

## Preludes

(Preludes are short musical compositions on one theme. The name became popular as group of Piano pieces through the composition of Polish composer Frederic Chopin)

BY [T. S. ELIOT](#)\* (to know about the poet, please see the link given under T.S Eliot-Biography)

### *Composition and Publication:*

Preludes I and II were written at Harvard in October 1910; III was written in Paris in July 1911; and IV at Harvard, probably sometime after November 1911, or in 1912. They were published together in Wyndham Lewis's journal *Blast* in July, 1915.

### *I (Lonely street in the evening)*

The winter evening settles down (The first line starts with what is normally considered the fourth part of the day (after morning, noon and afternoon) or respectively the fourth season of the year: "The winter evening settles down")

With smell of steaks in passageways. (steak-thick piece of meat or fish)

[মাছওমাংসের গন্ধে চলাচলের পথ পরিপূর্ণ]

Six o'clock

The burnt-out ends of smoky days. (days are full of smoke and fog specially during winter)

And now a gusty shower wraps (Wrap-জড়ানো)

(This reading builds up the personification of the rain as an artist, practicing a hybrid art form between music and poetry. The personification of the rain is continued by the adjective "gusty" which other than a sudden strong wind, can also denote a sudden strong expression of emotion.)

The grimy scraps (Scraps-টুকরো)

Of withered leaves about your feet (withered leaves-ঝরাপাতা)

(The apostrophe "your feet" signals either the presence of at least one other person or the speaker's ability to look on himself from the outside. This external view creates the impression of a more neutral and accurate look as it widens the perspective of the speaker. At the same time, the *pars pro toto* for the addressee: "your feet" illustrates the speaker's incapability to perceive himself or someone else as a whole person.)

And newspapers from vacant lots

The showers beat

On broken blinds and chimney-pots,

And at the corner of the street

A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps. (steam-বাষ্প/ধোঁয়া, stamps-(মাটিতে)সজোরে আঘাত করা)

[ঘোড়ার গাড়ির ঘোড়া বাষ্পের মত নিঃশ্বাস আর মাটিতে পা ঠুকছে।] Whereas the verb "steams" suggests that the horse is exposed to the cold and wet weather, the verb "stamps" might indicate its impatience to walk on.

And then the lighting of the lamps. (the lighting of the lamps shows that darkness deepens.)

Montgomery (1973: 61) points out that the image of the "winter evening" is representative for the doomsday atmosphere described in the following thirteen lines, as it can be considered the coldest and darkest time of the day and year in the Northern hemisphere. The reader also learns about the exact time: "six o'clock" (3) which suggests that one quarter of the day remains. Despite the concrete time given, Montgomery however argues that past, present and future would somehow coincide in this singular "six o'clock" creating an "empty timelessness" (61). The romantic tone of the poem's first line is suddenly destroyed by the prosaic language and the banal topic to follow: "with smell of steaks in passageways" (2). The "smell of steaks" serves here as a signal for the "steaks".

This creates a higher level of abstraction, as the real life object is replaced by the mere perception of its smell.

Paradoxically enough, the “lightening of the lamps”, which closes the first stanza, indicates the settling of nocturnal darkness. This can be seen as an allusion to light pollution in the city where the difference between day and night is completely blurred.

## II (Busy street in the morning)

The morning comes to consciousness( **Just like the “winter evening” in the first stanza the “morning” is personified**)

Of faint stale smells of beer( the morning air is filled with the smells of beer, Stale-বাসী;

টাটকানয়এমন)

From the sawdust-trampled street

With all its muddy feet that press (press-এখানে ভিড় করা)

To early coffee-stands (shops).

With the other masquerades(মুখোশধারীব্যক্তিবর্গেরউত্সব)

That time resumes,(resume-পুনরায়আরম্ভকরা)

One thinks of all the hands

That are raising dingy shades (dingy-dirty)

In a thousand furnished rooms.

(A semantic contrast is inherent in the phrase “the sawdust-trampled street” (16) that, just like: “grimy” (6), “muddy” (17), “dingy” (22), “sordid” (27), “soiled” (38) and “blackened” (46,) evokes the gloomy and dirty atmosphere of the city. Sawdust was, however, also used to take up dirt on floors (cf. annotations). Moreover, Germer (1966: 95) argues that “sawdust” arouses the connotation of a circus, drawing with it the noun: “masquerades” (19). This depicts the anonymity of city life where faceless people hide their real identity behind masks. The second part of the word “sawdust-trampled” (16) signals the presence of feet which on their own are but a pars pro toto for the people in the street. This fragmentation of the city dwellers negates their individual identity, as it expresses the monotonic and mechanic movement of their “feet that press” (17) all in the same direction “to early coffee-stands”.

The lack of individual autonomy is also expressed in the following line: “all the hands that are raising dingy shades/In a thousand furnished rooms.” (22/23). The phrase probably describes the city dwellers who simultaneously pull up their window shades. Germer (94) considers this an automatic, repetitive gesture of daily routine just like the “feet that press/To early coffee-stands” (17/18) or the “short square fingers stuffing pipes.” (43).

Moreover, “dingy shades/in a thousand furnished rooms”, associates the meaning of dark and blurred colours. This idea is also supported by the parallel syntactical structure with: “the thousand sordid images” (27). One could consequently go on to conclude that the speaker is looking from the street at the lighted windows of surrounding buildings in the early hours of the morning. The expression: “a thousand furnished rooms” (23) alludes to a big hotel complex and stands in ironic contradiction to the “vacant lots” (8) in the first stanza. The idea of pre-furnished rooms illustrates the restlessness of the city dwellers who do not dispose of a permanent, individually furnished home where to “settle down” (1). A similar notion is present in the term “early coffee-stands” (18) which implicates that the clients are probably drinking their coffee while walking or at least standing on their feet. This and the time reference “early” (18), illustrate the frantic pace of city-life which allows but for a hasty breakfast. )

### III (The street seen from above)

You tossed a blanket from the bed, (toss-উপরদিকে ছুড়ে দেওয়া, blanket-কম্বল)

You lay upon your back, and waited;

You dozed, and watched the night revealing (doze-ঝিমোনো)

The thousand sordid images (sordid-নোংরা; ইতর; হীন)

Of which your soul was constituted;

They flickered against the ceiling. (flickered-মিটমিট করা; পিটপিট করা;)

And when all the world came back

And the light crept up between the shutters (crept- এখানে আলোর প্রবেশ)

And you heard the sparrows in the gutters,

You had such a vision of the street

As the street hardly understands;

Sitting along the bed's edge, where

You curled the papers from your hair,

Or clasped the yellow soles of feet (clasp-শক্ত করে ধরা)

In the palms of both soiled hands. (soiled-নোংরা)

(The third stanza is distinct from the two preceding ones in that it brings about a change in place, time and persona. Away from the street scene, the speaker zooms into a room, probably one of the "thousand furnished rooms". More so, the first line gives a precise close-up of the bed: "You tossed a blanket from the bed" (24). The verb "toss" implies that the blanket is thrown carelessly from the bed. The removal of the blanket hence indicates a change from day to night.

Like already in the first stanza the speaker directly addresses another person here, as can be detected by the frequent repetition of the personal pronoun "you" and the possessive "your" (24, 25, 26, 28, 32, 33, 36). The identity of the "you" is not revealed. Probably, it's a female persona as can be deduced from line 36: "You curled the paper from your hair". Jain (65) argues that this change in persona illustrates the speaker's split personality. Moreover, both Jain (64) and Germer (96) suggest an allusion of these lines to a passage from Charles-Louis Philippe's novel: "Bubu de Montparnasse" where a prostitute is discovering to suffer from syphilis, as Eliot drew upon this novel, esp. his subject and images from passages that describe street-walkers. Ironically enough, the alleged "street-walker" is not walking in the street. Instead the woman is lying on her bed with her face directed towards the ceiling: "you lay upon your back and waited" (25). The question arises what or respectively whom she is waiting for: for sleep, for the next customer, for the next morning? The following lines give rise to the idea that she is waiting for some altered state of consciousness as she deliberately abandons herself into a trance-like state: "You dozed, and watched the night revealing/The thousand sordid images/Of which your soul was constituted;" (26-28). The verb "doze" reveals that she is neither fully awake nor fully asleep. This absence of dualities is also expressed by the verb "flickered" (29) which describes a light that keeps going on and off, being neither really bright nor dark, neither day nor night. Again these lines can be read as an allusion to the problem of light pollution in modern cities. This idea is confirmed by the mentioning of dirt and light in the same context: "thousand sordid images (...) flickered against the ceiling". In its second meaning, however, the word "flickered" can also denote "emotions or thoughts that appear somewhere for a short time".

It promotes the idea that the woman has rejoined the world in the sense that she has regained full consciousness and awareness. It can be concluded from this that the "you" has attained some sort of religious enlightenment which in Buddhism is described as "the complete state of awakeing" (Keown, 22). The transition from one world to the other is depicted as a creeping process: "And the light crept up between the shutters" (31). This line can be interpreted both as a description of the dawning sun and as a metaphor for her enlightenment. Combining both ideas, it can be supposed that the true nature of reality has finally dawned on her.

Ironically enough, the idea of enlightenment is consistent with the symbolic meaning of the "sparrows in the gutters" as Hindu tradition has it that birds represent "the higher states of being"

(Cirlot, 2002: 26). Additionally, birds are universally considered a symbol of the human soul, suggesting a supernatural link between the physical and the spiritual world.)

#### IV

His soul stretched tight across the skies  
That fade behind a city block,  
Or trampled by insistent feet (trample-দুর্ভাবেআচরণকরা; পদদলিতকরা, insistent-জেদী,অত্যন্তজরুরী)  
At four and five and six o'clock;  
And short square fingers stuffing pipes,  
And evening newspapers, and eyes  
Assured of certain certainties,  
The conscience of a blackened street  
Impatient to assume the world.

I am moved by fancies that are curled (here the poetic voice speaks directly and admits that it is not detached or impassive)

Around these images, and cling:  
The notion of some infinitely gentle  
Infinitely suffering thing. (this is perhaps the compassionate perception of the suffering inherent in the images around which the poet's fancies are curled, and in the souls constituted by these images. It is reminder also of the suffering of Christ to redeem the sins of humanity.)

Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;  
The worlds revolve like ancient women  
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

(The street lies like a collapsed body trampled over by "insistent feet" the feet of the office workers returning at 4 and 5 and 6 o'clock. It is evening again. The opening line reminds us of the Prufrock image of the patient etherized on the table. The scene is again suggested by a few deftly drawn lines: "short square fingers stuffing pipes", "evening newspapers." The image of the soul in this stanza is an example of dedoublement. Here the concept of the soul is different from that in the third. There is a sensation of acute suffering and pain in its being racked across the skies and on the street. Echoes of the subterranean ravings of the mad hero in Tennyson's Maud heighten the suggestions of pain and of mental disintegration:

And the wheels go over my head,  
And my bones are shaken with pain,  
For into a shallow grave they are thrust,  
Only a yard beneath the street,  
And the hoofs of the horses beat, beat,  
The hoofs of the horses beat,  
Beat into my scalp and my brain,...

There are religious overtones in the lines, "The conscience of the blacked street/Impatient to assume the world". Blackness implies a sense of sin and conscience of moral discrimination and responsibility. The distinction between the subject and object is again blurred—whose conscience is it?—that of the street, or of the perceiving self?

At this point here the poetic voice speaks directly and admits that it is not detached or impassive. There is a note of compassion and a tentative movement towards religious belief. "The notion of some infinitely gentle/ininitely suffering thing' is perhaps the compassionate perception of the suffering inherent in the images around which the poet's fancies are curled, and in the souls constituted by these images. It is reminder also of the suffering of Christ to redeem the sins of humanity. However, there is a change of tone, and the religious vision is sardonically brushed aside.

It is not altogether obliterated though. The cynicism perhaps conceals a nostalgia and wistfulness for an absent ideal. The typographical space emphasizes the gap between the ideal and the actual.)