuvika Nagar*](#)
2. [*A Peculiar Thought - Sowmya Bhaskar*](#)
3. [*Poseidon's Daughter - Saisha Srivastava*](#)

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Edited by: Ananya Maddukuri and Ayanna Kohli

Photography by: Yoganjana Singh

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4 Likes · 1 Restack

A Bead/She

(Of Letters, In Letters— A Lipogrammatic Epistolary)



JABBERWOCK ONLINE
MAR 23, 2025



Azure beads slip from grasping hands,
Coaxed down by the gravity of the situation;
Just quiet enough to not wake you from rest.

*(One day a letter came,
For me,
For me,
The letters kept coming—*

*Dear,
It said,
Deer; my eyes widened.*

*Dear,
I wrote this long before you will see it.*

Your eyes will cry tears long before I will feel them.

*Maybe if you read this now,
It will make you feel like I knew what you lost
In your —
Of your —
youth.)*

A necklace is a passive choker,
When hands circle necks,
Arms are necklaces,
Fingers a maze,
Affixing,
In vernacular, a claim;
Glimmering, branding,
Jabbing light,
IQ dripping in sparkling lines;
I can never find
An escape.

*(There was an older,
Much older,
Letter that came one day.*

*It wasn't at my doorstep.
It was in my hands,
I was made to close my hands around it as if in prayer.*

*It was for my parents,
I was told;
I ripped it open with bitten fingernails.*

*Respected Parents,
It began,
I did — I did, I did.*

Respected Parents,

This letter is about your daughter, out of a place of concern.

We have noticed that she has not been as lively as usual in the classroom.

*In the past, she was always *curious*, and *quick* —)*

A gale blew,
Beaded fae jangled weal —
Dangled a pen, a fable laden blade —
Vale ablaze—
Page aflame.

Mangled men gamble fame,
Plead and weep,
Bang and bawl;

Jaw agape,
Awe pained.

A few blame me;
Glazed wax,
Aflame,
A gem, a bead,
Deaf and lame.

Delve deep,
Wade, expand;
Gaze, demand;
A bangle, a band
'N me.

*(I wrote a letter one day.
The lies I tell are longer when penned in your language;
They're deliberate, I am not fluent enough to lie easy.*

*I did not start it with any sort of familiar address,
Nor with any endearment;
Perhaps I thought it was proof of familiarity and fondness enough
That I was writing at all,
That I did not bother with adding another lie for the sake of formality.*

*Even if it was all there was,
I don't think i'd tell you about content
Meant— what I meant—
These letters are mine.*

Or the drawer's.

Or they belong to the dust.

Or the other rubbish, the loose beads I pile on top of them.

Or— I lost you first— they belong to anyone but you.

I didn't address them formally, after all.)

გვიპყრობდა კვამლი, ჩიტებს გაჰქონდათ ჟღურტული ზეცაში, ძილს უფრთხობს
ჭიქების ჭახუნი მინებში

*(There's nothing left to say.
It's perfect; I don't have anything that I want to.)*

Rough translation for the stanza in Georgian: 'We were overcome by smoke, the birds were carried away, chirping, into the sky; our sleep was disturbed by glass clattering on the ground'.

Note - The above, in the original language, is a pangram, containing all the letters of the Georgian alphabet.

Poetry By: Ayanna Kohli

Art By: Andrea Zanatelli (Ex Corde - The Embroidery Series)

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Apples, Seeds and Worms



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

MAR 23, 2025



A little fish in the corner of my palm,
The mole on my eyelid that disappears when I laugh;
The deep set eyes that sink like anchors into my sister's skull,
Her second toe bigger than her thumb.

My hair, ending in waves, more tumultuous than the sea,
Its thickness stings like a shark's teeth,
It wants to claim my face and assert its rights;
A stubborn will evident in my baba's legacy of legal battles.

My mother's hazel eyes, my Nana's blue,
Overpowered by my father's chocolate brown.
My sister had a tryst with a vampire in a prior lifetime,
Yielding reddish brown eyes and razor sharp teeth.

Brown, auburn, black, and grey.
Turning to snow on my mother's head.
Blue veins, green veins run along her arms and legs,
Knife wounds, burn marks cover her fingerprints.

My knee is scraped white and blue,
Falls from cycles, stairs, bikes, and skates,
The stitches on my fingers from when I was three,

I carry the blue sky on my back;
I'm Atlas but I'm free.

Turning red in the sun,
Like camellias, poppies and azaleas,
Dark forest eyebrows and full moon cheeks,
Sand dune stretch marks and bunny teeth.

Someday I'll learn to love
This Apple that fell from the tree.
With all of its seeds and worms.
And everything else it stands for.

Poetry by: Yashi Tripathi

Art: Landscape with Apple Trees by Levi Wells Prentice

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2 Likes

On a Brief Dalliance with Time



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

MAR 23, 2025



The match births the flame,
 The wind puts it out
Flickering, flickering,
 Flickering throughout.
On wicks and leaves, on woods and houses
It dances in every quarter.

Mist-like sunlight touches my feet.
Years and seasons have passed
I tiptoe through time like
An estranged traveller. One sultry day,
In worn palms, I held a thing and

Gazed at it through the stillness of water:
Ashes in its hair like the snow
I never saw, and only heard about;
Maybe it's a myth, I don't know.

So amazed at my hair, I forgot
To see the rest. Confounded—
The face in the lake has
Not belonged in any mirror
It's ever seen. I was loved in blue;
At last I found a place. Maybe
This is how Narcissus felt
There was finally a reflection in
Which he could love himself.

It's all going away, I can't hold onto
Anything, nothing here is mine—
Not the sand that glitters,
Not the leaves that wither,
Not the fire that flickers,
Not the moon and its craters
Not even my own eyelids.
Whatever we lived, however
We despaired, amidst unrelenting time
We kissed its petals and
We danced with the daffodils.

Poetry By: Poojita Chand

Art By: Sung Hwa Kim

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Pygmalion's Prayer



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

MAR 23, 2025



and thus in the dark of a midsummer night,
head hung in shame, flowers in his arms,
pygmalion sat at the blood-washed altar,
of the fair goddess of beauty and love.

he knelt before the foam-born dove,
spitting out his heart- wringing it clean,
and sang of his love for an ivory girl,
with lips that craved her ivory skin.

"prithee, goddess, pardon my sins,
forgive my pride, my adamance,
and heed the tale of consequence
of my ill-born judgement.

when the seas punished the proud cliffs,
with storms mighty, cold and unkind,
seeing their offence to virtues profuse,
i turned away from womankind.

resolve etched in stone, i began to sculpt,
with the purest ivory, my perfect woman.

eyes wide with an innocence unseen,
curves supple and gentle with health,
nose straight, lips full, smiling with devotion, gentle,
unlike the harlots with mores torn asunder.

and the world should not taint her, blemish her,
so i kept her tucked away, in the perfect alcove i made.

yet, i tell you, goddess, as i gazed at her every day,
the arch of her brows turned uncanny and feigned,
the hair i envisioned as flames cascading,
turned inhuman, unreal and severe.

my hands shivered with want to carve it away,
to lift her lips a little more at the left,
to veil her eyes with a mystique that is coy,
to give her perfect visage, imperfections sundry".

and out his throat crawled these words,
he could only pause to save his breath,
weak of love, strong like the winter storms,
of months before, when it all began.

and thus in the dark of a midsummer night,
heart in his palm, a prayer in his throat,
pygmalion sat in front of the blood-washed altar,
of the fair goddess of beauty and love.

"prithree goddess, accept my sacrifice,
and give life to the woman i love,
i long to see it, her eyes coy, coloured with life,
as a crooked smile plays over her lips.

i long to see her arched nose smell the spring flowers,
as zephyrus cards his fingers through dark curls.

i long to see her beauty, her perfect imperfections,
prithree, goddess, give life to the woman i love."

Poetry By: Gowri S.

Art By: Jean-Baptiste Regnault (Pygmalion and Galatea)

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Roses and Fireflies



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

MAR 23, 2025



I clench my fists tightly,
but the fireflies still crawl out.
Gossamer, the flickers cease,
consumed by tenuous clouds.
I'm
left with
cobwebs
floating about.
Pastel-hued corpses
Of vivid sights and sounds.

Caught in the unyielding lines of my brother's palm,
fists that can no longer be enclosed in mine.
I lift the cup, a few sips of tea still remain,
Acrid residue; lacks in hue.
The remembrance of our laughs
has been suffused with all the times I've cried
Each breath I can count
tastes of a weebegone tear I sighed.

Hear! Hear! Inhere?

Sibling ties stand on lasting presence.
So, do they cease when one stops being around?
My absence must be of little consequence,
when damp cheeks quiver
in the silence abound.

The briars grazed my arms first,
so I could teach him how to look for roses.
Yet I stand and reconcile,
forced to inhale incense that reeks of blood.
He would not let me near.
I've tried.

Day by day,
I'm forgetting the maps of my threshold.
Fireflies are finding skies anew.
Where
will
I find
him when
he leaves too?

I've already seen my half of rare roses.
I hope he comes across the orange ones
my fireflies have left behind.
—for him to find.
—for him

Original Formatting: [Roses and Fireflies](#)

Poetry By: Yoganjana Singh

Art Via: Pinterest

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Unruly Diary

A Tanka



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

MAR 23, 2025



Unruly Diary

I'd scurry and tell stories

About life, love and

Bitter feelings. Then, to hearth—

I hate I'd made you so full.

Poetry By: Chunchangliu Gonmei

Art By: Caterina Giglio

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A Mosaic of Farewell



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

MAR 23, 2025



Will you mourn for this end or will you return to grieving over your last goodbye? Maybe you will lament it for a week, two maybe? Then you will go back to the flashbacks of those memories— the memories which I am not a part of. Would you tell about me to the next person that comes along? Would you pretend I never existed or Would you tell them about our encounter— a faint irrelevant mention, hinting at its transience like it was nothing, nothing but a mistake, like the summer last year never happened? Would you pick up your guitar for them too? Would you let them read the black diary that you've hidden in one of your shelves? Would you bake brownies for them too? Would you take them to the same places— our places? If someone knocks on my door to offer love once again, I will tell them about your favourite movies and songs and cafes. I will travel back to those old places, hoping to find a trace of you somewhere— and I will fail to find you, yet you will be there besides me when I will walk through those streets once more, each time promising myself that it's the last time. I never believed in the concept of forever— it's too fraught with limitations and utopian idealsbut I believed in whatever the two of us had. But it faded away, quickly became a thing of the distant past— just how do you leave behind a time and place

that doesn't exist anymore? Perhaps that's what life is— a tapestry of flaws and ephemerality. And I will create a mosaic of those moments— a mosaic of every farewell.

Prose By: Yuvika Nagar

Art Via: Saint Peter Mosaic Art Gallery

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A Peculiar Thought



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

MAR 23, 2025



Just the other day, I had a peculiar thought that crossed my mind. Something that I had pondered on about quite a lot, but never wondered about the nature of the thought itself. I had just returned home from a long day of work, tired and burnt out from all the innumerable small things I was doing at the same time. One task to a few to a hundred, was I even doing any of them? Was I giving each of these things I needed to accomplish my complete and unwavering attention, was I doing any one of them at all, if not nothing...

Painting a banner, stitching an outfit, mopping the paint-soaked floor in college, writing a letter, a title, an essay, a practical report or cooking dal; all the small things that look mundane at first but pile up like the list of unread books on my desk, demanding and demanding my attention, my eyes, and my hands.

Why is it, I wonder, that we end up thinking these thoughts? When looking on from the outside, one would hardly imagine such a battle coursing through someone's mind, as they are jotting down notes, looking focused at a lecture hall. But it is precisely these moments and these times where we encounter the beautiful paradox

of a seemingly put-together and sophisticated life interspersed with periods of chaos, where one can only be described as utterly broken and definitely not sorted out.

Would the love that you feel for someone be as strong as it was if hate didn't exist? Would chocolate taste as sweet if some salt were not added in? An entity would not be enjoyed as much if it was regularly occurring and common; just as a shining kindness that seems so special in a dark world. We yearn, we long, and we crave the things which we miss the most, more than the things that we see around us every day. All through these moments of chaos, of imperfection, and of doubt in the world of certainty, I realise that I live and I live... Uncertainty is the darkness that lets the certainty of hope shine bright; letting life be felt in all its forms, colours, shapes and sizes, accented by the multiplicity of experience, thoughts, and memories. I feel then, is darkness all that bad? A villain in all our hearts that makes the hero of the novel seem virtuous, I think, as I take a sip of water, look back into my notebook and write down the next point.

Prose by: Sowmya Bhaskar

Photography by: Sowmya Bhaskar

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Poseidon's Daughter



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

MAR 23, 2025



I grew up near the ocean. We lived near a chain of hotels and resorts, on the sole turf that hadn't been grabbed by a developer and turned into a tourist hubbub. During the summer, I would work at my friend's gift shop near the beach for some extra cash and to kill time. I've always had an innate connection with water, everyone in my family did. At twelve, I was convinced that I must have been part Greek in my last life — *'Poseidon's daughter'*. At fifteen, when I experienced heartbreak for the first time, I envisaged the ocean waves to be the words I couldn't speak. During sunsets, I would

observe couples on their honeymoons at the beach. Between the world behind us and the endless water ahead, the sand was an intermediate place, a transient space which was uniquely mine. It seemed as if the water and I were one.

I am twenty now, fresh off the boat from London, back at home after two years, with straightened hair and glittered eyes. The accent I supposedly picked up in the city is suddenly dropped when the cab driver speaks to me in my mother tongue. I realize then that I can be an excellent shapeshifter. A few miles down the road, and I see it again, my 'home', the water, the beach. I let out a short sigh of relief I didn't know I was holding in. What is this feeling, this anticipation? Am I meeting a long lost lover, one that I left to pursue my dreams? The idea is laughable, but when I look at it again — the water, the sand, the skyline — I am met with pangs of guilt.

Everyone at home greets me with love. I go down to the beach with my little cousin Lola and Ma after lunch. She squeals when she enters the water, but she doesn't let go of my hand. Lola keeps calling me a 'city girlie'. We build a sand castle together, but the minute we get up, the waves sweep it away. 'It's okay, Lola, we'll build another', I start to say, but she doesn't care, she runs away to build another without me. Gosh, once when I was her age, I cried to the point that my father had to drag me away from the beach, all because I saw my sand castle being swept away before my eyes.

"It doesn't feel the same," I tell my mother. It slips out, without my intention, before I can catch it, but now it's out in the air, and my mother glances at me questioningly. "When your grandfather died, I couldn't understand how the world could go on without him. Obviously you are not feeling the same. My point is, the tides don't stop. Life goes on. Perhaps you will never be the same again, but that's not the worst thing in the world. You are the ocean's child, like everyone in this family, who was born here. No matter where you go, the water will be with you." I realise then that there are tears on my face... I half expect the waves to stop and confront me for leaving... but they never do. 'Look at your hair, it's the humidity!' Ma exclaims with a light laugh. It's puffed up, the saline water having clamped up all the keratin I had amassed in my hair. I'm home.

Prose By: Saisha Srivastava

Photography via: Pinterest

A Picnic in Sunder Nursery

An anecdote



JABBERWOCK ONLINE
MAR 23, 2025



From Left to Right: Komal Kashyap (below), Gowri S., Ayanna Kohli, Debasmita Borah, Yoganjana Singh, Ananya Maddukuri

Area: New Delhi

Type of Outing: Picnic

Rating: 5 polygons

A Sunday morning, running late, we meet up at the college gates as we embark on our first trip as Jabberwock Online. One chaotic auto-trip later, we arrive at Sunder Nursery, which exists as an idyllic paradise nestled in the middle of the hustle and bustle of Delhi, surrounded by tradition; past, present, and future. We wait as more people arrive, and then trace our way through the blooming flowers that encapsulate early spring.

The trip has its hiccups along the way, and our congregation has an addition at the last minute; yet it is much welcomed by the attendees. The arrangement starts off with my extremely pale bedsheet that is to be our settee, despite my companions' concerns. The picnic begins with the main course: the food— obviously. The spread includes nachos, pasta, a plethora of cookies, oreo fudge balls, and plenty of fruits and juice.



The spread (spot the fruit!). Plushies and decor credit to Ayanna. She somehow has the most extensive collection I know.

After everyone has their hearts full with food and drink, we go on to describe the inspiration behind our outfits, with our theme being, 'A mosaic of anything you love'. Some of our outfits encapsulate our love for our families, some for our favourite

artists, some for beloved fictional characters and some as a remembrance of the first instance of our adult independence. The Uno battle came next, as we conspired with each other to give the closest probable winner a stack of draw two's, creating the origin story of the greatest revenge in history.



Playing Uno with stolen cards courtesy of my darling friend Sowmya

As we fight to be heard through the music of the neighbouring couples, we go on to have our fortunes divined by Tarot, during which we get to know each other with 200+ questions on a personality test. For the next half-hour, we draw each other, drawing lots four times to pick our victims— ahem, I mean our muses, with a background of rock music (We were trying to beat the couples). When we finish, we apologise profusely as we hand our art to our forgiving muses.



For the next two hours, we film a reel— one that you should definitely check out on our Instagram page. No spoilers. And then, the only phone that has any internet connection dies, so we are stranded. The End. Thank you for reading. Ok, actually no. We walk and walk, climb the occasional tree and take so many photographs that our phones have no storage left.

Our trip ends quite dramatically — in Wabi-Sabi spirit — with a sentimental decorative bottle being broken by accident; the bottle itself having been bought on the day Ayanna and I were announced as the upcoming editors-in-chief of Jabberwock. It also witnessed the teary eyes that bid our previous editors good-bye as they voyaged out into their own spheres of undertaking. Past and future now colliding, just as Sunder Nursery serves as a juncture between Humanyun’s Tomb and the bustling streets of Delhi; just as we placed flowers over the farewell that we had once conducted, we now commemorate the incident by using a picture of the broken glass shards as the main header of our issue, proving that things may not go as one planned, but their value can be ameliorated by their imperfection.



Condolences to Ayanna who lost a beloved bottle on that fated day, just as I had broken my trusty lunch box a few days prior.

Anecdote by: Ananya Maddukuri

Photography by: Komal Kashyap, Ayanna Kohli, Ananya Maddukuri

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Kiki's Delivery Service: Magic and Maturity

Monthly Movie Night



JABBERWOCK ONLINE
MAR 23, 2025



Title: *Kiki's Delivery Service*

Language: *Japanese*

Genre: *Animation/ Fantasy*

Release Year: *1989*

Plot:

Kiki's Delivery Service is the tale of a young girl's journey towards embracing herself and her independence; set in a fantasy realm, blending the whimsy of magic with the realities of adolescence. The story explores Kiki's relationship with magic and how the same mediates her relationship with her own personal abilities, taking the viewer along with her as she emerges into her true self.

Review:

Kiki's Delivery Service is a movie that, in this day and age, thirty-six years after its initial release, hardly needs an introduction. It exists symbolically alongside the Ghibli name; a name that has become synonymous with stunning visuals, heartwarming

stories, and the conveyance of an underlying beauty that reverberates around the mind of any viewer, resonating with them for years afterwards.

Directed by Hayao Miyazaki, *Kiki's Delivery Service* is, indeed, no exception to this description. It transports the viewer, fully immersing them into the world of the story through its combination of likable characters, depth-filled scenes, and landscapes rendered in a way that make them feel intimately familiar.

And that, in its essence, is the hidden joy of the movie; the familiarity it unlocks within you.

The music, composed by Joe Hisaishi, balances perfectly with the rendering of each scene, enveloping the viewer, weaving the threads of the story so that one is left snug within a cocoon of sentiment.

Truly, the charm of the movie lies within the warmth the viewer feels in their chest, the subtle ball of feeling that twinges as Kiki faces each of her trials; as she is helped and hindered on her way to maturity.

When the members of *Jabberwock Online* watched the movie together, they did so initially as individuals unsure of their place to comment upon the film. However, as the film progressed, each of the members found a sliver of their own heart, their own feelings, encapsulated within it, and thus began to talk animatedly about each scene and what it meant to them personally.

The movie, mirroring the setting of one of its early scenes, acted as water for them; allowing them to reflect on themselves, their experiences, and realise the depth behind them.

Kiki starts the movie as an impressionable young woman who is self-confident and who has faith in her ability to handle the wider world, beyond what she is used to. She is capricious, yet determined; driven in her desire to succeed whilst doing what she is best at, making the most of who she innately is.

Yet, she discovers, having the will to exist and to thrive is not enough to understand the nuances of such an existence, and forging such a will before developing that understanding makes her vulnerable to self-doubt.

The mastery of *Kiki's Delivery Service* lies in its subtle imagery; what is left unsaid, but still understood innately, because it is, yet again, to each of the viewers, somehow uniquely familiar.

Kiki associates her sense of self with her magic; similar to how many people associate their 'self' with what makes them 'special'. In the film, Kiki's magic starts to wane as she grows older, just as some of the epithets of one's youth may disappear along with the passage of time in real life.

Kiki's broom, and tangentially her ability to fly, form the axis of the film's metaphorical poignancy. Early on, Kiki insists upon the efficacy of a broom she crafted herself, before being handed a more reliable broom by her family; time-worn, safer. Her broom is what she clings to in an unfamiliar environment, what allows her to find a new home, a new means of employment. She brings that piece of her youth with her, lets it cradle her and give her a sense of security; what she knows, what magic has always been to her, what she has always been to herself.

In contrast, as Kiki begins to emerge into her true, mature, self, as she begins to re-examine her own abilities in the light of the sun rather than in the light of her home, the film brings in new forms of flight; both of her own definition and of the people who are newly around her.

Kiki's Delivery Service is as much a story of Kiki's companions as it is Kiki's because they help define her; or rather, they help to define her expectations of the world she is to live in.

She is primarily accompanied by her cat, Jiji, who serves as both a link to her past and as a symbol of her magic, of what she stands to lose; the tangible pain that comes with the loss of childhood security and wonder, childhood perfection. She flies with Jiji, with Jiji being witness to her inexperience on a broom.

As she moves to a new town, she is greeted warmly by a woman named Osono, who encourages her to fly, but more-so simply encourages *her*, and who emerges as a mother figure for Kiki. Kiki first meets her while flying, and it is her hospitality that makes Kiki decide to stay.

Kiki also meets a child her own age, Tombo, who is fascinated by flying. He embodies the shift that comes over Kiki, personally being content to experiment and fail, trying

unconventional methods of flight. He is initially met with disdain by Kiki, who later comes to see him with affection.

Flight thus becomes a model of re-invention for Kiki, for her to see, and accept, the imperfections in herself implicitly, and a medium for her to get used to questioning- the gateway towards understanding.

Kiki's Delivery Service, a movie that sought to transcend its original source material, does so by enhancing the empathy one feels for its titular character. Kiki is not a one-dimensional 'childish girl', she is bursting with personality; determined, yet careless, kind, yet petulant. She is full of the contradictions of adolescence, the true imperfections of youth, which are what bring about, in this reviewer's opinion, the perfection of the movie.

Yet, even as the movie ends on a happy note, the viewer's heart remains begging for more. Such is the sad truth of any story told of one's childhood; no matter how exciting the story itself may be, the ending will always remain unsatisfactory, simply because the end of a childhood story is the beginning of a story of adulthood, and one feels the chasm in between the two open wide, they look down and feel the hesitation one does before they jump.

But they do jump, after all.

With movies like this, that leave one feeling as if they are somehow incomplete, perhaps the implication is that there is one missing fragment left; one for the viewer to slot themselves into.

This reviewer sincerely hopes that you watch *Kiki's Delivery Service* for yourself, see if you can find yourself in its missing fragments, and decide whether that jump is worth it.

Review By: Ayanna Kohli

Artwork By: Ayanna Kohli

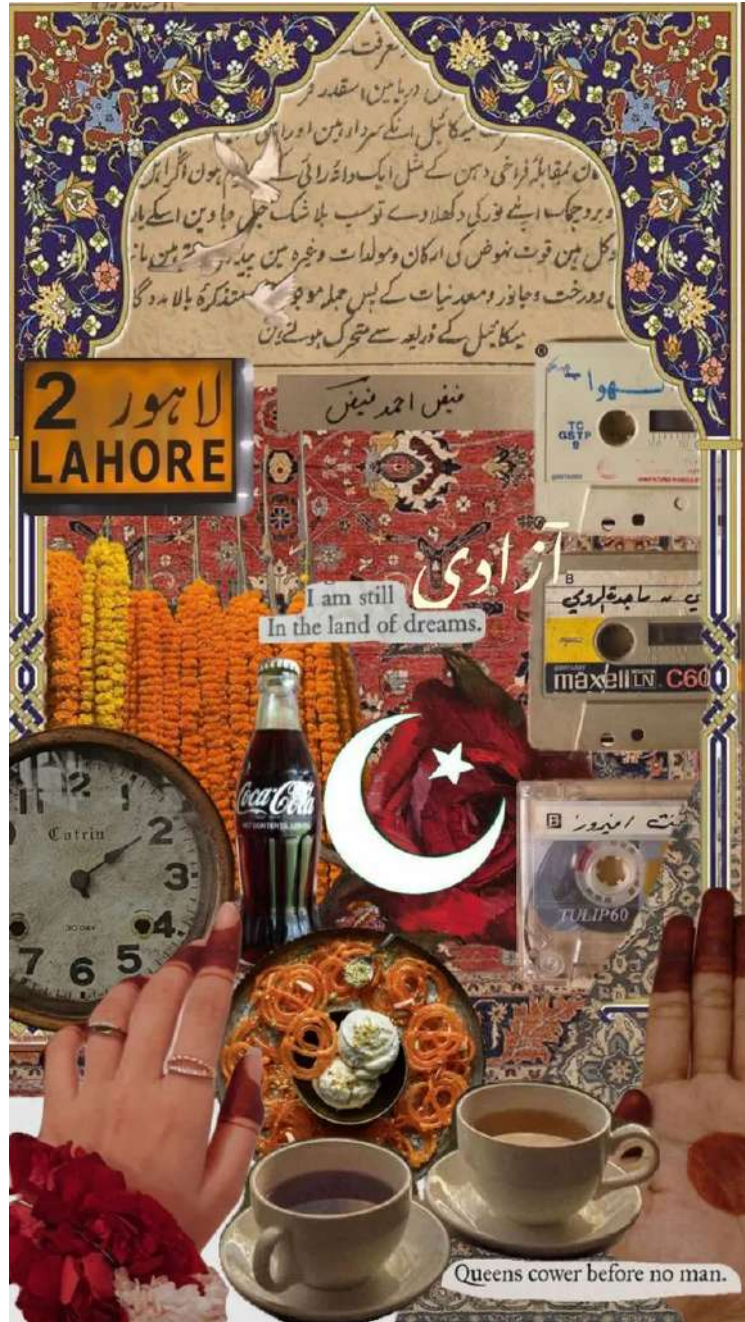
Read the whole issue here: [Wabi- Sabi](#)

Zauq

A column by Meenakshi Jha



JABBERWOCK ONLINE
FEB 08, 2025



Imagine the joyful sweetness of letting Badam Kulfi melt in your mouth.

Imagine the fulfillment you would experience after gourmandising on a batch of Biryani.

Imagine the intoxication most of us encounter after taking in the aroma of freshly

brewed Adrak-Chai.

Taste, pleasure and variety in each of these aforementioned experiences, have worked in tandem to evoke a feeling of satiation. Zauq aims to recreate these diverse experiences of satiation not through food but by analysing facets of Urdu poetry, wherein each syllable has an aftertaste that will rejuvenate the fatigued palate of your mind.

The word 'Zauq' denotes the concepts of perception and taste in Urdu, allowing you to feast on what most poets have said about the myriad of mundanities that morph our minds and lives.

Poetry is a delicacy in ink and Zauq is a flavourful celebration of its units, one new issue at a time.

1. [Sheher-O-Shayari](#)
2. [Iqtidar-e-Ishq](#)

Art by: Bismah Mughal, Pinterest

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Sheher-O-Shayari

Zauq, A column by Meenakshi Jha



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

FEB 08, 2025



I don't have a home.

Often, glances riddled with pity are thrown my way when I say so. The statement is both true and false. It stands true because my ancestral home was swept away in a flood before I was even born. On the other hand, it stands false because my family went on to create abodes they would cherish dearly, everywhere they chose to migrate. The only homes I have ever known are Delhi and Varanasi, miles away from the site of the flood that engulfed my clan's hard earned labour.

Delhi has given me everything I have ever known, even the concept behind this very column. It is home to the greatest Urdu poets in history, Mirza Ghalib and Mir Taqi Mir. Ghalib, Mir and I have seen drastically different versions of Delhi yet our love for the city binds us together across time-frames. In the works of Mir and Ghalib, I have discovered the faint outlines of home-like comfort they experienced while adorning Varanasi and Delhi with pearls of paeans.

While the excruciating search for a home brought my family to Delhi in the 2000s, Mir had to leave the city in the 1780s. Distressed to see the plundering of his beloved "sheher", he sought refuge in Lucknow and spent the rest of his life there. The similarities between me and Mir are not only limited to the absence of a home. We, interestingly enough, think of Delhi the same way. We cherish its unparalleled beauty through ink-tips dipped in admiration. An Urdu couplet from him that accurately sums up our similar stances on the city flows is as follows:



یہ شعر میر تقی میر کا ہے۔ اس کا اردو میں ترجمہ اور وضاحت کچھ یوں ہے

اصل شعر دیوانگری میں

*The streets of Delhi are not just streets, they are no less than an artist's canvas
Every sight you see, looks like a painting*

Ghalib happens to be the bridge between Mir's original "sheher" and the metropolitan mammoth of New Delhi I grew up living in. Alive at the time of the Sepoy Mutiny, Ghalib elegized the annihilation of Delhi through his poetry during the revolt. Delhi was the epitome of excellence to him, an opinion that finds a place even in the following lines:



*اک روز اپنی روح سے پوچھا، کہ دلی کیا ہے تو یوں جواب میں کہہ گئے، یہ دنیا "مانو جسم ہے اور دلی اُس کی
جان*

I asked my soul, "What is Delhi?"

*The answer I received was as follows, "Imagine the world as a body and Delhi to
be its soul."*

It is true that Delhi lies at the heart of everything political, economic and cultural in India till date. The magnificence of well-pruned shrubs flanking the Shanti Path cannot be captured in metres of poetry written ages ago. Yet, poetry does not fail to

portray the essence of Delhi that lies in the stickiness of its summers, the barbarism of its winters, the quiet resignation of its autumns and the seductive bloom of its spring.

If Delhi is the home that taught me the nuances of falling in love and commemorating the intricacies of "ishq", Varanasi is the home that made me introspect about the tenets of "ibadat". I have spent nearly every summer of my life taking boat rides in the Ganges, trying to learn more about the delicate balance between the living and the dead while visiting my grandparents.

While most people know about Ghalib's tendency to write glowing descriptions of Delhi, his masnavi "Chirag-e-Dair" is a masterpiece unknown to many. The masnavi was written in Persian after Banaras, or Varanasi restored Ghalib's health while travelling to Calcutta. The meanings of Banaras vary depending on the scholars you choose to read. Colloquially however, it is believed that Banaras is a portmanteau of two Urdu words "bana" (meaning ready) and "ras" (meaning juice, a metaphor for the juices of life). In "Chirag-e-Dair" or "The Temple Lamp", Ghalib writes heartfelt reflections on the city that marks a confluence of all the juices of life in the following manner:



کی می آید به دوآگاهِ لافشِ جهان آباد

از بھرِ طوافش

So glorious is this city

Even Delhi visits it to explore

"Chirag-e-Dair" happens to be a brilliant example of secular poetry. In all the 108 verses that constitute the poem, Ghalib not only expresses his bewitchment by the city but also by the traditions of its people. He calls Banaras "bahist-e-khurram" or "the blissful paradise" and later the Kaaba of India as follows:

عبادت خانہ ی ناقوسیانست همانا کعبہ ی ہندوستانست

Banaras is the temple of conch-bearers

It is the Kaaba of Hindustan

Reflecting on Ghalib and Mir — by keeping in mind the cities I have loved and treated as my home — is an experience that exposed me to the universality of emotions. While Mir and Ghalib talked about the now forgotten bylanes of Old Delhi with awe, I often fixate on the new parts of the city to soothe my soul. When I hear Ghalib's syncretic verses that contribute to the mystical heritage of Banaras, they seem like kind reminders about inclusivity in an age in which we all battle forms of political extremism everyday.

Mir, Ghalib and I may be separated by the walls of time but our lives intertwine to serve as an ode to the idea of a "sheher" and the distinguished delicateness of masterfully penned "shayari".

Column by: Meenakshi Jha

Edited by: Ananya Maddukuri

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Iqtidar-e-Ishq

Zauq, a Column by Meenakshi Jha



JABBERWOCK ONLINE
FEB 14, 2025



Mushy brains, dilated pupils and involuntary smiles become commonplace as soon as February begins. Love and longing take over, rationality and detachment trail far behind for one whole month.

February and various forms of media share one similarity. They conspire to represent a concept many have tried to understand, yet remains to be misunderstood — a concept called love. While the way we express love ("izhaar-e-ishq") receives overwhelming attention, the power of love ("iqtidar-e-ishq") is horribly slept on.

Love is not powerful because it is universal. Love is powerful because it keeps on evolving unlike joy and sorrow, and forces you to change everything about yourself in a heartbeat.

The evolution of love is usually traced by the Sufi demarcation of its seven stages in Urdu literature and popular media. It is a great fortune to experience all seven stages. Perhaps, today you and I are lucky enough to vicariously savour the seven flavors of

“ishq” through the language of romance, Urdu.



'Stolen Interview' by Raja Ravi Varma

Dilkashi

The chokehold love has on us starts with its very first stage, attraction or *dilkashi*. It is the stage where you want to look at one person a little bit more than you look at the others. Attraction is the *je ne sais quoi* behind the burning curiosity that makes you want to know someone more. *Dilkashi* tricks your brain into painting a glowing white portrait of an individual that maybe deserves to be smothered in ugly gray. It makes you crave and an accurate account of this craving finds a place in the following couplet by **Junaid Hazin Lari**:

وہ سادگی میں بھی ہے عجب دلکشی لیے

اس واسطے ہم اس کی تمنا میں جی لیے

Even their simplicity is so peculiarly attractive

| *I have spent my entire life desiring them because of it*

Uns

If Dilkashi is craving, Uns is consumption. *Uns* means infatuation, a period of intense admiration. Your infatuation propels you to take the initiative to understand the subject of your affections more deeply. In case all of this sounds cryptic, consider this: the second stage of love is like that one fight you had years ago but could never get over. The only difference lies in the fact that during this period of being absolutely bewitched, you obsessively think about the little things your romantic interest does every waking moment, without any intention of making this performance of pining stop. The desire to be in the vicinity of your beloved constantly during this phase has been highlighted by **Bashir Badr** as follows:

نہ جی بھر کے دیکھ

نہ کچھ بات کی

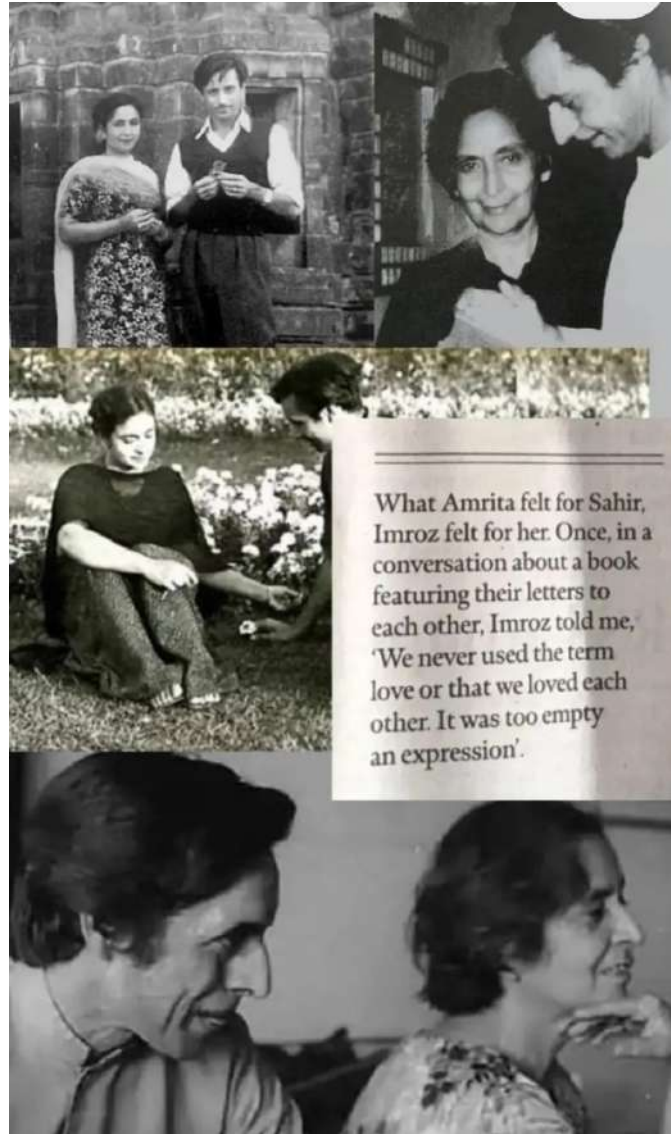
بڑی آرزو تھی ملاقات کی

I barely looked at them

I barely got my fill seeing them

Yet, I strongly desired to meet them.

Ishq



I have heard hundreds of people talk about the enigma that is *ishq*. I have lost track of the times I have tried to discern the hues of love that paint the canvas of poetic canon. I have experienced love in all its forms. I have tried to understand what love looked like to people I idolise through the letters of Amrita Pritam and Imroz, Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville West. Yet, when it came to defining what *ishq* stands for while penning this edition, I was confused about how to describe it.

Milan [posted in Trieste]
Thursday, January 21, 1926

I am reduced to a thing that wants Virginia. I composed a beautiful letter to you in the sleepless nightmare hours of the night, and it has all gone: I just miss you, in a quite simple desperate human way. You, with all your un-dumb letters, would never write so elementary phrase as that; perhaps you wouldn't even feel it. And yet I believe you'll be sensible of a little gap. But you'd clothe it in so exquisite a phrase that it would lose a little of its reality. Whereas with me it is quite stark: I miss you even more than I could have believed; and I was prepared to miss you a good deal. So this letter is just really a squeal of pain. It is incredible how essential to me you have become. I suppose you are

Confusion in fact, seems to be the very emotion you experience when you trespass the boundaries of *uns* and find yourself in the territory of *ishq* because one person becomes the centre of your universe. The actual magnitude of the *iqtidar* love has over all of us, becomes vividly clear during this stage.

Just how I have failed so far to justify what *ishq* exactly means, even **Mir Taqi Mir** failed to accurately sum up what *ishq* is (he failed a lot more skillfully than I did though). The following section, taken from a larger sher is a testament to the quandary of love Mir iconically failed to answer:

کیا کہوں تم سے میں کہ کیا ہے عشق

جان کا روگ ہے بلا ہے عشق

عشق ہی عشق ہے جہاں دیکھو

سارے عالم میں بھر رہا ہے عشق

عشق ہے طرز و طور عشق کے تنیں

کہیں بندہ کہیں خدا ہے عشق

عشق معشوق عشق عاشق ہے

يعنى اپنا هى مبتلا هے عشق

How do I tell you what is love? A fatal disease, a calamity is love

Wherever you look, you will find it, the entire world brims with love

Love is the manner and love itself is its style

Somewhere love is God, somewhere love is a slave

Love is the lover and love itself is the beloved

Therefore, love is its own meaning



'Reunion' by Salman Toor

Aqidat

As banal as it sounds, love is blind. I have always found this idea of being blindly in love scary but lately, I have discovered it to be profoundly beautiful. The reason behind people abandoning their rational faculties in love boils down to just one word,

aqidat or trust. As soon as *ishq* starts feeling inadequate, *aqidat* makes its way to convince you that staying truthful to your beloved will be worth it in the end.

The opening lines of one of **Mohammed Iqbal's** most iconic ghazals based on the eternal quest of life communicate the significance of *aqidat*. The following lines signify the trust you need to have in your love in order to pass every test it throws at you:

ستاروں سے آگے جہاں اور بھی ہیں ابھی عشق کے امتحاں اور بھی ہیں

Beyond these stars, more worlds are to be explored

Henceforth, more tests are to be passed in love

Ibadat

Ibadat has to be the most mystical of all stages of Sufi love and arguably, the most impactful too. Your love and devotion for one entity motivate you to pedestalize it. While *dilkashi*, *uns*, *ishq* and *aqidat* keep you rooted in this world, *ibadat* is the gateway to transcend this realm and the bedrock of preparing to love someone eternally. *Ibadat* makes gods out of men and it makes men out of gods. It is the stage wherein your beloved becomes the only thing you know and the only thing you need to know.

I look
at you and I would rather look at
you than all the portraits in the
world

'Having a Coke with You' by Frank O'Hara

A representation of this supposed pedestalization finds a quiet corner in **Zehra Nigah's** oeuvre in a quite detailed manner. The following couplets have been taken from a larger ghazal she wrote to chronicle how her paramour has taught her everything she knows, revering them as a godlike figure:

نقش کی طرح ابھرنا بھی تمہی سے سیکھا

رفتہ رفتہ نظر آنا بھی تمہی سے سیکھا

تم سے حاصل ہوا اک گہرے سمندر کا سکوت

اور ہر موج سے لڑنا بھی تمہی سے سیکھا

اچھے شعروں کی پرکھ تم نے ہی سکھلائی مجھے

اپنے انداز سے کہنا بھی تمہی سے سیکھا

I have learned how to stand out from you, I have learned how to render myself invisible at times from you

You have shown me the calmness of the sea but to fight with frenzy also, I have learned from you

You have taught me how to distinguish expressions of good poetry, but to express myself in my own way, I have also learned from you

Junoon

When your beloved becomes all that you know, you start abandoning any sense of self. This translates into madness or *junoon*. Your sole purpose in life becomes to attain a perpetual union with your lover. Before this stage, people look at love through a lens of comfort. *Junoon* stands for the parts of love that are uncomfortable to the point that you don't know what to do with yourself anymore. This cluelessness is perhaps the most talked about aspect of love in Urdu poetry and an open testimony to this fact is the following couplet, written by **Jigar Moradabadi**:

سب کو ہم بھول گئے جوش جنوں میں لیکن

اک تری یاد تھی ایسی جو بھلائی نہ گئی

In the enthusiasm of madness

I have forgotten everything except your memory

Maut

What begins with stolen glances ends in complete annihilation. *Maut* or death is the last stage of Sufi love. The kind of death that occurs during this stage has multiple interpretations. It can either entail a spiritual death or a physical death or maybe even both at once. This stage is not understood to be tragic, rather it is something to be rejoiced since lovers forgo their old patterns by abandoning their physicality or their spiritual flaws to achieve perfection, paving way for them enter a new realm where they can unite with their beloved in the truest sense without the illusory influence of the world. Every person who falls in love knows what it leads to at the very end and the poet **Mubarak Azeemabadi** presents this sentiment as follows:

مجھے معلوم ہے انجامِ محبت کیا ہے

ایک دن موت کی امید پہ جینا ہوگا

I know what is the result of falling in love

One day, I must patiently await death



The evolution of love is never-ending. More months of February will follow and whole new generations of readers as well as writers will keep on raving about how they express love. Yet, few will understand the artful progression of what qualifies as amatory and even fewer will understand the weight this progression carries to shape and mould lives.

Column by: Meenakshi Jha

Edited by: Ananya Maddukuri



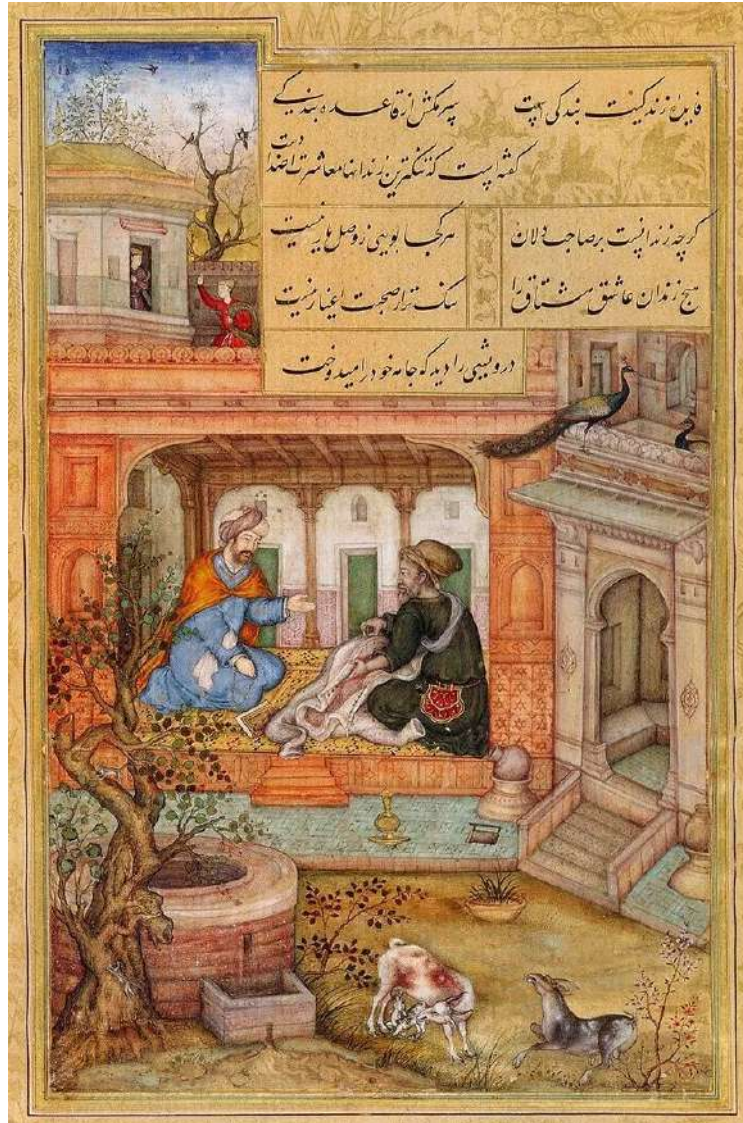
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QalaaKriti-que

A column by Dorothy Bhuyan



JABBERWOCK ONLINE
APR 21, 2024



Dear readers! Welcome to QalaaKriti-que. The title itself may give you an idea of what this column will entail in all of its coming editions. The title is a wordplay on "Qalakriti", a Sanskrit word meaning "artwork," and the English word "critique." This column will take you on a journey through art and the numerous forms it exists in. This column will bring to you a myriad of perspectives on art from all across the globe, in the form of: art and literature , art from Dorothy's lens, touching upon the various debates in the art community and its following effects and consequences; stories and perspectives of artists, art through the sands of time; art through the varied

geographical landscapes, cultures, and trends. Thus, Dorothy, with her column, wishes to expand the obvious yet underexplored space where literature and art blend with each other to give birth to something beautiful and almost mystical. Qalaa-kritique is an open space for conversations on art that go beyond just admiring it. Art can be haunting, art can be controversial, art can be more than simply admirable, and this column will enrich it's readers with all aspects of art and literature

1. [Art and Literature intertwined in History: Retracing Cultural Consciousness in the Subcontinent.](#)
2. [The Motif of The Witch: Exploring the Feminine Mystique in Europe's Art and Visual Culture](#)

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The Motif of the Witch: Exploring the Feminine Mystique in Europe's Art and Visual Culture

QalaaKriti-que, a Column by Dorothy Bhuyan



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

APR 16, 2025



The Witches' Sabbath, Hans Baldung Grien

Chapter 1: Early Modern Europe

There's something about the figure of the witch that has always pulled me in—an image that is both feared and fetishized, condemned and desired. The way she appears in art is never neutral; she is either a grotesque crone, her sagging breasts and withered flesh marking her as monstrous, or a dangerously seductive enchantress, her sexuality wielded as both power and poison. I've spent years poring

over these depictions, and the deeper I go, the clearer it becomes: the witch is a mirror, reflecting every anxiety society has ever had about women's bodies, their autonomy, and their refusal to conform.

The first time I saw Hans Baldung Grien's *The Three Witches*, I was taken aback. I wasn't prepared for the way their bodies twisted together, naked and gnarled, at once decaying and obscene. The composition is suffocating, the figures tangled in a way that feels almost incestuous, their exaggerated expressions blurring the line between ecstasy and malevolence. I remember staring at it online, then later in print, thinking about how medical discourse at the time described postmenopausal women as biologically defective—dangerous in their supposed infertility, threatening simply by existing. The way Baldung visualizes these fears is unmistakable. The witches aren't just old; they are excessive in their aging, their flesh contorted into something unnatural, something that must be reviled.

It's a pattern I've traced through centuries of art. Even when the grotesque crone gave way to the Pre-Raphaelite enchantress, the underlying message remained the same: a woman with power is dangerous. John William Waterhouse's *Sorceresses* may be beautiful, draped in soft fabrics and bathed in ethereal light, but they are still framed as a threat—always manipulating, always outside the boundaries of acceptable femininity. I've seen people romanticize these paintings, but I can't look at them without noticing the way they still trap their subjects within a rigid narrative. No matter how much the aesthetic softened, the fear of female autonomy remained.

By the time the Enlightenment arrived, belief in witches had supposedly faded, yet their image persisted, now filtered through the lens of hysteria and delusion. When I first studied Francisco Goya's *The Spell*, I was struck by the way he dismantles the supernatural, reducing witchcraft to a symptom of mass paranoia. His witches aren't demonic; they are grotesque, yes, but human. They are products of fear rather than forces of nature. That shift—from the external threat to the internalized hysteria—marked a turning point in how the witch was framed. No longer just an agent of chaos, she became a cautionary tale, a diagnosis, a problem to be solved. This however, we shall touch upon in the continuation of this piece in the next issue.

I've spent years fixated on these transformations, tracing the witch's evolution from a scapegoat to an archetype to a reclaimed symbol. It's not just an academic exercise for me; it's a way of understanding how art doesn't just reflect cultural fears but

actively shapes them. The witch is more than a figure of the past—she is a specter that continues to haunt, her image shifting but never truly disappearing.

The Witch in Art: From Persecution to Empowerment



The Four Naked Women, Dürer

The witch has always been a site of tension, caught between fear, fascination, and reinterpretation. Historically, she was the embodiment of chaos, seduction, and heresy—an easy target for society's deepest fears. But the more I immersed myself in her visual history, the more I saw the ways she has been reclaimed, transformed into a symbol of resistance, wisdom, and defiance. The same artistic tropes that once served to vilify her are now used to celebrate her.

I can't look at early European demonological prints without feeling a sense of unease. They are crude, explicit in their intent to dehumanize. The witches are twisted, grotesque, their bodies exaggerated into something monstrous. But in contemporary feminist art, those same grotesque elements are wielded differently—distorted bodies now symbols of power rather than shame. The very features once used to condemn are now reclaimed, the narrative rewritten.

Studying witchcraft imagery isn't just about history for me. It's about seeing how visual language dictates who holds power and who is cast as the other. And the witch, no matter the era, has always stood on that precipice.

Historical Context and Gender Dynamics in Witchcraft Imagery

When I first read the *Malleus Maleficarum*, I felt a kind of rage I can't fully describe. The language was clinical, methodical in its misogyny. The text wasn't just a theological rant—it was a guidebook for control, mapping out exactly why women were the natural agents of the Devil. The sheer absurdity of it made my skin crawl. Weak-willed, overly sexual, prone to deception—this was how women were framed, and not just in words but in images that reinforced every misogynistic fear the text outlined.



The Witch Riding Backwards on a Goat, Albrecht Dürer

I remember seeing Albrecht Dürer's *Witch Riding Backwards on a Goat* and immediately understanding how deeply these ideas had permeated visual culture. The old woman, her body writhing, clings to the goat, a beast long associated with Satan. Her form is grotesque, her sexuality implied yet repulsive. The composition isn't just about witchcraft; it's about disorder, about what happens when a woman exists outside of male control.

Baldung Grien took that a step further, his *The Three Witches* turning the female body into a site of horror. Their nudity isn't erotic—it's confrontational, a perversion of desire that men were taught to fear.



Melancholia, Lucas Cranach

Even larger compositions like Lucas Cranach's *Melancholy* series and Pieter Bruegel's *The Fall of the Magician Hermogenes* carried the same message: women outside the bounds of acceptability were dangerous. Whether framed as agents of supernatural destruction or as mentally unstable, their existence had to be pathologized. It wasn't enough to fear them; they had to be explained, dissected, and ultimately dismissed.



The Fall of the Magician Hermogenes, Pieter Bruegel

The Aged Witch: Fear, Sexuality, and Power in Early

Modern Art

There is something about the old woman in art that has always unsettled me—not because of her decay, but because of how much fear is attached to it. The way artists contorted her into a grotesque warning, a symbol of everything a woman should not become, is something I couldn't ignore. Society has always had a deep-seated anxiety about women who live beyond their "usefulness," and nowhere is that more obvious than in Hans Baldung Grien's work.

I remember seeing *The Three Witches* for the first time and feeling an immediate unease, not because I feared the figures but because I recognized them. I had seen that same terror of the aging woman reflected in real life, in hushed conversations about women who had "let themselves go," in the obsession with youth and fertility that dictates so much of female worth. Baldung wasn't creating something new—he was distilling centuries of cultural paranoia into a single, twisted image.

Lynn Botelho's work on old women and sexuality put words to something I had always suspected: that the postmenopausal woman wasn't just dismissed; she was actively feared. She had stepped beyond the bounds of reproductive control, no longer a mother, no longer a wife, and therefore no longer legible as a woman in the way patriarchy defined it. That made her dangerous. And in Baldung's work, that danger took shape in the form of witches, bodies gnarled and exaggerated, reduced to symbols of everything that threatened male order.

The Artistic Representation of Old Women: The Ages of Life with Death (1541–1544)



The Ages and Death, Hans Baldung Grien

The Ages of Life with Death was a painting that sat in my mind long after I first encountered it. The way Baldung structured the composition—the maid, the mother, and the widow—was so rigid, so absolute, as if a woman's worth could be divided into three stages and then discarded once the final one arrived. The old woman in the center is impossible to miss. She is stripped of softness, of beauty, her sagging breasts and lined face standing in sharp contrast to the figures beside her. It is not just aging that marks her—it is exclusion.

I've always been fascinated by the way art turns age into monstrosity. It's not enough that a woman grows old; she must do so grotesquely, unnaturally. Baldung knew

exactly what he was doing when he placed the old woman at the heart of the painting, letting her body tell a story of decline. The young figures beside her represent fertility and vitality, their smooth skin a silent accusation. There is no room for the old woman in that idealized vision of womanhood—she is the endpoint, the warning.

What struck me most, though, was how Baldung's depiction wasn't just about aesthetics. It was about control. The moment a woman moves beyond reproduction, she becomes something else in the eyes of society—something aberrant. Botelho's research makes that clear: fertility loss wasn't just a biological transition; it was a crisis. The old woman became a liminal figure, trapped between the living and the dead, not because she had changed, but because society could no longer categorize her. She had slipped beyond patriarchal definition, and that made her a threat.

The Old Woman as Witch: Infertility and the Fear of Anti-Fertility

The more I studied the connection between old women and witchcraft, the more it became impossible to separate the two. The fear of infertility, of a woman who no longer creates but instead destroys, runs deep. In early modern Europe, where a woman's worth was tethered to her ability to produce children, the barren woman was more than just an anomaly—she was a danger. I've seen this pattern again and again: when a woman cannot be controlled through marriage or childbirth, society finds another way to demonize her.



The Witches' Sabbath, Baldung

The Witches' Sabbath (1510) laid that truth bare for me. Baldung's composition isn't subtle. The witches are chaotic, their bodies twisted into unnatural forms, their power threatening simply because it is uncontrolled. And at the heart of that chaos, the old witches loom. They are not just wicked; they are repulsive, their very existence a violation of natural order. The message is clear: young witches may be dangerous, but old witches are something worse. They have nothing left to lose.

I think about how often older women are dismissed, ignored, or rendered invisible in modern society, and then I look at Baldung's work and realize that invisibility is a relatively recent kindness. In the 16th century, they were not ignored—they were feared. If they weren't nurturing, they must be consuming. If they weren't bringing life, they must be cursing it.

Botelho's work on early modern medicine showed me just how deep that paranoia ran. The idea that menopause wasn't just a physical change but a moral and spiritual

corruption is something that still lingers in quieter, more insidious ways. The belief that women's bodies, if not actively regulated through childbirth and menstruation, would "stagnate" into something monstrous wasn't just medical nonsense—it was an excuse. It was justification for the witch trials, for the social ostracization, for the relentless suspicion that followed older women throughout history.

And so the aged witch became the perfect villain, a warning to every woman about what awaited her if she lived too long, if she did not remain useful, if she did not disappear when expected. The fact that this fear still lingers, buried beneath anti-aging industries and whispered derision, makes me wonder just how much has really changed.

The Symbolism of the Aged Witch in Baldung's Work

There is a pull in the contradictions in Hans Baldung Grien's witches—the way they exist between categories, neither fully human nor fully monstrous. There is something unsettling in how his brush traps them in a liminal state, neither young nor dead, neither feared nor entirely dismissed. In *The Three Witches* (1514), this tension is especially pronounced. The figures stand together, naked, exposed, their bodies twisted in exaggerated displays of age and decay. The young witches are smooth, seductive, untouched by time, while the old ones bear the marks of their years in sagging flesh and hunched posture. The contrast is deliberate, calculated. The old woman is not just an individual—she is a warning, a grotesque prophecy of what every young woman will inevitably become.

Lynn Botelho's research has been invaluable in understanding why early modern society fixated so much on this contrast. The aging female body was not merely an aesthetic concern but a moral one. A woman's beauty and fertility were inextricably linked; once the latter faded, the former was seen as a kind of deception, a trick that nature had played. The post-menopausal body was considered unregulated, unpredictable. Without the supposed "purging" effect of menstruation, it was believed that dangerous humors accumulated within, making older women prone to corruption and vice. This medical belief was not just superstition—it was an excuse, a justification for why older women were marginalized, distrusted, and, in many cases, persecuted.

Baldung played on these fears with remarkable precision. His witches are often nude,

but their nudity is not a celebration of form. It is an exposure, a stripping away of illusion. The eroticized horror of their bodies speaks to a deeper societal unease—an acknowledgement that female beauty is temporary, that youth is fleeting, and that what comes after is something both terrifying and grotesque.

The Symbolism of Baldung's Imagery: Owls, Death, and Darkness

It is impossible to ignore the weight of Baldung's symbolism. Every element in his compositions serves a purpose, reinforcing the narratives that shaped early modern fears of old women. The owl, a frequent companion to his witches, was a well-known symbol of the occult, a creature that lurked in darkness and saw things humans were not meant to see. In *The Three Witches*, the skeletal figure looms, an ever-present reminder that time devours all. These images are not subtle—they are blunt instruments, wielded to drive home a singular message: to age is to decay, and to decay is to become monstrous.

The interplay of life and death in his work fascinates me. The way the skeletal imagery intertwines with living flesh suggests something more than just the inevitability of aging—it implies a kind of corruption, as if the old woman is already half-consumed by death but refuses to let go. This is what made her so terrifying to early modern audiences. She was not simply a woman who had grown old; she was a woman who had defied nature by continuing to exist past her prescribed role.

Botelho's analysis of these motifs makes it clear that this fear was deeply ingrained. Women who no longer bore children were considered to exist in a space between life and death, their bodies unnatural, their presence unsettling. The skeletal imagery in Baldung's work is not just about mortality—it is about obsolescence. The old woman was a reminder of what every young girl would become, a living memento mori that society preferred to keep hidden.

Art as a Mirror of Societal Fears



The Seven Ages Of Woman, Hans Baldung Grien

Hans Baldung's witches are more than just figures in paintings. They are manifestations of a deeply rooted cultural paranoia, a fear of women who exist beyond reproductive usefulness. In *The Ages of Life with Death*, *Witches' Sabbath*, and *The Three Witches*, he does not just depict aging—he indicates it. He makes it something unnatural, something grotesque, something that must be contained. The postmenopausal woman, unbound by motherhood or marriage, was an anomaly that had to be explained, and Baldung's art provided that explanation in the form of the witch.

Botelho's research helps contextualize why these images were so potent. Early modern medicine, religious doctrine, and patriarchal social structures all worked together to ensure that women who aged outside of male control were viewed with suspicion. The association between old women and witchcraft was no accident—it was a convenient way to justify their exclusion, their persecution, and, in many cases, their execution.

When I look at Baldung's witches today, I see more than just fear. I see an attempt to define, to categorize, to impose order on something that refuses to be ordered. The aged woman, the independent woman, the woman who no longer conforms—she is still a threat. The methods of suppression may have changed, but the impulse

remains the same. Baldung's art is a testament to that enduring fear, a reminder that society has always struggled to contain women who refuse to disappear.

Written by: Dorothy Bhuyan

Edited by: Ananya Maddukuri

Read the rest of the column here: [QalaaKriti-que](#)

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1 Like

The Motif of the Witch: Renaissance and the Romanticized Witch in Europe's Visual Culture

QalaaKriti-que, a column by Dorothy Bhuyan



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

APR 21, 2025



Circe offering the Cup To Ulysses, J.W. Waterhouse

Chapter 2: New Reimaginings of the Witch

Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite Reimaginings of the Witch

The Victorian era could not leave the witch alone. No longer the grotesque, nightmarish hag of earlier centuries, she was reborn in the 19th century, transformed

by Romanticism, the occult revival, and the shifting anxieties of a society that both feared and fetishized female power. She no longer cackled in the shadows—she whispered from the canvas, draped in gauze, staring out with eyes that held far too much knowledge. The witch was not vanquished. She was repackaged, softened, and made beautiful—but beauty, as always, is a kind of violence.



The Sorceress, J.W. Waterhouse

John William Waterhouse, the great conjurer of melancholy and mysticism, painted witches not as monstrous but as ethereal, self-possessed women whose power lay in their knowing silence. *The Magic Circle* (1886) is no ordinary scene of witchcraft—there is no chaotic, frenzied ritual, no gnarled fingers or grotesque sneers. Instead, there is precision. The woman at the center of the painting is entirely absorbed in her craft, drawing a protective circle around herself with a calculated grace. Her expression is unreadable. Is she performing magic, or simply protecting herself from the world beyond that line? The Victorians, trapped in their own contradictions, would have seen both (Prettejohn, 1997).



The Magic Circle, J.W. Waterhouse

But Waterhouse does not allow his witches to exist outside of male anxiety. *Circe Offering the Cup to Ulysses* (1891) drips with the same tension that had plagued depictions of women for centuries—power and seduction, magic and menace, attraction and fear. Circe, poised and deliberate, holds out a cup laced with enchantment. Ulysses, the mighty hero, is utterly at her mercy. She does not need to cast a spell; the spell has already been woven into her very presence. Waterhouse, knowingly or not, painted the thing Victorian society both craved and loathed—the woman who could not be controlled (Smith, 2002).

And yet, not all artists of the period accepted this uneasy, eroticized vision of the sorceress. Evelyn De Morgan, a woman who understood the weight of the stories being told, painted witches with something far rarer—dignity. *The Love Potion* (1903) does not present magic as seduction or danger but as a form of agency. There is no fear in the subject's expression, no hesitation in her gesture. She is not a vessel for male fantasy or anxiety—she is a woman making a choice. Where men painted witches as objects of fascination and fear, De Morgan painted them as subjects in their own right (Gerrish Nunn, 1998).



The Love Potion, Evelyn De Morgan

The Victorian witch, then, is a study in contradiction. She is dangerous, but desirable. Wise, but damned. Beautiful, but doomed. The artists of the time could not decide whether she was a creature to be feared or pitied, so they made her both, layering her image with melancholia and mystery. But beneath the gauzy veils and golden light, the same old truth remains: she has power, and that, more than anything, is what makes her a witch.

Goya's Enlightened Vision: Witchcraft, Melancholy, and Delusion in "*The Spell*"



The Spell, Francisco Goya)

Francisco Goya was not interested in fairytales. By the late 18th century, belief in witches had been dragged into the light of Enlightenment reason, stripped of its supernatural weight and reclassified as mere delusion. The world had supposedly moved past the hysteria of the witch trials, but Goya knew better. Fear is not so easily eradicated. The witch did not disappear—she simply took on a new form, lurking in the spaces between sanity and madness, between reality and illusion.

Goya's *The Spell* and its accompanying witchcraft series exist in this liminal space. These are not simple portraits of supernatural horror. They are something deeper, more unsettling—an exploration of how belief itself creates reality. The witches in these paintings are neither fully real nor fully imagined. They are manifestations of a mind unhinged, figures of grotesque distortion that exist not because they have power, but because people believe they do.

By the late 1700s, Europe had abandoned the legal persecution of witches, replacing trials and executions with medical explanations. Hysteria, melancholia, madness—

these were the new terms for what had once been called possession or sorcery. The afflicted were no longer condemned to burn; they were confined, studied, dissected by the cold eye of reason. But if anything, this shift made the fear more insidious. If witches had once been external enemies, they were now internal ones, lurking within the mind itself (Tal, 2020).

This is what Goya captures with such devastating clarity. *The Spell* is not about witches at all—it is about the terrifying uncertainty of perception. The central figure, twisted in distress, may be experiencing a supernatural event, or he may be trapped within his own delusion. The witches that surround him may be tormenting him, or they may be nothing more than the echoes of a crumbling psyche. Goya refuses to provide an answer. Instead, he forces the viewer to sit in the discomfort of not knowing.

His engagement with Enlightenment medical theory is evident in every brushstroke. The twisted fingers, the downcast gaze, the hunched posture—these are textbook symptoms of melancholia, a condition frequently linked to visions, paranoia, and supernatural delusions. Enlightenment physicians had rebranded witches as sufferers of psychological distress rather than agents of dark power, but Goya does not let them off so easily. He does not merely suggest that witches were figments of a broken mind—he suggests that the very fear of them is what gives them life.

This is what makes *The Spell* so uniquely terrifying. It does not dismiss the supernatural outright, nor does it fully embrace it. Instead, it forces us to confront the uneasy truth that reality is not as stable as we would like to believe. The witches in this painting may not be real, but does that make them any less powerful? If fear and belief can conjure demons from the shadows, then what is the difference between illusion and reality?

Goya, ever the master of ambiguity, leaves us with no certainty. The Enlightenment had declared witches dead, but in *The Spell*, they are alive and well—not as agents of Satan, but as manifestations of human terror, lingering in the space where reason and superstition collide. The painting does not just depict witchcraft; it enacts it, pulling us into its haunting uncertainty. And in that moment, we, too, become its victims.

Visual Semiotics and Theatricality: Performance of Fear

Goya understood something fundamental about fear: it is always a performance. It does not exist in isolation—it needs an audience, a stage, a script. In *The Spell*, everything feels deliberately composed, as if we have stumbled into the middle of a sinister play. The figures are confined within a tight, claustrophobic space, the lighting exaggerated to the point of surrealism. Nothing about this feels organic. It is a spectacle, a ritual, a nightmare meticulously arranged for maximum effect. And yet, the question lingers—who is performing, and for whom?

I can't help but see *The Spell* as a critique of belief itself. The witches are grotesque, their movements exaggerated, their limbs twisted in the manner of religious exorcisms and baroque theatre. This isn't just horror—it's pantomime. The wild gestures, the frenzied expressions—they feel like something borrowed from religious iconography, as if these figures are acting out a preordained role, one the audience already expects them to play. The possessed woman, the accuser, the tormented victim—it's all there, played out like a twisted morality tale.

And this, I think, is the brilliance of Goya's vision. He doesn't simply paint witches; he paints the idea of witches, the way they have been shaped by culture, religion, and hysteria. He shows us the mechanics of fear—the way it is constructed, rehearsed, and performed until it feels like truth. Enlightenment thinkers dismissed witchcraft as mere superstition, a relic of an ignorant past, but Goya doesn't let us off the hook so easily. He asks, If witchcraft is a lie, then why do we still believe in it?



The Witches' Kitchen, Francisco Goya

Christian Symbolism and the Inversion of Ritual

It is impossible to look at *The Spell* and not see the fingerprints of religion all over it. Goya was raised in a world where the Church dictated the boundaries of belief and morality, where rituals were sacred and heresy was a death sentence. And yet, in his witchcraft paintings, he does something deeply subversive—he takes the language of Christianity and twists it. The witches' hands are raised not in malevolent hexes, but in something eerily close to a priest's benediction. The gestures meant to ward off evil are mimicked, distorted, turned into something unholy.

This, I think, is one of Goya's most brilliant and unsettling tricks. He knows that fear of witches is not just about magic—it is about corruption, the fear that the sacred can be inverted, that the boundaries between good and evil are not as solid as we want them to be. The witches in *The Spell* are terrifying not because they are inhuman, but because they are too human, their rituals uncomfortably close to the ones performed in churches. What, after all, is the difference between a priest's invocation and a

witch's spell, between holy relics and magical charms, between faith and delusion?

This is why Goya's witches disturb us so deeply. They are not shadowy, monstrous figures from the abyss; they are reflections. They remind us that belief itself is unstable, that the things we call sacred are only a step away from the things we call cursed.

Goya's Audience: Intellectual Engagement with Superstition



The Witches' Sabbath, Francisco Goya

Goya did not paint for the ignorant masses. He painted for the thinkers, the skeptics, the people who sat in salons debating science and reason, the ones who declared that the age of superstition was over. *The Spell* was commissioned by the Duke and Duchess of Osuna, members of an elite intellectual circle who delighted in philosophical discussions and progressive thought. And yet, here they were, fascinated by images of witches, commissioning works that depicted the very

superstitions they supposedly rejected.

This is what makes Goya's engagement with Enlightenment thought so fascinating. His work does not merely illustrate witchcraft—it interrogates it. He does not paint witches as literal beings of evil, but as psychological constructs, figures born from fear, repression, and cultural expectation. His audience would have understood this. They would have recognized the layers of meaning, the subtle critique embedded within the grotesque imagery.

And yet, even the most enlightened mind is not immune to fear. That, perhaps, is Goya's real argument. We like to believe that reason will save us, that knowledge will dispel the darkness—but belief is not so easily unraveled. The witch lingers, not because she is real, but because we need her to be.

Goya's Enlightened Witchcraft

If *The Spell* teaches us anything, it is that witches are not real—but our fear of them is. Goya does not ask us to believe in the supernatural; he asks us to examine why we have ever believed in it at all. He deconstructs the image of the witch, stripping away the myth until all that remains is a raw, unsettling truth: witchcraft is a creation of human imagination, a performance of fear rehearsed across generations.

And yet, I find myself wondering—does that make it any less powerful? If a thing exists in the mind, does that not make it real in its own way? Goya understood that the most terrifying monsters are not the ones that lurk in the dark, but the ones that live inside us. The witch, in the end, is not a creature of magic. She is a reflection of our fears, our desires, our guilt. She is a construct, but she is ours.

Modern Feminist Appropriations of the Witch



The Examination Of a Witch, T. H. Matteson, 1853

The witch was never going to stay buried. Her image, used for centuries to justify the persecution of women, has been resurrected—not as a figure of fear, but of defiance. I have seen her everywhere: in protest movements where women reclaim the slur, in literature that transforms her from a villain into a survivor, in art that paints her not as a monster but as a symbol of power.

The witch trials were never just about magic. They were about control. They were about punishing women who refused to conform, who practiced medicine, who lived outside the dictates of church and state. To be called a witch was to be marked as dangerous, and that is precisely why so many women now claim the title with pride (Federici, 2004).

Writers like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton understood this deeply. They invoked witchcraft as a metaphor for rage, for autonomy, for the ungovernable power of women who refused to be silent (Middlebrook, 1991). Modern art, too, has embraced this reclamation, casting witches as guardians of nature, as rebels against industrialization and patriarchal rule. It is a powerful image, but one that carries its own complexities.

Because the witch was not always a hero. The people who died in the real witch hunts were not mystics wielding power; they were victims, scapegoats caught in a machine of paranoia and misogyny. And so, while the witch has been reclaimed as a symbol of strength, there is a danger in romanticizing her too much. She is not a fairy tale. She is a wound in history, and we must remember that even as we rewrite her story (Roper, 2004).

But this, I think, is the beauty of the witch as a symbol. She is not fixed. She shifts, evolves, takes on new meanings with each generation. Once a figure of terror, now a figure of power, she embodies the fears and desires of the culture that shapes her. And as long as there are people who challenge authority, who seek knowledge, who refuse to be silenced, the witch will never disappear.

She does not need to be real. She has always existed exactly where she is needed.

Written by: Dorothy Bhuyan

Edited by: Ananya Maddukuri

Read the rest of the column here: [QalaaKriti-que](#)

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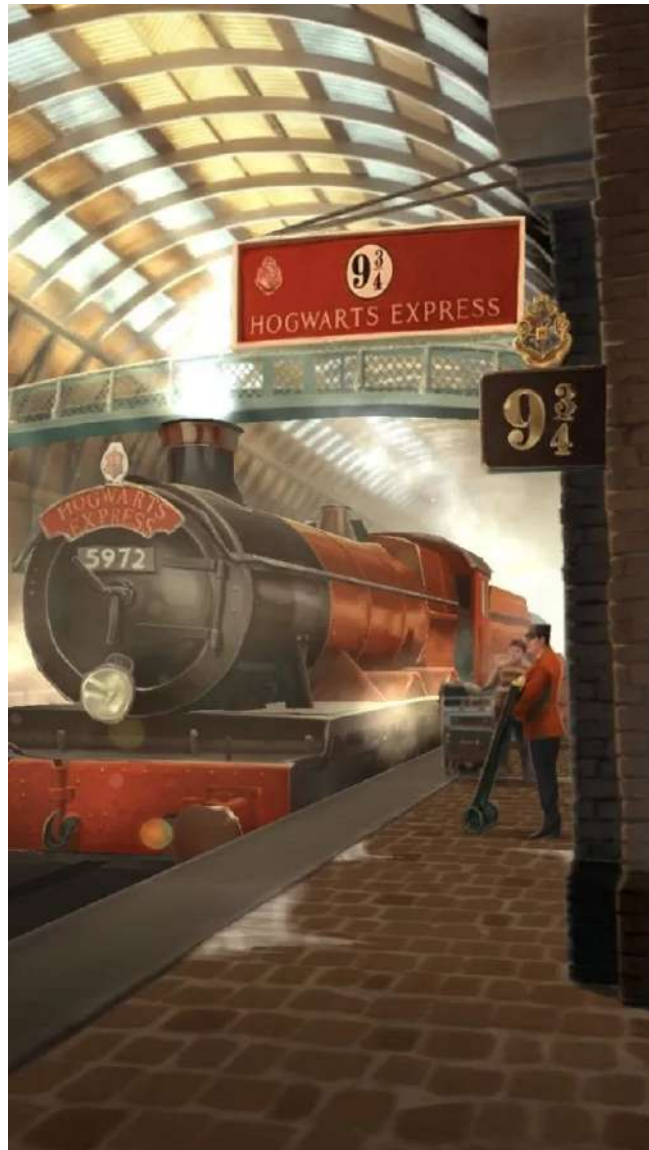
From Magic to Malevolence

A column by Debasmita Borah



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

APR 18, 2025



Remus Lupin's poignant words, "The wizarding world is not all about magic and wonder, it's also about darkness and danger," serve as a haunting reminder that even the most magical of worlds can conceal profound darkness. Rowling's series, which has attracted readers worldwide, harbours dark secrets, moral complexities, and unsettling truths lurking in the shadows. Beneath the whimsical world of wonder that captivated our childhood, the series is riddled with sinister elements.

This column explores the often-overlooked dark themes of the Harry Potter series;

from the disturbing implications of Amortentia to the troubling consequences of Hermione's memory charm; from the exploitation of the house elves to the danger of providing students with access to a range of dark spells and curses, we shall delve deeper into these shadows, where the lines between good and evil blur, and confront the uncomfortable truth within. As we revisit the magical realm, prepare to have your perception of the wizarding world changed forever.

1. [Stirring the Cauldron: A Descent into Potter's Shadows](#)

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Stirring the Cauldron: A Descent into Potter's Shadows

From Magic to Malevolence, a column by Debasmita Borah



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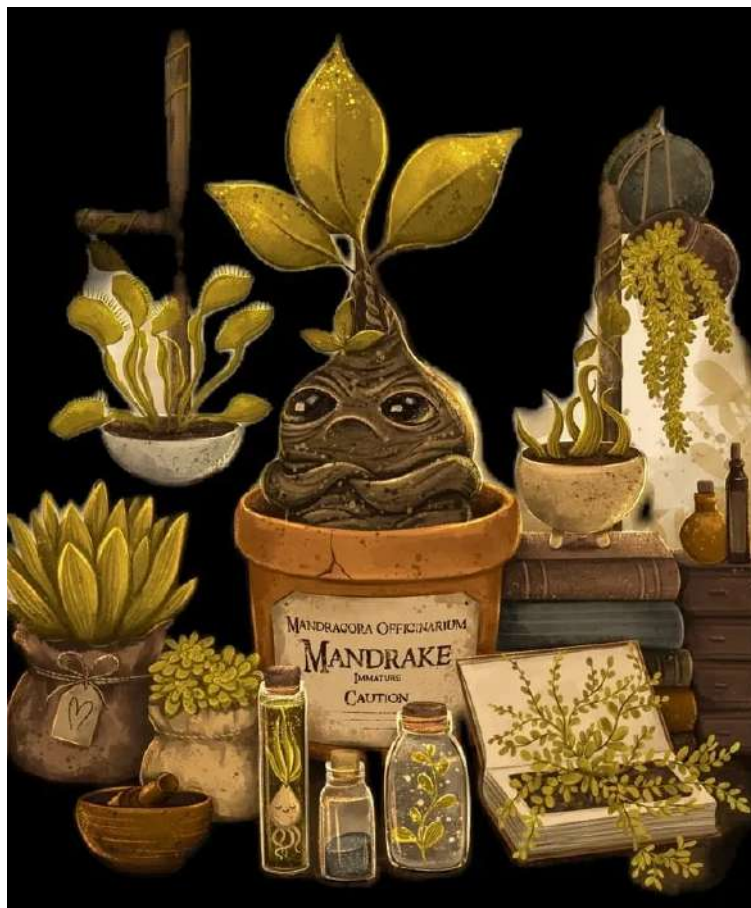
APR 18, 2025



It is a truth universally known and accepted that Harry Potter is not merely a book series; it's a cultural phenomenon, one that has influenced fan art, fan fiction, and popular culture. Harry Potter has become a significant part of many children's childhood worldwide, mainly because of its relatable characters, magical world-building, themes of love, friendship and adventure, and its timeless appeal. And why just children? There are several adults on online platforms waging fan wars on topics

which would appear absolutely trivial to non-HP fans, or the 'muggles', as we will call them from now on. I suppose an escape from reality is something we all need from time to time, and what better place to take refuge in, other than in Harry's magical world?

But perhaps, the books that we associate with childhood nostalgia are not all that innocent. In fact, there are several dark, obscure moments in the books which are generally overlooked by casual readers. However, as a critic, I must examine each word, each sentence, and each paragraph. And I have done so before arriving at the unnerving conclusion that our childhood favourites are not as straightforward as we might think. So, let us look at some of these mysterious elements which may have escaped the unsuspecting eyes of our readers.



If we let ourselves travel back to the second book of the series, the Chamber of Secrets, we would recall the panic and chaos caused at Hogwarts by a Basilisk on the loose. Those of us with a fairly sharp memory would recall that quite a few students were petrified by the Basilisk, which had further fueled the panic-stricken atmosphere in the castle. Those of us with an even sharper memory would recall that there was

only one cure to bring those petrified students back to life — mandrakes, or specifically, cooking the mandrakes and feeding them to the petrified students. Now, what are these mandrakes that Professor Sprout was growing in her greenhouse? Plants, surely? Well, no. Not entirely. Mandrakes were humanoids who were being raised from infancy to adulthood only to be slaughtered. They have humanoid physiology, humanoid developmental patterns, humanoid conversations, and humanoid social growth patterns. They are also depicted as going through puberty and developing acne, which is disturbing to say the least, as humans are the only known species to have an extended puberty and develop acne thence. Whether giving the mandrakes a humanoid character was done intentionally by Rowling remains a matter of speculation. This nonchalant raising and slaughtering of humanoids is indeed dark and ignored.

Hermione's parents. Two characters who could have been developed a bit more. In fact, Hermione seems to share Rowling's carelessness towards these characters, as proved by the rather limited amount of time she spends with them. What is inexcusably dark is the act of altering their memories without their permission. Since the characters are basically non-entities, readers don't take this incident too seriously, or even if they do, it's mainly to acknowledge Hermione's supreme sacrifice. Indeed, Hermione does something extremely courageous and selfless to fulfil her duty, and knowing her competency she likely has the ability to reverse the spell's effects. However, there is no sidelining the fact that she erased her parents' identities and compelled them to be people they are not. Imagine losing your entire identity and being forced to live someone else's life. I know Hermione finds her parents after the war and reverses her spell. However, a stunt like this would probably cripple them for a lifetime, as they would likely struggle to grasp what is real and what is not. They would find it difficult to trust anyone and their minds might be severely impaired. Also, keeping aside the ethical dilemma, it leaves behind a lot of doubts in the minds of the readers, such as the careers of the Grangers, their properties, their other relations, and their documents. It was a really calculated move on Hermione's part, and while her heart was in the right place, it could have caused a lot of damage ranging from her parents failing to cope with their shifting identities to the fracturing of the bonds in the family.



The open sale of the love potion Amortentia, the potion that gifted the world the little wonder, otherwise known as Lord Voldemort. Despite knowing that Voldemort became what he was because of the circumstances of his birth, the wizarding world didn't put any ban on the sale of Amortentia. They are played off as something to laugh at. Ron being drugged is a comic scene in the books as well as in the movies. This potion essentially robs you of your senses once it enters your body. Once you are drugged, anyone can take advantage of you and can absolutely manipulate you. It is essentially a rape drug sold openly in the market, giving easy access to teenagers, without parents or the authorities batting an eye. Molly jokingly tells a story involving a love potion, Romilda Vane doesn't receive any punishment for trying to drug Harry and Slughorn never questions how Ron got drugged. Merope is portrayed as a victim and we are supposed to feel sorry for her. There is no denying the fact that she had a hard life. However, that doesn't disguise the fact that she drugged and practically confined an unsuspecting muggle man for months, taking advantage of his befuddled state. Tom Riddle Sr. is not a particularly likeable character but we feel sorry for him when we realize that he never consented to be drugged, kidnapped, raped, or to father a kid. The "romantic" view on the love potion makes a lot of people sympathise far more with Merope than with Tom.



What about the Polyjuice Potion? Isn't that rather dangerous too? One would imagine that at least some people would protest against the careless use of this potion. While I understand that Aurors might have a use for it to go undercover on a mission, there should be laws heavily regulating its use. A bunch of second-years can concoct this potion. Even if we acknowledge Hermione's exceptional skills, it's possible that fifth and sixth-year students could comfortably brew it. Anyone can disguise as someone and do a bunch of things such as stealing, murdering, raping.... need I go on? Also, it leaves behind a number of questions in the reader's minds, such as does it also affect the internal anatomy of the person?

There are several other points which lead us towards the shadows of the wizarding world. The deeper you dig, the darker truths you discover, which draws our attention towards the gaps in Rowling's world-building. These truths are bound to mortify my readers and give them many a sleepless night. Thus, with my readers' welfare in mind, I'll conclude this column. Until the next installation...

Written by: Debasmita Borah

Edited by: Ayanna Kohli

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Buy Yourself the Damn Flowers

A column by Jiya Joshi



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

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This title captures the essence of the 'self' and control over one's own validation; Something that has been long forgotten. We all associate receiving flowers as a romantic gesture. But what if we stop expecting it, and instead buy the flowers ourselves?

From asking a friend's approval before posting pictures on Instagram to staying in an unfulfilling career out of the fear of judgment from other people, we've placed the keys of our own lives in the hands of others. The number one response to when I ask people, "but why aren't you living life the way you wholeheartedly desire to?" is often centred around others and their judgments of it.

This fear has also stripped me of opportunities and authenticity in external surroundings. From feeling silly for recording in public to my heart pounding before a presentation in a class of an unfamiliar bunch, I've hated every single time I've kept the keys to my own validation in the hands of others.

This column is my attempt to help others take back the power of their own life. The magic that we've been too busy looking in others has always resided within ourselves and it can only be harnessed through the power of self-love <3

1. [A Longing for Mental Mastery](#)
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A Longing for Mental Mastery

Buy Yourself the Damn Flowers, a column by Jiya Joshi



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

APR 23, 2025



As I write this piece, the new year is just thirty-two days away. While I feel a bit nostalgic about yet another year coming to an end, I do look forward to cultivating and embracing profound changes in myself. 2024 didn't go quite as I envisioned. Looking back, I realize I lost sight of my goals after writing them down. Taking the time to reflect on whether they genuinely resonated with me—rather than chasing them because they seemed like the standard aspirations—could have made all the

difference. I wish my mindset aligned more with my actions, and I envisioned myself growing into a confident, courageous woman by now, a version of me I'm still striving to become.

Through the ups and downs, I've gained clarity about where things went wrong. I am cutting myself some slack—after all this was the first year I set goals for myself and strived to become something by the end of the year. I have gained more insight into my self-sabotaging tendencies. Now as I look toward 2025, I feel more focused and aligned, ready to set intentional goals that truly reflect the direction I want to grow in.

The question comes, how can this growth come about? I've realized champions fall into two categories—the natural action-takers and the intentional mind trainers. Have you ever met those individuals who seem effortlessly driven, diving headfirst into action without hesitation? These are the natural doers. The mind is not their worst enemy. For them action isn't a decision, it's an instinct. Then there's another kind of champion—the thinkers. They face battles within, wrestling with overthinking, self-doubt and imagined barriers that hold them back. But here's where their true power lies: they take control. They consciously train their minds to work for them, and not against them. Through consistent and intentional positive self-talk, having a clear vision of their future and mentally rehearsing it every single day, they rewire the narrative. They transform their mindset, turning challenges into stepping stones and their thoughts into their greatest strength.

For the longest time I thought I was stuck with the mind that I had. It's not really been my best friend. But as I step into a new year, one of my deepest desires is to switch up my inner dialogue, and harness the power of my incredible asset to craft a life on my own terms. Each time I'm on the verge of action, my mind floods me with a thousand excuses—old scripts pull me back into the comfort of familiarity. My body, conditioned by years of habit, follows suit, holding me in place.

Only I truly know the weight of my setbacks and the little wins that have come along the way, and I know I can do more. Things are meant to change for the better. It's this little moral voice that you may call intuition which has always pushed me to be better and strive for more. That's how I know, things aren't always going to stay this way. I want to look back brimming with confidence and self-worth of having made it. If you've read this far, maybe you relate to this. Maybe you've wrestled with the darkest corners of your mind, the kind that whisper destructive thoughts. On such days, all

you want to do is escape. But you've also stood tall after the storm, basked in the sunlight when it finally broke through. You know the resilience it takes to weather through those storms. And what about those moments of unfiltered joy, when the world fades and your entire being feels alive? Those moments when your eyes lit up, brimming with emotions so intense they defy explanation—when others might not fully grasp the depth, but you know. Those are the moments that remind us why we keep going.



The gift of thinking and feeling deeply is a double-edged sword. Sure, it may invite overthinking, but don't let that overshadow the power you hold—the ability to express your emotions in profound and captivating ways. That's the beauty of being human. And I assure you, you are in full capacity to rewrite your inner dialogue for the better. It's not that complicated. Start by becoming aware of the thoughts that enter and exit your mind each day, and consciously replace the negative chatter with positive and encouraging thoughts. Take a moment each day—for seven to eight minutes and visualize your most confident self: the way she dresses, carries herself when she walks into a room, her posture, tone of voice and ease in conversation. Let the image sink in so deeply it feels like you're already living that reality.

Remember, anything and everything takes time to bear fruit. Especially, with toughening your mental game, it's a process that will challenge you, and test you with no motivation. But the reward? Your mind will become your masterpiece. It's about time you get started on this journey. You have everything within you to make this happen. You've got this and I'm cheering you on<3

With love,

Jiya Joshi

Written by: Jiya Joshi

Edited by: Ananya Maddukuri

Read the rest of the column here: [Buy Yourself the Damn Flowers](#)

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2 Likes

Songs of the Soul

A review by Kaniksha Jilowa



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

FEB 09, 2025



Rabindranath Tagore, celebrated as a poet, philosopher, and visionary, crafted works that transcend boundaries of language and culture, offering profound insight into the human spirit. A true polymath, Tagore wove together threads of literature, philosophy, and spirituality, creating a body of work that resonates with seekers of truth and beauty across the world. Central to his writings is a quest for spiritual freedom—an exploration of the divine that goes beyond religious doctrines to touch the universal. His poetry and prose reflect a profound belief in the divine presence within and around us, fostering a unique perspective and liberation that invites self-realisation and inner peace. In today's fast-paced, often fragmented world, Tagore's spiritual

insights remain deeply relevant. His vision of a world free from fear, prejudice, and narrow-mindedness—epitomized in his timeless poem, "Where the Mind is Without Fear"—continues to inspire readers to pursue a more enlightened, liberated existence. Tagore's literature works as a beacon, urging individuals to transcend societal constraints and awaken to a life of authenticity, peace, and universal connectedness.

In 'Gitanjali', Tagore embarks on a profound journey of devotion, offering his soul's yearning for the divine in language that speaks directly to the human heart. This collection is a prayerful offering; where Tagore seeks a union with a presence that is deeply felt yet elusive— a spiritual longing that resonates universally. Through 'Gitanjali', Tagore transcends religious boundaries, inviting readers into a sacred dialogue that reflects an intimate and evolving relationship with the divine.

In 'Where the Mind is Without Fear', Tagore's call for an India liberated from oppression extends beyond political independence to embody an ideal of spiritual freedom. Here, he envisions a society where individuals can live without fear, prejudice, or narrow beliefs; guided by a sense of self-realization and divine connection. This aspiration becomes a personal prayer for intellectual and spiritual enlightenment. Tagore's usage of phrases like "where knowledge is free" and "the clear stream of reason", reflect his desire for a world in which the mind can explore truth unencumbered by societal restrictions. This ideal of liberation, both social and spiritual, defines much of Tagore's vision in 'Gitanjali', making it a plea for a spiritually awakened humanity. As literary critic Mary Sinclair noted, Tagore's devotional poetry, with its simplicity and purity, brought a transformative presence to western audiences. Unlike complex theological constructs, Tagore's approach is personal and accessible, bridging what Sinclair described as the "great gulf" between humanity and the divine. His work offers a conversational approach to God, allowing readers to see God as a companion rather than a distant entity. This universal quality enables 'Gitanjali' to resonate across cultural and religious boundaries, touching the "common human heart" with its longing for freedom and connection. In simple yet profound language, Tagore brings a uniquely Eastern mysticism to his verses, where divinity is interwoven into daily life. This is captured in lines like "lead me from the unreal to the real; lead me from darkness to light; lead me from death to immortality."

Although rooted in Vedantic thought, Tagore's poetic voice gives these themes fresh resonance. Unlike intense Western mystic poetry, Tagore's devotion embodies a calm

acceptance that resonates deeply with readers seeking both peace and purpose. Tagore's portrayal of the divine as an intimate and personal force is central to his worldview. Divinity, for him, is present in every aspect of life, as close as one's breath or heartbeat. This aligns with the Eastern concept of "Atman", the inner self that is one with the divine. Tagore believes this connection allows individuals to transcend societal limitations, achieving a freedom that is both personal and spiritual. In *Gitanjali*, God is not a distant judge but a nurturing force guiding individuals toward self-awareness and growth.

Through '*Gitanjali*', Tagore encourages readers to see beyond societal illusions, embracing a vision of the self connected with the divine. His message is clear: the path to liberation does not require renunciation of life but an intimate embrace of its beauty and depth. In '*The Religion of Man*', Tagore articulates a vision of spirituality that transcends organized religion, advocating instead for universal faith grounded in the interconnectedness of all human beings. For Tagore, true religion is not a matter of doctrine or ritual, but a personal journey toward self-realization and a profound connection with existence.

Through this work, Tagore calls for spirituality that is free from institutional divisions, united in humanity's shared essence. Tagore's understanding of religion centers on what he calls the "religion of the poet", rooted in an intuitive experience of the divine. In '*The Religion of Man*', he describes this faith as "the harmony of our soul with the supreme soul", an inner alignment that goes beyond dogma. Tagore's belief that divinity resides within every individual reflects the Vedantic concept of "Atman". According to him, recognizing this divine presence allows people to transcend narrow identities and see themselves as part of a greater whole. His vision is beautifully expressed in his assertion that "the highest form of worship is the worship of man". Here, Tagore suggests that honoring humanity—its potential, struggles, and dignity, is itself an act of devotion. For Tagore, spirituality is deeply ethical; calling individuals to recognize and honor the divine spark in others. He emphasizes that spirituality should connect people through a shared yearning for meaning, understanding and peace.

In '*The Crescent Moon*', Tagore channels the innocence of a child's perspective to explore themes of joy, love and connection with nature. Tagore believed children hold a unique spiritual insight that adults often lose. This childlike oneness with nature

evokes a spiritual truth: that by embracing our surroundings with love and openness, we connect to a greater reality. He suggests that by experiencing the world with wonder, we touch upon the divine, recognizing the sacred in ordinary life. Tagore writes of children's dreams, play, and their deep bond with their parents; emphasizing love's spiritual dimension. Through 'The Crescent Moon', Tagore encourages readers to reconnect with their own inner child, see life with fresh eyes, and find joy in simplicity. This collection serves as a reminder for adults to cultivate humility and joy, cherishing the sacred bond uniting all beings.

In 'The Home and the World', Tagore explores the tension between materialism and spirituality, set against India's struggle for independence. Nikhil, the idealistic husband, embodies Tagore's vision of ethical responsibility and inner peace, contrasting with Sandeep, a nationalist advocating for violent methods. Through this contrast, Tagore questions whether material pursuits, even for noble causes, can corrupt ideals. Bimila's journey illustrates love, devotion and personal awakening. Initially devoted to her husband, she is later drawn to Sandeep's nationalism, sparking her desire for involvement beyond her home. This leads her into a moral crisis, symbolizing a struggle between the inner self and the allure of power. Ultimately, Tagore suggests that true freedom is both political and spiritual, requiring self-knowledge and the ability to discern genuine devotion.

Tagore's own life experiences provide context for his spiritual philosophy. Raised in a wealthy Bengali family, he was exposed to Eastern and Western traditions, profoundly influencing his worldview. His personal losses, especially of close family, fostered a sense of life's transience. Rather than turning from life, Tagore's grief led him to seek understanding in human suffering and joy, reaffirming his belief in the divine presence within daily experiences. Tagore's commitment to education and social reform, particularly founding Santiniketan, reflected his spiritual ideals. He believed true learning should nurture the soul, encouraging students to find their path rather than conforming to rigid systems. His life journey reflects a philosophy celebrating interconnectedness, inner growth and ethical responsibility.

Rabindranath Tagore's works resonate with a timeless spirituality that bridges the personal and universal, inviting readers on a journey of inner awakening, self-reflection, and connection with the divine. From the devotional fervor of 'Gitanjali' to the philosophical insights in 'The Religion of Man', Tagore's writings explore spirituality

as an ongoing pursuit of truth, freedom, and love. His belief in the unity of all beings and the presence of the divine in everyday life encourages readers to transcend societal divisions and recognize the sacred within themselves and the world around them. In today's world, marked by rapid change and often fragmented values, Tagore's insights remain deeply relevant. His vision of a compassionate, interconnected world offers inspiration for those seeking meaning beyond materialism. His reflections on love, duty, and inner peace guide readers toward liberation by fostering an open, fearless mind and genuine connection with others. Through his works, Tagore not only invites us to appreciate life's mysteries, but to actively participate in them. His legacy encourages a reimagining of spirituality as a path to both personal fulfillment and social harmony, making his words as inspiring today as they were in his time.

Review by: Kaniksha Jilowa

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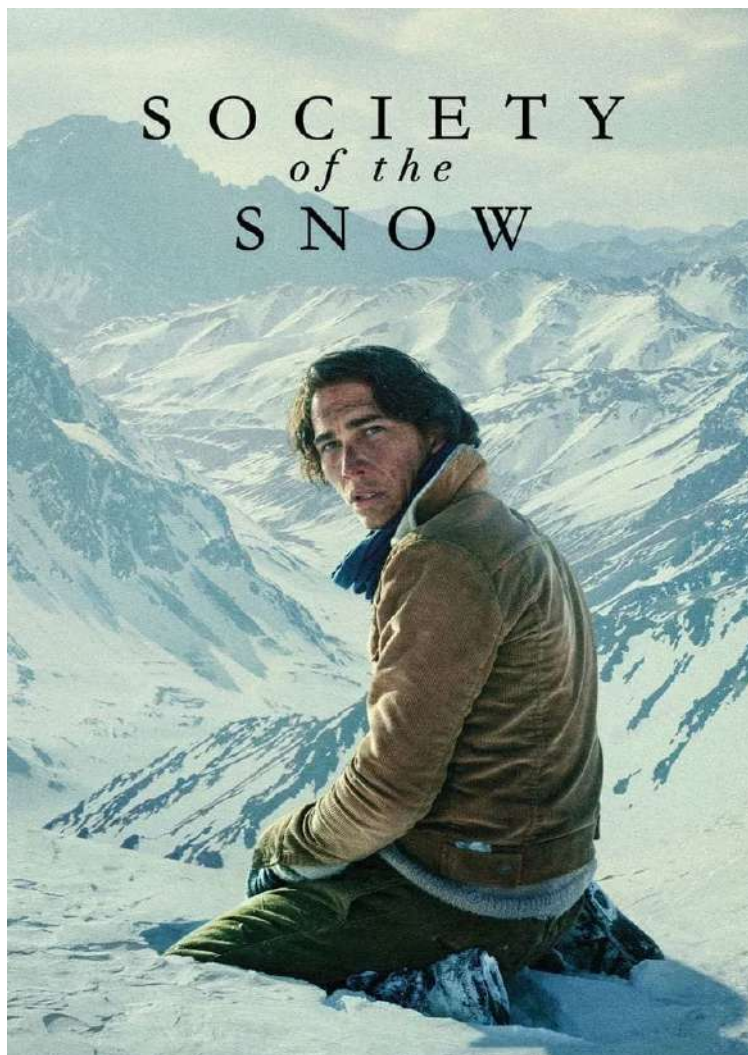
Against all Odds: La Sociedad de la Nieve

A Review on 'Society of the Snow'



JABBERWOCK ONLINE

APR 16, 2025



"Estoy vivo papa! estoy vivo!" shouted Carlitos Paez as he jumped off the rescue helicopter and ran to his father, embracing him. Words that chilled the hearts of everyone present.

On 13th October, 1972, a Uruguayan chartered plane, F-227, carrying the rugby team, Old Christians, crashed into the Andes Mountain. There were forty passengers and five crew members. Cut off from the rest of the world, given up as dead and without any provisions, this group of young men were left to fend for themselves in unimaginably hostile circumstances. No retelling can do justice to this harrowing

incident, but J.A. Bayona's *Society of the Snow* undoubtedly comes closest to capturing its essence.

The film begins with a dramatic and intense narration by the protagonist Numa Turcatti (played by Enzo Vogrincic), which sets the tone of the rest of the story. The audience is transported back to the past to witness the Old Christians Rugby team arranging a trip to Santiago, Chile, to participate in a rugby match. With friends and family accompanying many of the players, the trip takes on a vacation-like atmosphere. This upbeat atmosphere is carried over into the next scene, where we see the young rugby players in their gayest spirits as they gather in the airport. Not even separation from their girlfriends and families could dampen their spirits as they complete most of their journey playing cards, passing around the rugby ball and clicking pictures. A carefree bunch, they were strangers to suffering and had insolent attitudes, characteristic of young men. However, this jubilant atmosphere doesn't last long as the plane encounters severe turbulence while flying over the Andes range. The weather changes from bad to worse and the pilots lose control. The mood inside the plane changes abruptly as the enthusiasm and energy evaporates, only to be replaced by cold dread. Many of the passengers pray to God and cling to each other desperately. And then in one blinding instant, with our pulses racing and our mouths dry with anticipation, the plane crashes into a wall of mountains with a deafening sound. It breaks apart in two, with people and bags flying about, and skids down the mountain slope. It finally comes to a stop, with people pushed forward in their seats and the air filled with their blood-curdling screams. While several of them perish on the spot, a few lay alive for a few more hours, tormented by the biting cold and their gory injuries. The uninjured minority try their best to tend to the injured and save themselves from the numbing cold, while waiting for the help that never arrives. The rest of the movie shows how these young men, having found themselves suddenly in the face of unimaginable adversities, do everything within their means to survive. Having realized the grim truth that they were on their own, they count on each other and use the resources at hand to survive.



What Bayona's movie does better than the other adaptations is to unflinchingly portray the raw reality of the survivors without hiding the unpleasant moments under a layer of Hollywood drama and sensation. The story has been told with a lot of respect for the survivors and their moments of tenderness and friendship have been perfectly depicted. Bayona's talent and sensitivity helped him to adopt a previously untold, deeply personal way of telling the story. His major decision to portray Numa Turcatti, one of the victims, as the narrator and protagonist, tells a previously hidden side of the story. The one that sheds light on the victims' experiences and sufferings. Bayona's other moments of alchemy include the plane crash moment which had the audience on the edges of their seats and biting their nails. The intense camera work capturing the panic and disorientation, the amazingly natural acting by the workers and the deafening cacophony of voices leave no room for improvement. Bayona's ability to capture a lot of detail in a single moment is what gives the film a rich, layered depth. Even something as fleeting as a glance is not without its significance.



Bayona's ingenious ideas have been expertly brought to life by the capable cast, selected based on how closely their personalities resemble those of the real-life individuals. Be it the moments of carefree joy, the ones of numbing terror or the ones of helpless despair, each emotion has been portrayed flawlessly. The actors also underwent a rigorous journey of weight gain and subsequently, weight loss. They also filmed using real snow to make their acting as natural as possible. Even though this was the first major project for most of them, their commitment to their roles were indeed praiseworthy.

Even though all the actors did a commendable job, it was Matias Recalt who stood out the most amongst them, owing to his vivid portrayal of Roberto Canessa's character. Recalt perfectly brought to life the nuances and complexities of Canessa's character. He gives off the impression of being much older, hardened and wizened by the life-altering experience. The maturity depicted in his eyes is beyond what the makeup and special effects could portray. Recalt was the only cast member to receive a Goya award nomination and win. The film has been awarded 12 Goya awards and 2 Oscar nominations.



The survivors and the families of the victims were consulted and interviewed meticulously to ensure authenticity and accuracy. The various soundtracks used in the film also help in creating a deep emotional connection between the viewers and the characters. The viewers find themselves reflecting on what it means to be completely and utterly alone; To be at the mercy of nature, forced to confront your own humanity and spirituality. Controversial issues like cannibalism were dealt with sensitivity, and the friendship and trust between the characters have been highlighted.

This Netflix film, with its poignant and emotional storyline, its historical significance, and detailed cinematography is a must-watch for all age groups, in order to embrace the deeper meaning of life. This film earns a flawless 5 out of 5 stars.

Written by Debasmita Borah

Pictures via "Society of the Snow"

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Thailand and its Obsession with Gay Engineers

A review on 'Perfect 10 Liners' by Manasi Sharma



JABBERWOCK ONLINE
APR 22, 2025

GMMTV, a Thai television company, has always been called out for its obsession with engineers in the BL (Boy Love) series. For example, series like *Sotus*, *Dark Blue Kiss*, *My Gear Your Gown*, etc. all revolved around engineering students, in true GMM fashion. Aside from a borderline obsession with engineering students, these series also carried certain stereotypes and overused plot settings such as the initiation activities as the hub for growing feelings—The 'I am not gay I just love him' plot and many others. Though loved by the audience at first, these instances soon started being critiqued for not doing justice to the LGBTQ+ experience.

GMMTV slowly moved away from this initial obsession and started releasing a wide set of LGBTQ+ series that portrayed not only the multifaceted nature of the queer experience, but also allowed for it to be presented as part of a wider socio-cultural demographic. Despite the welcoming attitudes towards this much-needed change, GMMTV enthusiasts have always missed their engineering series.



Perfect 10 Liners, a recent release from GMMTV is like an elixir bestowed upon such

enthusiasts. The series not only follows the age-old setting of the queer engineering students but is also a representation of everything that GMMTV has learnt to do right in its portrayal of a BL series. This series in my opinion can be seen as the accumulated result of everything that GMMTV started with and has acquired in its process of making BLs. Of course, it is also a representation of how the audience's perception has changed through time and in turn shaped the representation of MM romance (male-male).

The series follows three main couples *ArcArm*, *YothaGun* and *FaifaWine*, all in one way or the other are part of the Line Code— Perfect 10 Liners, a tight-knit group comprising extraordinary individuals from different years. Divided into 3 parts, each couple is allotted 8 episodes for the exploration of their relationship, resulting in a total of 24 episodes. The series also follows two side couples *PondSand* and *KlaoWarich*. All in all, the series is filled with a variety of BL couples, each representing a different kind of romantic relationship. Single friends like Po add an extra touch of humour to the series. The series also features a straight-side couple but the lack of other representations is still there. This review will mainly focus on analysing the main couples.

ArcArm



They are the couple that the series starts with and also the most entertaining out of all the couples. The teasing and cheeky banter that forms the crux of their relationship is not only endearing but also makes you blush. Arm, a first-year, is the

most recent addition to the Perfect 10 Liners code and gets pulled into managing the engineering cute boy page due to his second-year mentor Yeepun. Eventually, he breaks the most important rule of the page— to never post a picture of Arc, famously called Beyond Star for his good looks that even beat the campus star. This mistake leads to a set of funny scenes where while trying to hide his identity as the admin of the page, Arm also gets the front-row seat to Arc's wrath.

One thing that pulls you into their dynamic aside from the teasing is that despite how much they annoy each other, they are still drawn together. It's not that they fall together effortlessly— Arm can be a big airhead, refusing to even acknowledge any flirty remark that Arc makes while Arc being the epitome of the cold guy, strict face, takes to scolding Arm more often than whispering sweet words to him. They are the kind of couple that everyone knows will end up together. It's just a waiting game of when.

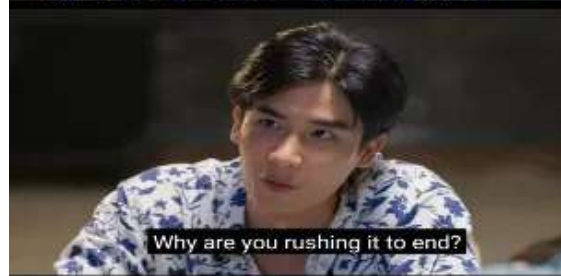
The core of their relationship is trust. Arm's implicit trust in Arc despite how hot-headed Arc can be is what underlines their relationship and Arc making sure that he never breaks Arm's trust is what safeguards it. Arc would rather change himself than lose the trust Arm places in him. The most significant portrayal of this trust is Arc explicitly asking for Arm's permission every time he kisses him. Which is refreshing to see after so many BLs taking consent for granted. Arc and Arm's relationship is like the perfect glass of orange juice, tangy with hints of sweetness that makes it all the more refreshing. Their teasing nature never takes away from how sweet these two can be. Trust me they'll make you want to go and cuddle the first available person.



But relationships take effort and so does theirs. Despite knowing how they feel, it takes them a long time to come together, which makes sense if we keep Arm's reservations in mind. Arm needs time and that's what Arc gives him. If there's one thing that Arc is sure of it's that Arm is the one for him and he will wait for him no matter how long it takes. Arc is upfront about his love for Arm and that's one of the things that makes this series different from all others that came before. He's not afraid to tell Arm he loves him even when he knows Arm won't say it back. Arc and Arm take their time to become a couple not because of societal judgement or their negotiations with their sexuality, but rather because of other factors that can be a part of any other college student's life too.



Their relationship might not be the hot chocolate on a cold day, but it is the beachside vacation; filled with laughter, teasing and an overflowing amount of love.



YothaGun



When a marriage is broken, it affects more than just two people. Yotha is the middle child from a broken family who had his world first broken when his parents split up and his mother took away his twin brother. Then again when his ex broke up with him. Yotha is the broken child who grew with glass pieces embedded in his heart and became the young adult who bleeds in anger. Gun on the other hand is sunshine, innocence and everything soft combined into human form.

Their first meeting marks how intrinsic it was for Yotha to let Gun into his guarded heart. When realising his twin saved Gun from getting in trouble due to a broken faucet Faifa states how out of character it was for Yotha to do so and maybe it was. But this out-of-character behaviour that Yotha showcases around Gun is where we as an audience find the reason for these two to be together.

Gun has his trauma with dark spaces and Yotha has his with love. Together they work to get the other out of his trauma. Yotha is someone who knows how selfish people can be. People around him have always chosen themselves no matter how much they might hurt him. In such a situation, Gun's unconditional love and care are like the first ray of sun in his life of perpetual coldness.



If Arc and Arm's relationship was teasing and trusting. Yotha and Gun's relationship is about care and selflessness. Gun is selfless in his love for Yotha, his love is built on the same innocence that makes him. He doesn't demand or push Yotha, he waits for him to fight his own battles and maybe one day choose him. Yotha on the other hand refuses to let Gun suffer the same way he had. The series, though carrying forward

the bad boy x good boy dynamic, lacks the toxicity that often invaded such representations, especially in the BL genre.

Despite the heavy emotional baggage that the series deals with, it still carries the humourous edge that was so loved in the engineering series. In this case, visual cues along with the interaction among characters is what makes it the perfect balance between lighthearted comedy and emotional struggles. Thai BL series have always played with sound cues and music to highlight or add the comedic element. The play with visual details in the series is a testament to how visual storytelling has improved from what it started with. Two of my favourite instances are: a) Newton's (Yotha's elder brother) bar which he co-owns with two other friends Warich and Nop having a pink neon sign that says— 'don't text your ex'. It's a hilarious thing to notice every time, especially because every interaction Yotha has with Warich, his ex is inside the same bar, and b) a moody Yotha wearing a T-shirt that says 'positive energy'. Such small details though not adding to the story, do add to the visual experience that the audience has.



The reconciliation scene between Yotha and his mother, aside from allowing Yotha to move forward and express his emotions, also does away with the trope of the saviour partner. Who changes the closed-off bad boy into someone who respects and is considerate of other people's emotions. Gun doesn't perceive himself as Yotha's saviour. He's just the sunshine that has melted the frostbite that refused to let Yotha express himself outside of the pain he carried. Yotha on the other hand is Gun's silent protector, he understands the novelty and importance of Gun's innocence and does his best to save him from the world and even himself.

It's a story about leaving behind the baggage you have carried your whole life.

FaifaWine



The kindest ones have been hurt the worst. Faifa, Yotha's younger brother and Irish twin is the complete opposite of his brother. Kindness to Faifa is not just his default setting but his survival mechanism. Being returned to his father after his mother started a new family, Faifa grew up learning that if he wants to be loved he has to be kind. Wine, Yotha's mentee is the most recent addition to the perfect 10-liner code. Struggling with a recent breakup with his girlfriend because he fell for her brother, Wine's struggle with his sexuality is personal. He's worried and scared about what this discovery about himself means for those around him.



Both of them have their struggles to deal with that in a way they have internalised. But it's the beauty of their dynamic that when they are together these internalized thoughts and worries are easier for both of them to express. Yotha's main concern regarding Faifa had always been that because he's kind to everyone he doesn't know what it means to have someone special. It is at times funny to see how at odds Faifa and Wine's relationship is with what people assume. But instances also underline the gap that exists between Faifa and his family, people who are supposed to be the closest to him.



The most frustrating and heartbreaking representation is a) when Faifa's mother offers him milk forgetting he's allergic and b) when he waits 5 hours for his mother at the airport without anyone telling him that the flight has been delayed.

Wine at times seems to be the only person who's able to even see Faifa. He understands the utter despair and heartbreak he hides behind his smile and works to provide him with whatever comfort he can. Their relationship is one of comfort and things falling into place. There is no exaggeration, extended heartbreak, misplaced jealousy, etc. Their relationship is like a soft blanket after a hard and tiring day.



Though they are the only couple whose confession happens in front of their friends, their story is mostly played out in a separate space, almost like in a plane that's been created for them away from everything else. The way that Wine and Faifa come together doesn't feel like it is something new that they have to work on creating. It was always there; they are just learning to see it.

Their story isn't rushed, it unfolds at their own pace with a warmth that leaves you glowing from the inside.



Perfect 10 Liners is different from any other series GMMTV has released not because it deals with a concept or idea they haven't done before, but rather because it brings out that feeling of nostalgia in every BL viewer. Just like how the couples become safe

spaces for each other, this series becomes a safe space for us—the audience. People who are new to the genre might watch it and think of it as a fun series that’s well-made but anyone who's dabbled with the genre before knows just how much of a healing touch this series carries for us. It is in a way getting back the love that you have given to this genre. I'd like to end by paraphrasing a line from the series— Love is only hard when it's one-sided, the moment you are both on the same page it becomes easy.

Written by Manasi Sharma

Edited by Ananya Maddukuri

Watch the series on [YouTube](#)

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