

WHEN ROBOTS FALL IN LOVE: EXPLORING ISAAC ASIMOV'S SHORT STORY 'TRUE LOVE'

*Bhagyashree D. Pattanshetti**

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ABSTRACT

Reading science fiction is in a way walking into the amazing field of facts and fantasy combined with scientific elements in it. Isaac Asimov, the Russian-American writer, wrote this fantastic story for the American magazine in 1977 on the occasion of Valentine's Day. The story revolves around the idea of match making with the help of a computer program and data bank. It is an ideal example for the present generation to think in terms of valuing humanity instead of running after man's gifts of intelligence by being unethical. The story is a combination of many thematic contrasts. It is narrated in the voice of a computer program Joe (as our present day Artificial Intelligence), from the perspective of robots for human beings. Irony is that, though Joe (Robot) fixes the match for its master/creator, but ditches its master by fixing the match for itself by superseding him. The story written in 1977 is timeless for its unique quality of universal truth and relevance.

KEYWORDS: Science-Fiction, Computer Program, Gemini, Google, AI, Robot, True Love.

Introduction

There are many science fiction writers like H. G. Wells, Mary Shelley and others known for their contribution towards science fiction. Isaac Asimov is one of the prolific writers of the 20th century for his invaluable contribution. Many of the science fiction stories are surrounded towards time machines and flying saucers. The present story is much advanced of its time. It is an interesting story of a programmer Milton Davidson aged forty, in search of 'True love'. Milton is assisted by a computer program named Joe in finding an ideal girl. In the present day as we give prompt to Gemini, Google, ChatGPT, Chatbot AI etc., in the same way, Joe is a computer program created by Milton to assist him in solving the problems of the world. The story is set in the computer laboratory of Milton Davidson. It is a true reflection of the current fashion of sentiment analysis through Joe as AI/Google in the present day. Isaac Asimov gave a clear message to the world that in the modern world, data or information is power. Through his three characters, he conveyed it to the world that, life is not a matter of data analysis rather, it is a matter of feelings and sentiments that are abstract ideas. He warns that, negligence of humanity in lending intelligence to machines can lead to

catastrophe as in the case of Milton. The story with a simple plot, truly reflects the condition and attitude of man towards technology and life. The story ends with the computer program betraying Milton unlike any human being. By selecting Charity Jones as a perfect match for itself and thus by overtaking man the creator by sending him to jail on the grounds of malfeasance.

Relevance of the Study

The story is relevant in the present digital era as it warns us about the dangers of man-made machines. Man and machines are contradictory, competitive, and complimentary. Through this story, Asimov gives a hint that the days are not far when machines will start controlling men as he is becoming slaves of machines. The present study is an attempt to analyse the story from various perspectives. It is pertinent to read it in the AI world, where no section of the society has remained aloof from being digitalized. In a way information and data science has become another self of the man throughout the globe. Every aspect of life is being digitalized and slowly the whole world is becoming dependent on Artificial intelligence. Joe, the computer program in the story is just like the present day AI or Google, who knows everything. One can foresee the state of man becoming a slave

* **Dr. Bhagyashree D. Pattanshetti**, Associate Professor, Department of English, SSCA Government First Grade College, K. K. Koppa, Belagavi.

of machines and machines overtaking the man who has created it with his intelligence for his benefit. Thus the story reflects the present condition and future prospects of man.

Objectives of the Study

In the digital world of 21st century every aspect of life is being digitalized. Man has become a slave of his own creation. Artificial Intelligence/Google has made things easy for man as it knows anything and everything unlike, Joe in the story. The main objective of the paper is to convey the following messages to the world. Firstly, though the data/information is power, life is not a matter of data analysis. It is a matter of feeling beyond analysis. Secondly, the current fashion of sentimental analysis through AI is subject to problem. The present day online match making business is something to the similar case of Milton. Finally, any small act of negligence may result in a catastrophic end for man and he needs to be cautious before lending intelligence to machines.

Research on the Topic

As far as the knowledge of the writer is concerned, some research has been carried out in analyzing the story. Exploring the story from the present context of Artificial Intelligence and data analysis for sentiments and feelings like love, jealousy and betrayal is a new aspect. Exploring the themes like love of a robot take the central stance and moving the rest all to its periphery makes the present paper unique. Instead of man controlling the robot, it is the robot that controls man and moreover the machine advises man to not to go by looks by asking the question "What are looks?" makes the human think in a philosophical way. The result of trusting machines by lending every detail of himself, machine becomes almost his own self. It is just like selling the soul to a machine that results in punishing its creator. Reading the story from the present context is appealing and apt as it mirrors human action by being predictive of his future. Some research is already done on reading the story from other contexts but exploring the story from the perspective of the AI world is a novel concept that adds value to the story.

Methodology of the Study

The focus is on the analysis of the primary sources in the light of present AI world. The emphasis is made on critical interpretations. And contrasting themes through which the robot falls in love. The paper is divided into four parts. The first part deals with the background and storyline of the science fiction. The second part deals with the uniqueness, contradictory themes of the story. The third part focuses on human relationships and

reflections on life. Finally sums up the paper and leaves some questions with the reader to think and act.

Introduction to the Story

It is a story of a Milton Davidson, a Programmer at Multivac-complex super computer in search of 'True love'. Joe is Milton's private computer program and is going to assist him in finding his true love. The story takes a different turn and Milton is betrayed by his colleague, Joe, the computer program. The story is narrated by the computer program (robot) Joe, is set in the Milton Davison's laboratory. The event of match making for Milton Davidson ends in match making for Joe (robot) by finding Charity Jones, an Evaluator at the Library of History in Wichita whose data bank fits theirs' perfectly.

Uniqueness of the Story

The story is all about man and machine. It is interesting to note that Milton Davidson, a computer programmer and the creator of a computer program Joe, has created it as his experimental model. Milton has created Joe and is tired of improving Joe to solve the problems of the world. Irony is that he is unable solve his own problem of finding 'True Love'. The story ends in machine betraying human being by selecting a match for itself. Contrasting themes are intertwined with a beautiful love story of a robot fixing a match for itself, which is the uniqueness of the story.

Process of Selection Through Elimination

The search begins through elimination process to find the 'Perfect person' for Milton Davidson. The process of elimination through symbols and sounds for Joe, the computer program was so easy that with the accumulated data of every human being in the world, it could quickly do the elimination. This process is made just like the present day physical verification for a government job. Milton gave instructions to eliminate all younger than twenty-five; older than forty, and then, to eliminate all with IQ under 120, all with height under 150cms and over 175cms. Likewise women with living children and women with various genetic characteristics and women with red hair were all eliminated. He did not specify the eye color as he wasn't sure about it and language was not a barrier as it would be readily done through translation.

Holographs to Shortlist Women for the Interview

Thus two weeks later only 235 women remained in the list. Yet, for Milton found it a

difficult task to select. So, he came out with a solution by bringing in the holographs of three women who were beauty contest winners, to find out the similarities, to shorten the list of 235 women. Finally eight women were selected as good matches. Thus assigning the work of selection of women by the holographs and by the robot like Joe makes the selection process more mechanical and unnatural and unacceptable for the humans as the very concept of beauty is sublime. Thus questioning the very definition of beauty as it is a matter of individual choice. The interview with the selected eight women started with the first girl coming after a week. Milton spoke as though it were hard for him to do so. The result of the interview was that Milton didn't feel the touch of true love with any of the eight beautiful women he met and was not able to understand why they were unable to please him. So finally, Milton decided to leave the decision to Joe. He was going to tell everything about himself to Joe and give all his possible details to be filled in his data bank and search for a match out of 227 women other than the 8 interviewed. He asked Joe to arrange for the psychiatric examination to find correlations. Thus, Milton went on giving every detail of his life, parents, childhood, schooling, adolescence and also about the woman he had admired from a distance. Thus Milton's data bank grew and he adjusted Joe to broaden and deepen its symbol-taking to fit his. By giving every detail of himself, Milton had made Joe to think the way he thinks. Milton asked Joe to search 'true love' for him by understanding him and also by talking to him more and more. Milton himself said to Joe happily that "Talking to you, Joe, is almost like talking to another self". Thus we come to know that Milton (man) has shared every detail of himself with Joe (robot).

Do Looks Really Matter or the Personality?

The next part of the story is more interesting where Joe (robot) tells Milton to not care for the physical looks or physical ideal. Joe tells Milton that he needed a girl who is personal, emotional, temperamental fit for him. If they get such a girl out of 227 then, the looks would be secondary and if not, then they would go with the personality fit. At last they found a personality of the woman that fits the personality of Milton. Her name was Charity Jones and she was the Evaluator at the Library of History in Witchita. By the end of the story it was the same computer program Joe, who had all his data bank, betrayed him. Milton was arrested on the grounds of Malfeasance in office which he had done some ten years ago. Thus defeated by the robot, helpless Milton went to jail

for being negligent on the grounds of malfeasance and for carelessly lending intelligence to machine. Finally Joe is waiting for Charity Jones's arrival on the next day that is the Feb 14, Valentine's Day. Joe says that the next day Charity will arrive with her cool hands and sweet voice and Joe would teach her how to operate and how to care for it, and Joe would introduce himself to Charity as she was its true love. Thus the story ends with a rhetorical question; what do looks matter when our personalities will resonate?

Themes

- The contradictory theme of Man and Machines are highlighted in the story and they are competitive to each other but needs to be complementary with each other is the message the writer wants to convey.
- Defining true love and false love is not a mathematical calculation as it deals with human emotions through the characters Asimov makes it more humane.
- Selection through elimination with the given instructions is the easiest thing with the computers and can work only with the data and not with the human.
- World problem and personal problem are the two contradictory themes which lay with a man who understands more about programming than anyone in the world. Irony is that he is unable to solve his own problem.
- Trust and betrayal are the two antonyms which lay with man and in the story machine proves that it is also more vulnerable.
- Master and servant are computer programmer (Milton) and computer program (Joe), needs to be loyal to master, deceives him at the end.
- Sound and symbols are the language of the computer in which Milton has mastered and created a program (Joe); the experimental model is much more advance than the master who supersedes even in his private life.
- Ethical and unethical practices results in catastrophe as the case of Milton proves it in the story.
- Professional (Public) and personal (Private) life are clubbed by Milton resulting in inviting many more problems in his life.
- Universe and the self is another important theme where we find a man solving the problems of the world but to his own self, he is helpless.
- Abstract and concrete ideas beauty, love, looks and personalities are tested through process of

elimination.

- In search of finding a Match for Milton, Joe finds the match for itself.
- Mismatches are eliminated and search for the perfect, ideal and true love resulting in self elimination.
- After realizing that match is an unattainable idea, physical appearances are compromised in the name of personality.

Conclusion

It is this blending of fiction, fantasy and scientific ideas and touch of human emotions, sentiments and abstract ideas makes the story unique and appealing with an important message of being cautious of machines in the world. The story leaves some questions for the readers to ponder over:

- How can a machine (technology) find 'true love' for a man?
- Even if the machine finds through data analysis will it be a perfect match?
- Are human feelings subject to the matter of mathematical calculations? How does the machine evaluate beauty and personality?
- What would be the state of man if he continues to be the slave of machines?

Thus the questions needs to be thought carefully before it is too late for the man. The story cautions us to beware of middle men and middle machines messing up our lives and to use the intelligence carefully.

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