

ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – II Issue-II (March – April) 2024

Frequency: Bimonthly



The Incarnation of Anxiety in the Early Poetry of T. S. Eliot

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| **Received:** 12.04.2024 | **Accepted:** 16.04.2024 | **Published:** 20.04.2024

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Abstract

Through a careful examination of T.S. Eliot's early poetry (written between 1910 and 1917), this paper examines whether or not anxiety is necessary or particularly useful for the production of poetry in the contemporary world. Eliot's early poetry expresses his just-discovered conviction that the bourgeoisie's life is not what it seems to be. The subjectivity of experience and the slave labor of material commodities do not, nevertheless, always imply the irreconcilable character of the human spirit. There are, however, faint traces of optimism. The expression of worry in Eliot's poem demonstrates his urgent need to address it both inside himself and in this troubled, war-ravaged period, illuminating his fixation with the social and spiritual deterioration of society.

Keywords: Anxiety, Prufrock, Embodiment, poetry, Artistic Production.

Introduction

Anxiety is a real situation that produces unexciting feelings and is accompanied by physical sensations that remind humans of a dangerous situation. Anxiety is a response of emotion that occurs in specific conditions that can be perceived as a threat after the operation process. Trait anxiety is a claim for being anxious in various situations. The ego is the only entity that can feel anxiety. Freud divides anxiety into three categories. Neurotic anxiety is fear of an unseen danger. This fear is formed in the inner Ego, but the source is from the Id. Moral anxiety is a conflict between the Ego and the Superego that occurs when people do not do what they think is right according to their moral values. In childhood, hostility is often followed by fear of punishment. These fears develop into neurotic anxiety without being realized. Realistic anxiety, or objective anxiety, is very similar to fear. It is defined as

an unpleasant and unspecific feeling that can happen. Moreover, it is different from fear because it does not have a specific fear object. (Freud, 1895, p. 98)

Anxiety acts as a defense mechanism against the ego. It alerts humans when there is danger or when there is no right action that increases the danger until Ego is defeated. (Freud, 1895, p. 98). Anxiety cannot be managed through effective action, which is known as trauma. It makes a person impotent and immature. Freud said anxiety is caused by a feeling of impotence. Adult neuroses develop symptoms to control themselves from threats that are perceived as life-threatening, such as when their mother abandons them in infancy. On the other hand, they develop symptoms of subconsciously replacing everything that cannot be stopped by consciousness. If the Ego cannot rationally fight anxiety, it will

return irrationally. Freud says that anxiety decreases as an experience of impotence and as long as it is a symptom of avoiding danger. (ibid.)

1. The Stylistic Embodiment of Anxiety

There is no denying the link between suffering and creative output. The main causes of "important human achievements in art and the history of ideas" are sadness and the intractable challenges of contemporary life (O'Gorman, p. 147). O'Gorman calls Eliot "worry's first poet" and describes him as "a worrier himself and a writer of worry" (O'Gorman, p. 17). He is perfectly correct when he highlights the extreme uncertainty, loneliness, and susceptibility to doubt and skepticism that characterized the early Eliot, as well as his tendency towards passivity, solipsism, and even despair; these characteristics are nourished by his natural tendency towards doubt and mysticism, as well as by his Harvard studies of Indic philosophy and language. His self-steeping in French Symbolist poetry not only influenced various schools of thought but also acted as an inspiration for Eliot's early poetic enterprise (Marx, p. 66).

Finding psychological tensions in an external item is one method Eliot probably borrowed from his readings of Baudelaire and Laforgue, early on in the development of his notion of the objective correlative. For instance, the persona's brain is imprisoned inside a fluttering moth in the 1914 poetry "The Burnt Dancer": "Within the circle of my brain, the twisted dance continues." Captured amidst those flailing horns, losing the thread of his need, is the singed celebrant [sic], the patient, agonizing devotee, and the powerful beyond our mortal capabilities. There are two types of confinement: the moth itself, or the "singed reveler of the fire," and the circle that encircles the persona's brain. Thus, this poem's sensation of incarceration may be even stronger than that of "Introspection," where the mind is submerged beneath a cistern and merges with a raptor serpent. The subsequent "twisted dance" is evocative of the nervous mental patterns marked by a mundaneness that seems almost orchestrated. The "patient acolyte of pain," like the dancer in a formal waltz, is all too aware that, since he is helplessly "caught on those horns that toss and toss," he will continue to perform the same actions and arrive at the same conclusion. Possibly the most horrifying picture comes from the magnificent chiasmus: "Losing the end of his desire / Desires completion of his loss." Desire and loss become almost inseparable from one another according to the chiasmic process, much as the snake devouring its head in "Introspection." The final sentence is ambiguous since a spoken word is absent. It might be interpreted that the mind-moth is subject, in which case the anguish is unbearable and the "completion of his loss" is a terrible but happy end to suffering. However, it may also be interpreted as follows: "Desires [are the] completion of his loss," suggesting that desire—which on a personal level takes the form of will and volition—inevitably results in loss. The fundamental query is whether pursuing one's goals will be worth the suffering involved in either achieving and then losing them or never achieving them at all. (Crawford, p. 121).

The 1917 poem "Portrait of a Lady" investigates the concept of disembodied will as well, but it progresses to show the human brain inhabiting a physical person rather than being imprisoned within an object. Jules Laforgue's poetry shares stylistic similarities, especially in "Autre Complainte de Lord Pierrot," or "Another Complaint of Lord Pierrot". Eliot and the French poet could have been drawn to each other by a shared interest in the

psychological underbelly of upper-class polite society. In several of his early poems, Eliot also skillfully conveys "anxieties involved in conversations real, abandoned and imagined between men and women," as Laforgue does here (Crawford, p. 122). Through two literary strategies, the character of "Portrait of a Lady" rather indirectly sets the situation. He addresses the reader in the second person from the outset, saying, "You have the scene arrange itself—as it will seem to do." Saying "I arrange the scene" or "The scene arranges itself" is not the same as this. While the latter conveys a disembodied will as if the situation were going to organize itself, the former says that the persona has more agency. The persona has created the scene, but there's something off with the grammatical structure that makes it difficult to see how the persona fits into the situation. Compared to them, the mechanism is more accurate. What connection exists between the persona's free will and the setup of the scene? The statement has a problematic ambiguity because of the rhetorical construction, which also affects the entire tone of the poem. The statement that follows is the second instance in which the persona subtly sets the situation. The caesura: "as it will seem to do". (ibid.,23.) Once more, the persona's description avoids establishing a clear causal relationship between the action and the outcome. It's uncertain if the scene that puts itself in order is a true representation of reality or if the character is only making what appears to be a real alteration out of his will. In all scenarios, the woman mentioned in the title can be genuine or a composite of several fruitless meetings, and the dialogue might be real or made up. As a result, the persona's self-questioning regarding reality and perception, as well as how to get out of his head, becomes more urgent.

In their conversation with this actual or imaginary woman, the persona displays a variety of anxiety-related behaviors. Naturally, the dialogue appears to be one-sided at first glance. However, it appears conceivable that Eliot restricts the male character's input to an internal monologue due to his realization that his previous interactions with women were "so inauthentic that it was unbearable for him to copy them in the text" (Vender, p. 87). As she refers to "the words that Eliot presumably heard himself saying aloud" (Vender, p. 87), Vender proposes that Eliot's inability to have meaningful conversations with women serves as the dialogic paradigm for "Portrait of a Lady" and that Eliot is a curiously silent listener who is seeing his inability to speak. Oddly, Vender's writing supports the male character's distancing from himself, which is evident in his lack of a "public idiom" in the dialogue.

The most well-known example of the destructive effects of subjectivism can be found in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," which was primarily written by Eliot in Paris during his 1910–1911 years abroad. Completed in Munich during cerebral anemia, it was published in 1917 in Prufrock and Other Observations (Crawford,p.332). Circularity in the poem's rhetorical patterns—derived from Victorian dramatic monologues—embodies some of its unease. (Vendler 111). The tense repeating tendencies later displayed by the character are reflected in the fifth line, "The muttering retreats": "The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes, / The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window--panes" (15-16; RM 5). The persona seems to be unhappy with his portrayal of the scenario at the end of the queue and has to go back and think it over. The unsettling repeating of the same but slightly off-kilter pictures in quick succession appears to be the idea, rather than the change from fog to smoke and then back to muzzle. Though Eliot asserts in a 1936 letter that the 1917 edition "does not differ from the [1910-1911] original in any way,"

Yellow Fog takes on new meaning after 1914 as an allusion to the Great War (RM 363). Perhaps feeling insecure about the underlying inability to create something truly out of arbitrary, constrained words, Prufrock dwells on the picture. The yellow material repeats itself, as though the character is forced to demonstrate a lack of literary authority since expressing the same thought in two marginally different ways will make it seem more plausible. He laments, "It is impossible to say just what I mean!," revealing how painfully conscious of his lack of clarity he is. (104; MH 45). Eliot personifies a character in his poem "Do I Know How I Feel?". Similarly, "Do I know what I think? There's something right at my fingertips that ought to be firm but slips" (14–15; RM 269) is expressed with regret. The poet lost in agonizing subjectivism is unable to express himself artistically or take action.

The passionate and honest language used by Eliot invokes the Faustian myth⁴, which holds that human love and fine art are mutually incompatible. It follows that Eliot cannot be both a successful poet and a regular person at the same time; instead, he must give up material pursuits to focus on writing, which is a "painful and unpleasant business: it is the sacrifice of the man to the work, it is a kind of death." (L1 471).

Eliot's marriage and poems are put under constant emotional and sexual strain because to his relationship with Vivien when he was younger. Like the protagonist of Miltonic "The Triumph of Bullshit," Eliot yearns for a lady with whom he may have an unparalleled mental and cultural communion, but he is unable to meet her expectations. Vivien's mental illness might be seen as "both an inhibiting and creative force" in his post-1915 poems (O'Gorman, p. 1011). Vivien "found Eliot inhibiting and inhibited, yet worshipped him," According to Stephen Spender, one of the couple's contemporaries, and Russell is well-known for saying that "she married him to stimulate him but finds she can't do it." (Ibid.)

2. The Anxiety of Artistic Production

Eliot traverses one such complex web of inter-subjective interactions in his early poetry—the upper-class, polite bourgeois society that surrounds him—enjoying the pleasures while bearing the expenses while keeping an eye out for and exposing any potentially inauthentic threads. Nevertheless, even in the face of effectively creating timeless and perceptive work, his creative temper is troubled by the limited amount of time he can devote to his poetry as well as the question of whether he can rightfully defend devoting time to something that can be viewed as unimportant or not entirely vital. "Everyone's individual lives are so swallowed up in one great tragedy, that one almost ceases to have personal experiences or emotions, and such as one has seemed so unimportant," Eliot says in a letter to his father dated December 1917. L1 242. When people are losing their lives on the front lines of World War I, Eliot worries that his lyrical endeavor is frivolous or may be viewed as such. Even if he believes that something has to be said and that he is uniquely qualified to speak it, he believes that his audience might not be as interested in it both academically and emotionally: He confides in his father, saying, "If the time ever comes when people will attend to them, I have a lot of things to write about" (L1 242).

Despite the pervasive national tragedy, Eliot can defend his literary endeavor in large part by appealing to his wish to somehow transcend consciousness and give himself up to his art. The statement "must be aware that the mind of Europe the mind of his own country - a mind which he learns in time to be much more

important than his private mind is a mind which changes" (T&IT 107-108) is one of his most poignant quotes from 1919. Eliot engages in this "continuous self-sacrifice" because he understands that his writing expresses "something more valuable," something priceless for the European mind (T&IT 108). Eliot's emotions serve a poetic purpose rather than being the main subject of his works; thus, the often-quoted statement, "The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates," is accurate. Eliot does not indulge in helplessness or overwhelming fear. The poetry is impersonal in that the feelings it arouses in readers compel them to think deeply and feel deeply, even though they are not directly related to the poet. (Bloom, p. 86).

Naturally, it takes a great deal of work to separate individual emotion from universal emotion. When we contrast poetry with science, Eliot stated in 1920 that "we shall find that the poet's training and equipment is parallel to the training and equipment of the scientist; we find that his purpose is parallel; and that his attitude towards his work is parallel" (MTP 213) as long as "we take poetry seriously as a work and not as the mere ebullition of a personality." Stated differently, Eliot's claim that "the emotion of art is impersonal" (T&IT 112) readily gives rise to the notion that poetry is the conscious observance of "the social virtue of detachment from one's imagination" (Bloom, p. 86). From Baudelaire to Mallarme, this conception of impersonality has been consistent throughout history, paralleling and falling in line with "a genetic movement of gradual allegorizing and depersonalization" (de Man, p. 176) In its self-aware involvement with "the incessant conflict that opposes a self, still engaged in the daylight world of reality, of representation, and life, to what Yeats called the soul," Eliot's early verse is really modern (de Man, p. 171). Amazingly, even at the age of twenty-one, Eliot's poetry is a fearless and daring endeavor that explores his tormented consciousness and that of his generation with equal vigor.

3. Anxiety in 'The Love Song' of J. Alfred Prufrock

The fact that J. Alfred Prufrock is unsure of himself is the source of one of his main neuroses. Prufrock's mental instability stems from his inability to make a decision. He is uncertain due to his anxiety, and his indecision fuels his anxiety. The refrains "Do I dare?" and "Should I presume?" are part of Prufrock. Prufrock inhabits a universe devoid of societal norms and rules, resulting in extreme and unbridled freedom. Anxiety, according to Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, is "the dizziness of freedom." When Prufrock is faced with options and possibilities, he becomes extremely anxious. As a result, he considers questions such as, "Do I dare to eat a peach?" Even if his predicament is absurd and humorous, we modern people may relate to it. It might be challenging to choose what to stand for and how to behave in a society when everyone's values and practices are debatable. Prufrock's adaptable moral sensitivity is both commendable and essential, in a way. His complete lack of self-determination is the drawback. He is kind of a coward. One might envision the chaotic society of the current day based on the information that has been revealed. The confusion in those intellectuals' minds is the result of this pandemonium. The contemporary poet is faced with an unplayable circumstance. He feels disappointed by both his pleasure and his public duty, which are at odds with one other. The poet's poetry captures all of his emotions, ideas, deeds, and responses to the events of the 20th century since he is a recognized global legislator and sensitive to such chaos. (Bloom, p.87).

The poet in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is shown as cautious, shy, timid, and spiritually numb. The personality of Prufrock in the poem represents the poet's self. He ends up speaking for his creator, Eliot. The writer describes Prufrock as "a symbol of the shy, hesitant, self-conscious young man who is out of place in a capitalist society... He is a symbol of helplessness and hesitation". In this poem, Prufrock's agony mirrors the poet's pain. The phrase "you and I" in the initial sentence "may be thought of as two parts of Prufrock's personality, one part urging him to go, to participate in experience; the other parts holding back, withdrawing, retreating" (Boris, p.531).

The poet is portrayed in the poem as someone terrified of relationships and life in general. The poet's internal struggle is brought on by this circumstance. The poet learns from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" that performing poetry in the present day is not encouraged. The imagery of the poem's opening fourteen lines, which creates the mood of apathy and despair throughout the whole poem, amply illustrates this. The speaker's premise, "Like a patient etherized upon a table" (L.3), compares the evening to an etherized patient, which defies the reader's expectations regarding the poetic landscape and instead paints a vision of sterility in an urban setting that appears hostile to human existence. The poem's "half-deserted streets" convey the poet's sense of loneliness. Despite his attempts to find solace in these desolate alleys, they appear to be "muttering" to him—as if to remind him of his situation (Boris, p. 531).

Not only are the unclean, urban streets the unsightly area of the city, but they are also the poet's mental spaces, the aimless rambles of his thoughts. The streets, which the poet describes as "like a tedious argument" (L.8), are therefore also the twists and turns of an internal dispute that the poet has with himself. The speaker of the poem alludes to the poet's anxiety about the poem's ending—an overpowering query that would force him to face the pointlessness of his existence. He struggles throughout the poem to reconcile his fear of change with his desire to make changes in his life. The poet's perception of contemporary life is hazy. He faces a dilemma between giving in to the banality of civilized life and the anonymity of the broken-down city. (Boris, p.154).

After the first fourteenth line stanza, the poet's rage approaches a boiling point. The couplet "In the room, the women come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo" reinforces the idea of trivialization and meaninglessness. Eliot utilizes rhyme in this instance to satirically contrast the magnificent and the banal, and the rhyme between "Michelangelo" and the sing-along line "come and go" alludes to a broader trivialization of culture. Eliot satirizes the superficial, societal fascination with the beautiful in the picture of the women discussing Michelangelo like they would any other piece of gossip. According to the poet, genuine beauty is now only a topic of conversation in society. (Jabber, p. p.92-93).

The poem presents a very nervous and helpless awareness as the poet is unable to draw any conclusions. Eliot employs his skill to make every element of the poem serve his purpose—that is, to reveal the poet's predicament, even the structure. Thus, the ellipses, the series of brief, nervous queries, and the poem's partition into short, fragmented pieces are all formal devices that significantly add to the overall feeling of mental bewilderment, worry, and aggravation in the poet's thoughts. For instance, the first verse paragraph's suggestion that the speaker visit his audience is succeeded by two brief, rhymed lines that are unrelated to the lines that came before them: "In the chamber, the women come and go/

Talking of Michelangelo" (L 13- 14). These lines make the reader ask what room and women the poet talks about. Additionally, the Eight lines describing the October fog that covers certain city streets replace the eerie singsong lines before them. the deluge of inquiries, including "Do I dare?" "Do I dare?" "So how should I presume?" Another significant formal element that portrays Prufrock's anxious and neurotic state of hesitation is "And how should I begin?" These queries receive no direct responses (Joha, p. 284).

The poem's middle ellipses, which trail the picture of the ragged claws, also serve to symbolize the poet's repression of unpleasant ideas. The poet finds it too painful to acknowledge the self-loathing and desire for oblivion that are inherent in his self-image as a "pair of ragged claws,/ scuttling across the floor of silent seas" (L. 73–74). The poet claims that the current world has a diseased aura that permeates every aspect of civilization.

By the poem's conclusion, it is clear that the mermaids have awakened the poet's desire for a simpler, more enigmatic existence. However, the poet learns that although the mermaid's singing is exceedingly lovely, it is not for him. The poet's desire for beauty or perhaps love is depicted in this image, yet even this fantasy is fleeting. The mermaids' singing serves as a reminder of the mundane conversation that readers are meant to return to—the "human voices" that awaken them from the wonderful and strange illusion.

Conclusion

It is concluded that a poem is about fear itself, not about conquering fear. Thus, more research on anxiety within my broad critical framework may go in several different directions. One of the most beneficial courses, it is thought, would be to broaden the focus to include other authors and artists working within Eliot's historical and geographical setting. Not only would Wolf be included in this endeavor, but women who have historically been neglected in critical research on "canonical" modernist literature—Gertrude Stein, Mina Loy, and especially Djuna Barnes, whose work, notably, Eliot believed to have immense promise. To do this, formalist readings of other contemporary writers' poetry and fiction would be employed. The goal would be to look into the reasons for the decline and/or opportunities for spiritual, physical, and intellectual interaction between and among the sexes.

It is exactly because Eliot's early verse symbolizes, if not perfectly captures, one such halt that merits critical attention in the current situation. Through his early poetry endeavors, Eliot models a valuable both/and perspective that views worry as a gift and a liability. This helps him to confront the anxiety, disillusionment, and contemporary cultural regression of his era. Ironically, the body of work attesting to his agonizing struggle with these worries may be seen as both the diagnosis and the solution to these issues—and perhaps as a lesson for our own turbulent, dynamic, and generally uncomfortable period.

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