

Epitaphs and Elegies

Edgar Lee Masters' "Cassius Hueffer"

They have chiseled on my stone the words:
"His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him
That nature might stand up and say to all the world,
This was a man."
Those who knew me smile
As they read this empty rhetoric.

My epitaph should have been:
"Life was not gentle to him,
And the elements so mixed in him
That he made warfare on life,
In the which he was slain."
While I lived I could not cope with slanderous tongues,
Now that I am dead I must submit to an epitaph
Graven by a fool!

Wulf - Anon.

Prey, it's as if my people have been handed prey.
They'll tear him to pieces if he comes with a troop.

O, we are apart.

Wulf is on one island, I on another,
a fastness that island, a fen-prison.
Fierce men roam there, on that island;
they'll tear him to pieces if he comes with a troop.

O, we are apart.

How I have grieved for my Wulf's wide wanderings.
When rain slapped the earth and I sat apart weeping,
when the bold warrior wrapped his arms about me,
I seethed with desire and yet with such hatred.
Wulf, my Wulf, my yearning for you
and your seldom coming have caused my sickness,
my mourning heart, not mere starvation.
Can you hear me Eadwacer? Wulf will spirit
our pitiful whelp to the woods.
Men easily savage what was never secure,
our song together.

Elegy - W.S. Merwin

Who would I show it to?

Funeral Blues - W. H. Auden

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message 'He is Dead'.
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

Love Poems

Emily - Elise Cowen

Emily,
Come summer
You'll take off you
 jeweled bees
Which sting me
I'll strip my stinking
 jeans
Hand in hand
We'll run outside
Look straight at
 the sun
A second time
And get tan

and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)

The house was just twinkling in the moon light - Gertrude Stein

The house was just twinkling in the moon light,
And inside it twinkling with delight,
Is my baby bright.
Twinkling with delight in the house twinkling
with the moonlight,
Bless my baby bless my baby bright,
Bless my baby twinkling with delight,
In the house twinkling in the moon light,
Her hubby dear loves to cheer when he thinks
and he always thinks when he knows and he always
knows that his blessed baby wifey is all here and he
is all hers, and sticks to her like burrs, blessed baby

No Loser, No Weeper - Maya Angelou

"I hate to lose something,"
then she bent her head,
"even a dime, I wish I was dead.
I can't explain it. No more to be said.
'Cept I hate to lose something.
"I lost a doll once & cried for a week.
She could open her eyes, and do all but speak.
I believe she was took, by some doll-snatiching sneak.
I tell you, I hate to lose something.
"A watch of mine once, go up & walked away.
It had twelve numbers on it & for the time of day.
I'll never forget it and all I can say
Is I really hate to lose something.
"Now if I felt that way 'bout a watch & a toy,
What you think I feel 'bout my lover-boy?
I aint threatening you, madam, but he is my evening's joy.
And I mean I really hate to lose something."

Identity

Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock - T.S. Eliot

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma percioche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question ...
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

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

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
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.

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

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 —
(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin —
(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

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? ...

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet — and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,

And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it towards some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
If one, settling a pillow by her head
Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
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."

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old ... I grow old ...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.
We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Analysis

“Prufrock” is a dramatic monologue between the speaker J. Alfred Prufrock and an unknown listener, played by the reader. Prufrock is a socially anxious and image conscious man. He is a keen social observer, quick to judge the inanity of his peers, but his acute criticisms feed into his sense of hesitancy in social situations. Prufrock wanders through a deserted street in a shabby area, where he is surrounded by the “muttering retreats of restless night in one-night cheap hotels” (Eliot 4). The deserted city reflects Prufrock’s sense of alienation from humanity, and the restless nights are contrasted with Prufrock’s “etherised” feelings (3). Prufrock and his companion leave the empty streets and go to a social event in a posher part of the city. Here Prufrock’s alluded to alienation is made explicit. The paroxysms of social angst that he has experienced throughout his life make him shy away from interactions--particularly with women--because he fears that he will be stuck by the sharp eyes of social critique, “pinned and wiggling on the wall” if he shows his genuine self. Despite his lack of action, he is obsessed with women, and his inability (real or perceived) to talk to them further compound his feelings of alienation and anxiety. He soothes himself with the thoughts that there is plenty of time to “prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet” and engage with others. He placates himself that “there will be time” to act, to talk to women, to “dare”, and he uses this fantasy of endless time to assuage his feelings of inadequacy. This sense of time is undermined at the end of the poem when he declares that he is “old”. Prufrock recognizes that he has allowed his life to pass him by while he has waited on the sidelines. He finishes the poem with the heartbreaking assessment that he has “heard the mermaids singing, each to each” but he is no great hero like Odysseus and the mermaids cannot be bothered to sing to him; he is unworthy even of being lured to his death by these mythical creatures.

Eliot creates the hopeless and neurotic tone of the poem through metaphors, allusions, repetition, pathetic fallacy, synecdoche, and an inconsistent use of rhyme and metre.

1. Rhyme and metre

- a. The poem begins with a rhyming couplet, but majority of the poem follows no rhyme scheme. The metre of the poem is similarly inconsistent, ranging from monometre to heptametre, and occasionally slipping into blank verse.
- b. The inconsistency of the rhyme shows Prufrock’s inability to fully commit himself to something. Eliot uses sporadic rhyming to parallel Prufrock’s many abandoned attempts at

2. Synecdoche
 - a. scuttling claws in place of crabs, arms in place of women, eyes in place of people
 - b. Eliot's profuse use of synecdoche highlights Prufrock's feelings of isolation and disconnection. By breaking images down into dissected parts, Eliot mimics Prufrock's detachment from his peers.
3. Personification
 - a. Yellow fog, restless nights, eternal footman
4. Metaphors/similes
 - a. Like a tedious argument of insidious intent, I have measured out my life with coffee spoons
5. Repetition
 - a. let us go
 - b. in the room...
 - c. Do I dare?
6. Alliteration
 - a. The taking of a toast and tea
7. Tone
 - a. Hopeless
 - b. Neurotic
 - c. Defeated
8. Pathetic fallacy
 - a. When the evening is spread out against the sky like a patient etherized upon the table
 - b. The poem begins with a vivid description of the sky that parallels Prufrock's demeanor exactly: etherized and somnolent. The sky is a metaphor for Prufrock's neuroses, which have caused panicked inaction rather than manic hyperaction.
9. Themes
 - a. Alienation
 - b. Isolation
 - c. Neuroses
 - d. Discomfort
 - e. Discontent
 - f. Wasted time

Proxy Poem

Floundering under bloated, indolent skies
 We walk, rain stinging our eyes
 With lazy raindrops
 Falling
 Falling
 Falling
 Forcing us under the awnings of streetside cafes—
 Bumping the tables of
 mouths being stuffed by food, uninterrupted by the rain.