

LOW SELF-ESTEEM AND EXISTENTIAL DESPAIR IN T.S. ELIOT'S *THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK* 1919

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Abstract: It is highly believed that modernism brought about various positive aspects to people's life. However, it should be noted that it has, as well, a number of shortcomings as it caused tremendous change to the deep structure of the society and individuals' perception of the world. The present work aims to spot light on the issue of social anxiety; its causes and effects on the modern individual through the analysis of T.S. Eliot's poem *The love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. The poem exhibits sense of loneliness, worthlessness and meaningless of modern life that results in low-self-esteem and existential despair to individuals. The work adopts Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a humanistic theory in addition to the existentialist theory to analyse Prufrock's social despair, low self-esteem, and ineffectiveness. The poem shows that people's unsatisfactory need to security, love, acceptance and sense of belonging may have destructive effects on people's self-esteem, sense of existence and worthiness of life.

Key Words: social anxiety, modern life, meaningless, low self-esteem, existential despair.

DÜŞÜK BENLİK SAYGISI VE VAROLUŞSAL UMUTSUZLUK T.S. ELİOT'S J. ALFRED PRUFROCK'UN AŞK ŞARKISI 1919

Öz: Modernizmin insanların yaşamına çeşitli olumlu yönler getirdiğine inanılmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, toplumun derin yapısında ve bireylerin dünya algısında muazzam bir değişikliğe neden olduğu için birtakım eksikliklere de sahip olduğuna dikkat edilmelidir. Bu çalışma, T.S. Eliot'un J. Alfred Prufrock'un aşk Şarkısı şiirinin analizi yoluyla sosyal kaygı konusuna, nedenleri ve modern birey üzerindeki etkilerine ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır. Şiir, bireylere düşük benlik saygısı ve varoluşsal umutsuzlukla sonuçlanan modern yaşamın yalnızlık, değersizlik ve anlamsızlık duygusunu sergiliyor. Çalışma, Prufrock'un sosyal umutsuzluğunu, düşük özgüvenini ve etkisizliğini analiz etmek için ana teoriler olarak varoluşçu teoriye ek olarak Maslow'un ihtiyaçlar hiyerarşisini hümanist bir teori olarak benimliyor. Şiir, insanların güvenliğe, sevgiye, kabullenmeye ve aidiyet duygusuna olan yetersiz ihtiyacının, insanların benlik saygısı, varoluş duygusu ve yaşama değerliliği üzerinde yıkıcı etkileri olabileceğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: sosyal kaygı, modern yaşam, anlamsız, düşük benlik saygısı, varoluşsal umutsuzluk.

Introduction

Modernism is a literary movement that sprung up to the foreground of the literary arena in the early 20th century. Its main concern is to spot light on the

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individual rather than the society. In modern literature, the individual is the centre of interest and concern and due to the hardships of modern life, he is believed to counter difficult life, unfavourable circumstances and hard challenges. Modern literature no longer depicts the society in the usual traditional way rather it forms a break with everything old. This type of literature actually collapses ancient social norms and behaviour.

Modern writers have given considerable attention to the effects of modernity on the individual in their writings. Outstanding authors such as Ernest Hemingway, Arthur Miller, Joseph Conrad, and William Faulkner endeavour to reveal themes of isolation, disillusionment, despair, emptiness, and confusion through unstable characters that seem to suffer from the selfishness of modern times. In this vein, these authors engage to depict the deep wounds of their characters' discomfort with modernity.

The present study analysis T.S Eliot's outstanding poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and highlights the difficulties that a modern man confronts in his daily life through the character Prufrock. The protagonist suffers from low self-esteem that he develops due to his failure to build social bonds with the other members of the society. The man's continuous hesitations and cowardice for action are indeed the main reasons for his ineffectiveness and worthlessness sentiments. His internal conflicts and hollowness result in severe existential despair and vacuum. All in all, through his notable work, Eliot attempts to depict the dreary of modern society and its effects on the individual.

1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

In 1943, the psychologist Abraham Maslow published a paper under the name of 'A Theory of Human Motivation' to explain the necessary needs that individuals must meet in their life. It should be noted, however, that human beings must fulfil lower levels first before it can be possible for them to achieve the higher ones. This means that for individuals to achieve self-actualization which is the top level of needs, they must satisfy the first four ones. These needs are therefore put in order.

To start with, the physiological needs shape up the very basics that humans need to survive. This is generally related to the body such as food, water, sleep, air, and warmth. The satisfaction of these primary needs have a great influence on individual's behaviour and later level needs. Second, safety needs are mainly the need to feel secured and independent in life. This comes from a job that ensures a regular income, a home that protects the individual from danger in addition to health and peace of mind. The subsequent level which is love and belonging need has an immense influence on the psychology of the individual. People need to feel accepted in the society. They need to belong to a

certain social group so that they can fulfil their role identity effectively. Negative feelings such as isolation, loneliness, and worthlessness are the main features of people who fail to satisfy the third level needs.

Self-esteem level need, the fourth one, is a stage in which individuals must have positive perceptions about their selves. They need to develop the feeling of self-respect and being respected in the society. It can be achieved when individuals manage to obtain a respectful social status in the community. This is mainly revealed when individuals gain recognition, appreciation and self-confidence. Last but not least, the upper level self-actualization needs can never be achieved if all the other lower level needs are not realized. At this stage, Individuals must manage to overcome the internal and external obstacles they may encounter when realizing their goals. Self-actualization is an on-going process that never stops as individuals' life is in constant change.

In literature, Maslow's hierarchy of needs are well illustrated through the different characters writers explore in their works. Authors do not necessarily depict all the human level needs in their writings; rather they can focus stress one particular need at the expense of the others. Works such as *The Miserables* (1862) by Victor Hugo, *The Grapes of Wrath* 1939 by John Steinbeck, *Down and Out in Paris and London* 1933 by George Orwell and *Oliver Twist* (1837-1839) by Charles Dickens exhibit the suffering of man from poverty, hunger and homelessness.

Through *Oliver Twist*, for instance, Charles Dickens wants to crystalize the suffering of orphans from abuse, violence, starvation, poverty, lack of shelter and security. These orphans are deprived of the very essence of life. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the first two level needs are not achieved by infants like Oliver and his siblings. In the case of these kids, there is no hope for them to achieve higher levels of human needs. Unfortunately, they remain wallowing in the cruelty of life without being able to satisfy the basic needs of life.

In many novels, characters may suffer from lack of recognition, sense of belonging or self-confidence. This is true for African-American characters who wish to gain recognition and to be considered equal to the whites. These inferiorized subjects hope to obtain a full chance to provide positive contributions to the American society and hence develop high self-esteem and respectful social status regardless of their skin colour. This is typically the case of the protagonists in *The Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison, *The Human Stain* (2000) by Philip Roth, *Native Son* (1940) by Richard Wright and *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Toni Morrison.

In the invisible man, for example, Ellison intends to stress the way the protagonist suffers from invisibility as he is not recognized by the other notable

members of the society namely the whites. This unnamed black man lacks the opportunity to perform significant roles in the society, the thing that devastated his self-esteem and destroys his self-confidence. In the poem under study, we will attempt to spot light on the needs Prufrock is deprived of in his empty, worthlessness, and meaningless life.

2. Existentialist Development in Literature

As a literary movement, Existentialism depicted the turmoil of World War II period. This is what Hans van Stralen actually approves in the following statement: 'I consider literary existentialism, in the first place, as a movement which can be understood by way of existential phenomenology. Furthermore, this is a type of literature which is closely connected with World War II.' (2005:56). Accordingly, literary existentialism refers to individual experiences and actions which are also tied to World War era and circumstances.

Existentialism first emerged as a philosophy to question the real meaning of individuals' existence, freedom and choice. It reflects people's living conditions and perception in life. Existentialism began with the works of notable figures namely Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche around the mid and late 19th century. Though the term has never been used by them, their works formed a solid ground on which existentialism flourished. This literary movement developed largely thanks to the French philosophers Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus who invested their existential ideas in their famous works namely *Nausea* 1938 and *The Outsider* 1939 respectively. These novels are considered the best examples that depicted in a broad sense the concern of existential thought.

It is worth mentioning, however, that the literary works that illustrate existential issues such as meaningless, absurdity, suffering, despair and frustration in modern life are not necessarily produced by existentialist writers. This is typically the case of the literature produced by the famous Russian writer Dostoevsky. Stephen Michelman summarizes perfectly the different cases through which existentialism is explored in literature when he claims:

'The scope of 'existentialist fiction' is thus indefinitely large, however, it is possible to introduce a distinction between three senses in which a work of literature may be considered existentialist: works of literature written by existentialist philosophers; works of literature influential to the development of existentialist philosophy; and works of literature that express an idea or content associated with existentialism, such as absurdity or alienation, but that otherwise are unconnected to existentialist philosophy.' (2008: 143).

Therefore, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche fall into the category of the figures who contributed to the development of existentialist theory while Sartre and Camus are the existentialist philosophers who used literature as the best mean

to reveal their existential tendencies. Dostoyevsky, on the other hand, is considered the forerunner of existentialism in literature. His masterpieces' main concern, namely *Crime and Punishment* 1866 and *Notes from Underground* 1864, depicted perfectly the real suffering of man from modernity. Dostoyevsky's characters are entrapped in the dilemma of fragmentation and paralyzed to move forward and alter the absurdity of life that shows the complex nature of individual's psyche. Meaningless, hopelessness and alienation in life tend to overcome man's will for freedom and hinder him from creating true meaning to his life and essence. The following section is an attempt to explore deeply the issue of low self-esteem, existential despair¹ and frustration² through the notable work *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* by T.S Eliot.

3. Low Self-esteem, Existential Despair and Frustration of J. Alfred Prufrock

Modernity had tremendous effects on the social order of communities and life of individuals. It broke social bonds and caused psychological disequilibrium to men.³ This is what Eliot intends to stress through his notable work *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. The poem opens with one of the most stressful aspects that negatively affects people's psyche in modern times. Alienation and loneliness are a widespread phenomenon of the twentieth century. At the beginning of the work, readers get the impression that the protagonist is accompanied with another person when he says 'let us go you and I'(line1), then when readers move throughout the lines of the poem, they come to understand that poor Prufrock is merely having an internal monologue.

Prufrock is alone; his alienation irritates him to the extent of imagining a person to whom he can chat with. The man is unable to build bonds with people around him and invites an imaginary person to walk with him through the empty streets where 'the evening is spread out against the sky like a patient etherized upon a table' (line2-3). This line shows the absence of people in Prufrock's life and in such an isolated situation, the protagonist is found hopeless to face the cruelty of life. He is like a patient under the mercy of his doctor. The patient here represents Prufrock who feels paralyzed in facing his sad reality in life.

In the next lines, Prufrock asks the person he is with to go and make their visit (line12) and uses imagination to realize the things he wishes them to hap

1. According to online Collins dictionary, existential despair is the feeling that everything is wrong and that nothing will improve.

2. Existential frustration is a term used by Frankl to refer to the experience of being blocked in searching for a meaningful life.

3. This is mainly due to world wars I and II and their aftermath social, economic and political consequences on people.

pen in his life. The normal situation in people's daily life is to create several personal relations with the other people in the community they are surrounded by. The man hopes not only to have a friend but also to visit others and build connections in the society. The protagonist is, in fact, afraid of loneliness, this cruel feeling that pushes any normal person to develop anxiety and psychological problems. It should be noted that this situation depicts the negative side of industrialization and development; a modernity that dehumanizes individuals.

In an attempt to explain the truth on human existence, existentialists assume that 'existence precedes essence' (Jean Paul Sartre, 1980:45) which means that humans exist first then meaning to life is attributed. Concerning this point, Sartre in his 'Existentialism is Humanism', suggests that people are responsible for creating sense to their lives. They have the total freedom to choose their way in the world. In his own words, Sartre believes that "man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does"(1980: 295).

Human beings are born free as they are the manipulators of their world. To Sartre, man is not a mere object under the mercy of destiny. It is, in fact, the individual who is responsible for constructing his self and essence. Sartre stresses further the idea in stating, "[I]f life is nothing until it is lived; but it is yours to make sense of, and the value of it is nothing else but the sense that you choose" (1975: 309). Stated differently, human beings' life is insignificant until it is lived where meaning and choice is attributed to it. However, if man proves to be inefficient and unable to make his own choices in life and to decide upon his future, in this case he is considered a mere object and an inefficient member in the society. Kierkegaard suggests that choice 'is decisive for the content of the personality, through the choice the personality immerses itself in the thing chosen, and when it does not choose it withers away in consumption' (1959 :167). In other words, one of the major features of a consistent personality is the ability of the individual to make sharp decisions i.e. individuals' personality exhibits itself depending on the choices an individual commits to. Choice, for Kierkegaard, is crucial in personality formation of individuals. In case the opposite, the individual falls in the absurdity of life.

In the poem under study, Prufrock falls into the category of people who seem to be imprisoned by his negative thoughts and ideas. This is mainly when he reveals sense of hesitation, doubt and cowardice in making choices. Throughout the verses, the protagonist pretends to have time for change and improvement. Each time he lies at himself that there is still time for him to make decisions. He states, 'Indeed there will be time' (23-26). This expression has

been used several times by Prufrock to exhibit the mean by which he relaxes himself. He tries to calm and reduce his anxiety with such words. He states in another line of the work, ‘...there is time For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse’(47-48). The man still attempts to convince himself that he has enough time to make a decision in order to alter his sad reality ; a reality that he is lonely in this world. In fact, sense of hesitation overwhelms the protagonist to make decisive choices.

When Prufrock assumes to have time to make his life better, he wonders how he should presume and start again to face the obstacles, hesitation and cowardice, in his life. At the beginning, he plans to resume action before the taking of a toast and tea. However, after going through the lines of the poem, the man actually makes none of his predetermined actions. He keeps on saying and planning for things he never does actually. Readers can easily notice his frequent postponing action when he changes his mind in stating ‘Should I, after tea and cakes and ices’(179).

Freedom of choice has been well illustrated by Jean Paul Sartre. In his own words, he stresses that: "[s]ince freedom is choice, it is change" (1994: 496-497). In the case of Prufrock, he is a person who is typically imprisoned by his frequent hesitations and postponing. Life is actually what you live, realize and act not mere hopes, desires, and unfulfilled plans. If the individual does not commit himself for action, then his life is non-sense. No one can improve his life in reality just by dreaming and developing fantasies of success. Any person, according to existentialists, is responsible for his life i.e. all the surrounding circumstances and conditions are not taken into consideration.

It is true that freedom of choice is a positive aspect in existentialism. However, it places a heavy burden on the individuals’ shoulders to take up their future with their hands as not any person can make it easily. According to Rollo May, "Freedom is man's capacity to take a hand in his own development. It is our capacity to mold ourselves" (1953:138). In fact, people are active participants in the shaping of their lives, the thing that is totally absent for Prufrock. Since the protagonist is too much hesitating and seems paralyzed to make decisions and actions in his life, this affects negatively his psyche. Prufrock due to his loneliness, alienation and incapability of shaping a sane world where he functions as a full-individual in the society, he develops social anxiety.

Every individual should attribute meaning to the world he lives in. No one can live without having a well-established purpose and meaning in life. In Frankl’s perspective, this is the ‘basic striving of man.’ (1969:35) seeking purpose is indeed one of the fundamental urges in people’s life. Not only this, Frankl further believes that in reaching meaning and purpose, man is auto-

matically fulfilling himself (1969: 38). In other words, an individual can never realize himself and achieve self-esteem outside a meaningful world where he functions effectively. This means that attributing meaning to life goes hand in hand with self-realization and transcendence.

In the work under study, Prufrock lives with no clear purpose and meaning in life and this appears in several verses. The line where he says, 'time for all the works and days of hands' (29) shows that he has no well-determined function in life. This is mainly because the protagonist continues to assume that he still has time for working and running his affairs. A person with no clear role in his community is with no doubt useless and his life is meaningless.

Routines also take a great part in the protagonist's life and reinforce in return the idea of his insignificant life. In the poem and during the party, the man asserts that he has already known them all: the evenings, the mornings and the afternoons' (49-50) nothing is new for him. This shows that he has encountered such situations several times in his life. There is nothing exciting in his life to the extent that he measures his life with coffee spoons. His life is as ridiculous as coffee spoons. Coffee spoons are a mere object characterized by being static, rigid and unchanging that is typically the state of Prufrock's life. Here, the protagonist minimizes the importance of his life and compares it to mere coffee spoons.

Prufrock goes even further to underestimate himself in denying his importance. He pessimistically asserts 'I am no prophet-and here's no great matter' he adds 'No I am not prince Hamlet, not was meant to be' (84-115). Here, the protagonist intends to reveal his insignificance as a person. He is not that important to be considered or even noticed and he approves others' behaviour towards him in return. The idea of his worthiness is also supported in the lines when he stresses that he 'should have been a pair of ragged claws, Scuttling across the floors of silent seas' (73-74). The image of ragged claws symbolizes the fact of growing old and useless. Even his movements become slow and difficult. Prufrock shows great anxiousness and concern in growing old. He fears life to end without any single attempt for change, without consideration and enjoying the premises of life.

The protagonist resumes his hopeless thoughts through underestimating even the importance of change. It is true that several lines in the poem depict the Protagonist's long for change, improvement and meaning in his life. However, the most astonishing aspect and the height of frustration are revealed when he wonders what is the importance of realizing his hopes and dreams and questions, 'would it have been worth it' (89). Through this line, one can easily stress the extent to which Prufrock is desperate in his life and how he considers his life as deeply meaningless. He lacks even the motif for change as there is

nothing that deserves it. In short, his life is overwhelmed by sense of loneliness, hopelessness, hollowness, boredom, and meaningless that results in existential despair, anxiety and particularly existential vacuum.⁴

There are four important elements that Frankl thinks are necessary for human beings, ‘a meaning to fulfil or another human being to encounter, a cause to serve or a person to love’ (Frankl, 1978: 35). In this vein, human beings’ life is not set in a vacuum. Stated differently, for an individual to develop self-transcendence, he should be an active member in the society. His life should be well-established, he should have an objective to achieve, a role to fulfil, a certain community to deal with and a person with whom he establishes an intimate relationship. Poor Prufrock lacks all of these features in his world. The man is imprisoned by his negative ideas and thoughts that he could not function appropriately in the society. Indeed, his lonely life destroys his being.

Frankl’s work does not seem to contradict with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. According to his humanistic theory, individuals should meet certain sequential needs to achieve self-actualization that represents the peak satisfactory level that fulfils and satisfies any individual’s long for success in life. Starting from the very basic needs namely the physical and security needs, the protagonist does not seem to suffer from any of these first two level needs.

In several occasions in the poem, readers can notice the comfortable life of Prufrock. He looks like a rich man especially in describing his necktie as rich and modest. Furthermore, the protagonist speaks of Dante and Shakespeare which reveals his intellectual and high social class. The same is true for the women in the party he attends. They seem to represent a respectful social status in the society. This is basically because they talk about the famous Renaissance painter Michelangelo. Despite, Prufrock’s intellectual and social rank, the man suffers from alienation, doubt, hesitation, self-underestimation and dehumanization.

Getting deep into the concept of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the protagonist does not seem to fulfil the third level needs. Absence of love and sense of belonging, in Prufrock’s life, result in immense psychological deficiencies. The man’s loneliness is with no doubt the centre of his suffering. He fails to establish social bonds with people around him. This appears in the fantasies he develops in being accompanied with an unnamed person, would it be a man or a woman. He uses repeatedly the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘You’ in addition to ‘we’ in attempt to fill his lonely world. It is a form of compensation to his deprived world of people in his life.

4. It is the state of individuals who experience meaningless, insignificance, emptiness and boredom due to industrialization and modernity.

The protagonist does not belong to any social group of his surrounding community. From the very beginning of the work till the last line, Prufrock has had no single talk with any of the people in the gathering. Sitting and eating alone seem to represent the sad reality of the man. According to psychologists, sense of belonging is a fundamental constituent of a sane personality formation. Without social acceptance and recognition, individuals tend to endure serious psychological problems and develop social fear and anxiety that result, in return, in low self-esteem and poor self-actualization. This is, indeed, what Maslow endeavours to confirm when he explains in his theory that without sense of belonging and the first level needs, people cannot achieve self-esteem.

Prufrock develops deep grief sentiments in being marginalized by others. In the party, he hears pettily the voices from a farther room. In his own words, 'I know the voices dying with a dying fall', 'Beneath the music from a farther room' (52-53). Here, the protagonist can hear the voices of people around him. Yes, they are just nearby but he cannot reach or talk to them. The word 'music' here is used to show that Prufrock is deprived of the joys and beauty of life. His social anxiety hinders him from dealing with people around him.

Prufrock is even considered invisible by the attendance of the party especially females. No woman seems to care about him or notice his presence. It is clear through the different lines in the poem how this intimate marginalization irritates his psyche. Any person needs to have a partner who shares with him/her both the hardships and joys of life. No one can live without love and tenderness. Hanna Segal in a radio talk states: 'For me, life without any relationship, any sharing, is meaningless.' (2006) i.e. People should feel that they have someone in life that cares about them otherwise life is insignificant. Intimate, love and romantic relationships are thus necessary to achieve the subsequent level in Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

The absence of women in Prufrock's life is one of the central issues in the poem. The protagonist regrets his life without a woman with whom he can overcome the harshness of life, fill his emptiness, and have love and romantic relation with. This can be well illustrated in the following line where he states 'Do I dare to eat a peach?' (126); peach here in the poem represents a woman. Prufrock hopes to enjoy a sexual intercourse with a woman and readers feel his depriving from this natural need as a man. The protagonist resumes his fantasies when he imagines himself enjoying a walk on the seaside of a beach with a woman. He wishes to experience this intimate romantic moment. Pettily the man hesitates to engage and experience the moment. He lacks the necessary courage to make this initiative due to his anxiety.

In his notable work *Man's Search for Himself*, Rollo May suggests the relationship between courage, anxiety and freedom in saying: 'Courage is the

capacity to meet the anxiety which arises as one achieves freedom.’ (1953: 192). This completely contradicts the way Prufrock chooses to face the hardships of life. Instead of struggling to attribute meaning to his life, and integrate himself into the community and the people surrounding him, he fears to move forward and make positive changes to his world. Instead of exploiting his freedom of choice in life, he imprisons himself and places his dreams under the mercy of his negative thoughts, cowardice and fear.

Prufrock goes further to add, ‘I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each, I do not think that they will sing to me’(128-129). The man is really deprived of this affective side. The absence of love in his life destroys his psychological equilibrium and self-image which pushes him to dehumanize himself. This justifies Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. According to him, love, sense of acceptance and intimate relationships are vital steps for individuals’ to realize high self-esteem and move to the next level needs namely self-actualization.

Prufrock is obsessed by his image in the eyes of the others. He has no confidence in his image though he seems from the description to be a good-looking man. The problem is actually internal. It has nothing to do with his appearance and clothes. The protagonist lost confidence in everything that surrounds him. This is well illustrated when he states, ‘they will say: how his hair is growing thin !’(41). Here, the man is meticulous about the way people look at him. He thinks that all the people around him do not bear his presence. When people fix him with their down looks, he equates himself to an insect that is pinned on a wall.

According to Maslow’s theory, individuals must develop positive images about themselves so that the fourth level need is achieved. Contrary to Prufrock, the man seems to underestimate himself in many occasions in the poem. As have been mentioned before, the protagonist compares himself to coffee spoons, a pair of ragged claws and finally to an insect. The man actually disrespects himself and fails to develop high self-esteem. Even the surrounding community do not even notice his presence. Lack of recognition and appreciation from both Prufrock and the community around him result in his underestimation and low self-esteem.

After attempting to challenge life through his fantasies, the protagonist finally achieves the sad truth that he grows old. He severely states ‘I grow old, I grow old’ (124). Instead of breaking the bonds and overcoming his internal and psychological obstacles, he admits that he grows old and that it is too late for him to make sense to his life. Now, death mocks at him in being paralyzed to improve his life relations, to live a meaningful life and to enhance his high self-esteem. Prufrock is conscious now that he is near the end without realizing

any single achievement. He even lost will and enthusiasm in struggling to attribute meaning to his life. Death for the protagonist is another door that would direct him to the meaningless of human reality. In what is termed existential vacuum, Prufrock seems to be caught in the insignificance of life.

In his significant work *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl assumes that people who suffer from existential vacuum 'lack the awareness of a meaning worth living for. They are haunted by the experience of their inner emptiness, a void within themselves' (1992:110). Accordingly, such type of people loses the value of life. Their internal hollowness⁵ hinders them from making action and attributing sense to their life. The state of vacuum, to Frankl, is a hard feeling to overcome as it requires the individual to alter his life paths which is not the case of the protagonist. The latter is aware that his life is meaningless and wishes to change it but he cannot. He is haunted in the absurdity of life.

Prufrock seems to refuse the reality of his life. It is evident through the lines of the poem that he fails to reach compromise with his internal conflicts. This makes him vulnerable to severe existential crisis. In this matter, Albert Camus says: 'there is no love of life without despair of life' (Camus: 1970). This means that individuals should learn to accept the hardships of life in order to enjoy life. In other words, individuals should go along with the issue of meaningless and absurdity to feel the pleasures of life which completely contradicts Prufrock's situation in the poem. The man's inability to overcome both the internal and external obstacles justifies his failure to achieve the top level needs that is self-actualization. In fact, sense of fear, despair, vacuum, frustration and anxiety overwhelm the protagonist. He could not mitigate with the negative effects of modernity on him. This is mainly the reason why he develops low self-esteem and existential despair.

Conclusion

From the analysis of TS Eliot's work, one can confirm that modernity has destructive effects on individuals' social relations. In the case of Prufrock, the man suffers from alienation and loneliness that resulted in subsequent destructive consequences. According to Maslow, people need to feel love and sense of belonging in order to move to the next need level that is self-esteem. However, Prufrock's loneliness shapes a tough obstacle for him to form a

5. Hollowness is a widespread phenomenon and one of the key features of a modern man. This kind of people appears on the surface to be normal and even attractive. However, what is astonishing about them is that they lack significance, depth, values and morals i.e. internally empty. This is what modernity actually caused to humanity. A 'hollow man' is considered one of the most serious effects of modernity and development on man.

positive perception on himself. Throughout the poem, readers can notice his self-dehumanization and underestimation. In the party that the protagonist attends, he is unnoticed by the surrounding people. No one in the party gives him a slight importance which destroys his psyche. He wills to make changes but he seems paralysed due to his social anxiety.

Prufrock's hesitation, doubt, and fear to make decisions to change his life for the better make the situation worst. He is aware that he ought to make changes but he does not. Instead of satisfying his needs and realizing his dreams in reality, he escapes the sad truth in his fantasies. He imagines himself with the company of a woman having a romantic relationship with. Not only this, he believes to have enough time to improve his life. However, none of his hopes and dreams comes true. This results in his development of existential despair, frustration and vacuum. Nothing seems meaningful in his life as he lost hope in positive change. By the end of the poem, the protagonist thinks of death. Sense of meaningless, insignificance and absurdity of life overwhelms his thoughts.

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