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THE FEMININE IMAGE IN T. S. ELIOT'S "THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK" AND "PORTRAIT OF A LADY"

A Paper

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Dedication

To my family

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Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds, and prayers and peace be upon the Seal of the Prophets and Messengers. At such moments, the firefly stops before writing the letters to collect them in words that scatter the letters. In vain, he tries to put them together, many lines that pass in the imagination. In the end, we have nothing left but memories and pictures that bring us together with comrades. On our side, it is our duty to thank them as we took our first steps in the midst of life, and we extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to everyone who lit a candle in the paths of our knowledge and to those who stood on the pulpits and gave from the outcome of an idea to light our path to our honorable professors. Well, he has all our appreciation and respect.

ABSTRACT

Modernist poetry is a mode of writing that is characterized by two main features. The first is technical innovation in the writing through the extensive use of free verse. The second is a move away from the Romantic idea of an unproblematic poetic 'self' directly addressing an equally unproblematic ideal reader or audience.

Modernist poetry in English is generally considered to have emerged in the early years of the 20th century with the appearance of the Imagist poets. In common with many other modernists, these poets were writing in reaction to what they saw as the excesses of Victorian poetry, with its emphasis on traditional formalism and overly flowery poetic diction. In many respects, their criticism of contemporary poetry echoes what William Wordsworth wrote in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* to instigate the Romantic movement in British poetry over a century earlier. In general, the modernists saw themselves as looking back to the best practices of poets in earlier periods and other cultures.

This paper tackles the modernity of T. S. Eliot's poetry. It is divided into four chapters. Chapter One is an introduction to the age as well as the poet's background. Chapter Two and Chapter Three deal with 2 selected poems for the poet. The paper is finalized with a conclusion in Chapter Four.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Eliot, Life and Works

(Elliott, 2007:3) said that T. S. Eliot was born on September 23, 1888, in ST. LOUIS, Missouri, the seventh and last child of Henry Ware Eliot and Charlotte Champe Stearns. Although the Eliots were a reasonably prosperous family who could trace their original New England roots back to the earliest days of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the St. Louis of the time still had some of the rough-and-tumble spirit of a frontier town and river city from its own original heyday as the fabled Gateway to the West. Growing up in that vibrantly active community along the fabled Mississippi River would remain an experience that would shape Eliot's poetry and acute sense of place well into his advancing years. "The Dry Salvages," composed during the height of World War II in the summer of 1940, begins with its famous image of a river that is unmistakably the Mississippi, a "strong brown god."

In 1910, he joined to Harvard University; he added many poems to Harvard. After taking the Master Degree, he left the United States. A year later, he returned to Harvard to acquire the Doctorate in Philosophy. He finally settled in England in 1914. In England, he worked as a teacher, and then he worked in a bank. In London, Eliot fell under the influence of

Ezra Pound. Ezra Pound discovered Eliot's poetic abilities and helped in publishing Eliot's works in a number of magazines. The publication of his first book *Prufrock and other observations* made Eliot being the leading poet of avant-garde. In 1922, Eliot published his most famous epic *The Waste Land*, (Khider, 2018:10).

According to Rohilla (2015:202), T. S. Eliot is a British as well as an American poet. He can truly be called as The Renaissance Man of 20th Century. He was more schooled than any other literary figure of his time. His studies in Classical literature cannot be matched by any other writer of his time. Though, it was a modern age, yet we find that Eliot is standing class apart from his generation encompassing all the ages- right from Chaucer till Pound and others. He is a perfect example of The Renaissance Man of the 20th Century", bringing to fore the conflict in the psyche of the modern man caused because of his trap in the world of old and the new ideas. His erudition hardly leaves any stage of the literary development that it does not bring under its scanner. And similar to the Renaissance man', he is trapped in the middle of the old and the new worlds- the medieval and the modern. His conditions often land him into a metaphysical state.

Eliot's works in prose include; *The sacred wood* in 1920, *Andrew Marvell* in 1922, *For Lancelot Andrews* in 1928, *Dante* in 1929, *Tradition and experimentation in present-Day literature* in 1929, *Thought after Lambeth* in 1931, *John Dryden* in 1932, *After strange Gods* in 1933, *The use of poetry and the use of criticism* in 1933, *Elizabethan essays* in 1934, *Essays Ancient and modern* in 1936, *The idea of a Christian society* in 1940, *The classics and the man of letters* in 1942, *Notes towards the definition of culture* in 1949, *Poetry and drama* in 1951, *The tree voices of poetry* in 1954, and *Religious drama: medieval and modern* in 1954, (Khider, 2018:11).

Eliot's works in Drama include; *Sweeny Agonistes* in 1932, *The rock* in 1934, *Murder in Cathedral* in 1935, *The family reunion* in 1939, *The cocktail party* in 1950, *The confidential clerk* in 1953, and *The elder states man* in 1958 (Ibid).

(Crawford, 2014:2), said that Eliot sees the roots of religion as ultimately inscrutable. It may be possible to reconstruct an "external order in ritual and creed and in artistic and literary expression," but only approximately, and examination of the elements of that order moves us immediately from unstable "fact" into interpretation. "The actual ritual" is part of "a complex which includes [the] previous stage's interpretations of the ritual of the preceding stage, and so on back indefinitely". Here, I

think, the editors have changed very slightly what Eliot wrote; in manuscript this reads (with no definite article) “previous stages’ interpretations of the ritual,” but the editorial intervention may be seen as clarificatory. Though Eliot’s interest here was in the way “‘fact’ melts into interpretation, and interpretation into metaphysics,” later this sense of ritual, artistic expression, and religious forms being layered one on top of another in a possible order that went “back indefinitely” would be part of the underpinning of *The Waste Land*, and of other poems.

1.2 Modern Poetry

The outbreak of World War I represented a setback for the budding modernist movement for a number of reasons. Firstly, writers like Aldington ended up on active service. Secondly, paper shortages and other factors meant that publication of new work became increasingly difficult. Thirdly, public sentiment in time of war meant that war poets like Wilfred Owen, who wrote formally more conventional verse, became increasingly popular. One poet who served in the war, the visual artist David Jones, would later resist this trend in his long experimental war poem *In Parenthesis*, which was written directly out of his experiences in the trenches but was not published until 1937. The war also tended to undermine the optimism of the Imagists, and this fact was reflected in a number of major poems written in its aftermath. For instance, Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1919) uses loose translations and

transformations of the Latin poet Propertius to ridicule war propaganda and the idea of empire. His *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1921) represents his farewell to Imagism and lyric poetry in general. The writing of these poems coincided with Pound's decision to abandon London permanently. The most famous English-language modernist work arising out of this post-war disillusionment is T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* (1922)

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a
notion into his head :

“Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are
cows? But here there are no cows. Before I built a wall I'd
ask to know

What I was walling in or walling out, And to whom I was like
to give offense .

Something there is that doesn't love a wall ,

That wants it down.” I could say “Elves” to him, But it's not
elves exactly, and

I'd rather

He said it for himself. I see him there Bringing a stone grasped
firmly by the top

In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed. He moves in
darkness as it seems to me ,

Not of woods only and the shade or trees. He will not go
behind his

father's saying, And he likes having thought of it so well He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors".

Eliot was an American poet who had been living in London for some time .

Although never formally associated with the Imagist group , Eliot's work was admired by Pound , who , in 1915 , helped him to publish a poem , The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock , which brought him to prominence . When Eliot completed his original draft of a long poem based on both the disintegration of his personal life and mental stability and of the culture around him , provisionally titled He Do the Police in Different Voices , he gave the manuscript to Pound for comment . After some heavy editing , The Waste Land in the form we now know it was published and Eliot came to be seen as the voice of a generation .

The addition of notes to the published poem served to highlight the use of collage as a literary technique , paralleling similar practice by the cubists and other visual artists . From this point on , modernism in English tended towards a poetry of the fragment that rejected the idea that the poet could present a comfortably coherent view of life .

Paris

Although many of the Imagists were Americans, they were essentially a London- based group. By the end of World War I, they had effectively ceased to exist as a movement and a number of them had more or less stopped writing poetry altogether. By 1920, Pound and Joyce were both living in Paris and participating in the vibrant expatriate writing scene. This scene centered around the salons hosted by Gertrude Stein

and Natalie Barney, both of whom wrote poetry; Stein was to go on to become one of the most formally and linguistically innovative of modernist novelists.⁸

Many modernist poets and writers, including Pound, Joyce, Williams (on a trip to Paris) Mina Loy, Robert MCAlmon, Djuna Barnes, E. E. Cummings, Hart Crane, and Ernest Hemingway attended these salons. Both Stein and Barney were openly lesbian and Barney, in particular, actively encouraged women writers. One of the most active of these women, Mina Loy, was born in Britain, where she studied art, and first moved to Paris in 1902 to continue her studies. She soon became a regular at Stein's salon and exhibited her paintings both in Paris and London. In 1905, she moved to Florence where she mixed with the expatriate community and the Futurists, and had a relationship with their leader Filippo Marinetti. Her first poems, published in 1914, showed her familiarity with the work of other modernists and an advanced sense of formal experimentation .

Her work was greatly admired by both Pound and Williams, amongst others. In a 1917 review of her work, Pound coined the ideas' to describe her poetry. These writers found themselves exposed to a general culture of artistic ferment in their adopted city, particularly in the visual arts and music. Artists like Picasso, Georges Braque and Constantine Brancusi and musicians including Igor Stravinsky and George Antheil were part of their same social and artistic circles, and a high level of cross pollination between these arts and artists urged the poets towards ever greater levels experimentation. The Parisian expatriate community provided an environment in which literary experiment was encouraged and served as a major source of modernist writing in all genres, including poetry. This concentration of activity in one city also helped support a

thriving small press publishing industry, with presses like MCAImon's Contact Editions and William Bird's Three Mountains Press publishing many of the key modernist texts of the period .

CHAPTER TWO

"THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK"

According to (Güven, 2020: 80) T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* carries the characteristics of modernist poetry such as objective correlative, fragmentation, free verse and irregular rhyming. It suggests a direct break with English romantic poets such as Coleridge and Wordsworth. It is unlike the Romantic poets, Eliot attempts to convey the essence of life; and the content represents actual contemporary life rather than an escape from the grinding nature of reality.

'*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*' exemplifies Thorne's definition of Eliot's poetic art clearly. The poem is about a middle-aged man who cannot make a progress in life and dare to approach women due to his timidity. Hence, the title of the poem is ironic since Prufrock never talks about his feelings of love throughout the poem. His indecisiveness is also caused by self-isolation from the society as a modern man. He finds himself in a society which is not different from a hell for him, so Eliot portrays the complexities of the modern world vividly through the inconsistent psychology of Prufrock, (ibid).

A. Abdul (2008: 2) The problem in this poem is that some critics connect it with the emotion of the poet rather than with the persona of the poem. In "*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*", there have been different critical approaches because "it raises so many issues relating to matters such as history and biography". It is true that friends who knew the young Eliot describe him in Prufrockian terms but this poem was

published in the year of Eliot's own first marriage. While it is clear that Prufrock will never marry, Eliot, however, has not clarified this problem. He once said of dramatic monologue as the voice of the poet who has put on the custom and make-up either of some historical character or one out of fiction". He also said "what every poet starts from is his own emotion, and that he thinks of his own voice. This what encourages Cynthia Ozick to say that objective correlative is "suddenly decipherable as no more than a device to shield the poet from the raw shame of confession".

According to (Güven, 2020: 80) 'The Love Song' is more than a retreat from love, however; it is the portrait of a man in Hell, though until his truth is clearly realized, the hell appears to be merely the trivial one of the self-conscious individual in a sterile society. Apart from the content, in the form Eliot uses objective correlative to relate feelings through the use of objects. The poem focuses on the dilemma caused by modern urban civilization and therefore, the purpose of this paper is to show how T.S. Eliot's The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock reflects modernism in terms of its content and structure respectively.

Rahman (2020:n.p) said that 'The love song of j. Alfred Prufrock', the title itself is an irony. It a very hopeless and pathetic song of J. Alfred Prufrock. Prufrock has tried his best to do something but he couldn't to do anything because he is really a modern man. In the modern society, man like Prufrock has no position at all. The hypocrite people play the lead role in the modern society.

Tawfiq (2018: 51) Although the poem is a dramatic monologue with Prufrock as the only speaker, he asks his addressee from the very beginning to share with him his own experience and express his opinion: "Let us go then, you and I". The poem starts abruptly, with an abnormal image of the evening and the sunset as "a patient etherized", but this

image is logical because it emphasizes the abnormality of the poem. It further highlights the remoteness of Prufrock from poetic creativity at this stage, which is emphasized by Prufrock asking his readers to take a tour of "half-deserted streets" with their routine "muttering" of people. Prufrock is now wandering, and he is attracted to "cheap hotels" and "restaurants". Prufrock fosters the idea of living an ordinary life by describing these restaurants, with their "sawdust" and "oyster-shells":

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,

The muttering retreats

Pratap (2014:9) The Main Themes in the poem , Social anxiety , Lack of spirituality /emotional progress , Criticism of Modern Civilization , Longing , Aging , Sexual frustration , Sense of decay, Mortality , Urban life and Anguish , anxiety and Environment.

The Features of Style in the poem Modernist Style, Imagism / Imagery, Precise Description, Concrete images, Presentation of Interior monologue, Symbolism, Illustrations , Allusions , Refrain as a device for maintaining coherence, Carefully constructed but inconsistent metre, end rhymes, (ibid).

CHAPTER THREE

"PORTRAIT OF A LADY"

This poem was written in 1910-11 and was published in the volume entitled *Prufrock and other Observations* 1917. According to Conrad Aiken, a friend of Eliot, the lady of the poem is "our dear deplorable friend, Miss X serving tea so exquisitely among her bric-a-brac". So, the lady's character is taken from real life and she represents the frustrated and the bored woman of the modern age. The theme is the man-woman relationship and its failure. During the earlier period of his career, Eliot was under the influence of Laforgue and other French Symbolists. This poem reveals the Laforguian method- a picture of an intelligent young man with his inner conflicts, fears and uncertainties, dodging an elderly woman trying to exercise her charms on him for an illicit and unequal love-relationship. The poet wishes to satirize his own milieu and urban society through the story of the old woman and the young man. Moreover, there is the problem of communication- between a man and a woman and its uncertainty and failure.

A voice is speaking, but it is addressing the lady of the title apparently, "you," and not the reader, in which case the speaker would have referred to the lady in the third person, "she." With any modernist poem, but especially one by Eliot and particularly at this point in his development, it is best not to imagine that the poet, rather than some invented mask à la Jules Laforgue, is the speaker. (In the case of "Portrait," there is not even good reason to imagine that the speaker is a male.) Surely approaching "Portrait" as if it is not veiled autobiography but a character study with two characters—the speaker as he is revealed through his friendship with and unspoken attitudes toward the lady,

whom the reader meets as well through her quoted conversation—will allow the reader more latitude in coming to terms with the poem's otherwise enigmatic content.

Coming upon this text as if there is a key to it to be found in some information outside the text—the “real” identity of the lady in question, for example, or Eliot's relationship with her (assuming that there was a real lady)—all too often results in false confidence and falser readings. Approaching the text instead as a self-enclosed world, while limiting the information base to the text alone, nevertheless expands the range of defensible readings. What a reader approaching “Portrait” in this manner, having survived the blow to the sensibilities that is struck by the double-edged sword of the contrast between the genteel title and vulgarity of the epigraph, discovers very quickly, then, is that the speaker is engaged in a one-sided conversation, a device that Eliot picked up from Laforgue and would use to great effect in the opening gambit in “A Game of Chess,” part 2 of *In*. In “Portrait,” the words of the lady, enclosed in quotation marks, are apparently being spoken in some context or another; the words of the speaker, on the other hand, are his unspoken reflections on her and her utterances, either at the moment that she is speaking them or later when, in private, they recur to him. Surely there is a hint in the “let us say” that, as much as she may have let the “scene arrange itself,” the speaker, too, is arranging a future scene, or rearranging a past scene, either of which will expose the lady's true nature (which is what a successful portraitist always aims to do). For if one thing is certain, it is that “Portrait” is not a love poem. If anything, the speaker seems to be a bit put out and put off by the lady—her conversation, her tastes, her habits.

They apparently attend social functions together; she speaks of a Chopin concert. But they are otherwise rather like characters in a tale by Henry James, the then-reigning serious American fiction writer, one of whose major works is also entitled “Portrait of a Lady,” although that is an entirely different story from Eliot’s. The personages of Eliot’s “Portrait” are more reminiscent of May Bartram and John Marcher from James’s 1901 short story, “The Beast in the Jungle.” Those two keep company for many years, but the reader is encouraged to imagine that they shared little more than each other’s social company through all their years together, although they may have shared that intimately enough, a secret between themselves. While James gives the reader both sides of the story—as Eliot does, sort of—the tragedy of the James tale is built around Marcher’s being so self-absorbed in his own destiny that he never takes the time to notice that May has become an integral part of it. The tale ends poignantly with Marcher suddenly coming upon the discovery, a year after May’s death, that she had been in love with him all along. In his defense, Eliot’s speaker lacks Marcher’s density and does not appear to be in any danger of becoming sentimental. If anything, Eliot’s speaker seems to know all too well what is going on, and he does not, on balance, like it. The temptation to link the speaker with the poet is always a strong one, of course, and since Eliot was still a young man of 22 at the time of the poem’s composition in March 1911, there is also a strong temptation to imagine that this may be a May–December sort of pairing, a younger man with a much older or at least not quite as callow woman.

That might explain the none-too-thinly veiled eroticism of the epigraph—wishful thinking, or just plain old frustration. Surely there is little doubt that the speaker is dissatisfied with the kinds of activities in which he and the lady engage during their time together and seems to be

wishing, or at least delights in imagining, that they might let their hair down, as it were. Still, the reader should be looking for evidence of this in the text, not making the speaker a stand-in for a youthful Eliot.

As the poem opens, the speaker recounts a day, an afternoon, an evening, perhaps all three, that he and the lady have just recently spent or will shortly spend in each other's company. He recounts the events with a sort of begrudging deference that borders on an insolent and mocking cruelty. If she seems overly polite and cordial, he seems to be reacting to her cautiously familiar formalities with a secret desire that she were less of a stuffed shirt. If, then, she is in a "darkened room" that reminds him of Juliet's tomb, the implication is assuredly not that he is regarding himself as a young swain on a dangerously erotic adventure, but that she is past her prime and conceals time's fabled ravages by keeping the lights low.

As they converse, she seems to be always making elaborate excuses for this or for that, excuses that he, on reflection, resents but that he apparently otherwise suffers gladly as she makes them. And so, as part I ends, he can speak of "a dull tomtom . . . / Absurdly hammering" and of a "Capricious monotone" as he then suggests, rather wryly, and certainly not to the lady's face, that they would do better to go out for cigarettes and beer. It should go without saying that that would not be the kind of activity that any self-respecting lady of the time in which Eliot is writing would be caught doing, no matter who was her escort.

The other two parts of the poem continue in this same vein, and if "Portrait" has a flaw that makes it far less successful an achievement, finally, than the contemporaneous masterpiece "Prufrock," it is that "Portrait" strikes a note but then never much develops or varies it. Once

the parameters of their relationship are defined in the first part of the poem, the lady continues to patter on about her lost youth, his youthfulness, and their friendship. The speaker continues to listen in what must be a respectful silence that she takes for acquiescence but that is actually a colossally petulant boredom that he nevertheless is polite enough to conceal.

With their pity-me honesty, his reflections do take on a tone and style that equal some of the best urban sophisticate poetry that Eliot was at the same time turning into poems such as “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and the “Preludes”: “I mount the stairs . . . / And feel as if I had mounted on my hands and knees.” There are great turns of thought and speech as well: “(But our beginnings never know our ends!)” is a concept that, with only slight modification, will serve Eliot well as one of the themes in one of his greatest poetic achievements, *Four Quartets*. Otherwise, however, the lady’s selfdeception and the speaker’s self-serving deception must become as tiresome for the reader, after a while, as they do for the speaker. Very likely, however, that is the very effect that Eliot wishes to achieve, and the reason why reading the poem as if it were semiautobiographical rather than a fictive construct diminishes both Eliot’s efforts and the poetry’s effectiveness.

Like “Prufrock,” to which “Portrait” is in many ways a companion piece that also has as one of its aims exposing the limits of social interaction in polite society, “Portrait” comments tragically on the dilemmas that human communication, which ought to be a means toward self-revelation and interpersonal fulfillment, can create when the process is turned inward. The lady is talking to hear herself talk; the speaker is talking about her, but not to her. Both are missing the point of what human conversation is all about, which is to talk to each other.

Toward the poem's end, as the lady expresses her belated, perhaps, realization that they will never now be friends, since he is leaving, his language reaches its greatest capacity at expressing the frustrations that their strained relationship has caused for him. He imagines himself "a dancing bear . . . a parrot . . . an ape." He goes to extremes trying to characterize his frustrations, granted. The problem remains that he never speaks them and never has spoken them, not, at least, to her.

CONCLUSION

The paper discussed the effect T. S. Eliot had on Modern Poetry. Modern Poetry developed a great deal in theme and style. Moreover, it was Eliot's poetry that shaped the beginning of the century after the first World War. Thus, it is his poetry which defined what modern poetry had become.

Eliot's is best discussed through his poems, which are included in this paper. Those two poems presented the modern man with all the depression and struggles s/he was facing for different reasons.

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