

Prufrock in progress

Experience, Human Nature



Prufrock in Progress In A Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock by T. S. Eliot, the main character, J. Alfred Prufrock battles with his identification in the world. T. S. Eliot comprises this character with traits that any human being can relate to, like fear and desire, while ironically depicting the character as a monster. This dueling monster lives within Prufrock. His desire to be accepted is bogged down by his unworthy self-esteem because of his lack of human relationships. Prufrock is a relatable character at best, but his self-image ruins his potential of connecting with other people.

Some scholars believe that Prufrock is yearning for a long lost lover throughout his love song, but most evidence shows that he is in conflict with himself. Sistani writes *Internal Anxieties and Conflicts in The LOVE SONG of J. ALFRED PRUFROCK* and states that Prufrock is searching for a female lover in his expression of A Love Song. Sistani believes that J. Alfred is experiencing internal conflict about a love source and the need of comfort through a relationship with another woman. This interpretation poses irony continuously established throughout the poem because Prufrock does not even love himself.

Sistani explains this insecurity by analyzing, “ The article concludes that the male character’s anxieties and conflicts are all the results of a past unsatisfactory mothering situation during his childhood,” (Sistani 478). This accusation is made from empty evidence that he desires a woman’s affection simply because he did not ever have it. This shows that J. Alfred Prufrock is in a habitual pattern of looking for love in all the wrong places. This interpretation by Sistani suggests that J. Alfred is speaking out in the desire for a loving partner.

Sadly, Prufrock's relationship with his mother was disappointing and unfulfilling, therefore; he longs for someone to fill this place. Unfortunately, his lack of love and acceptance for himself disables him from relating and loving or even accepting others. Prufrock speaks of attending a party in which none of the women are good enough for him. He talks of their skirts hitting the floor and is infatuated by the women, but then ironically changes his viewpoint stating, And I have known the eyes already, known them all- The eyes that fix you in a formulated phase, And when I am formulated, Sprawling on a pin, When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall, Then how should I begin? (Gwynn 623). Prufrock is explaining how women prevent him from being his true self. How the presence of them makes him feel like an insect being pinned on the wall; examined and preserved for humans to review and criticize. He deems the question of how to begin the expression of self when all women seem to want is a fixed idea of what a man should be, and that is not what J.

Alfred is. Sistani evaluates " As a dependent character with not good enough mothering, Prufrock, like a child, is always willing to attach to an external loved object to achieve support and gratification. This need for attachment, to relate to the desired object is constant in Prufrock," (Sistani 481). The poem in itself is a projection of how Prufrock views himself in comparison to how the reader or another person would view him. He projects only what he wants to be known, and leaves the rest as mystery.

He purposefully reveals only what he is comfortable revealing, which will never lead to a sustainable relationship. Sistani concludes in her article, " Prufrock, with unresolved internal conflicts and anxieties still dreams of the

women to attach to in order to fulfill the need for security and comfort,” (Sistani 481). This analysis believes that Prufrock himself feels he will not be able to fully express himself or be accepted without a female partner to lovingly accept him first. Unfortunately and ironically, the cycle persists because J.

Alfred Prufrock does not ever have the epiphany that his entire misery is derived from his lack of confidence and love for himself, not from a lack of an external object or person. On the other hand, *Human Voices in Silent Seas: A Reading on Eliot’s Love Song* by Videnov uses a psychoanalytic approach to interpret the poem sang by J. Alfred Prufrock. She expands on his internal conflict of worthiness. Throughout the poem, Prufrock battles with the public and private sides of himself, and whether his thoughts and feelings are worthy of expression.

Videnov explains this contrast in character by stating, “ Through jarring and easy transitions, Eliot contrasts the privacy of observation, insight, and dream with the social functioning of man, his appraisal by others, and his appraisal of himself as reflected in “ the eyes” (55), thoughts, and words of others. ” (Videnov, Valentin A. , 126). Videnov also analyzes the internal and external influences on J. Alfred Prufrock’s psyche. The internal conflict that J. Alfred Prufrock exhibits throughout his love song is evident in his lack of self-confidence that leads to a feeling of disconnection with the human population.

On one hand, Prufrock expresses the desire to cultivate a relationship with the external world, or a lover; yet on the other hand, he lets his insecurities define him and refuses to let himself engage in relationships with other

people. Videnov explains this by describing Prufrock's quest, " a quest for belonging, the examination of which could yield the message of the poem and the ultimately optimistic idea of love, as the title suggests, lurking behind the apparently tragic finale," (Videnov, Valentin A. , 126).

This statement establishes the irony in the desire to fulfill a journey of love, yet the inevitable misery Prufrock lives. The psychoanalytical dynamic of the ego and the true self is brought through in Prufrock's character. T. S. Eliot repeatedly uses the pronouns, " you and I," to describe this relationship of the ego and true self that Prufrock experiences. In the interpretation of *Human Voices in Silent Seas: A Reading on Eliot's Love Song*, Videnov declares that these two entities are both representative of J. Alfred Prufrock himself. " You" represents the public face of Alfred J.

Prufrock, the ego; and " I" represents the true self, the self that wants to be expressed but is prevented by Prufrock's fear and insecurity. The opposing characters within Prufrock are further extended through the symbols of afternoon and evening. The imagery of afternoon is a representation of the light, the desire to express, and the need for connection. The evening represents a darkness, or comfort in the habitual pattern of the introverted mind and its self-destructive thoughts. Prufrock expresses his mental state when he says, ' the evening sleeps so peacefully. ' (Gwynn 624) In saying this, Prufrock is confirming within himself his comfort in the thought pattern of darkness. This leads him to question, " Would it have been worthwhile? " (Gwynn 625), referring to the desired human connection he wants deep down. He truly believes that expression of the self and what he, as an individual has to say and share, are not going to be accepted by others.

Because of his fear of expression, the singer sings a song of love, but predominately and more ironically, a song of sadness. He has continued his pattern of introversion to such an extreme that he suffers from continual loneliness and disassociation.

He proves this dissociation when he ends the poem with an insight of his fantasy world of mermaids where he retreats, when he is lonely. He looks upon the beautiful creatures in awe of their unifying world; yet won't even allow himself to be happy in his fantasy. He states this saying, " I do not think that they will sing to me," (Gwynn 625). This prevents him from dreaming himself to a healthy and loving relationship with himself, or anyone else. The lines " let us go" (Gwynn 622) used repeatedly are incredibly significant in this poem. Us" being the internal representation of the two conflicting sides that exist within Prufrock, as he yearns for release of this horrible cycle. What J. Alfred Prufrock does not understand is that every individual goes through this experience of questioning self worth. The underlying ironic theme of this poem is the relation of the reader to Prufrock himself. This is a cry of the main character to emerge from the inner seclusion that he feels - a bonding of the afternoon and evening, the light and dark, inner and outer; a battle for the merging of duality to become a union.

In " an overwhelming question" in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock by Xue, the main question that J. Alfred Prufrock is consistently in conflict with is whether or not to reveal his true self. Prufrock's dueling character is established through the language of the poem. The internal conflict of Prufrock is addressed through repetitive language. " Prufrock is trying to

express some deeper philosophical insight or disillusionment with society, but fears rejection. ” (Xue 79). This fear causes his misery. Prufrock’s character is dominated by his uncertainty.

The repetition of the lines, “ there will be time,” (Gwynn 622) pose irony in the poem. Prufrock is hopeful that he will be able to truly open up to the world in time, yet currently; he is perpetuating his cycle of loneliness by assuming that these desires will naturally unfold without regarded effort. Xue states this in saying, “ The phrase ‘ There will be time,’ repeated five times between lines 23 and 36, represents his hesitation and delay, in order to conceal his inner anxiety to the world,” (Xue 80).

Essentially, Prufrock is only happy when he is alone with his thoughts because there are no external influences to judge him, yet this is also his cause of misery. Irony is also addressed in the “ you and I” (Gwynn 621) characterization of Prufrock. Xue states the psychoanalytical interpretation of these pronouns, “ In the poem, Prufrock is divided in two selves. One is persuading Prufrock to ask the ‘ overwhelming question’, while the other is trying to prevent it,” (Xue 82). Prufrock’s soul really desires is the opposite of what it endures. At the root of his inability to express is his insecurity.

Prufrock asks, “ Do I dare Disturb the Universe? ” (Gwynn 623) which is direct evidence that Prufrock has serious lack of self-confidence. J. Alfred directly articulates his anxiety about interaction by describing his unappealing physical attributes. He quivers in the thought, “ With a bald spot in the middle of my hair- ‘ They will say: ‘ How his hair is growing thin! ’ ” (Gwynn 623). This statement is directly in connection with Prufrock’s

physical insecurity, as well as his emotional insecurity because of his self-image. He uses this as an excuse for his anti-social behavior.

He manifests this negative expression of self by boldly stating that if he were to share with another he would, “ Die with a dying fall,” (Gwynn 623). This self-conscious attitude and fear of being mocked for this truth is the entire reason for J. Alfred Prufrock’s cyclical misery. He does not love himself; therefore, he cannot find or receive or the love of another. If he never learns to share his truth, he will never understand the beauty of human connection. The reality of how much Prufrock shares about himself is shown in the line, “ To prepare to meet the faces that you meet; to murder to create,” (Gwynn 622).

The real self or “ I”, as Videnov described in *Human Voices in Silent Seas*, is lost or “ murdered” in society to “ create” a false self or alter ego that functions in society. Another line stating this ego-oriented society and repeating the symbol of darkness reads, “ the evening spread out against the sky,” (Gwynn 622) which refers to the apparent darkness of all humans all hidden under the masks of ego. Yet, if J. Alfred Prufrock understands this is a battle of every individual, he would be able to relate. In conclusion, it is J. Alfred Prufrock’s choice to live in misery.

If he were open to see himself as a mirror image of others he would realize that every individual has insecurities of their own. Therefore, I agree with scholars Videnov and Xue in the psychoanalytical approach to J. Alfred Prufrock battling with his own ego versus the exploration and expression of his true self. If he deemed himself worthy of external expression then he would finally be able to share in love with himself and in turn, the rest of

humanity. Works Cited Gwynn, R. S. Literature: A Pocket Anthology. 5th. New York: Pearson Education, Inc. , 2012. 21-625. Print. Videnov, Valentin A. " Human Voices In Silent Seas: A Reading Of Eliot's Love Song. " Explicator 67. 2 (2009): 126-130. AcademicSearch Complete. Web. 10 Nov. 2012. Sistani, Roohollah Reesi. " Internal Anxieties And Conflicts In " The LOVE SONG Of J. ALFRED PRUFROCK. " European Journal Of SocialScience17. 4 (2010): 478-489. Academic Search Complete. Web. 27 Nov. 2012. Xue, Haiqin. " On " An Overwhelming Question" In The Love Song Of J. Alfred Prufrock. " Canadian Social Science 5. 2 (2009): 79-82. Academic Search Complete. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.