Modern Man’s Confusion in the Poem The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock by T.S. Eliot

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Abstract: T.S. Eliot makes his name famous with his writings like other writers who contributed in 20th century. His works are unique and different than other 20th century writers. His renowned works are ‘The Wasteland and The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’. He presents several themes in his poem ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ such as displeasure, silliness, meanness, infertility, separation, self-hatred and vagueness. He focuses on the motif of confusion of the modern man and he mentions this fact from various parts of the poem. T. S. Eliot points out the physical and religious confusion of modern man who is searching for the true meaning of life. Modern man is well-educated but he is very poor in making relationships due to this, the situation creates confusion in mind and this leads to the communication gap among the people who live nearby. The researcher analyses a wide range of research articles to support the topic and find out the reasons behind the confusion of modern man.

Keywords: Wasteland, Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, Displeasure, Confusion, Modern man

Introduction

T.S. Eliot was born in Missouri in 1888. Due to his writing style and criticism, he became one of the most dominant writers of modern era. He won the Noble Prize in 1948. His masterpiece ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ was published in 1915 and he captured in this poem the confusion of modern man from various directions. ‘The Love Song Of J. Alfred Prufrock’ is one of the most significant and prominent poems. The poem presents isolation, disintegration, confusion of the modern man in the society. It demonstrates the choice and the idea of the modern man in the industrialized and modern society. The communication gap guides the modern people towards the confusion in their relationships. The structure of poem is a deviation on the dramatic monologue. Prufrock is a narrator as well as he represents a confused man of the modern world.

He is over-educated but he doesn’t know how to live in a society. T.S. Eliot portrays modern man as pessimistic and confused. The character in the poem ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ is struggling to find out the meaning of his life. He is detached from the natural world. It seems that he is doing a job which other people have given him. He thinks he is not rewarding for what he has come into this world for that reason he is living his life in confusion.

Literature Review

The struggle of the modern man can be elaborated through the poem ‘Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock. The poem shows the loss of religious identity of modern man who lives in this world in confusion as on page 45 [1]. Modern man losses his faith and the spirit of religion because of confusion over meaningless things.

Singh intricate that approximately all his poems such as The Hollow Man, The Waste Land and Long Song of J. Alfred Prufrock are certainly now, turned into the pointer or landmark of modern English Poetry. These poems are full of vicious fundamentals, filthy conditions, disappointment, the confused or unsure situation of mind, bogus illustration, foolishness, cruelty, barrenness,
existential silliness and segregation of modern city life see page 41 [2]. T.S. Eliot presents in his poetry the confused and puzzled disorder of the modern age. Eliot was unhappily aware that something was missing in the modern man’s philosophy and ethos as reference of page 51 [1]. T. S. Eliot represents the confusion of modern age in his poetry. Modern man loses his culture and tradition owing to that now he traps between nature and artificial life.

‘The Love Song of J. Alfred prufrock’, ‘The Hollow Men’ and ‘ The Wate Land’ are from the same era when Eliot tries to find out either to live with confusion in following the ways of the world or live happily by finding his own method of escape as mention on page 441 [3]. T.S. Eliot knows that he cannot live with the philosophy of this world for finding happiness. This philosophy only creates more confusion than peace.

T. S. Eliot is acknowledged for being curtai and conventional modernist poet, but there are various division and cynicism, confusion, self-hatred and profound ambiguity that formulate ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ directly associated to transgender readers as consider from page 75 [4]. Prufrock hesitates all the time while talking to women. His way of life provides him inferiority complex and he is not able to get rid of this issue because he lives in a society where he is not equipped to separate this phenomenon from his style. As on page 57, Snyder articulates that Prufrock’s confusion of temporal way of life is more aggravated by his effort to create gender dissimilarity of outer social hope and that’s why it ends up obscure amongst the women [5]. Dalarna clarifies on page 20 that Prufrock tries to find concord and unity in the confusing modern world and women that he meets up his pursuit [6]. Prufrock’s heart always attempts to talk to women for making harmony in his life but he fails every time when he starts thinking about the action. Because his thinking offers him nothing but more confusion.

The questions in the poem reveal that Prufrock is gone astray in the confusion of modern era and this averts him from being submissive with the people bound by him on page 56 [7]. Modern man’s connection with the era is questionable due the confusion created by the people.

Prufrock’s longing to get away looks weighed down by his uncertainty, confusion and incapability to discern precisely what to articulate as he gets himself at the end of infancy and on the edge of maturity see page 35 [5]. With the passage of time the modern man increases his confusion rather than reducing it. The uncertainties of the era create conflicts in the mind of modern man.

Al-Khader expresses on page 52 that these streets interweave and twist like a “tedious argument” with “insidious intent” which symbolizes an image of confusion and hammering. Prufrock inquires this position and solicits his readers to take a walk through the component of an anonymous town where the streets direct readers to an irresistible question [8]. Prufrock’s mind only rises questions not the answers or solutions as a result those questions generate confusion in the life of modern man. Cash elaborates that the image of the catlike fog, with its figurative association between fog and furry being, is a symbol of J. Alfred Prufrock’s confusion as on page 7 [9]. To be exact, Prufrock is confused by this gaudy image; warped in his mind are the insights of a seductive woman who could console him in his isolation and a prostitute who would cost him his self-respect. His respect binds him not to pursue a woman due to the fear of rejection. His own mind now confuses him either to chase a woman or protect his self respect.

Research Questions

1. Why does T. S. Eliot present modern man in confusion?
2. What are the reasons of modern man’s confusion?
3. Does confusion lead towards the isolation?

Content Analysis

T. S. Eliot exposes modern man in confusion from several aspects. He believes that modern man lives in this modern era in perplexity that leads him towards isolation. Modern man lost the spirit of religion on account of this he became alienated from spiritual world.

The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oysters-shell:

The scene of quiet voices vanishing among the abandoned streets implies the act of illegitimate sex conceded out in cheap hotels. Consequently, it specifies ethical confusions in city life.

To lead you to an overwhelming question
Oh, do not ask, “What is it?”
The situation leads to the irresistible question which doesn’t have any proper answer. Even the narrator restricts the reader not to ask about the situation. Modern man has many questions regarding the surroundings and each question escorts the modern man towards the confusion. He doesn’t know why he is here and how to deal with the surroundings even he doesn’t know the meaning of his life.

In the room the women come and go Talking of Michelangelo.

Women are interested to talk about Michelangelo, the Renaissance age famous painter. A question raises and it develops the confusion in mind of modern man that why women are talking about Michelangelo over and over. The poem doesn’t show any hint regarding that.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,  
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,

The fog represents inner or spiritual confusion of modern man. He separates himself from religion and that separation provides spiritual confusion. It can be said that physically and spiritually modern man is confused.

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,

The confusion of modern man snatches the ability of taking decisions. He is not able to take any verdict inspite of being educated.

And indeed there will be time  
To wonder, “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?”  
……………………………………
Time to turn back and descend the stair,  
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair

Modern man, being an over educated, is not capable to ask and tell his heart’s secret to anyone specially women. He fears about the result of being rejected. Due to bald spot, in middle of his hair, makes him more confused that he thinks his beloved would not accept him in this appearance.

For I have known them all already, known them all:

Beneath the music from a farther room.  
So how should I presume?

His life style and environment do not encourage him to do what he has in his mind. Even he has education and living a middle class life but again he is still assuming how to pursue his desire while having the confusion.

And I have known the eyes already, known them all  
……………………………………
Then how should I begin  
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?

He knows all but not competent to presume his life style. He sometimes questions his existence as well that what he is doing here. With an howl of frustration, he rejects the ‘impossible’ chase for meaning; once again, it has resulted merely in a gaudy image of confusion.

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets  
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes  
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? ...

Modern man doesn’t know what he is doing here. He just wastes his time by looking the people doing their things. Modern man is so isolated that he passes his time leaning out of window and watches people who come and go. He is uncertain about the things which he is observing on daily basis [10].

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  
……………………………………
That is not what I meant, at all.”

Modern man lives isolated life which makes him dull. He is not conveying his message in proper way. He prepares his mind again and again to convey his heart’s message properly but then he starts thinking about his words validity.

Modern man has many questions in his mind like “Do I dare disturb the universe?” “How should I presume?” “How should I begin?” “Would it have been worthwhile?” His questions demonstrate that Prufrock is lost in the confusion of the modern world and this stops him from being acquiescent with other people around him.
Conclusion

T. S. Eliot is considered to be a dominant and well-known writer of 20th century. He shows an inventive style of modern life. He discusses the problems related to modern society. T. S. Eliot illustrates in his poem ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ the confusion of modern man. Modern man is searching for the aim of his life and he wants to fit himself in the people around him. People are living collectively but they have a lack of communication. They are confused for being a part of modern world. Modern man is away from the religion that creates spiritual confusion as well. Modern man is well-educated but not able to convey his thought to women in his surroundings. He has a fear of rejection therefore, his actions are confusing too. Many researchers have discussed this poem in many ways but the researcher has focused only of the theme of confusion which is related to the modern man.

References