

Juliana 01 january 2018 poetry analysis paper

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JacksonEnglish 9 Intensified01 January 2018Poetry Analysis PaperAt first glance, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" seems jagged and at odds with itself. With broken up stanzas and contradictory, fragmented dialogue, the awkward and indecisive Prufrock of the title seems hardly confident enough to answer the "overwhelming question" of the poem, let alone ask it (10). This very satire, however, is just what the poet intended. Through irony and the various ways in which he deploys it, T. S. Eliot is able to convey the constant, paralyzing indecision of Prufrock's frantic and tongue-tied mental state. Eliot chooses to forward his poem by quoting a section of Dante's Inferno.

Tellingly, the translated quotation ends with the phrase, "...I can answer you with no fear..." As a result, a sense of irony is inserted throughout the poem which is to follow, considering that the speaker is a self-conscious man too timid to even eat a peach in public.

And when this quote is coupled with the title, Eliot suggests that this "love song" is a ballad to the impossible ideal: not only written to a beautiful, intimidating woman, but also to a concept that is, to Prufrock, equally unattainable. To Prufrock this concept is that of confidence and self-assuredness, the ability to truly respond without shame. And as he is unable to reach this ideal, the setting from the quote- hell, if you haven't read Dante- is fitting.

As the poem continues, the reader is given more elements that provide irony and give context to Prufrock's mental state. A large section is dedicated to <https://assignbuster.com/juliana-01-january-2018-poetry-analysis-paper/>

describing the yellow smoke surrounding the house and how it resembles a cat, confident and assured; Prufrock reflects that there will be time for him to become similarly unruffled. However, because he still has not achieved this state of mind, he soon dissolves into a downward spiral, reflecting on time and how he is wasting it. There's almost a bitter tone in the poem when Prufrock remarks mentally to his love, "Time for you and time for me / And time yet for a hundred indecisions..." (31-32). Further irony is added when one considers that while mainstream love ballads might put the emphasis on the eternal nature of love, the speaker in this poem instead reflects on the million ways it can go wrong. In addition to all this is Prufrock's constant mental back and forth, at some points hopeful and then in others despairing, to absurd effect. The necktie that is "asserted by a simple pin" (43) becomes much less assertive when, later on in the poem, he is "sprawling" on that very same pin, and "pinned and wriggling on the wall" (57-58). The earlier focus on time, and how much he has of it, turns into a lament when he moans, "I grow old... I grow old..." (120).

He is preoccupied with how weak he is- after a passive diet of cakes and sweets served at the tea parties he frequents, he wonders if he has the strength to force himself to act. In short, Prufrock is paralyzed by his inability to be assertive, which is ironic when you consider how confident he is in listing his shortcomings. The entire poem, in fact, is filled with such self-professed statements of inferiority, creating further juxtaposition to the setting of sophisticated women "who come and go, talking of Michelangelo." The speaker asserts that he is no "Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be"

(111) echoing the character's "to be or not to be" soliloquy, a classic Shakespearean lament that parallels Prufrock's woes.

Instead, he sees himself as a fool, a nobody, merely a plot device used to move the story along- ironic, again, considering his inability to move his own narrative along. Prufrock imagines his head chopped off and brought in on a plate, an allusion to John the Baptist, but ruminates that he is not even worthy of that since he is no prophet. Prufrock's consistent undermining of himself is underscored by the sections that imagine him, to dissonant effect, as the unachievable ideal: a confident, assured individual who does not hesitate to "disturb the universe" (46). In the end, the irony in "Prufrock" is the contrast between the optimistic title and the gloomy content, the insidious streets and high-bred drawing rooms, the dream of an identity that will never become reality. Perhaps Eliot himself describes Prufrock's incongruous dilemma best in his poem "The Hollow Men," writing: "Between the idea / And the reality / Between the motion / And the act / Falls the Shadow" (72-76). If only Prufrock were not too paralyzed to respond, surely he would agree.