



Comment on *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* With Reference to T.E.Hulme's Romanticism and Classicism

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at reading *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* with respect to T.E.Hulme's argument in Romanticism and Classicism. The researchers try to apply T.E.Hulme's notion of Romanticism and Classicism on dramas and poems. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* poem will be examined and illustrated from two differing but independent classical and romantic perspective based on Hulme's definitions. It shows that the poem contain characteristics of both classical and romantic art forms. The effect of Hulme's notion can be seen particularly clearly in the works of T.S.Eliot and other poets of the 1930's. T.E.Hulme's insistence on order and exactness sowed the seed of 'Classical revival', to which Eliot contribute a great deal in his poems.

KEYWORDS

Romanticism, Classicism, Classical revival

Thomas Stearns Eliot is perhaps the most well-known of the modern critics, playwright, essayist, publisher, though he wrote verse plays also he is one of the major poet of the Modern age. Eliot's poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* published in that journal in 1915 which is seen as a masterpiece of the modernist movement. There are some other well-known poems in English language, including *The West Land* (1922), *The Hollow Men* (1925), *Ash Wednesday* (1930), and *Four Quartets* (1945). He is also known for his seven plays, He was awarded the Noble Prize in literature in 1948, for his outstanding poetry.

T.S. Eliot originally entitled this poem *Prufrock Among the Women*. He changed the title to *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* before publishing the poem in *Poetry* magazine in 1915. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* was published in the 1917 one of the finest poems of the twentieth century. This poem is indeed an innovation both technically and thematically. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* form is a modernistic poem in the form of a dramatic monologue. The whole poetry is a study of suffering and exploring the self. It gives the real picture of urban society.

As Eliot, Hulme is also gave inevitable insight in the field of poetry and criticism in the modern era. Thomas Earnest Hulme was early proponent of imagism. He read French poetry and philosophy and was particularly influenced by the philosopher Henri Bergson. He was dissatisfied with the state of English poetry; Hulme puts arousing argument proposing a new direction for poetry in his essay *Romanticism and Classicism*, the essay is logical, detailed and sometimes funny as he executed with Romanticism and looks forward to a Classical revival.

He represents five or six kinds of antithesis to interpret 'Classical' and 'Romantic'. Hulme reveals the catastrophic flaws of romanticism on society. He compares the tendency of romanticism in man is like a 'well'. A reservoir full of possibilities, however, he talks about classicism to show the contrast against romanticism. Classicist follows the rules and regulation. He compares classicist with the 'bucket' which regard him as a very finite and fixed.

Hulme is weary of the politics and philosophy of romanticism. He next defines poetry again in contrast to romanticism. Romanticism offers the power of drug on the individual so that one can conceptualize the beauty in the infinite way rather than in reality. For Hulme this poetic revival will attempt to find beauty in reality. Thus, the quality of the poem is determined by the energy that the poet had in recreating an image

from reality. That's why fancy is the more important function of human creativity in the classical revival.

Begins with the evaluating *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, departing from the romantic tradition though it has some effect of romanticism and as it is representing the modern reality so it has the characteristics of classicism. The poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is not love song as the title describes. It is not a spontaneous outburst of feeling of the lover for beloved. The title itself suggests irony of the poem. Its title saying something but the whole poem has different meaning. Generally Romantic poetry dealt with all this glamour and glory. Love was the refuge from stress and storm of life. They wrote from their love affairs and those of their characters. Rather it is recoil from love. It is the analysis of the mind of the lover who is unable to take decision about making a proposal to lady he loves. The lover is entirely 'unheroic', a bundle of hesitations and indecisions, he have not any courage to approach a lady love. Not to mention any love making or seduction that is obviously beyond him. So he is anti-romantic hero. Even he is not portrayed like traditional hero. That's why he speaks:

"And time yet for a hundred indecisions And for a hundred visions and revisions" (line 30-31)

"To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"

(*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* line 38)

He is too conscious of his thin arms and legs, the bald spot in the middle of his hair, his growing old. He compares his life with coffee spoons. He represents the futility and anarchy of the contemporary civilization. Hulme, states that:

"In the classic it is always the light of ordinary day, never the light that never was on land or sea. It is always perfectly human and never exaggerated: man is always man and never god." (Lodge, David., 1972:99)

So the poem describes the classical traits of the main character who is ordinary man rather than God.

Romantic poetry was subjective. Here, this poem is not subjective but objective *Prufrock* is not Eliot. He is the protagonist of the poem not Eliot himself. Poet wrote his own feelings and thoughts. He is only describing what happens in the minds of *Prufrock* with the use of stream of consciousness technique. The settings are in the streets of London or the city slums. The

ugliness of the factory surroundings and pollution and loneliness of city life, in spite of its swelling crowd and exclusive parties, are represented in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock. The restaurants smelling of oil and dust and rotten cabbages filled with sawdust, are found in the poem. Prufrock states that

"Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets, The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells"

(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock 4-7)

Romantic poetry describes the illusive world. As T.S.Eliot is anti-romantic he describes the sad realities of life into some imaginary word. He shows the horrors and frustration of urban life. Romantic poetry had its own diction which is highly imaginative and evocating. Hulme believes that images in poetry are not used merely for decoration but is the very essence of intuitive language. However Eliot uses the colloquial idiom, conventional images and symbols. Even the words are taken from the everyday conversation, for example the very first line of the poem:

"Let us go then, you and I "

(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock 1)

shows how the poet sticks to reality in the matter of diction. Prosaic words are found in a great abundance as for example 'Half deserted street', 'chimneys', 'coffee-spoons', 'smoked cigarettes', and 'men in a shirt sleeves'

Moreover romantic poets used conventional images and symbols. They drew largely on nature and past for their images. However, Eliot draws his image in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock from the immediate scene, from the dirty environments of streets and slums. The evening is compared to patient on the operation table, 'the unending streets' are compared to 'tedious arguments'. Similarly, he also uses the metaphysical conceit which consists of comparison between remote and farfetched objects, is a kind of personal image.

The first line of the poem is an invitation to the beloved to go out with him in the evening. The mental condition of Prufrock is symbolized by a patient who has been given a medicine to render him unconscious for the operation which is to follow. The patient is in a peculiar state of mind where he is conscious but conscious of nothing. Such is the condition of the Prufrock. Another symbol of 'The spreading fog of the October evening' resembles a cat that is lazily going about. 'The fog' also reflects the states of mind of Prufrock. Like the fog Prufrock's mind is lazy and wants some excuse for postponement of his decision regarding the proposal. The fog also represents the dirty and unhealthy physical environment of city life. Prufrock compares himself to 'a pair of ragged claws in the sea' (73) he would like to run away from the reality. Prufrock realizes his helplessness and compares himself to a 'worm' fixed against a 'wall with a pin'. Image of death wish he includes to suicidal tendency of the modern man is evident in different parts of the poems. For example: 'When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,' 'the floors of silent seas,' 'eternal Footman', 'the chambers of the sea', 'we drown', 'I am Lazarus'. Sea images are also used by him. He refers himself as a kind of fish in the sea. The sea-image also represents the mind of Prufrock which is swept by stormy waves.

He also uses literary images. There are three allusions in the poem- Lazarus, Prince Helmet, and John the Baptist. Besides this, the Epigraph given at the top, from Dante's Inferno, signifies that the world of Prufrock is a kind of hell. It arouses the memory of Dantesque scene and thus establishes a relation between the medieval inferno and modern life. This situation is repeated by reference to Lazarus. Lazarus was brought back to life after his death by Christ.

He thinks that he is living in the world of dead. The contemporary world is the world of dead means they are spiritually dead. Another allusion is to Prince Hamlet. Prufrock says:

"No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be"

(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock 111)

He is both like a Hemlet and unlike Hemlet. He is indecisive and tense like Hemlet. But he is unlike Hemlet as he has no sense of responsibility and he does not want to take any action.

The third one is of John the Baptist because Prufrock finds no purpose in living. As poet remarks:

"Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter, I am no prophet—and here's no great matter"
(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock 82-83)

These are the artistic images which are used in the poem The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.

"In Laforgue, Corbiere, and Donne, Eliot found the qualities of transmuting ideas into sensations and of transferring ideas into a state of mind. Besides these qualities in a poem, Eliot also appreciated "a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace," and the quality of "wit" by which he meant "a constant inspection and criticism of experience" (Haladar, Santwana, 2005:1)

So that the poem deals with the major qualities of classical verse like displaying reality, metaphysical ideas, images, symbolism, dry hardness and fancy. Fancy is represented by the use of metaphors that Eliot had used in the poem. There are some romantic elements describe in the poem like subjectivity of the Prufrock. Prufrock represent the feelings of repulsion from vulgarity and an attraction to the common life. Prufrock is a day dreamer, a romantic, who often has vision of beauty. From the very beginning of the poem he compares himself with "Etherized-patient" conscious but conscious of nothing. Then he reaches the salon of fashionable restaurant and indulges in day-dreaming. Prufrock imagines himself in different planes which depict the irony. He longs to escape from reality to some world of romance. Firstly he likes to be prophetic vision and even he imagines himself as John the Baptist. He knows that despite his prophetic visions he is lacking in courage. Then he wishes to be Lazarus with the knowledge of underworld and capability to deliver speeches like Lazarus he wanted to tell the people of the earth about hell. After that he again come up with the role of Helmet who is famous for his query of whether life is worth continue. His acute self-consciousness leads to the confession that he is not in the position of Hamlet even. So he imagines these three characters in his mind and as Hulme describe:

"there is always the bitter contrast between what you think you ought to be able to do and what man actually can "
(Lodge, David., 1972:95)

Here also there is a larger contrast in the character's mind. In the same way time like space, has only a subjective existence for Prufrock, As a result, past, present and future are equally immediate and Prufrock is paralyzed. Memories, ironic echoes of earlier poetry, present sensations, anticipations of what he might do in the future

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

(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock 120)

There is a systematic confusion of tenses and times in the poem, so that it is difficult to tell if certain images exist in past, present, and future. This line seems to point to a fresh variation on the theme rather than any sense of finality. Yet

Eliot had to end the poem at same point, and he does so with lines in which the nervous sexuality of a small world of novels and tea-cups and skirts that trail along the floor is exchanged for the pure but remote eroticism of the

“By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown

Till human voices wake us, and we drown. “

(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock 130)

Its double suggestion of ‘waking’ and ‘drowning’, offers an ultimate possibility of escaping from one of the most intense, yet controlled, experiences to be found in modern literature.

He has often walked on the beach dressed in white trousers and he shall do so again to escape from the boredom of the present and has seen mermaids singing to each other. But such vision of beauty, such escape into a beautiful dream world, has been short-lived, for reality has always intruded upon his romantic dreams and awakened him to sense of actuality. His romantic inner self has always been ‘submerged’ in this way by the realities of life, which he wants to escape but cannot.

All said and done, it is futile to consider poems as either classicist or romantic. It would not do to say that Eliot drained the entire element from his poetry, for in his thispoem the classical and romantic strains meet. Here one can find Romantic element in Eliot’s Classicism. But Eliot himself as a classicist his poems have the elements of classicism more than romanticism. Eliot had the notion of Hulme’s Neo-classical Poetry, such as the ‘Dry-hardness’, ‘accurate’, ‘precise’ and ‘definite’ expression. In Romanticism and Classicism, Hulme had already stated that Classicism is: “absolutely identical with the normal religious attitude” that is reflected in the works of T.S.Eliot on a view of some ethical value that release from any relativism connected to human activities. Moreover, like Hulme, Eliot never forgets his finiteness and his human limitations. He jumps but always returns back.

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