

Self-conflict in Seid Kamaly Emamy's *The City of My Heart* and T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*

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Abstract

Man's internal self-conflict is something of great interest among philosophers, playwrights, and poets. It is an everlasting and universal issue of human psychological discordances which continuously draws the poets' attention. For this reason, the present research tends to compare self-conflict in two selected poems; "The City of My Heart" by the Kurdish poet Seid Kamaly Emamy (1903-1989) and "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot (1888-1965). In the above-mentioned poems, the poets shed light on man's indecision from two different perspectives, but still, there are some mutual similarities between them. The central conflicts of these poems are encapsulated in the figures of their apparent heroes.

The study consists of three sections. The first section is an introduction. Then the second section attempts to give an account of self-conflict in "The City of My Heart" by Seid Kamaly Emamy. Following that, the third section explores self-conflict in "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot. Finally, there is a conclusion to the study.

I. Introduction

Self-conflict is the powerhouse of all human thoughts and actions. It has a holistic cultural background. It is being dealt with by all the cultures of the world differently. On the one hand, in European culture, it has a long history and its frame was drawn academically by Freud in his personality theory (1923). Freud drew the borderline of self as an entity which includes id, ego, and superego. "These are...ways of conceptualising important mental functions." (Milton & et al: 18) On the other, in the eastern culture, especially Islamic culture, it is seen differently. The human psyche is of two parts: one is the ordering-self, *Nafsi Ammar* (Source of Evil, Evil Commanding) and the other is *Nafsi Lawwam*, blaming self. However, the final decision is made by mind. Both cultures see human self as the "memory of the database of what we call the 'working self': a repository of currently active goals, models of the self, and the beliefs about ourselves, what we are, what we want to be, and what we ought to be" (Crawford: 89). Therefore, the internal conflict of the human psyche: "is the experience of having opposing psychological beliefs, desires, impulses or feelings" (Sol).

In the selected poems the central characters are in front of two opposing decisions. The central conflicts are encapsulated in the heroes of the poems. As J. Alfred Prufrock suffers from the indecision of the choice of whether to act or not, Emamy's character, who apparently seems to be himself, is plagued by the indecision of whether to 'go' or not to 'go'. In both poems, the body is

like a ship which is steered by two captains. Each wants to direct the ship in his own way. Thus, the conflicts go on until the end of the poems.

II. Self-conflict in The City of My Heart

Kamil Abdul-hakim Abdul-Karim was a Kurdish classic poet who was born in the village of Zambily in Kurdistan of Iran in 1903. He started his education at home in 1912 and studied Islamic studies and Arabic language. In 1930, due to his father's illness, he left his study and on his father's demand, he got married. His pen name is 'Awat', but sometimes he uses 'Emamy' too. After his father's death, he started working as a farmer. At the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah in Iran, he was imprisoned for his national and religious believe for two years and released in 1948. Finally, he settled down in Qaqlawa village and worked there as a farmer, until he died in 1989 (Khaznzdar: 583-4).

In spite of his limited education, Emamy has tremendous poetic merit which gives him a high status among his contemporaries. His poem, *The City of My Heart*, is his masterpiece which is like a national anthem among Kurdish singers. The lyric is turned into songs by many famous Kurdish singers such as Mamle and Nasiri Razazi.

The poem is 14 lines which are written in the Kurdish couplet form.

City of My Heart

*I say the city of my heart is gardens and flowers, though
My mind says no, it is the place of the drunken rebellion battlefield, don't go*

*I say its place is the place of blessing, I go
It says no, it is dark, the hunting field of Satan, don't go*

*I say it is the place of spirit's comfort, I go
It says it is entirely destroyed, devastated, don't go*

*I say it is the place of fools and deviled people, I go
It says no, it is haunted by ghosts, don't go*

*I say it is the center of fellows' secret, I go
It says it is the place of the evil-eyes of greedy people, don't go*

*I say it is a shelter and shield at the time of jeopardy, I go
It says it is full of spear holes, don't go*

*Among all these goes and don't goes, (Kamil) is confused
I say it is better to go, it says it is better not to go (Imami: 236)*

There are two beliefs of the cause of its composing. A group of critics believe that it was written from the Sufism (mystic) perspective that believes in an internal conflict between 'heart' and 'mind'. According to the Kurdish writer and critic Marif Khaznadar, in Sufism 'heart' symbolizes Sufism and 'mind' symbolizes religion (598). Sufism believes that heart is superior to the reasoning mind and one should follow its directions. The heart takes its inspiration from the

metaphysical world. As Pascal says: “Heart has its reasons of which reasons knows nothing” (qtd. in Milton & et al: 18). As Novykh asserts:

Some people are pure in their souls, and their consciousness is not bogged down in the behaviour pattern of world egocentrism and personal doubts... Their questions come neither from logic nor from human mind, but rather from the deepest feelings as if invisible communication is taking place between souls. (8).

Sufism sees the conflict between heart and mind as an everlasting struggle. In the classical literature of the area, the heart is the center of emotion and the brain is the center of reasoning. The poets want to choose their heart over their reasoning and logic. If the poem was written in a Sufism point of view, in the end, the poet is supposed to choose a side; follow his heart.

He was nominated as an absent member of the Central Committee of Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (PDKI) in the second congress in 1964 (Sultani). Therefore, the other group of critics believe that it was written for his political indecision. So, they say he was called for a congress of the party and he was not allowed to go by his family. That was because PDKI was a communist party and he was from a religious family. Thus he was internally in a struggle whether to go or not.

However, the researcher believes that the technique of the poem is written on the base of an Islamic belief that human internal psyche is of two parts. One is the ordering-self and the other is blaming-self. Whatever decision we take, internally we are split into two selves. One orders the action and the other blames you of doing it, especially when the outcome of the action is not clear. As a referee, the mind is the ultimate master that finally chooses one side. In the poem the struggle between these two sides of human selves starts from the beginning:

I say the city of my heart is gardens and flowers, though

My mind says no, it is the place of the drunken rebellion battlefield, don't go

No matter what the background of the poem is, but it is still one of the masterpieces to show internal self-conflict from an eastern point of view. Emamy's poem is written in dialogue. Like Prufrock, he is in indecision condition. Imamy's conflict, on the one hand, is more like that of Hamlet when above all his indecision he is still cautious of both selves. Still, he can evaluate them and study them clearly. On the other hand, he is Prufrock's reflected image because, till the end of the poem, he does not choose the final decision:

Among all these goes and don't goes, (Kamil) is confused

I say it is better to go, it says it is better not to go. (Lines: 13-14)

If the poet wanted to change his decision or to take the last decision, the doom of the poem would be changed. Then he would be a narcissistic poet who makes decisions instead of others and tells the reader what to do (Sultani). He is not sure to choose which side. He evaluates the conflict without the final solution. The open ending of the poem makes it the universal not personal. It lets the reader experience the feeling.

III. Self-conflict in *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*

Thomas Stearn Eliot was an American poet, playwright, and critic. His first volume of poems was *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917). “It marked the beginning of an era in modern poetry.” (Chinitz: 120). He was under the influence of the works of the French symbolists. As Sara Thorne suggests Eliot believed in a symbolical poetic language that could express the vague, fleeting nature of experience. Eliot also thought that whenever the direct statement or description

incapable of representing real experience, a succession of images could convey a true sense of consciousness. (279) ... Ezra Pound (1885-1972) believed in the power of a poem as a word picture with which the reader must actively engage in order to interpret implicit messages. (qtd. in *ibid*: 279) Pound's statement is ultimately true for Eliot's poetry. He is "A deeply challenging and innovating writer whose implications are still not fully absorbed." (Bergonzi :x) So, modern poetry especially Eliot's is not a task to be tackled easily. He practiced boxing, learning Sanskrit, studying philosophy etc. One can say he was a child in the wonderland. He wanted to examine and investigate all human activities. Therefore, this kind of curiosity makes his poetry sophisticated and a puzzle-like formula.

The poetry of 1919-1925 is known as the "poetry of despair" and thus Prufrock can be regarded as the fundamental base of this sense. "He reflects fears and anxiety of his time. (Peck & Coyle: 248). 'The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock' was begun at Harvard in February 1910, and the final version was assembled in July-August 1911 from a number of fragments written over the past years. Pound declared immediately that Eliot "has sent in the best poem I had yet had or seen from an American ... He has actually trained himself and modernised himself on his own". (qtd. in Jain: 32)

The poem is written in dramatic monologue. Cooper aptly comments that the monologue attracts the reader not simply to observe but to participate actively in the poem, from the inside (49). It makes the reader a part of the process by giving him the ability of investigating the mind of the character. "The form has a dual function: it allows the poet to give a direct insight into a character, but simultaneously acts as a mask."(Thorne: 291). This disguises through masking enables the surfacing of emotion and personality. The pronouns, from the very first line onwards, confuse rather than illuminate. While these pronouns presumably refer to specific people, Eliot frustrates our desire to identify than by never mentioning them by name in the lines of the poem. (Badenhausen: 3)

His allusions and literary references have made his poem almost impossible to be interpreted intelligibly. "The poem comes to us precisely as an accumulation of pieces, in short, a collage."(Cooper: 52) His use of different literary references creates a kind of intertextuality that lays the ground to the publication of his literary criticism essay *Tradition and Individual Talents* in which he focuses on the tradition of a poet's preceding generations. This essay made Eliot not only a poet but a theorist too. Eliot lays down in it the basic principles of objectivity and impersonality in poetry. Dr. Vilas Salunke writes "No other critical essay of the 20th century has been as influential as this one."(131).

The meaning of Eliot's verse can be difficult to pin-down. It makes great demands upon the reader. It is no longer possible to rely on narrative structure, instead, we must recognise the significance of sequences of images, repeated words, recurring themes, and allusions (Thorne: 282-3). He uses diverse images and symbols to lay bare the mind of his character. Critics see Prufrock as a psychologically disturbed individual. According to modern psychology:

a neurotic patient is someone who is preoccupied with conflict: "why do I do what I do? what is driving me". He struggles with guilt: guilt for doing forbidden acts, for entertaining forbidden thoughts, for surviving where others did not, and for enjoying forbidden pleasure... while a personal disorder struggles with a strong internal censor for his thoughts and actions. He finds it difficult to maintain self-control. (Manfield: 3-4).

Prufrock appears to have a personality disorder. “Instead of looking within themselves to locate feelings or make decisions, patients with personality disorders look outside themselves for evaluations, directions, rules, or opinions to guide them” (ibid: 3). Thus Prufrock clearly enacts personality disorder. There lies the question; whether Prufrock is a neurotic patient, or is a man stuck in his personality disorder; in another word disorder of the self? There are symptoms of both. He is ashamed of his planned actions and even desires and he is passive. He remains in his indecisive state. Thus they become the source of Prufrock’s dilemma.

The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock presents Eliot as a genius poet with “its stylistic innovation and its thematic and linguistic complexity, and enactment of psychic conflict.” (Jain: 32). As Manju Jain rightly says “Prufrock is timid, fastidious, and afraid of action. He desires experience but is unable to surrender to it.”(33) The poem engages the readers’ inner life by involving them into Prufrock’s agonies so that they become their own in the course of the poem. (Cooper: 49). When the reader indulges in Prufrock’s dilemma, they become a part of his internal conflict. In an Aristotelian word, it works like catharsis. Readers are jolted out of their security into the new world of Prufrock, the world of despair and turmoil, the world of self-splitting conflict. Thus it purifies their inner own conflicts.

Some critics see the poem as Eliot’s internal conflict between Romanticism and Modernism. His sense of self-split in his poem was a foundation of his *Tradition and Individual Talent* essay which declares that a poet cannot be extremely subjective. Therefore, he practiced his art under the influence of his predecessors’ tradition. So, it shows his longing to romanticism and his awareness of the urgency of modernizing himself. “The protagonist is divided within himself because he is no longer sincerely within the tradition.”(Jain: 40).

Other critics regard it as a pure internal self-conflict of any human. As Bergonzi suggests: Eliot forbade any life of himself to be written together ... And there is an inevitable desire to bring together what Eliot wants to keep apart, the man who suffers and the mind which creates. (iix)

He suggests that “The man who suffers and the mind which creates can and perhaps should remain separate (ibid: xii). The work and the biographical factors should be kept apart in order to let us truly appreciate the poem as a literary work. So, the researcher prefers to depict the poem as a pure literary masterwork. Therefore Eliot’s preoccupation with the nature of the self is central to the reading of ‘Prufrock’.

The title and the epigraph to “Prufrock” both have the prepared the reader for anticipating a struggle with meaning that will require rethinking, interpretive process of suspicion as well as discovery because they have also prepared the reader to keep an open mind (Murphy: 283). Indirectly, Eliot splits the reader’s mind and the reader becomes suspicious of the sign-post and its content. The meaning of the epigraph is like what we experience with the poem, Dante’s *Inferno*. Here Prufrock is the incarnation of Guido; his story is slipped from his hands unconsciously. So, the reads become extremely cautious to investigate its entire literal labyrinth and to find something hidden inside the character. When the epigraph refers to Guido in the hell, it compares Prufrock’s psychological struggle and psychological hell, in Faustus’s word the hell is inside him. From this perspective, Prufrock is to be understood as a character living in psychological hell and trying to disclose his dilemma.

One of the confusing parts of the poem is its narrative technique. The way the poem starts signals the uncertainty of the teller, the one who communicates the message. Describing a speaker, Jeffrey Wainwright asserts that “the ‘voice’ becomes a persona, or a mask, which enables the poet to explore a personality which might include some indistinguishable part of him or herself but can range more freely, much as a dramatist can in creating a character (51). The voice goes on calmly or anticipating decisions and indecisions, disaster and recoveries, and by the time we reach the end of the poem it is impossible to say whether we have made any progress at all in time and action from the opening lines (Bergonzi:17).

When Eliot wrote about the function of irony, he referred to its use, by Laforgue, as an instrument to express ‘dedoublement of the personality against which the subject struggles’. The term dedoublement means the splitting of the self into subject and object- into the self-thinking and the self-observing - the ‘you’ and the ‘I’ of ‘Prufrock’ (Jain: 37-8). In the opening line, three of the seven words are pronouns. The question that immediately arises is, who the anonymous ‘you’ is and who is the ‘I’. The discourse between the ‘I’ and the ‘you’ goes on throughout the poem. Then another plural pronoun, “we” comes in the last line. Prufrock “set(s) out on a journey, but the destination remains vague, as does the “overwhelming question” that he never asked” (Chinitz: 123).

There are many speculations on the identity of the pronoun “you”. Murphy declares that some of the critics have speculated that the “you” is Prufrock’s alter ego, the person he would like to be but feels incapable of ever becoming (293). The distinction between subject and object is often buried (Jain: 36). As David E. Chinitz says:
This confusion is a linguistic symptom of Prufrock’s indecisive negotiation ... this special division also corresponds to the problematic boundaries of Prufrock’s selfhood, between the interior of his thoughts and emotions and the exterior world of things and other people. (123)

Also, Raine asserts that: “Let’s go then you and I... conceivably summons Dante and his guide Virgil” (69). Indeed, it is in their efforts to understand these lines and everything that follows, that so many readers of the poem go astray (Bergonzi: 15). A further problem is that this “you” introduced early in “Prufrock” virtually disappears as an effective presence from the scene, or at least from Prufrock’s ken of reference... Prufrock has been fixed in the reader’s mind as a key to the solution to Prufrock’s problem, yet the identity of “you” is never clearly established (Murphy: 293-4).

It is more apt to identify the pronoun “you” as the other part of Prufrock’s psyche, because throughout the course of the poem that “you” disappears. It happens when the other part of self, controls the scene and wins over that supporting and courageous “you”.

The grammatical structure is another channel that exerts out Prufrock’s split-self. It is often incomplete or disrupted to reflect the fragmentation of Prufrock’s shattered statue. David E. Chinitz notices that beginning with a future orientation (“let us go” and “there will be time”... Prufrock turns into the present tense (“the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully” and then hesitates in the conditional “should I” that tests out the possibility of action. A moment of crisis comes and goes, indicated by Prufrock’s transition to the past conditional (“would it have been worthwhile?”) (123). The repeated use of the modal (would) implicitly reveals Prufrock’s inability to act (Thorne: 283). Finally, with the past tense, he gives up the idea of asking the

‘overwhelming question’ or disturbing the universe. When “there will be time” is repeated continually, it is a retreating technique to get away from the action.

The poem opens with the emphasized imperative (let us go), but the certainty is soon replaced by the repetition of the modal (will) with its connotations of possible future action. Further doubt is introduced with the use of the interrogative mood: do I dare/ disturb the universe?; ... how should I presume? then how should I begin ...?. The modal (should) with its tentative connotations emphasize the doubt about Prufrock’s intended action. With the replacement of (should/shall) with (would), we realize that the moment for action has passed: Prufrock is now thinking of what could have been rather than what will be (Thorne: 284).

There are many more hints that show Prufrock’s split-self and self-conflict. For example in lines 14 and 15, there is a strong verbal parallelism. One feels that there are two doers who are doing the same work, as his split-self: “The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, / the yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,”

Prufrock reminds the reader Stanley in the Birthday Party by Beckett, how he is confused in his psychological turmoil. From line 40 to 44, Prufrock sees things as fragmented parts. Instability of his mind is destabilizing the images in his memory. Chinitz believes that Prufrock is incapable of seeing a whole person. Even his beloved is seen only as disconnected body parts (125):

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!")

.....
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare

(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!) (63-64)

References to detached body parts (face, hands, voices, eyes, arms) intensify the loss of humanity by reducing individuals to fragments. Similarly, Prufrock sees himself in terms of his bald spot, his arms, legs, and his clothes; in the term of the face, he must prepare for society (Thorne: 283-4).

In the Lines 111 to 119, Prufrock compares himself with Hamlet and he resembles him in his indecisiveness and procrastination, but he rejects the role because he is aware of his inadequacy to perform the heroic task of setting his world in order (Jain: 51). Hamlet is like Prufrock in experiencing “a hundred indecision”, but unlike him in finally taking violent and decisive action (Chinitz: 126). He is not from a noble family. He is neither the man of challenges nor a hero. He is an indecisive neglected modern man who is lost in the midst of a capitalistic society; a society that alienates its individuals on the base of material values.

The last performance of his conflict is shown in the final stanzas. The poem ends with a haunting image of the mermaids “offers an alternative reality to Prufrock, a place of escape where he will no longer be faced with his own inability to communicate” (Thorne: 291). The nervous sexuality of a small world of novels and teacups and skirts that trail along the floor in exchange for the pure but remote erotism of the “sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown” (Bergonzi: 18). He is a kind of allergic to nearness. He prefers keeping his demands away

in order not to take action. He is more in control where the realm of action is far. That is why he takes shelter from ideal comfort.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is now explicit that Emamy and Eliot artistically expose human psychological self-conflict from their personal perspective. In both poems, the central characters are in front of two opposing decisions. The central conflicts are encapsulated in the heroes of the poems. The poets shed light on human turmoil and indecisive status. Eliot with his innovative style and his confusing narration and Emamy with his open-ended dialogue leave the reader with contemplation. Though they are from two different educational and cultural backgrounds, still there are some similarities between them. At the end of the poems, there is no clear action from both sides. They remind the reader that internal conflict is an inevitable part of human existence. Thus the reader is left with a big question mark in his or her mind.

Note: all the quotes of Eliot's poem are taken from (<https://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poems/love-song-j-alfred-prufrock>.)

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