



ACADEMIC ARTICLES

Carl Jung, T.S. Eliot, and Kim Namjoon: An Unexpected Trio

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ABSTRACT

It is a frustrating paradox that all the opportunities and energy exist for young people, but they live with the unhappy feeling they are incomplete and are unsure of themselves. The idea of “finding oneself” has been repeatedly explored in literature and media to the point of creating tedious cliché expectations. Quite often, fictional movies and books portray it as a magical moment that strikes the main character in a dramatic way, thus satisfying the audience’s need for character-development completion. However, the reality of reaching a point where one feels happy with who they are is not as easily resolved as a fictional plot. Many people never reach that stage where they feel balanced, where they have accepted all their many varied facets. Some are so invested in the shadow of how others view them, they can never reach happiness. Creative works such as literature, movies, and music that explore this aspect of the human condition in a serious manner can be helpful to analyze how people can reach that balance. This paper attempts to show both sides of that challenge: a successful journey and an unsuccessful one. This paper is a comparative analysis of T.S. Eliot’s poem, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and songwriter from BTS, Kim Namjoon’s song, “Intro: Persona” in context of psychoanalyst Carl Jung’s theories of persona and shadow as it applies to well-being and self-acceptance.

KEYWORDS

search for identity, self-acceptance, societal pressures, spiritual well-being

C.G. Jung argues that “The most terrifying thing is to accept oneself completely. . . . Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes” (as cited in Sreechinth, 2018, p. 19).

Carl Jung, the founder of analytical psychology in the 1900s, introduced the idea of an individual’s *shadow*—that part of a person’s psyche that can balance the *persona*, which can become obsessed with society’s opinions. According to Kelland (2015), Jung believed that accepting both selves can lead to spiritual well-being. The journey to that balance is a lifelong challenge, which could be aided by friends, family, outside inspirations, personal obstacles, and the creative process.

Literature and music have always been outlets for self-discovery and introspective exploration, and as some struggles of the human condition are universal, such as self-confidence, regrets, loneliness, desire, and shame, it is no surprise to find similar themes in poetry from a Nobel Prize winner from the U.S. in the twentieth century — T.S. Eliot—and in a song from a famous pop music performer and songwriter from South Korea in the twenty-first—Kim Namjoon. Though the speaker of T.S. Eliot’s poem, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” is the fictional J. Alfred Prufrock, the poem does give realistic insight into common emotional struggles of modern mankind (Eliot, 1963). Kim Namjoon, rapper and songwriter of the South Korean musical group BTS, helped to write the song, “Intro: Persona,” which seems to detail a personal journey of his own to overcome societal expectations and self-doubt (2019). The speakers of these works are stalled in life — vehicles that want to move forward but cannot. Both are asking themselves who they are, how they fit in, and how others’ judgments color their own self-perception. One is triumphant in his quest to find the answers to his soul; the other is not and remains unsatisfied.

“Intro: Persona” is the first song from the 2019 BTS album, *Map of the Soul: Persona*, which is heavily influenced by the theories of Jung. The song is structured as stream-of-consciousness, as if Kim were speaking to himself in a mirror or writing in a personal journal. Though the rapper does appear to address an audience later in the song, the lyrics could also be interpreted that he is

still speaking to himself, challenging himself. The song begins with the universal question, “Who am I? / The question I had my whole life. / The question which I probably won’t find the answer to” (Kim, 2019). Kim is unsure, at first, how to answer the question because words do not seem to be sophisticated enough to encompass who he is; his question is “unanswerable,” leaving him and the audience feeling hopeless at first.

In the beginning of the poem, Prufrock seems to be addressing a companion, yet the narration is also stream-of-consciousness, flowing from one concern to another, creating an uncomfortable situation where Prufrock feels misunderstood. Jung (1989) believed that “[l]oneliness does not come from having no people about one, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself. . . .”(Jung, 1989, p. 356). Prufrock’s loneliness creates a desperate tone in his attempt to find happiness, trying to get his companion to agree to visit somewhere unlikely frequented by “proper” society: “half-deserted streets,” “sawdust restaurants,” and “one-night cheap hotels” (Eliot, 1963, p. 3). He is looking for happiness outside himself in a change of scenery, a change in routine, a change in himself. Unlike Kim, Prufrock seems to put a lot of weight into this other person’s opinion, as if his happiness hinges on his companion’s opinion and willingness to “Disturb the universe” (Eliot, 1963, p. 4).

Both speakers feel as if they are judged and labeled unfairly. Kim (2019) admits he is a “little uncomfortable” because he is “still not so sure if [he’s] a dog or a pig or what else, / but then other people come out and put the pearl necklace on [him]” (Kim, 2019). Because some people have judged him as unworthy and others have given him glory that he feels unworthy of, he is not sure how to define himself—to himself. This dark side of him, the shadow as Jung (1989) would describe, is fearful that he or his efforts as a musician are not valuable. Instead of being joyful of becoming the hero that he “dreamt of becoming” (Kim, 2019), it only increases the pressure of being perfect in the public eye. He also feels torn because of the disparate advice from others, such as “Look at the forest” but also, “Look at the wildflower” (Kim 2019). He knows it is impossible to please

everyone.

In the poem, Prufrock faces similar prejudice, but his shadow's fear is becoming old without having fully lived and being just a nameless background character in his own life. He admits that though he wears the "proper" clothes, people are still finding fault with him and whispering behind his back, "How his hair is growing thin!" and "But how his arms and legs are thin!" (Eliot, 1963, p. 4). Later in the poem, Prufrock compares himself to an insect pinned down for inspection:

*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? (Eliot, 1963, pp. 4-5)*

This overwhelming feeling that his flaws are on display and the dissection of them make Prufrock's obvious lack of confidence even more pronounced.

Both speakers acknowledge and own their shortcomings, though perhaps exaggerate them in their own minds because of the eyes that always seem upon them. Kim identifies part of the flawed side—his "shadow." When he is "on the stage" and "the light keeps glaring at [him] scorchingly like a heat wave," (Kim, 2019), he forgets why he reached for his dream in the first place and that it sometimes sounds like "freaking nonsense" (Kim, 2019). He goes on to say that he is not "good enough for music... / for truth... / for a calling... / to be a muse" (Kim, 2019). His self-worth seems tied into his artistic expression—writing and creating music. Not only does he think he is not worthy of the art he creates, he believes the world will not acknowledge his existence. He states, "The world is actually not interested

in my clumsiness at all" (Kim, 2019). He identifies his craft as "clumsiness" here, so he fears that not only is his craft not good, the world will not care anyway. These fears have culminated in a sort of apathy where the regrets he has do not make him "sick" anymore. The persona and shadow are still out of balance at this point.

Similarly, Prufrock feels disconnected from a caring world. He confesses, "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" (Eliot, 1963, p. 6). He longs to be understood by at least one person, as evident in the following passage:

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." (Eliot, 1963, p. 6)

That fear of being misunderstood seems to hold him back from his desire to "Disturb the universe" (Eliot, 1963, p. 4) and contribute something significant to the world. He also fully realizes his lack of importance in society because of this reluctance, as seen in these lines:

*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. (Eliot, 1963, p. 7)*

He admits that he is a minor player in this game of his society; he knows full well that he is a background character in most people's lives—not worthy of genuine and sincere human connection. He even goes on to say that he will wear his trousers rolled like young people, anything that might set him apart, even if it makes him look ridiculous. Jung reasoned that “[p]eople will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own souls. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious” (Jung, 1968, p. 99). Prufrock does not face his shadow but falls into distracting himself through self-deprecation and self-pity.

Prufrock ends his ruminations with an allusion to the Sirens from Greek mythology. These creatures lure travelers to their deaths, but he says, “I do not think that they will sing to me” (Eliot, 1963, p. 7). In other words, he does not even find himself worthy of a death by temptation, leaving the audience feeling sympathy for this lonely man with a wasted, unfulfilled life. This is where the comparison ends, because Kim Namjoon does not give up so easily and accept his supposed fate.

Kim claims that after wrestling with who he is, “something that raised [him] up again every time / The first question / The three syllables of [his] name.” Some believe this is a reference to a trend of others using the phrase, “But Kim Namjoon,” to deflect any bad publicity from their favorite pop artists’ negative press (Wynne, 2019). If this reference is true, Kim is powerfully claiming what should be a hurtful insult as his own. He says that he is nothing more and certainly nothing less than his name. Instead of dwelling on the negative voices, he is taking his power back from the public’s opinion and beginning to frame

his self-perception on his own—embracing his shadow. Once he is past the shame thrust upon him, he begins talking to his audience, or perhaps to himself or both, and positively challenges them to explore who they are as well. Kim questions, “Where’s your soul? / Where’s your dream?” He victoriously contends that,

*The ‘me’ that I remember and people know,
 The ‘me’ that I created myself to vent out,
 Yeah, maybe I have been deceiving myself
 Maybe I’ve been lying
 But I’m not embarrassed anymore
 This is the map of my soul. (Kim, 2019)*

He obviously has come to the conclusion that who he is is determined by him, not others’ perception of him—just him. His “map of [his] soul” belongs to him alone, and he is not going to be ashamed of himself any longer. Kim has proven his alignment with Jung’s assertion, “How can I be substantial if I do not cast a shadow? I must have a dark side also if I am to be whole” (Jung, 1966, p. 59).

Unlike Prufrock, who ends his exploration with a metaphor of death, Kim ends his song with the desire to help others find themselves as he offers, “I just wanna give you all the voices till I die; I just wanna give you all the shoulders when you cry” (Kim, 2019). Whereas Prufrock is solely interested in his own problems of inadequacy—never asking what his companion wants or cares about, Kim Namjoon has come to accept himself and wants to support others on their own journeys. The act of balancing one’s persona leading to the need to help others might not be the natural progression for everyone’s journey, but it certainly is a more positive outcome than Prufrock’s apathetic outlook on the future.

Prufrock unfortunately refused to analyze his shadow, keeping him in a lonely, pitiful state; Kim found his balance despite the obstacles of his life in the spotlight. Prufrock only dreamed because he looked outside himself, so his

persona's balance was elusive. However, Kim's introspection led him to what Jung described as "awake" and allowed him to find fulfillment in the rejection of others' ideals of who he should be (as cited in Sreechinth, 2018, p. 19). Exploring literature and music as tools for self-discovery could be the difference in success of finding that balance as Kim Namjoon did through writing the lyrics of "Intro: Persona." Though they were from a very different time period than Kim, Carl Jung would likely have appreciated Kim's lyric development, and Prufrock—though merely a fictional character—might have benefited from hearing such an inspiring, hopeful song.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

N/A

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The creator has no relevant conflicts of interest to disclose.

AFFILIATIONS

N/A

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SUGGESTED CITATION

APA CITATION

McDonald, S. (2020). Carl Jung, T.S. Eliot, and Kim Namjoon: An unexpected trio. *The Rhizomatic Revolution Review* [20130613], (1). <https://ther3journal.com/issue-1/an-unexpected-trio/>.

MLA CITATION

McDonald, Shanna. "Carl Jung, T.S. Eliot, and Kim Namjoon: An Unexpected Trio." *The Rhizomatic Revolution Review* [20130613], no.1, 2020. <https://ther3journal.com/issue-1/an-unexpected-trio/>.