

T.S. ELIOT: 'THE LOVE SONG OF J ALFRED PRUFROCK'

(B. A. Semester V Honours and Pass Course Students)

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Objectives:

The modest objective of this e content is to:

- to develop ICT resources as e content in Modern British Poetry
- contribute to formal and non formal education of the stakeholders concerned
- facilitate the e learning of the students of B.A. students in English subject
- associate literary studies with behavioral knowledge

Learning Outcome :

After studying this e content, the learners shall

- comprehend T.S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'.
- understand the text, contexts and connotations of the poem.
- make a critical appreciation 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'
- associate the context of the poem , and develop the power of association and expansion of ideas on the themes and issues concerned .

Subject Mapping /Structure:

1.Text

1.1.The poem:

1.2.Glossary

2 . Contexts

2.1. Critical Appreciation

2.2 .Main Themes

2.3. Features of Style

3 .Connotations /Understanding

3.1. Food For Thought (Appreciation and association)

3.2. Assessment /Questions

Subject Content: Dear learners, please find below the discussion of the text, context and connotations of T.S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'.

1. Text

1.1. The poem:

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question ...
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,

Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
 Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
 Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
 And seeing that it was a soft October night,
 Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
 For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
 Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
 There will be time, there will be time
 To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
 There will be time to murder and create,
 And time for all the works and days of hands
 That lift and drop a question on your plate;
 Time for you and time for me,
 And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
 And for a hundred visions and revisions,
 Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
 Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
 To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
 Time to turn back and descend the stair,
 With a bald spot in the middle of my hair —
 (They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
 My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
 My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin —
 (They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")
 Do I dare

Disturb the universe?
 In a minute there is time
 For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:
 Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
 I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
 I know the voices dying with a dying fall
 Beneath the music from a farther room.
 So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
 The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
 And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
 When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
 Then how should I begin
 To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
 And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
 Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
 (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
 Is it perfume from a dress
 That makes me so digress?
 Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
 And should I then presume?
 And how should I begin?

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
 And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
 Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? ...

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
 Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
 Smoothed by long fingers,
 Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,
 Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
 Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
 Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
 But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
 Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,
 I am no prophet — and here's no great matter;
 I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
 And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
 And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
 After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
 Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
 Would it have been worth while,
 To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
 To have squeezed the universe into a ball
 To roll it towards some overwhelming question,
 To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
 Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
 If one, settling a pillow by her head
 Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;
 That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,

Would it have been worth while,
 After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
 After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
 And this, and so much more?—

It is impossible to say just what I mean!

But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:

Would it have been worth while

If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,

And turning toward the window, should say:

“That is not it at all,

That is not what I meant, at all.”

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;

Am an attendant lord, one that will do

To swell a progress, start a scene or two,

Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,

Deferential, glad to be of use,

Politic, cautious, and meticulous;

Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;

At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—

Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old ... I grow old ...

I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?

I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
 Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
 When the wind blows the water white and black.
 We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
 By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
 Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Source: *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (1963)

1.2 Glossary:

Dear Students, let us find the meaning of difficult words expressions and contexts as given below:

- i. Epigraph : Refer the lines written in italics just before the beginning of the poem. These lines mean, "If I thought my answer were to one who ever could return to the world , this flame should shake no more , but since ever did return alive from the depth , if what I hear be true , without fear of infamy I answer thee."(Eternal Rhythms 132)
 Note : The Epigraph is spoken by Count Guido da Montefeltro (1223-1298) IN Dante's Inferno xxvii, 61-6.
- ii. Etherized :It offers clinical as well as romantic connotations
- iii. Michelangelo : (1475-1564) Italian sculptor , painter and poet.
- iv. Presume : take to be the case or to be true
- v. Digress : to move from a direct or straight course
- vi. overwhelming question : it refers to unstated and indeterminate question. The intention is Prufrock's proposal to the lady he is about to visit. Also it refers to the meaning of J Alfred Prufrock's social and existential meaning .
- vii. Malinger : someone who pretends to be ill in order to escape duty or work,
- viii. to avoid responsibilities / duties
- ix. Prophet : someone who speaks by divine inspiration
- x. The Eternal Footman : Perhaps a parodic allusion to John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* .
- xi. Eternal : continuing forever or indefinitely
- xii. Porcelain : ceramic ware made of a more or less translucent ceramic

(For detail notes and illustrations, please refer to your text book *Eternal Rhythms*, page 129-133.)

2 . Contexts:

2.1 Central Points:

1. 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 .

2.2 .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

2.3. 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

3. Connotations /Understanding:

3.1. Food For Thought: Topics for discussions and debate

1. Do you think that T.S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is really a love song? Give a reasoned answer.

3.2. Assessment:

Questions: Read the poem, and find the answers of the following questions:

1. Write a note on the description of modern life in T.S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'.
2. Find out the figure of speech in "When the evening is spread out against the sky/Like a patient etherized upon a table."
3. Explain the following lines:
 I am no prophet — and here's no great matter;
 I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
 And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
 And in short, I was afraid.
4. Explain the following lines:
 No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
 Am an attendant lord, one that will do

To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
 Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,

5. Explain the following lines:

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
 By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
 Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Summary: The e content titled T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ offers a detailed reading on the text, context and connotations of the poem in question .On the one hand it offers an indicative analysis of the poem , and on the other it suggests the issues of further studies and research in the field concerned.

Frequently Asked Questions

Question-1: Is this matter sufficient for the critical appreciation of the poem?

Answer: Yes , if followed well , it would suffice the purpose.

Videos and Audios:

Dear Students, please open the following links , and see the videos for a better understanding of the text:

- Animated Video of T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ By CCS1989 April 9,2012 .

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xpRSmMnx1MU>

Note : An animated adaptation of T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock” was created as an honors capstone project at Rutgers University in the Fall and Spring 2011/2012)

- Katie Bickham . The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock Analysis .March 09,2017.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CD7h4WISkfc>

Assignment:

Write a critical appreciation of T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ in 250 words .

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