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Text piece

**Poetry Study Reference: Preludes, T.S. Eliot**

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**Tigrex**

Resources consulted

**How to approach a poem, JSK Publishers**

## ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE

### PRESCRIBED POETRY FOR NSC EVALUATION 2009

<b>Achebe</b>	<i>Refugee mother and child</i>
<b>Banoobhai</b>	<i>You cannot know the fears I have</i>
<b>Cummings</b>	<i>i thank You God for most this amazing</i>
<b>Day-Lewis</b>	<i>Walking away</i>
<b>Dikeni</b>	<i>Love poem for my country</i>
<b>Eliot</b>	<i>Preludes</i>
<b>Ghose</b>	<i>Decomposition</i>
<b>Keats</b>	<i>To Autumn</i>
<b>Livingstone</b>	<i>Sunstrike</i>
<b>Mungoshi</b>	<i>If you don't stay bitter for too long</i>
<b>Plath</b>	<i>Mushrooms</i>
<b>Serote</b>	<i>City Johannesburg</i>
<b>Shakespeare</b>	<i>To me, fair friend</i>
<b>Shelley</b>	<i>Ozymandias</i>
<b>Yeats</b>	<i>An Irish airman forsees his death</i>

Preludes  
**T.S. Eliot**

**ANALYSIS OF THE POEM**

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*Grammatical errors were corrected by BTG Educational Resources Department*

*[http://www.eliteskills.com/analysis\\_poetry/Preludes\\_by\\_T\\_S\\_Eliot\\_analysis.php](http://www.eliteskills.com/analysis_poetry/Preludes_by_T_S_Eliot_analysis.php)*

T.S Eliot's Preludes, is one of his most prominent poems because it presents his view of society at that time using concrete objects and images to metaphorically explore the nature of life and society. In this poem, we discover society as corrupt and desolate going through a cycle of meaningless routine where people bare a false hope of a divine source overlooking and protecting humanity.

The title itself holds significant meaning. A prelude in general and particularly in a musical sense characterizes an introduction to something. This is suggesting that the characteristics of society we are provided with in this poem are merely an introduction to what we should be viewing society like.

The first stanza introduces the tone of the poem with a description of a typical street from an omniscient point of view. We are first given the impression of a desolate, corrupt and exhausted society through the use of a variety of verbs his accumulation of verbs is heavily supported through a the use of alliteration of the "s" sound in words such as x. This technique evokes our sense of smell imagining the picture Eliot is describing. Throughout the first stanza, we are given the suggestion of the presence of people though it is not actually ever stated. This is evident in the mentioning of "smell of steaks...feet." This effectively communicates to us that this is a fragmented world where nothing is whole. The darkness of the first stanza is concluded with a pause, creating anticipation followed by the line "then the lighting of the lamps..." This line gives us a feeling of hope as the darkness is contrasted with the mentioning of light.

However, the start of the second stanza marks the next morning, yet the tone is still identical to that of the first. Eliot stresses out the fact that it is now morning, the possibility of a new start, through the use of personification. But we are soon to discover that nothing has changed. The lines that follow it give us the feeling of a "hangover." This is depicted by the mentioning of "faint stale smells of beer from the

sawdust-trampled streets...” Once again the alliteration of “s” reminds us of the sense of smell of the image we are given. The rest of the stanza continues the motif of emptiness created in the first stanza with the extensive use of “muddy feet...hands.” The last line introduces a change in perspective as we now focus on a more personal view, assuming the point of view of one particular person.

The shift to the second person immediately leads us to become more involved with the situation. The first three lines depict a haunted and restless night using the repetition of “you” and the accumulation x whole stanza constructs a shattered and desolate life, strengthening the picture painted from the earlier stanzas. This is portrayed by the “sordid images of which your soul was constituted...” The woman in this stanza even goes through an epiphany, in which we are shown that she herself makes a discovery of life to be meaningless. This opinion of society is reflected as an opinion shared by the whole society since this particular woman is representative of everyone because she is just one of “a thousand furnished rooms.”

The final part of the poem embraces the climax of the poem’s message and wraps up what is stated. After three stanzas of describing a failing society, this stanza suggests it is an ongoing cycle. The view is now switched to another particular person, a man this time. The alliteration of the “s” is reintroduced here in the first line “soul stretched tight across the skies...” Eliot points out the action of ‘stretching’ to suggest a sense of pain and agony created by restlessness. This idea could also be extended to almost make it seem like the man is vulnerable and fragile since his soul is personified to be “stretching tight.” The accumulation of “four and five and six o’clock” infers a rhythm and a busy ongoing routine which society goes through, almost like in a mechanical way. This further outlines how society is so meaningless since we are forced to go through the same routine everyday. The “evening newspapers” is a reference to the people who travel in public transport everyday and reading the paper in the evening, a routine many people share.

The final three lines are very dramatic as Eliot reveals that people are constantly “assured of certain certainties” outlining the lack of uniqueness among society and yet again explaining how we are part of a meaningless routine. The sharpness of the following statement “conscience of a blackened world” is extremely heartbreaking. Eliot for the first time in the poem no longer uses a metaphor to bring across his message but instead makes a definite statement about the fate of society and

ultimately, the world. This rather harsh statement gives us the total impression that there is no hope left in society and that we all live in a doomed world with nothing to save us, a truth we, as the reader, are forced to discover and accept. This forms a climax in the poem as we share the despair in the words that conclude his opinion.

However, the next stanza directly contrasts this lack of hope. The perspective changes to the first person with a very personal view. His mentioning of “the notion of some infinitely gentle infinitely suffering thing” is a reference to Jesus, a divine source, whom many people of society rely on for hope. Eliot is stating that he is succumbing himself to the hope of a god to save him and society. This denotes that this is exactly what people think of for hope, a divine intervention of some sort to save humanity. But Eliot quickly dismisses this source of hope in the final concluding stanza. Using an extremely harsh and savage tone, Eliot totally disregards the hope of a god saving the world. This yet again brings us back to the tone of a sense of hopelessness, as the world has no one to save it. The use of the word “revolves” tells us that society is still undergoing a continuous process, a reminder of the idea of a meaningless, mechanic routine which society goes through. The very last line “gathering fuel in vacant lots” is a very bleak and terror-filled tone, which the poem concludes on. The ‘vacant lots’ brings us back to the first stanza, a street where the society is corrupt, desolate and fragmented.

Eliot’s Preludes, is a poem that expresses his view of society as a hopeless world where the streets are lonely, shattered and exhausted and its people are mechanical, going through a constant, meaningless routine that lacks vividness and uniqueness. Discoveries are forced upon the reader as we are faced with the harsh reality of society. Divine sources are what people believe in for hope but he dismisses this idea as well, stating that it doesn’t exist and that no one will save this world from its doomed state. And so, with this in mind we truly discover what our world faces and how there is no god to save us.

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***“He is not of us, unless he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself”***

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