

*To what extent do you find the extract provided, typical of the poetry of T.S. Eliot which you have studied? Discuss with reference to Preludes and at least one other poem of Eliot's.*

Eliot forms parallels between lines in his opening stanza of Preludes to corresponding concepts he refines in later poems. By introducing these notions in Preludes and extensively unpacking them in The Lovesong of J Alfred Prufrock (hereafter Prufrock) and Rhapsody on a Windy Night (hereafter Rhapsody), he creates a cohesive and united text. The most prevalent concepts touched upon in Preludes include the hopelessness of modern life, this is also represented through natural phenomena becoming more cognizant than the citizens surrounding the persona. Eliot's introduction of ideas in Preludes is accounted for through the context of his writing. He began writing Preludes in 1910, before both Rhapsody and Prufrock were published, later finishing it in 1911. Prufrock was also commenced in 1910, as an expansion on the concepts dealt with in Preludes. Eliot remains consistent with the form and features used in Preludes, tenaciously employing them in his later poems creating an unprecedentedly coherent set of texts.

Through the voice of a flâneur, Eliot represents the hopelessness of humanity resultant of the modern world. His writing is subject to an overlay of melancholy that spans the entire text. Particularly, in Preludes and Prufrock, this is shown through an extended metaphor of cigarettes. Commencing in Preludes, Eliot compares the days of those living the city life to a burnt-out cigarette - "The burnt-out end of smoky days." Symbolically, the cigarette represents the 'end of the day' allowing the overarching theme of inherent mortality, found throughout the entire text, to be openly viewed. The imagery of "smoky days" characterises the lives of the citizens as ambivalent, with no clear or apparent meaning. Likewise, this metaphor is depicted in Eliot's Prufrock. Prufrock, the poem's namesake, wallows over the emptiness of his life. Seeing his life and the lives of those around him as meaningless, Prufrock questions himself and the audience through the rhetorical question, "Then how should I begin/ To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways". Not only is the quote similar, through the shared metaphor of cigarettes, but it also follows the structure of the previous excerpt. Adding "and ways" to the line in Prufrock suggests even the activities he, and those around him, perform have no meaning in the scheme of life. Through the highly modal word "spit" which is connotative of disgust, Eliot and Prufrock's pessimistic assumption of their lives end is simultaneously expressed. It is inferred that Eliot disagrees with the actions of those around him, seeing modern life as a hopeless phenomenon with a dismal end. In Rhapsody, Eliot deviates from the cigarette metaphor. Instead, Eliot relays the lack of hope for the future of humanity through the symbolism of eyes, a prevailing feature of his work. Again, a flâneur-like persona is revealing their cynical opinion of the world around them through their narration - "Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was running along the quay.../ I could see nothing behind that child's eye". Eliot's combined use of "pocketed a toy", which implies the child is stealing, and the metaphor of "see[ing] nothing behind that child's eye" illustrates that the child has no innocence, contrasting with the orthodox depiction of children. If the eyes are the window to the soul, yet there is nothing behind them, one could infer Eliot is suggesting the child has no soul as a result of growing up in the modern milieu. In subverting the archetypal symbol of innocence, a child, Eliot communicates his disdain towards the behavior that led to this soulless society. Through unpacking this idea in different poems, beginning with a simplistic depiction in Preludes, our depth of understanding as an audience is increased significantly.

Time, as a concept within Eliot's poetry, is warped for the narrating persona. The text represents natural phenomena, such as the evening, in a civilized manner, with the use of anthropomorphism. Introducing this notion in Preludes, Eliot unpacks it further in his later

poems, again forming direct links with Prufrock. In the extract, “The winter evening settles down”, which opens Preludes, the monotony of modern life is suggested through “settles down” implying also a sense of stasis that cannot be felt by the fast-moving modern world. The personification of the ‘evening’ pictures a distorted view of time as a construct thus highlighting that the citizens of the modern world are subject to it as a measurement of success. Though the evening is settling down, the flâneur is still watching ‘the lighting of the lamps’, indicating their inability to settle down due to the fast pace of society. Furthermore, a link is created between Preludes and Prufrock through the shared notion of the evening resting, seen in the extract, “And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!.../Asleep...tired...or it malingers”. Prufrock shows his resentment towards those who are able to sleep due to his own insomnia, again resultant of a fast-moving society. The extension of this metaphor of time as well as the anthropomorphism of the evening expresses an increased sense of hopelessness. Prufrock is envious of nature, seen through his exclamation of ‘peacefully!’, and wishes to revert to the connection mankind once had. Conversely, in Rhapsody, Eliot again extends this metaphor but similarly diverges from the way in which it is expressed in the formerly discussed poems. Instead of the connection to time, Eliot personifies the lamp, subverting the traditional flâneur and instead has the lamp narrating the squalid lives of the surrounding citizens. “The street lamp sputtered/The street lamp muttered/ The street lamp said, ‘Regard that woman’”. Eliot’s calculated choice to bring the lamp alive, through anthropomorphism, expresses his own personal comment on society. He believes society is becoming so carried away with advancement and technology that they are relenting to absolute mechanisation. This cog-in-the-machine mentality is prevalent in Eliot’s poetry, courtesy of his sustained personification of the city. Overall, Eliot presents the audience with an increased understanding of the persona’s hopeless view of society by giving life not to the persona, but to objects around them.

Throughout the poems Preludes, Prufrock and Rhapsody, Eliot lays out a cohesiveness that is gained through the consistent use of form and features. In associating these features with concepts throughout his poetry, his text is, as a whole, united. Introducing notions in Preludes informs the audience initially in a simplistic manner, allowing greater depth of understanding to be gained in later poems. His use of overarching themes has given the text integrity that is unsurpassed.