**Comparative Essay – comparing three poems by the same poet: approx. 1000 words**

**‘A’ Grade**

*In the following essay, strengths include: The thesis answers the question rather than just rephrasing it. The introduction includes comparisons which are furthered throughout the essay. Titles are consistently formatted for typing – italicised. Sophisticated vocabulary is used consistently, accurately and without verbosity. Analysis is detailed and includes a variety of literary devices and effects. The writing style has flair; it ‘flows’ nicely and does not contain redundant words/tautology.*

**Question: How do poems explore man’s response to modernity? (1094 words)**

Poems explore modern civilisation’s capacity to corrupt and bewilder the individual. In *Preludes*, T.S Eliot posits that the modern world has catalysed the corruption of individuality, causing individuals to experience ongoing torment. Likewise, *Rhapsody on a Windy Night* explores the degradation of the human spirit engendered by the modern world, suggesting that – as in *Preludes* – modern society has corrupted man’s spirit. As a Modernist, Eliot portrays his rejection of modernity; he resents the intrusion of technology upon the natural environment and the natural state of man. Thus, in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Eliot represents modern man as inherently anxious and isolated due to the negative impact of modernity. He portrays man as ‘paralysed’ in an urban social milieu predicated upon overwhelming choices due to the changing nature of social conventions; in doing so, he suggests that modern man has not only become corrupted, but bewildered by their experience of Western life. Through depicting the existential concerns of individuals in 20th century, via poetic devices, Eliot positions responders to consider the way that modernity has corrupted and bewildered individuals due to its dehumanising repercussions.

*Preludes* suggests that the modern world limits individuality, through his critical depiction of urban routine and its corrupting capacity over mankind. In the poem’s opening, the street’s possessive subsumption of the people is highlighted by their synecdochal reduction to the “feet that press to early coffee stands”, underscoring their subservience to this morning ritual. Eliot frames the whole poem with routines, beginning with this derogatory consumerist imagery and ending with vulgar imagery of “fingers stuffing pipes”, intimating that true individuality has been supplanted by habitual behaviours in the modern world. The speaker’s exploration of modern society and its corruption of mankind is further evoked as the people, metaphorically described as insincere and artificial “masquerades”, are held in temporal stasis until “time resumes” – a repeated motif. In this way, Eliot depicts humanity as perpetually ‘on edge’, corrupted and dislocated in their manmade environment. Thus, in keeping with the beliefs of his Modernist contemporaries, he depicts a modern world that provokes a loss of individuality and humanity, consumed with cyclic routine.

Likewise, in *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*, Eliot explores the degradation of the human spirit engendered by the modern world, furthering his suggestion that modern society has corrupted man. Both *Preludes* and *Rhapsody* depict individuals who have been ‘consumed’ by the modern world and its dehumanising influences. The persona’s memory of a child instinctively “pocket[ing] a toy” symbolises the corruption of humanity, as a parallel is drawn between the child’s instinctively immoral theft and the disgusting action of a cat “devour[ing] a morsel of rancid butter”. Furthering the corrupted characterisation of the boy, he is described as possessing “nothing behind…[his] eye”. This confronting image, coupled with a distorted and impersonal description of a woman’s eye through simile, “twist[ing] like a crooked pin” combine to suggest that not only has man become consumed in the routines of modern society, as in *Preludes*, but they have also become morally corrupted by this experience. These ‘eye’ symbols – the symbolic ‘windows’ into the soul – reinforce Eliot’s depiction of the moral decay that has arisen in his contemporary world as both the boy and prostitute are characterised to be spiritually devoid. As such, while *Preludes* suggests that individuals have become corrupted through their inhumanity, *Rhapsody* furthers this notion by insinuating that their corruption has led to them becoming inhumane. Ultimately, *Rhapsody’s* jarring positioning of the fatalistic metaphor on the final line, “last twist of the knife” compounds Eliot’s portrayal of a hopelessly corrupted modern individual; here, he suggests that man has become so corrupted due to modernity, as to prevent their return to a moral life. Thus, while *Preludes* suggests that humanity has become corrupted by innovation, *Rhapsody* furthers this notion by suggesting that the corruption has led to humankind’s hopeless inhumanity.

Alternatively, in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Eliot presents modern man not as actively corrupt, as in *Rhapsody*, but in stasis caused by modern life. Man is portrayed as inherently anxious and isolated - paralysed in an urban social milieu predicated upon romantic success as the persona contemplates whether or not to ask a romantic interest an “overhwhelming question”. The persona is depicted as ‘plagued’ by “restless nights” and “one-night cheap hotels”, suggesting his emotional dislocation to his sexual encounters, evincing Prufrock’s inability to connect with women beyond a superficial level. Indeed, this is apparent in the analysis of feminist theorist Carol Christ, who conceptualises Prufrock’s synecdochal reduction of potential romantic partners to their “arms…white and bare” as “fetishistic replacements” – substitutes for true and unattainable intimacy. Coupled with this, Prufrock’s social incompetence is shown to give rise to crippling anxieties and self-consciousness as he repeatedly rhetorically questions, “do I dare?...do I dare?…how should I presume?”. In this way, and similarly through the repetition of Prufrock’s hollow assurances that “there will be time…there will be time”, Eliot underscores his portrayal of the modern man’s inherent need for connection and his simultaneous inability to achieve this in the modern city. As Prufrock reflects on his life wasted in indecision, he envisages a symbol of sexual connection, the “mermaids singing”, but states pessimistically in a despondent tone, “I do not think they will sing to me”, ultimately cementing his meditation upon the negative impact of modernity: social anxiety and crippling hesitancy. This supports *Preludes’* suggestion that man has become corrupted by modern society, yet instead of insinuating that this corruption has led to man becoming ‘empty’ due to this corruption, as in *Rhapsody*, *The* *Love Song* asserts that modern man has become overwhelmed with indecision due to the anxiety of modern life.

Modern civilisation has the capacity to corrupt and bewilder the individual, according to the poetic works of Eliot. In *Preludes*, he suggests that the modern world has catalysed the corruption of individuality, causing individuals to experience cyclic torment. Likewise, *Rhapsody on a Windy Night* explores the degradation of the human spirit due to the influences of the modern world, suggesting that – as in *Preludes* – modern society has corrupted man’s spirit. Further, in keeping with Modernist beliefs, Eliot portrays his rejection of modernity in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, where he depicts modern man as ‘locked’ in stasis due to the negative impact of modernity. In each poem, man is portrayed as a combination of corrupted, devoid and bewildered by their experience of 20th century Western life. Thus, through poetic devices, Eliot positions responders to consider the way that modernity has corrupted and bewildered individuals due to its dehumanising repercussions.

**DRAFT 1: Comparative Essay – comparing three poems by the same poet**

**B (798 words)**

*No comparisons are provided beyond linking words. Verbosity and tautology are consistent throughout. Inconsistent formatting of titles is distracting. The introduction is essentially a copy/paste of topic sentences without much paraphrasing. Detailed analysis although not always clearly explained or relevant to the question/thesis. The conclusion is blunt and not detailed.*

**Question: How do poems explore man’s rejection of modern civilisation?**

Poems explore man’s rejection of modern civilisation. In *Preludes*, Eliot posits that the modern world has engendered a corruption of the people’s essential individuality, fundamentally reducing them to trapped in a cycle of urban routine. Likewise, ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’ explores the degradation of the human spirit engendered by the modern world. Further, in ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, Eliot presents a depiction of modern man as inherently anxious and isolated - paralysed in an urban social milieu predicated upon romantic success. Additionally, in ‘Journey of the Magi’, Eliot explores the difficulties of arriving at and maintaining a sense of spiritual identity in the modern world, through his depiction of the analogous experiences of the Magi. He achieves this through metaphor, motif, symbolism and other literary devices.

In *Preludes*, Eliot posits that the modern world has engendered a corruption of the people’s essential individuality, fundamentally reducing them to trapped in a cycle of urban routine. In the start of the poem, the street’s possessive subsumption of the people, evinced by the pronoun “its” is coupled with their synecdochal reduction to the “feet that press to early coffee stands” to underscore their adherence to this morning ritual. Indeed, Eliot frames the whole poem with such routine, beginning in this fashion and ending with another such depiction of these actions “fingers stuffing pipes”, intimating that true individuality has been supplanted by such habitual behaviours in the modern world. Just so, this notion is reflected in the analysis of A. Mendilow, who notes that the poem “catch[es] up to the image of ‘vacant lots’” in the end of the poem, signifying “fruitless change”. Eliot’s exploration of the modern human condition is further evoked as the people, metaphorically described as insincere and artificial “masquerades”, are held in temporal stasis until “time resumes”. In this way, and through another such a treatment of time as a persona “lay on [its] back and waited”, Eliot depicts a people on edge, corrupted and dislocated in their manmade environment, , thereby cementing his depiction of a modern world that has provoked a loss of individuality and humanity.

Further, in ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’, Eliot explores the essential degradation of the human spirit engendered by the modern world. Indeed, the persona’s memory of a child automatically “pocket[ing] a toy” serves to reveal the corruption of humanity as a parallel is drawn between the child’s instinctively immoral theft and the disgusting action of a cat “devour[ing] a morsel of rancid butter”. In addition to this image, the “nothing behind…[the boy’s] eye” is coupled with a distorted and impersonal description of a woman’s eye, “twist[ing] like a crooked pin”. The use of these two eye symbols – the windows into the soul – evinces Eliot’s conceptualization of the moral decay that has arisen in the inorganic world as both the boy and prostitute are revealed to be fundamentally lacking on a spiritual level. Moreover, the uneasy tension between the linearly demarcated time phrases that punctuate the poem “half-past one…half-past two” and the confused and relativistic experience of the persona cements this sense of intrinsic disconnect. Ultimately, the jarring positioning of the fatalistic metaphor of the “last twist of the knife” finally compounds Eliot’s portrayal of a hopelessly corrupted modern individual.

Likewise, in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Eliot presents a depiction of modern man as inherently anxious and isolated - paralysed in an urban social milieu predicated upon romantic success. Foregrounding this sense of alienation, the tension between the plural “restless nights” and the singular “one-night cheap hotels” ascribes a sense of meaninglessness and emotional dislocation to these sexual encounters, evincing Prufrock’s inability to connect with women beyond a superficial level. Indeed, such a notion is apparent in the analysis of feminist theorist Carol Christ, who conceptualizes Prufrock’s synecdochal reduction of potential romantic partners to their “arms…white and bare” as “fetishistic replacements” – substitutes for true and unattainable intimacy. Prufrock’s social incompetence is shown to give rise to crippling anxieties and self-consciousness as he continually questions himself, reciting “do I dare?...do I dare?…how should I presume?”. In this way, and similarly, through the repetition of Prufrock’s hollow assurances that “there will be time…there will be time” Eliot underscores his portrayal of the modern man’s inherent need for connection and his simultaneous inability to achieve such in the modern city. Fundamentally, as Prufrock reflects on a life wasted in indecision he envisages a symbol of sexual connection, the “mermaids singing” but states pessimistically “I do not think they will sing to me”, ultimately cementing Eliot’s meditation upon modern social anxiety and crippling hesitancy.

Therefore, poems explore man’s rejection of modern civilisation. In *Preludes*, ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’, ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ and ‘Journey of the Magi’, Eliot explores the difficulties of modern society.