

# Close reading a poem and thesis-driven

Literature



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The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock In the poem 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', T. S. Eliot presents a unique examination of the anguished psyche of an archetypal modern man who is overeducated, neurotic, eloquent, and emotionally stilted. The poem's speaker, Prufrock, seems to be speaking to a potential lover whom he desires to consummate a relationship with. Despite the comments that his friend make about his inadequacies, he does not dare to make a deft approach the lady since he knows too much about life. This essay seeks to give a close reading of the text on the basis of its setting, form, rhyme scheme, fragmentation, and figurative language. Further, the essay will also determine whether Prufrock is insecure and unable to relate to women.

The poem's setting moves from a series of the concrete physical environment to a series of vague images of an ocean. For example, in his description, Eliot sets a cityscape presentation of the famous and other several interiors such as 'women's arms in the lamplight, coffee spoons, and fireplaces' (Eliot 822). Besides, Eliot also incorporates a series of ocean images such as 'I am not Prince Hamlet.' He does this to convey Prufrock's emotional span from the globe as he comes to understand his second-rate status (Eliot 826).

Moreover, the poem employs dramatic monologue form. In the poem, Prufrock is used as a variation of the employed dramatic monologue. There are two things that qualify the form of the poem as dramatic monologue. One of them is the fact that the poem has both utterances of Prufrock and the poet. Besides, the monologue is directed to a listener who is not directly referenced but slightly revealed by the speaker's words. The poet modernizes the form of the poem by focusing on Prufrock isolation and

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interiority and also by removing the implied listeners. Prufrock is portrayed as an ideal audience.

Further, the poem has an irregular rhyme scheme that is not random.

Though the poem sections resemble free verse, Prufrock depicts a carefully structured poetic form. The pieces and bits of rhyme in the poem become evident when it is read aloud. For example, from line ‘Arms that are braceleted and white and bare’ and ‘But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!’ There is rhyme in the words ‘bare’ and ‘hair’ (Eliot 823).

Besides, Eliot uses a fragment of sonnet mode to bring out rhyme and rhyme scheme of the poem. The three-three line stanzas of the poem are rhymed in the same manner a Petrarchan sonnet conclusion would be in order to develop the rhyme scheme of the poem. The clause shows Their pessimistic and the coupled interjection, “I do not think they (the mermaids) would sing to me,” (Eliot 825). The statement generates a contrast that comments of the cheerlessness of modernity thus disqualifying the stanzas as a form of Petrarchan sonnet.

Additionally, the poem uses various figurative languages and among them is parallelism. Parallelism refers to the repetition of a phrase at the beginning of a stanza or a line in a stanza. In the poem, repetition of the phrases exist ‘Do I dare’ and ‘There will be time’ (Eliot 823). The repetition mirrors the actions of Prufrock since refuses to commit to taking any action and believes that there in plenty of time for everything. Prufrock inability to take any steps and ask questions reveals the theme of passivity. Besides, there is the use of irony in the poem. The title of the poem is ironical since at the first glance one would assume that the poem ensue a tale of a man deeply in love. However, despite the fact that the poem is about Prufrock desire to

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engage in a relationship with a woman, the love song is more of a lament for a love that does not come to fruition. That is because Prufrock does not have the courage to approach the woman and inform her of his intention. He believes that his arms and legs are too thin, and his hairline is diminishing (Eliot 823).

The poem also uses fragmentation and juxtaposition. In the poem, fragmentation occurs where the poet shows the reader the way the mind of Prufrock jumps from one thought to another and from one image to the other. The types of imagery employed by Eliot bring about a sort of epiphany thus showing that something innovative can be created from the ruins. For example, from the poem, Prufrock thoughts keeps shifting from the women he has an eye on to his personal looks. Prufrock thinks it was better if he was a pair of ragged scavenger claws then ends with assigning himself a heroic role (Eliot 824).

From the poem, it is evident that Prufrock is insecure due to his inability to speak and that makes him afraid of approaching women. It is because he feels that he cannot speak well enough to make them interested in him.

That, therefore, makes him pay too much attention and believe what other people say about him, and that makes him lack the self-confidence.

However, despite his insecurities, it is apparent that he is capable of intimately communicating to women. For example, he expresses what he feels about the woman in a poetic manner ‘ And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!’ ‘ Soothed by long fingers (Eliot 825).’ The beauty and flow of this lines show that Prufrock is capable of communicating intimately to women thus he should not be insecure.

In conclusion, the poem is dedicated to uncovering how an indecisive, a

coward, and a lonely man like Prufrock acts. Besides, Eliot also uses the poetry to satirize the meaningless lifestyle of a wealthy modern man. That is because Prufrock is educated and rich but he cares so much about the opinions of other people, and that makes him fear being rejected by women.

#### Work Cited

Eliot, T S. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. New York: Ameron, 1939. Print.