The Implications of Mudhafar Al-Nawab's Lyric "Layl-Albanafssj"

A B S T R A C T

Writing about great poets of different nations, religious, philosophies and schools of thoughts and in their diversities can bring great beauty, strength and colors of different literary works to the world. Lyric is the most wide spread kind of literature through the world, since a poem does not come into existence by accident. This study aims to investigate the hidden message, implied meanings and memories in one of the best early lyrics of the Iraqi poet Mudhafar Al-Nawab (1934-2022). It also explores the social background that surrounded Al-Nawab through the period of writing this lyric. The findings are that the poet was affiliated with the Iraqi Communist Party, when he wrote the lyric, "Layl Albanafssj". It also has suggested that there are hidden messages and allusions in the lyrics of the 70ths in Iraqi songs and particularly in the lyric of "Layl Albanafssj" as it is used as a mean of communication between the poet and his friends and among the revolutionaries as well. The researcher has followed the reader response approach in interpreting and examining the implications of the lyric.

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تداعيات قصيدة "البنفسج" للشاعر مظفر النواب

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الملخص

الكتابة عن العديد من الشعراء من مختلف الأمم والديانات والفلسفات والمدارس الفكرية المتنوعة يمكن أن يجلب جمالًا عظيماً وقوة وألواناً مختلفة من الآداب والفنون للعالم. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى البحث عن الرسائل والرموز العميقة في واحدة من أفضل القصائد الغنائية للشاعر العراقي مظفر عبد المجيد النواب (1934-2022) والتي سماها "ليل البنفسج " Layl Al-Banafsa. تبحث هذه الدراسة في الظروف التي أحاطت بالناوب خلال فترة كتابة هذه القصيدة الغنائية. وتبين أن الشاعر ينتمي للحزب الشيوعي العراقي عندما كتب هذه القصيدة الغنائية التي سماها "ليل البنفسج. " يعتمد الباحث على نص الأغنية كمصدر رئيسي، وقد أشارت نتائج الدراسة إلى أن هناك رسائل خفية في القصائد الغنائية في فترة السبعينات في العراق و وخاصة قصيدة "البنفسج" التي وجد الباحث أنها قد استخدمت لل التواصل بين الشاعر وأصدقائه وبين الثوار. كذلك، سوف يقوم الباحث بتحليل وفحص تداعيات النص وفقاً لاستجابة القارئ له.

الكلمات الرئيسية: النواب، الشاعر، البنفسج

Once upon a time, the only kind of literature that existed was poetry. Poetry had three divisions lyric, dramatic, and epic. This study will focus on the lyric poetry which is the commonly used kind. Poets and musicians are the best experts at expressing emotions for us (Wilson, 1969, 7-11). Therefore, lyric poetry had a great status, since its prominent role in spreading the glories and history of the tribes, nations and in praising their accounts. Furthermore, recording their achievements or defeats for the next generations. In the ancient times, poems were sung with accompaniment from a lyre. From the third centuries B.C., the poetic output of earlier centuries was assembled and edited by the great literary scholars of Alexandria, Ibycus, Pindar and Sappo.(Miller, 1996, xiii) religious works written between, 1200 and 1340, by unknown writers who paved the way for the first lyrics.

In Middle English, one can point first to certain lyrics, written with great delicacy and skill, but signed by no name, which still have power to enchant us and still in fact are sung. This is known every-where, together with its delightful tune. As nature is described and people are celebrating the coming of the new season which also implies the rebirth of creation and humanity.

Sumer is icumen in,
Lhuude sing cuccu!
Growth sed and bloweth med,
And springth the wude nu
Sing cuccu! (Wilson, 1969, 35).
Afterward, many great writers sprang in the following centuries. Providing a strong sense of humor, a fine musical ear and the ability to tell a story or to reflect sensations and different subject-matters. In Europe, during the renaissance, poets created lyric poetry with influence from ancient Greece, Persia, and China. In the sixteenth century, William Shakespeare popularized lyric poetry in England. It remained prevailing in the seventeenth century thanks to poets like Robert Herrick, and later, in the nineteenth century, through the work of poets including Percy Shelley, John Keats, and later on in the century, Alfred Lord Tennyson. It is not possible to know the beginning of Arabic lyric poetry accurately, because there was no systematic categorization in the pre-Islamic era, and this period extended from 400 until 610. However, the poetry that we reached was linguistically and stylistically complete, which indicates the existence of previous attempts (Stetkevych, 1993, xi).

Song is one of the most popular literary works, it is preferable and very close to publics because they will not only get fun from it and brought into large close and fresh relation to life challenges, but also songs are used to express points of view, talk about history, send messages, criticized some issues about society or about someone's life. Songs are used also to inspire or to motivate the people that are listening to them or even change their mind. The song tends to be written in language simple enough to be understood on first hearing.

Al-Nawab began his poetry in the free verse with informal Arabic language (the Iraqi dialect). He chose the dialect of the people of the south in Iraq because of their poverty and because of his belief that this area is permanently fertile with revolution. The most important of these poems are "Rail and Hamad-1958" and the poem "Innocence-1963". In this lyric, Al-Nawab asked the political prisoners in Iraqi prisons not to give up their determination in the face of power, and this was the poem which caused his imprisoned for three years (Al-Nawab, 1996, 7). Both of these lyrics and others were performed by famous singers, so they became very popular in that time. Later and after realizing that the vernacular language is understood only by a small group of people, he began to use classical language so he wrote his next collective poems "Waterait" between 1970-1975.

The songs of the Communist Party around the National Front, and of the Ruling Baath Party in 1970s, were a product of this era, and these sentimental songs had a double meaning, they conveyed political messages in the context of lyrics and talk about the anguish of love; like the poem "Layl Albanafssj" by the Communist poet Al-Mudhafar Nawab. Because this song was popular in the political struggle period of the poet and his colleagues in prison or friends who had the same interest, readers intent to interpret the words of this song according to their response to the depression political action like the torture, threat, and imprison of the Party's members. Literarily, this can be analyzed as the use of allusion which defined as "a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage", which can "serve to illustrate or clarify or enhance a subject, but some are used in order to undercut it ironically by the discrepancy between the subject and the allusion", and "imply a fund of knowledge that is shared by an author and an
audience" (Abrams and Harpham, 2009: 11-12). The communist intellectual poets presented melodies and songs deals with the Iraqi life, its beauty, culture and sophistication, which is indebted to the communist culture. These lyrics worth contemplating and stopping, because it sought life, beauty, love and patriotism. The Iraqi communist songs were associated with the details of life. They clung to the hypothesis that these calm days could be restored again through poetry and music. These poems, melodies and voices continued to seek life, without despair, even in its most cruel years. These popular songs appeared in the mid-seventies such "Ya Ashkanah, 1975" by the singers Fouad Salem and Shawqiah Al-Attar, which was composed by the communist artist Hamid Al-Basri. These songs are famous because they embody the necessity of loyalty to the beloved and the homeland alike. (Noory, 2022).

"Oh our love... the joy of the bird that returns to its nest in the afternoon. Oh our love... from bunches of grapes and we gather them in the afternoon, and our land is silver and gold, and its fragments are tied to it. The mothers chatter outside their house on the doorstep sessions, having..." 

Moreover, the Iraqi people remember these songs on daily bases because of their prejudice feelings, whether in their exile or in their homeland, and because of its distinctive vocabulary (Alazeez, 2021).

The communist Party is the oldest active party in Iraq, it had been established in 1934; it had dominated the left Party in Iraqi politics life. It played a prominent role in shaping the political history of Iraq between its foundation and the 1970s. The Party was involved in many of the most important national uprisings and demonstrations of the 1940s and 1950s. The poet Mudhafar Al-Nawab was affiliated with the Iraqi Communist Party, a Leftist party whose goals are derived from Marxist theory. The economic factor of Iraq is what led him to reject the political reality of his country and feel spiritual alienation. (Sherwan, 2018, 470).

Carrying communist rhetoric at that time, the emotional lyric song contained hidden messages in the same direction. After the collapse of the National Front and the start of massacres that crushed the communists by the hands of the Baath Party, writers engaged in presenting poems that express their principles and views. They did not renounce their opinions directly, so they implied their real intension in works. The aforementioned "Telawohi", by the great poet Erian Al Sayed Khalaf, which included an inflection that echoes with a catastrophe, concluding each stanza of the song: “We made us and we made it / dirt is with you,” in reference to the collapse of the Front and the massacre of the communists.

Mudhafar Alnawab is considered one of the pioneers of modern Iraqi song poets during the period of 60th when the Iraqi song revived. His great talent lies in his ability in weaving poetic images, and linking the heritage to the modern era. He has occupied Peoples' minds and consciences when he adopted a new method for writing the song. He is regarded as a new phenomenon as he invented his expressive tools and vocabulary that he derived from the folklore. Furthermore, the poet has an outstanding ability to describe events and present them

as documentary film that captures all the small details without forgetting the movements, expressions, colors (decoration), clothes, symbols and slogans. He draws expressive and suggestive scenes using charming eloquent sentences. In general, his poems are sad and do not seem strange because they are a realistic reflection of the dark and sad history of Iraq due to the succession of random and failure governments.

Al- Nawab was able to make a literary fame for himself by writing poetry in the informal Arabic language in addition to the informal dialect in Iraq, enhancing the balance of his fame by criticizing and opposing the Arab political regimes in general, and the Iraqi political regime in particular, and this is what made him a homeless in exile for most decades of his life. In his mystical poetry, Al-Nawab often talks about alienation of the self, and the alienation of the homeland.

“Once again at our window weeping, and nothing but the wind and snowflakes on the heart / and sadness like the markets of Iraq(wahtee, 2022)

His satirical political poems made him to be a "poet of exile." He lived in Arabic and foreign exiles, scattered in his travels between Damascus, Beirut, Cairo, Tripoli, Algeria, Khartoum, and the Sultanate of Oman. However, Baghdad remains a source from which the poet Mudhafar Al-Nawab, where he derives his poetic images. He also derived different social and political subjects (Hussain, 2011).

Al- Nawab wrote the song of " Leal Albanafsaj 1968-69" in the city of Samawah, "The Castle of Heroes", specifically in Nuqarat al-Salman Prison. It was symbolic lyric as it was originally a political poem that turned into a sentimental song in 1973. However, this song was prevented from public for more than 30 years. (472:2018). It was regarded as one of the masterpieces of what is known in Iraq as "Seventieth Singing". It formed the nucleus of a unique national singing school through its tight blending of local singing arts and those that were prevalent in central and southern Iraq. The technical editor of "Al-Sabah" newspaper, Muhammad Ismail, pointed out that this song is the clearest example of this school. The word " Al banafsaj" means the violet colour, which is associated with innocence, modesty, spiritual love, mysticism and remembrance. (Hussain, 2011)

The words of this remarkable lyric lived and are still in the memory and conscience of the Iraqi people. Al-Hashemi says that the charm of this song lies in its ability of transferring the feelings of the environment of southern Iraqi to the Baghdadi climate, which was different at the level of speech and melody.

As Wimsatt, 1954 points that "Poetry is a feat of style by which a complex of meaning is handled all at once. A poem succeeds because all or most of what is said or implied is relevant"(p. 4). Hence, the implication of this poem carries more than one interpretation by the readers who link its words to the state and circumstances of Al-Nawab's. According to the method of "Reader response approach which promotes transaction between readers and texts
as readers are given the freedom to analyze literary pieces based on their personal experiences, diverse cultures, and unique perspectives" (p.108). Consequently, the poet's goal is the simple reader, so he writes without pretension, and from here we understand the huge demand for his poetry among the various social class. The poet is very interested in the opening line, and he wants to convey the strength of the idea and its implications from the first word of the poem. He wants to read the feelings of the ordinary and simple recipient, before the specialist or critic reveals judgment on it, because he is motivated by his nature and artistic taste to write to the general public.

Oh, what a favorite test of the violet's night
You are a dream. Oh what an emptiness
The temperature of my heart is like yours
When you became cheap and I praise and love you
I'm desperately accustomed to you(L,1-5) (Retrieved from the wwwfoulabook.com)

The first word in this poem, "oh taste" draws the reader to contemplate this taste, and therefore he wants to know the type of taste and its shape and what is coming after this word, in order to complete the meaning of the taste. Here, the poet makes the interpretation of the opening word. So the reader is free to choose the shape, type, and taste of what comes after this word, and even distinguishes it from the rest of the taste before the completion of the poetic sentence reaches him. It holds the recipient firmly, and draws him to the poem’s atmosphere, its structures and spaces, which is called “the noise of the poem”. Then, the poet attaches the word “taste” with "albanafssaj" a captivating magic word which is derived from the shape, smell and color of violet, the beautiful and enchanting flower which shines in the moonlit nights. However, the real interpretation is depending on the poet's visualizing state in his mind which may refer to the state of unknown which the poet lives in, as he has no idea about the coming. So he starts with "oh test", is it sweet or better? The readers also do not know and the use of the abstract words "night, dream, emptiness" suggest the ambiguity and fuzziness of the speaker's state mind. There is uncertainty surrounding the relationship between him and the addressed entity.

Oh, when your news come from the darkness
My clothes were odd before your coming
And I'm strange from my eyes
And you have hurt me!
On nothingness you taught me(L, 6-10)

At the beginning of the second line, the poet addresses this entity directly, which emphasizes his urgent and continuous need to evoke a person, a party, people, or a certain group. The poet is not always clear, and he is not so simple or naive, he is clear, mysterious, and profound at the same time. It is not easy to understand his poems, because they need to be read by literarily, politically and geographically educated reader (Radwan,2012,17). Here, he uses the suggestion to preoccupy the recipient with the question of interpretation of what the
The poet is aiming at, so he describes it as "dream". In fact, the poet is still flying in the "world of imagination". The dream is a vision that touches the soul in the moment of its absence from the temporary physical existence. This dream usually comes in a dream or in what is known as "daydreams." Then, the line comes, "you become cheap", which the poet refuses to deal with, because of his intense love, and he does not want this love to be vulgar, and therefore he thinks that his beloved be precious. From a semantic perspective based in the conscience, is presented in consciousness and subconscious, which is what the sentence reveals in the fifth verse: "I am very accustomed to you?" the use of the personal pronoun "I" refers to the desire of the speaker to strength the connection between him and the reader. This habituation is a state of permanence, which is difficult for the poet to change, because he has become familiar with that state and he is accustomed to it, clearly and frequently. On that state as a "oh my broken silence" i.e. my accustomed state in you, and solitude normalization, and your silence on that state is also a state of contentment.

Al-Nawab moves to address this emotional being, and tries to conjure her into present. Spiritually, the speaker lives in the world of alienation and homelessness, and he addresses his beloved, saying “Oh, your news. You come from darkness.” and “your words (actions, habitus, memories),” means things you do, could reach me while I am in a strange state and a state of complete darkness, so I am not afraid, because you are united with my being, and I communicate with you in all difficult circumstances. Hence the poet confirms that the coming of the lover has changed both of his physical and spiritual state, such as his, feeling, clothing and thought, and it is evident in the next line which says: " before your coming , my clothes were odd on my". The poet personifies his clothes and considers them as someone who used to be very near to him or as a part of his body, but turned to strange one. This means he has no entity, identity or he is not existed anymore. The implied meaning of this stanza denotes to the weakness of the poet before the powerful entity in his mind like the authority around him. Synonym is defined as a word that has the same sense, or nearly the equivalence and interchangeable meaning (Richards, 2002, 533). In this context, the synonym of the word "odd" refers to his disconnection from the world. It reflects an absolute separation of all the poet's feelings, and it is a clear exposure of the extent of his attachment to this being, for he is the one who changed the poet's entire entity. Starting from clothes to feelings, because before his coming (the beloved), he was in distance with his people, and he was feeling hostility even within himself, and this is a rare case. That the coming of his beloved has turned all the thoughts and feelings of the poet upside down, as it is like a new birth that dictates its legality to existence, and then moves the imagination to things far beyond what is carried or used in this place. The phrase, in this verse, is readable in more than one way.

The ironic calmness of the speaker after the coming of his beloved, reassures his need for this arrival, so he calms down a little, and finds comfort in this abstract arrival which touches his imagination and emotions. This reflects Al-Nawab's vigorous verbal gift in his remarkable ability to convey a situation or state of mind in fewest possible words. It is notable that this poem is written with a great power of description (Ibrahim, 201310-11). As the speaker addresses his beloved saying "you blamed me and made me accustomed on nothingness." The consistency between the words and their connotations embodied in "maimsh, (nothing or
emptiness).” The people of Iraq understand this phrase as if there is someone who should be prepared for dangerous things, then the poet addresses his beloved again using the rhythm of the “maimsh” you are still conservative and you made me accustomed to this “mamish”, which means nothing and emptiness, and I am still clinging to you in spite of your strong rejection. However, I preferred you over anything.

The third stanza of the poem begins with a description of the love that is in harmony with the general content of the poem, but plays to the rhythm of excessive flirtation with the beloved, as he says in the facilitator of this passage:

How would I describe you... you are an emerald  
I am drop of tear in the light of your injustice! 
How can I describe you!! 
You are great like a book  
And I'm small like a word 
Oh, you who have no concern about anyone, 
And you who no one was able to disturb you 
You have the blue eyes, 
I become afraid when I tell you that 
I love you 
I love you (L, 11-21)

The speaker begins the stanza with: "how would I describe you", that is, how do I begin to describe you, and you shine as “ruby stone”, which shines in the dark night, and attracts all eyes to look at it. While the poet's face, or the beams of his eye looks like the drops of tears spilled at night that no one sees. The comparison with the luminous splendor of your face is not correct and not acceptable, no matter how close I try to get close to all the flaming I have, which is symbolized by the phrase “as my eyes.” Then, the speaker goes further in this description when he says: "how would I describe you....you are a notebook and I'm a word! These are two completely different containers. Both of them are used for writing, but the speaker is only one word, while the beloved is a book that may contain tens of thousands words. The speaker sees himself as tiny creature that has no power or any authority; he cannot make himself visible, while, on the other hand, the addressed person has everything like the power and the controlling. In other words, this description reflects the beauty of using the power of words as extended metaphor, the use of "book" versus "word ". Considering the huge different of these two words leads us to think about the poet's ability in finding different words that have hidden meaning to embody such emotions, fear, sorrow, and passion. (Aldalkhi, 2019, 1445-6) In other words, I am just a word in "dictionary" which is expressed by the word "notebook". Here, the poet uses the literary device hyperbole, a "stylistic device which has the function of intensifying one certain property of the object. (Abdul-Hameed Ali, 594) as the speaker exaggerated in his description of himself with his beloved with completeness of the qualities of the beloved in comparison to the lover, the poet then presented complex image using literary devices to deep the meaning and give power to his lines. Hyperbole is used to emphasize for
amusing effect the poet makes common human feelings remarks and intense to such an extent words. (Ali, 2018, 600) Then, the usage of hyperbole develops contrasts between the speaker and his beloved which indirectly refers to the contrast between the poet's views, believes, demands and the authorities' lows in Iraq. Hyperbole is used to emphasize for amusing effect, by hyperbole using, the poet makes common human feelings remarks and intense to such an extent words. The usage of hyperbole develops contrasts and therefore we see that the poet adds the words of majesty and beauty is described, as it is “peaceful, calm in his sleep, indifferent to the condition of his beloved, and he is not disturbed by thinking or staying up at night, which is what was expressed by the saying:

“You are the one who did not stay up at night and did not bother yourself with any anxiety,” which means, “You are free of any worries.”

Therefore, the description is accompanied by the following verse;

“You are the one who is between your eyebrows a river’s slumber,” means that you are in a peaceful sleep, similar to the river’s slumber in states of serenity and calm. The analogy is very rare in Arabic literature, and the poet was guided to him, as a result of his constant concern and staying awake over his poem and its uniqueness, and this is recorded for him in this objective equivalent in the connotations of poetic drawing. The drowsy eyes of his beloved formed a graphic perspective for the poet, as he depicts the features of his beloved in complete calm, from dozing to visualizing absolute calm. Obviously, the poet does not dare to wake her up. Instead of that, he considers his beloved sleeping and tries to flatter her during her sleeping.

The poet addresses her carefully and he is full of yearning state: “I do not want to wake your eyes that have the same color of the clear sky to tell you that I love you.” The analogy of description of the eye as the color of the sky is almost known to many Arabian poets, and Al-Nawab is well aware of this. The poet thinks that it is not his right to “disturb” the sleeping blue eyes of her beloved even if by spinning, as he goes, saying "I'm afraid of waking you, when I like to tell you that I love you.”. These lines ascertain the fact that this man is confused he is stuck and hesitated. The fear he feels is coming from the unknown and alienation he lives in.

In the fourth and final stanza, the poet plays with the words" emptiness with emptiness” to prove his conception about his beloved's fix stand where it become part of his daily life. The speaker thinks that his beloved is deceiving him and the steady rejection of his beloved is incredible therefore she is not human being. However, in spite of all her rejection and giving nothing to him, the poet still attracted to her even though he knows about her cunning. The speaker is very affectionate to this woman as she is the most precious creator to him and he cannot remove her from his mind, rather he keeps on thinking about her all the time. From this
comes the speaker's description to this woman as "a mean of "measuring gold". Here, the poet brought us to another objective equivalent that enters the manufacture of gold jewelry, where it is known, in Iraqi culture, that in this balance there is always a lot of cheating, and only the goldsmith himself knows its secrets. This point of this stanza can be about the promises of reformations and restructurings of the authorities which later turned on nothingness. Lyric song is one of creation from the song writer which has a deep meaning to be delivered for the listener. Sometimes the lyric song has a difficult meaning to understand, because it has an ambiguity meaning in its structure word or sentence (Yastant, 2018, 1). Despite the beauty of the poetic images and its magic in terms of recruitment, connotation, and suggestion, the gold scale is the objective equivalent of the intended object’s behavior. This is a miraculous gesture from the poet in this equation, recorded by his ability of using the language of the brain to express feeling. This emotional attachment of the poet to this being is really puzzling, despite the accurate knowledge of his conditions, the speaker is still clinging to it until this hour.

*Your beauty had dazed me..... Oh benafssaj
And for your love. I loved the one who loved you
Oh wonderful test ...oh night from al banafssj. (L, 26-28)*

These lines imply a signal from a hidden side to the political connotations, which is indicated by the use of the plural adjective “who blames me for their love”. Then the poet concludes the poem by returning to the first verse of it, as if he overlooks the negative inclinations and the mistakes that come from that entity. Then he returns with his favorite hymn of admiration in directing the poetic discourse, where he concludes with "oh, test of night from the night of the flower of "albanafsj". The constant thinking and interpretative reading, holds more than one facet of this lyric, put this recipient in a state of distress, contemplation, and constant hopelessness, with his feelings of hope and concern.

It is worth to mention that after about 50 years after writing this lyric, when Al-Attar, asked Al-Nawab brother's about the real reason behind writing this lyric. The answer was that " it was not about the communist Party/ and it was only romantic lyric (Alattar, 2022). Perhaps Al-Nawab did not consider it to be a political poem and only the audience/ readers thought it was so. Whatever its theoretical basis, the "Banafsj" succeeded as a as political/ communist poem , due to the fact that it was paned for about 30 years and due to the imprison of Al-Nawab when he wrote this lyric. Good readers connect their past experiences with the text: interpreting, evaluating, and considering alternative responses or interpretations(Tomasek .127, 2018). Listening to this lyric, it seems as we are listening to thoughts, feelings and physical passion at one and the same time, where all these three elements are in perfect balance. Moreover they are capable of fusion. Al-Nawab creates a poem whose formal perfection cannot be questioned and at the same time whose popular appeal can never die by using his awareness of sensuous gift and flood of rich language. This poem was written in the early seventies of the last century, and at this time there was an important political event, which was the establishment of a clear political alliance between the communists and the Ba’athists, and other parties, known as: “The National Front of Progressive Iraq in 1973.” To that event and that alliance, or to something else!?
In conclusion, the reading of Al-Nawab's lyric reveals before us a distinguished poetic world, which the poet wrote with great care, as the poet’s method in building the popular poem dictates the recitation. A state of constant tension and contemplation, and a diligent search for the meanings and what these symbols represent.

Finely, this study is important because it encourages other researchers to investigate the poetries of Al-Nawab, which talk about the struggle of the patriotic heroes and how do they scarify their freedom and become outlanders just because their opinions or oppositions to the authorities. Also it is important to study Al-Nawab' poetry because of its ability to make a bridge between the heritage, tradition and the present through the use of rich and rhetorical description in his subjects. The researchers believe that there is an obligation to write about some icon poets in Iraq in order to get the world know about this type of poetry that shows struggle, culture, love and other social issues.

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