
The Character of The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

There is a lot in the world that there is to question from love, the world, existence, and much more. Writers and artists dedicate what they do to show us what the world was like at a certain point through their eyes. Modernism was the movement after Romantic era where the emphasis was on imagination, emotions, the sublime, the transcendence, nature, and the natural. One of the characteristics of modernism is that the writers of that era questioned the self and their identity. T. S. Eliot in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" gives a sense of irony because the main character never talks about his feelings of love but instead questions the idea of love, and the world for it the emotion. Our main character isolated and isn't able to accept the progressing world around him which detains him from finding true love. As a typical Modernist, T.S. Eliot's character is portrayed to be trapped in a modern dilemma of alienation brought upon by the urban civilization.

Questioning the self and the world around was a big part of the modern movement which was most often used within the plot or the characters of the story. T.S. Eliot's character J. Alfred Prufrock is a man who expresses no feelings at all, struggles with knowing himself and his true identity, and questions it. He says,

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!") (38-41)

Here Prufrock is questioning himself and the bald spot in head. He feels judged by the world around him because they don't see how he was or is. Time has passed and he can't turn back time when Prufrock was in his prime with no bald spot and no insecurities. Prufrock makes scenarios by starting them with "they will say" the "they" is what is bothering him. The they is the urbanization of the world around him no longer appreciating the imperfections of nature, or in this case of aging. They aren't letting him be himself and therefore questioning everything about him. His character questions if he dares go back and talk to whom he has fallen for and keeps questioning by saying

Do I dare

Disturb the Universe?

In a minute there is time

For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse (45-48)

He wishes to go back in time to be able to change what he knows is wrong with him, or so he thinks is wrong with him. Prufrock is unable to proceed in a world that is different to him. The

world is constantly changing and there is nothing one can do about it not even go back in time and change the future.

The disconnection of Prufrock and the world around him is evident. Prufrock is unable to find true love in the society that he lives in which causes him to feel alienated. The poem's first line begins by saying "Let us go then, you, and I" (1) as if it was going to be romantic and an actual love song to someone. But then we get to the next couple lines that say, "When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table" (2-3) which ends the romanticizing of the you and I in the beginning. There is a sort of awkwardness to Prufrock, which can't be blamed on the society, he isn't connected to love or better yet doesn't know how to. He knows that it is a feeling between two people but can't grasp the concept of it. But again, Prufrock starts questioning the relationship and time. He says, "Time for you and time for me, / And time yet for a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions" (31-33). The idea of time is important to Prufrock because he feels like time has run out for him but isn't actually using it. Yet is using time for indecisions, visions, and revisions as he says. Prufrock is showing that he isn't fulfilled with what life has to offer. Even though the society he lives in has a lot to offer with Prufrock alienating himself from everything and everyone he himself is at fault too. Questioning his every move and how he talks to the person who he is pursuing romantically. Being indecisive causes this man to become lonely and results in alienating himself from everything even love itself.

The setting in this poem seems to contemplate Prufrock because it isn't romanticized as a love poem should be, hence the irony of the whole poem. Our writer gives us a great visual of how the society that Prufrock lived in wasn't full of emotion just like him. The narrator describes it and says, "For the yellow smoke 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" (15-17). Here we get a feel of what the neighborhood is like or at least how it does amongst the fog. There is no beauty in how it is described just yellow fog. The way the fog is described is as if there is a cat is roaming as the smoke. The smoke timidly roams the neighborhood just going through the windows. It's almost describing Prufrock due to his timidity and just lingering around to avoid being a part of the society and just watching. Prufrock also uses his own life and the lives of others to see only the negative side of the setting. Prufrock says, "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 the windows?" (70-72). The society as a whole is miserable even to Prufrock who is miserable himself. He watches the people around him and notices that he isn't the only one that is lonely and watching their surroundings. He doesn't allow himself physically to be a part of the place he inhabits but is through the window. By watching he is alienating himself to not be a part of a society that is changing.

Overall, J. Alfred Prufrock doesn't seem to find his place in the society which results in him alienating himself. Prufrock is an outsider that is just watching everything around him but not allowing himself to be part of it. He questions the way he looks and how time has a lot to do with his aging. Time is essential to the life of Prufrock because there isn't enough time and he wishes to go back in time to stop for him to be able to detain what is causing his insecurities. The people around him and the way they look at him cause him to question the universe and blame it for what is happening to him. All his insecurities cause an inability for him to find love and pursue anyone. The way that Prufrock tries to pursue love but fails to obtain it because of his awkwardness and inability to love. The setting gives a look into how miserable the society in which Prufrock lives in looks. The fog illustrates a neighborhood that lacks life just like Prufrock.

He is constantly seeing the negative side of life by questioning the way he looks, time, and the way he views the setting which puts him in a dilemma of alienation from his society.

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