

T.S. Eliot- Preludes and Prufrock

The notion of some infinitely gentle / Infinitely suffering thing (Preludes)

With a stark modernist tone that disrupts centuries of romantic poetry, T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *Preludes* present the world as it existed—in all of its filth, desire, and motion, its smog, age, and squalor.

Prufrock reads as the elongated whine of a lonely man yearning for comfort and companionship. Likening his aged, domestic setting to hell and rejecting his humanity instead of something more primal, the fictitious J. Alfred Prufrock weaves a 'love song' for the Mermaids of his sea. Demoted to the role of a crab, a bug, a scavenger sentenced to forever watch women swim just above himself, out of reach, Prufrock metamorphoses into the physical manifestations of his loneliness. He is the overwhelming yellow smoke and fog, dense, stale, and inescapable. He is fragile Porcelain, locked away in a cabinet so as not to break. In his unfulfilled longing, Prufrock sings a tragic song of desire and a crippling, hellish fear of rejection.

Like Prufrock, the depths of Eliot's writing slowly reveals itself verse by verse. Setting the scene of a long winter day, his melancholic language paints the scene, emphasizing the wear of the day one descriptor at a time. The day dies, bringing with it its grime, withered scraps, beating showers, and broken blinds. In its place, the day is born with faint, lingering traces of stale beer and newly constructed masks. Throughout the poem, Eliot switches the subject, jumping from 'you' to 'his', at one point placing the reader in the role of a prostitute, waking up after a long night. In playing with the perspective, he uniquely personifies inanimate objects such as the ever-changing street-- sawdust-trampled, visionary, blackened, conscious-- and blurs the borders between 'the self' and the world. We are one, we all share the same environment, and thus we all suffer together.

Both poems have an overarching sense of suffering: the lonely man entrapped in his own hell, the prostitute with yellow-soled feet and dirtied hands, *Prelude's* early morning masqueraders that draw a parallel to Prufrock's preparation to 'meet the faces you meet'. Both poems also create a distinction between the day and night, the many things to fantasize about before the 'taking of a toast and tea' and evening newspapers. The suffering that is a byproduct of abandon is explored, whether standing in vacant lots or pinned and wriggling against a wall. We all suffer and we are all one-- the damned J. Alfred Prufrock, the blackened cognizant street, Eliot himself, and you.

438 Words