

# Love or Neurosis: A Comparative Analysis of *Porphyria's Lover* and *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*

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## Abstract

*This research deals with the comparative study of Porphyria's Lover and The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock. Both characters want to achieve their love. The lover in Porphyria's Lover kills his beloved to achieve his love. On the other hand in the poem The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock, Prufrock wants to be successful in love but he has no strength and he is unable to share his feeling with the beloved. One has a futile yearning for The Love and other has no courage as he does not have the willpower. Their love has no content of love and both of them show a neurotic approach to fulfil their aims and remain unsuccessful.*

**Keywords:** Neurotics, futile, despair, dramatic monologue, interior monologue

Robert Browning was born on Robert 7 May 1812 and died on 12 December 1889. Browning is a Victorian poet and dramatist. He has mastery in the art of the dramatic monologue. It is a type of poetry in which one character gives the speech. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, dramatic monologue is a poem in the form of a speech by a character, who reveals things about themselves while describing a situation or telling a story. He is known for his characters in the poems written by him. Dramatic monologue, obscurity, optimism are the prominent traits of most of his poetry. *My Last Duchess, The Lost reader, Meeting at Night, Porphyria's Lover* etc. are some of his major works.

T S Eliot was born on 26 September 1888 and died on 4 January 1965. He's not only a great poet but also a literary critic. He belongs to the modern period. His major literary works include poems like *The Waste Land, The Hollow Men, The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*. He is known for his plays like *Murder in the Cathedral, The Cocktail Party*. He won Nobel Prize in the year 1948. He has given many literary concepts like the dissociation of sensibility, objective correlative, tradition and individual talent. He is known for complexity in his

literary works which include themes like moral bankruptcy of the modern man and his dilemma in this materialistic world.

Porphyria's lover is the narrator in the poem *Porphyria's Lover*. He starts the poem by presenting the scenic elements of that night which are rain and storm.

The rain set early in to-night,  
 The sullen wind was soon awake,  
 It tore the elm-tops down for spite,  
 And did its worst to vex the lake:  
 I listened with heart fit to break.  
 When glided in Porphyria; straight  
 She shut the cold out and the storm,  
 And kneeled and made the cheerless grate  
 Blaze up, and all the cottage warm; (1-9)

He is sitting at a remote place waiting for his beloved. Porphyria is in love with him. She decides to meet him in such weather. She does not care for social hindrances and societal expectations. When she meets him he strangles her to death. He is confident that she has died a painless death. He feels that now he has won his love and they remain together without any problems.

The poem *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock* has one character J Alfred Prufrock. He is a middle-aged person. He is confused sad and lonely. He is not talking to anybody; he is talking to himself. In a way, this poem is also a monologue but it is a type of interior monologue. There is no listener and there are mental jumps. He feels that he is old and he is weak. He is going outside in the evening which is not beautiful like the evening shown by romantic poets. This evening is like a patient etherized upon a table. Moreover, it is also not sure who the 'you' in the poem is. This remains unknown until the end of the poem. This is not love, but a futile yearning for the love. Moreover, he feels depressed throughout the poem.

Both the poems have characters who desire true love and they are not happy with the circumstances. Porphyria's lover has a beloved who loves him from the core of her heart but he feels that he still does not have possession of her love. He feels incomplete and wants to get rid of that incompleteness. Eliot describes the feelings

of J Alfred who is walking alone in the evening. Thoughts are at war with one another in Prufrock's brain which has become a battlefield.

It is impossible to say just what I mean!

But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:

Would it have been worth while

If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,

And turning toward the window, should say:

“That is not it at all,

That is not what I meant, at all.” (104-110)

It's the time of world war and another war is going on in the mind of Prufrock. He has to ask a question which he calls an overwhelming question. He thinks that this very question can disturb the whole universe. In a love song, a singer should share his or her feelings of love but this love song is different. Prufrock is a neurotic who has a futile yearning for love. He is mentally weak and has no courage to ask the question which he compares with a question on the plate. Asking a question to the beloved is a Herculean task for him. He is unable to take the decision to express his love or not. His plight in his interior monologue is tragic and poignant.

There will be time, there will be time

To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;

There will be time to murder and create,

And time for all the works and days of hands

That lift and drop a question on your plate;

Time for you and time for me,

And time yet for a hundred indecisions,

And for a hundred visions and revisions,

Before the taking of a toast and tea. (27-34)

He does not want to show his true face to the people. He wants to wear a concocted self to present himself in front of the people. He is unable to decide any course of action so he mentions indecisions and revisions. He is overpowered by alienation and despair.

In the poem *Porphyria's Lover* the quiet, off-the-cuff manner the speaker refers to the murder is bizarre, presenting the distorted mind of the narrator. And the act of the cold-blooded murder appears to be executed without any rhyme or reason. However, when Porphyria meets him, she is active and her lover is passive.

She put my arm about her waist,  
 And made her smooth white shoulder bare,  
 And all her yellow hair displaced,  
 And, stooping, made my cheek lie there, (16-19)

The horror exactly matches with the horrible atmosphere of nature in the stormy night. The horror in the murder reflects the unstable state of mind of the narrator. He feels that he should possess his beloved being a lover. He kills her to be with her forever. In his opinion, by killing her she is successful in taking her love back from the clutches of society. It's a brutal murder which he calls a painless death to justify the murder. It is certainly not love but a whim of a neurotic. A renowned critic C R Tracy observes, "he thinks it better that she should die rather than sully spiritual purity in the marriage bed of a man she does not love"(579)

From the discussion, it is clear that both lovers want to achieve their love. But what they both lack is the strength of the character. They are mentally unstable full of sadness suspicion and doubt. so their love cannot be categorised as love in the actual sense it is more a fiscal act of a neurotic. One kills her beloved even though she loves him and the other is unable to share his feelings and in depression.

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