

Eighteen Inches Apart: Mapping the Distance Between Loss and Love

Dr Ritu Kamra Kumar

Retd. Associate Professor of English,

Mukand Lal National College,

Yamuna Nagar, Haryana.

ritukumar.gmn@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.66376/galaxy.v15.n4.2>

Abstract:

This paper is a humble attempt to study distinguished perspectives in the novel *Eighteen Inches Apart*, an exploration of love, longing, loss and memory that keeps alive the central protagonists to survive the battle of life, look for an alternative support system and make a new beginning.

The plot moves to two places, Calcutta and London, much like Charles Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*, London and Paris, where both sets of characters are affected by the French Revolution but in different ways. Similarly, through the parallel life stories of Leela and Neil, Sonia Bahl delineates their lives, whose paths had unintentionally converged almost 12 years ago, how they both lost their partners, and how they meet again at the end of the novel. The paper elucidates the gay and grey moments of their lives, a blend of joys and sorrows. It also focuses on the lives of protagonists, which can be the life of anyone; thus, a universal aspect of literature is defined through the narrative.

Keywords: Exploration, love, loss, longing, grief, psychological realism.

Introduction:

E.M. Forster observes, “fundamental aspect of the novel is storytelling... the novel tells a story” (40)

Eighteen Inches Apart is a novel that tells more than a story, as Forster further says, but “with a purpose”. The novel is about the journey of comprehending life’s mysteries, trauma and means to heal it. Sonia Bahl chooses the title with great symbolic overtones: the journey from head to heart or vice versa, with complete surrender to God’s omnipotent powers, with perseverance. The plot spreads across continents, cultures, classes, and communities, exploring and excavating the psychological and emotional landscapes of central protagonists as they begin their lives with much enthusiasm and elation. With a rhythmic structure of alternating chapters, it follows the lives of Leela and Neel, two innocent souls who cross paths long before fate brings them together in spirit and perhaps souls that were intertwined somewhere in their consciousness. What begins at a snowbound and mist-enveloped train station in England gradually unfolds into a delineation of the onset of grief, lost love, fractured memory, flickering friendship, single-parent upbringing and issues related to that and Leela and Neel endeavour hard for a second chance to make lives worth living. The title is an apt metaphor: eighteen inches between head and heart, a traumatic journey from intellectual experience to emotional acceptance as the will of God. The themes explored are various and veritable.

In a further way, Sonia Bahl does not simply write about two people whose lives intersect and run parallel but explores their psyches in detail. The book looks at the way one grieves, remembers, and builds oneself up again after experiencing a great loss. It shows that the way we grieve has much to do with the concept of continuing bonds and the difference that Freud notes between mourning and melancholia. Leela and Neil’s chance meeting in their past, and their second chance at romance twelve years later, makes this a story of how grief is processed

and the possibilities of post-traumatic growth. By showing us the “gay and grey” in Leela and Neil’s lives, the author shows us how universal the experience of loss and love is. She shows how grief is not something that can be conquered, but an internal force that changes how we relate and love. In his essay “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), Freud distinguishes between mourning and melancholia. While Freud argues that mourning is a healthy process in which the griever disengages emotionally from the lost object over time and reinvests his or her emotional energy in something new, melancholia is the pathological process in which the griever becomes fixated on loss. This theory of mourning and melancholia can help us analyse what Leela and Neil go through after losing their partners. One of them has a healthy process of mourning, in which they go on rebuilding their lives and themselves as independent subjects, while the other experiences melancholia and is unable to move past the losses. In reuniting twelve years after the loss of their partners, Freud would say that the two have moved on from the melancholia and have finally been able to mourn healthily. However, John Bowlby’s attachment theory (subsequently elaborated upon by Klass, Silverman, and Nickman as the concept of continuing bonds) is another perspective that can be applied to the novel in order to better understand Leela and Neil’s journeys. This concept was introduced in his work *Attachment and Loss*. While Freud believes that it is possible to move on from loss completely to reinvest one’s feelings in another, Bowlby argues that it is more realistic that the bereaved never actually completely detach from the one they lost. Rather, the bereaved continue to maintain some type of emotional bond to that one. This concept of continuing bonds applies to the way Bahl portrays the grief of Leela and Neil. Both of them have never been able to let go completely of their late partners in the twelve years after their deaths; yet they are not prevented from finding themselves in new relationships by having to re-discover themselves as individuals. Their reunion is only possible because that the past does not require either of them to betray their earlier bonds to their loved ones. Freud’s theory of mourning and melancholia,

paired with Bowlby's concept of continuing bonds, helps the reader understand the novel's overall psychological storyline, moving from a state of disorientation with grief, to a point of reconciliation in both remembering and moving forward. Because Bahl depicts a more complicated version of this process, her work is what gives Leela and Neil's story its "gay and grey" quality, and makes it universal, for while theirs may be their experience of loss and love, it is what Freud and Bowlby write about that makes these stories recognisable as human experiences of grief and love.

Furthermore, the fruitful comparison in the paper is Neel's fixation on Mira's belongings with Mrs Macnab's preservation of Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. In Woolf's novel, the house functions as a repository of the past, the things that it contains (the shawl, the boar's skull, Mrs Ramsay's old clothes) conserved by Mrs Macnab in order to stave off the reality of death. Neel's relationship to Mira's belongings serves the same psychological purpose: his objects are not merely sentimental clutter but rather an expression of externalised grief, or a strategy for preserving what continuing-bonds theory would call an ongoing relationship with the lost. Woolf captures this sentimentality through the detached and elegiac tone of "Time Passes," but Bahl focuses on Neel's internal state and his need for the object as a direct connection to his unresolved grief. Thus, both authors are drawing from the same modernist assumption that grief lives in material things, but where Woolf's novel is less direct in its portrayal of grief, Bahl makes her characters' grief palpable and their longing for the things they lost clear.

Nevertheless, Bahl's framing of Leela and Neel's reunion after decades is comparable to the reconnection of Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth after eight years of separation in Austen's *Persuasion*. Austen's narrative explores the emotional repercussions of missed opportunity, the persuasion that initially estranges them, and the self-realisation that makes their union possible only after both individuals have grown and changed over the intervening years. Bahl heightens this notion by adding an element that Austen's novel lacks. Whereas their separation in the

Austen novel is largely social and perhaps easily reversed, the reason for Leela and Neel's separation lies in the loss of their respective partners, and as a result, their reunion becomes about more than merely resolving past conflict; it is about healing a long-held wound. So, while in the Austen novel the second-chance narrative functions as a romance narrative in which their separation is merely social, for Bahl, the second-chance narrative serves as a story of grief as well; indeed, the passage of time is less an obstacle in the way of reunion than a necessary component of it.

The author's appeal to Dickens is a likely reference to the author's tendency to use characters whose quirks and pasts haunt them, characters like Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* who are caught up in a particular moment, as representations of their own psychological stasis. Bahl's novel is a counterexample to that Dickensian idea of grief as a permanent state. Bahl's characters are not frozen in a permanent state of loss, and neither of them resembles a Havisham-like character who has been stuck in time for decades. While both authors share an obsession with the material traces of the past, Miss Havisham's untouched wedding cake and stopped clocks serve as physical reminders of what has been lost, Leela and Neel are very different from Dickens's grotesque characters: they do not live in the same state of grief as Havisham, and as a result they are capable of moving past their grief. Bahl's novel is therefore less a portrayal of grief as an eternal state than in Dickens, but rather as a stage that characters are able to survive and even change from.

Joyce's portrait depicts the maturation of the protagonist Stephen Dedalus and his psychological development in a series of discrete moments, and each stage marks a significant shift in self-understanding achieved through introspection rather than through action. Bahl's novel employs a similar structure through her use of alternating chapters detailing the psychological states of Leela and Neel, each a distinct stage in the novel. This reflects the author's focus on the importance of interiority to the development of her protagonist, and like

Joyce's novel, the structure of her novel enacts a similar theme as the text. The reader must piece together the psychological and intellectual growth of Leela and Neel as the reader moves through the chapters in her novel, in the same way the reader must understand Stephen Dedalus' progress through Joyce's text. Bahl's novel thus takes the modernist assumption that we construct ourselves through individual internal events and applies this to her use of two separate protagonists, each growing throughout the novel.

Finally, the author's use of Anatole France's *Thaïs* is a less explicit comparison, but one worth considering in the context of other allusions in the novel. France's novel depicts the spiritual transformation of two central figures: Paphnutius and Thaïs, whose psychological changes are inverses of one another and who end up doing what it was that they had once been against. Likewise, Leela and Neel occupy opposite positions on the continuum of loss and healing, and converge at the end of the novel as their psychological states align. Like both Bahl and France, the novel concerns itself with how love and loss destabilise the self; Bahl is similarly focused on the way that love and grief can shift a character's understanding of themselves. The comparison between the two novels, while much thinner than in the examples cited above and in need of more substantial grounding, offers an opportunity for the reader to understand that Bahl's focus on the ways in which loss changes us reflects an older literary tradition of the transformation of the self.

As far as themes or thrust areas are concerned, they are of a distinct literary tradition of novels that dwell on psychological realism, what happens when one is forced to get immersed in grief, and memories become a support to survive. The writer evokes time as a healer and emotional maturity that human beings gradually attain as they move with the flow of time. The novel falls in the realm of social fiction with a peek into the inner recesses of the mind, how one sleepwalks life after a sudden loss, and then the blissful bonds become emotional anchors. The focus here is not on a romantic stance. It is through the process of emotional healing and survival strategies

that we evolve or learn to evolve in the process of restarting, making a new beginning. The departed ones, Mira and Zain, remain omnipotent in the story long after their deaths, becoming a lingering influence that persists beyond the heavenly abode. In this sense, the novel serves as a reminder that the loss of dear ones and the trauma of accepting finality are difficult, and memories are subjective. The novel comes close to Virginia Woolf's *The Lighthouse*, where Mr Ramsay undertakes a trip to the Lighthouse after the demise of Mrs. Ramsey to pay homage to her memory, to fulfil her vision. This is what Neel is doing: living for Mira, her flowers, and adopting Zar is a tribute to the memory of Mira. Zar is his Lighthouse; nurturing him is his salvation, his epiphany; he is redeeming himself through him.

However, one of the novel's greatest strengths is the symbolism that lies in flowers, photographs, maps, musical instruments, text messages, homes, and even cats becoming monuments raised by Mira's eternal presence. Mira's message to Neel— "Don't worry. A fresh batch of irises has just arrived. I am listening to you. They are talking about you"—beautifully illustrates the novelist's conviction that belonging remains through objects. Neel sees Mira in them as Mrs Macnab in *To the Lighthouse* sees Mrs Ramsey everywhere- in a shawl, in kitchen soups, in clothes hung on the wire. This similarity raises the novel to a universal work of art. Such instances elevate the plot beyond conventional romance, transforming it into a holding of emotional legacy with panache and passion.

Neel's character is the novel's supreme achievement. His journey from a grieving and grumbling son and husband to a compassionate and caring mentor, saviour of children like Zar and Akuba, provides genuine psychological depth to his persona. Struggling with the burden of an emotionally aloof father and the untimely loss of Mira, he slowly channels his grief into constructive action of caring for vulnerable children like Zaar and Akuba. Leela is the Lighthouse guiding wandering ships like Zar and Akuba. His urge to create a safe abode for deprived, abandoned, talented individuals reflects a moral vision that goes beyond personal

suffering, and he reclaims his own self through them. Leela becomes his mooring. In many ways, Neel resembles Dickens's Characters who find maturity as they grow mellow with experience.

Leela's character is enigmatic and shaped by ambiguity, especially after the death of Zain. Her childhood, her keen observation of Calcutta's bylanes, her passion for photography, and her devotion to her kids are portrayed with sagacity, despite occupying half the narrative; cartography of her mind is, though psychologically profound, remains elusive. The reader learns a great deal about the external events and movements, the photography of her life, but gains little insight into the deeper layers of her inner world. Nevertheless, her remark—"I always grew up like an open book, unconcerned by criticism"—offers a glimpse into her character. Through photography, she seeks to preserve fleeting beauty, thereby becoming a link between the eternal and transience.

The novel's diction is simple and accessible. Intertextuality adds to the richness of the narrative. Conversational tones, dialogues, and soliloquy convey emotions directly. At some places, the repetitions slow the pace of the narrative. References to locations such as Calcutta, London, Belgravia, Hyderabad, and Delhi are there, but the cacophony of cities is not mentioned much. So, the portrayal of these cities lacks the vividness and impact found in works where the city itself emerges as a character.

In terms of structure, the novel has both strengths and weaknesses. The alternating sequence of events successfully establishes parallels between Leela and Neil, reinforcing the idea that their lives are intertwined. The opening sections are laden with extensive external details, delaying the emotional quotient of the story. While characters like Chai, Lance, Isra, Hala, TJ, and Joe add a touch of warmth and wisdom, some episodes feel more like anecdotal tangents than essential parts of the story.

Comprehensive Study

Twelve years ago, they met at Widnes Railway Station in London, post-midnight, with no staff and the station empty for a documentary shoot. She was working on a project, waiting for a train to London, he for Cambridge. Leela became a mother of two at twenty-two and a widow at twenty-nine; a late-born child, she is father fifty-five, mother forty-nine. She looked like “Rosemary’s Baby”, who knew what was going to happen or anticipated something perfectly ordinary, like the cook in the kitchen dropping a plate.

The Belgravia boy was more than decently qualified to hold a job: Eton, Cambridge, and a semester at London Business School. The guy who had won the lottery and tossed it into the trash in the UK and Uganda. He became Neel, son of Harry Paul. Neel’s father revelled in luxury while his mother stayed somewhere in the shadows. His mother passed away before his 21st birthday. Leela’s driver Moin, 22 years of age, ferried her from school. Zain was Moin’s son; Leela was the first friend he made at that age. Zain’s mother passed soon after his birth. Zain, aged 7, and Leela, aged 6, were meant to be friends. Neel, in London, on a date with a girl from a florist, buys roses for Amira; she was shy, a little melancholic, graceful, and old-world.

Leela’s father was fascinated by the Indian French beauty Leela Naidu. Leela was named after her. She loved her name; her Dadi wanted her to be a queen, named a princess. She walked when she was little through the towering colonnade of The Tollygunge as “if I was entering my own castle” She sat with her father and frequently met Zain. Her mother’s friend, Mrs Parshad, visited in a crisp white cotton saree, which looked like papier-mache, and told Leela’s mother that she shouldn’t be allowed to play with Zain, which Leela listened to and sought revenge by flipping over with mint chutney that landed on the lady’s crisp white cotton saree. This episode

is a glimpse of her independence and rebellious temperament. She cannot be swayed by the established order.

The opening is rather slow and lacks pace, depriving readers of clarity. The story of Leela and Neel changes as the chapter progresses. No setting or locale is described in much detail. Society is explored; diction is plain, and the narrative is linear; the story moves very slowly, with little external or internal movement.

Furthermore, Neel felt his father could be the boss of a crime group syndicate, surrounded by relatives who thought Neel to be an empire “inheriting a clone of his father” At the club, Mira and Neel meet, and his father is there as well. Mira’s parents, medical practitioners in Syria, lost their lives. She was afterwards with her Dadi, then she died, now with her aunt, a florist. Mira left her medical career to become a florist. The youngsters are defying the set norms and following their passion. The novel weaves a whiff of fresh air.

Simple words, plain narrative, with economy of words, expected developments; the plot moves: past of Mira’s aunt Isra and her marriage to Lancelot Thomas- then the marriage of Neel with Mira - no surprise element, it already seemed happening. At Mayfair home, 16 months and a feline were added in the home, which perhaps Neel disliked.

In the marriage of Leela and Zain, they are blessed with twins Jahaan and Rumi; a job offer in Stuttgart is refused due to Zain’s father’s ill health; three marriage ceremonies take place: Hindu, Nikah, and a registered wedding. One offbeat development: no opposition from Leela’s parents, which seems a heartwarming gesture; a rich vs middle-class marriage celebration is held amicably

However, two people bravely face the untimely deaths of their partners, bringing them closer to readers. Grief soaks them, but they act bravely. Life moves on... The novelist vividly brings

life's impermanence to the pages of the novel. Dead Zain and Mira are more alive than ever, just like Mrs Ramsey in *To the Lighthouse*.

Neel misses Mira, changes places and ends up at Covent Garden. Meets Chaitanya Menon, a new character introduced at this stage when one-third of the novel is over. Past of Chai, who had been an alcoholic, now a businessman, co-founder of a gaming company, reformed cocaine addict, divorcee; Neel shares his details; he advises, "When a rocket comes apart, it's because of its stages, which propel it to its next level. Eventually it reaches a place of tremendous perspective...A place where you can see that endings are beginnings." So Chai's role is neatly defined: he will bring Neel out of the tragic events of his life. A companion, he becomes.

That prepares readers for his role in Neel's life. Outside, he meets a boy of nine playing the harmonica. He runs after him just out of curiosity; the boy hits him, and he lies on the floor. The world went dark.

Leela moves around in the wedding - pomp and show of the rich is at full display. She does not mix up with guests and feels Zain is present there. The mockery of the rich at weddings has been widely recounted. The writer remains alive to the social canvas; she raises her eyebrows but lets the readers interpret the scenario while the primary focus remains on central protagonists.

New characters, new beginnings; when one-third of the novel is ending, it appears a new story is on the cards, call it weakness of the plot or narrative technique of the writer.

Sid returns in the narrative. Leela often remembers his kindness in horrifying moments; he visits Calcutta for her only, suggests joining a dating app, and refers to having lost someone to suicide when he was too young. Together, they talk about Zabu- his, Abu, and Zain.

Zain misses Mira terribly and reads the message she sent when he was once caught up in traffic.

“Don’t worry

A fresh lot of irises just arrived.

I’m listening to them

They are talking about you”

Wasabi occupies Mira’s bed. He meets therapist Steve and Zar, takes charge of his education and nature, and his exquisite talent for running brings them closer. Chai meets him in Covent Cafe.

Who says, “This is just the prologue

my friend

A brilliant new story”

London calling - a flashback where Leela and Mira meet as Leela buys flowers.

“Don’t wish these would last forever.

Aren’t they more beautiful because they don’t

Photographers ...freeze fleeting beauty”

Their paths had converged when they were happy.

Now a flat opposite is available in her London home, which she always wished to buy.

Will Leela buy? She had planned holidays with Zain there, but fate had other plans.

Neel lives only in memories of Mira; he intends to retain a place his father wants to sell, breaks off ties with his father, and feels relieved. He refers to Harbou. German screenwriter depicts a countdown: “10, 9, 8...

Until zero.

Had he not been counting down his entire life?

Finally, the count was about to touch zero.

Hope, the hope of ascent”

Leela experiences a soul-crushing date experience. It is a satire on modern culture and C U Saturday.

Abbreviations...she thinks about them- linguistic mockery the writer tends to bring to notice.

Neel plans to remodel the House: “There are kids with raw, untold talent and absolutely no way to do anything about it. I want the House to be theirs...a place to be nurtured, a place where we’ll treat their talent like holy scriptures.” Zar and his own childhood, his father’s untimely demise and his father’s wayward ways are in his mind. It brings to mind Pip, David Copperfield, and Moll Flanders, though poverty in their case blighted their childhoods, and Jane Eyre, like all, was deprived of emotional love and care.

Chai tells him to pause and takes him to a two-week, two-country, six-city trip.

The House is named Leela: “Hindu Philosophy has the perfect word for creative play, when it is accompanied by love and presence”

What is it

Leela

It prepares readers for how soon both lives will converge! Symbolically, too, both are yearning for love that has been lost to God’s will.

Leela in Calcutta visits Corner Coffee, a soothing place she finds it to be. While leaving for a fleeting second, she glances at a handsome man whom she sees- Shapeshifter.

The story gains momentum, with new characters...

Leela is ready to nurture talent among the underprivileged. Don Quixote: “A bit of Quixote lives inside every founder.”

Chai introduces him to Jo Wilson (Joanna), who refuses to be defined by sex. So, he is appointed as the first employee at Leela.

Leela meets 3 guys on a dating app and tells Sid it is not a cure; she needs a therapist.

Neel gets Zar exposed to Toots Thielemans. Leela becomes: an office, the House, the play place, homework. Chai asks Neel what he thinks - philanthropist or at least make a damn living.

Belgravia apartments being sold to the next-door lady where he found Mary Oliver’s poem, no negotiation- readers can connect and know, guess who the buyer is; it is Leela.

Jahaan and Rumi grow up. Leela meets TJ on a dating app when she is about to delete it. They go to Five-Star Cafe and binge on ice cream. He is 38. Strange are the ways of life.

Neel had no funds for Leela. In a world plagued by intense pitching, hustling, humblebragging, and overpromising, Neel’s brand of sincerity had zero value. Chai arranges his meeting with someone whom he calls Sculpted. A detailed description of the man is given on pages (223-224)

Leela’s upbringing - I grew up like a perpetually open book, unafraid of censure.

Jo and Leela discuss touching. Leela’s parents hold hands all the time. Jo says his parents seem to have touched each other twice; he has a sister.

Neel meets sculpted man MAK Miad Ali Khan- his past: wife dead, remarried a failed actress- retinue of servants for kids. The novel has too many digressions; it becomes episodic.

Zain’s birthday, compass, bond, symbol. Jahaan draws a map, places on it the things Zain loved. Her parents organised a comic-book-themed party for kids.

So, Mira remains omnipotent, and Neel's journey of the soul begins. His sole purpose in life seems to be giving and making people happy. His father remains a flat character.

Readers are curious about how Leela and Neel meet.

Leela attends a birthday party of some royal couple's wife, social eccentricities and banal niceties with TJ. Social commentary on higher-ups.

Leela attacks Steve, Zar's father, the culprit.

Leela visits TJ, and they talk as TJ tells her about Neel, which, to her, sounds like a broken heart. They try to become phi, but Leela cries and says, "The only man I want to fund is the one I christened the Shapeshifter."

Neel on sleeping pills - 72 hours he sleeps Lance and Isra - What have you been up to.... not replying to sixty- three text messages or showing up at work for three whole days?

After Leela was vandalised, expenses gushing, the horse chestnut tree broken, it reminds one of Jane Eyre's Chestnut tree, bag of cocaine, two unsavoury characters...it had been enough, Zar being handed over to foster parents Akuba to Derby with mother- all was over for Neel. He talks of quitting. Lance replies, most good decisions come with many bad weeks, months and sometimes, years.

The novel belongs more to Neel than to Leela. Neel's character has been explored more enthusiastically and psychologically. Leela sometimes seems lost and forlorn and lacks the depth to comprehend her own feelings. Why cannot she be happy with kids?

Chai took Neel to Jazz, and QB says, Jazz

is not clean, man... it is about listening hard, choosing the off-note, the dissonant one, and making space for it. That is how music becomes family"

Neel adopts Zar, becomes his dad, and meets a lady, Hala Khan.

Leela searches for the Shapeshifter whom she had seen for a fleeting second- was I mythologising a passing homeless man? At Corner Coffee shop - she sits, photographs watch repairman shop, rickshaw Piller, fortune teller- Calcutta had much to offer. Sid arranges a call with a small Delhi photo shop, and soon she receives an invitation to be part of an exhibition titled All Caps. Off to Delhi she is, a city where she lost Zain.

Hala Khan, MAK's sister's daughter, becomes a regular visitor to Leela. She studied at Yale and worked at Google; now here. Both are getting close.

Leela in Delhi, Abby, Zain's father, meets, gets them biryani, tells her he is moving to Aligarh, she has a round of city-stopping over to Zain's favourite places, revels in September rain, may be pathetic fallacy, all getting healed, TJ tells her to meet the guy he met in London- Neel, we know as readers.

Neel and Hala Khan are in a relationship, but Neel is reluctant to admit it. Wasabi objects through her gestures. When Hala stays for the night, he sends Zar to Lance and Isra. Lance shows him a photograph published in The Telegraph, and, boy, not known, some poor boy who found a camera in a dustbin used it to click pictures. Neel wants him to come to Leela. In the trash, a treasure is found.

Change of locale from Calcutta to London for Leela

At a local music festival, Leela's children successfully perform and receive applause. Neel recalls Mira's words-" Breathe, there's space"-and wonders if this is the start of his crazy growth spurt. The plot is heading towards the expected closure; the only surprising element is Leela and Neel's meeting.

Otherwise, a linear narrative, with multiple themes: love, longing, nostalgia, memories that shape us, deprived children, high-fi society.

Parents have been kept backstage; they should have been made active participants.

London beckons; parents now play an active role. She mails Neel, as TJ had told her, and gets a reply. The meeting is fixed- "I'll see you on Wednesday at 4"- but unfortunately, the meeting does not materialise, as Leela leaves early because her father is unwell.

Mail exchange takes place, and Neel knows he sold the Belgravia home to Leela. The Uber arrives. She re-routes and stands at Leela's

Neel, the Shapeshifter, stands- "This place is yours? He nodded, Leela's mine"

The scene of the 1st chapter returns- when they had a shoot 12 years ago- what neither of them realised, not even when they finally met, was that they had met 12 years ago. On a small snowed - in railway Station in England.

The novel's ending is its most satisfying achievement. It recalls the serenity and certainty found in *Persuasion*, where emotional journeys finally reach their true destination. Furthermore, the novel's title finds its full meaning in these final pages; the *Eighteen Inches Apart* distance between the head and the heart represents the longest journey one of the protagonists must undertake.

Conclusion

Eighteen Inches Apart ultimately resists easy resolution, situating itself within the psychological novel tradition where grief, memory, and desire coexist rather than resolve neatly. Bahl's engagement with Woolf, Austen, Dickens, and Joyce places her novel in dialogue with a wider literary lineage, even as her characters escape both Havisham's stasis and any wholly neat catharsis. Instead, Leela and Neel enact what Bowlby and Freud describe as the

quiet, ordinary work of mourning and continuing attachment. Their reunion after twelve years signifies not the closure of a love story but the psyche's slow reconciliation of loss and love. The novel's title thus measures not physical distance, but the psychological distance every grieving self must eventually travel.

Works Cited:

Austen, Jane. *Persuasion*. 1817. Penguin Classics, 2003.

Bahl, Sonia. *Eighteen Inches Apart*. Fingerprint! Publishing, 2026.

Bowlby, John. *Attachment and Loss, Vol. 3: Loss, Sadness and Depression*. Basic Books, 1980.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1847. Penguin Classics, 2006.

Defoe, Daniel. *Moll Flanders*. 1722. Oxford UP, 1998.

Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. 1850. Penguin Classics, 2004.

Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*. 1861. Penguin Classics, 2003.

Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel*. 1927. Penguin, 2000.

Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." 1917. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV*, translated by James Strachey, Hogarth Press, 1957, pp. 237–258.

Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. 1916. Penguin, 1992.

Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. Harcourt, 1927.