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How does The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock reflect T. S. Eliot's concerns about the modern world?

T. S. Eliot's poem, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, is written in a modernist style. This becomes apparent from the very first stanza, when he describes a sunset. In Georgian poetry, a sunset is usually described in a beautiful sense, whereas Eliot has compared it to a 'patient etherised upon a table'. The language Eliot has used is one of a scientific and sterile nature. He may be trying to raise questions as to what we perceive as beautiful in our modern world, as people used to believe nature was the most beautiful sight on earth, whereas now people may perceive modern buildings or sports cars to be beautiful objects. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume Eliot wants to return to the past, as he misses the tradition and respect for nature. The fact that this is a modernist poem demonstrates Eliot's belief that the modern world offers no benefit to humanity, as the modern world is highly linked with the degradation of nature and traditional values.

T. S. Eliot also uses many writing techniques which are typical of modernism, such as an irregular rhyming scheme, and irregular structure in his stanzas and writes a stream of conscious thought. There is a great effect on the reader in having an irregular rhyming scheme and structure, as it makes the poem awkward to read and makes the poem seem disjointed, which is a good reflection on the modern world, as Eliot believed people were disconnected from each other in the cities. Through this poem's structure, Eliot is raising questions as to how people are perfectly accepting to see dozens of hundreds of faces pass them by in their daily business, but not

know a single one of them, leading one to the idea that the city, despite being a heavily populated area, can be incredibly lonely for someone to live in.

This is shown later on in the poem, when Prufrock believes he should have been 'scuttling across the floors of silent seas', essentially being a hermit, as he is so lonely in the city he lives in. It is also shown when Prufrock describes all the arms, 'braceleted and white and bare', that he has seen during his days yet he cannot bring himself to talk to them or bring his eyes to theirs. The degradation of traditional values is revealed when Eliot comments on the 'restless nights in one-night cheap hotels', as this insinuates there is a sexual relationship of adulterous or promiscuous nature. This is because any traditional relationship would be done in a more romantic setting, and not in a 'one-night cheap hotel'. Therefore it is permissible to say that Eliot mourns the traditional romantics of the Georgian era. Eliot could be criticising the modern world for its lack of permanent structures when he refers to 'sawdust restaurants'.

As one imagines 'sawdust restaurants' to be cheap and only function for a relatively short period of time. The title of the poem is highly ironic, as Prufrock is deeply socially inept, especially with women. We understand this in the semi-refrain, 'In the room the women come and go,/ Talking of Michelangelo'. The scene pictured here highlights a few key points. Firstly, we understand that Prufrock feels alienated from this scene, as he is an uncultured, ordinary man, who probably has no knowledge of art. Secondly, we see that Prufrock does not know how to approach or socialise with

women. Another point in which we see Prufrock afraid of women, is when he says 'Is it perfume from a dress/that makes me so digress?'. Prufrock is implying that he is almost afraid of talking to a woman. Therefore, we understand this poem to be a sort of parody of romanticism, as Prufrock has no love, even though the title of the poem would suggest otherwise, as if Eliot was building high expectations of a romantic poem in the title, and then taking the reader by surprise when they read it. We see contrast in this poem, as Prufrock asks himself 'do I dare/ Disturb the universe?'.

This displays Prufrock's inner turmoil, as he cannot bring himself to be a man of action, through simple fear of something bad happening. It is also a hyperbolic statement, as he asks a question of such great magnitude. However, Eliot uses bathos after asking this hyperbolic statement, as he refers to his life being 'measured out with coffee spoons', which is an incredibly trivial statement, showing the menial tasks he faces everyday in his life. Eliot also uses anaphora later on in the poem, by repeating the word 'to'. This again highlights the trivialness of everyday life, and how it is the exact same things done everyday, and again criticising the modern world for creating this routine. Prufrock describes himself as an anti-hero through out the latter part of the poem. Firstly comparing himself to John the baptist by saying 'I have seen my head ... Brought in upon a platter'. Secondly to Prince Hamlet, whom is considered courageous man, if not heroic and the same with John the Baptist.

However, he quickly denies that he is a prophet or Prince Hamlet, and follows it with 'nor was meant to be', which suggests that he was never

meant for great things or to be a hero, as it simply was not in his destiny. This leads to Prufrocks conclusion, which is that he hates the modern world and wants to escape it, just as the mermaids do, ' I have seen them riding seaward'. He wants to escape because he feels disconnected from the people, and despises modern day values and morals, as he believes they lack past traditions. This leads Prufrock into the viscous circle he is now in, of just observing life, rather than taking part.