European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies
Vol.6, No.5, pp.49-59, July 2018
Published by European Centre for Research Training and Development UK (www.eajournals.org)

THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK: A POEM ABOUT PRUFROCK'S MOVEMENTS TOWARD POETIC MATURITY AND CREATIVITY[i]

Dr. Mutasem Tawfiq Al-Khader

Associate Professor, Al-Quds Open University, P.O. Box (65) Tulkarm, Palestine

ABSTRACT: *This paper represents a new approach to studying T. S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." It is an attempt to explore the poem's theme by establishing connections among its parts, as well as by identifying similarities between Prufrock and the other characters mentioned in the poem. The poem features a lot of familiar social activities, with lines and phrases that are repeated and in which one can see elements of the main ideas of the poem. There is a dialectical relation between poetic creativity and everyday social activities. This study differs from previous attempts to understand it as principally a poem about loneliness and man's modern crisis, or a poem about eroticism, by focusing on finding differences between Prufrock and the other characters in the poem. This fresh interpretation proves that the poem is concerned with Prufrock's movements toward poetic creativity and maturity, with Eliot's desire to be a poet being camouflaged within Prufrock's character. The poem also tackles the problem of the insufficiency of language as a tool of expression. Yet, the end of the poem shows that Prufrock succeeds in crossing the threshold to the sea of imagination and creativity.*

KEYWORDS: Eliot, Imagination, Creativity, Prufrock, Readings, Ordinary

INTRODUCTION

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was completed in August, 1911, and it first appeared in print in 1915. It is important to bear in mind that the poem is a dramatic monologue with a speaker and a silent addressee. The title of the poem and the epigraph are both true reflections of what the poem is about. Eliot chose the word "song" due to it being an archaic version of the word "poem," which can be determined from the etymology of that word as described in any dictionary. This word choice is intended to emphasize the importance of the past to the poet's career. However, it is not directly stated to whom Prufrock is singing, although an analysis of the poem shows that he is singing to his beloved poetic creativity, and one of the aims of the present paper is to prove this. Moreover, it is not easy to identify a thread that unifies the whole poem. Thus, a number of critics accused Eliot of having written a nonsense poem because they failed to spot a connection between its parts. For example, Mays (1994, p. 110) believes it is difficult to understand "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" because its "theme and technique cannot be reconciled in any meaningful way," while Kearns (1987, p. 135) argued that Eliot's poetry is "far beyond the categories of human understanding" and apprehension. Yet, it is vital to recognize that the difficulty of Eliot's poetry is partly caused by what Shusterman (2000, p. 31) referred to as "his early absorption in philosophy," which affected "his development as poet and critic." Moreover, Eliot's use of allusions contributed to the poem's difficulty, and so a number of critics, as early as during the composition of the poem, including Drew (1949, p. 35), considered the allusions to be a way to "take us to worlds of action and expression which are very different."

Print ISSN: ISSN 2053-406X, Online ISSN: ISSN 2053-4078

There are other important readings of the poem. For example, a number of critics have interpreted it as a poem about sexual desire and Prufrock's sexual impotence, including Lobb (2012), who considered it to concern "Prufrock's personal sexuality" and to be an "exploration of sexual loneliness." However, it is difficult to believe this interpretation, since many parts of the poem do not fit with it, for example, how can one connect Hamlet, who seeks to avenge his father's death, with his sexual desires or Polonius, who was killed behind the curtains, with knowing the truth about Hamlet? Indeed, one cannot find any reason to justify Prufrock's telling his addressee about his sexual impotence or unmanly activities. Thus, it is difficult to associate Prufrock with eroticism. Moreover, there is no reason to link male-female relations, as Mein (2012, p. 90) has stated with what is "distressingly undesirable." Other critics believe that the main idea of the poem is loneliness, a state of being in which Prufrock has tried to find a refuge. For example, Boyd (2010) considered "Prufrock as a man destined to a lifetime of loneliness similar to the" lonely men in his poem, although reading the poem in depth shows that different characters' loneliness does not affect them in the negative sense of the word.

The researcher arrived at this new understanding of the poem for two reasons. First, it is important to identify connections among the familiar ordinary activities that constitute the main body of the poem, and second, there are a number of expressions within the poem, such as "To have squeezed the universe into a ball" (l. 92), that impel its readers to search for a reasonable interpretation. It is impossible to understand the meanings of the lines in the poem to be literal, since it is ridiculous to believe that Prufrock might literally squeeze the universe. Hence, a reader should look for a new perspective with which to interpret the poem.

However, by relating the different parts of the poem to each, one can see that the poem is a journey toward poetic creativity, as well as a realization of the poet's true self, which Prufrock achieved in the end. Ironically, the ordinary social activities and details that filled Prufrock's life are, at the same time, the material and substance that constitute the bulk of the poem. There are also within the poem a number of instances of repetition of certain lines, as well as a number of questions that embody the main ideas around which the poem is built. Thus, one of the main roles of readers of this dramatic monologue is to think about the use of repetition and the questions raised and identify the thread that unifies it all. The end of the poem, particularly from line 124 to the end, constitutes another world that is different from the rest of the poem, since it is about a world wherein Prufrock drowned in the sea of imagination with the mermaids, that is, where he succeeded in entering the world of his poetic imagination.

It is important to note that readers' appreciation of the poem varies according to their interpretations of the "overwhelming question" (ll. 10, 93) that is crucial with regard to understanding the whole poem. As for the issue of "What is it" about (l. 11), Prufrock deliberately leaves his readers to discover the ontological and existential "overwhelming question" (l. 10), as if the speaker in the poem challenges the understanding of his addressee. Almost all critics and readers of this poem try to determine what this "overwhelming question" is, while answering this question depends on the individual orientation of interpreting and understanding the poem. For example, Maxwell (1960, p. 59) believed that this question concerns the "subtle use of" a "deliberate disintegration" that "enhances the effect of wandering indecisions" in the poem, while in Xue's (2009) opinion, it is part of the poet's technique "to say that the overwhelming question is only one of these questions which are perplexing modern human beings." This paper aims to prove that the question which Prufrock leaves his addressee to think about through the employment of different images and allusions is actually Prufrock's movement toward poetic maturity, which enables him to be a creative poet. However, Eliot's

Print ISSN: ISSN 2053-406X, Online ISSN: ISSN 2053-4078

allusions to various literary works and characters make understanding the poem challenging, although at the same time, they help in terms of understanding both its message and its profundity. In Mandal's (2013, p. 30) opinion, allusions are one of "the prime aspects of Postmodernism" that Eliot used in his poem as a tactic for stimulating readers to think deeply about the theme of the work.

However, some readers feel that there is a tone of sadness to the poem, which may be a result of what Mays (1994, pp. 110-111) described as the "sad accidents of [Eliot's] own life," which colors his poetry.

In order to simplify understanding the poem, the researcher has divided this paper into a number of sections according to the ideas embodied in a number of lines. The analysis starts with the epigraph, which provides a clue to what the poem is about.

The epigraph

The epigraph offers an idea about the theme of the poem and helps readers to understand it. It is a direct quotation from the Italian poet Dante's *Divine Comedy* (*Inferno*, Canto 27, ll. 58-63). In that poem, Dante achieved the impossible by visiting the Inferno and meeting Guido, and so does Prufrock at the end of his poem when he is drowned in the sea of creativity. Both narrators are explorers of new worlds that are hidden and unknown. Eliot, perhaps, chose this epigraph for a number of reasons. First, to show that the poet's journey toward creativity is painful and difficult; second, to emphasize the universality of literature; and finally, to prove that modern poets are not cut off from the past. In fact, Dante's ability to visit the *Inferno* as a living human being, and then to return to earth from there, was in Guido's opinion impossible because he (Dante, 2006) "thought that" his "reply" was "to someone who would" never "return to earth." This mirrors Prufrock's journey toward the sea of creativity and his return from there.

According to the epigraph, Guido's infamy would cause him to "remain without further movement." In the case of Prufrock, his "infamy" concerns him ceasing his movement toward creativity, but neither Guido nor Prufrock actually stopped. Thus, the word "movement," which is used in the epigraph, reflects Prufrock's movement toward his goal, and it is hence the thread that unifies the whole poem. Moreover, Dante, the creative writer, moves from this world of reality to another world beyond the senses, and the same is true of Prufrock, who moves from his ordinary, social life to the sea of imagination.

The abrupt beginning, aposiopesis, and restlessness

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" (l. 1). The poem starts abruptly, with an abnormal image of the evening and the sunset as "a patient etherized" (l. 3), 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" (l. 4) with their routine "muttering" of people (l. 5). Prufrock is now wandering, and he is attracted to "cheap hotels" and "restaurants" (ll. 6-7). Prufrock fosters the idea of living an ordinary life by describing these restaurants, with their "sawdust" (l. 7) and "oyster-shells" (l. 7):

> Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
> The muttering retreats

Print ISSN: ISSN 2053-406X, Online ISSN: ISSN 2053-4078

Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells. (ll. 4-7)

These streets twist and turn like a "tedious argument" (l. 8) with "insidious intent" (l. 9) which represents an image of confusion and loss. Prufrock questions this situation and asks his readers to take a walk through the parts of an unidentified town where the streets lead readers to "an overwhelming question ..." (l. 10). The aposiopesis in line 10, which is repeated in different places, is used to indirectly ask readers to think in order to fill in these omissions. Each reader has his own construction and interpretation of what Prufrock intends to say is the technique that leads his addressee to his overwhelming question. The same is true of the repetition of the phrase "let us go," which is used to encourage the addressee to participate in Prufrock's experience. One may understand aposiopesis as a sign of the existence of obstacles between Prufrock and his goal. This reading is bolstered by the strange behavior of women who are entering and leaving a room while talking about the Italian Renaissance painter Michelangelo, "In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo" (ll. 13-14), since their repeated action of coming and going shows a kind of restlessness. These two lines are also repeated in lines 35-36.

The image of the fog in nature (ll. 15-22), with a "back" and a "muzzle" that "licked" (ll. 15-17) things and makes "sudden leaps" (l. 20), is compared to a cat, with its soft fur and its practice of rubbing against its owner. This happens in a "soft October night" (l. 21), which means the poem is set during autumn, the season of reaping in England, and this foreshadows the poet's coming maturity and productivity. Moreover, creativity sometimes sneaks in like a cat, arriving all of a sudden.

"There will be time"

This line, "There will be time" (l. 23), is repeated five times throughout the poem to show that poetic maturity takes time to become fully ripe, and this delay in time is to Prufrock's advantage because he is waiting for the ripening of his poetic creativity. This repetition may be intended to echo Eliot's (1919) belief that the age of 25 is the age at which the poet has "the historical sense," which is "nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year." Yet, a number of commentators, such as Scofield (1988, p. 60) think that "There will be time" is an allusion taken from Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress," with its carpe diem theme.

It is significant that Prufrock repeats "There will be time" four times during the fourth stanza (ll. 23-34), perhaps to mirror the four seasons of the year. Prufrock wants to tell his readers that there is a season for sowing seeds, then plants grow, they become ripe, and finally they are reaped, and the poet is no exception to this cycle of growth. It is important for Prufrock to wait, because if he tries to voice his thoughts before he reaches maturity, he will never be successful and his voice will be akin to "dying with a dying fall" (l. 52).

However, one may interpret "There will be time to murder and create" (l. 28) as embodying the endless cycle of both destruction and creation. Prufrock thinks "there will be time" (l. 26) "to murder" one part of his self, perhaps the public, social self, in order to "create" another self, which is his creative self, or his true self. This cycle of life and death brings to mind Shelley's (1882) "Ode to the West Wind," in which the wind is both a destroyer and a preserver.

Print ISSN: ISSN 2053-406X, Online ISSN: ISSN 2053-4078

Readers have noticed that Prufrock refers to individual body parts, such as "the faces that you meet" (l. 27), rather than to people so as to show that these parts are organically combined to form a body. This draws our attention to the notion that what initially appear to be fragments in the poem are in fact organically related.

Prufrock mentions that there is plenty of time for "indecisions," "visions," and "revisions" (ll. 32-33), which are all repeated in line 48. These activities mirror how a poet composes his poems, with repeated revisions and visions leading to his decisions regarding what to choose as the best of his composition. Yet, it is true that a poet can turn what seems to be ordinary events, such as "toast and tea" (l. 34), into the material for creativity. This echoes Eliot's (1919) belief that "those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality."

It is important to note that when "there will be time" is repeated in the fifth stanza (l. 37), it is accompanied by Prufrock's evaluation of himself through asking questions, such as "Do I dare?," because he realizes that the time is still not ripe for him to be a poet. Prufrock does not describe this scene to his addressee precisely, "Time to turn back and descend the stair" (l. 39); instead, he offers his readers the freedom to imagine why he descends the stairs (l. 39), which is usually associated with departure from a place and, in this case, a step forward in his journey toward his goal.

Related to the line "there will be time" is the importance of the literary norms of the poet's time, as well as how he is received by the public. Thus, we can guess from the description of his physical appearance (ll. 40-44) that he is worried about what people will say about his poetry and how they will receive it. Prufrock follows the fashions of his days when choosing his clothes such that his "morning coat" and "necktie" symbolize how the traditions of his time have affected him.

Prufrock's universe and reaching the threshold of creativity

It is illogical to question how Prufrock can "disturb a universe" if the following is taken literally, "Do I dare / Disturb the universe?" (ll. 45-46), although it is logical through his poetic creation. Eliot (1919) seemed assured of this when he wrote that a poet can influence "the whole existing order" of literature. This edifice represents Prufrock's real universe.

Prufrock insists that "there is time" (l. 46), but in his universe everything could change in "a minute." It is clear that Prufrock's creativity is not completely under his control, and so "a minute will reverse" the situation and end his creativity. In other words, the poet continuously changes his poem and revisits it again and again. He changes it in the matter of a "minute," and he "will reverse" (l. 48) what he composed. These ideas enter his mind in anticipation of what will happen when he is finally able to compose.

Now, Prufrock has the necessary experience, since he has "known the evenings, mornings, afternoons" (l. 50). He is waiting for a suitable moment to turn his experience into poetry. The poet feels that his life and existence are nothing and no more than time measured in "coffee spoons" (l. 51) in the absence of his creative abilities. Prufrock questions these abilities, "how should I presume?" (l. 51), because the voices of creativity within him are "dying with a dying fall" (l. 52). It is autumn, but at the same time poetic rhythm starts within the chambers of his mind, as symbolized by the music in a "farther room" (l. 53), and now he is searching for how

Print ISSN: ISSN 2053-406X, Online ISSN: ISSN 2053-4078

best to "presume" (l. 54) and trigger his creativity. This music within him is Prufrock's reminder that he is destined to be a poet as well as a lover of poetry, which echoes the title of the poem.

The restraining of the poet by factors that distract him from crossing the threshold to creativity

The eyes that are considered to be Prufrock's are different because they fix the addressee "in a formulated phrase" (ll. 55-56). They are hence similar to the Mariner's eyes in Coleridge's (1834) famous poem, "The Ancient Mariner," which glitter and mesmerize the wedding guest. Readers should recognize the special powers of the creative person.

This image, "When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall" (l. 58), brings to mind the Christian creed concerning the cross to which Christ was nailed, and at the same time this pinning represents the beginning of salvation. The pain that the poet undergoes is necessary. However, when Prufrock could "spit out" and get rid of what hinders his creativity, such as "all the butt-ends" of his "days and ways" (l. 60), he could share his experience in a new way. "And how should I presume?" (l. 61) is repeated in line 69, which questions Prufrock's courage in relation to starting his mission to create.

Women are used as a double-edged symbol in the poem. First, they are often used as a symbol of productivity, beauty, and what triggers the poet's creativity. Prufrock is an expert in appreciating beauty, and that is why he has "known them all" l. 62). Second, women are used as a symbol of the factors that may distract Prufrock from achieving his goals and make him "digress" (l. 66). The poet puts line 64 between brackets with an exclamation mark, "[But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!]" to emphasize the strength of the factors that distract Prufrock. This is clear when Prufrock and his readers are walking and Prufrock admits that he has been digressing, or wandering away, from his task due to the scent coming from a woman's dress:

> It is perfume from a dress
> That makes me so digress? (65-66)

One of the problems facing Prufrock is how to connect with the world of creativity despite the distractions that surround him. Another factor that hinders Prufrock's creativity is the question of how to begin talking, "And how should I begin?" (l. 69). The repetition of "I" shows that his problem is within him, and the idea of the poet's individuality is emphasized through these ordinary scenes:

> Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
> And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
> Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?… (ll. 70-72)

The dots at the end of line 72, as mentioned above, urge readers to think about these scenes and attempt to fill in the spaces with the appropriate bits of information.

Self-evaluation and a step forward toward creativity and poetic maturity

The following two lines:

> I should have been a pair of ragged claws
> Scuttling across the floors of silent seas (ll.73-74)

Print ISSN: ISSN 2053-406X, Online ISSN: ISSN 2053-4078

represent an accurate self-evaluation that Prufrock offers with regard to his present abilities, which shows that he is similar to a crab that seeks to reach a goal. Prufrock compares his movements to those of a crab traveling from the sea-shore to what seems to be a silent sea, although Prufrock's sea is still because he is unable to reach the sea of creativity. Thus, he requires extra effort to complete his mission.

Both Prufrock and his addressee are comfortably "Stretched on the floor" (l. 78), which shows that relations between the pair are intimate. They are similar to "the evening" that "sleeps so peacefully" (l. 75), which gives the impression that Prufrock, the poet, is in a peaceful state that exists prior to poetic turmoil.

Prufrock questions his ability and whether he has "the strength to force the moment to its crisis?" (l. 80) after living his ordinary life, as represented by drinking "tea" and eating "cakes and ices" (l. 79). This shows that he tries to depart from this level of existence to a higher level by elevating "the moment to its crisis" (l. 80). It is worth noting that Prufrock mentions "tea" in line 34 without tasting it, while in line 79 he tastes it, which indicates a step forward toward his goal.

Prufrock "fasted, wept and prayed" (l. 81) like a hermit or a mystic in order to give himself the necessary spirituality to kick-start his poetic imagination. Although Prufrock admits that he is not a "prophet" like John the Baptist, both Prufrock's and John the Baptist's heads were "brought in upon a platter" (l. 82) because they are the same in terms of being illuminated. The former from within and the latter from God. Prufrock is being ironical when he says, "here's no great matter" (l. 83), since the opposite is true. Prufrock is also similar to John the Baptist, who sticks to his principles in front of a powerful king when refusing to accept Herod's marriage to Herodias, since Prufrock is dedicated to his mission as a lover of poetry and is heading toward his goals.

Now, Prufrock is hopeful and full of expectations because his poetic imagination is expected to increase and therein lies his greatness, "I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker" (l. 84). He feels that current circumstances are very helpful, as represented by "the eternal Footman" (l. 85), who helped his master by holding his coat as he got in a carriage or entered a house. Prufrock "was afraid" (l. 86) because both life, which for him is his poetic creation, and death, which is its cessation, are mingled, and it is possible that the latter situation may win.

Prufrock is about to have the opportunity "To have squeezed the universe into a ball" (l. 92) and "To roll it toward some overwhelming question" (l. 93). Both lines are related, since through this process of squeezing the universe into a ball, he can roll it toward the overwhelming question. This discovery of the relation between the two issues may stem from ordinary activities, such as what comes after drinking "the cups" and "the tea." (l. 88). Things will be "bitten off" "with a smile" (l. 91), which symbolizes Prufrock's ability to assimilate what is around him in order to form something new. "To have squeezed the universe into a ball" (l. 92) is miraculous, as is the poet's mission.

Related to the proximity of Prufrock's revival as a poet is the relation between Lazarus and Prufrock:

> To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
> Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all" (ll. 94-95).

Print ISSN: ISSN 2053-406X, Online ISSN: ISSN 2053-4078

It is logical for Prufrock to compare himself to Lazarus, who returned to life from death, because the poet's resurrection is his creation. Prufrock's mission is to convey his experience of creation to his readers, and this reflects the epigraph in which Dante, the poet, returned from the underworld to tell people in verse what had happened to him. Prufrock wants to have a new life as Lazarus. When the moment of creation comes, Prufrock will astonish his readers with his freshness and innovative images, as was the case with Lazarus's resurrection.

Differences between the poet's intentions and his production, as well as the problem of the insufficiency of language as an instrument of communication

Prufrock is now near to his beloved, "settling a pillow by her head" (l. 96), that is, he comes closer to composing, but his intention is still not clear to him. Thus, he says, "That is not what I meant at all. / That is not it, at all" (ll. 97-98). However, Prufrock wonders and questions the sufficiency of the sunset and other ordinary activities, such as "teacups," to convey what he intends to say and express fully what is within him. Prufrock finds it "impossible" (ll. 104) for the poet to do so. He ends this stanza with an exclamation mark, "It is impossible to say just what I mean!" (l. 104), in order to express the strangeness of the fact that the poet's intentions are different from how his creation turned out. Prufrock repeats the same idea in lines 109-110, and this repetition emphasizes the shortcomings and insufficiency of language. Indeed, language falls short of the poet's needs. Thus, Prufrock questions his description, "And this, and so much more?" (ll. 101-103), as part of his technique to draw a parallel between the limitations of the places he has mentioned and limitations in terms of self-expression forced on him by a language that is limited in both scope and capacity.

The door to creativity is about to open

One can accept the traditional association of the "magic lantern" (l. 105) with poetic imagination. But whether Prufrock is "settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl," he is "turning toward the window" (l. 108) and opening it on the sea of poetic creativity. This brings to mind Keats's (1884) "Charm’d magic casements, opening on the foam" (l. 69).

Prufrock's existential problem is about to be solved, as was that of Hamlet when he fulfilled his desire by avenging his father's death. From line 111 to 119, Prufrock is being ironic, as indicated by the use of an exclamation mark after "No!" (111). He is, in fact, like Hamlet in terms of his depth due to his "overwhelming question," which recapitulates his existence. The "Fool" is a character from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, but his sayings are full of wisdom. The same is true of Prufrock, who seems to be illogical, although what he says is actually coherent. By the same token, Prufrock is similar to Polonius because he wants to gain knowledge, as Polonius did, despite the fact that he may suffer. Polonius, the "attendant lord" (l. 112) to the king in *Hamlet*, lost his life when he hid behind the curtain to listen to the dialogue between Hamlet and his mother. Hamlet thinks that he is the king, and so he stabs him and kills him. Thus, the reader's intelligence is required to detect the similarity between Prufrock and Shakespeare's characters, and hence Brimer's (1992, pp. 1-2) claim that Eliot's "uses of Shakespeare are often overt" is inaccurate.

Prufrock offers his readers the chance to meditate when he says twice with dots, "I grow old … I grow old … " (l. 120), although he is not old. This may show that he has reached the maturity necessary to be creative.

Print ISSN: ISSN 2053-406X, Online ISSN: ISSN 2053-4078

Prufrock questions the routine activities of his daily life in order to highlight his individuality as contrasting with his poetic side, which is different, "Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?" (l. 122). Every activity in his life, even if it seems to be insignificant, such as wearing "white flannel trousers," leads him to "walk upon the beach" (l. 123) of imagination that he finally reaches at the end.

Prufrock reaches his destination, the sea of poetic imagination

The following lines conclude the poem when Prufrock reaches his destination, namely the sea of poetic imagination and creativity:

> 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. (ll. 124-131)

These lines are concerned with the revival of Prufrock's imagination and poetic creativity when he drowns in the sea of poetic imagination and is thus able to hear the mermaids singing. It is a poetic trance that is just like a dream. Prufrock starts to see, hear, and understand a new language. However, the poet is always anxious about this seemingly golden moment of imagination, so Prufrock tries to show that poetic imagination is not a kind of self-confident activity, which is why he says, "I do not think that they will sing to me" (l. 125). He is afraid because creativity is not completely within the poet's control.

Prufrock starts to gain special powers that allow him to see the mermaids in such a beautiful scene (ll. 126-27). Prufrock's creativity continues, and he can see the beauty of the sea and what is within. The wind, which is traditionally used as a symbol of creativity, blows: "When the wind blows the water white and black" (l. 128). The water of the sea of poetry starts to show its beauty through the beautiful image of the mermaids, who are "riding seaward on the waves" and "Combing the white hair of the waves blown back" (ll. 126-27).

Moreover, Prufrock starts to explore the "chambers of the sea" (122), which are really the chambers of creativity. Prufrock brings his readers into his world of imagination, and so both the speaker and the addressee cross the threshold from the slumbers of ordinary, social life and drown in the sea of creativity and poetic imagination. In the end, both Prufrock and his readers know the "overwhelming question," that is, the experience of poetic creativity, which Prufrock tries to ask, although we only know it when Prufrock drowns and so finds his true self, and so do his readers. This experience is fulfilled by composing the poem. Ironically, his drowning actually marks his revival and the start of a new life. Some "human voices wake" (l. 131) to return to their normal life and activities after experiencing drowning in the sea of imagination, which enables the fountains of poetry to spring from within. Readers feel that in the sea of imagination, there is a mutual understanding between Prufrock and his addressee. Prufrock finds his real self and consequently, finds hope. These lines conclude the whole poem because Prufrock arrives at his destination, that is, poetic creativity, and the overwhelming question

Print ISSN: ISSN 2053-406X, Online ISSN: ISSN 2053-4078

becomes known. However, Prufrock's reader could not understand him until he was immersed with Prufrock at the bottom of the sea of imagination. Peterson (2011, pp. 20-35) rightly argued that Eliot built many of his longer poems around sonnet structures with a conclusion at the end.

CONCLUSION

The poem represents Prufrock's journey toward his sea of poetic creativity, where his real self as a poet is revealed and realized. Prufrock's movement toward his goal is the thread that unifies all the parts of the poem, which initially seems to be a poem made of fragments. Readers can detect that Prufrock goes through several stages until he reaches a climax when he drowns in the sea of creativity with the mermaids and lives his life as a creative poet. Prufrock proposes asking "an overwhelming question," although he never tells us what it is and what it means. Yet, when one studies the poem thoroughly, he can understand that Prufrock's intended question is actually no more than the discovery of himself as a poet.

REFERENCES

Brimer, Alan. (1992) "Shakespeare in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot." *Shakespeare in South Africa*, Journal of the Shakespeare of South Africa, Vol. 2, pp. 1-12.

Boyd, Joshua T. (2010) *The Impulse toward Beauty in Prufrock*, the Waste Land, and Four Quartets: T. S. Eliot's Aesthetic Response to the Spiritual Collapse of His Era." *Yeats Eliot Review*, 27(1-2), Murphy Newsletter Services, page number: 23+. Available online at https://www.questia.com/read/1G1-268650709/the-impulse-toward-beauty-in-prufrock-the-waste

Coleridge, S. T. (1834) The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. Available free online at https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43997/the-rime-of-the-ancient-mariner-text-of-1834

Dante, A. (2006) The Divine Comedy, Inferno, Canto 27, ll. 58-63 Available free online at http://www.bartleby.com/20/127.html

Drew, E. (1949) T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry, New York, Charles Schribner's Sons.

Eliot, T. S. (1917) Prufrock and Other Observations. London, The Egoist, pp. 9-16. Available free online at https://www.kennedaleisd.net/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=71&dataid=437&FileName=Prufrock.pdf

Eliot, T. S. (1919) *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. Available free online at http://people.unica.it/fiorenzoiuliano/files/2017/05/tradition-and-the-individual-talent.pdf

Kearns, C. M. (1987) T. S. Eliot and Indie Traditions. Cambridge: CUP.

Keats, J. (1884) The Poetical Works of John Keats. Available online at http://www.bartleby.com/126/40.html

Lobb, E. (2012) *Ellipsis and Aposiopesis in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Connotations: a Journal for Critical Debate, 22(2), page number, 167+.

Available online at https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1P3-3080228301/ellipsis-and-aposiopesis-in-the-love-song-of-j-alfred

Mandal, A. & Modak, A. (2013) *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock: A Postmodern Poem with a Postmodern Hero*, The Criterion: An International Journal in English, Durgapur,

Print ISSN: ISSN 2053-406X, Online ISSN: ISSN 2053-4078

National Institute of Technology. P. 3. Available free online athttp://www.the-criterion.com/V4/n1/Annesha.pdf
Maxwell, D. E. S. (1960) The Poetry of T. S. Eliot. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 59. Available online at https://www.questia.com/read/10443673/the-poetry-of-t-s-eliot
Mays, J. C. C. (1994) *Early Poems: From 'Prufrock' to Gerontion*, The Cambridge Companion to T. S.
Eliot. (Ed. A. David Moody). Cambridge: CUP, pp. 108-20.
Mein, G. (2012) Modernism, Memory and Desire: T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 90.
Peterson, R. (2011) *The Women Come and Go': Sonnet Cycles in T. S. Eliot and E. E. Cummings*, The Journal of the E. E. Cummings Society, 18 20-35.
Scofield, M. (1988) T. S. Eliot: The Poems, Cambridge, CUP, p. 60.
Shelley, P. B. (1820) *Ode to the West Wind*, University of Toronto Libraries.Available free online at https://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poems/ode-west-wind
Shusterman, R. (2000) Eliot as Philosopher. (Ed. David Moddy) The Cambridge Companion To T S.
Eliot, Chapter 3, Shanghai, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, p. 31.
Xue, H. (2009) On *An Overwhelming Question* in the Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, Canadian Social Science, 5(2), page number, 79+. Available online at
https://www.questia.com/read/1P3-1758910721/on-an-overwhelming-question-in-the-love-song-of

[i] Hereafter, I use line numbers in parentheses to refer to quotations from T. S. Eliot (1917) Prufrock and Other Observations, London, The Egoist, pp. 9-16.
Available free online at
https://www.kennedaleisd.net/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=71&dataid=437&FileName=Prufrock.pdf

Print ISSN: ISSN 2053-406X, Online ISSN: ISSN 2053-4078