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# MONOGRAPH

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# Editor's Note



*I sit in one of the dives  
On Fifty-second Street  
Uncertain and afraid  
As the clever hopes expire  
Of a low dishonest decade:  
Waves of anger and fear  
Circulate over the bright  
And darkened lands of the earth,  
Obsessing our private lives;  
The unmentionable odour of death  
Offends the September night.  
-September 1, 1939 (W.H. Auden)*

The rampant politicisation of a humanitarian issue bodes ill for the future of our institutions. What was perpetrated by individuals now allows the government to swoop in with marching men, in a simple attempt to control an educational institute and by extension, the future vote-bank. You see this nationwide. Ashoka University finds a professor disgraced for writing a paper that should be protected under the principles of academic freedom. Time and time again we see the government vie for authority over liberal institutions, and the administration simply shuffles along. Where were they when Jadavpur University, which has proved time and time again its academic brilliance, needed funds for functioning. We see “Goli maaro” and “tukde-tukde” enter the local lexicon. Where will this political shit-show end?

Yes, the administration failed at protecting a student, and they deserve the ire of the

general public. But let us not sit and pretend that this is a college-specific issue. This is something that has been perpetrated, and then forgiven, for years and years, across the nation.

MLA's and MP's with little to do will not be enriching the lives of the general public by vilifying institutions as and when they see fit. Either support and introduce initiatives to eliminate "ragging" at its roots or stand aside. CCTV cameras will do little, as any other institution will let you know. They have been unable to stop ragging, sexual assault, or other acts of harassment in the past, and the future seems no different.

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





# VIOLENCE AND THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF ART IN ELFRIEDE JELINEK'S *THE PIANO TEACHER*



M D . A D N A N

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*Sometimes, of course, art creates the suffering in the first place.*

— *Elfriede Jelinek*

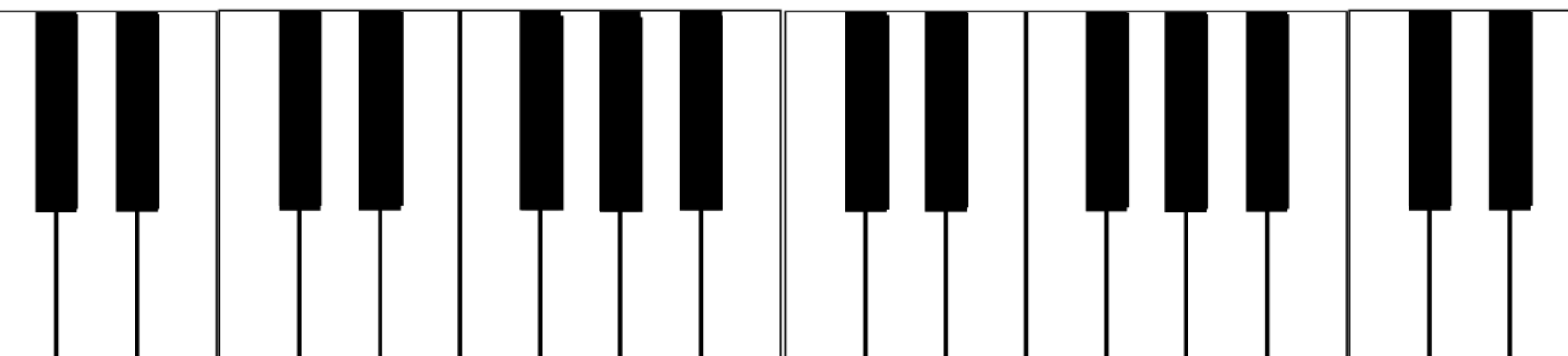
Critical reception of Elfriede Jelinek's celebrated novel, *Die Klavierspielerin* (trans., *The Piano Teacher*), has largely laid stress on reading it as a literary case study. This notion has contributed to the proliferation of insightful and voluminous psychoanalytical and gender-related studies centered around the novel where a sizeable amount of criticism has concerned itself with the titular piano teacher, Erika Kohut's sadomasochistic perversions and her relationship with two other important characters — her student, Walter Klemmer, and her mother. Such studies have recognized the novel as a significant literary achievement whose incidental contribution to psychoanalytic research cannot be denied because, as various critics have observed, Erika serves as a vital and equally demanding substitute for a real woman with acute sadomasochistic perversions. However, while the importance of music as a subject, the "inherent musicality and the thematization of music as a paradigm of art" (Powell and Bentham 163) in Jelinek's writing have been acknowledged, very few studies have explored how the novel engages with the connection between Erika's sexuality and her profession as a pianist. Even less attention has been given to the novel's illustration of the connection between violence (on one's self as well as others) and the instrumentalization of music (and artists) in Austria's post-war, capitalist society. Since the purpose of this paper is to explore Jelinek's illustration of this relationship in *The Piano Teacher*, it is necessary to elaborate on the aspect of instrumentality in art and violence that helps in realizing and comprehending such a relationship.

In his book, *Art for Art's Sake*, Albert Guérard proposes that one may distinguish three aspects inherent in art: “Art may be perfect adequacy to purpose, the purpose itself being worthy or not in terms of social welfare... Art may be the sheer joy of living, a gratuitous activity with no thought beyond itself... Art may also be the battle line of the spirit, the venture beyond the law”. For Guérard, art can exist as a service, a means of relaxation, and/or as something that goes beyond pleasure and utility, involving an awareness or appreciation of transcendence. What is extremely relevant for this paper is the conception of art as a service, as a medium of utilitarian and functional expression, as a means of achieving economic aspirations, or as an object of possession for claiming cultural refinement. In short, the conception of art as service establishes art as something tied to the social order. Art influences and is influenced by society and its political and economic mechanisms. If art and, by implication, the artist are inseparable from the social order, then art as service and the artist as the provider of that service acquire a commodity form in a capitalist system. This is due to the pervasion of the process of commodification in every sphere of human activity where every activity is transformed into either a product that can be sold and bought in the market or a tool that facilitates the achievement of other economic or social aspirations.

Increased transformation of art and artists into commodities results in, according to Theodor Adorno, an increased resemblance between “culture business” and sports (86). This cultural sport — the almost industrial reproduction of art and artists for a utilitarian purpose — is based on the model of tireless competition between the players/objects and their owners/producers. Within this model, “one is allowed to inflict pain according to the rules, one is maltreated according to the rules... The rules of the game resemble those of the market, equal chances and fair play for all, but only as the struggle of all against all” (Adorno 90). In the process of production of an artist/object, a person is rigorously trained, forcibly disciplined, stripped of their subjectivity or subject position, and sent through multiple qualitative checks and examinations. Every artist/object is thoroughly compared to each other as well as to a standard that must be emulated. After their quality is quantified, they are classified and assigned their respective roles. Once most of the artists/objects assume their roles in a capitalist

society, their function is not governed by an artistic or spiritual impulse to achieve sensuous pleasure or transcendence from the material, but by a sense of duty and need brutally enforced by a coercive “adaptation to an over-mastering arbitrary power” (Adorno 95). Thus, violence, assuming an objective and systemic form, is implicit in the production of artists and art.

Furthermore, there also exists a parallel between art and violence at the level of definition. If we accept Guérard’s conception of the forms in which art exists, then we can perceive art as a medium (for realizing, achieving, expressing, propagating, and so on) and the artist as a means of its production (or reproduction). Similarly, while distinguishing violence from “strength”, “force”, and “power”, Hannah Arendt perceives violent actions “as ruled by a means-end category” (4). Thus, both violence and art have an aspect of instrumentality associated with them and can be defined as tools or means to an end. However, the interpretation of art as an instrument and its relationship with violence is usually not recognized because severity, privation, and exertion, no matter how detrimental, are often legitimized as necessary investments for the sake of art’s glorification and the artist’s supposed intellectual and cultural refinement. This is especially prominent in art capitals of the world like Vienna, the undisputed capital of Western classical musicianship, where music signifies the trials and tribulations of musical achievement and the illustrious age of composers like Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, and Schoenberg among others. In her novel, Jelinek attempts to puncture these superficial and romanticized notions about musical training and how music must be produced and perceived. It is through the illustration of the two types of relationships between violence and music — the implicit presence of violence in the production of art and artists, and the shared aspect of instrumentality — that *The Piano Teacher* attempts to explore the role of violence in the life of an artist, Erika Kohut.





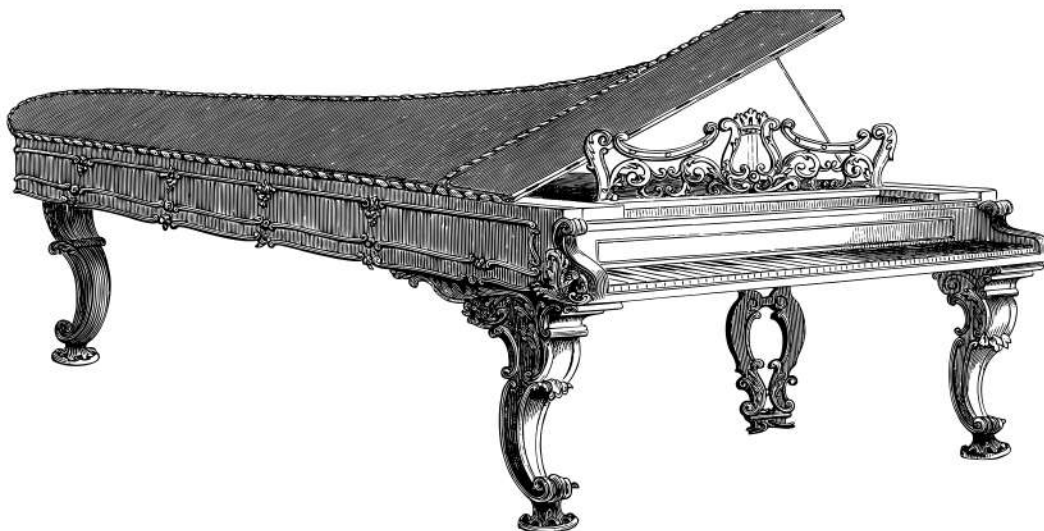
Whenever the narrator illustrates practice sessions, music lessons, recitals, or concert rehearsals, the rigorous physical effort and unrelenting discipline required for producing music are emphasized. For Jelinek, the body, in all its sheer physicality, becomes the object and the site of violence meted out during an artist's training in music. This is illustrated through a description of an adolescent Erika as she practices Mozart's compositions under the watchful eyes of her mother and grandmother: "Reluctantly, the violin finally moves under her chin, heaved up by an unwilling arm... Her fingers press the painful steel strings down the fingerboard... Mozart's spirit shrieks from an infernal abode because the violinist feels nothing, but she has to keep enticing the notes" (39). It is interesting to note here that by withholding the name of Mozart's composition, the novel shifts the readers' focus from the aural quality of the music to the ramifications of musical training. The author also attempts to demystify conventional assumptions about music-making by contrasting the sensation of pain with Erika's inability to feel the music she produces spiritually as she is supposed to. The usage of adjectives like 'reluctantly' and 'unwilling' signals Erika's subjugation by the dual authority of the mother and the legacy of "dead masters": "This grid system, together with her mother, has hamstrung her in an untearable net of directions, directives, precise commandments" (191). Similarly, when Erika is coerced into playing a recital for the populace of the valley, the narrator illustrates her bodily movements through violent metaphors: "She gathers all her energy, spreads her wings and then plunges forward, towards the keys which zoom up to her like the earth toward a crashing plane" (41). Contrary to the traditional focus on the relationship between auditory experience and music, Jelinek's usage of free indirect speech highlights a performer's perspective and sensorial assault experienced by their body while trying to master sophisticated techniques and re-producing the precision achieved by prolific composers in their works.



Furthermore, besides the demands of discipline and subjugation in Western classical music education, Jelinek also highlights the complicity of Viennese society, especially of the members from the bourgeois and the petty-bourgeois classes, in facilitating as well as augmenting violence under the garb of celebrating and democratizing Vienna's musical heritage. The Polish emigre family, which organizes "private chamber concert[s] for voluntary listeners" (64, emphasis mine), is described as imposing its love for music on others, especially adolescents and children: "These people love music, and want others exposed to it too. With loving patience; if necessary, by force... The children are sieved for any garbage brought in from outside. The coarser children remain in the sieve, they will never achieve anything on their instruments" (64). The sincerity of its love for music is further questioned when the narrator illustrates the family's overt display of its collection of old instruments. Instead of an automobile, it is these possessions that help the family in claiming its superiority over others (64). Therefore, musical heritage and refinement assume a functional status for them. Similarly, the novel highlights that for Erika's mother, as for most parents, a career in music is a means of fulfilling socioeconomic aspirations: "It had to be an artistic profession, so she could squeeze money out of the arduously achieved perfection, while average types would stand around the artist, admiring her, applauding her" (28). Like most young people, driven toward an artistic education by "parents who know nothing about art" (31), Erika is forced into the "yoke" (30) of music by her mother "who sets up guideposts along the way, smacking Erika if she refuses to practice" (28). For Frau Kohut, violence becomes the means for utilizing the instrumental aspects of both music and her daughter. Musical instruments and the daughter become the same in this violent pursuit of an artistic career: "Mother makes sure the piano is kept properly tuned; and she also keeps twisting her daughter's vertebrae, [...] this stubborn, easily deformable, living instrument (39). Thus, her daughter, the artist, becomes an object, a "clumsy tool" (63) for her to "utilize" (30).

The objectification of artists is constantly hinted at through the descriptions of performers as machinery, tools, and automatons: "The gears click, the pistons bang, the fingers move in and out. Sounds are emitted" (115); "like clockwork, the fingers tick the seconds into the keys" (44). Even the objectified piano

teacher/ player, Erika, adopts the instrumental perspective of her mother and applies it to her students and audience with sheer aggression and violence: “One has to tyrannize them, one has to suppress them and oppress them, just to get through to them... They want thrashings and a pile of passions (72). As a piano teacher, she makes the same severe demands, imparts the same derision, advocates the same philosophy of self-denial, and bequeaths the same forms of violence that constituted her training: “...she has to take the idling student engine and step on the gas, slam down hard in order to rev it up” (32). The unarticulated aggression that she has developed, possibly due to her stringent subjugation by her training in music, finds its outlet in her day-to-day activities: “She bangs into people’s backs and fronts with her stringed instruments and wind instruments and her heavy musical scores... Emulating a kamikaze pilot, she uses herself as a weapon” (19). Erika’s objectification as an artist has severely limited her life which, barring her confidential escapades and the pathological deviations from the path defined by her mother and music, primarily revolves around either practicing, teaching, and performing (in recitals and private concerts), or traveling from the Conservatory, private concerts, orchestras to her house and vice-versa. While the “music business” (75) does not offer any meaning to her, its severity and unforgiving brutality serve as a system of law and order to which she passively submits herself and against which she fervently struggles on her own terms. This conflict between her indoctrinated acceptance of herself as an object and violent outbursts of her innate subjectivity that attempts to explore itself is made prominent through her sexuality and the violence she commits on her own body.



Erika has been conditioned to believe, from a very young age, that pleasure (of musical perfection) and the superiority of the artistic mind are inseparable from the objectification, fettering, and chastisement of the body. This belief, in conjunction with her painful experiences, helps shape her sexuality. In sadomasochistic fantasies, as in classical music, pleasure is connected to discipline and restriction. The novel suggests that the continuous repression of the self that Erika faces in the domestic and professional realm permits her to feel only within the frame of total bondage and violence. While her mother utilizes Erika's body for her wish-fulfillment and music utilizes it to immortalize itself, Erika instrumentalizes her own body to gratify her perverse urges — her visit to the peep shows (51-60) and movie houses featuring “porno flicks” (110), her ritual of secret self-mutilation (47, 90), her voyeuristic adventure of observing people engage in sexual intercourse from behind bushes in the Prater (143-150), and the sadomasochistic sexual desires she describes in her letter to Walter Klemmer (214-218). However, this gratification does not necessarily entail an achievement of sexual pleasure. On the one hand, these acts are often governed by a movement towards passivity, towards the complete negation of the body: “All Erika wants to do is watch. Here, in this booth, she becomes nothing” (55). On the other hand, she struggles against this objectification and attempts to reclaim her subjectivity, albeit through the only means she has at her disposal — pain and visceral play. The asceticism and self-denial that music and her mother have imposed upon her have made her own body “dreadfully alien to her” (91).

According to Arnold Cooper, Erika's perversions are reflective of attempts to erase passivity and the experience of being oppressed by her mother and music. He states that violence becomes the means through which the person “protects [oneself] against the vulnerability of loving, against the possibility of human unpredictability, and against the sense of powerlessness and passivity in comparison to other[s]” (175). This reading is confirmed by Jelinek's essay, “Limits of Shame? The Usual Violence of Female Hygiene” (1983), which focuses on the instance when Erika, after a fruitless rendezvous with Walter Klemmer, inflicts pain upon her body by lacing herself with cloth pegs, kitchen utensils, and pins while seated before the mirror. According to Jelinek (as reproduced in Beatrice Hanssen's essay):

This image of a woman, who is penetrated literally by all kinds of kitchen appliances, is her attempt to demystify her own body. Erika Kohut conducts research, so to speak, conducts an analysis of her own body, an analysis that always also affects her body detrimentally: it is a necessary masochism [...]. Of course, she feels pain. But she at least undertakes an attempt to discover more in her own body than simply the territory that has been defined (137-138).

Thus, violence (in the form of masochistic pain) becomes symbolic of a mutinous struggle, a subversive instrument through which Erika attempts to reclaim her subjectivity. The body is stripped of its covers and dissected, literally and metaphorically, in an attempt to get acquainted with it, understand it, and retake control over it. Thus, in *The Piano Teacher* Jelinek highlights how pain (through self-negation and voluntary violence), a precondition for musical perfection, also becomes an instrument of self-discovery and analysis in the life of an artist.





# MUSIC IN WAR: THE UNDERGROUND MUSIC SCENE IN SYRIA



GUNJAN MITRA

It is not often that one hears of the state of Syria outside the milieu of war, terrorism or refugee crisis. The state of Syria has been faced with, perhaps, the deadliest civil war of the modern era for nearly nine years now. The war has been responsible for colossal damage and loss to human lives and property. More than 465,000 Syrians have been killed in the fighting, over a million injured, and over 12 million – half the country’s pre-war population – have been displaced. The Syrian War has often been dubbed responsible for having created the largest refugee population in the world, with several human rights organizations calling it ‘the worst humanitarian crisis of the 21st century.’ Yet, against all odds, the people of Syria continue to live, adapt and create art. In recent years, music, especially that of the metal and techno genres, has emerged as an important means of expression; an escape from the years of political turmoil that have ravaged the country. The people of Syria, who are every day perched dangerously on the brink of an unknown fate, find refuge in music and art with like-minded individuals. Their sound may not be louder than the bombs, but music continues to be an insurmountable source of solace.





It is not entirely surprising that it is the Techno and metal musical genres that have resonated most with the people of Syria. The very genesis of Techno music took place underground. It is a dark, rough and industrial style of music, not unlike war itself. More importantly, Techno music has an extraordinary capacity of bringing people together, transcending the shackles of ordinary life, unleashing energy and precipitate rejoicing. On its part, metal music is fuelled by a blend of anger and positivity. The cause of metal music has always been defiance. Transgression lies at its heart, and it's capable of invoking the joys and terrors of formless oblivion within the collective, whilst simultaneously bolstering feelings of individual control and potency. In Syria, in particular, metal has found purpose as an instrument of endurance, power, anger, rebellion, and abuse.

Electronic or Techno music is a relatively recent development in Syria. Electronic music events are still a rather vague concept primarily due to their novel and unconventional nature. However, the popularity of this musical genre, especially among the youth of Syria is steadily on the rise. Owners of underground Syrian music houses, such as the Underground Music House and Damascus Underground Session, bear witness to how the Electronic Music Community of Syria- known as 'the Scene'- has grown over the years. 'The Scene' is particularly remarkable for the diversity of its audience in terms of age, sex and educational and social backgrounds. Newer genres of Electronic music have emerged in the Scene, and a larger number of people have become cognizant of it.

Techno musicians and concert organizers have observed the momentous impact of the Syrian War on the development of Electronic Music in the country. Before the war, Electronic Music was largely unknown in Syria. The nine years of war, however, took a massive toll on the Syrian people. Music and dance have traditionally been an emotional outlet for the people of Syria and during the war years, the Syrians increasingly turned to Electronic Music as an outlet of suppression. Syrian artists and fans began channeling more of their thoughts, feelings, and culture into this type of music. It has enabled the people of Syria to comprehend their experiences during the war years through the channel of music. The people of Syria have been able to manifest much of their character and essence in the agency of Electronic Music. Electronic Music concerts have become a place of deliverance. Most significantly, this genre of music has liberated its audience from social constrictions and given many asylums from the havoc of war.

Contrary to Techno music, metal music has had a long history as a tool of expression in Syria. The operatic singer Jack Power is largely credited with introducing metal in Syria through his cover bands in the 1980s. In 2003, the first original Syrian metal band, Abstention, was formed. In 2007, their debut album *Mental Battle Resurrection* was released. Thereafter, the popularity of metal among the Syrian people rose rapidly and the metal music scene in Syria is flourishing today.

Metal music's capacity for unshackling its artists and listeners has long been recognized. This is especially true in the case of Syria, where metal has been effective both psychologically and physically beneficial. Metal music has an energising and mobilising impetus capable of provoking psychological empowerment that can translate into real-time actions. In Syria, this form of music has generated local and national scenes that permit people to resist oppression and mould their cultural and intellectual identities. The empowering character of metal can be used as a transgressive resistance to authority: this constructs civil movements which protest against oppressive status quos through their very existence, evoking and channeling emotions for social and political change. This concept of constructive empowerment through metal

music has particularly found reflection in the working-class communities and subordinate ethnic groups of Syria.

Additionally, metal music has been instrumental as a voice of dissent in Syria. In a country where physical revolt can, in more cases than not, lead to life imprisonment or even death, many metal bands in Syria use angry but ambiguous lyrics as a form of rebellion. In one of their songs for instance the metal band Haunted Cellar uses the lyrics, “If the police shut us down or detained us, there would be no more Haunted Cellar and no more of us...They have us so afraid and so under surveillance from any kind of rebellion. Mental or physical. So yes it is implied. but given the freedom needed, we may include it more in our sound.”

Metal music has enabled the Syrian people to express their anger and frustration with the political realities in Syria. While making his documentary, *Syrian Metal is War*, the Syrian director Monzer Darwish observed that Syrian metal musicians and audience sought emotional sanctuary in metal, using it “as a way to cope with mass trauma.”





Music has always been an intrinsic part of the lived human experience. However, music is largely associated with situations of contentment and peace. The case of Syria perforce makes us reconsider the power of music, especially in a state of war and strife. Nine years of civil conflict has left the country of Syria as nothing more than a shadow of its former glorious self. Remorseless attacks of terrorist groups, international coalitions and governmental forces have reduced the country to a pile of rubble and smoke. The human impact of this conflict has been spine-chilling. Syrian men, women and children have been abducted, unlawfully detained, tortured, brutally executed and killed by indiscriminate attacks. The streets of Syrian cities and towns are awash with the blood of thousands of innocent citizens. Amidst such despondency and desolation, the people of Syria have remarkably found refuge in the realm of music. Far from being forgotten, music, especially the unconventional genres of techno and metal, has become an important part of the lives of many Syrians. Many Syrians have found liberation, safety and empowerment in music. Music in Syria has developed as an instrument that gives people the strength to persevere: to persist in creativity, in standing up to authorities, in resisting suppression, in enduring hardships, in finding passage out of geographical regions, in living.





AN ATTEMPT AT UNRAVELING  
THE BEAUTIFUL MIND OF THE  
HIGH PRIEST OF PATHOS,  
LEONARD COHEN



SWATI JOSHI

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Words, sometimes, forge an unceasing echo in our conscience. These words of love, loss, desire, and spirituality do not just stay with us but also help us find the catharsis we sorely need. One such person whose words had an immense effect on its audience/reader was Leonard Cohen. I owe my acquaintance with Cohen's music to a poetry workshop that I attended back in 2017, a year after this poet of melancholy left us. Completely tantalized by his voice, I remember rushing to my hostel room and spending the rest of the day comprehending his beautiful mind. By the end of the day, I was in complete awe of this person. His charismatic personality and the melancholic nature of his work coupled with contemplation has been feeding my soul with tranquility ever since. Already a captive of his music, I tried to explore his poetry which was again as uncanny as his music. I was drawn to his wistful attachment to the past and his frequent allusions to it.

In his poem "*Streetcars*" Cohen explores the view that the past is perfect. Perhaps, it is perfect because it is complete in itself and isn't subject to change; however, the present is constantly under alteration and might change in the glimpse of an eye. It is due to this constantly suspicious nature of the present, Cohen admits that it is inferior to the past. I believe this is also true of love. Love is always subject to change, which is why it's so fleeting. The memories of love, however, can last a lifetime. Though Cohen's treatment of love in his music is multifaceted, the melting point of all the varsity lies in the way he interweaves the theme of impermanence with love, longing, and nostalgia wherein he portrays



the ecstasy as well as the pain that love brings. Love, allied with the present, is always subject to change and therefore, is inferior to the memories that it gave. As Neruda famously put it, "Love is so short, forgetting is so long"

Suzanne, released in the late 1960s by Cohen, is a perfect blend of storytelling and musicality, wherein Cohen reminisces the time he spent and the emotions he felt with his muse, Suzanne. The time that has now become past, is perfect to him. Although they did not share a romantic relationship, Suzanne Verdal's profound influence on Cohen's life and art was significant. The song is a perfect example of how Cohen was able to use his music to explore the complexities of human relationships. Another beautiful song that has been my "morning bhajan" for quite a long time now is, Famous Blue Raincoat. This song is a devastatingly beautiful ballad about a love triangle. Cohen's lyrics are incredibly honest and vulnerable, and they perfectly capture the pain of unrequited love. I once shared this song with a friend of mine and what he said is worth mentioning. "I wish I had the patience with which this guy sang". Patience. Patience wrapped in his deep resounding bass is the ultimate aesthetic of Leonard Cohen. One can go on and on listening to his artful lyrics which communicates his vulnerability, longing, and sense of melancholy. In songs like Dance Me to the End of Love and Hey That's No Way to Say Goodbye, Cohen brings the endurance of love and its vulnerability to the passage of time. The authority of time and his conflicting relationship with it has been the soul of his music.

What's peculiar to note is that over time, Leonard's perspective shifted from bitterness induced by time's lethal force to its acceptance. Some of his compositions and more importantly, a letter he wrote to his muse Marianne while she lay on her deathbed show these waves of changing viewpoints. He writes, "Well Marianne it's come to this time when we are really so old, and our bodies are falling apart, and I think I will follow you very soon. Know that I am so close behind you that if you stretch out your hand, I think you can reach mine. And you know that I've always loved you for your beauty and your wisdom, but I don't need to say anything more about that because you know all about that. But now, I just want to wish you a very good journey. Goodbye old friend. Endless love, see you down the road..."

Only two days after receiving Cohen's letter, in July 2016, Marianne passed away. She did so while singing the song *Bird on the Wire*, in which she had been the subject. Cohen soon followed her muse within four months as he had promised in his letter, and ever since then, his existence appears to resound with his admirers just like his deep bass. Although their relationship was defined by great love, they had their share of struggles and indifferences and eventually parted ways. Throughout his entire career, Leonard Cohen had a special place for Marianne in his heart which is quite evident in several of his songs. The most well-known song by Cohen, *So Long, Marianne*, describes their relationship and their time together on the Greek island of Hydra. The song, *A Thousand Kisses Deep*, which was released in the year 2001, explores the idea that existence has a deeper meaning and promotes understanding and acceptance of how life unfolds. Life occasionally doesn't go exactly as we plan, but in order to deal with this, we must understand that everything has a predetermined path. Although it's important to recognize that artistic interpretations can be subjective, the trajectory of Cohen's work progresses from constantly reflecting on the past to accepting the present and thereby encapsulates his development as an artist.

A contemporary artist who admired Cohen, Damien Rice, pays him homage with the song *Back to her Man*, in which he tries to capture the unfathomable wretchedness of women who would watch Cohen perform live and would later have to go "back to their men" after being completely enthralled by his enigmatic demeanor and singing.

About the song , Rice wrote, “ *Dear Leonard, a few years ago I had the honor of opening up for you in Ireland. After the concert I noticed something curious. My mother, my sisters, my girlfriend and ex-Girlfriends were ALL dripping with love for you. I found it humorous to imagine that after your show many women would be going back home and their men were not, and would never quite be, Leonard Cohen. This song is about those imaginings. Love, Damien.*”

Anyhow, an artist's reality and what we perceive it to be, can frequently be at odds. Although the creative expression and the zeal with which an artist pursues their art is often lauded, the reality of their daily lives may be very different. Cohen, on being called a ladies' man, remarks “*My reputation as a ladies' man was a joke and caused me to laugh bitterly through the ten thousand nights I spent alone.*”





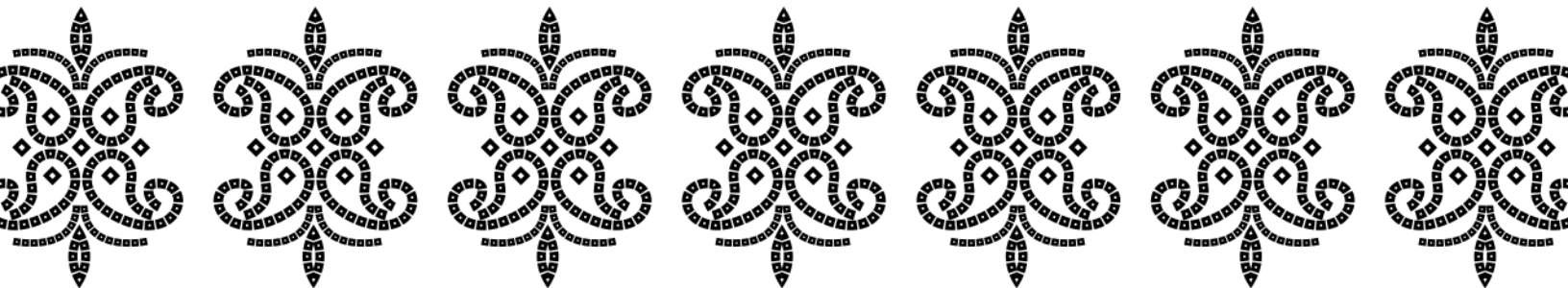
# DRAPES OF RESISTANCE, RESILIENCE AND RAGE



NILASRI BHATTACHARYA

My thamma had a peach colored almirah, which was borderline absurd since they had painted the almirah with the color of our walls. It all seemed to merge into one another- the walls, the almirah and thamma's individual space in a structurally patriarchal family. The stacks of sarees neatly arranged in the shelves of her almirah always fascinated me, like a jar full of rainbow-colored candies in the eyes of a four-year-old. What intrigued me further was the smell that comes off clothes kept in a closed space for a long time, something to do with naphthalene balls, care and a whole lot of stories. Stories of oppression, stories of displacement, stories of sacrifices, and most importantly stories of resistance.

Tussars, Baluchoris, taants, silks, benarasis, linens. You name it and thamma had it all. A century worth of collection of diverse fabrics. One could have glided their fingers through the tussars and immediately felt the coarseness of the fabric, one could have tried to get hold of the silk and it would fit in the iron-grip of a single fist. Thamma had to leave behind the comforts of her South Kolkata address and become the eldest daughter-in-law of a post-partition refugee family in the remote corners of North Kolkata. The displacement brought along with it the abandoning of an identity, an identity that no one asked if thamma was ready to give up. That's what women do; they navigate from one identity to the next with mostly six yards of fabrics to call their own.



Maa was married into the family three decades later, a young girl of one and twenty. Maa had just completed her graduation in Botany and decisions were made for her. She brought along with herself a bright cherry colored cupboard, some jewellery and the temperament to make peace with the surname of a man she had only met once before the wedding. Maa tells me with some hesitant fondness how she was gifted dozens of sarees as wedding gifts. The colors fascinated her young, unexplored world of marital bliss. Peacock green, crimson red, prussian blue, calming lavender. Maa has witnessed all these colors of hope and joy build a brightly lit cage for her overnight. She was soon made to realise that her days of girlhood were long gone, it was time to embrace the role of a married woman. She was deprived of the agency to wear anything else in our conservative middle-class family.

Maa's resilience came in silent waves. Slow. Patient. Calculated. At that young age, maa had somehow figured out that it is not easy to defeat centuries old structures in a single day. Maa avoided wearing anything but sarees in front of her in-laws but made sure to show them pictures of her in suits and denims on trips and getaways. She started by instilling the idea that she was not alive only to carry the weight of her married surname, she owed some justice to her self-identity too. The fact that she was a different individual beyond her Dhakai jamdanis, tussars and pure silks slowly tiptoed in and quietly made its assertion felt in our family. Maa always mentions how baba has been incredibly supportive throughout her early and later years of marriage. I refuse to believe we must give credit for a woman's acts of dissent to a man, but again this is maa's choice to make.



Two decades later, I find myself in a sultry summer afternoon in Kolkata, standing in front of maa's cupboard pondering. I precisely have forty minutes to get ready for a seminar. As my fingers brush through the years of fabrics, maa's voice rushes to me from a distance, "Why do you want to wear a saree at all? So difficult to manage and the heat will make it worse." My fingers stop at a red cotton saree with a thin purple border. I pair it with a white linen shirt. What escapes maa's understanding is that I have a whole lot of rage pent up in me. I start by tucking in the first layer of the burning red fabric into the petticoat. Thamma's and maa's stories keep ringing in my ears, brilliantly inspiring women who were not let to have a choice. I take the extra bit of the cloth and start making neat pleats. "You know it was never just about the sarees. The cycle started there, until we had no choice left in us." I finish by pinning the aanchol on my left shoulder. It is a gradual, painstakingly slow, every-random-day attempt to take the shackles and turn them into swords. It is the act of stepping out wearing the same garment that kept women indoors for generations. I smile at my reflection in the mirror. Probably this is how womanhood works, we take the vermilion and turn it into gunpowder, we take the sarees and drape around ourselves our own language of rebellion and rage. The cycle began through us. It will end with us.







# THE SEASON FOR KITES



## PRERAK PATHAK

I envy the young boy who,  
Looks up into the August sky,  
One jerk of wrist, now and then,  
Swoop and dive of the kite.

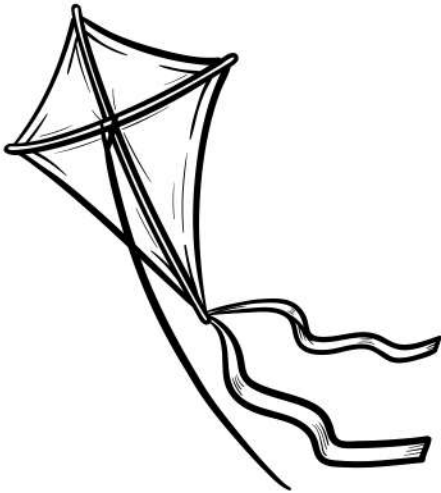
I envy the second boy too,  
Who holds the pulley and,  
Awaits his turn, so earnestly,  
I wish bad luck upon the flight.

A manoeuvre of hands there,  
Hangs the kite atop the sky,  
Of the cursed kite that had,  
Just, dipped from one side.

Twilight appears on the line,  
Boys rush to start the rewind,  
On the business of kite-flying,  
Before night's curtain descends.

I behold the paper-kite overhead,  
Two o'clock from where I stand,  
And hope that the bird breaks free,  
From its owner's taut thread,

I wish for a shipwreck, mid-flight,  
And will be made happy,  
To even collect the remnants,  
Something typical of one who can't fly (kites).





# 'WHERE MEN CANNOT BEAR ARMS'



AMNA MANNAN

I have a string of thoughts at loose ends,  
it wraps itself around  
the last speck of compassion,  
which the end of a tiring day  
threatens to get rid of.

It calls itself a train  
and moves to a destination  
where men cannot bear arms.

It believes that  
I'm terrified of losing the ability  
to fantasise life  
at the most unlikely places.

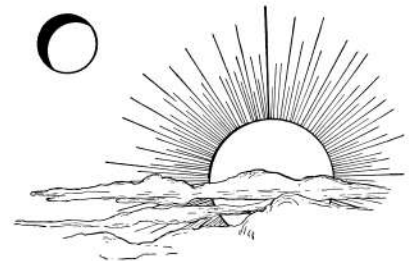
A northern light as the  
metro drags me to a concrete building,  
a coffee brewing in a bookstore  
as the  
minutes of the day become bygones,  
a gentle imagery of a warm hug  
as crude glances eye me.

I use escape, a lilac sky of infinite possibilities.

Losing what I know  
to be an expression of grief,  
I wallow in inscrutable hate of the self.

A hollow, musical laugh  
escapes me as I make fun  
of a perpetual shade, denial denial denial.

It is the loneliness that sharpens  
the blades of fire,



the utter loneliness of inescapable grief.  
Losing what I know  
becomes losing myself, without words and phrases.  
Losing what I know  
becomes losing my identity as a marginalised woman.  
I'm also terrified of losing  
an emotional outlet.  
a person, a pen, a pillow, a pet, a prayer.  
A voice that screams  
resentment to perpetrators of oppression  
and catharsis that creates a bridge  
between my identity  
and others who are trying to assert their own.  
Love is what binds me to everything that I'm afraid to lose  
but loving comes at the cost of sanity.  
Losing sanity,  
fear is tangible in parts of me  
I never thought were worth paying attention to.  
Losing memory is where the fear is the most tangible.  
Losing memory of eternal freedom when the night never ends,  
having to imagine light, impenetrable light, without ever knowing it, feeling it.  
These strings at loose ends are  
far-fetched  
and way into a future in which I won't exist,  
they call themselves a train  
and move to a destination  
where men cannot bear arms,  
where the shade of my race,  
will be seen as beauty in a spectrum.  
where the state loves its people  
without prejudice, without majoritarianism,  
where the truth - seekers  
are not behind bars,  
where calls for Inquilab are not met with  
repression and silencing,  
where difference does not  
result in hierarchy,  
where women of the marginalized come together to form an inclusive world,  
where marginality becomes power,  
and that power  
becomes revolution.



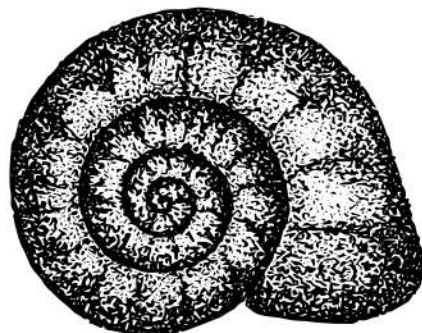
# ELECTRIC LOVE



ANURAAG DAS SARMA

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Moon, Lorca's moon-  
Tug on the tides, cocoon-  
The sea, envelop it in your  
Gravity. Black-  
As the water,  
Reflects but none other,  
The whites of waves crashing;  
The sea, ignites.  
Into the shore,  
I hear the soft uproar,  
Of quiet dissidence and now,  
A riot of sounds.  
Against the sands,  
The wind on coastal land-  
Puts salt in your evergreen  
hair,  
Electric Love-  
Play fair.





## COLLAPSED HALF



MEHAK KHURSHIED

Why be afraid that the end of the world has arrived?  
The mountains already look so tired  
Tending to the business of men.  
The last time you went home  
They said the mountains had come too close  
and yet had not moved at all  
That day, the sky wept in pastel  
An evening smeared itself into the night.  
[Uncaring of its beauty]  
The tenderness of winds looks for a place to hide  
And the violence of the night swallowed it whole.  
You looked at the stars with your mother.  
It was the last time you both were women, together  
She had written the testimonies of her youth on the mountains.

Her hair draped in a crimson light  
Her scarf falling off her dainty shoulder  
The green eyes turned youthful again  
Undeciphered, incomprehensible  
Eyes that hadn't seen what the world could do to them  
She told me that the end was near  
Life had begun to feel more like a shrine than a garden  
Memories had become a pilgrimage to the God of Time.  
She said, "My sore feet give up too soon"  
Half of my faith rested on that mountain.

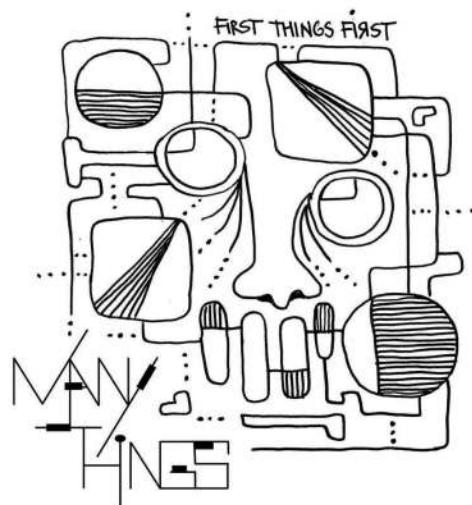
From where I left,  
Barefoot, a lost disciple  
Looking for my father's footprint in the mud,  
That I mistook for a beast and ran off in the woods.  
The other half, collapsed into itself  
Like a black hole

Why be afraid that the end of the world has arrived?  
It is the last thing you'll ever see.





# *Artist Profile: Many Things*



*Formed last year in Chennai, Many Things, - which spans jazz, blues, funk, and more - has released their debut EP, titled *First Things First*.*

*Currently on tour, the trio is set to play in Pune, Mumbai, and Kolkata. The following profile discusses the various elements - or things - that drives the band's sound and the creative process behind it, and chemistry that brings it all together.*



## MANY THINGS



AYUSH CHAKRABORTY



Maarten Visser rests his weight on the table as he attempts to explain his attitude towards sound structure, “I don’t want to mystify the process. It’s fine to do that – artists tend to do so, saying they don’t know where it comes from.” When it comes to him and his new band, *Many Things*, structure is a very cerebral thing – they do know where it comes from and they want to take you there. What the trio, consisting of bassist Aravind Murali, drummer Manu Krishnan, and saxophonist Maarten Visser, bring to the table, are “not emotions, but ideas in sound,” and this they accomplish by being generous to the audience that is part of the conversation. As a musician, it is impossible to know what sound is going to trigger what in an individual in the audience, for they do not know that individual and where they come from. “So, it is our job to take you away from whatever you were in, then to propose something else. Something about aesthetic, something about sound, something about our music itself, after which we hope then... it would be really nice if you got something out of it”

The trio denies the ‘jazz’ label; “we’re as the name suggests, many things,” says Aravind Murali as he lists down genres that the band may encompass. “It’s a lot of jazz, a lot of blues, funk, classical, pop and soul,” and as such, it is quite hard to think of their sound in binaries. Their debut EP, suitably titled *First Things First*, is exactly all that you can think of, for there are no wrong answers or ideas. “These ideas, what they represent or do not represent, doesn’t matter. They’re called things; they may be multiple things, simple or complicated things,” says Visser. He denies the role of emotions or feelings in the trio’s sound, “it’s such a complicated thing, I often feel things that are not very clear – it’s hard to be clear about all that,” and so they leave the interpretation of their ideas to the audience.

*Many Things* works towards crafting their own sound through their bucket of references that they have gained in the process, and “how that will translate onto different instruments and how we can also have a healthy disrespect for that.” In this process, they have managed to create sound that is uniquely theirs. There are so many things to this sound but at the same time, it all comes together as a cohesive unit with unparalleled chemistry. There exists no fixed groove, but rather a fixed vision and a fixed idea, and that is what *Many Things* aims to present. There are no specific roles, as those in a traditional ensemble, with the drummer keeping the time and the bassist holding the groove. Drummer Manu Krishnan says, “here, I am supposed to be like another voice, another instrument, not really supposed to be a drummer. And [Maarten] doesn't want me to keep the time all the time. A lot of times we want to be out of sync, not exactly in sync with the other person, ideawise, and playing different things.”

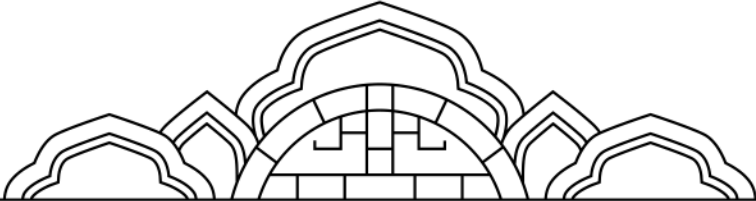
Here are three different voices, all coming together; they're just having a conversation on stage, and these voices have no set rules to stick to. Their shift in roles is both fluid and humane as they traverse through song structures that encompass multiple genres. The fourth track from their EP, *Thing 2*, gradually builds tension from a waltz-y head to a fast-paced Latin section that then takes that tension to the absolute edge before exploding into dissonance and diverse tonality. The three voices play along well, with a back-and-forth between the drums and the bass, and the saxophone jutting through the atmosphere in sharp intervals, filling in the gaps.

To bind so many elements together, the structure needs to be solid. “If the structure is not solid, then what you're trying to do will not work. If your structure is strong, then you're quite free to do anything around it,” says Visser after a brief interval of geeking out on nonsense syllables in Kurt Schwitters' *Ursonate*. “I am a structure junkie, I admit that. I trip on structures; I try to have as much direction as possible.”

The exact notes are irrelevant, because “I know I need a few strong melodies. I know I need some grooves and things that are just straight up, because that gives people points to anchor on to.” *Many Things* doesn't need their audience to carry the same amount of references that they entail, “If I want that dissonance, I have to take people there; the final ideas are less important than the larger structure.”







*As the interview nears its end...*

**Maarten:** I like to go to the edge. Here (he holds his right hand up, palm spread out flat facing down), I know I can control it and here (tilting his hand) I know I can't but over here is where I know it's right. And then here it falls apart.

**Interviewer:** Then just go back and record it, I presume?

**Maarten:** Or not. In *Thing 2* at the ending of the solo — I completely screwed up. It's like the worst but it's there, because the rest of the take was —

**Interviewer:** perfect?

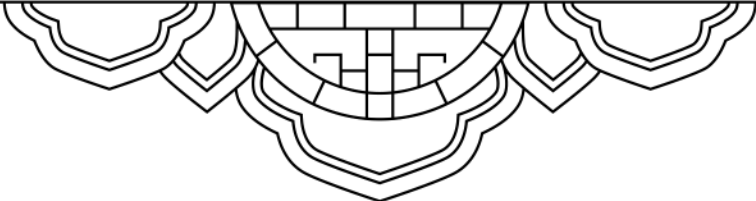
**Aravind:** Oh, we don't do perfection

**Maarten:** No we don't. The rest of the thing is solid but the ending is not — its completely terrible.

**Interviewer:** I think it was well resolved

**Manu:** At the end of it, he was like 'there's a lot of fuckups' but for me this was by far the best take

**Maarten:** Well, three months of discussion after and I'm still not convinced  
*(laughing)*



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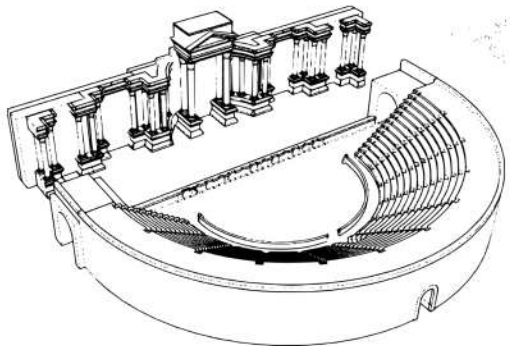
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