

## Eliot's Approach to Ethical Poetry as a Case Study *The Love Song by J. Alfred Prufrock*

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### Abstract

This study aims at showing the ethical approaches in T.S. Eliot's poetry. I argue that Eliot's poetry is loaded with ethical approaches that characterized the era in which he lived. Also, the significance of this study arises from the fact that ethics have become buried in modern life. I, among others, feel we need it urgently these days to survive in a nice manner.

In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, readers are shocked to notice male man has become or is viewed as being less productive and lacking decision-making, exactly another copy of Hamlet. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* reflects the feelings of emasculation, not feminism, experienced by many men as they returned home from World War I to find women empowered by their new role as wage earners. Prufrock (2009), unable to make a decision, watches women wander in and out of a room, "talking of Michelangelo" (p.14), and elsewhere admires their downy, bare arms.

**Key words:** Eliot; Prufrock; Ethics and morality; Poetry; Love; Sex; Religion

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### INTRODUCTION

Ethics, in general, have been a significant factor all over the world. Also, they are a very significant part of our

life, especially during the rise of the Arab spring. They, along with morals, were extensively found in all ethics, and literary pieces. Morals have been highly regarded as a weapon in literature, especially when scholars, critics, and authors wanted to express their own thoughts, ideologies and manners.

According to Valery and Follit (1985), ethics is considered

a field of rational, scholarly discourse, the beginnings of ethics are built into our very bodies. They are rooted in moral emotions such as empathy, shame, and guilt. Moral intuition and reasoning emerge similarly in children across cultures, and they are nurtured by adults. We build on these moral emotions and instincts by making agreements with each other, weigh costs and benefits of different courses of action, looking to ethical scholars, and drawing on the wisdom of our ancestors. (p.20)

Furthermore, people, in the past, had problems with ethics and ethical questions. They work to balance the happiness of an individuals against the wellbeing of other individuals or the collective, and through the use of moral philosophy and religion to find this balance, (Valery & Follit, 1985, p.20). As a part of ethics, especially for this study, the present researcher is interested in expressing ethical poetry because it is not only part of our life, but also it is needed in our religion.

Ethical poetry and morality are as important as other fictive and literary genres. Many scholars and people defined them differently, although in terms of content these definitions seem to be identical. However, below, I will illustrate some of these definitions.

According to the business dictionary (2012) ethical poetry is defined as:

The basic concept and fundamental [one] of right human conducts. It includes [the] study of universal values such as essential equality of all men and women, human or natural rights, obedience to the law of land, concern for health and safety and, increasingly, also for the natural environment. While morality is [the] conformance to a recognized code, doctrine, or system of values of what is right and wrong and to behave accordingly. (p.1)

Then it adds:

No system of morality is accepted as universal, and the answers to the question "what is morality?" differ sharply from place to place, group to group, and time to time, for some it means conscious and deliberate effort in guiding one's conduct by reason based on fairness and religious belief. For others it is, in the words of the UK mathematician and philosopher Alfred Norton Whitehead (1861-1947), "... What the majority then and there happen to like, and immorality is what they dislike. (p.2)

## 1. RATIONALE AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

I have chosen T.S. Eliot because Eliot is one of the most prominent British poets of the twentieth century and the representative of free verse and modernism in the poetry of the twentieth century. Eliot's poems helped reshape contemporary European literature. Also, in 1948, Eliot obtained the Nobel Prize for literature. For the sake of current study, I will consult one famous poem by Eliot, "*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*" because these poems treated ethical issues extensively. "*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*" has shown his creative and sophisticated style, the French influence is very clear by some poets of the nineteenth century. Additionally, the use of Eliot phrases instead of flowery language, and indirect literary allusions and his cynical and pessimistic trend added new recipes to English poetry (Valery & Follit, 1985, p.5).

Furthermore, this study aims at showing the ethical approaches in T.S. Eliot's poetry. I argue that Eliot's poetry is loaded with ethical approaches that characterized the era in which he lived. Also, the significance of this study arises from the fact that ethics have become buried in modern life. I, among others, feel we need it urgently these days to survive in a nice manner.

## 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

When studying the literature that talked about my subject, I found that much literature has talked about ethical poetry and morality in general. But, in this study, I will focus on two main poems by Eliot which he employs differently. This poem is: *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. In this review, I will talk about all the literature that deals with ethics and morality. Also I will review Eliot's poems and research that talked about these poems. Further, I will show all the similarities and differences of my study.

Azizmohammadi and Hamedreza (2011) wrote a paper titled "*A Study of Consciousness in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot.*" In this paper, they showed how Eliot wants his poetry to express the fragile psychological state of humanity in the twentieth century. The passing of Victorian ideals and the trauma of World War I challenged cultural notions of masculine identity, causing artists to question the romantic literary ideal of a visionary-poet

capable of changing the world through verse. Modernist writers wanted to capture their transformed world, which they perceived as fractured, alienated, and denigrated. "*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*" demonstrates this sense of indecisive paralysis as the titular speaker wonders whether he should eat a piece of fruit, make a radical change, or if he has the fortitude to keep living. Humanity's collectively damaged psyche prevented people from communicating with one another, an idea that Eliot explored in many works. This study attempts to examine the role of consciousness in the poetry of T.S. Eliot (Azizmohammadi & Hamedreza, 2011, pp.2339-2342).

Dewan (2011) wrote a paper titled "*T.S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'*". In this literary piece, Dewan gives brief glimpse about T.S. Eliot and his poem "*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*", which is one of the prescribed poems in major English BA course. This is only a commentary on the poem and does not cover each and every detail about T. S. Eliot's works and life. This study is meant to be works of citation from the websites and books. It will be useful for the students or any individual to gain basic knowledge on elements of poetry and its figures of speech. It is also very helpful for the English teachers to get the idea about the poem for classroom teaching. "*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,*" is often called "the first modernist poem. The poem centers on the feelings and thoughts of the persona. The poem is composed of Prufrock's own neurotic and lyrical associations. Indeed, over the course of the poem, he sets up analogies between himself and various familiar cultural figures, among them Hamlet. This establishes a connection with Hamlet's famous soliloquy ("To be or not to be?—That is the question"). Prufrock's doubt that he deserves the answer he desires from the woman transforms the poem into a kind of interior monologue or soliloquy in which "To be or not to be?" is for Prufrock "To be what?" and "What or who am I to ask this woman to marry me?" (Dewan, 2011, p.20).

Xue (2009) wrote a paper titled "an overwhelming question in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.*" In it, he analyzes an overwhelming question in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. This poem delineates the deep theme of modern character separation in Western countries. In this poem, the interpretation of the overwhelming question is crucial for the appreciation of the whole poem. Also, this paper analyzes the use of images and allusions and the philosophical basis for the poem. Thus the author gets the conclusion that this question which Prufrock never speaks out is his psychological conflict. He is pondering whether he should reveal his true self before the public (Xue, 2009, pp.79-82).

Lowe (2009) wrote an essay *Shelleyan Identity in T. S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'*. In this essay, Lowe discusses whether the poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, by T.S. Eliot was influenced by the

work and views of the poet Percy Shelley. The author not only notices Eliot's criticism of Shelley's work and Romantic views but also suggests that Eliot shared many of Shelley's attitudes. He further notes how Shelley's poem "Alastor" reflects concepts of identity and isolation present in Eliot's poem (Lowe, 2009, pp.65-74).

Rivers and Walker (1978) wrote a paper titled *Eliot's "THE WASTE LAND"*, in which they discussed T.S. Eliot's use of allusions to Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* in his poem *The Waste Land*, to reinforce the poem's theme of sexual sterility and lack of proper love in the modern world. They compared Dante's characterization of the crowds which swarmed into Rome in 1300 and Eliot's description of people he sees in London, England (Rivers & Walker, 1978, p.8).

Although my subject talks about very common songs and poems, it is different from what the critics above theorized. For example, Peter Lowe discusses whether the poem "*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*," by T.S. Eliot was influenced by the work and views of the poet Percy Shelley, I focus on ethics and morality in "*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*" from a modernist point of view.

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### 3. THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

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This study will include a chapter. In the introduction I will introduce the main terms of my study: ethics and morality. Also, I will talk about the significance of the study, review of related literature, and the statement of the problem. In this chapter, I will explain how T.S Eliot used ethical poetry and morality in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. In the poem, the researcher will shed light on a number of stanzas and excerpts that mainly focus on ethics and morality. e.g. religion, sight/blindness, resurrection/death, water/drowning, fertility/impotency, civilization/decline, love/sex, voice/silence. In the conclusion, I will write some remarks, conclusions.

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### 4. THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

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*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is not a love song in the traditional sense of the word. Eliot marks a break from the Romantic tradition of the nineteenth century. Romantic poetry, the stream of which ran at its highest flood in the first half of the nineteenth century, became weak and thin. By the end of the century, the romantic poets sought an escape from the realities of life into the world of nature and art. He also exploited the past for its pageant and glory. His poetry faces the problems of modern life and does not turn its back from urban civilization. Its settings are in the streets of London and the city slums. The ugliness of the factory surroundings and pollution of the smug and loneliness of the city life, in spite of its swelling crowd and exclusive parties, are represented by Eliot without any fear or favour. He does not white-wash

the grim picture of urban surroundings. The restaurants smelling of oil and, dust and rotten cabbages filled with saw dust, are found in *The Love Song*. Williamson says: "In this poem (1917) we have the love song of a certain character, whose very name is suggestive of qualities he subsequently manifests." (p.9) Additionally, the most significant theme are ethics and morality, the focus of our study. Many British scholars, authors, and playwrighters tackled the issue of ethics and morality. In other words, not only T.S Eliot talked about this subject. Shakespeare and John Dryden are the example below.

William Shakespeare is an English poet and playwright who wrote the famous 154 Sonnets and numerous highly successful oft quoted dramatic works including the tragedy of *The Prince of Denmark*, Hamlet (North, 1991, p.51):

Neither a borrower nor a lender be;  
"For loan oft loses both itself and friend,  
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.  
This above all: To thine ownself be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.  
Farewell: My blessing season this in thee!" (Ibid.)

Notably, Shakespeare here treated social conditions so that he tells us not to borrow, which could lead to a loss of confidence by the same borrower and friends around him, leading to social problems that may arise between the parties. Moreover, such behavior is not religious. John Dryden was an influential English poet; literary critic, translator, and playwright who dominated the literary life of Restoration England to such a point that the period came to be known in literary circles as the Age of Dryden. Walter Scott called him "Glorious John". He was made Poet Laureate in 1667 (Winn, 1987, p.512). Another excerpt of Dryden is:

Now you shall see I love you. Not a word  
Of chiding more. By my few hours of life,  
I am so pleased with this brave Roman fate,  
That I would not be Caesar, to outlive you.  
When we put off this flesh, and mount together,  
I shall be shown to all the ethereal crowd,--  
Lo, this is he who died with Antony! (Ibid., p.512)

Notably, John Dryden discusses here emotional problems and the impact of these problems on the lovers by differences in their veins, religion, sex and social positions. Despite the harsh conditions that surround them, but they remain immortal in the hearts.

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### 5. THE RELIGIOUS VERSUS THE SEXUAL INDICATIONS IN THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK INTRODUCTION

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In this Introduction, I will use three sections in Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Section one focuses on



T.S. Eliot's style. In section two, there will be a review to Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* by giving some criticism, summary, and analysis. In the meantime, I will hint at two dimensions: Religion versus Sex.

### 5.1 T.S Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

According to Berryman, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* begins with an epigraph, a quote that sets the tone for the poem to follow. This epigraph, included in the poem in the original Italian, is from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Its use here emphasizes Eliot's belief in the instructive function of poetry, as well as his conviction that it was a poet's responsibility to be aware of and build on the established tradition of poetry. In other words, This poem is structured into four sections, with each section separated by an ellipsis, a mark used in conventional punctuation to point out an omission, but used here to signal either time passing between thoughts relevant to the subject under consideration, or information considered too obvious to be included (Berryman, 1976, pp.270-278).

Eliot's belief that "No verse is free for the serious poet" is apparent in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. This poem is written in free verse with varying line lengths, but Eliot employs rhyme as a major structural component in its composition.

In fact, in the 131 lines of the main poem structure, only 12 lines are unrhymed. Note the pattern of the rhyme in the first stanza, beginning "Let us go then, you and I...": a couplet—an unrhymed line—a series of three couplets—an unrhymed line—a couplet. Such a pattern serves to establish coherence in the stanza, as well as to create a distinctive music. Eliot also found repetition useful to establish rhythms of ideas as well as sound rhythms. Note the repetition of the word "time" in the two stanzas beginning "And indeed there will be time..." in the first section (Ibid.).

Ezra Pound, one of the most influential Imagist poets, defined this movement by saying: "We [scholars] are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous." Eliot's employment of imagery had become particularly important to the reader, who has an inspired intellect of poetry. Also, his employment of exact language aggravated readers to scrutinize each word and create a representation familiarly (Blum, 1957, pp.424-426).

In order to comprehend the sense behind this poem, the reader must cut up Eliot's imagery, examine its representative meaning, and discover thematic outlines. By highlighting a few leading images and allusions in the poem, it is hoped to gain a few insights into Eliot's use of descriptions to narrate the major themes of this poem. While the clarifications of the representations on this page follow the same incoherent pattern of organization as Eliot's images themselves, it is hoped to show that while

each image or image cluster are distinct and apparently unrelated, they are tied together though thematic elements. Through his exercise of imagery and allusion in this poem, Eliot deals with themes that circle around the delicate and awkward human condition, touching on the ideas of shortage, sexual nervousness and fear of death (Ibid.).

In Carol Christ's words, "It is a fact that three of the principal modernist poets—Eliot, Pound, and Williams—each wrote a poem entitled "Portrait of a Lady" within a few years of 1910. The title, of course, alludes to James's novel and, for Eliot and Pound, refers to the Jamesian project of some of their early verse (Christ, 1991, p.1).

For Eliot, "[p]oetic representation of a powerful female turnout created difficulty in embodying the male. In order to do so, Eliot avoids envisioning the female, indeed, avoids attaching gender to bodies." According to Carol Christ, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* "circles around not only an unspoken question, as all readers and critics agree, but also an unenvisioned center, the "one" whom Prufrock addresses. The poem never visualizes the lady or the girl with whom Prufrock imagines a meet except in fragments and in plurals—eyes, arms, skirts-synecdoche we might well imagine as fetishistic replacements". These synecdoche replacements are not clearly engendered. The braceleted arms and the skirts are especially female, but the faces, the hands, the voices, the eyes are not. As if to displace the central human object it does not visualize, the poem projects images of the body onto the landscape (the sky, the streets, the fog), but these images, for all their marked intimation of sexuality, also avoid the designation of gender (Ibid.).

The most visually precise images in the poem are those of Prufrock himself, a Prufrock cautiously composed—"My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin, / My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin"—only to be decomposed by the watching eyes of another into thin arms and legs, a balding head brought in upon a platter (Ibid.).

Moreover, the images associated with Prufrock are themselves, as Pinkney observes, terrifyingly unstable, attributes constituting the identity of the subject at one moment only to be wielded by the object the next, like the badge that centers his necktie and then pinions him to the wall or the arms that change into Prufrock's scrapes. The poem, in these a variety of ways, decomposes the body, making ambiguous its sexual recognition. These sprinkled body parts at once entail and avoid a middle encounter the speaker cannot bring himself to confront, but in the pattern of their scattering, they comprise the voice that Prufrock feels cannot live in the stare of the other (Ibid.).

### 5.2 The Structure of *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

When it comes to the structure of the poem, it is noted that "*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*" is a theatrical

monologue insecurely bound together with a rambling emotional coherence. The character or the persona is paralyzed by irresolution and extreme reserve, thus making him hesitant to “dare/ disturb the universe,” consoling himself with the thought that “[t]here will be time, there will be time” (Miller et al., 2005, pp.113-150).

As an internal dramatic monologue it is part of a long-standing tradition, and although it modifies the tradition by incorporating a more disjunctive narrative structure and a heavy reliance on allusion, which highlights the ironic contrast between past glories and modern inadequacy, it still remains squarely within that tradition. The poem’s value doesn’t lie in its structural innovation so much as in the fact that its themes—the disintegration of the modern world, “the tone of effort and futility of effort which is central in Eliot’s writing”, the failure to act, to “disturb the universe,” as Prufrock puts it—were to preoccupy Eliot throughout his career (Ibid.).

The theatrical structure of Eliot’s poem “*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*” owes much; it seems, to a Dantean parallel that has gone ignored. The correspondence is deliberately between a passageway in *Inferno*, Canto II, 31-42, and the passage in “Prufrock beginning “No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be,” although the implications of the parallel extend throughout Eliot’s poem. At this in the poem, the crisis is past, Prufrock having creped away from the decision to speak to the lady or, in abstract terms, away from an active participation in life which might involve risk and suffering. By his reference to Hamlet, he deliberately gives emphasis to what other insinuation in the poem make clear: He is not heroic, creative, risk-taking, or religiously committed. His explicit identification of Hamlet as a familiar tragic hero in our culture effectively defines Prufrock in the reader’s mind partly because it also shows the speaker’s own mode of self-definition (Hollahan, 1970, pp.91-92).

### 5.3 About *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

Eliot simultaneously lauded the end of the Victorian era and expressed his concern about the freedoms inherent in the modern age. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* reflects the feelings of emasculation, not feminism, experienced by many men as they returned home from World War I to find women empowered by their new role as wage earners. Prufrock, unable to make a decision, watches women wander in and out of a room, “talking of Michelangelo” (p.14), and elsewhere admires their downy, bare arms. A disdain for unchecked sexuality appears in both *Sweeney Among the Nightingales* (1918) and *The Waste Land*. The latter portrays rape, prostitution, a conversation about abortion, and other incidences of nonreproductive sexuality. Nevertheless, the poem’s central character, Tiresias, is a hermaphrodite—and his powers of prophesy and transformation are, in some sense, due to his male and female genitalia. With Tiresias, Eliot

creates a character that embodies wholeness, represented by the two genders coming together in one body (Reaza, 2010, p.8).

*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is a dramatic monologue of a typical modern man in the early 1900’s and how he feels conflicted over his place in society. The speaker gives animated descriptions of the settings to make it clear that everything around him affects him in a negative way. For example, Eliot states “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.” The speaker pays attention to these things around him in order to avoid people in the room who are talking about him (Booth et al., 2011, pp.672-673).

Contrary to what the title implies, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, by T.S. Eliot, is anything but a love song. It is instead quite the opposite. Although the poem is open to several interpretations, after careful reading of the poem, the several underlying themes can be expressed by one central idea. In the poem, the narrator, J. Alfred Prufrock, portrays his disappointment with the society he lives in. By interpreting aspects of imagery, speaker and intended audience, one can easily assess Prufrock’s views of life. His interpretation of everyday life can be described as a vacant, bleak, and repetitive (Komal, 2012, p.1).

Eliot’s *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* was completed in 1910 to 1911 but it was not published until 1915. It is an examination of the tortured psyche of the ideal and perfect (modern) man—as being overeducated, eloquent, neurotic, and emotionally stilted. Prufrock, the speaker, seems to be addressing a potential lover, with whom he would like to “force the moment to its crisis”. Prufrock, however, knows too much of life to challenge an approach to the woman: In his mind he hears the comments others make about his inadequacies, and he scolds himself for “presuming” emotional interaction could be possible at all (Southram, 1994, p.249).

In fact, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is not a song, nor is it about love. This seemingly off track title is in fact a well-skilled example of what is called according to Tripod a “verbal irony”. J. Alfred Prufrock, with an unromantic name itself, describes in this interior monologue, his fanciful view of love and discovers his weakness and nervousness along the way. Eliot employs numerous rhetorical devices to illustrate Prufrock’s helpless and low-grade view of himself. His insecurity and cowardice heighten until he accepts his death of any effort towards romantic action (Pellum, 2009, p.20)

According to Komal, the *Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, by T.S. Eliot is about a man who is searching for something to break him for the dull life that he has been leading. In the beginning, the speaker invites us to go with Prufrock and come into his world with the statement “Let us go then, you and I.” Through out the poem, the reader

is following the speaker throughout an evening searching for the acceptance of a woman. Because of his lack of self-assurance, he fails to find the meaning and acceptance of his love (Komal, 2012, p.3).

The title of the *Love Song* is sarcastic and cynical. The tendency is to assume that Prufrock is T.S. Eliot, even though Eliot was 27 years old when the poem was first published. The pronouns of the "Let us go then, you and I" are sometimes interpreted as two different parts of Prufrock's personality: One that urges him to take action and participate in events; the other, a feckless dilettante who fears involvement and rejection. Or perhaps the "you" is the generalized reader (Wood, 2008, p.9).

The speaker, J. Alfred Prufrock, is an aging man who is very self-conscious about his appearance. He is afraid that women won't find him attractive because he is thin and balding. He is speaking to his physical body ("you"), and from his mind ("I"). He first speaks of himself as looking in a mirror, contemplating visiting a "room" where "women come and go" on a late afternoon. Here, Prufrock falls into multiple daydreams in which he avoids the "overwhelming question" of whether or not to confront these women. He becomes more aware of his timidity as he concludes that confrontation of the "overwhelming question" would not have changed the outcome of nothingness. He recedes into a final reverie in which he follows mermaids out to sea and drowns, passively accepting his death of action (Pellum, 2009, p.9).

This inaction is due to Prufrock's self-image of helplessness and insecurity. Prufrock indirectly alludes to his helplessness by comparing himself to an etherized patient. This metaphor illustrates how helpless Prufrock feels by making this subconscious comparison. This helpless attitude relates to the torture he feels through his inaction. He also uses a metaphor, comparing himself to an insect "pinned" down. These helpless images suggest Prufrock's view of his inability to change his numbness. This helpless attitude relates to the torture he feels through this inaction. The allusion made to Dante's *Inferno* suggests this torture. The sin Prufrock is suffering from is "like a tedious argument / Of insidious intent". This simile illustrates his wasted energy on this pointless fantasy (quoted in Kaplan, 19). These unsatisfied desires are demonstrated in the images of "restless nights in one-night cheap hotels". Just as the hotels suggest a lack of contentment, Prufrock's desires are not met. Prufrock understands his helplessness and dissatisfaction and can not deal with it (Ibid., p.6).

These desires are a result of Prufrock's self-imposed inferiority. When the women are "talking of Michaelangelo", Prufrock is quick to distract himself by focusing on the yellow fog. The allusion to Michaelangelo and Prufrock's reaction suggest he feels inferior to a man with great talent. His inferiority is confronted again in his physical description. Although his dress is "rich

and modest", he fears he will be seen as unattractive for his thin arms and thin hair. Synecdoche is used as he sees "eyes" judging him, reiterating Prufrock's self-consciousness. His timidity and inferiority are made more apparent through Prufrock's view of time. Anaphora is employed in Prufrock's comfort in it. The repetition of the statement, "There will be time", shows he plans to continue his immobility through his comfort in time. He understands his "indecisions" and knows he will make "a hundred visions and revisions". However, these fantasies will continue regardless of his realization (Ibid., p.5).

The poem's epigraph at once opens and closes up this discourse of a poet-hero generically old before his time. Eliot's early work is unusual in its dependence on epigraphs that mediate between the poet and the poem, reformulating the poem before it can begin, and his epigraphs often explicitly concern belatedness, exhaustion, and endings (Blasing, 1987, p.22).

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The poem moves from a series of physical settings to a series of indistinct ocean images conveying Prufrock's emotional distance from the world as he comes to recognize his second-rate status ("I am not Prince Hamlet"). *Prufrock* is powerful for its range of intellectual reference and also for the vividness of character achieved (Ibid., p.250).

In fact, the way critics read Prufrock was not positive. According to Mitchell, J. Alfred Prufrock is not just the speaker of one of Eliot's poems, he is the representative man of early modernism, shy, cultivated, oversensitive, sexually retarded. In other words, many people would like to consider him impotent, ruminative, isolated, self-aware to the point of solipsism. That is to say, the speakers of all these early poems are trapped inside their own excessive alertness. They look out on the world from deep inside some private cave of feeling, and though they see the world and themselves with unflattering exactness, they cannot or will not do anything about their dilemma and finally fall back on self-serving explanation. They quake before the world, and their only revenge is to be alert (Mitchel, 1991, p.1).

In Blasing's (1987) words, the physical and psychological enervation of Eliot's early personae may be read in part as correlatives of his literary situation; this is the way *Prufrock*. For example, he states his problem:



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? (p.19)

Blasing adds, Prufrock does not know how to presume to begin to speak, both because he knows “all already”—this is the burden of his lament—and because he is already known, formulated. His consciousness of the other’s eye—I haunts his language at its source: “Let us go then, you and I.” An “I” who addresses a “you” becomes subject to the laws of communication, and his voice is subsumed by expression. In his critical replay of the poetic process, Eliot remarks that the poet expresses not a personality but a particular medium. The particular medium expressed in “Prufrock” is a confession or a dramatic monologue (Ibid.).

Blasing also adds, if Prufrock’s problem coincides with the dynamics of Eliot’s particular medium of dramatic monologue, Eliot’s problem coincides with the dynamics of the poetic medium itself. In the line “It is impossible to say just what I mean!” the dramatic character and his author meet, “uttering the words in unison, though perhaps with somewhat different meaning,” and displaying the rhetorical advantage a dramatic poet holds. And Eliot’s imprisoning his speaker in the very medium of expressive or even confessional speech may register his own intertextual interment in a medium inscribed with prototypes of original or central speech—whether prophetic, like John the Baptist’s, or epic, like Dante’s, or dramatic, like Shakespeare’s—which are codified in and reinforced by conventions precluding the possibility of saying “just what I mean” (Ibid., p.14).

Eliot’s ironic employment of rhyme and meter in “Prufrock” acknowledges the complicity of the poet’s conventions with his persona’s “de-meaning” language. On the one hand, the “comic” meter of lines like “In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo” equates poetic forms that channel force and the social forms of keeping conversation light (Ibid.).

The speaker asks himself if he dares to what one may assume is approach a woman, but is tormented by the thought, and chides himself for almost approaching her. The speaker then presumes to muddle over whether it would have been worth it to approach the woman. He states:

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?  
(Booth et al., pp.674-676).

It should be emphasized that there is much similarity between Prufrock and Shakespeare’s Hamlet. The speaker continues by contrasting himself to Hamlet, and describing specific characteristics of his own personality, and claiming that he “almost, at times” resembles a fool (Ibid.). The poem concludes with a series of ambiguous ocean images, for the purpose of the speaker’s emotional distance and acceptance of who he is in this modern world. As previously mentioned, the speaker begins this poem by describing the settings in great detail, and it is apparent that these settings are concrete places, such as rooms or buildings. At these concrete places the speaker is struggling with his place in society, and during the ocean scenes he is coming to terms with that person. He declares:

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 (Ibid., pp.676-677).

This stanza illustrates the speakers difficulty deciding where he belongs, and acts as a metaphor for his emotions. In the last stanza the speaker states:

“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” (Ibid.).

This implies that the speaker finds comfort in the sea, and those humans, or more generally society, is what he wants to escape (Ibid.).

In accordance with many studies and readings, Prufrock’s “song” is read as a similar confession of a soul in torment, though Prufrock’s sins are errors of omission and inaction rather than of commission. If hesitation, inadequacy, and a lack of self-assertiveness are mortal sins, Prufrock deserves a place in hell among those who fail to do either good evil; or maybe Eliot considers him a purveyor of false counsel (In Prufrock’s case, self-counsel) and deserving of a spot in the 7<sup>th</sup> ring next to Guido (Wood, 2008, p.5).

The plot of the poem states that Prufrock has paid a visit to a woman whom he loves but to whom he is incapable of asserting his emotions and desires. He reviews his life prior to the crucial meeting, a life that can be epitomized by “a hundred indecisions.” In other words, he has never been decisive to take a decision of love, religion, or anything else (Ibid.).

All over the song or the poem, readers will notice that Prufrock has been always hesitant and doubtful Self doubt and hesitation color this milquetoast’s interrogation of himself. “Do I dare?” “How should I presume?” “How should I begin?” “Shall I part my hair behind?” “Do I dare to eat a peach?” How much derring-do is such a man capable of? He can’t risk eating a peach for fear

of upsetting the stomach or bowels. He imagines the women exchanging comments not on his heroic virility and assertiveness but on his thinning hair, the absence of masculinity betrayed by "how his arms and legs are thin!" (Ibid., p.2)

Prufrock's life of cultured politeness and empty affectation echoes hollowly in "For I have know them all already, known them all:- / Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons, / I have measured out my life with coffee spoons." This is in stark and sad contrast to Duke Orsino of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* - a man in love with love, a man who begins his life drama by telling the musicians:

If music be the food of love, play on,  
Give me excess of it; that surfeiting,  
The appetite may sicken and so die.  
That strain again, it had a dying fall. (Ibid.)

Prufrock's proper behavior in his drawing room society has been measured out in discreet coffee spoons, and the "voices dying with a dying fall" are music from a farther room into which he dare not intrude (Ibid., p.3). His doubt leads to distaste and inaction. Prufrock becomes angry when he realizes that he has "measured out [his] life with coffee spoons". This metaphor suggests the monotony of his life. Everyday he continues these pointless fantasies, hence the repetition associated with coffee spoons. Inaction is also apparent in that only a coffee spoon could measure how little he has accomplished (Pellum, 2009, p.17).

In the poem, there is a comparison which Prufrock makes in naming himself a "Fool". This cognition of his cowardice and timidity causes him to surrender. He confesses the foolishness of his reveries but cannot see a way to change them. An extended metaphor is used as Prufrock compares this death of action to drown. Like the mermaids that tempted the Greeks, Prufrock follows the mermaids in a final reverie, drowning and accepting the death in his inaction (Ibid.).

Prufrock's and Eliot's cowardice and hesitance illustrate his inaction. The conscious and subconscious comparisons Prufrock makes about himself explains the reason for his timidity. His poor self-confidence and feeling of inferiority are represented in the devices Eliot uses and help the reader understand Prufrock's refusal to change. His self-image causes his perversion of reality, making him afraid of confrontation as he helplessly retreats into unsatisfying daydreams (Ibid., pp.14-15).

Prufrock is a timid man. He is extremely conscious of what others think of him and this has a great effect on his actions. He has problems with speaking what he feels and this is demonstrated when he "prepare(s) a face to meet the faces that (he) meet(s)." He is also extremely self-conscious with his appearance and thinks that people talk about what he looks like and what he wears. Other opinions of Prufrock bother him so much so that he does

not want to "disturb the universe" by making an entrance into it (Komal, 2012, p.3).

That said, one can infer that Prufrock seems to feel as if his life is over and he has no more to offer. He makes statements similar to this throughout the poem. He proclaims to have known "the eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase" and the "arms that are braceleted and white and bare". We get more of a sense of Prufrock's disillusionment of life with his many references to time. In lines 24-34, he claims there is time to "meet faces", "murder and create", have a "hundred indecisions" and a "hundred visions and revisions". It is not as though Prufrock is doing this in a hopeful manner, though. Instead we get the impression that he is reflecting on time as if it is plentiful only if you take advantage of it and perhaps he feels he did not (Ibid. p.15).

Once the reader gets past the initial misconceptions about the poem due to its misleading title, they can easily see that this is a poem about what happens if you do not make the most of your life. Prufrock is a character that we all can learn something from and or about. Through interpretations of this poem, one can assume that even though a person's life may seem to be normal and successful, that same person may have a dissimilar view of their own life. From the poem, we can conclude that Prufrock's life was like many others during the time it was written. It talks of parties, drinking, and good-looking ladies. This did not, however, bring his happiness. As he aged, Prufrock was left very disenchanted with his life. In the end, he discusses how he will behave in his old age and finally describes death as what can be interpreted as drowning in the sea (Ibid., p.3).

The last part of the poem shows Prufrock's final desolation and sadness in life. He can not bring himself to tell the woman that he is in love with how he really feels and whether or not she will listen to him. However, if he ever did decide to tell her, it would come out as a mess. He finds himself with no real role in life. He is no "Prince Hamlet, nor was he meant to be," but rather an "attendant lord," or sometimes "the Fool." He hears the mermaids singing, but he thinks: "I do not think they will sing to me" (Ibid., p.9). In the end, Prufrock feels left out of society, and can not find his own place in the universe. As an old man on the beach, looking out into the ocean, he questions if he did the right thing. But he missed everything, all because he was scared. He realizes that he has been living in an imaginary world. When this reality hits him, he drowns soul and all (Ibid., p.9).

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## DISCUSSION

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In our discussion, I will use two sections that in depth talked about ethics and morals. The first section talks about religion, and the second one addresses a mix of sex and love.



Indications and Interpretations in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*: Love, Religion and Sex.

The biggest blockade for Prufrock is not just that he cannot find love, per se, but also his self-consciousness of his age and resulting physical appearance. Youth is gone and death is near for Prufrock, who has “seen the moment of [his] greatness flicker, and sees “[t]he eternal Footman hold [his] coat, and snicker.” Prufrock sees women everywhere and, still, has yet to find love (Hernandez, 2007, p.10).

T. S. Eliot is known for being the staunch and stuffy modernist poet, but there are tones of estrangement and disillusionment, confusion, self-hatred and deep uncertainty that make “*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*” instantly related to transgender readers. Throughout the poem, Prufrock struggles with his emotions, lack of definite gender, and relation to peers and the world in general are the same as those that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. Prufrock can be, no matter Eliot’s intention, a vivid gender queer literary protagonist (Stevens, 2012, pp.2-3).

In expressing his view about the religious views in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Eliot substitutes the word with an accumulation of words—superficial, mundane and even cruel. In the suffocating atmosphere of tea rooms and haute bourgeoisie salons, Prufrock is condemned to be “pinned and wriggling on the wall” like a butterfly or an insect under observation, like a Christ whose death does not bring redemption. The parallel with Christ is further developed in the absence of meaning of the ritual that Prufrock undergoes:

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.  
(Onley, 1978, p.149)

Notably, one can see that Prufrock pictures himself in a very strange way. If he sees himself as a kind of powerless Christ, he confesses that unlike John the Baptist he is no prophet, he has no revelation to make, no path to prepare, no saviour to announce. As Brooker puts it: “Mallarmé had predicted that removing Christ from the altar, the body and the blood from the table, would purge Christian ritual and enable it to survive as a framework for a higher religion based on art.” But here, it is the self, it is Prufrock himself who is the god—to be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk among whispers.” While Eliot uses the Christian ritual almost as if to ridicule it, he seems to realise that nothing successfully replaces the meaning hidden at the core of the ritual. Prufrock, just as Eliot maybe, is entrapped in the superficial codes of society, he is paralysed by the impossibility to escape from his incessant

repetitions and meaningless questions (Ibid., pp.150-154).

It is important to indicate why Eliot has created the character of Prufrock. This is why I illustrated an introduction which clarifies this. This introduction explains how Eliot experienced queer theory and straight people. That said, over the course of Eliot’s life, gender roles and sexuality have become increasingly flexible and usable. Eliot reflected those changes in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. In the repressive Victorian era of the nineteenth century, women were confined to the domestic sphere, sexuality was not highly and extensively discussed or publicly explored. However, there was a puritanical atmosphere that dictated most social interactions. Queen Victoria’s death in 1901 helped usher in a new era of excess and forthrightness, now called “the Edwardian Age,” which lasted until 1910. World War I, from 1914 to 1918, further transformed society, as people felt both increasingly alienated from one another and empowered to break social mores. English women began agitating in earnest for the right to vote in 1918, and the flappers of the Jazz Age began smoking and drinking alcohol in public. Women were allowed to attend school, and women who could afford it continued their education at those universities that began accepting women in the early twentieth century. Modernist writers created gay and lesbian characters and re-imagined masculinity and femininity as characteristics people could assume or shrug off rather than as absolute identities dictated by society (North, 1991, p.51).

In Eliot’s literary work, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*’s main theme is love. This theme is also augmented by other universal concepts such as age and issues in psychology. Eliot’s themes in this work, conveyed to the audience through a pronounced character possessing a defined psychological profile, strikingly reminds the reader that love and romance is something that is pursued by all, but not always obtained by all. Especially when, as in the case of Prufrock, reaching the reality of romance seems futile (Hernandez, 2007, p.4).

To speculate that the women who “come and go/Talking of Michelangelo” in the hotel lobby most likely have the artist’s “David” on their minds, an ideal physical image of man, is perhaps all too harsh for Prufrock. After all, Prufrock fears that all the women see him as the “bald spot in the middle of [his] hair,” a pronounced mark of advanced age indeed. “I grow old . . . I grow old . . . /I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled,” only continues to suggest that for Prufrock, advancing age is a handicap, and it plays a most insurmountable barrier to Prufrock, who is all too aware of his physical state (Ibid., p.6).

While age is indeed a barrier for may perhaps be seen by him a barrier to love, it is certainly one that is self-conceived. Prufrock’s inability to find love is surely

self-derived. While his mental and emotional love and emotions may yearn for romance, he never seems to actually chase for it. He ultimately descends the stair and does not even attempt to mingle with the women in the “room where women come and go” for fear of that the women may think of that nagging “bald spot in the middle of [his] hair.” Even in Prufrock’s dreams he finds himself falling short of realizing romance and/or love (Ibid., pp.8-9).

Prufrock wonders:

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. (Ibid., p.8)

Will covering his bald spot with his back-parted hair allow Prufrock to “Eat [the] peach” of a climactic event of physical romance? These themes of love versus age wrestle each other on the sandy ground of the beach, while the psychological angle comes into focus yet again, for Prufrock does not believe the mermaids that reside just off the shore will “sing to [him].” How is it that those beautiful sea sirens who “sing[s] each to each” will not sing to Prufrock. This is once again where Eliot puts front and center the theme on the human psychology and how complex it is. Prufrock’s inability to experience and/or to love, demonstrates just how incapable one can make himself when unequipped with a healthy and rational mind state (Ibid., p.7).

Eliot’s interest in the male-female relationship was evident in the poem. However, Eliot’s relationship with gender is one of confusion, fascination and often disconcerting dissection, particularly with Prufrock in “*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*”. The present researcher believes that J. Alfred Prufrock is a transgender character, one who transgresses rigid, socially-constructed concepts of sex and gender identity. To fully connect with this character

requires that we go beyond the limited homo/hetero binary...that is, the ways in which that taboo, in conjunction with his sense of masculine affiliation and his troubled relation to femininity, generated the most remarkable poetry of the early twentieth century. (quoted in Laithy, p.26)

I feel that any transgender reader can find a kindred spirit in Prufrock’s anxious, dithering sweetness (Stevens, 2012, p.3).

For decades it was thought by critics and scholars that T.S. Eliot had a very rigid and often misogynistic treatment of gender and sexuality in his poems, but rather than at all rigid I feel that Eliot can be read as “queering” the experiences of his characters, specifically Prufrock, before second-wave feminism or Queer theory ever existed. A brief synopsis of queer theory: “To “queer” becomes an act by which stable boundaries of sexual identity are transgressed, reversed, mimicked, or otherwise critiqued. “Queering” can be enacted on behalf

of all non-normative sexualities and identities as well, all that is considered by the dominant paradigms of culture to be alien, strange, unfamiliar, transgressive, odd—in short, queer” (Ibid., p.11). Very few of Eliot’s male characters can be said to be stereotypically masculine. This is one of Eliot’s most well-known characters and showcases his ability to “play with gender in order to highlight its social construction,” or “genderfuck” (Ibid., p.12). Ze pushes the boundaries of gender to a degree none of Eliot’s other characters quite attain. In other words, the researcher have asserted that the females around Prufrock, including the “arms that are bracelet, white and bare”, the “one,” and the mermaids catch her attention not because Ze desires them sexually, but because Ze, to a certain degree, desires their sexuality (Ibid., pp.11-12).

Ze admires, even covets the Female and experiences something we call “gender dysphoria,” which can be defined as “unhappiness or discomfort about one’s gender role assigned by society based on one’s physical sex” (Ibid., p.12). At no point within this work can Prufrock be said to feel at all comfortable with her assigned maleness. A close reading can shore up any argument to this effect (Ibid.).

The imagery of the early days of love, little infinite moments we have all experienced, is really one of the most touching parts of the poem, but it is short-lived. If the “one” accepts what Ze says, do the benefits, the cozy moments of togetherness, outweigh the risks? I would be inclined to say so, but Prufrock, returning immediately to the idea of the “one” rejecting her. Ze is defeated before Ze even begins (Ibid., p.13).

And finally, we reach the conclusion of the poem, where Prufrock dreams of mermaids and the sea. Eliot conjures a hauntingly beautiful image here, another excellent example of phanopoeia. When I read or speak this passage I see a collage of dark waters with sea-women deftly navigating, or congregating together in the dim places of the deep, safe in their femininity, “wreathed in seaweed red and brown” and the sea itself (quoted in Eliot, 2001, p.7). Prufrock does not feel that they will sing to her, and to reiterate a point I’ve made in this class before: Sirens, who are often depicted as mermaid-esque beings, lure only male sailors and I think that hints once again towards her gender confusion. “...human voices wake us, and we drown,” concludes the poem (quoted in Eliot, p.7). Prufrock is dragged out of her reverie, and returns to a reality in which Ze is drowning in feelings of anxiety, inadequacy and alienation (Stevens, 2012, p.13). As Suzanne Churchill said in “Outing T.S. Eliot”:

My purpose here is not to pin down Eliot’s sexual orientation” and the same is true for me. It is considered extremely rude in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community to attempt to use your own perspective to try to guess someone’s sexual identity, and that is not my aim. I only wish to make the point that Prufrock, to transgender readers, can be found to be very relateable. Eliot himself resisted queer readings of his work, but after reading “Prufrock” through the lens of the transgender, I find this perspective hard to ignore. (Ibid., p.13)

And then he adds:

Whether Eliot intended it or not, the themes of misplacement in one's own place, the scorn of peers, the fear of love and the disbelief that one deserves to be loved, are themes to which any transgender person can strongly relate. The plight of Prufrock, the paralyzing fear that inhibits one from truly living, and which is the aim of the homo- and trans-phobic "bully" is a struggle that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth endure today. Prufrock can be, no matter Eliot's intention, a vivid transgender literary protagonist (Ibid.).

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## CONCLUSION

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After we have finished showing different readings and interpretation of Eliot's *The Love Song*, it is important to show the following conclusions that we came with. These conclusions have been derived from our discussion of issues related to love, sex and religion. Right after these conclusions, we will recommend some of the remarks for this study.

Some conclusions, we should add, apply to Eliot's *The Love Song* whereas others only apply to their poem. Most of Eliot's poetry is full of indications, clear and obscure, about religion and religious symbols. These were all taken from different religions such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, and Paganism. Most of this poem has didactic sense: Eliot tries to teach and instruct as he writes poetry.

There are some indirect references to our religion, Islam. readers especially those who belong to our Islamic culture may feel the reference to the holy Koran. This story refers to quranic miracles in which prophets were equipped with. The reference to the mountains and rocks is significant. Eliot gives many examples in which he shows how love has been abused and been moved according to people's desires and emotions, rather than their feelings. He offers us an image of the many ways in which sex is abused or misused and points out that these unsacred representations and images of sex are indicative of *The Love Song*.

This once again emphasizes Eliot's notion that we often fail to see the difference between the physical and emotional aspects of sex and/or love. Eliot shows a harsh criticism for the period in which the poem is written. Eliot censures the period and its people because they celebrated sex for its physical needs rather than its moral and spiritual aspects of it.

Notably, Eliot is very discouraged about the society he has described as a waste land, but he does offer hope and a means of recovery. Eliot uses a dramatic structure in both poems, thus standing for the conflicts that exist in life. As for Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, readers can think of J. Alfred Prufrock as the prototype of human man. In other words, it is an examination of the tortured psyche of the prototypical modern man- overeducated, eloquent, neurotic, and emotionally stilted.

Or we can see him according to Mitchell as the representative man of early modernism. Here, we can tell that the image of Prufrock is exactly like the image of the eastern man as being always: shy, cultivated, oversensitive, sexually retarded, ruminative, isolated, self-aware to the point of solipsism.

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