



John Lennon and the Unraveling of his Symbiotic Bond with Yoko, on “Double Fantasy”

Moskowitz J*

Department of Psychology, USA

*Corresponding author: Jeff Moskowitz, Department of Psychology, USA, Tel: 513313316;

Email: jeffmoskowitz63@gmail.com

Opinion

Volume 9 Issue 1

Received Date: March 15, 2024

Published Date: March 22, 2024

DOI: 10.23880/pprij-16000407

Keywords: Symbiotic Bond; Double Fantasy

Opinion

Lennon’s comeback “Double Fantasy” album is a brilliantly conceived and painfully honest musical dialogic between he and Yoko as they confront the realities of growing older. It surely is an unprecedented in the annals of popular music for someone of Lennon’s stature to open himself up in such a way to the public’s gaze and judgement---but he is a making good on his pledge to be honest and transparent, in his life and music, going back to his “Two Virgins” album, where he and Yoko stood naked before the world. “Double Fantasy” has John and Yoko standing emotionally naked before the world, expressing their deepest feelings, including disappointment and satisfaction, about their relationship. We see, on “Double Fantasy,” a Lennon struggling with the waning of their symbiotic bond and the creeping separateness in their relationship. Their time apart which came more frequently than he would have liked aroused him in old fears of loss, though tempered somewhat by age and growth. He still seems to be holding tightly to the love and the sense-illusion of oneness that had once held him and made him feel whole; while Yoko, in her songs, offers her sometimes chilly, sometimes affirming and sometimes challenging responses. It is clear from their songs on this album that while Yoko harbors some ambivalence about their relationships, John is still completely invested in it (and the illusion of oneness) and her and only fears losing her.

“Double Fantasy” was anything but a musical memorialization of the “blissful” home life of “aging hippies” or of “middle-aged tameness,” as Kenneth Womak has described it---rather it was a confessional and emotional diary of their relationship,” warts and all, with little held back, a relationship still in the process of figuring itself out,

a work in progress. Beatles, we recall, were always growing, musically and psychologically, and it can be said they led us out of the 60s and our youths and into the great adult world beyond. While Lennon’s fears of loss, on “Double Fantasy,” are not marked by the emotional devastation---“can’t go on,” if she leaves, was a familiar refrain in his Beatle songs---it is clear that they are still pronounced, suggesting that he had still not achieved a level of security that would allow him to tolerate her absences---time apart---much less the dreaded prospect of being permanently left and therefore being left alone.

There is no doubt that Lennon had found in Yoko a symbiotic partner. He signed his name, “JohnandYoko,” no space, in the beginning to signify this merger. He believed they were one, that they were on the “same mental wavelength.” He was, in his words, “a half” and needed Yoko to feel whole (he even called her “mother”). However, after a few years of being together all the time Yoko, needing some space to breathe, asked for a separation. That was in 1975. Lennon moved to Los Angeles with the transitional object Yoko assigned to him, May Pang. By all reports, he began drinking more, with one notable episode of getting thrown out of a club for being rowdy and intoxicated, calling out Yoko’s name---reality paralleling fiction, namely his song, “I Call Your Name.” On the other hand, during this time, away from “mother” and a situation in which he felt all his needs were being met through her, Lennon renewed his relationship with his son, Julian, and even had some contact with his ex-wife, Cynthia.

A little history is in order here. Lennon, in his earliest years, lived with his mother and her parents, all of whom were involved in his care. As were his mother’s sisters. Thus, he had multiple caretakers and it is reasonable to infer from adult derivative behavior that he never experienced fully a



singular bond with his mother, one that would have provided him with a sense of wholeness, well-being and adequate reality-relatedness. And as we know from some of his songs his sense of reality-relatedness was tested during stressful times, as for example, "nothing is real," from "Strawberry Fields Forever."

Lennon, around three, lived just with his mother, Julia, in a cottage behind his mother's sister's, Mimi, house. Julia, not the most mature person, was often gone and left John with anybody she could find. Julia was still married to Freddy who was AWOL---and this was during the war---and in his absence found a new man, John Dykins, and eventually moved in, along with John, with him. Julia's family considered this "living in sin" and got Children's Services involved. Finally, after much pressure, Julia handed John over to Mimi, her sister, to raise and it was with her that John lived for the rest of his young years. For a time, Julia disappeared from his life---or Mimi prevented her from seeing him---no doubt instilling in John the trauma of losing his mother (they did resume their relationship when John was around 13). Sadly, she was killed in a car accident when he was 17 and thus the famous, "I lost her twice" quote.

As mentioned, John did begin seeing his mother again when he was around 13, setting up a sort of triangle, Julia, Mimi and John. John, as kids in such situations do, played one off against the other, as the two, perhaps, competed for his love. Whatever the case, John, as a child felt not "wanted" and that explains his desperate need to feel wanted as an adult. His song, "I Want You," expresses that neediness. There was much leaving and coming back, ambivalence (acting out his ambivalence) in his early Beatle songs which probably could be traced back to the family dynamics of his childhood.

Despite the apparent cracks in their relationship and in their symbiotic bond, on "Double Fantasy," his relationship with Yoko, on "Double Fantasy," is still holding, if by a slender thread. Yoko signals some dissatisfaction with it and him, a wake-up call, perhaps, to John, in a couple of her songs. As with most relationships partners begin to see each other more clearly over time. Lennon acknowledges, on Double Fantasy, that they are physically "apart" more than he would like---and definitely more so than they were in the beginning when they were together all the time--- while trying to come to terms with their creeping separateness. It is clearly not what he wanted. He still believes or wants to believe that they are "still one," John and Yoko" as he signed his name in the beginning; he is not yet ready to relinquish the illusion of oneness. The growing distance between him and Yoko has clearly aroused in him fears of loss.

While Yoko acknowledges their creative partnership and her love for him, she also calls out what she feels she is not

getting---and needing---from him. Yoko also walks out, in her songs, her role as mentor and, at times, mother to John---someone who kept him grounded while challenging him to grow and to feel. She wouldn't let him get away with his "jive" (Yoko) and "bullshit," as John once called it, and that role is amply evident on "Double Fantasy." And that was one of the things that initially attracted John to her. He liked that she was "real," that her music was "real," and that she kept him grounded in reality. Their evolving relationship is facing challenges it didn't have in the beginning. A new status quo would have to be negotiated. Of course, we will never know if they were able to do the necessary work to preserve their relationship.

"Double Fantasy" is structured as alternating songs---a dialogue--- by John and Yoko, first a song by the (John), expressing some feeling about their relationship and life together and then a response from Yoko. The dialogic format gives the album a sense of liveliness, interaction and dialectic and allows the listener to engage with it. We hear clearly both sides, two brilliant artists laying out in song where they stand in the relationship. There are, in total, fourteen songs on the album, seven by John and seven by Yoko. It is left to the listener---and here the analyst--- to sort out the dynamic going on between them; John and Yoko were just being honest about what they felt.

"Just Like Starting Over" is about re-birth, breathing new life into their relationship which perhaps had become too "comfy" after all their years together, perhaps too distant. Lennon was a great believer in second chances in love, in starting over, in new beginnings and fresh starts, perhaps because he had a second chance with his mother when he was a teenager, after having been abandoned by her as a child. With Yoko he had a second chance after separating in 1973, reuniting with her in 1975. Many of his early Beatle songs have second chances in love as their theme which probably accounts for the irresistible joy in them. In "She Loves You" if he "apologizes" (apologies figure strongly into many of his songs, a way, for him to remediate a potential loss) to her she will take him back; in "This Boy," he stands to have a second chance with his old love; in "I'll Be Back," if he is given a second chance the second time he will "not pretend."

Lennon acknowledges in the song that they "have grown," presumably meaning learned to incorporate some separateness into their relationship but still misses the old days when they "made love" every day and were together all the time. He could be alone again with her if they "fly away," go somewhere far away and in being alone with her he could be his best self again. At bottom he still felt "a half" and needed Yoko to feel whole, a remnant of his incomplete symbiosis with his mother in his earliest years. Being with

Yoko, being alone with her, was enough to satisfy most of his needs.

The Beatles completed in 2024 Lennon's demo of "Now and Then," written around the time of *Double Fantasy* but not included on the album. This song is very similar to "Just Like Starting Over." In it, he "misses" Yoko "now and then"--suggesting again that they were spending more time apart than he would like--- and as in "Starting Over" he is ready to "start again," if he must, to show her how much he loves her. With distance, comes fear of losing her and that is evident in "Now and Then." Yoko and only Yoko is responsible for his "making it through," for meeting his needs, surviving and by implication without her he would be nothing. His life is "in her hands" ("Woman").

In "Woman," Lennon expresses his gratitude for all that Yoko has done for him. She has been his mentor and has "shown" him "the meaning of success." Not unlike the love-object in his song, "If I Fell," who he hoped would "help (him) understand" the meaning of love. John was looking for a mentor and mother. Yoko, in "Woman," "understands the little child inside the man," giving him what he never had as a child, understanding. Being understood is crucial to Lennon's sense of self well-being. He gives to Yoko the perhaps not entirely desired role of saving him---"my life is in your hands." It is a lot to ask of another. Again, in "Woman," Lennon acknowledges the growing gap of space between he and Yoko---"however distant"---and wants some reassurance that they are "still one." Finally, he apologizes to Yoko ("never meant to cause you sorrow"), as he had apologized so often to love-objects he had hurt in earlier songs (e.g. "I didn't mean to hurt you") or had urged his friends to "apologize" to their girl ("apologize to her" from "She Loves You") to get her back. Lennon saw such apologies as a way of getting second chances in love, though one might argue that sometimes apologies aren't enough.

"Dear Yoko" has Lennon again "missing" Yoko, even if they are apart just "one day," a short time. In her absence he "wilts like a flower." He has no complaint about their relationship other than this one, that they are apart more than he would like. While we don't hear the emotional devastation---"can't go on" was a common refrain in his songs about loss or potential loss--- that was Lennon's typical response to being left in his Beatle songs, he is definitely not yet secure enough in himself to tolerate well Yoko's absences. The sense of object constancy is not there. In "Dear Yoko," again to reassure himself and to hold onto the old illusion he declares that the "two of us are really one."

It is worth pointing out here that Lennon was in some ways as much as a "bundle of contradictions" as George Harrison. Both were complicated and fascinating men, in

addition to being brilliant musicians. Lennon believed in relinquishing illusions, "possessions of the mind," as he once described them, in facing life and self squarely, without the aid or balm of illusions. His song "God" is about not "believing in, mythologizing or deifying "Elvis...Kennedy...Zimmerman... Beatles" but he seems determined to hold onto the illusion that he and Yoko are "one." Harrison, as we shall see, became a devout follower of Hinduism while lambasting those who are "brainwashed" and who don't think for themselves.

Lennon comes right out and says in "I'm Losing You" what he fears most, that he is losing Yoko. They are spending more time apart---and time apart spells, for him, potential loss--- and perhaps not communicating as well as they used to, well enough that is to mediate their separateness. The old, old fear, going back to his childhood, rears its ugly head---"I'm Losing You." Their "communication" has broken down and he can't even reach Yoko on the "phone." Given that this was a time pre-cell-phone, one might hypothesize that feelings around being apart were much stronger than they are today, with the means for instant communication. On the other hand, the emotions that gave rise to songs about loss or fear of loss were felt more deeply than they are today and thus the songs were more poignant and compelling than they are today. Lennon, in "I'm Losing You," fears that Yoko is "carrying some (old) cross" and that is what is keeping her away from him; he wants her to let it go. Essentially, Get over It. It is interesting to note that as in so many of his Beatle songs the (emotional) action, in this song, turns on the act of being left or fear of being left (e.g. "the girl that's going away" in "Ticket To Ride") rather than on any actual loss.

Yoko responds, leaving little doubt that she is not entirely satisfied with him or the state of their marriage. There is still work to do. While for John the main problem is that they are physically apart more than he would like---but "no one is to blame" for that--- Yoko has specific complaints about him in "I'm Moving On" and "Give Me Something." In "I'm Moving On," she is no longer moved by his "sweet talk" and will no longer let herself be manipulated by it. "I'll see through your jive... and window smile," she declares in that song, vowing to not let him get away with his "phoniness" any more. She wants the truth and nothing but. John was initially attracted to Yoko because she could see through his "bullshit" and because she kept his feet to the ground. He was attracted to her music because it was "real," just as he was initially drawn to rock and roll music because it was "real." Realness is what he was looking for, in life, people and his relationships, having grown up in an environment where "nothing is real" ("Strawberry Fields Forever"). He penned the song "Real Love" to express what he thought he found with Yoko, what he wanted. So, it is a bit ironic that the writer of "Gimme Some Truth" is being held to account for his falseness and "phoniness." Yoko, in "I'm Moving On," is essentially saying that she is growing past

him, creating some asymmetry in the relationship, and that he needs to catch up. Which is probably why John felt that he was “losing” her.

“Give Me Something” is a brutally honest song, a demand that John “give her” something, something “warm.” Just occupying the same physical space will not do. In that song, his “eyes are cold” and his “voice is hard,” a stinging indictment and yet John may not even have been aware of himself. But it is a brave and honest thing to say in a song on an album about their relationship. Yoko is still invested in the relationship, though obviously disappointed in some things about it but promises that she “will give” John something in return if he just “cleans up”---which is the title of another of his songs on “Double Fantasy”--- his act and removes the hard edges in the way he relates to her.

Yoko shows her vulnerability in “Kiss Kiss Kiss,” asking--not demanding as in “Give Me Something”—for some affection. She is hurting, “bleeding inside,” some wound we gather from her childhood, and wants the tenderness of a kiss but not too much---“one kiss will do,” which seems to suggest she didn’t want to be smothered with affection. We know from John’s Beatles songs that he tended to over-give and perhaps Yoko is referring to that. “Kiss Kiss Kiss” does leave us curious to know more about the pain inside she has been carrying. But it is a clue that the two were kindred souls in this respect, both carrying within them unresolved hurts from their past.

Yoko melts back into one, agreeing that they are one---

“yes our hearts are one”--in “I’m Your Angel.” She resumes her role as sorceress with “magical powers” who can make all his “wishes come true” and he is her “fairy’ who has “given her everything she ever wanted from life.” She is his, “in his pocket” in this song. All is well and their relationship is hitting on all cylinders. Their fertile imaginations and creative minds still animate their relationship; they still “believe in pumpkins that turn into princes” and “house built in the sky.” It is interesting to think about the contradictions between Yoko, on the one hand, wanting something real from John and, on the other her, be an active participant in their fantasy/imaginative world.

Finally, in “Beautiful Boys,” Yoko admires Lennon’s genius, a “mind that changed the world,” while challenging him to continue to grow, create and feel. Despite all that he has accomplished he still feels “empty” inside. She understands, to quote from “Woman,” discussed above, the “little child inside the man,” with all his little “toys” and “plans and schemes” (“Real Love,” Lennon) and that becomes a message to all boys and men; “don’t be afraid” to feel pain, to suffer if need be, to live.

“Double Fantasy” is an amazing musical-psychological document, two brilliant artists baring their hearts and souls for the world to see. It shows a Lennon still deeply in love but struggling to come to terms with the growing distance between himself and Yoko. And a Yoko still deeply in love but increasingly dissatisfied with John’s coldness and “phoniness,” needing more from him.