



Fragmented Desires: A Comparative Study of Love and Alienation in T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and Rehman Rahi's *Creation*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the complex themes of love and desire in T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and Rehman Rahi's *Creation*, analyzing how both poets portray these emotions in the context of modernist disillusionment and existential searching. Eliot's *Prufrock* intellectualizes and hesitates in his pursuit of love, reflecting a profound sense of social alienation, anxiety, and self-doubt. His inability to act upon his desires is emblematic of the fragmented, uncertain condition of modern love. Rahi, in contrast, presents love as a mystical and elusive force, where the speaker's yearning for connection is challenged by existential and spiritual dilemmas. Both poets evoke the tension between the personal and the cosmic, the tangible and the ephemeral, in their exploration of love's transformative yet disorienting power. Through a comparative analysis of these works, this paper examines how both Eliot and Rahi use love as a lens to explore broader themes of identity, isolation, and the search for meaning in the modern world.

Introduction:

Both T.S. Eliot and Abdur Rehman Rahi have left indelible marks on their respective literary landscapes, though they emerge from vastly different cultural contexts. Eliot, as a pioneering figure in

early 20th-century modernist poetry, channelled the disillusionment and fragmented consciousness of his time. His works like "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men" are steeped in cultural decay, spiritual emptiness, and existential alienation—hallmarks of the post-World War I era. His journey from despair to spiritual resolution through his Anglican conversion, often reflected in poems like "Ash Wednesday" and "Four Quartets," mirrors broader concerns with personal salvation amidst a decaying world. Eliot's reflections on urbanization, ecology, and the environment are strikingly prescient, as they offer a cautionary outlook toward unchecked modernization and alienation from nature, resonating with contemporary ecological concerns.

On the other hand, Abdur Rehman Rahi, a major figure in Kashmiri literature, brought modernist sensibilities to his poetry while grounding it in the socio-political and cultural ethos of Kashmir. His work, particularly "Siyah Rood Jaeren Manz" (In Black Drizzle), reveals an acute sensitivity to the human condition, shaped by the tumultuous political landscape of Kashmir. Like Eliot, Rahi's poetry navigates personal, cultural, and political dimensions, often reflecting the tension between tradition and modernity. The influence of existential thinkers like Camus and Sartre is visible in his contemplations of meaning, identity, and freedom within a constrained socio-political framework.

Both poets explored the notion of alienation—Eliot in the wake of Western industrialization and spiritual crisis, and Rahi within the context of Kashmiri strife and colonial legacies. The modernist aesthetic of fragmented narratives, dense imagery, and symbolic references marks both their works, though filtered through their unique cultural lenses.

Fragmented desires in *Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock* and *Creation*

In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T.S. Eliot, the themes of love and desire are woven intricately into the psychological landscape of the protagonist, J. Alfred Prufrock. Eliot's portrayal of these emotions is both modern and deeply introspective, exploring not only Prufrock's yearning for love but also his crippling anxiety and sense of inadequacy that prevent him from pursuing it.

Prufrock intellectualizes love and desire to the point where he is unable to act upon them. Rather than experiencing or expressing love, he contemplates it endlessly. His mind is dominated by questions like, "Do I dare?" and "Do I dare disturb the universe?" These questions reveal his fear of disrupting the order of things, of stepping outside the bounds of propriety or what he perceives as societal expectations. His

inner world is a constant cycle of reflection, doubt, and self-reproach, which paralyzes him emotionally and socially.

This hesitation and over-analysis of his own feelings and potential actions create a distance between Prufrock and any actual experience of love. Desire becomes something abstract and cerebral, rather than passionate or immediate. His desire is not just for romantic or sexual fulfillment but also for connection, understanding, and validation.

Prufrock's overwhelming fear of rejection is a major barrier to his pursuit of love. He imagines himself being judged and ridiculed, particularly by women, whom he fears will find him physically and socially inadequate. His famous lines, "They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!'" and "They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!'" reflect a deep insecurity about his physical appearance. He anticipates the criticisms and judgments of others before even giving himself a chance to engage with them.

This fear is rooted in a profound sense of inferiority, as if Prufrock does not believe himself worthy of the kind of love he desires. His longing for connection is overshadowed by his assumption that he will be found lacking. This fear of rejection is paralyzing, causing him to retreat into himself rather than take the risk of being emotionally vulnerable. Prufrock's hesitation in matters of love is also tied to a broader sense of social anxiety and alienation. He is acutely aware of the social rituals and expectations surrounding love and courtship but feels inadequate within those structures. The social world he describes in the poem—of "tea and cakes and ices" and "women [who] come and go / Talking of Michelangelo"—is one in which he feels like an outsider. He does not see himself as part of this elite, intellectual society, and his desire for connection is complicated by his belief that he is not sophisticated enough to belong to it.

This anxiety about his place in society magnifies his insecurities about love. He imagines scenarios where he might express his feelings only to be met with dismissal or mockery. For example, he imagines the reaction to his confession: "That is not what I meant at all. / That is not it, at all." This line suggests a fundamental miscommunication or misunderstanding, which reflects Prufrock's fear that he is incapable of making himself understood or appreciated by the women he desires.

Prufrock's desires remain largely unfulfilled in the poem, manifesting instead in fantasies and dreams. His vision of the mermaids, "riding seaward on the waves / Combing the white hair of the waves blown back," is one of the most vivid symbols of unattainable desire. The mermaids represent an idealized,

almost mythical form of love and beauty, yet Prufrock is painfully aware that this fantasy is out of reach: “I do not think that they will sing to me.”

The mermaids serve as a metaphor for the emotional and physical fulfillment that Prufrock yearns for but believes is inaccessible to him. This idea of unreachable desire is reinforced throughout the poem, as Prufrock’s fantasies of love and connection remain distant and imaginary, never materializing into real experiences. His desire becomes something that is longed for but never realized, always just beyond his grasp.

Eliot’s modernist portrayal of love in Prufrock reflects a sense of fragmentation and disillusionment with the traditional romantic ideal. Prufrock’s love is not grand or redemptive; rather, it is fraught with indecision, anxiety, and self-doubt. In contrast to the idealized, passionate love found in earlier literature, Prufrock’s love is alienated and incomplete. He is unable to transcend his own fears and insecurities to reach the object of his desire.

This fragmented view of love reflects the broader cultural and psychological disorientation of the early 20th century. Prufrock's inability to connect with others, his fear of failure, and his endless questioning are emblematic of the modern condition, in which love and desire are no longer straightforward or certain. Instead, they are fraught with anxiety and uncertainty, reflecting a world in which individuals feel increasingly isolated and disconnected.

A significant aspect of Prufrock’s relationship with love and desire is his awareness of aging. Time is a recurring theme in the poem, with the repeated references to the passing of time—“I have measured out my life with coffee spoons,” “And indeed there will be time”—suggesting Prufrock’s anxiety about the dwindling opportunities for love as he grows older. His sense of aging contributes to his feelings of inadequacy and urgency, yet paradoxically, it also fuels his indecision. Even though he is acutely aware that time is passing, he remains unable to act.

Prufrock’s desire is thus tinged with a sense of loss and regret. He is aware of what he wants but feels that time, and his own inability to seize it, is slipping away. His constant reflections on time and aging create a melancholic backdrop to his desires, which are never fulfilled and instead become part of his broader existential despair.

In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," love and desire are portrayed as complex, fraught with self-doubt, social anxiety, and a deep sense of inadequacy. Prufrock's inability to act on his desires, coupled

with his overwhelming fear of rejection and humiliation, leaves him in a state of emotional paralysis. His yearning for connection and intimacy remains unrealized, and his fantasies of love are distant and unattainable. Through Prufrock's internal monologue, Eliot captures the modern condition of fragmented desire, where love is no longer a straightforward or redemptive force but rather a source of anxiety and alienation.

In Rehman Rahi's poem "Creation," the interaction between love, longing, and existential searching is central. The opening lines invite the beloved to enter, signaling vulnerability and a yearning for connection: "Push the door, come in, I am here." The description of the beloved as "the ethereal spirit of spring's breeze" suggests something elusive and beautiful, embodying renewal, while the speaker identifies as "the searching spring of the backwoods," evoking an image of isolation and internal quest.

Throughout the poem, the speaker struggles with the fleeting nature of this encounter. The references to "a jingling footstep in the void" and "a flutter of wings at midnight" indicate an intangible, almost ghostly presence, hinting at the elusive and ephemeral nature of the beloved. The "restless snake vanishing into the haystack" furthers this idea, symbolizing how quickly the object of desire can disappear, leaving the speaker grasping at illusions.

The emotional intensity rises with the speaker's declaration, "I sacrifice my life for you," expressing a deep, consuming desire to bridge the gap between them. The request, "Stop a while and let me see you properly," reveals the speaker's frustration with the beloved's evanescent nature, a plea for clarity and a real, tangible connection.

The line "No, don't close the door, I feel suffocated" underscores a sense of urgency and fear of abandonment. The speaker feels suffocated not only by the possibility of the beloved leaving but also by the intensity of the emotions and the inability to fully grasp or understand the beloved, highlighted by "A mantra is playing on your lips"—an enigmatic, repetitive, and distant chant that reinforces the otherworldly quality of the beloved.

From Rahi's modernist perspective, this poem explores the emotional and philosophical dimensions of love, where desire is both intense and unattainable. The beloved represents an ideal, something ethereal and spiritual, yet forever out of reach, while the speaker is trapped in a state of yearning and searching, caught between connection and isolation.

In these lines, “What is this madness? I am alone,” signal the speaker’s feelings of disorientation and loneliness. The use of “madness” suggests inner turmoil, as if the speaker is grappling with their own emotional or psychological state. This sense of isolation is compounded by the electrifying gaze of the other: “Your eyes are incredibly electrifying,” which hints at both attraction and a sense of being overwhelmed by an intense, external presence. The imagery of the “narrow attic” reflects confinement—both physically and mentally—suggesting that the speaker’s environment, like their mind, feels restricting.

The desire for relief or escape is expressed with, “I want to drink water, your breath is searing.” Water, often a symbol of life and sustenance, contrasts with the oppressive heat of the beloved’s breath, intensifying the sense of discomfort and need.

As the poem progresses, the figure of the “magician” enters, representing someone who has power over the speaker, both fascinating and disorienting them. Descriptions like “His arms soft like wild tulips” and “His steps like a spider on its web” evoke images of beauty combined with manipulation or entrapment, further intensifying the complexity of the speaker’s relationship with this figure. The magician plays “deer-like” and “lion-like,” shifting between roles of prey and predator, suggesting the constant flux of power and vulnerability in this relationship.

The speaker then confronts coercion directly, asking, “This coercion, why so much coercion?” and challenging the manipulator with, “O trickster, I am not out to sell myself!” This resistance highlights the speaker’s struggle for autonomy, rejecting the role of a passive participant in this dynamic.

In the lines, the speaker expresses doubts about what is real, asking, “What if illusions and shadows mock me?” This question reveals the speaker’s fear of being deceived, not only by the magician or external forces but by their own perception. The demand, “Reveal your true nature...then let’s see!” is a call for authenticity, a challenge to uncover the reality hidden behind the trickery and illusion.

“I am dead—every inch of me is on fire” immediately signals an intense internal transformation, common in modernist explorations of the self. This death is not physical but metaphorical, suggesting a shedding of old identities or ego as one moves into a state of passionate desire. The imagery of fire speaks to the consuming nature of love, which annihilates the old self, a theme Rahi often explores in his poetry. The tension between destruction and renewal echoes his broader concerns with existential crisis and rebirth.

“Where has my mad heart flown away? / Why doesn’t any bodily part touch the ground?” conveys a sense of dislocation, both emotional and physical. In modernist poetry, the search for meaning often leaves the speaker suspended between worlds, and here, love dislodges the speaker from earthly grounding. Rahi’s works often evoke this existential drift, where the self feels both liberated and alienated in its quest for meaning. The sense of madness (“mad heart”) suggests a love so overwhelming that it transcends the rational mind, another hallmark of his approach to desire.

“I hear the flutter of wings” introduces a mystical dimension, perhaps alluding to the soul or spirit taking flight. Wings, traditionally symbolic of transcendence, could signify the ascent of the soul in Sufi thought, where love leads to spiritual ecstasy. However, the modernist framing in Rahi’s work challenges traditional religious interpretations, instead positioning love and desire as forces that propel the self into an unknown, uncertain realm (“What is this dark cave? Where have I reached?”). The darkness of the cave suggests a journey into the depths of the subconscious or into a space of spiritual trial.

“Do I have to gulp down this spring of fire?” invokes the contradictory nature of love and desire in Rahi’s work: it is both ecstatic and painful. Fire here functions as a double metaphor—while it symbolizes burning passion, it also suggests a trial, something that must be endured, consumed, or absorbed. The spring of fire, a paradoxical image, merges life (spring) with destruction (fire), capturing the modernist complexity of desire as both creative and destructive. Rahi often portrays desire as something that must be overcome or integrated to achieve a higher state of consciousness or being.

“My love you possessed me and I embraced you/ You are no more a God, nor am I Eve” is a striking rejection of conventional religious or mythological frameworks. Rahi’s modernist voice challenges the traditional notions of worship (God) and sin (Eve), seeking a more egalitarian, earthly connection. This reflects his interest in exploring love outside traditional hierarchies or binaries—divine/mortal, sacred/profane, male/female. The speaker and the beloved are no longer trapped in these roles but instead meet as equals in their mutual surrender.

“From your every glance trickles grape wine / Every beat of pulse sparkles like stars” brings the celestial and the bodily together, an essential aspect of Rahi’s modernist treatment of love. The grape wine, a Sufi symbol for spiritual intoxication, becomes a metaphor for the lover’s power over the speaker, while the pulse and stars connect bodily sensations to the cosmos. Rahi often fuses the personal with the cosmic, suggesting that desire is not only an intimate experience but also an expression of universal rhythms.

“Earth’s moisture oozes below the eyebrows / I cool my finger in the lightning” further blends the natural world with the physical body. The earth’s moisture and lightning suggest both fertility and danger, symbols of life and energy that mirror the speaker’s internal experience of desire. Rahi’s use of natural imagery often signifies the grounding of spiritual or emotional states in tangible, sensory experiences. Here, the cooling of the finger in lightning evokes a moment of contact with something beyond the ordinary—a divine spark or electric connection that is both thrilling and perilous.

Through this stanza, Rahi, as a modernist poet, explores love and desire as forces that displace the self from conventional roles and boundaries. The imagery of fire, flight, wine, and lightning conveys the intensity, ecstasy, and trials that accompany deep emotional and spiritual connection. His modernism lies in the way he questions traditional binaries (God/Eve, spirit/body) and offers a vision of love as a transformative, yet disorienting force that fuses the personal with the cosmic, the sacred with the earthly. Rahi’s exploration of desire, therefore, reflects both a mystical yearning and an existential search for self amidst love’s consuming flames.

The line, “Else I would have weaved a dream!” suggests a sense of regret or missed opportunity. It’s as if the speaker is caught between reality and the imagined, yearning for the ability to dream but constrained by the present. This line adds an element of existential contemplation, characteristic of Rahi’s modernist leanings—where the dream might represent an ideal, or an escape from the harshness of reality.

The following lines introduce a vibrant and intoxicating scene: “The morning light has brightened up the peaks” and “The air trips in ecstasy today.” These images create a sense of natural exuberance and life, contrasting with the speaker’s internal state of weariness revealed at the poem’s end. The “youthful bush” that has “blossomed early” speaks to a sense of vitality and new beginnings. The environment is flourishing, filled with the intoxicating beauty of nature, yet the speaker seems emotionally distanced from it.

Each image builds on this lush natural world: “Each petal wears the color of cool shade,” “Every fragrant bit intoxicates,” and “Every pore oozes youthfulness.” These lines reflect a heightened sensory experience, where nature is alive, young, and full of energy. However, this abundance contrasts with the internal tone of the speaker. While nature thrives in youth and exuberance, the speaker is overcome by a weariness that sets a melancholic undertone.

In the final lines, the speaker addresses their heart, imploring it, "Don't disturb the bees anymore." This is a striking metaphor. The bees, often symbols of industriousness or desire, may represent the constant inner stirrings of longing or effort, and the speaker now seeks peace. The weariness expressed in the final line, "A weariness seems to have overcome my body," marks a shift from the external vibrancy of the natural world to the speaker's personal exhaustion. This duality—between the outward ecstasy of life and the inward sense of fatigue—reveals a deeper modernist tension within the poem, where external beauty is contrasted with internal struggle.

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