



The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Other Poems

T.S. Eliot

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Let us go then, you and I, When the evening is spread out against the sky Like a patient etherized upon a table; Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets, The muttering retreats Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Other Poems Details

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From Reader Review The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Other Poems for online ebook

Joseph says

Read as preparation for reading and reviewing *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock: a Modern Reimagining* by Sarah Daltry.

Erika B. (SOS BOOKS) says

"Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach? I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach. I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each. I do not think they will sing to me."

O the ever so lovely and depressing love song of Mr. J. Alfred Prufrock. He is the victim of the modernist generation who wandered around aimlessly searching for meaning in life and finding nothing there. T.S. Eliot coined this generation the wasteland. Maybe I'll eat a peach. Maybe I'll wear flannel trousers. Or be sad and sexually depressed. O the modernists...gotta love 'em!

A man said to the universe:

“Sir, I exist!”

“However,” replied the universe,

“The fact has not created in me

A sense of obligation.”

-Stephen Crane

(_- Jared -_) ? Book Nerd ? says

I re-read this and have indeed gained deeper insight from my first reading in high school.
Raises questions of introspection,
of mortality,
of inhibitions,
of regrets,
of hopes,
of drive,
of happiness,
of love,
of lust,
and so much more.

In a word: Beautiful!

Now, I leave you with the opening stanza:

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

Michael Finocchiaro says

Prufrock is one of my all-time favorite poems and it is included here with other works by Eliot. This is a great and relatively short way to capture the beauty of Eliot's verse.

Dora Sky says

"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."

What is there not to love about this dramatic monologue? The imagery it's breathtaking.

zeynep says

gotta love it when a white male canon poet writes about social anxiety.

Cynda says

My most favorite parts: Motif of cat as night & Image of patient on thhe surgery table & the spider on the wall. This poem makes me go "yew....." and "exactly".

The motif of the cat thrills me because it is so perfect. This cat idea has occurred to others, yet it took all these centuries, millenia, for a writer to get the imge so perfect.

David says

This poem is, I think, Eliot's 'fanfare for the common man'. Prufrock is the ordinary bloke in the street, and his name itself seems deliberately humdrum to set him apart from the great figures of literature: 'No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be,' he exclaims self-deprecatingly after a rather long passage of philosophising. But although he is no hero, Prufrock is as capable of appreciating beauty and having deep

insights into the human condition as any of the exalted ones. He is rather like Leopold Bloom in Ulysses in this respect. Prufrock and the greats are connected by their shared humanity.

The poem, as is usual with Eliot, is saturated with literary allusion, from Donne, Dante, Shakespeare and Marvel to Chaucer, Hesiod and the Bible. A reader has to take these allusions on board to get the most out of his poems, though on the surface they are fairly accessible. You can enjoy Dante's Divine Comedy without knowing all the ins-and-outs of Florentine power politics, but if you do pick them up you'll enjoy it even more and catch nuances of meaning that flesh it out. In Prufrock, you can appreciate the line, 'I should have been a pair of ragged claws scuttling across the floors of silent seas', without knowing that it is an allusion to Hamlet ('for you yourself, sir, should be as old as I am, if like a crab you could go backwards', where Hamlet is simulating madness to the old courtier Polonius). The allusions bring in other flavours and shades of meaning from the works of other writers. Another case in point is:

'And I have known the arms already, known them all –
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)...'

To know that this is a reference to the line, 'a bracelet of bright hair about the bone', in 'The Relique' by John Donne, is to heighten one's appreciation beyond the immediate one and bring out a much fuller awareness, tying it in with other references to death and the passing of time. The epigraph in Italian at the beginning is from Dante's Inferno xxvii 61-6, and the lines are spoken by Count Guido da Montefeltra, where he tells Dante that he will speak openly about what he has seen in Hell because he assumes that he, Dante, cannot return to earth to report what he says. This in turn connects with line 94 of Prufrock: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead, come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all...'. In Luke, Lazarus goes to heaven and asks Abraham if the rich man Dives can be sent back from Hell to tell Lazarus's five brothers what it is like, as a warning to them (Abraham refuses). So there are many crosscurrents and connections in Eliot's poems that bring out a deeper and fuller appreciation of them, though this can be irritating at times.

Eliot himself was fully aware that he was seen in some quarters as being unnecessarily obscure and indeed pretentious, but he did not apologise for it. He defended his own perceived obscurity by reference to Dante's Divine Comedy: 'If you get nothing out of it at first, you probably never will; but if from your first deciphering of it there comes now and then some direct shock of poetic intensity, nothing but laziness can deaden the desire for fuller and fuller knowledge'. And again: 'The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning'.

James says

Review

3 of 5 stars to the poetry of T.S. Eliot, specifically, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Other Poems*.

In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", a man confronts his physical sexuality during an elite social gathering. The man, J. Alfred Prufrock, breathes in his surroundings and then uses them to define his own appearance as the antithesis of what he sees. The man has no self-esteem and therefore constantly dwells on his negative attributes and less-than-perfect features. In the poem, Prufrock recites a long monologue that is characteristic of almost every other human being. T. S. Eliot uses Prufrock as a symbol, for humanity in

general, to show how all persons are doubtful at times of their attractiveness.

Prufrock is a man of uncertain age. (Spender 31) Therefore, he can be portrayed as a teenager, a middle-aged man, or a person of any other age very easily. If one looks at Prufrock through the eyes of a teenager, he can easily be seen as a seventeen-year-old. While Prufrock is “like a patient etherized upon a table” (line 3), teenagers roam the halls at school like puppy dogs with their mouths open, dazed and lost in space. Both are in love with some beautiful woman and wander the paths practically drooling. While Prufrock is busy finding time “for a hundred indecisions, and a hundred visions and revision” (lines 32-33), teenagers are occupied thinking of ways to approach the person they want. Both seem to put facades on to make themselves sound better so that they will get the person they want to get. While Prufrock is worrying “with a bald spot in the middle of his hair - (How they will say his hair is growing thin!)” (lines 41-42), teenagers constantly, in vain, check their own hair in the mirror to see if it is just perfect! There are several similarities between young people like teenagers and Prufrock. However, not only does Prufrock resemble teenagers, but he also resembles middle-aged men who are hitting a mid-life crisis. They worry about their hair balding or becoming gray and whether they are attractive enough. They go out and try to reinvent themselves as different people just as Prufrock does with his revisions, decisions, and visions. Prufrock has characteristics of several different people of all ages. Eliot is showing that all men (women included) have doubts and occasional low self-esteem. Whether you are 17, 37, or 57, you are capable of having no confidence occasionally. This is Eliot’s generalization of all men.

Prufrock’s worries concerning his sexuality and appearance not only show his resemblance to all men, but they also stop him from continuing on with his life as a happy, caring, and normal man. “He is Eliot’s archetype of the great refusal, the man who fears to dare and so misses life... ...Prufrock initiates Eliot’s obsession with the lost opportunity and the missed life.” (Mayer 127) Prufrock is so busy concentrating on his less-than-perfect features and supposed negative attributes that he lets life pass him by. “I grow old... I grow old... I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.” (Line 120-121) Prufrock loses the future by concentrating on the present. His inhibitions about the opposite sex hold him back. “‘Prufrock’ is built around the arid, timid, conventional persona of a man sexual enough to admit desire, but insufficiently sexual to do anything about it.” (Raffel 24) In every person’s life they feel like this occasionally. They love someone, but they hold themselves back because of some fear, etc. Eliot uses Prufrock as a symbol for all men again.

“Prufrock is inhibited, self-conscious, obsessed with image, self-possessed, and afraid... Fear is in the way - the fear to dare, to live honestly, to tell all, to be the Fool. The mermaids will not sing to Prufrock because he will not sing to anyone. His “love song” to himself is a cry of anguish...” (Mayer 128-129) While Prufrock sings to himself, men everywhere are busy talking outlook to the stars, the sky, and the moon about how much they wish they could get the girl they loved or be more handsome, more intelligent, or more loved. Some of these men will cry out in anguish and they will not tell anyone how they feel because of inhibitions. The mermaids (women) therefore will not sing to him if he will not sing to them! All men are afraid to tell a woman how they feel about them often in reality. They will stutter and beat around the bush. Besides the mermaids, there are several other minor characters who can support this theory. Prufrock talks about Prince Hamlet, Lazarus, the Footman, and an attendant lord. He has characteristics of all these men. He attends to others and never pleases himself like the attendant lord. “Hamlet embodies Prufrock’s aspirations to live - that is, to be or not to be”. (Mayer 117) All men have asked themselves that question; Should I do it or shouldn’t I? (Referring to asking someone out) All of these people have traits in common with Prufrock, moreover with every other man. Once again, Prufrock is shown to be a symbol for all men.

In the middle of the poem, Prufrock talks of other men and the effect of the yellow smoke that curled around the windows. “...And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out

of windows.” (lines 71-72) Prufrock obviously identifies with the lonely men (despite their shirt-sleeves), and perhaps sees their leaning out of the windows as symbolic of his own desire for contact with the world. (Spurr 7) Since Prufrock identifies with the lonely men, therefore, that is proof that others have felt this way. Prufrock, like all others often in their lives, back away from pursuing love from a paralyzing fear that results in the ultimate loss of the object he desires. “Prufrock watches his possible moment of greatness flicker because of his anxiety over his looks.” (Spurr 56) All men seem to follow in his footsteps.

If one looks at a few words specifically in the poem, like “let us go then, you and I” (line 1), one can see why Prufrock really is a symbol for all men in general. “The “you” and “I” of the first line present greater difficulties. Critics have commonly interpreted them as referring to two parts of Prufrock, carrying on a conversation with himself.” (Headings 24) Many times Prufrock seems to be having a conversation with someone else, perhaps another man, or even his object of love. However, the poem is really one long monologue. Prufrock is speaking to himself. Men in reality will often do the same when trying to make a decision. They will ask themselves whether they really love the woman, or want to marry her, or want to kiss her, etc. Talking to oneself is a common practice to make a decision.

J. Alfred Prufrock is a man who is in love with a certain woman, but he is somehow held back from approaching her. He feels unworthy of her, he feels unattractive, and for some reason he is sexually inhibited. At one time in their life, whether it be as a teenager, a middle-aged man, or an older person, men have felt like Prufrock. They have doubts, fears, and inhibitions. Prufrock is truly a symbol for all of humanity in general.

About Me

For those new to me or my reviews... here's the scoop: I read A LOT. I write A LOT. And now I blog A LOT. First the book review goes on Goodreads, and then I send it on over to my WordPress blog at <https://thisismytruthnow.com>, where you'll also find TV & Film reviews, the revealing and introspective 365 Daily Challenge and lots of blogging about places I've visited all over the world. And you can find all my social media profiles to get the details on the who/what/when/where and my pictures. Leave a comment and let me know what you think. Vote in the poll and ratings. Thanks for stopping by. *Note:* All written content is my original creation and copyrighted to me, but the graphics and images were linked from other sites and belong to them. Many thanks to their original creators.

Jennifer (aka EM) says

Eliot's own reading

Anthony Hopkins

Christopher Plummer (?)

Stella Dinielli says

“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” is an examination of the tortured ego of the modern

man—overeducated, eloquent, neurotic, pompous and disturbed, who's ironically tortured due to his overwhelming brilliance. The main character, not someone of fame and wealth but rather an unacknowledged poet, sees the world as spiritually exhausted and a wasteland. Humans are incapable of communicating with one another because their psychological state is too fragile and afraid of change. He notices all these things by observing people and nature, and yet is unable to do anything to change any of it because he is “etherized like a patient” by his own fear of rejection, change and indecisiveness. While a part of him would like to shake them up and wake them from their cookie cutter, meaningless lives, another part of him knows to accomplish this change he would have to “disturb the universe” and change is hard. All this realization and character development given to us by T.S. Eliot through Prufrock’s eyes is from simple observation and figurative language. This work is a perfect example of just how T.S. Eliot mastered figurative language.

Claudia says

This is one of my most favourite books. I love T. S. Eliot. His writing, his poem...his rhythm is without equal. I will never again walk around a beach without remembering:

'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.'

It's magical and yet so real. Read it. Again. And again. You will learn something very unique about yourself.

T.S. Eliot rules. 5 stars.

Sarah says

Question: Why oh why do they make children read Prufrock in school? How can a kid, having run in from recess with pink perfect cheeks and years to go before hairs start sprouting out of weird places, have any idea what T.S. Eliot is talking about? How can someone who thinks 21-year-olds are ancient, possibly get *Prufrock*? I remember being asked to read this poem in fourth grade, and it is touching in an odd way to think back on the scene in the classroom - my 40-ish, balding teacher, bent almost double over his desk with his passion for this poem, begging, pleading with us callow, bright-eyed children, to get it - his desk might as well have been the Great Wall of China. We just stared and blinked our big anime eyes and thought he was a crazy old fart. Time didn't touch us yet. Like all kids, we thought it never would, that we had been spared by dint of our superiority. Poor Mr. Bull; he must have gone home, shaved his bunions and wept into his tea.

Years and years later, I took a class at San Francisco City College, which focused on three readings: *Hamlet*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, and *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. I had not re-read *Prufrock* since that 4th grade incident. Growing up in the 60s and 70s, I was inculcated in the theory that if a poem scans, rhymes, tells a cohesive story, or otherwise makes sense, it sucks. Ginsberg, Snyder, Diane DePrima, and anyone who wrote stream-of-consciousness, explosive, expressive id-based barbaric yawps = good; Shakespeare, St. Vincent Millay, Eliot, and essentially anyone whose work appeared in the reviled, rejected, Lackeys-of-the-Imperialist-Bourgeoisie-classical canon = bad.

At 11, I read it and couldn't believe how stupid it was. What the hell was this guy Eliot even talking about? I liked mermaids and peaches, but the rest of the poem might as well have been in a dead language.

At 30, I read it and every line sank into my soul and shook me. I had spent enough time on earth to feel the first stirrings of fear of mortality. I wasn't in my twenties anymore and I thought, this is the best damn poem I have ever read.

Maybe you have to get a bit older before this poem resonates with you - maybe you have to have felt the first stirrings of existential despair and the chill of mortality. Probably you have to have heard the eternal footman hold your coat, and snicker, and in short, be afraid.

There are so many parts of *Prufrock* that I love - that sum up the so-called 'human condition' so perfectly: "Let us go then, you and I, when the evening is spread out against the sky, like a patient etherised upon a table..."

"I have measured out my life in coffee-spoons.."

"Do I dare to eat a peach?"

"I grow old, I grow old..I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled..."

"I should have been a pair of ragged claws, scuttling across the floors of silent seas.."

And finally:

"I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves

Combing the white hair of the waves blown back

When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea

By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown

Till human voices wake us, and we drown."

Hasan Makhzoum says

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons

When I was asked by BBC Culture what would be my favourite line by the great poet T.S. Eliot, this famous expression from his poem **The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock** came up instantly to my mind.

Not for my adoration for espresso (worship would be the appropriate term), but for being intrigued by how a simple line provides multiple figurative meanings..

My illustrated quote on the BBC Culture's page <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/2015...>

The reference to the coffee spoon has many interpretations. Many people mistakenly thinks it is just humorous.

However, this expression denotes that rationality, the carefulness in the way of thinking and the moderation

in taking decisions, in accordance with the essential theme of the text which is despair, leaves little space for ambitions and leads to a mediocre monotone life.

The implied meaning of this expression is close to Nietzsche's (Yes, I'll mention him in every post, sue me) wonderful aphorism **One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star.**

This metaphor indicates boredom and bitterness as through this poem the narrator is evaluating retrospectively his life and is regretting its mediocrity..

The poem, described as a *drama of literary anguish*, highlights the narrator's inertia, his cowardice to approach women, his ineptness and his spiritual flaccidity.

It takes a form of a dramatic interior monologue or a modernist stream of consciousness, which according to J. Harlan and K. McCoy, *"epitomize(s) frustration and impotence of the modern individual" and "represent(s) thwarted desires and modern disillusionment"*.

Consequently, the little quantity a coffee spoon can hold is an allusion to the little his life experiences amount to, how insignificant are the steps the ineffectual and dull "Prufrock" has taken and his frustration over the lost opportunities.

"Prufrock" was incapable to take decisive actions. He has surrendered to the monotone acts and rituals (as same as we use the coffee spoon daily) and he fears to pursue change. He then uses the coffee spoon as a measure unit to assess his life, because he is diligent and meticulous and therefore doesn't dare to drop carelessly the sugar in his tea or coffee.

According to a different interpretation that I have read once, a literal one that tends to separate it from the rest of the poem, a coffee spoon alludes to the social, as we spend most of our time when drinking a coffee or a tea cup in the company of other people, discussing, debating and telling our secrets.. So whenever you are nostalgic or thinking of your life, others would be present in these memories and they are the witnesses of it.

Alejandro Saint-Barthélemy says

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock is a masterpiece, ?????, but, as a whole book of poems, it just functions like a pop album, meaning that there are two very good poems or hits (**Rhapsody on a Windy Night** is also brilliant) and the rest feel like fillers (which **Eliot** knew, for they are clearly jokes).

Let us go instead of *Let's go* (same goes for *do not ask* and maybe other cases) seems like a poetic inaccuracy to me (it would be great to have **Ezra Pound**'s opinion on this [aren't all his corrections of **The Waste Land** fantastic? Pound was as knowledgeable as gifted [he had a poetic 6th sense which **Eliot** would have given an arm for having]], for **Eliot** wanted to sound modern, casual, etc.

If you like **The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock**, **T.S. Eliot** and/or poetry enough, you should know whom this poem comes from: **Jules Laforgue**.

Eliot was close to not overcome the anxiety of his influence, stating that *I was hypnotized by the music of his verse.*

Prufrock, published in 1917, was immediately hailed as a new manner in English literature and belittled as an echo of **Laforgue** and the French symbolists to whom **Eliot** was highly and clearly indebted.

T. S. Eliot said that he traced his beginnings as a poet to two influences, the later Elizabethans and the poems of **Laforgue**. He said that **Laforgue** spoke to his generation more intimately than **Baudelaire** seemed

to do, and he ranked **Laforgue** with **Donne** and **Baudelaire** as *the inventor of an attitude, a system of feeling or of morals*. Some of Eliot's early poems, notably **Portrait of a Lady** and **The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock**, are modeled on **Laforgue**'s "complaints."

Julia says

[Anxiety, worries, and fears rendering you unable to act on your thoughts. Not knowing what to expect from the future besides the foreseeable outcome of thinning hair and growing old. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* portrays these common concerns with eloquence.

There are many lines throughout the piece that I have thought over. The third line states, "Like a patient etherized upon a table". I think that Eliot uses this image as a foreshadowing

Paras2 says

Oh Eliot, how u push me to fall into the chasm of nihilism.... ?

Jennifer says

The first time I heard this poem out loud, all I could say was "Wow." I haven't read much of Eliot's work, and to be honest, most of it goes over my head. However, "Prufrock" connected with me so strongly—the indecision, fear of the future, fear of doing something incredible, falling in love, the meaninglessness of life, the fear of not being worthy of affection, doom in death.... Written so eloquently, with great sadness & emptiness, this gorgeous poem voices the fears of every person doesn't know how to voice. I recommend reading the poem out loud to fully appreciate the sound and rhythm. It's breathtaking.

Henry says

*I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.*

This is undoubtedly the best poem ever written, I feel so lucky I got the chance to study it, or else I am pretty sure I wouldn't have stumbled across it. Or if I had had, I wouldn't have picked it up for fear I might not be able to grasp the meaning behind it. But, amazingly, I did, I felt it in my bones which made it all the more shocking. I've been crying my eyes out for an hour or so, no poem has ever had such an impact on me before. Just like Alfred, I lie to myself on a daily basis, I keep telling myself "there will be time, there will be time", when in fact, I know the opposite is rather the case. Time is unforgiving, and I am a procrastinator, there is so much I'd like to experience, but my crippling fear of life tells me I've had enough, I've seen it all. I shudder at the thought of death, at its unpredictability, at how one day it might creep on me, snickering, and *in short, I am afraid.*

Beth says

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock is the most beautiful poem I have ever read. I'm not a big poetry connoisseur, so feel free to disagree.

I would eat this poem if I could. Or marry it. I would hold the hair of this poem while it puked, if it were the type of poem to drink heavily to the point of wretching, but it's not. This poem is far too good for those sort of shennanigans. (Instead, it partakes of tea and cakes and ices and lingers in dooryards and ponders the beauty and futility of life, which is why I love it so.)

I don't know about the rest of the poems in this book because Prufrock is so brilliant it burned all the rest of the pages of this book with its white-hot awesomeness.
