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## THE TWO VOICES IN *THE LOVE SONG OF J ALFRED PRUFROCK*

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### ABSTRACT:

This article attempts to critically analyze *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock* by T S Eliot to make those unheard romantic and the realistic voices heard. These two voices of this dramatic monologue became a means to think through about alienation, disillusionment and fragmentation of the modern man and his society. An attempt is also made to show how Eliot blends the language of the modern man streams out of consciousness in poetry which is distinctively known as modernist poetry. A brief discussion is also made to show how interestingly and brilliantly Eliot uses literary motifs and allusions to compose this song with those two voices.



**KEYWORDS:** Critically, romantic and realistic, alienation, disillusionment and fragmentation, motifs and allusions.

### INTRODUCTION

T. S. Eliot's Literary World  
T S Eliot, an American but the greatest British literary figure of the 20th century. He, in collaboration with Ezra Pound, propagated new forms of poetry rich with unique features. As a modernist, he believed that literature/poetry must be a way to control order and shape the futile anarchy of contemporary history. This made him constantly explore and experiment new literary devices to make the modern world possible for art. The horrors of industrialization, increase in the of growth of shabby cities, disasters of two world wars, lack of faith in religion, gender,

class and racial discrimination etc, have been the great causes for shaping his radical poetry. This made him a great social critic with aesthetic and literary sensibilities. Thus, his poetry became a means to think through about alienation, disillusionment and fragmentation of the modern man and his society.

Critical Appreciation of the Poem  
The present poem is undoubtedly a master piece next to his *The Waste Land*. It is because, it doesn't only offer us to study J Alfred Prufrock's, a modern man, loneliness, isolation and helplessness but also helps us to understand the salient features of modernist

poetry.

Features of this Modernist Poem  
It is necessary to comprehend the essential features that constitute this modernist poem before we actually proceed to study the poem. These features speak the revolution in poetry that Ezra Pound and T E Eliot propagated collaboratively. The essential features are:

1. Radical disruption of linear flow of narrative.
2. Individual consciousness is explored with a focus on introspection.
3. Language is central to the artistic expression.
4. Individual's alienation and confusion
5. Cuts and jumps.

6. More use of symbols and images.
7. Engaging in dialogue with classics of the western culture.
8. The use of complex cultural allusions.
9. High poetic diction.

### The Motifs Used in the Composition of this Song

Eliot uses certain key motifs to compose this modern Prufrock's love song. It becomes difficult for us to relish this modern love song without knowing about those motifs. The key motifs of this poem are:

1. Urban grime.
2. Personal and emotional discontent.
3. Self-loathing.
4. Sexual anxiety.
5. Ambiguity between space and time

### The Striking Title

As we begin to analyze the poem the first thing that draws our attention is the title of this poem. One can sense immediately that there is something wrong in it. J Alfred Prufrock, a modern man, obviously has no business in a love song, a very traditional mode of poetry going back thousands of years. The title indicates the structure of this poem at large. Eliot's popular poetic structures are romance and realism. These are the two voices we see in Eliot poems which correspond the diction of W B Yeats that "Poetry is the quarrel with oneself."

### Italian Allusion

Classical allusions are one of the significant features of Eliot's poetry. He once said, "I am a classicist in literature." It means that a poet who ransacks the literature of the past trying to dig out the valuable, meaningful items that are still relevant today. They still help us to understand our views today. They also help us to know how to live our lives in this world of crises.

The Italian passage under the title of this poem is an excerpt from Dante's *Inferno*. He describes Dante reaching a level I, the lower hell, where the sinners are so shamed of their depravities committed in the upper world. Here the sinner asked him to remember him. It appears as tongue of flame. As it waggles tells Dante "If I believed that anyone had ever come this deep in hell goat returned again, I would not tell my story. But because no one ever came so deep in this hell, got back to earth, I will tell my story. He tells the story which is reported to upper world by Dante.

### Allusion: Its Significance

The significance of this excerpt from Dante's *Inferno* is to highlight the theme of loneliness, of isolation, of the man being unable to tell his story which is exactly Prufrock's predicament.

### I and You: The Two Voices

The question that confronts the reader in the beginning is the question of identity. Prufrock says "Let us go you and I." who are these two figures, You and I? In modern poetry the author doesn't explain what he/she has done in this poetry. Therefore the readers have to infer who these two figures are? It is quite possible to have different acceptable inferences which may lead to multiple interpretations.

The present analysis of the poem is done keeping "I and You" as the two voices in Prufrock. That is the voice of the realistic Prufrock versus the romantic Prufrock. The latter is longing to have a relationship that would break out of his loneliness. In fact the rest of the poem will give us an alternative along those lines.

What really happens in the poem is Prufrock is going to a party where he hopes to express his feelings of love to a woman at the party. The question is whether he would get enough nerve/courage to say something about his love song or will he fail to do that?

### The Analysis of the Prufrock's Song

The first two lines of the poem have a romantic ring to them. We can imagine a beautiful sunset. But the line three of Prufrock's song, we have something entirely new in English poetry. "The evening is etherized on a table like a patient." This motif offers several prophecies. The most immediate one is to indicate Prufrock's hopeless paralysis. He is frustrated and anxious. It also introduces another motif that scatters images of Prufrock throughout the poem mainly images of Prufrock being dissected. We have, that is to say, "a pair of hands," "pair of eye balls," we have "several heads," we have "nerves and patterns."

It is also important for our analysis to take Prufrock psychologically as the poem goes on. If we continue in the psychological mode of realism, in stream of consciousness fashion Prufrock exhibits his inner most mind to Eliot's readers.

We find him moving through the crooked streets in the first stanza which has the structure of the music. Poetry in modern time is not sounding like music necessarily but it is being organized in the way as music is organized. The word "question" is the most important of these recurring motifs in this poem. The question is whether he will get up the courage to speak to his women in the party or not? But even before he goes to party, he is experiencing a failure of nerve. So he calls her to go and make their visit.

Another important feature of modern poetry is "jump cut" of a movie. That is to say we move immediately to another scene without any bridge. Here we move immediately to another scene where Prufrock observes women who are talking about Michelangelo. Eliot has great respect for the past. He believed that past is superior to the present. So we have giant figures of the past such as Hamlet, Lazarus, John the Baptist along with Michelangelo suffices to make Prufrock even more inferior, insignificant, more unable to insert himself into the picture at the party.

We then move little later into the evening. We see Prufrock who instead attending to the guests of the party he is staring, in a solitary mood, out of the window looking at the fog there. The fog that occurs in Eliot's poems indicates isolation. Prufrock is isolated from the people in the party. As he suffers from many psychological problems, we often see him in this poem proceeding to rationalize his failure of nerve. He often says "indeed, there will be a time." It is important to know what Eliot means of "time." It is perhaps one of the most continues themes of Eliot's poems.

Naturalistically time means getting old, getting close to death, an experience of huge wasted life. Modern Prufrock thinks that he gets the time in this party to speak out his mind to his lover. He says he has to prepare himself for this task. But the lovers of the past did not prepare to express their love as they were bold enough to express their love directly. Prufrock, as a bundle of modern inhibitions, has no courage. But the question is can he break these inhibitions do be courageous.

He refers to "works and days" a phrase that refers to a poem by a Greek philosopher. He, by referring to the works of the farmers, wrote about meaningful time. The question here is can Prufrock measure up to meaningful time? This stanza ends with time for everything before they take toast and tea. Meanwhile the women are talking about Michelangelo.

It is at this point he discloses why he is so inhibited to open up his mind and express his love freely. He realizes that has no physical attraction. He can imagine what others think about him. They may comment on his hair, arms and legs. He looks like a walking skeleton. He is an inferior male in short judged by his external appearance. The man who is unable to attract any desirable women has no value in the party. He has rich internal consciousness which is something interested in women. But he is inhibited with complexities. So he proceeds to work out romance and realism within his own being.

As we proceed, we alternate between romance and realism in Prufrock's mind. There is a romantic motif. He says "I have known them all ....." Though he had good time, he was not able to anything meaningful in it. He says "I have measured up my life with coffee spoons" It is harshly a

realistic brilliant image that Eliot strikes off. It shows how Prufrock is trying to rationalize his failure nerve. He seems he has given up everything. He justifies his failure through the realistic Prufrock. He would be caught and pinned in a wall as an inferior man. Therefore he asks how I shall begin.

But the romantic Prufrock pushes back as he talks about the fair and beautiful hands. He says that he knows already fair arms, inviting arms, romantic arms. It is an appealing image. But the realistic Prufrock says he studied the arms more closely. If you look closely many ladies arms are hairy. Prufrock has seen clearly by others how he is growing thin. His legs and hands are thin. All these make him to think that he probably couldn't make his romance possible.

He proceeds further to work up the courage to put his question. He asks "should I then presume? How should I begin?" This is the most important point of the poem where Prufrock goes so far and try to formulate how he will address the women. He says "shall I say....." Shall I tell her that I am lonely and I have seen my future? He wants her to tell that he would be the lonely man seeing through the window without doing anything or saying something. But he gives up completely as he doesn't get that courage. So he continues to rationalize his failures.

He begins by envying the sub human forms of life. It is true that this burden of self-consciousness is uniquely human. Negative self-awareness, inferiority in sexual selection process will generally lead any individual to wasted and lonely life. Therefore, he thinks that he should have been a pair of lobster that "silently scuttling across the sea shore." Here the word "silent" is very important. If only he could be like a lobster he wouldn't have spoken. He could only scuttle to catch the woman he desired. How interesting that could be when compared to this human burden.

As he continues to rationalize, he makes reference to John the Baptist. He had a shock when he found his head on a platter with hair like a male lion. If Prufrock is able to stir up enough feelings when someone brings his head on a platter what is that first thing they see is his bald head. He says I have seen my head grown bald. He finds, he can't escape from his inhibitions.

He continues to rationalize his failure by making long elaborated sentences. He asks some rhetorical questions while he refers to one of the love poems "To My Coy mistress" by Andrew Marvel. The bold lover in this poem makes a witty argument to convince his lover. He wants her to jump into his bed for the physical union. Prufrock thinks like doing in the same way as he did. But he, being extremely self-conscious, gets struck with ifs and buts. His apprehension is that he will be rejected by his lover.

If we infer from this that the women he admires must have previously given him some gestures of love. These gestures must have given Prufrock some courage to think about her in terms of love and romance. But now he thinks that he must have mistaken and misunderstood her. Therefore he feels that now it is not worthwhile to act like Marvel's bold lover.

Prufrock continues his routine one more time. Here we bring on the primitive movie camera of Eliot's time. It is very difficult to say what he meant. It is because he constantly thinks that he has been rejected more dramatically by the women. Yet he wants us to understand that he is not like Hamlet in Shakespeare though he has some resemblances. But he says he is like Polonius, an attendant. He thinks that he couldn't do anything except remaining lonely.

The question here is how he would comfort himself. He grows old doing nothing significant. Meanwhile he asks some practical questions. What to do about that bald spot. How to be free for inhibitions? This conflict continues till the end of the poem.

At the end we again see this conflict between the realistic Prufrock and romantic Prufrock. The former Prufrock says he wants to walk along the beach wearing trousers. The latter says he listens to the song of mermaids. As the reality is sad and disgusting, he takes refuge in fantasy, imagination and romantic nature. But the realistic Prufrock thinks that the mermaids don't sing for him. For one last time the romantic Prufrock surges back he gives further description of those mermaids. But the last words again remind him of his reality that is disappointing. He has heard those voices saying how thin he is, how bald he is, how his hands are, voices talking about Michelangelo etc. All the pictures of reality made him drown in the bottomless ocean of loneliness.

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