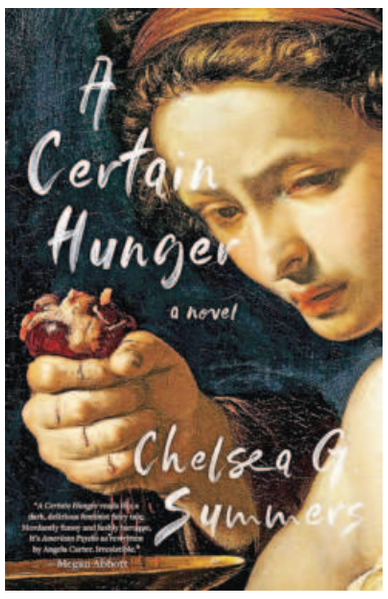
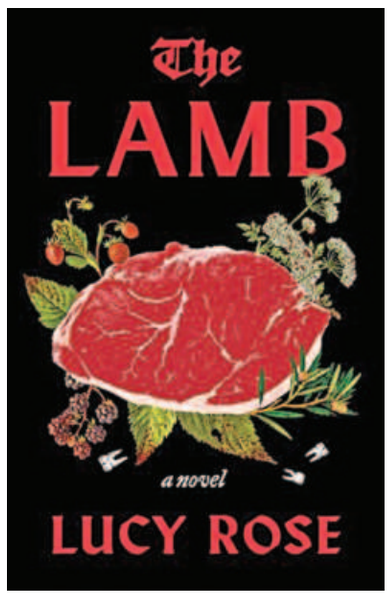
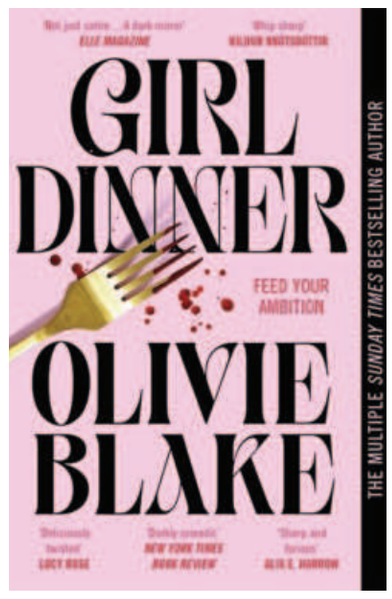
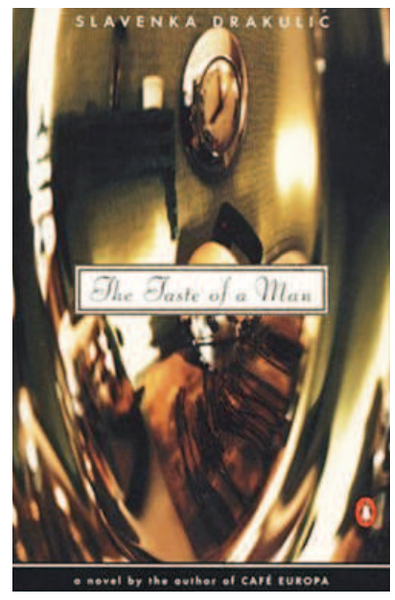












THE SHELF

8 books that give the monstrous feminine a seat at the table

KAZI RAIDAH AFIA NUSAIBA

October has come to sharpen its teeth. The nights grow long and hungry, the candles flicker, and somewhere a woman sets the dinner table for one more guest than she intends to let leave. Halloween has always adored its monsters, but somehow it has always been a woman being sacrificed for the plot, be it the ghostly bride in a bloody dress or the last girl standing in a horror movie. Not this year. Here are eight books where the women are hungry, and the men are the main course, and every last bone is picked clean. Bring your napkins. Lock the doors.

A Certain Hunger
Chelsea G. Summers
Hogarth, 2020
Dorothy Daniels would never eat standing up in a kitchen. A food critic of refined palate and enormous self-regard, she is writing her memoir from prison because she killed and ate several of her lovers, and she describes them the way she would a perfect plate of pasta: with relish and without a flicker of guilt. Snobbish, insufferable, and deliciously grotesque.

The Eyes Are the Best Part
Monika Kim
Erewhon Books, 2024
Once her father walks out, Ji-won, a Korean-American college student, watches her mother become smitten with George, an arrogant man whose fondness for Asian women is more than a little unsettling. Then the dreams start: dreams of eyes and of how delicious they might be. The gore is genuine, but what really stings is how ordinary the cruelty feels.



Maeve Fly
C.J. Leede
Tor Nightfire, 2023
By day, Maeve plays a princess at a Los Angeles theme park, wearing tiaras and showing endless patience with sticky-fingered children. By night, she tends her love of slasher films and a growing habit of handling irritating men in her own distinctive ways. It is the loudest and messiest book in this collection, and beneath all the spectacle it asks why horror's greatest monsters have almost always been men.

The Lamb
Lucy Rose
Harper, 2025
Margot and her mama live at the edge of an English forest, where strangers occasionally come knocking at the door. Mama brings them inside, feeds them, and takes care of them. And then, in the end, they turn into supper. Rose's debut is folk horror whispered by a child who does not yet realise her world is wrong: tender, terrible, and concerned with the hunger mothers hand down to daughters, whether they intend to or not.

Bones & All
Camille DeAngelis
St. Martin's Press, 2015
Maren Yearly consumes hearts. From infancy, anyone who grows too close to her (mainly boys) is ultimately devoured,



bones and all. Left by her mother at 16, she travels across America in search of the father she never knew. Later adapted into Luca Guadagnino's Bones and All (2022), it is the tenderest book here: a coming-of-age story about a girl whose appetite makes her unloveable, who has to decide whether to believe it.

Girl Dinner
Olivie Blake
Tor, 2025
Sloane, a sociology professor easing back into work after becoming a mother, and Nina, a pledge at an elite sorority called The House, are drawn into a circle of wealthy women whose secret wellness trend is cannibalism. It is a sharp satire about the impossible idea of "having it all" and about what, exactly, women are expected to consume to get there. If you liked the book Bunny (Viking, 2019) by Mona Awad, you will love this.

Rabindranath Ekhane Kokhono Khete Ashenni
Mohammad Nazim Uddin
Batighar, 2015
Mushkan Zuberi is captivating and sophisticated, a true femme fatale. She owns a high-end and elite restaurant in the little-known town of Sundarpur. Men are completely captivated by her beauty, gathering in her dining room to be close to her and try her renowned cooking. However, when an investigator begins to look into her mysterious history and the series of vanishings surrounding her, the horrific reality of her kitchen comes to light.

The Taste of a Man
Slavenka Drakulić
Abacus, 1997
Tereza, a young Polish poet studying in New York, falls into an all-consuming affair with José, a married Brazilian anthropologist, until love curdles into a hunger she can only satisfy by eating him. Drakulić, the Croatian writer who died this June, first published it in Croatian in 1995, decades before "femgore" had a name.

What Drakulić understood decades ago is that the line between consuming passion and literally consuming a person is paper-thin. The recent explosion of this subgenre isn't some sanitised, academic metaphor about "refusing to be prey". That's cute, but no. Reading about a woman who looks at a toxic man and sees only protein brings a peculiar, utterly unhinged kind of delight. It removes the courteous pretence of modern womanhood and substitutes it with bare cartilage and a snapping jaw. Together, these books form a blood-soaked permission slip allowing women to be wholly and unapologetically grotesque. They speak to a wild, unspoken weariness: the very particular exhaustion of smiling through condescending conversations and making yourself smaller to take up less physical space when all you want to do is scream ferociously in the grocery line. If that makes sense to you, pick up one of these books on the way and dig in. Bon appétit.

Kazi Raidah Afia Nusaiba *is a contributor.*

BOOK REVIEW: NONFICTION

In remembrance of bricks

Review of Amit Guha's 'Tapestries in Brick: A Guide to the Architecture of Bengal' (HarperVantage, 2026)

MARUF AHMED

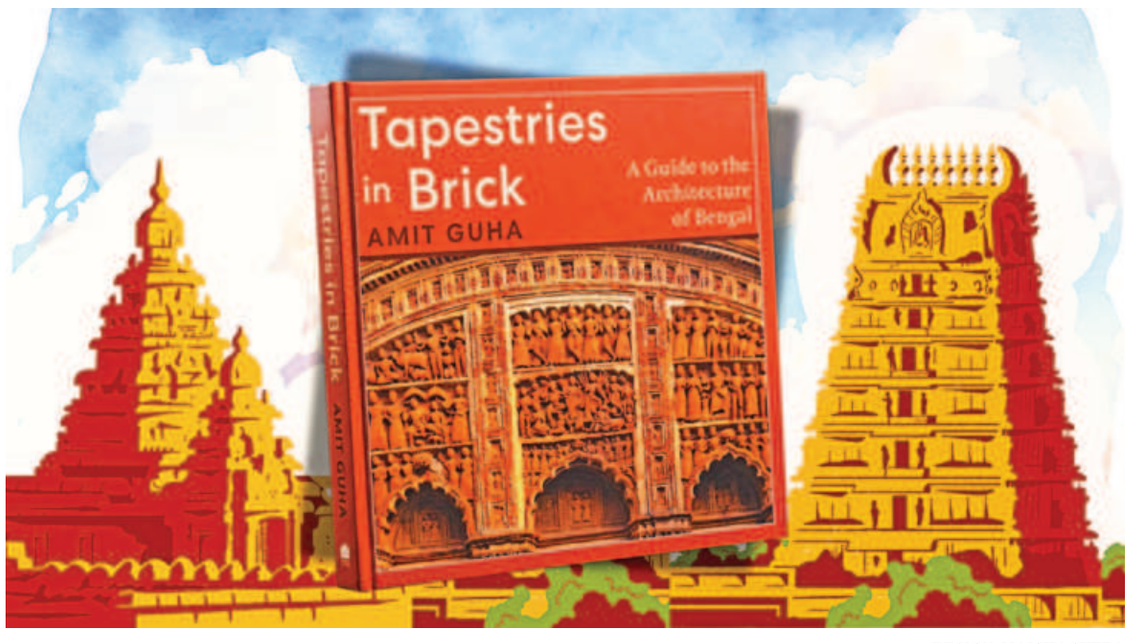
In Bengal, permanence has always been a precarious architectural ambition. Rivers abandon their courses, monsoons work patiently through masonry, and settlements disappear from the very ground on which generations have built their lives. Yet across this unsettling landscape stand hundreds of brick temples, their walls crowded with gods, merchants, musicians, animals, and the ordinary inhabitants of a world long gone. Their endurance presents a curious contradiction. How then does a civilisation so accustomed to the impermanence of its ground continue to produce architectural forms that aspire to outlive it? Amit Guha's *Tapestries in Brick* approaches this question through the extraordinary material and artistic inheritance of Bengal's temples, mosques, and other brick monuments.

The book is the outcome of more than two decades of travel and documentation across villages in West Bengal and Bangladesh. An engineer by training and an independent architectural historian by intellectual pursuit, Guha brings together an impressive photographic archive, historical accounts, architectural classifications, and detailed descriptions of monuments frequently neglected by conventional histories of South Asian architecture. His undertaking recalls the pioneering surveys of David McCutchion, Tarapada Santra, Hitesranjan Sanyal, and George Michell, whose scholarship Guha readily acknowledges. I believe the book's principal achievement, therefore, lies less in establishing an entirely new architectural history than in making an unusually dispersed architectural world intelligible and accessible to a wider readership.

I have found its most remarkable argument concerning the cultural mobility of architectural form. Bengal's brick temples emerged through prolonged encounters among Buddhist construction traditions, the curved roofs of village huts, the arches and ornamental vocabularies of Sultanate architecture, the towers of North Indian and Odishan temples, and, eventually, European decorative influences. These exchanges resist the convenient habit of assigning every architectural form an exclusive religious ancestry. A curved cornice cannot be understood merely as a Hindu expression when its genealogy passes through vernacular dwelling and Sultanate construction. Guha's account restores something of this historical complexity, revealing how Bengal's artisans transformed inherited forms through successive acts of borrowing, experimentation, and adaptation.

Yet architecture never travels innocently between cultural worlds. Its movements are also governed by wealth, religious authority, political ambition, and the changing organisation of labour. Guha is attentive to the rise of the Malla rulers, wealthy zamindars, merchants, and other patrons whose resources enabled an extraordinary proliferation of temples between the 17th and 19th centuries. His historical chapters trace how commercial expansion and systems of revenue extraction helped produce these concentrations of wealth. This context matters because the exuberance of terracotta ornament can otherwise make patronage appear as an uncomplicated history of artistic generosity. Behind every commissioned shrine stood an economy that determined who possessed the means to build, whose labour was employed, and whose aspirations acquired monumental form.

I think Guha is particularly convincing when he allows ritual practice to explain architectural organisation. In the temples associated with Gaudiya Vaishnavism at



DESIGN: **MAISHA SYEDA**

Bishnupur, the south-facing courtyard, subsidiary entrances, ceremonial structures, and elevated shrines were integral to congregational worship. Kirtan required gathering spaces, while certain upper shrines accommodated deities ceremonially carried above the sanctum during festivals. Architecture thus participated in an evolving relationship between worshipper and deity. The temple's meaning resided as much in the movement of bodies and the recurrence of ritual as in the profile of its towers. These passages offer an important corrective to architectural histories that classify religious buildings principally through their visible forms.

At Kantanagar in Dinajpur, Guha's descriptive powers find an especially rewarding subject. The temple's profusely sculpted walls assemble the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, Krishna's many exploits, and a remarkable sequence of secular scenes. Zamindars travel in palanquins and pleasure boats, musicians perform, hunters pursue animals, and ordinary activities enter the same material field as divine narratives. These images are invaluable witnesses to the social imagination of their time, although their testimony cannot be read as an impartial account of society. A procession carved at a patron's expense may tell us as much about the desired image of authority as about the lives over which that authority was exercised.

Kantanagar also unsettles the familiar distinction between architectural survival and architectural completeness. The earthquake of 1897 destroyed its crowning towers, whose former appearance survives in 19th century photography. The temple continues to accommodate worship, festivals, and large gatherings, even as its original architectural composition remains irrecoverably altered. What, then, has survived: the monument, its image, its ritual life, or a changing relationship among all three? Guha does not pursue this question philosophically, but his documentation makes it difficult to ignore. Permanence here emerges through continued inhabitation, repair, and remembrance rather than the preservation of an untouched original form.

Equally significant is his attention to the sutradhars, the artisan communities whose skills and itinerant practices shaped Bengal's architectural landscape. Their contribution complicates histories that attribute architectural creativity almost exclusively to rulers and patrons. Particularly revealing is Guha's account of Nayabad Mosque, built, according to the history he recounts, by Muslim artisans associated with the construction of Kantanagar. The two buildings invite us to reconsider the boundaries through which religious architecture is habitually understood. Their proximity suggests a shared world of constructional knowledge and craftsmanship, without requiring us to imagine that differences of faith, patronage, or social position had somehow dissolved. Cultural exchange is historically meaningful precisely because it takes place amid such differences.

For all its descriptive richness, however, the book occasionally permits the visible surface to become the principal measure of architectural significance. Its extensive classifications of decorative panels, towers, arches, and sculptural programmes are supported by excellent photographs, but comparatively less attention is given to the technical and spatial questions through which these buildings might be understood as inhabited structures. How did brick dimensions, bonding systems, structural transitions, drainage, and changing environmental conditions govern their construction and endurance? How did thresholds distribute access among priests, patrons, devotees, and artisans? Plans, sections, and more sustained constructional analysis would have helped connect the magnificence of the façade to the less visible organisation of architectural life.

This is an excerpt. Read the full review on *The Daily Star* and Star Books and Literature websites.

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