

The love song of j.
alfred prufrock opens
selected poems.



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

‘ The Love Song of J.

Alfred Prufrock’ is in many ways a comical poem, a mockery of a man lacking confidence and the ability to progress. It seems that Eliot is portraying the desperation felt by this character and how it seems to hinder so many aspects of his life. An element of self-portrayal can be detected throughout the poem. For example, the name ‘ J. Alfred Prufrock’ follows the early form of Eliot’s signature ‘ T. Stearns Eliot’.

This is simply a small suggestion that Eliot sees a part of himself in Prufrock. Although the signs are subtle, it is possible that having experienced the issues raised in the poem Eliot is putting forth many of his own fears and worries. The name ‘ Prufrock’ in itself is rather comical. It can be related to a touchstone (proof rock).

This was normally used to assess the purity of precious metals. Therefore it can be assumed that Eliot is implying that the character of Prufrock is always assessing others, who perhaps he sees as better than himself, or of more value. This lack of self-confidence again emphasises weakness and desperation. The ‘ restless nights’ spent in ‘ one night hotels’ suggest an element of impermanence. This brings forth the idea that Prufrock lacks a stable foundation upon which to build his life.

If this is the case Eliot is clearly concerned about the inability of the character to move forward and to care for his own well being and happiness. Prufrock’s clear lack of confidence leads to an immense, continual struggle. It seems clear that he desperately wants to speak out, yet feels that he

cannot. The poem dramatises his state of mind, an 'overwhelming question' haunts him.

Others 'do not ask... "what is it?"' for Prufrock cannot tell them. His fear of commitment means that he will never receive an answer.

He exists in a society in which 'women come and go talking of Michelangelo'. This suggests high society, which is clearly daunting for Prufrock as he does not see himself as a man who could ever integrate. The repetition of 'there will be time' could show that Prufrock relies heavily on self assurance. He feels that he will act at some point, although whether that time will ever come he does not know.

As long as there is still time, there will still be the opportunity. Unfortunately this only adds to Prufrock's woes, for as time passes it only becomes more difficult. He talks of preparing 'a face to meet the faces that you meet'. This suggests that he lacks the confidence to be himself. The only time that he feels confident to meet others is when he can hide behind a false persona, as far from who he really is as possible. The reader now sees what a lonely and rather pathetic being Prufrock really is.

The damage that he does to himself through his lack of drive is huge. He has an obsession with time, yet suffers from the inability to ever make a decision. It is as if he has convinced himself that time will wait for him, unfortunately for him time does not. Prufrock watches as 'in the room the women come and go'.

It is clear that he observes others yet does not act himself. Eliot is continually building the impression that he cannot make progress, no matter how many hours he spends watching and producing false promises. He appears paranoid repeatedly asking himself rhetorical questions such as 'Do I dare? And, Do I Dare?' The only answer he can ever give himself to these questions leads to 'time to turn back and descend the stair'. It seems that his self esteem is incredibly low; he lacks energy in life and therefore comes across as simply ordinary.

He attempts to mask this by donning 'my morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin, my necktie rich and modest'. This links back with the disguise that he uses when meeting new people, it is carefully planned and every detail examined. His clothing is his armour. He is able to shield himself and change who he is in order to impress the women who 'come and go talking of Michelangelo'.

Suddenly though, no matter how impressive his clothing is he realises that he can still be mocked for 'a bald spot in the middle of my hair'. Prufrock is clearly an extremely sensitive character. 'Do I dare disturb the universe?' he asks. This gives the impression that he is detached, not a part of the world in which everyone else exists. He over-estimates the consequences of his actions. He is aware that he is feeble, yet takes no action to counter this, therefore leaving himself in a state of continual depression.

Eliot suggests that the women that Prufrock so desperately wants to attract have a self confidence that Prufrock does not possess himself. He is therefore emasculated. Traditionally a man should be confident, outgoing

and strong-willed. Prufrock lacks all of these qualities. This brings the reader to question whether he will ever be able to change. Overwhelmed by a profound sense of complete desperation he is 'pinned and wriggling on the wall' by the eyes of the women.

He knows that there is no escape from this, and he sees no way around it. Therefore he is too full of complete terror to ever try. He continually adds to this by reminding himself of the terrible situation that he would likely be left in. The final show of this desperation is when he asks openly, 'And how should I begin?' The reader must question to whom Eliot is turning to. Perhaps he is indicating that Prufrock has a dual personality, one which he begs for advice.

On the other hand it could be that he simply has reached the end of his wits and is forced to cry out for help, although possibly knowing that none will come. In conclusion, the opening passage is an extremely effective opening to Eliot's methods and concerns. He is clearly painting a vivid image of Prufrock as a character overwhelmed by his inability to move forward in life. The reader is struck by what a seemingly pathetic and partially comical character he actually is. The suggestions of self-portrayal also give an insight into the life of the poet. J.

Alfred Prufrock is possibly a representation of many of Eliot's fears, making this passage extremely useful as an insight into Eliot and his thoughts.