

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

Written in 1911 while T.S. Eliot was studying at Oxford University and published in 1915, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was Eliot's first professionally published poem and is one of his best remembered today.

The title of the poem has two parts "The love song of" and "Prufrock". The first part "The love Song of" has apparently come from Rudyard Kipling's poem entitled "The Love Song of Hardy". The poem is composed of 140 lines. It is divided unevenly into twenty stanzas. There are a few rhyming couplets at the beginning of the poem. The poem, in parts, is a blank verse and somewhere, we hear the rhythmic pattern of iambic pentameter.

The poem opens up with the invitation of Prufrock to us to come along with him to visit the dirty streets of a big foggy city that feels like London. Mr. Prufrock is desirous to show us some of the best places of the city,

Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:

Then we witness a bunch of women coming and going from the room, discussing about famous painter Michelangelo.

Although Mr. Prufrock's dress is good but rest of him is not. People comment on him that he has thin arms and is bald. But he is proud of his accomplishments. His accomplishments include like having drunk a lot of coffee, living through mornings to afternoons and having known a bunch of women.

Prufrock is afraid that he is growing old. But he intends to do other important stuff like rolling his pants or eating a peach. Then he asserts that he has heard mermaids singing but their songs are not for him. He, then, tells us that we have been living with him in an ocean. We were sleeping in the ocean until we were wakened up by the human voices. As soon as our sleep is over, we sink in the salty ocean.

This poem takes place in the foggy and dark city of London in the "soft night of October". The images used in this poem are brilliant and vibrant. The images may include like "evening is spread out against the sky", "sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells", "Licked its tongue", "a dying fall", "perfume from a dress", and "riding seaward on the waves" etc.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock is an interesting monologue depicting the social issues as well as the epoch-making progress of mankind in modern times.

Themes

The theme of this poem concern with the problems a modern man is facing. The first prominent theme inside the poem is anxiety, lack of decision-making which leads to inaction. There is no doubt that our present age is marked with anxiety. So is Mr. Prufrock. He wants love but is anxious about his physical features which he cannot change. He tries to minimize his physical limitations by styling his hair but he is bald. His anxiety results in a lack of decision making and he does not know where he is heading towards.

The second notable theme of this poem is desire. The desire of Mr. Prufrock is already obvious from the title of the poem, to enjoy a few romantic moments of his already sinking life. He longs for sexual communication but due to his anxious state, he cannot proceed further which ends in hopelessness. Prufrock himself moans, how should I begin?

The third theme of this poem is alienation caused by modernity. The poet acknowledges the importance of modern technology like lamps, advancements in the medical profession as well as factories. But such growth has come with the cost of alienation. The speaker sees Yellow fog as more active and alive than humans.

“Prufrock” comes from the name of company of furniture “Prufrock-Litton company” which existed in the area where Eliot lived during early years of his life. “J” and “Alfred” in the title are inventions of the poet. With these inputs the full name “J. Alfred Prufrock” appears to be an attempt to mimic his own name which he spelt in his initial years as T. Stearns Eliot. If we understand the title in this way then to some extent the poem would appear a biographical poem in which T.S. Eliot expresses his own feelings about the “love” or more specifically about the “lack of love” in his own life during the years when he was composing this poem. The use of the words “Love song” in the title is appropriate as a refrain, which has rhymes and particular rhythm. There is a refrain in the poem:

“In the room the women come and go

Talking of Michelangelo”

Also just like “Love song”, this is a narrative poem in the form of a dramatic monologue. A dramatic monologue is a discourse in which the narrator or the speaker intentionally or unintentionally reveals personal information and feelings. As we have seen earlier, this is a typical feature of T.S. Eliot’s poems.

The epigraph of the poem, originally written by Dante in Italian, can be translated as follows: “If I thought that my reply would be to someone who would ever return to earth, this flame would remain without further movement; but as no one has ever returned alive from this gulf, if what I hear is true, I can answer you with no fear of infamy”. (translation taken from SOUTHAM, B.C., 1965, Fourth Edn. 1981, A students’ guide to the selected Poems of T.S. Eliot, Faber & Falws. London-Bost)

In these lines there is pessimism that the narrator will not be able to come out of his present state and in fact is able to speak only because he feels that he can confide in the listener with no fear of being shamed. And then the poet speaks in the style of a dramatic monologue. The mood of pessimism follows in the ensuing lines of the poem. The first two lines create a lovely atmosphere but the third line destroys it with the grotesque imagery of a “patient etherized upon a table”.

Then the poet goes through the town passing by shabby and unkempt streets and hotels. The streets are as lonely as the evening was lifeless. And this is a long drawn situation which continues like an unending argument presented with unhealthy intentions. In this hopeless situation, the poet does not even question anything. He simply tries to move ahead. But all that he could see further is the aimless movement of women who talk of someone far away in history though very important with his contributions in painting and architecture. This is the refrain in the poem. This refrain refers directly to the lines by Jules Laforgue whose related French lines can be roughly translated as:

“In the room the women go and come

While talking of the masters of Sienne”

[The original French lines are:

“Dans la piece les femmes vont et viennent

En parlant des maitres de Sienne”]

Sienne is a place in Italy known for its contribution to art and architecture. It is worth noting here that Michelangelo was also an Italian painter and artist. In the lines from 15 to 22 we again find “yellow fog” and “yellow smoke” created as an image to express the hopelessness in the life around him which is stifled in the din and bustle of an industrialised city. It is worth recalling here that T.S. Eliot spent his childhood in an industrial suburban town of St. Louis. This imagery of ‘yellow fog’ and ‘yellow smoke’ behaving like a timid cat finally sleeping outside the house is

very much like the symbolists of French literature and further enhances the pessimistic feelings in the poem. In the next stanza (lines from 22 to 34), Prufrock assures himself that there will be time to sit and talk with his beloved but the possibility of this meeting is further postponed as the hope for this time is in future. This is expressed by the use of 'will' in the verses. Also the time is for "indecisions", "visions" and revisions which all delay the meeting. And when there is time, it will be for "murder and create". So there is simultaneously pessimism and hope.

In these lines there appear to be two allusions also, 'There will be time' alludes to the poem "To his Coy Mistress" by Andrew Marvell (a poet of 17th century) but the situation is completely different. While in Andrew Marvell's poem the speaker asks his beloved not to be shy, Eliot's Prufrock delays the meeting with combination of hope and despair.

The other allusion is "works and days" (line 29) which is a poem of Hesiod, a Greek poet of 7th century B.C. Hesiod uses these words in order to emphasise hard work, righteous living and being guarded against moral decay. Eliot also appears to use them with the same purpose but in a gloomy mood with pessimistic feelings. The refrain comes again and this repetition is suggestive of the dullness and repetitive nature of events in life. Then again in the next stanza Prufrock becomes unsure of himself as contrasted to the faith in future of the previous stanza. Prufrock is not sure if he may dare to approach a woman and if at all he dares to do so, he is unsure and afraid of the consequences.

In the ensuing three stanzas Prufrock again emphasizes on the dull and boring situation. He says that he knows all of them; they are the same people with the same decor and demeanour. And in this boring and dull situation, should he take any initiatives? Even the time which appears to be passing in terms of evenings, mornings and afternoons is all measured as one unit in the cof T.S. Eliot fee spoons (which are very small in size). Here T.S. Eliot appears to allude to the philosophy of French thinker Henry Bergson (1859-1941) who proposes that though time is calculated in series of measurable units, actually our consciousness perceives them in a continuum without any succession of measurable duration. Thus past and present are equally real and the entire life of Prufrock is one continuum not consisted of disjoint time units. His past, present and future are real before him.

Another allusion in line 52 is "dying fall" which refers to Shakespeare's Twelfth Night.

Shakespeare writes:

"If music be the food of love, play on;

Give me excess of it, that, surferting,

The appetite may sicken and so die.

That strain again! It had a dying fall.

O, it came over my ear like the sweet sound,

That breathes upon a bank of violets,

Stealing and giving odour!

T.S. Eliot alludes to the above in the following two lines:

"I know the voices dying with a dying fall

Beneath the music from a farther room."

The gloomy mood in Shakespeare's line, "The appetite may sicken, and so die" reverberates in the above two lines of T.S. Eliot.

In the line 70 to 73, there is a description of people who resemble Prufrock in terms of dullness and boredom in life. This is further depicted in lines 74 & 75 as he feels like a "pair of ragged claws" sunken in the sea.

In the lines from 75 to 80, the time passes peacefully and then Prufrock becomes unsure of himself again as he questions "Should I Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis". In lines 80 to 85, there is an allusion to John the Baptist by "head brought in upon a platter". Prufrock imagines that he has lived to a mature age and grown bald and his life remains dull. Then he is dead and that is again of no consequence because he is not a prophet like John the Baptist.

The use of the word "Footman" alludes to death as "Footman" is supposed to be a servant who helps us in the afterlife.

T.S. Eliot continues in the same style depicting the gloominess and dullness in the life of Prufrock whose love song will never be sung as there will hardly be any love in his life. The title of the poem is very satirical in this way and T.S. Eliot continues to describe the life of Prufrock in a style which is characteristically typical to his poetry. We also may draw our attention to the music and babbling in "And how should I presume" (line 61) and "And should I then presume? And how should I begin?" (line 68 & 69). It appears as if the narrator of the dramatic monologue is muttering and babbling to himself. We notice, thus, that in the very first significant poem of his career T.S. Eliot exhibits the stylistic maturity and depth of content which continue to be prominent features of his later poems.

In the stanza lines 87 to 98, the poet questions whether it would be worth interacting with the women of his choice. In the process he again alludes to Marvell's poem "To his coy Mistress" in the line 92 – "To have squeezed the universe into a ball". The second allusion is in line 94. The poet mentions Lazarus who according to the story of the Bible, had come back from the dead. There are two Biblical references alluded here. First, from the Gospel of John chapter 11- according to this Lazarus was raised from the dead by Jesus. The other Biblical reference is from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 16. According to this, Lazarus, a leprous beggar, went to the heaven after his death whereas Dives, a rich man, was taken to hell. Dives requested that Lazarus be sent to the earth to tell his brothers about the horror of hell and the consequences of their deeds. The request of Dives was denied. Eliot alludes to the Biblical story and conveys his uncertainties in the situation.

The next stanza (line 99 to 110) conveys the same uncertainties while describing the settings around and the movements of women. Then farther in the next stanza, the poet alludes to Shakespeare's Hamlet to convey Prufrock's coyness and uncertainties and indecisiveness. Prufrock is afraid of being considered a 'Fool' – here 'F' is in capital as the poet means a 'court jester' by this word. Prufrock is compared to the character in Hamlet named Polonius who speaks high language. Prufrock, by using similar language, may be considered a joker like the 'Fool' of the English royal court.

In the lines 120 to 132, the poet expresses the realization of the character Prufrock that he is growing old and accordingly there will be changes in his life. There is an allusion to Homer's Odyssey in which Odysseus heard the songs of Sirens who are not singing to him. By this allusion again Eliot refers to Prufrock's situation in which he hears the women and pays attention to them but the women are not talking to him. Towards the end, the poet refers to the satire in the title. The 'Love Song' is being sung but not for Prufrock. This meaning is conveyed by alluding to the Sirens (the mythical women who sing to the sailors in the Greek mythology) who are singing but not for Prufrock.

Main Themes

1. Social anxiety
2. Lack of spirituality /emotional progress
3. Criticism of Modern Civilization
4. Longing
5. Aging
6. Sexual frustration
7. Sense of decay
8. Mortality
9. Urban life
10. Anguish and anxiety
11. Environment

Features of Style

1. Modernist Style
2. Imagism / Imagery
3. Precise Description
4. Concrete images
5. Presentation of Interior monologue
6. Symbolism
7. Illustrations
8. Allusions
9. Refrain as a device for maintaining coherence
10. Carefully constructed but inconsistent metre, end rhymes

Central Points:

T.S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is published in 1917 . 2. You can easily associate that the First World War (1914-1918) was affecting social psyche . 3. 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' shows a cultural paradigm shift from the 19th century verses. 4. We see the impact of French Symbolists, and metaphysical poets . 5. Critic find 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' as a "drama of literary anguish." 6. The text offers the interior monologue of a middle aged urban character . 7. J Alfred Prufrock is an isolated self , stricken with timidity in action . 8. He is not able to take any decision. 9. The text of T.S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' expresses physical and emotional incapability of a disillusioned man . 10. The character develops in age but lacks spiritual and emotional progress . 11. The thwarted desires of J. Alfred Prufrock create a vacuum in his life ,and he feels helpless and indecisive .

This poem The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock stands foremost in the poems Prufrock and other Observations (1917). It marks a complete break with the nineteenth-century poetic tradition. It is urban in its theme and setting. It reveals the ugliness of modern civilization, the never-ending streets of modern cities, smoking chimneys, yellow fog, dirty drains and smell of female bodies. The poem is not a love song in the traditional sense of the word. It is not a spontaneous outburst of feeling of the lover for the beloved, rather it is an analysis of the mind of the lover who is unable to make a decision about making the proposal to the lady he loves. In a series of paragraphs, the lover analyses the reason for a resolution and decision and tries to justify his cowardice and lack of nerves, which make him completely incapable of formulating a proposal of love to his lady. Behind this mental state, is a disease of modern routine - the aimless life of the city-dwellers and the monotonous round of social parties.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

SUMMARY

"Overwhelming question" of Prufrock: It is evening time. Prufrock is conscious but conscious of nothing. Outside his consciousness, like a patient lying etherized upon a table. He is helpless and has no strength left in him to act. Mentally, he wanders through the half-deserted streets, till his mind reaches the most important question before him. He is afraid of mentioning it. It may be noted that this "overwhelming question" refers to his intended proposal to the lady he loves. He avoids discussing this question. He reaches the restaurant, where he finds the society ladies discussing Michael Angelo. These ladies know practically nothing about the fine art but since it is a fashion to talk about the paintings of great masters, they discuss the works of this talented Italian painter.

"Enough time to spare" (Prufrock's indecisiveness): The fog outside is spreading on the window panes. It is dull October night. fog It reflects the inner foggy condition of the mind of Prufrock. Like the moving slowly, Prufrock is in no hurry to make a decision about his proposal. He feels that there will be enough time to decide about it. Meanwhile, the poem makes a sly comment on the hypocrisy of modern people, who keep up appearance as a matter of routine. Again, the poet shifts to the condition of the mind of Prufrock. This proposal is very important for, him, as important as murder (total failure of his life). Therefore, he must take time and plan it properly so that he may not fail in his endeavor. His mind is in a state of tension. It is full of a hundred indecisions, "a hundred visions and revisions." So, he wants to take some refreshment which may give enough vitality to make up his mind. Of course, he is well dressed, though of middle age, he cannot hide the marks of his face. Then he reverts to the important question and postpones the decision because there is no hurry about it.

Not Daring: Prufrock's timidity: Prufrock has known many ladies and enjoyed sessions of tea and coffee with them. He has also been intimate with some of them. But he dares not speak out his mind. He is timid and cowardly, afraid of ladies' rebukes or taunts. In that case, he would be wriggling on a wall fixed with a pin. The trouble with him is, though he knows the ladies, he is afraid of making a proposal for himself. He would definitely feel embarrassed. The initial difficulty lies in brooding over the subject. His problem is how to begin.

Mental fear of Prufrock: Prufrock now thinks of a plan to make a proposal to his lady. He would begin his talk with his fiancée by mentioning his friends who are lonely, in need of companionship. They would like to marry and settle down. But he feels that he may not have the courage to talk about and mention his own name as one who needs a life companion. Though he is lonely and bored with his mechanical life and wants a change, still he may not be able to talk about his own case. He is afraid of death and the very idea of death makes him reject his expressing love to a lady.

Cold response of the Lady: Prufrock takes refreshment to gather courage to make decision. Supposing he talked about it to that lady, she might turn round and tell him she had no idea of loving him. She had been polite and courteous to him, but that did not imply that she would be agreeable to marrying him. Prufrock, therefore, is extremely nervous. He thinks that if a magic machine were to throw light on his inner feeling and display them to his lady, she may reject him.

Not Hamlet, but Polonius: Prufrock denies he is like Prince Hamlet, he is indecisive and inactive. He is like Polonius, middle aged, conscious of his position, though double-headed and sometimes ridiculous. Though he is old, he wants to appear young with the latest clothes. Prufrock is unable to face the problems of life. He seeks an escape to a romantic world. While walking on the beach, he has seen mermaids singing to one another. He is dreaming about the mermaids and the sea waves, when he is awakened by the human voices around. The realities of life cannot leave him although he is unable to face them. The poem ends where it began. There is no progress with the love affair of Prufrock. His condition shows the nervousness and tension of the modern man and the barrenness of urban civilization.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Symbolism and Style of the poem: Eliot uses functional and compact imagery to clarify the neurosis and frustration of Prufrock. He borrows from Donne the metaphysical conceit. The very first line could have come through from Donne. The spreading fog represents the state of mind of Prufrock. He wishes to run away from realities, like "a pair of ragged claws scuttling across the floor of the silent seas." There are literary images too, as for instance Prufrock is a kind of Lazarus, a sort of Prince Hamlet, also like John, the Baptist. There are ironic images as for instance. "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons." His trivial personal matters appear to him as important as murder or creation or disturbing the universe or squeezing the universe into a ball. All these show the craftsmanship of the poet.

Secondly, the verification is also modern and suited to the moods of Prufrock. The metrical base is iambic, but the lines vary in length and number of stressed syllables. The rhyme scheme is not regular. It is flexible to suit the turn of thought of lovers. The stanza pattern is also not irregular. The poem contains small interrogatory lines like "Do I dare." Or again, "how should I begin" which reflects the fear and hesitation of the protagonist. The most important thing about the poem is that "like the spider web" it weaves strands around itself but there is no movement or development. This gives a singular unity to the theme of the poem. It rotates and revolves in a single orbit - the mind of Prufrock.

Internal Monologue: Prufrock is an embodiment of split personality - a separation of head and heart, a paralysis of the will and too much worry regarding a love proposal. Prufrock refers to Hamlet and this enables us to understand Prufrock's psychological malady. This introspection is the result of emotional frustration. His irresolution is complicated by the fact that though he is middle-aged, bald in the head, he is not hot-blooded. He dresses smartly, smiles to ladies but he is unable to express his inner state. His excuses for postponing the making of the love

proposal arise from neurosis and form his fear of rejection. The poem highlights the dilemma and indecisiveness as well as the squalor and barrenness of modern urban civilization.

\The first line of the poem "Let us go then you and I" may suggest that it is a dialogue between two persons but it is not so. Williamson suggests that it is an internal debate in the mind of Prufrock, between the two sides of his personality which thereby highlights the nervousness and neurosis. The poem can be best interpreted as an exposition of the moods and conflicts of the mind of Prufrock.

Title: The poem is not really a love song though love is the underlying theme. It records the indecision, hesitation and postponement of the proposal of the lover. The poem is rather psychological, intended to dissect the suppressed feelings of the lover, especially his cowardice and irresolution.

Epigraph: The epigraph is taken from Dante's "Inferno." In the eighth chasm of hell, Dante meets Guido, punished here with other deceitful counselors in a single prison of flame for his treacherous advice on earth to Pope Boniface. When the damned speak from the flame, the voice sounds from the top. Guido refers to this and speaks freely only because he believes that Dante, like himself, is one of the dead who will never return to earth to report what he says. The words spoken by Guido are contained in the epigraph: "If I thought that my reply would be to someone who would ever return to earth, this flame would remain without further movement. But no one has ever returned alive from the Gulf. If what I hear is true, I can answer you with no fear of infamy." Prufrock unbosoms himself and discloses his inmost thoughts, and feelings and assured that no one will be able to reveal them to his lady-love or anyone else.

PARAPHRASE: LINE BY LINE EXPLANATION

L. 1-14. When the evening spreads out in the sky, like a patient under anesthesia on a table, you and I (Prufrock and his beloved) go out together. Let us walk through some half-deserted streets which provide places of rest, for poor people. The lodgers, in the one-night cheap hotels, pass restless nights and visit restaurants full of sawdust and oyster shells. These streets follow a winding course like a tedious argument of concealed desire and ultimately lead you to an important question. Oh! do not ask me about that matter. Let us go and make a visit. The women come and go in the room talking of Michelangelo without really understanding his art.

L. 15-36. (Prufrock describes the scene in the evening. There is no movement of the air. The fog is spreading all over the streets). The yellow fog rubs itself on the window panes. It contains a lot of smoke which too covers the window panes. It spreads all over. It licks its tongue into the corners of the evening, lingering upon the pools, found in the drains. It allows the soot that falls from the chimney's of factories to settle upon its surface. The smog missed the terrace and suddenly jumped up in the soft October night, curled over the house and stayed there. There will be enough time for the yellow smoke that moves along the streets and rubs its back upon the window panes. There will certainly be enough time to get ready to prepare oneself to meet friends. There will be enough time even for a murder and act of creation, as also time for all the daily routine of work, there will also be time to prepare, question and put it on your plate. There will be time for you as well as time for me and yet enough time for a hundred indecision, a hundred visions and revisions, before taking a cup of tea and a toast. In the room women come and go out, talking of Michelangelo.

L. 37-48. There will be enough time to wonder and ask myself, if I have the courage to express my desire. There will be time to turn back and go downstairs which will disclose the bald spot in the middle of my head. People who see this will say: "How his hair is growing then!" I may dress well and appear at my best in my morning coat, my smart and stiff collar, my fine necktie held in position by a beautiful pin (but people may not observe my fine dress). People will say, "but how his arms and legs are thin!" The question is whether I should at all declare my love and therefore disturb the universe. (Prufrock's asking the question is as big a problem as the very disturbance of the universe). In a little time there can be decision and revisions which will in a minute be reversed.

L. 49-61. I have known all the decisions and revision and have also known what happens in the evenings, mornings and afternoons. I have followed the course of modern life by taking a lot of coffee. I have known people singing in the restaurants and their voices becoming faint on account of a highly vocal music coming from another room. The question is: How can I therefore speak out my mind? I have known the eyes (of ladies or of critics) - the eyes that size you up in a definite phrase, and after that I am labeled. I sprawl on a pin and am afterward pinned and left wriggling

on the wall. The question is how should I begin my proposal and declare the sum and substance of all my feelings. The important question is: How should I declare my love?

L. 62-74. I have known the arms of women (Prufrock is very familiar with the society women of the day). Their arms are braceleted, white and uncovered, but when seen against the lamp light, the arms are covered with brown hair. Is it the fragrance of perfume coming from her dress which makes me give up my intention to speak out my love? I should be bold enough to speak out my mind. Even if I do so, let me think how I should begin my proposal. Shall I begin the proposal in this manner? I may say that I have gone in the evenings through narrow streets and observed the smoke coming out from the pipes of the lonely unmarried men in their shirt-sleeves looking out of the windows. (Perhaps this introduction about my loneliness would form a good introduction to my proposal for marriage). I would not speak out; I would rather be a kind of sea species with rough claws moving quickly across the floors of silent seas.

L. 75-84. The afternoon and the evening appear to sleep peacefully as though smoothened and comforted by long fingers, asleep, tired or pretending to be asleep and resting on the floor here beside you and me. Perhaps after taking tea and snacks, I may have the strength to declare my love and to force the issue. Though I have wept, fasted and prayed, I imagined that my head has been cut and brought in a platter. I am no prophet, though I have suffered a lot of persecution but that is a different matter. I have observed my hesitation at the moment of my achievement. I have seen the god of Death laugh at my cowardice but what could I do. I was diffident and nervous and could not speak out.

L. 85-98. Even if it were possible for me to speak out, would it have been worth-while. Would it have been proper after the drinks and snacks served in the fine china-ware, to have said a few words and so to say squeezed the universe into a ball and to roll it towards a very important question and to say: "I am Lazarus come from the world of the dead to tell you all that I have been in Hell." Perhaps the lady putting a pillow under her head and quite informally, would tell me that she did not mean anything. (She has no love for him and Prufrock has simply misunderstood her courtesy.)

L. 99-110. Would it have been worth it after all social gatherings in the evenings and the door-yards and the different streets, the reading of novels, the taking of tea and the dance with the girls wearing skirts touching the floor and so much more; even so it is not possible for me to say what I feel. If a magic lantern could give picture of my inner feelings on a screen, for the lady to see, would it have been worthwhile doing all this. Perhaps the lady would rest herself on a pillow or throw off a shawl and turning towards me would say that she did not mean anything, i.e. she had no love for me. (Prufrock does not want to make a proposal to his lady on account of the fear of a cold response or a rebuff.)

L. 111-119. (Prufrock is indecisive like Hamlet but he is somewhat different) I am not Prince Hamlet nor was I meant to play the role of Hamlet. I am an attendant lord, a small person who will participate in a procession or take initiative in staging a scene or two, or advise the prince. I am an easy tool, respectful, glad to be of any service to others, courteous, cautious and careful, capable of using maxims and proverbs, though sometimes dull, at times ridiculous and almost a fool.

L. 120-131. Though I grow old, I shall dress well. I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled; I may part my hair behind to cover up my baldness, I can dare to eat a beach like a young man; I shall wear white flannel trousers and roam on the beach. I have heard that mermaids sing to one another. I do not think that they will sing to me. I have seen the mermaids riding on the waves as they move further into the sea. They disturb the white foam on the top of the waves, and when the wind blows, the water turns white and black. The mermaids seem to sing "we have waited long in the chamber of the sea. We have been garlanded with red and brown sea-weed by sea-girl, until we are disturbed by human voices and then we dive deep into the sea." The other interpretation of the lines (129 to 131) would be - Prufrock has been a romantic lover who has been unable to face the realities of life. He has gone deep into his subconscious in order to find out some excuse for delay and inaction. Prufrock and his friends have stayed long in the layers of the sub-conscious. They had visions of sea-girls garlanding them, but such happy dreams are few

and far between. The reality of human voices brings them back into this world and when the reality dawns on them, they become melancholy and frustrated.

LINE-BY-LINE EXPLANATIONS

L. 2. When the evening is spread out against the sky: When the darkness of the evening spreads over the sky.

L. 3. Like a patient etherized upon a table: Like a patient who is made unconscious with anesthetics while lying on a table.

L. 4. half-deserted streets: In the evening time the people leave the streets and go to their homes.

L. 5. The muttering retreats: Cheap hotels, where the visitors mutter in their sleep.

L. 6. Restless Nights: The people who cannot afford paying for good hotels, spend their nights in cheap hotels, but they do not get adequate rest and sleep.

L. 7. Saw dust restaurants: Cheap and dirty restaurants, the floors of which are covered with sawdust.

L. 8. A tedious argument: Streets which follow one another are like the never-ending argument, because the destination is unknown.

L. 9. Insidious: Concealed. Intent: purpose.

L. 10. To lead you: To take you to. Overwhelming question: the question of great importance. The real question is the marriage proposal, but it is not revealed in the poem.

L. 11. Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?': Prufrock does not wish to tell anyone the purpose of his visit.

L. 13. In the room: Prufrock speaks of the hotel room.

L. 14. Michaelangelo: He was a great Italian painter of the sixteenth century; the ladies talk of Michaelangelo but do not know much about his art. This is a satire on the pretensions of modern ladies.

L. 15. The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window panes: The fog is compared to a cat which rubs its back upon the window-panes.

L. 16. Muzzle: Projecting parts of animals head including nose and mouth or strap or belt put on the animals head.

L. 17. Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening. The fog spread widely so as to cover all the things visible in the evening.

L. 18. Lingered upon the pools: The fog hung upon the pools in the drains.

L. 19. Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys. The fog allows the particles of smoke and dust which come from the chimney of factories, to settle on its back. This is generally called 'smog' (smoke plus fog).

L. 20. Slipped: passed. Leap: jump.

L. 22. Curled once about the house, and fell asleep: Prufrock reflects his own mental foggiess in not being able to pursue the course of the fog.

L. 24. Slides: moves.

L. 26. There will be time, there will be time: Prufrock does not wish to take any decision. He easily postpones the issue before him.

L. 28. There will be time to murder and create: Prufrock is in no hurry to make his marriage proposal. This task is as difficult as the committing of murder and creating something new.

L. 29. And time for all the works and days of hands: This refers to the hard work of a farmer.

L. 30. That lift and drop a question on your plate: Prufrock is only to ask a question, but he is not prepared to answer it. This shows his great indecision.

L. 33. Visions: dreams.

L. 38. 'Do I dare?': He must muster up his courage in order to be able to make his proposal. This may take quite some time. He wants time and opportunity to screw his courage up.

L. 39. Time to turn back and descend the stair: At the right moment he may lose his courage and simply turn back and descend the stair.

L. 40. With a bald spot in the middle of my hair: People will observe the bald spot in the middle of his hair.

L. 42-44. My morning....legs are thin: In spite of his smart and modern dress, namely his morning coats, his stiff collar, his necktie, his pin, people will observe his thin arms and legs. Prufrock is growing old and even so he is becoming more and more indecisive and timid. He is conscious of his old age.

L. 45 & 46. Do I dare disturb the universe?: For Prufrock, the proposal is a very important matter and its reception or response is as important as a disturbance in the universe (natural calamity or disaster).

L. 47 & 48. In a minute....minute will reverse: On account of his ever-changing mind, his decisions are reversed in a minute and therefore it is much better postponing the making of a decision:

L. 49. Them: Refers to ladies.

- L. 49 & 50. For I have mornings, afternoons: Prufrock knows their nature and activities.
- L. 51. I have measured out my life with coffee spoons: Prufrock admits that his life is full of trivialities. He has wasted a good deal of time in taking coffee. Here the triviality of modern city life is disclosed. Modern civilization includes a succession of tea parties and coffee sessions. Prufrock's life is measured not in terms of actions or resolution but by the number of coffee spoons.
- L. 52. I know the voices: Prufrock recognizes the voices of the ladies who were singing in the restaurant.
- L. 54. So how should I presume: Prufrock cannot dare to speak out his mind. He does not know how to make the proposal or to disclose his love to his lady.
- L. 55-58. And I have on the wall: Prufrock knows the women in the room. He knows their likes and dislikes and their value system. He knows that they will look at him with searching eyes and he will not be able to stand their staring. His situation will be similar to that of a poor worm fixed on a wall with the help of a sharp pin. The worm will be struggling helplessly; as such he has no mind to face the ladies.
- L. 57. Sprawling: Crawling.
- L. 58. Wriggling: Struggling.
- L. 60. To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?: Prufrock's life is made up of trivialities which make up his days and ways. His life is as useless as the butt-ends of smoked cigarettes which are thrown away.
- L. 61. And how should I presume?: This express Prufrock's indecision and hesitation. He does not know how to make his proposals to his lady-love.
- L. 62. The arms: Refers to the arms of women.
- L. 63. Braceleted: Having a bracelet, a kind of jewelry.
- L. 64. Downed/Covered.
- L. 66. Digress: To side-track or to say something extraneous.
- L. 67. Lie: Relaxed.
- L. 69. And how should I begin?: The main problem with Prufrock is how to start his conversation with the lady and make her know his proposal of love. Prufrock is an embodiment of mental cowardice and indecision.
- L. 70. Shall I say: Prufrock wishes to introduce the subject of his love to his lady in a suitable manner. Perhaps he may make a beginning by mentioning his loneliness.
- L. 72. Of lonely men in short-sleeves, leaning out of windows?: Prufrock wishes to tell his lady that he has seen lonely men leaning out of the windows of their houses and smoking their pipes in the evening. This would emphasize his own loneliness and need for company.
- L. 73. & 74. I should have....silent seas: Prufrock does not like to make a decision. He wants to delay and to postpone his declaration. He wishes to be some sea-fish - say; a crab-who runs quickly across the sea-bed with its rough claws, fearing some danger. Prufrock wants to escape reality.
- L. 76 - 78. smoothed by....you and me: Surrounded by the peace and quiet of the evening, Prufrock does not feel the necessity of making the decision. The evening is compared to a child or a cat lulled to sleep.
- L. 77. Malingers: Pretends to be sick to avoid performance of duty and action.
- L. 79 & 80. Should I, after moment to its crisis: Prufrock thinks that perhaps after taking tea and snacks he will get enough strength and courage to take a decision in this matter.
- L. 82 & 83. Though I have.....no great matter: Prufrock refers to the story of John the Baptist, who condemned Herod for his adultery. Herod was much enraged and he got John killed. His head was brought to Herod in a plate by a dancing girl. Prufrock imagines that his own head which has slightly grown bald has been cut and brought in a platter. His problem is not so important as that of a prophet like John the Baptist. Yet, he lacks moral courage to speak out his mind to his beloved.
- L. 84. Flicker: hesitation; wavering.
- L. 85. Snicker: Laugh in a sly and derisive manner.
- L. 84-86. I have seen....I was afraid: Prufrock has known some occasions when he imagined that he was in fear of death. But, death just laughed at him, mocked at him and let him go free. Prufrock is dwelling on his cowardice and lack of decision.
- L. 88. Marmalade: a kind of jam.
- L. 89. Procelain: crockery; china-ware.
- L. 91. Bitten off: introduced quickly. The matter: the marriage proposal.
- L. 92. To have squeezed the universe into a ball: Prufrock thinks that the declaration of his love will require a very great effort like the effort needed to squeeze the universe into a ball, a task which is impossible for him.

L. 94 & 95. To say....tell you all: Prufrock makes a reference to the story of Lazarus in the Bible. Lazarus was sent to Hell and he wanted to come back to the earth for a short while in order to tell his friends about his experiences in hell.

L. 96. One: lady-love, settling: keeping.

L. 97-98. Should say....at all: Perhaps the lady whom he loves may tell him that he has misunderstood her gentleness and politeness. She has no love for him. He has only misunderstood courtesies. This is another reason for postponing his proposal to his lady-love.

L. 101 to 104. After the sun sets....what I mean: Prufrock refers to his activities during the day and in the evening, particularly the social formalities namely; taking tea in the club, and dancing with the ladies. After these formalities he has no strength left to declare his love in suitable words to his lady.

L. 105. But as if a screen: Prufrock compares the eyes of the ladies to the x-ray machines which can disclose the picture of things lying hidden inside the body. The ladies would be able to read his inner feelings-his cowardice, his indecision and lack of courage and so they would laugh at him. Perhaps the lady whom he loves would tell him that she knows his weaknesses and has, therefore, nothing to do with him.

L. 111. No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to Prufrock compares his indecision and lack of courage to that of Prince Hamlet in Shakespeare's play. He, however, realizes that his problem is not difficult and tragic as that of Prince Hamlet and so he gives up the comparison.

L. 112 to 119. Am an attendant....the Fool: Prufrock remembers Polonius, a courtier of King Claudius and feels that he can fit into that role. Like a courtier, he can attend on some prince, walk in his retinue, may initiate action in small matters or advise the prince or place himself at his disposal. He may be respectable, serviceable, wise, vigilant and precise, full of maxims, though a bit thick-headed and sometimes ridiculous like a court jester. Prufrock analyses his own character and he thinks rather low of himself.

L. 120 to 123. I grow old....upon the beach: Prufrock is old like Polonius but he is somewhat different. He dresses himself like a modern dandy. He wears the trousers with rolled bottoms. He dresses his hair in a fashionable manner parting them from behind, (perhaps to cover his baldness). Can he dare to eat a peach while walking on the beach? He wears fashionable white flannel trousers. Infact, Prufrock wants to look young and fashionable and to hide his old age in order to be acceptable to his lady-love.

L. 124. Mermaids: Sea-species with the head and upper body of a woman and the tail of a fish.

L. 124. I have heard the mermaids singing each to each: Prufrock wants to escape from the routine of civilized social life; while walking on a beach, he remembers the story of mermaids who sang to Ulysses and his companions voyaging on the high seas.

L. 125. I do not think that they will sing to me: Prufrock feels that the mermaids will not sing for him because he is not brave and adventurous like Ulysses. He is timid and cowardly and therefore unfit to listen to the music of mermaids.

L. 127. White hair: foam.

L. 129. Lingered: stayed.

L. 130. Wreathed: garlanded.

L. 126 & 128. I have seen....white and black: Prufrock says that he has seen the mermaid riding on the waves towards the sea and as they move, they comb the foam of the waves thrown back by the strong wind, which makes the water appear white and black.

L. 129 & 130. We have lingered....red and brown: This is the song of the mermaids. They sing about their living deep in the bottom of the sea and being garlanded by sea-girls with red and brown sea-weeds.

L. 131. Till human voices wake us, and we drown: Prufrock is awakened from his romantic visions (day-dreaming) when he hears the human voices around him. He realizes that he must face the problems of life and must take his decisions. The words "we drown" refer to his feeling of frustration and despair in facing the realities of modern life.