

უსახელო პროტაგონისტის იდენტობის კრიზისი და მოგზაურობა
ტომას სტერნზ ელიოტის “ალფრედ პრიუფროკის სიყვარულის
სიმღერაში”

The Identity Crisis and Journeys of a Nameless Speaker in T.S Eliot's
“The Love Song of Alfred Prufrock”

ლიზა ხასაია

თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი

Liza Khasaia

Tbilisi State University

აბსტრაქტი

ტომას სტერნზ ელიოტის პოემა, “ალფრედ პრიუფროკის სიყვარულის სიმღერა”, მოდენიზმის შედეგად ითვლება. ნაწარმოები, რომელიც თანამედროვეობის ქაოტურობასა და კომპლექსურობას, თავისივე ფრაგმენტული სტრუქტურითა და არასწორხაზოვანი სიუჟეტური წყობით გამოხატავს, ნაცნობ განცდებს აღძრავს მკითხველში. იგი სულაც არ შეეფერება “სიყვარულის სიმღერის” დეფინიციას და სავსეა თემებით, როგორცა იდენტობის კრიზისი, ეჭვი, პასიურობა, ქვეცნობიერი სამყარო და ა.შ. ეს ტექსტის დატვირთულ ალუზიურ სახესთან და ელიოტის გამორჩეულ წერის კომპლექსულ მანერასთან ერთად, პოემის მრავალმხრივი ინტერპრეტაციის საშუალებას იძლევა. ნაწარმოები უსახელო პროტაგონისტს, პრიუფროკს, ეხება, რომელიც კონცენტრირდება წარსულზე, უგულებელყოფს აწმყოს და ფიქრობს მხოლოდ მომავალზე. იგი იტანჯება იდენტობის კრიზისით და ტექსტში მისი ‘უსახელობაც’ ამას უსვამს ხაზს. კრიზისის გადაჭრის გზად იგი ან ახალ საწყისებს ხედავს, როგორც ლაზარე, ან ცხოვრების ოფელიასეულ დასასრულს. მას მუდმივი შიში ახლავს თან, რაც მის ინდივიდუალიზმს აფერმკრთალებს და იდენტობის კრიზისის საწყისი ხდება. ჰამლეტის ეგზისტენციალური კითხვის მსგავსად, პრიუფროკიც იტანჯება კითხვით, გაბედოს თუ არა, თუმცა რუტინულ ცხოვრებაში ჩაძირულმა აღამიანმა, რომელიც ცხოვრებას ყავის კოვზებით ზომავს, ძნელია გადადგას ნაბიჯი, რომელიც ცვლილებას

გამოიწვევს. აბსტრაქტულ ქალაქში/ქვეყნობიერში მოხეტიალე პროტაგონისტისთვის ანმყო და წარსული ერთმანეთშია აღრეული და მას იპყრობს სინანულის შეგრძნება. ამრიგად, წარსულში დაკარგული, მომავალს ეძებს და აიგნორებს ანმყოს, იმ იმედით, რომ სწორი დრო დადგება. პოემა მასში დამალული იდეებით, რთული სტრუქტურითა და თემებით თითქოს რთული აღსაქმელია მკითხველისთვის, თუმცა მაინც ნაცნობი, ვინაიდან გამოხატავს თანამედროვე ადამიანის მრავალფეროვან და კომპლექსურ ბუნებას.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ტ.ს ელიოტი, მოდერნიზმი, "სიყვარულის სიმღერა", იდენტობის კრიზისი, ქალაქი, მოგონება, სტილი.

Key words: T.S Eliot, Modernism, "love song", identity crisis, city, memory, style.

Introduction

T.S Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a notable 20th century modernist poem which explores themes of identity crisis, self-doubt, the wanderings of a nameless speaker, etc. Eliot's distinctive style contains frequent use of allusions including Shakespeare's "Hamlet," the Bible, and Dante's "Inferno," adding more interest to his poem and encouraging readers to think more deeply about the presented themes. In accordance with Deyab, this poem also was inspired by Dante's "Divine Comedy" as Dante's writing style and language affect Eliot's works. He often directly incorporates Dante's quotes into his writings, accordingly, "Prufrock" starts with the epigraph that is a quotation from Dante's "Inferno" (Deyab, 2021). Not only does "Prufrock," but also Eliot's well-known "Waste Land" begins with an epigraph about Sibyl at Cumae. His deliberate use of epigraphs always serves a purpose. In both instances, they carry the meaning and ideas that are further explored within the text. This connection provides opportunities for readers to draw parallels between Dante's Odyssey into Hell and Prufrock's journey through the city. Eliot presents us with "The Love Song" which challenges controversial notions of a love poem. Prufrock himself in the poem is the "Representative Man of early Modernism," says Roger Mitchell and characterises Prufrock as a "shy, cultivated, oversensitive, sexually retarded, (many have said impotent) ruminative, isolated, self-aware to the point of solipsism" (Snyder, 2015, p. 1-2) which are characteristics of modernism. In the poem, the nameless speaker's identity crisis is strongly connected with his journey through the city and memory. Such themes ultimately reveal the complexity of modern human existence and nature.

The central focus of the poem is around its main character J. Alfred Prufrock. Although the poem's title mentions Prufrock, his name is not explicitly stated within the text. Instead, the speaker is identified using the pronoun "I." At the heart of the poem lies the identity crisis of the nameless speaker, and the absence of his name in the text may symbolise his feelings of anonymity and feeling of being lost in the world. In the poem, Prufrock struggles with an

“*overwhelming question*”, much like Hamlet’s famous existential dilemma of “*to be or not to be*”. This parallel draws a significant reference to Hamlet. However, Prufrock declares: “*No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be*” (Eliot, June 1915), once again emphasising his profound uncertainty about his identity and indecision about his life. Furthermore, Eliot refers to “the Bible” mentioning Lazarus, a character from the New Testament who was resurrected by Jesus. Using Lazarus in the poem may emphasise the desire of Prufrock to change and transform. Towards the end of the poem, the speaker mentions mermaids, creating another connection to “Hamlet.” This reference includes elements like water, women, and drowning, which indirectly, but still paints the picture of drowning Ophelia for me, hinting at the theme of suicide. The theme of suicide in literature often reflects the idea of seeking escape from a distressing reality. The poem’s conclusion, I quote: “*Till human voices wake us, and we drown*” (lines 130-131) also reminds the reader of the “Inferno”, where Dante returns to the real world where human voices can be heard.

Prufrock is a type of character that Eliot knew well from a first-hand acquaintance: the cultured, sensitive, but bored gentleman of Cambridge or London society, who is seizing his life by measuring “*with coffee spoons*” (line 51) which can be interpreted as a reflection on the routine and habitual aspects of his life. The use of “*coffee spoons*” may symbolise the everyday, repetitive, and somewhat trivial actions that make up his existence. It suggests a sense of monotony and the idea that he has been marking the passage of time in small, insignificant increments. In the wider context, the poem describes the human conflict between sensual desires and longings and the restrictions of civilization. Every individual wishes for a state of happiness where they can fully enjoy their senses without worrying about society's judgement; but most people, like Prufrock, are deterred by fear of ridicule and feelings of inadequacy. At this point, the individuality of a human being disappears, giving rise to an identity crisis.

Wanderings through the City: Realms of Memory and Symbolic Significance

Another important theme in the poem is the city the speaker moves through. Eliot's city has “*half-deserted streets,*” a “*yellow fog,*” and a vibe of “*restless nights in one-night cheap hotels*” and “*sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells.*” Even though the character in the poem doesn't physically walk in the city but imagines it, the detailed descriptions make the reader feel like s/he is taking a walk through it. In agreement with Şen, it can be stated that incorporating a character in the poem helps to see how much the city has inspired the poet. London, which is like a symbol for all of England, becomes a template for an imaginary city made up of pieces of London and other cities. Eliot's goal seems to be to create a new kind of poetry that reflects the ever-changing environment. He draws from his memories, established literature, and personal experiences with the city, resulting in a fresh and innovative approach to writing (Şen, 2019). The poem also delves deeply into the city environment as a meaningful symbol. The city and the memory play a crucial role in analysing the poem’s symbolic meaning. The speaker's wandering journey through the city reflects his inner world, in

particular, restlessness and uncertainty. Eliot's exploration of the symbolic significance of the city has been extensively examined by numerous literary scholars; accordingly, it can be argued that the city symbolises his disconnection from the world, while memories express his deep thinking and reflection. Repeated descriptions of *"half-empty streets," "restless nights in budget hotels,"* and *"lonely men leaning out of windows"* paint a picture of a disconnected/fragmented world. This comparison between the city and the speaker's emotions highlights the theme of feeling out of place. The party he thinks about represents his anxieties and self-doubt, while the *"yellow fog on the windowpanes"* keeps him separated from others, possibly due to his fears. Different parts of the city symbolise the inner conflicts he grapples with, emphasising his fragmented self-concept (Dalli, 2023). In conclusion, the poem masterfully employs the urban landscape as a profound symbol, paralleling the speaker's inner state and detachment from the world, effectively conveying the theme of alienation and internal conflict, which is also expressed by the fragmented nature of Eliot's London, fragmented as Prufrock's thoughts and life.

As mentioned above, the speaker's journey is not in a physical environment, but rather in his mind and memory. So, beyond the urban backdrop, the poem intricately navigates the corridors of memory. The speaker's thoughts get all mixed up with memories of the past, things he wishes he had done differently, and dreams for the future. He wonders if he should have taken bigger risks and made a difference in the world, and he uses references to Michelangelo and Lazarus to show his desire for a fresh start, both in his art and his spiritual life. According to Dalli, memory is a big deal in this poem. Eliot plays with how the past and present blur together. The speaker can't help but think about his past, especially the stuff he regrets and the chances he missed, like when he mentions people *"talking about Michelangelo"* (lines 14, 36) or wondering if it would have been worth it (Dalli, 2023). Therefore, he is lost in the past and seeks the future, avoiding the present. He says: *"there will be time"* (lines 23,26, 28, 37) and this phrase appears five times in the text. This repetition shows how the speaker is fixated on the past, neglects the present, and only thinks about the future, hoping that the right time will eventually come, much like how we often behave as humans.

T.S Eliot's Distinguished Style

Analysing "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" presents a challenging task due to its unique and multifaceted nature. It does not follow one plot but is fragmented, making the poem complicated to interpret. Hence it becomes challenging to pinpoint the core message the author intended to convey. Right from the beginning of the narrative, readers encounter its distinctiveness, as it commences, with a quote from Dante in Italian and then continues:

"Let us go then, you and I,

When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherized upon a table;" (lines 1-3)

Initially, the poem establishes a romantic atmosphere with the presence of a couple, "you and I", on a lovely evening. However, this romantic atmosphere changes when the poem continues with a "patient etherized upon a table," which serves as a critique of the very idea of romanticism. In their joint work, Lowi and Sayre defined Romanticism as rooted in the notions of unity and wholeness, encapsulating the harmonious relationship between nature, the cosmos, and realms beyond (Lowi & Sayre, 2001) while Modernist works frequently embraced fragmentation and disunity as seen in the presented poem. Eliot is known for his innovative perspectives that were captured in his poems. Its fragmented plot and style of writing is a representation of Modernism. The way this poem is put together mirrors the speaker's scattered thoughts and shows how he struggles to express his feelings clearly. The way the speaker talks to himself helps us understand what is going on in his head, but it also shows he is aware of what he is saying and what he is not saying. This broken style fits well with modernist writing, which tries to capture the chaotic and disjointed nature of the world at that time. In the end, the poem takes us deep into the mind of a middle-aged man who feels isolated, uncertain, and weighed down by the passing of time. It's like listening to someone in a big city who can't make up their mind. As analysed by Dalli, the way the poem is written is a bit complicated and makes it hard to understand at times, but it connects with modern readers who know those feelings. Eliot uses figures of speech and comparisons to explore themes like anxiety, desire, and disappointment, giving us a glimpse into the speaker's inner world (Dalli, 2023). The poem's unique style, which mirrors the speaker's scattered consciousness, captures the essence of a modernist literary approach. Despite its intricacy, this work continues to resonate with contemporary readers, drawing them into the enigmatic inner world of the protagonist.

Conclusion

In conclusion, T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a profound modernist masterpiece that explores themes of identity crisis, self-doubt, and the complex journey of its nameless speaker through the city and realms of memory. Eliot skillfully captures the speaker's ongoing identity crisis, mirroring the common human challenge of balancing inner doubts with the outside world. The poem's fragmented structure and intricate use of allusions, including references to Dante, Shakespeare, and the Bible, create a tapestry of interwoven ideas that challenge conventional notions of love poetry. The city, with its vivid descriptions and symbolic significance, serves as a reflection of the speaker's inner world and disconnection from reality, emphasising the theme of alienation. The realms of memory, a central element of the poem, blur the lines between past and present, revealing the speaker's fixation on the past and hope for the future. Eliot's unique writing style, characterised by its fragmented structure and introspective exploration, makes the poem both complex and relatable to modern readers. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" remains a timeless work that continues to resonate with its portrayal of the human condition and the multifaceted nature of modern existence.

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ავტორის შესახებ:

თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის ინგლისური ფილოლოგიის საბაკალავრო პროგრამის მეოთხე კურსის სტუდენტს, და ასევე საერთაშორისო სტუდენტს გერმანიაში (Erasmus+პროგრამით). ლიზა ხასაიას აქვს დიდი ინტერესი ინგლისური ლიტერატურისა და ლინგვისტიკის მიმართ; მას აქვს პუბლიკაცია და სტიპენდიები ამ დარგში. მისმა დიდმა ინტერესმა განაპირობა აღნიშნული ნაშრომის შექმნაც.

About the author:

Liza Khasaia, a fourth-year student at the BA Program in English Philology, Faculty of Humanities, TSU and a former international (Erasmus+) student in Germany. She is deeply interested in English literature and linguistics; she has won scholarships and published in her field. Her keen interest has driven her to undertake her current work.

E-mail: liza.khasaia535@hum.tsu.ge