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Active Imagination and Shadow in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

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Abstract

The article aims to review Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" based on Jungian theories on active imagination and shadow. Since the poem's technique is a dramatic monologue, we know that both the reader and speaker of the poem are imaginary and they have nothing to do with the poet. Therefore the identity of the 'you' and 'I' are not clear and they raise serious arguments. Even the main reason for their quest has never been mentioned in the poem. The poem tells us that something is wrong with Prufrock and the balance of his psyche has been destroyed. The 'you and I' have no choice except to find the responsible person for this inner chaos. Critics have employed various approaches to clarify their identities. One of the approaches to the poem is a psychological one which brings us to the hidden layers of the poem. Thus, we seek to address the raised questions, who are 'you' and 'I'?, and what is responsible for the loneliness and imbalance of Prufrock's psyche? Through active imagination, Prufrock erases the border between conscious and unconscious and enters the depths of his unconscious and finds his shadow that is responsible for all his misery.

Keywords: Carl Gustav Jung, T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", Active Imagination, Shadow, Unconscious

1.1. Introduction

In the summer of 1915, T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) published "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in the collection of *Prufrock and Other Observation.* Through "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" Eliot reached a new style and technique which is now called 'dramatic monologue'. The dramatic monologue is a genre that

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brings a gap between the poet and the speaker and as Eliot himself mentioned "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates" ("Tradition" 104) so it is not surprising that Eliot chose dramatic monologue to separate himself from Prufrock, he does not want his emotions, feelings and even thoughts are counted as Prufrock's. First of all, from the beginning, the title of the poem makes us sure that Eliot is not the narrator or the hero of this poem, second there is a 'you' who is always addressed by Prufrock, the identity of this 'you' is unknown. It is obvious that this 'you' is neither Eliot nor the reader. Third, in "The Love Song" dramatic monologue implies "an ironic contrast between the 'love song' and the inability of confronting 'an overwhelming question'" (Haiqin 82).

Moreover in all of his poems especially in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", Eliot "combines the flexibility of free verse with a highly disciplined irregularity in the use of rhyme" (Stringer 549). Jenny Stringer in her book *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Literature in English* writes that though "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" counts as a dramatic monologue, at the same time this poem breaks with the conventions of the mode through "dispensing with orthodox narrative or thematic continuity", and displaying Prufrock's "incapacitating self-consciousness and intellectual doubt in the modulations of its mannered and artfully digressive development" (549). The dramatic monologue is based on the Imaginary speaker and Imaginary audience, everything is Imaginary and nothing is real, it is surrealistic or the mirror image of the real world, everything is upside down. In "The Love Song", the dramatic monologue directly points its finger to the psyche of the Imaginary speaker and invites the real reader to sit beside the Imaginary reader and listen to Prufrock.

Besides in Mays' view, Eliot in this poem embodies things in ways that are stunning and suggestive and regard the relation between life and art as tragic. This tragedy leads us to the modern city which brings spiritual exhaustion to its entire citizens. Spiritual exhaustion and desperate individuals attract psychological criticism into this poem. John Xiros Cooper in his book *The Cambridge Introduction to Eliot* tells us about the psychological point of view of the poem:

> In one respect the poem has already seen past the psychological construction of the self: although psychology was a new discipline at that time, Eliot even than anticipated a postmodern construction of personal identity. Years later, he was to describe this new condition of personhood more explicitly in his essay on the poet Lord Byron. Eliot perceived in Byron his making of 'a self that is largely a deliberate fabrication – a fabrication that is only completed in the actual writing of the lines'. (48)

"The Love Song" starts with an invitation to a journey, the invitation and the 'you' and 'I', who are talking to each other, cause lots of critics such as George

Williamson to think about their identity "the 'I' is the speaker, but who is the 'you' addressed? The title would suggest a lady, but the epigraph suggests a scene out of the world, on a submerged level" (Childs 687). Joseph Chiari declares that the "you and I" are parts of "an internal monologue which is not meant to be heard" (qtd. in Childs 688) and even Joyce Meeks Jones through her Jungian interpretation sees Prufrock as an extrovert "who is unable to resolve the conflict between the demands of his own individuality, and those of his persona, or social mask. In consequence, he struggles helplessly in an eternal hell of self-estrangement and moral indecision" (qtd. in Childs 687). Also Grover Smith realizes that the recognition between "you and I" are crucial for the framework of the poem "By a distinction between 'I' and 'you,' [Prufrock] differentiates between his thinking, sensitive character and his outwards self . . . He is addressing, as if looking into a mirror, his whole public personality. His motive seems to be to repudiate the inert self, which cannot act, and to assert his will" (qtd. in Childs 687).

So this masterpiece of the modernist movement describes the mental state of its antihero J. Alfred Prufrock by using the objective correlative (Mandal & Modak 1). The mental state of antihero J. Alfred Prufrock raised a lot of questions such as who are 'I' and 'you'? Why is the setting so sad and gloomy? What is responsible for the loneliness and imbalance of Prufrock's psyche? It is beyond doubt that these questions can only be answered from a psychological point of view. In this regard, C. G. Jung's theory on 'active imagination' and 'the shadow' can bring the best answer to these questions.

1.2. Review of Related Literature

In her article 'On "an overwhelming question" in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"' (2009), XUE Haiqin attempts to clarify the true identities of 'you' and 'I'. Step by step she analyzes the poem to reach the truth of 'you' and 'I'. In the second part of her article, she writes about the importance of allusion in the poem. Joan Chodorow in her article, "Active Imaginations", which was published in *The Handbook of Jungian Psychology: Theory, Practice and Applications*, scrutinizes Jung's theory of active imagination and explains how this method runs and can be used. In addition, Stanton Marlan in "Facing the Shadow", which was published in *Jungian Psychoanalysis Working in The Spirit of C. G. Jung*, introduced Jung's shadow and the importance of the shadow in the psyche of an individual. He even mentions that the meeting with the shadow is one of the crucial moments in the life of the individual. Based on Jung's active imagination and shadow, the article tries to discover the true identity of 'you' and 'I' and proves that through the active imagination Prufrock embarks on a quest to find his shadow in his unconscious.

1.3. Active Imagination

In 1912 when Jung left Freud (1856-1939) he was faced with depression and anxiety, therefore, he attempted to cure himself, also tried to find his way in psychology, the result of this restore is 'active imagination'. In 1913-16 Jung "was disoriented and experienced a time of intense inner turmoil" he even "suffered from lethargy and fears; his moods threatened to overwhelm him. He had to find a way, a method to heal himself from within. Since he did not know what to do, he decided to engage with the impulses and images of the unconscious" (Jung, *On Active Imagination* 15). Therefore, active imagination for Jung is an "analytical method of psychotherapy" (Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis* 222).

Chodorow in her article "Active Imagination" introduced active imagination as a "process involves turning attention and curiosity toward the inner world of the imagination and expressing it symbolically, all the while seeking the self-reflective, psychological point of view" (215). Active imagination applies a lot of creative forms such as "vision in the mind's eye, hypnagogic images that float up not only as visual impressions but also auditory images, motor images and other somatosensory impressions" (215). Robert A. Johnson defines active imagination as "a dialogue that you enter into with the different parts of yourself that live in the unconscious" (*Inner Works* 133). In other words, active imagination is in some way similar to dreaming, but it should be noted that we are fully awake and conscious during experiencing active imagination.

Moreover, all the images in dreams are the symbols of hidden and oppressed feelings, thoughts, etc. and the source of this oppression is unconscious. Active imagination brings these images into the border of conscious and unconscious, therefore, according to Johnson, instead of going into a dream, we can enter our imagination while we are awake and conscious. Besides the rising images in the active imagination is not only seen and heard but also felt and smelled, which dreams never include. There is no difference between images and reality; active imagination is a real dream in the real world.

As a matter of fact, Active Imagination is very important for Jung because he considered it as an effective path to the unconscious of an individual. Referring to Henderson in her article "Active Imagination", Chodorow states that Active Imagination comes from "the depth of the unconscious" and "its expressive forms are shaped by the particular tastes, talents, and inclinations of each individual", and influenced by the cultural atmosphere. Also, Chodorow concludes that Active Imagination is active in "re-creation of the personality" (216) too; Jung sees active imagination as a "method of self-healing" (qtd. By Chodorow 216).

Aforesaid active imagination is like a dream, but there is a clear difference between them: in our dreams, we "receive signals from the unconscious, but the conscious mind does not participate" (Johnson, *Inner Works* 134). Once we wake

up, our conscious mind remembers the dream and thinks about its meaning, but as Johnson tells us during the dream, the conscious mind cannot participate actively. Despite dreams, the conscious mind in Active Imagination is awake and even consciously participates in the events. The similarity between dream and Active Imagination reflects in a symbol. Like dreams, Active Imagination uses symbols that represent our "deep interior parts of ourselves" (Johnson, *Inner Works* 134).

Thereby Jung mentions, "in the intensity of the emotional disturbance itself lies the value, the energy . . . to remedy the state of reduced adaptation" (*On Active Imagination* 166). As Jung said most of the time active imagination is initiated with a "conflicted, depressed or disturbed state of mind" (Chodorow 224). As a result of this conflicted, depressed and disturbed mind, unconscious and conscious cooperate with each other to bring harmony and balance back to the mind or individual. Andrew Samuels, in his book *Jung and the Post-Jungians*, declares that "active imagination is a channel for 'messages' from the unconscious" (9). Through this message, the unconscious stretched its friendly hand to the conscious for help to bring the mind to her consciousness.

1.4. Shadow

In 1945 Jung defined shadow as "the thing, a person has no wish to be" (Samuels 138). In *Man and His Symbol*, Jung "used the term 'shadow' for this unconscious part of the personality because it actually often appears in dreams in a personified form" (165). Samuels understands that most of the time shadow counts as the negative part of the individual, all the disagreeable attributes which we want to ignore and hide, weakness in our psyche, the valuelessness and primitivism that is in our nature, the self that we hide under a persona or a mask, and even our black and evil side, all are in the darkness of a shadow, "Jung was well aware of the reality of EVIL in human life" (138).

Actually, Jung takes shadow from Freud's "original division between the light and dark sides of the human psyche" (Casement 94) but he found Freud's idea limited therefore he tries to have another approach to the shadow. Based on Jung's thoughts, the shadow is active and goes on without ego's knowledge; as a result, the ego has no control over the shadow but "the EGO stands to shadow as light to shade, that it is the shadow which makes us human" (Samuels 138). In *Psychology and Religion*, Jung explains more about the shadow:

> Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. If an inferiority is conscious, one always has a chance to correct it. Furthermore, it is constantly in contact with other interests, so that it is continually subjected to modifications. But if it is repressed and isolated from CONSCIOUSNESS, it never gets corrected and is liable to burst forth suddenly in a moment of unawareness.

> At all counts, it forms an unconscious snag, thwarting our most well-meant intentions. (70)

Jung declares that occasionally the shadow can be a positive figure too, but it is so rare. "An individual feels impelled to live out the worse side of his nature and to repress his better side. In such cases the shadow appears as a positive figure in his dreams". (Jung, *Man and His Symbol* 175) It is important to bear in mind that shadow is not always negative and omen, if the positive side of the individual is suppressed and pushed back to the shadow, the ego would "play an essentially negative role" (Casement 94). Shadow divulges what is hidden all the time. Most people escape from their shadows because they carry sarcastic, judgemental, and scary personalities:

> When an individual makes an attempt to see his shadow, he becomes aware of (and often ashamed of) those qualities and impulses he denies in himself but can plainly see in other people, in short, all the little sins about which he might previously have told himself: 'That doesn't matter; nobody will notice it, and in any case, other people do it too'. (Jung, *Man and His Symbol* 166)

Shadow shows us that we are like the other people in this world. Sins, crimes, shame, etc. are not just for other but also we have all these stigmas.

Besides, facing the shadow for Jung is very important, however, this meeting makes a lot of pain for a person. Shadow appears in "dreams, projections, transferences, and counter transferences and while it, on the one hand, resisting consciousness, on the other seems to be pursuing it by seeking confrontation, challenge, and threat, often leaving the person terrified and retreating from contact" (Marlan 6). At the end we will meet our shadow and most of the time, as Jung said, it will have a person of the same sex, "in dreams and myths, therefore, the shadow appears as a person of the same sex as that of the dreamer" (Jung, *Man and His Symbol* 167). While "projections onto persons of the opposite sex are thought to emanate from the anima/animus and lead to confrontation with contra-sexuality and the collective unconscious (Casement 97).

By way of explanation, we understand ourselves, our conscious and unconscious through our shadows. By reconciliation between conscious and unconscious 'self' has an opportunity to be restful and this reconciliation only happens by shadow's help. Like superhero shadow brings equilibrium and tranquility back to the self, as Jung said, "Conscious and unconscious do not make a whole when one of them is suppressed and injured by the other" (qtd. in Marlan 10).

2. Active Imagination and Shadow in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

The poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", is saturated with allusions, and active imagination is raised by these allusions. Also, the bedrock of active imagination is communication and the framework of "The Love Song" is on the conversation between 'you' and 'I'. It is beyond doubt that communication with the inner life is always a courageous act, you awaken what is hidden and dark. As Robert Johnson said active imagination is a dialogue, or we can say a chit-chat between conscious and unconscious, in our imagination, we start talking to our images and cooperate with them, and they even answer us back. These images expose hidden layers of our psyche, the layers which we are never conscious about them, therefore, we "are startled to find out that they express radically different viewpoints from those of" our conscious mind (*Inner Works* 133). As we see that Prufrock summons these images to travel to the hidden layers of his mind to see how these different viewpoints can help him to change his conscious life.

The first stanza of the poem starts with "Let us go then, you and I" (Eliot, line 1) Haiqin in her article tells us that, 'you' and 'I' are not two different individuals. "'You' is a thinking and sensitive self; while 'I' is a public and outward personality" (2). In this regard, 'you' is known as Prufrock's true self that traps in the unconscious. Based on Haiqin's idea, it is very difficult for most people to differentiate between their true self and the self that is hidden under the mask, a mask or as Jung said a persona has kept the truth hidden. As mentioned, the poem starts with an invitation, this invitation is sent to 'you' and 'I' by Prufrock to remove the mask so the true self can reveal itself to the world.

Furthermore, according to Mays, Prufrock divides it into two parts, a 'you' and an 'I', "a public outward personality and a thinking, inert sensitive self" (115). So both 'you' and 'I' are Prufrock, consequently we can see 'you' as unconscious and 'I' as conscious of Prufrock. 'You' awakens by active imagination and sits near 'I' in a bar, and then begins a chat or dialogue. 'I' asked 'you' to embark on a journey "through certain half-deserted streets" (Eliot, line 4). This journey starts at "restless nights", they walk in dark gloomy streets which guide them to the deep of unconscious:

> Streets that follow like a tedious argument
> Of insidious intent
> To lead you to an overwhelming question …
> Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
> Let us go and make our visit. (Eliot 8-12)

These lines are cogent pieces of evidence that prove to us that this communication or "tedious argument" is happened by an active imagination because then active imagination asks "do not ask 'What is it?'" let us go and visit what is hidden in the

depths of the unconscious what is under the mask. In fact, most people begin to exchange their points of view, as Johnson declares, "with the inner figures" and have a lot of talk with these inner figures in the active imagination, also they even try to ask for some advice from wise inner ones who are living in the unconscious. But Johnson believes that not all of the discussion is verbal; now 'you' is a tour guide of 'I' and here 'I' asks 'you' a question. 'You' answers 'I' that if he wants his answer, 'I' should follow 'you' into the deep of the unconscious to see what destroys a harmony of Prufrock. "The yellow fog" and "the yellow smoke" (15-16) divulge the chaotic situation of Prufrock and "there will be time", which appears ten times in the poem, refers to the anxiety in the inner world. This quest in the unconscious makes Prufrock ask 'you' (unconscious) and 'I' (conscious) that "Do I dare / Disturb the universe? / In a minute there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse" and "For I have known them all already, known them all" (45-49). He knows that he knows everything of this universe so "the universe" is his inner universe and totally familiar. He shakes "the universe" by starting a conversation between 'you' (unconscious) and 'I' (conscious) in the active imagination. But why does Prufrock start this negotiation? What is the main reason for this imbalance?

Meanwhile during active imagination, the conscious joins the unconscious to bring harmony and concord to the self. As mentioned above shadow comes from the depth of the unconscious, and the unconscious is the home of oppressions. These oppressions, rejections, waves of anger, and taboos, all gather in the shadow. In other words, the crux of the problem lies in the shadow which is the owner of "our personality that we disown" (Johnson, *Owing Your Own Shadow* ix) and because of the hidden shadow Prufrock has asked the question "Do I dare?" for six times during his Love Song, he needs the courage to raise active imagination and then send 'you' and 'I' to meet the shadow in the unconscious.

As a matter of fact, Eliot begins "The Love Song" with an epigraph from *Inferno* of Dante's *Divine Comedy*,

> If I thought that my reply would be to one who would ever return to the world, this flame would stay without further movement; but since none has ever returned alive from this depth, if what I hear is true, I answer you without fear of infamy. (Greenblatt 2289-2290)

In *Inferno,* Guido da Montefeltro, who is trapped in the fire of hell, is punished for all the evil and false things that he committed during his life. Montefeltro told Dante about his evil life because he thinks that Dante never returns to the earth, so his secrets will be safe forever and will be burnt in hell with him. We can call Guido da Montefeltro as Prufrock's shadow. Both Shadow and Montefeltro are trapped in the depth of the unconscious, which is dark and gloomy and can be compared to hell. Therefore from the beginning of the poem, Eliot gives us the hint that shadow is responsible for everything or responsible for Prufrock's quest to the dark gloomy

streets of the unconscious and then to the house of shadow in the depths of the unconscious.

Jung introduced shadow not as "the whole of the unconscious personality". Shadow characterizes "unknown or little-known attributes and qualities of the ego—aspects that mostly belong to the personal sphere and that could just as well be conscious". Broadly speaking, the shadow can also consist "of collective factors that stem from a source outside the individual's personal life" (Jung, *Man and His Symbol* 166). Thus 'you' tells 'I' that "to prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet; / there will be time to murder and create," the face, that they will meet, is shadow's face and as Jung said that shadow belongs to both conscious and unconscious, so they both should "murder" and "create" shadow again. It goes without saying that harmony gains only by death and birth of the shadow so both 'you' and 'I' have time and cooperation in building the shadow again "Time for you and time for me, / And time yet for a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions, / Before the taking of a toast and tea" (Eliot 31-34).

Therefore by these lines such as "For I have known them all already, known them all", "And I have known the eyes already, known them all", and "And I have known the arms already, known them all" (Eliot 49, 55, 62) Prufrock tells us that he recognizes his shadow very well. He knows his weakness, his poisonous judgement, his negative thoughts, and his coldness because all of them have been gathered in his shadow. Shadow and self are connected. Prufrock's shadow steals his peace; it robs harmony from Prufrock to make him understand that he is not a "prophet" (83) or "Prince Hamlet" (111) he is just like the 'Other' a "Fool" (119). He has weakness and darkness in himself, he has shameful secrets. Prufrock is eager to say that "I am Lazarus, come from the dead / Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all" (94-95) but his shadow reminds him "That is not what I meant at all / That is not it, at all" (97-98).

Foresaid "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock" is a dramatic monologue between the imaginary speaker and the imaginary reader. In fact, both the imaginary speaker and the imaginary reader are conscious and unconscious; the whole of the poem is a dialogue or conversation between them to bring back the harmony of the psyche. At the end of the conversation, both conscious and unconscious become one again but the result of the conversation is first confusion, but then the world becomes clear:

> No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
> Am an attendant lord, one that will do
> To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
> Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
> Deferential, glad to be of use,

Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous –
Almost, at times, the Fool. (111-119)

At the end of the conversation, which is raised by active imagination, conscious and unconscious go back to their territories and become silent "Till human voices wake us, and we drown" (Eliot 131). During his Love Song, Prufrock sees himself through the eyes of Other "They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!'" and "They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!'" (Eliot 41, 44), step by step "The Love Song" shows us how Prufrock defeats his shadow and now he clearly can see not only the world but also his true self "I grow old… I grow old…" (Eliot 120). As a matter of fact, Prufrock "rises heroically to meet his destiny" (Forbes 96) and this destiny is his dark shadow in the depth of his unconscious, and "The Love Song" is narrating his quest to find his destiny.

3. Conclusion

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a love song between the conscious and unconscious of J. Alfred Prufrock. From the beginning, we see Prufrock as a divided self. By active imagination, Prufrock travels to the deep of the unconscious to find his second dark self, the shadow, and cures his own self through confrontation and dialogue between his conscious ('I') and unconscious ('you'). The poem is Prufrock's interior monologue. The astute point in this poem is that, like the rest of other modernist works, Prufrock is an anti-hero; he is a hero because he faces darkness or an evil force, however, this darkness for an anti-hero is his own shadow in his inner world, and in the end drowns himself and his shadow to save his true self to remove his mask "Till human voices wake us, and we drown" (Eliot 131), the human voices is the voice of the true self. Moreover, Prufrock is an anti-hero because he has a shadow, heroes do not have a shadow, rather they are pure. There is no ugliness and darkness in the hero but the anti-hero is impure.

In addition, the whole of the poem reveals to us how Prufrock is addressing himself or his second self in the mirror; he faces his second self and speaks to it, and hears its answer. As Prufrock reveals to us, modern man lives in a fog "The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, / The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes" (15-16); the fog robs the clearness of the sight so he cannot see anywhere, especially himself. Modern man does not know himself and does not have enough courage to find his second self and faces it. Modern man prefers to stay in an illusion, in simulacra and simulation, in a fake paradise. When Prufrock embarks on his trip to the depth of his unconscious, he kills this cowardly modern man and drowns himself with his shadow to be born again, he gives to himself a chance to start from the beginning to be himself again.

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