

T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

From the very beginning of the poem one feels that the speaker is a divided soul or a schizophrenic personality because he talks to himself as if he is addressing another person:

Let us go then, you and I

Though the title of the poem is ironic (because it is neither a song nor intended to be sung), one can say it is a song of frustration, hesitation and emotional conflict. The poem starts with action (an invitation to go to a tea party) and moves into inaction and a desire for inactivity.

The poem is a monologue spoken by "I" who is presumably Prufrock. He talks to a "you" who is supposed to be a companion, a friend or a woman, but one can safely say he is talking to himself, his other self or to his divided soul. The speaker hesitates a lot before making up his mind to go to the party. His description of the atmosphere provides the objective correlative of his inner psyche. It is a dull evening "like a patient etherized upon a table" and the streets are like a tiresome "tedious argument".

However, the protagonist goes to the party, but even when he is physically in the party, mentally he is outside digressing to the yellow fog that licks the window panes like a cat... he is unable to communicate with the other guests in the party. Further more, he has an "overwhelming question" in mind which he is always trying to postpone due to his instability and hesitation. He tries to convince himself that "there will be time" for his question believing that his question is going to disturb the whole universe, not only the party.

On the other hand, the protagonist suffers from the inferiority complex and this is evident from the fact that he pays too much attention to his appearance believing that every body (especially women) is focusing his attention on him and on his thin hair, the bald spot in the middle of his hair, his thin arms and legs and his necktie. Hence, as a result of his inconfidence, hesitation and timidity, he has become incapable of any action of any sort. And his tragedy is simply that he is a man driven by a desire for something that he cannot achieve. Thus he cannot abandon the illusions of his fantasy world; he cannot accept the realities of the other

world in which the women talk, quite probably foolishly, of Michelangelo.

In this poem Eliot depends on evocation. He employs images which are expected to evoke in the reader echoes of other works and other ideas. At the same time this technique presupposes an awareness of the sources to which Eliot refers on the part of the reader. Hence, the images, the allusions, the technique and the language of the poem all participate in conveying the personality of the protagonist as a hesitant, schizophrenic divided soul who is a type rather than an individual. He is a type of the modern man, the alienated, fragmented and disappointed modern man in the West.