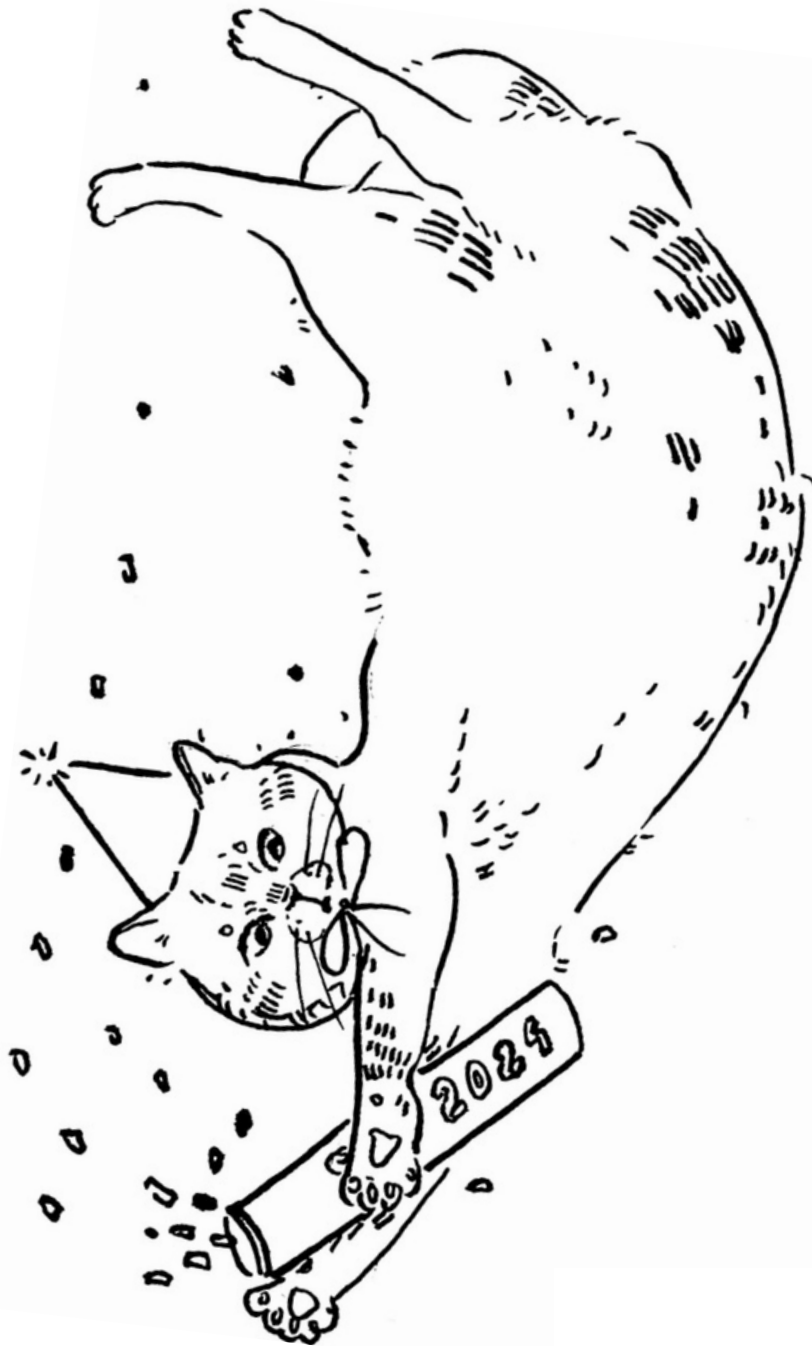


MONOGRAPH

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MONOGRAPH

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Editor's Note



*It is morning, Senlin says, and in the morning
When the light drips through the shutters like the dew,
I arise, I face the sunrise,
And do the things my fathers learned to do.
Stars in the purple dusk above the rooftops
Pale in a saffron mist and seem to die,
And I myself on a swiftly tilting planet
Stand before a glass and tie my tie.
-Morning Song of Senlin, Conrad Aiken*

It is morning, 2024. Creeping up on us, on a monday morning that lies in front of us in modest incredulity. The sun rises softly and gently in the yellow splendour of the Calcutta winter sun. I wish all our readers a wonderful year ahead, full of personal and artistic growth.

With upcoming elections that are now compromised with newer bills, a telecom bill that finds itself in autocratic territory, and the ongoing geo-political rise in political extremism, the year seems bitter. But I hope this year sees us better the world in which we live, by being compassionate and empathetic to others and ourselves.

Anuraag Das Sarma
Editor-In-Chief
Monograph





BOOK REVIEW



AMERICANAH: TAPESTRY OF DREAMS



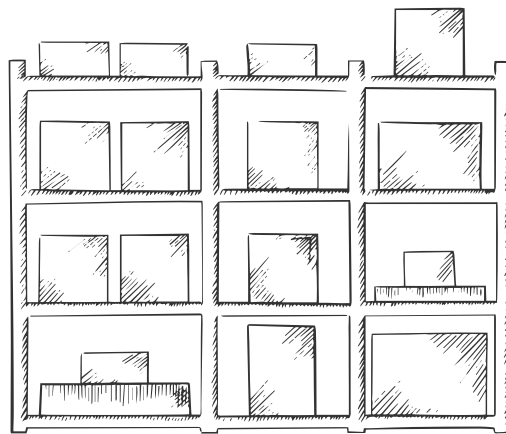
SWATI JOSHI

“Why do people ask, “What is it about?” as if a novel had to be about only one thing?”

- Adichie in *Americanah*

My bookshelf holds two neatly segregated worlds: escapist fiction inhaled for pure joy and academic tomes tackled with gritted teeth. Then, Adichie’s *Americanah* crashed into my postcolonial syllabus like a meteor, shattering this binary. Devouring books has always been my blissful escape, but with Adichie’s words, the line blurred. Suddenly, academic reading wasn’t a chore, it was a revelation.

Adichie, as a writer, captivates your soul and seamlessly weaves you into the action. The intertwined themes of love, race, and gender work to reflect Adichie’s own experience as an immigrant. *Americanah* captures the complexity of Nigerian experience through the eyes of two marginalized subjects. High school lovers Ifemelu and Obinze articulate the experience of injustice and oppression at the hand of colonising imperial powers. Centering African women’s experience in the narrative offers an in-depth understanding of the double marginalisation triggered by beauty stereotypes.



Ruminating on the politics of beauty, race, and identity, Adichie pushes your mind to mull over the supremacist colonial conceptualisation of beauty and the perception of beauty by other cultures – particularly the third world nations, and how they are non-existent. Adichie maps Ifemelu’s development on multiple levels; reflecting on her stage of assimilation, we find that Ifemelu never lost her cultural perspective and was able to assimilate properly in America. Ifemelu constructs her own identity in the process of becoming a subject.

Adichie further demonstrates the peculiarities of an immigrant’s experience through other characters who negotiate the questions of assimilation in distinctive ways. Aunt Uju could neither fully assimilate into American culture nor stay rooted in her own. Whereas Ginika fully submerged herself in American culture by blindly conforming to Western supremacy. Obinze’s both subtle and overt experience of racism upon entering the job market as a black man in England crashes down on his rosy image of Western culture as he witnesses black men automatically being accorded negative identities. Obinze’s color becomes the defining feature of his character, since black was equated with ‘evil’. Working as a warehouse delivery person during his last days in England as an immigrant, he comes face to face with racial oppression, with Adichie pointing to the workings of racism through political and economic exclusion.

What strikes me as most profound is Ifemelu's return to her native land — a place that feels oddly familiar yet alien at the same time. A mirror reflecting my own experience, her journey echoes the disconnect I've felt from my own hometown after six years away. The feeling of not belonging, such a perpetual state of being both within and without, seems to be an inevitable consequence of growth and change. It is a bittersweet dance between the comfort of familiarity and the unsettling unease of becoming.

Adichie, with the nimble fingers of a master weaver, crafts a tapestry where love is intricately intertwined with the threads of race and gender. In her hands, love becomes a homecoming, a poignant return to the source. Ifemelu and Obinze, having ventured into the world, cultivating their individual tapestries with threads of diverse experiences, find themselves drawn back together, and their understanding of their own landscapes deepens. Their journeys of self-acceptance ultimately lead them back to the shores of Nigeria. Here, where they began their individual voyages, they find solace and belonging, not just in their homeland, but in each other. Their love, enduring and true, has found its way back to its rightful place.



Americanah transcends the limitations of language. It becomes a visual experience, a symphony of colors, voices, and emotions. It is a book that stays with you long after you turn its final page, leaving you pondering the complexities of identity and the universal yearning for belonging. You'll laugh with Ifemelu's hilarious blog posts, feel her frustration and loneliness, and root for her love story with Obinze.





WINTERS, MEMORIES AND A CUP OF TEA.



SUBASREE VASANTHAMURALI

*We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left.
Memory, the idea of it – vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation,
susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived.
Memory is open to both forgetting and remembering, it's a perpetual cycle.*



It's winter in Delhi, I feel it. I feel it as a cold breeze touches my skin. Winters in Delhi are different. It's covered in smog, the pollution blurs your vision, chokes your throat. You feel the greyness of the air engulfing you. But the winters in Delhi, they are unique. They materialize your grief and give agency to all your sorrows. *You are not alone*, the clouds say, secluded behind the early morning mist. *I hide and run too. You are not alone*, they whisper.

My home. It takes three days to reach by train, 3 hours by flight. It's 2000 kilometres away. It is far away, very distant and different from the capital city. There, people use coconut oil and eat idlis for breakfast; here, we eat parathas every other morning and chew paan. The walls here are smeared with red stains; whereas back home, it would be the caricatures of politicians and pamphlets of failed promises. The Decembers see my hometown get submerged in water, with people travelling the main roads in boats.



There, the winter doesn't seep through your skin.

Delhi has been the biggest experience of my life.

Today, I came out of my campus having heard a lecture titled 'Memory as a narrative'. On some days, I learn about the 1911 revolutions in China and the role of Urdu magazines in pre-independent India. I learn so much here.

But how do I tell you about it?

How do I tell you of all the life lessons I've learnt on the metro? If you feel eyes following, silhouettes getting closer, you get down at the most crowded station and sprint. Never look back. How do I explain the eeriness that has followed me through all the nights I thought I would give up?

How do I tell you all of this without telling you about the cup of chai?

He takes his phone out, scans the QR code, shows it to the tea seller: "Two," he says. His voice echoes a little louder in the air than it usually does. I am offered one kulhad, he holds the other. My fingers turn pink – I did not expect it to be this hot. I flinch. He doesn't notice. I take a careful sip of the hot tea and the strength of the flavour hits me. "Is it nice? Do you like it?," he asks. I nod my head and finish the chai.

That night, I puke. My dormmate says that it was the tea. I disagree with her. We argue. We go the next day too; it's a kilometre away from the place I live. We go there almost every day. Halfway to our destination, there's a temple where we see people praying. Both of us don't. Every time we drink tea, we talk for hours together after. He tells me about the night life at the India Gate and the time he returned from Karol Bagh at 2 a.m.

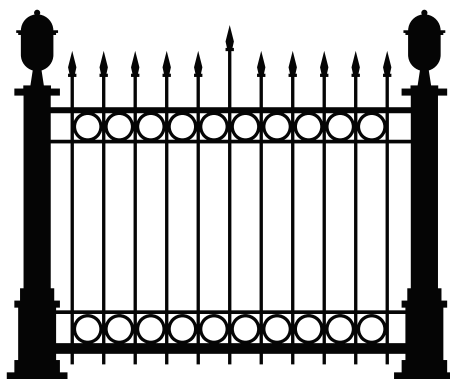
My life after nine is starkly different from his. I am not allowed to loiter around, there is a gate waiting to be closed after I enter. It is through his eyes that I see the nightlife of Delhi. The night life devoid of hooting and ogling, devoid of footsteps following in your shadows.

Every time we cross the temple on our way back, a strange anxiety engulfs me. I want him to stop, to talk to me for a few more minutes, to hug me and tell me it's going to be okay. Maybe I should ask him about Real Madrid, that would make him all excited. Or I could even crack a silly Marvel joke, hear the sound of his laughter. But then I remember that I have a curfew at 9. We both walk back.

I have to be chained before something bad happens to me. I have to be protected.

For the next 12 weeks, I puke almost every night. My dormmate looks at me with a quiet disappointment – or perhaps a look of pity, I never decoded it. But I sleep in peace. I love tea. It was my antidote to everything I believed would never heal.

Memory is conjured, my professor said. We go back to it, build it, rephrase it. Memory, it's conjured up.



It's partially true. Memory is indeed conjured up. For every time I think about him, my narrative differs. Sometimes I believe he did understand me, that he heard me rant – not because he was left with no choice, but because he sensed my anxiety.. Memory sometimes tells me that for, a brief period of time, I replaced the concept of home with a person.

I laugh at the naivete of my brain. How do you replace a home that is a person? You can't, I whisper. I feel the aftertaste of the lie on my tongue. I swallow it. It's salty, infused with tears.

It's been 86 weeks, 602 days since...

“Memory is something external - it's not something we live with, but rather, memorialise,” my professor continued.

Now, every time I walk across the temple, a familiar anxiety resurfaces. All these landmarks of togetherness, all the trees that bore witness – they have become the monuments of my life, archiving my memories, the past.

“Memory is open to both forgetting and remembering, it's a perpetual cycle open to manipulation and appropriation.” The professor flipped through her notes, choosing to ignore the restlessness of the class. *The amount of truth a statement can hold*, I think to myself.

I remember how he knew that he did not have to hold my hands as we crossed the road. How he walked, continuing the conversation even as a vehicle passed by us, instead of pushing me to the safer side of the road. All the times when he understood that silence was a way of being together through the voids that words could never fill. On other days, I remember the warmth of his hands. And then, I forget how he chose to end all this and walk away.



My curfew is now extended to 9:30. I got cat-called two days before. I still call and talk to my friend back home if I sense that the metro carriage is too empty, believing that this might stop everything bad about to happen.

“We speak so much of memory because so little of it is left.” My professor concluded her lecture.

So, I daydream very quietly, as if that might lead the passage to the solution of all my yearnings. I build up dreamscapes of running into him one day, in all the places we walked in the city; as if being in his presence would make everything seem fine, everything worth living and fighting for.

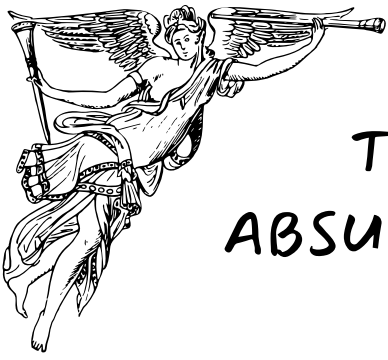
I dream of walking alone under the stars, tracing my own shadows. With nobody around, in solitude. The solitude that brings about self-containment and peace. I travelled 2000 kilometres in search of it and I will never experience it, even if I go further.

I realise that I always end up missing something I’ve never had.

I go back to my room. The winters are getting colder and colder. I feel my body freezing. *Should I let it all out? Let all the feelings explode?* I wonder, for a moment.

But I know that I will not. I would rather bundle it all under three layers of clothing than to let it echo louder. For if I say it aloud, somebody might finally hear, finally understand.





THE HUMAN CONDITION: ABSURDITY IN THE KAFKAESQUE



AYUSH CHAKRABORTY

“The fatal belief — as prevalent in Kafka’s time as it is in ours — that the task of man is to submit to a process predetermined by some power or other can only hasten the natural process of ruin because, propelled by such delusions, man in his freedom only assists nature in its ruinous tendency.”

— Hannah Arendt, **Reflections on Literature and Culture**

Here is how we arrive at the pretext of the human condition — by subjecting ourselves to the endless clockwork of a machine that promises purpose through a set routine of meaningless obligations. This is the world that Franz Kafka’s protagonists are caught within, a world in which people are assigned particular roles and are defined by what they do. A world which garners in its inhabitants, a misguided sense of omnicompetence and results in total alienation. This is the world that we live in, a world which is inherently confounded and devoid of any meaning yet makes it essential to strive for one.

“As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.” In the first sentence itself, Kafka drops us into the absurdity of *Metamorphosis*. Kafka’s world is profound; there is a lack of rationality, and one’s customary hopes and beliefs find no place in this dimension.

However profound this world might seem, Kafka presents us with motifs that we encounter in our real lives. Upon waking up and finding himself transformed into a bug, Gregor does not stop to think how or why such fate befell him – he thinks of his work as a travelling salesman. He complains about how exhausting it is to have to constantly travel and worry about “train connections, the bed and the irregular meals”. He worries about how he is not able to develop relationships into more intimate ones because the nature of his work doesn’t allow him the time.

The reason behind work being the first thought that comes to Gregor’s mind is this: ever since his father’s business failed, Gregor took up the responsibility of being the family’s sole breadwinner. At first, he took his job with a sense of pride and his family would show him gratitude. However, as soon as they get accustomed to this new family dynamic, they start to take him for granted. When his parents realise that he is getting late to work, their first thoughts are to get Gregor up from his bed and to get him to work. He has to leave perfectly on time for he is running on the clock that his family has wound for him. Gregor is a true prisoner to his work; although he isn’t important to his work, it is important for him to work as his employer tells him, “but a season of year for doing no business at all, that does not exist, Mr. Samsa, must not exist.”. He is eternally confined to the rat race but he accepts his condition without much resentment.

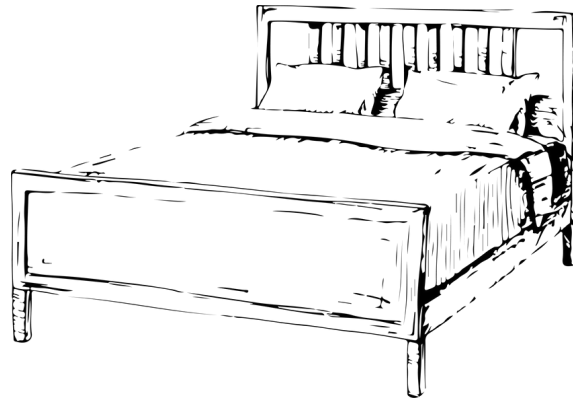
“The pretense [sic] of omnicompetence, the appearance of superhuman capacities is the hidden motor that drives the destructive machinery in which Kafka’s protagonists are caught, and that is responsible for the seamless functioning of what is senseless in and of itself.”

– Hannah Arendt



The biggest consequence of his metamorphosis is the ever-increasing emotional distance between him and his family. Gregor is separated from his family and, to a greater extent, humanity through his transformation. On waking up, he begins to introspect about his life as a travelling salesman – he realises how superficial his relationships have been since he'd taken up the job. His emotional isolation appeared well before his metamorphosis; his family started taking for granted, and the nature of his profession prevented him from establishing meaningful relationships with people. His isolation is an extension of the isolation that he was subjected to throughout his adult life. Gregor is indeed physically isolated after his metamorphosis – he is separated from his family and the outside world – but Kafka uses this physical isolation as a larger stage for projecting the theme of emotional isolation in humanity.

We try to find meaning in a life which is inherently arbitrary and meaningless. We assign ourselves roles and align ourselves to routines that complement them in order to garner in ourselves a sense of rationality, alienating us through the means. We stick to a process through which we live our lives, but these processes merely distract us from the irrationality that is life. If everything is to end, then what, one may ask, is the purpose of living? The late French philosopher, Albert Camus, argues that the quest for life's meaning is absurd in and of itself, and that life has no inherent meaning to discover. The world is depicted as a well-oiled machine within which we engage in tasks that compell us to keep the wheels turning. However, these tasks are constructed to keep us from questioning the absurdity that surrounds us – they keep us distracted while the machine keeps driving towards destruction, reaping the fruits of our labour yet heading towards the inevitable ending. Camus' absurd hero takes no shelter in illusions – they openly embrace the absurdity of their condition. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus writes that we must, “imagine Sisyphus happy” as he takes on the neverending task of rolling a boulder up a mountain, only to have it roll down all the way for him to push it up again. He is conscious about the futility of this ordeal, yet he keeps at it through his own will.



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Gregor Samsa is Camus' absurd hero in a kafkaesque world. He represents the entirety of the human condition yet he refuses to be caught in a web of illusions as to life's meaning. He readily accepts all hardships he goes on to face, and in the end, he dies much like he lived – accepting the absurdity of his circumstances without complaint. Kafka's protagonists are not the kind of people we come across in everyday life. They garner an uncompromising focus on what is universally human. Their function within each novel is inherently the same: they discover that the normal world that they live in, is in fact abnormal. They realise that the judgements of the respectable members are quite insane. Kafka's protagonists are not motivated by any revolutionary ambitions but by their own good will, exposing the hidden structures of this diabolical world unknowingly. Perhaps it is within the human condition to eventually arrive at such a disposition: one that is quite distinct from the rest of society, one that has no well-defined place or role. After all, what are we but indeterminate beings?





DEEP THINKING



L A M A R R I V

Let's go back to that place
Only there we are going to recognize each other
Our echoes upon the crystal blue river
Flowing like a natural event on earth
Faraway from the fireworks of constructive lies
Just unreachable to evil
control or possession of the situation.
Let's go back where nothing can harm us
Where the sky will spontaneously narrate us a story of fairies
and love letters to our inner child.





ZAINAB'S GRIEF



TASNEEM KHAN

“Nothing, it’s Zainab’s grief, that’s all.”

-Agha Shahid Ali, Above the Cities, From Amherst to Kashmir

My rage ends
Before the Tyrant’s court

It collapses into
A grief

Ancient and
Damascene.

My rage ends
When

The difference between two names
Is of a point-blank range,

My rage ends
Before the night

That refuses to leave
The ghost of our names.

Shahid, Zainab’s lament
Ends in Damascus

Now who is left to
Weep for the mourners?

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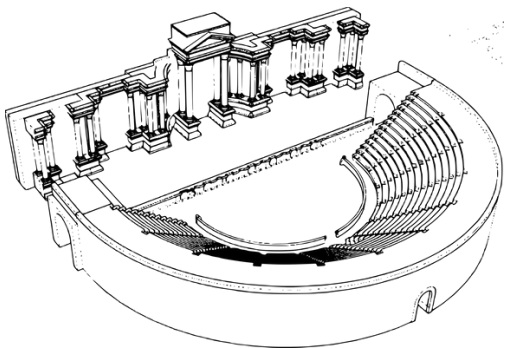
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