



An archetypal post modern lover as depicted in the poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

Sona Sharma

Lecturer, K.M.V Jalandhar, Punjab, India

Received: 23 Nov 2024; Received in revised form: 20 Dec 2024; Accepted: 25 Dec 2024; Available online: 30 Dec 2024

©2024 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— The love song of Alfred j prufrock is a masterpiece of the modern times. With the overlapping of the post modern over the modern times this piece of poetry has opened the attributes of an archetypal lover of both the times to be similar and also different. Classifying the text of the poem with the text of a contemporary novel as having striking similarities and undoable differences this paper strives to glue the times together and assert the commonness in discourse of love.



Keywords— Modernism, postmodernism, archetypal lover, comparative analysis, and discourse of love.

INTRODUCTION

Love is a universal emotion. However in reality it is severely complicated. Lovers share a very close bond, the second relation only to the first being between mother and child. Love and love affairs between man and woman is not something new Love has travelled the time machine and whether in the past or in coming future it has basic similarities as well as differences. Complexity of love especially the one in courtship, only in rarity do get solemnised into marriage. Rest ends up in a broken affair.

The love song of J. Alfred prufrock conveys similar feelings. The complexity is evident and the nature of love in the Modern and Post Modern times seem to overlap and also distinctively separate as is examined here under. The comparison is made with a recent novel by Kunal Bhardwaj *Love was Never mine*.

The epigraph

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo*

Translation of the epigraph:

If I but thought that my response were made/
To the one perhaps returning to the world /
This tongue of flame will cease to flicker/
But since up from these depths no one has returned alive/
If what I hear is true /
I answer without being fear of ashamed.

Through the epigraph the poet wants to narrate his story to those who would metaphorically never recite it to the others. Thus we see that the poet of the love song of J. Alfred prufrock wishes to tell us about his condition after a blunt rejection from his lover. So the epigraph where shame and dejection are ornamentally projected; matches the theme of the poem. It is an example of a prototypical modern man and also an archetypal universal lover. The protagonist is heartbroken and is seen developing his thought from rejection to reconciliation The Comparison with contemporary lovers and the ones in Eliot's times shows a sharp strike of commonality. In the recent book by Kunal Bhardwaj titled *love was never mine*. In this contemporary novel the post-modern lover archetype is depicted. He is under confident, Heart broken. Like the love song the novel has a similar narration. It is a pure tragic narration as at the end Rahul's car meets with an accident And he dies.

The poem love song begins by an address to the reader to slide along with him /accompany him as he is about to narrate a disheartening love story. At first he uses grotesque imagery to horrify the narrator and overwhelm him to ask the reason of his dejection from life.

Let us go then, you and I,

When the evening is spread out against the sky

He uses fragmentation and vague imagery like deserted streets, one night cheap hotels ,uncleaned inn , complex directions from street to street. When we readers are taken to a vexing state of mind; the poet tells us to wait and employing the art of fragmentation again describes how woman are talking about Michelangelo. This is perhaps because the poet wants to say a showy and uptown talk as it will appear later. Next continuing his grotesque imagery he uses a symbol of yellow fog to depict sickness. Yellow signifies sickness and disease. Through the symbol of fog the poet wants to depict his dismantled health and ill well being.

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,

The muttering retreats

Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels

And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:

Streets that follow like a tedious argument

Of insidious intent.

The licking tongue signifies the absence of fog in the corners in the evening and continuing his narration he employs the metaphor of a cat that is jumping and leaping over terraces and finally cuddles to sleep. This is to compare routine affairs of humans an evening Walk and cozy winter sleep:

In the room the women come and go

Talking of Michelangelo.

These lines are repeated again and again in the poem as is similar with the novel.

In the novel the author writes:

If you want something whole heartedly , the whole universe conspires to get it for you.(pg 33 , 55)

Through these repetitions the author as well as the poet tries to bring us to a realistic as well as hypothetical situation. The poet subconsciously employs his monologue and time and again is snatched away to the talking of the woman. Similar to this the author of the novel in the

course of his life is time and again reminded of his motivating self . He is taken away by his thoughtful self into his own realm of existence.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,

The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,

Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,

Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,

Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,

Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,

And seeing that it was a soft October night,

Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

Similar to it the novel portrays a dejected lover working in the corporate sick due to the heart break.

Hello Rahul said after hari handed him the phone. He was still sobbing. (pg 57)

In the subsequent narration the poet further delays his intentions and employing the allusion "there is time" from the poem to his coy mistress by Andrew marvell ; like the poet hurries his lover for intimacy, the poet Eliot's so and not so urgency to describe his condition in love . In the next paragraph ; as a kind of validation to the delay he is making , he puts forth his inadequacies in terms of his looks and demeanour.

With a bald spot in the middle of my hair —

(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")

My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,

My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin —

(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")

A striking similarity can be seen in the novel's protagonist where he is confused shy and pre-occupied with himself. He is unsure about his looks.

No this looks a little girlish. I should wear something macho, more masculine . Girls love macho boys..(pg 16)

Again employing the similar allusion , he says that even in a minute there is time to reverse the indecisions but not the shame caused to him in love through rejection. Further quoting time again , he talks of the time spent with his lover ,and so much so that

he can compare all his life with number of coffee spoons used for coffee with the beloved:

Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.

So how should I presume?

This is similar to the text in the novel in which despite strong relationship of Shreya and Rahul Shreya does not accept him as her husband :

Rahul you are a very good person. You are one of my very good friends. But I can't love you. I can't ever love you. You are not the kind of person I am looking for to spend the rest of the life with. (pg 104)

Then the woman talking about Michelangelo is dying away from the perception of the narrator similar to the leaving of his lover. With this mention he asserts the placid nature of his love. Quoting woman again, he talks of their vanities and cruel and selfish mindedness by describing them as pinning the men as insects on the wall, keeping them in formulated solutions. With this he describes the indecency of woman he loved. Next as if lighting a cigarette and getting away with its butt ends he seems to not love her anymore:

And I have known the eyes already, known them
all—

The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin

To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?

And how should I presume?

The novel also portrays a similar condition when the woman are uncertain about the man they would love:

But what? you need a good looking person who has loads of money; who is a status symbol for you while making your public appearances, even if he lusts after your physical beauty. (Pg 104)

Back in the poem, As a way to defend himself from the deceiving beauties of woman he says that he is sure not to digress from his honour and self-respect. Next describing the condition his lover left him he moans that he is equivalent to crabs and idle men glancing onto the streets. In a way of liking his situation and admitting it he wants to

be a person that malingers and also metaphorically a cat that is smothered to sleep.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!

Smoothed by long fingers,

Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,

Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.

Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,

Eclipsing again on his emotions and like an ideal lover in his interior monologue reminisces on the days spent with her (ice cakes marmalade) and in a moment of free flow of thought he mentions his reason to his dejection and depressed state. "Brought the moment to crisis" he wanted to go ahead with his relationship and desire intimacy to which the woman had adjusted her pillow and say "this is not what I meant; Nothing at all". To this he was ashamed and saw his greatness flicker; similar to the flame in the epigraph of the poem. In the succeeding stanzas the narrator confirms that he is not hamlet for he is procrastinating his whole affair, not being clear and getting swallowed by his own flaw or shame. However he is happy to be the other titular characters for in shame he wants seclusion:

Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald)
brought in upon a platter,

I am no prophet — and here's no great matter;

I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,

And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat,
and snicker,

And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,

After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,

Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and
me,

Would it have been worth while,

To have bitten off the matter with a smile,

To have squeezed the universe into a ball

To roll it towards some overwhelming question,

To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,

Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—

If one, settling a pillow by her head

Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;

That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
 Would it have been worth while,
 After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled
 streets,
 After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts
 that trail along the floor—
 And this, and so much more?—
 It is impossible to say just what I mean!
 But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns
 on a screen:
 Would it have been worth while
 If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
 And turning toward the window, should say:
 "That is not it at all,
 That is not what I meant, at all."

As we topple over the ending of the poem. The narrator feels himself to be in water chambers and with the voices of humans they will drown. This is similar to the rooms where woman talked. His dreamy sustenance with his lover would end as those voices (talking of Michelangelo) would be seen as indecency at their part, gossiping about the lovers and thus the poet will no longer love and again metaphorically out of shame drown.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
 Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
 When the wind blows the water white and black.
 We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
 By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
 Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

A similar situation also ends in the novel where after rejection Rahul tragically dies.

The novel is exemplary of woman who are corrupt by heart and are unable to get love all their lives. The protagonist like prufrock himself falls in love with such woman and at the end tragically forgets about it.

CONCLUSION

Most commonly love becomes a touchstone of trust and half of human beings fail to look up to it

Infidelity, ignorance and a corrupt heart (like in case of Shreya) and case of the woman portrayed in love song by Alfred j prufrock, shows the universality of archetypal characters involved In a love affair. The only bridge where modern times can be linked to the past is by the rational understanding of love in both times. Surely so, this

similarity in the perceivable world will form a glue to coalesce the two times together.

REFERENCES

- [1] Eliot, T. S. Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock. 1915.
- [2] Bhardwaj, Kunal Love was never Mine. 2011.
- [3] Gates-White Kerri Summary of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". 2017
https://www.academia.edu/35192660/Analysis_of_The_Love_Song_of_J_Alfred_Prufrock
- [4] Lotwala, Kunjal K. Comment on The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock With Reference to T.e.hulme'sromanticism and Classicism. 2015.
https://www.worldwidejournals.com/paripex/recent_issues_pdf/2015/May/May_2015_1432974085_67.pdf