

# The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

TS Eliot

Text of the poem	Explicações e comentários
<p><u>Epigraph</u></p> <p>S'io credesse che mia riposta fosse          persona che mai tornasse al mondo,          Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.          Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo          Non torno vivo alcun, s' i'odo il vero,          Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.</p> <p>—Spoken by Count Guido da Montefeltro, a Damned Soul in the Eighth Circle of Hell in Dante's <i>Divine Comedy</i>, the <i>Inferno</i>, Canto 27, Lines 61-66.</p>	<p><u>Translation</u></p> <p>If I thought my answer were to one who could return to the world, I would not reply, but as none ever did return alive from this depth, without fear of infamy I answer thee.</p> <p>—Translation by G.B. Harrison et al., eds. <i>Major British Writers</i>. Shorter ed. New York: Harcourt. 1967, Page 1015.</p> <p>Comment: Eliot opens "The Love Song" with this quotation from Dante's epic poem to suggest that Prufrock, like Count Guido, is in hell. But Prufrock is in a hell on earth—a hell in the form of a modern, impersonal city with smoky skies. The quotation also points out that Prufrock, again like Count Guido, can present his feelings "without fear of infamy."</p>
<p>Let us go then, you and I,          When the evening is spread out against the sky          Like a patient etherised 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.</p>	<p><u>Interpretation</u></p> <p>The speaker invites the listener to walk with him into the streets on an evening that resembles a patient, anesthetized with ether, lying on the table of a hospital operating room. (Until recent times, physicians used ether—a liquid obtained by combining sulfuric acid and ethyl alcohol—to render patients unconscious before an operation.) The imagery suggests that the evening is lifeless and listless. The speaker and the listener will walk through lonely streets—the business day has ended—past cheap hotels and restaurants with sawdust on the floors. (Sawdust was used to absorb spilled beverages and food, making it easy to sweep up at the end of the day.) The shabby establishments will remind the speaker of his own shortcomings, their images remaining in his mind as he walks on. They will then prod the listener to ask the speaker a question about the speaker's life—perhaps why he visits these seedy haunts, which are symbols of his life, and why he has not acted to better himself or to take a wife?</p>
<p>In the room the women come and go          Talking of Michelangelo</p>	<p><u>Interpretation</u></p> <p>At a social gathering in a room, women discuss the Renaissance artist Michelangelo.  <u>Comment:</u> If the women are speaking of the great Michelangelo, how could the lowly Prufrock</p>

	possibly be of interest to them? Or so Prufrock may think.
<p>The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,</p> <p>The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes</p> <p>Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,</p> <p>Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,</p> <p>Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,</p> <p>Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,</p> <p>And seeing that it was a soft October night,</p> <p>Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.</p>	<p><u>Interpretation</u></p> <p>Smoky haze spreads across the city. The haze is like a quiet, timid cat padding to and fro, rubbing its head on objects, licking its tongue, and curling up to sleep after allowing soot to fall upon it. The speaker resembles the cat as he looks into windows or into "the room," trying to decide whether to enter and become part of the activity. Eventually, he curls up in the safety and security of his own soft arms—alone, separate.</p> <p><u>Comment, Lines 17-19:</u> Prufrock alludes to his inferiority as well as his inability to act decisively: He consigns himself to corners, as a timid person might at a dance; stands idly by doing nothing, as does a stagnant pool; and becomes the brunt of ridicule or condescension— the soot that falls on him.</p>
<p>And indeed there will be time</p> <p>For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,</p> <p>Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;</p> <p>There will be time, there will be time</p> <p>To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;</p> <p>There will be time to murder and create,</p> <p>And time for all the works and days of hands</p> <p>That lift and drop a question on your plate;</p> <p>Time for you and time for me,</p> <p>And time yet for a hundred indecisions,</p> <p>And for a hundred visions and revisions,</p> <p>Before the taking of a toast and tea.</p>	<p><u>Interpretation</u></p> <p>There's no hurry, though, the speaker tells himself. There will be time to decide and then to act—time to put on the right face and demeanor to meet people. There will be time to kill and time to act; in fact, there will be time to do many things. There will even be time to think about doing things—time to dream and then revise those dreams—before sitting down with a woman to take toast and tea.</p>
<p>In the room the women come and go</p> <p>Talking of Michelangelo.</p>	<p><u>Interpretation</u></p> <p>The women are still coming and going, still talking of Michelangelo, suggesting that life is repetitive and dull.</p>

<p>And indeed there will be time</p> <p>To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"</p> <p>Time to turn back and descend the stair,  With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—</p> <p>They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!"</p> <p>My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,  My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—</p> <p>They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!"</p> <p>Do I dare  Disturb the universe?</p> <p>In a minute there is time  For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse</p> <p>For I have known them all already, known them all:—  Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  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?</p>	<p><u>Interpretation</u></p> <p>Prufrock says there will be time to wonder whether he dares to approach a woman. He feels like turning back. After all, he has a bald spot, thinning hair, and thin arms and legs. Moreover, he has doubts about the acceptability of his clothing. What will people think of him? Does he dare to approach a woman? He will think about it and make a decision, then reverse the decision. Of course, he realizes that the people here are the same as the people he has met many times before—the same, uninteresting people in the same uninteresting world. They all even sound the same. So why should he do anything?</p>
<p>And I have known the eyes already, known them all</p> <p>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?</p>	<p><u>Interpretation</u></p> <p>He has seen their gazes before, many times—gazes that form an opinion of him, treating him like a butterfly or another insect pinned into place in a display. How will he be able to explain himself to them—the ordinariness, the mediocrity, of his life?</p>

<p>And I have known the arms already, known them all —</p> <p>Arms that are braceleted and white and bare</p> <p>But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!</p> <p>It is perfume from a dress</p> <p>That makes me so digress?</p> <p>Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl</p> <p>And should I then presume?</p> <p>And how should I begin?</p>	<p><u>Interpretation</u></p> <p>Yes, he has known women like these before, wearing jewelry but really bare, lacking substance. Why is he thinking about them? Perhaps it is the smell of a woman's perfume.</p>
<p>Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets</p> <p>And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes</p> <p>lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?</p> <p>should have been a pair of ragged claws</p> <p>Scuttling across the floors of silent seas</p>	<p><u>Interpretation</u></p> <p>Will he tell a woman that he came through narrow streets, where lonely men (like Prufrock) lean out of windows watching life go by but not taking part in it? He should have been nothing more than crab claws in the depths of the silent ocean.</p>
<p>And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!</p> <p>Smoothed by long fingers,</p> <p>Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,</p> <p>Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.</p> <p>Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,</p> <p>Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?</p> <p>But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,</p> <p>Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in upon a platter,</p> <p>I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;</p> <p>I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,</p> <p>And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,</p> <p>And in short, I was afraid.</p>	<p><u>Interpretation</u></p> <p>The time passes peacefully, as if sleeping, very tired—or it simply wastes time, stretched out on the floor. Should the speaker sit down with someone and have dessert—should he take a chance, make an acquaintance, live? Oh, he has suffered; he has even imagined his head being brought in on a platter, like the head of John the Baptist. Of course, unlike John, he is no prophet. He has seen his opportunities pass and even seen death up close, holding his coat, snickering. He has been afraid.</p>

<p>And would it have been worth it, after all,</p> <p>After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,</p> <p>Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me</p> <p>Would it have been worth while,</p> <p>To have bitten off the matter with a smile,</p> <p>To have squeezed the universe into a ball</p> <p>To roll it toward some overwhelming question,</p> <p>To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,</p> <p>Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—</p> <p>If one, settling a pillow by her head,</p> <p>Should say: "That is not what I meant at all.</p> <p>That is not it, at all."</p>	<p><u>Interpretation</u></p> <p>Would it have been worth it for the speaker while drinking tea to try to make a connection with one of the women? Would it have been worth it to arise from his lifeless life and dare to engage in conversation with a woman, only to have her criticize him or reject him.</p>
<p>And would it have been worth it, after all,</p> <p>Would it have been worth while,</p> <p>After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,</p> <p>After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—nd this, and so much more? —</p> <p>It is impossible to say just what I mean</p> <p>But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:</p> <p>Would it have been worth while</p> <p>If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,</p> <p>And turning toward the window, should say:</p> <p>"That is not it at all,</p> <p>That is not what I meant, at all."</p>	<p><u>Interpretation</u></p> <p>Would it have been worth it, considering all the times he would be with the woman at sunset or with her in a dooryard? Would it have been worth it after all the mornings or evenings when workmen sprinkled the streets (see below), after all the novels he would discuss with her over tea, after all the times he heard the drag of her skirt along the floor, after so many other occasions? Would it have been worth it if, after plumping a pillow or throwing off her shawl, she turned casually toward a window and told him that he was mistaken about her intentions toward him?</p>

<p>No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;</p> <p>Am an attendant lord, one that will do</p> <p>To swell a progress, start a scene or two,</p> <p>Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,</p> <p>Deferential, glad to be of use,</p> <p>Politic, cautious, and meticulous;</p> <p>Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;</p> <p>At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—</p> <p>Almost, at times, the Fool.</p>	<p><u>Interpretation</u></p> <p>Prufrock and Hamlet (the protagonist of Shakespeare's Hamlet, Prince of Denmark are both indecisive. But Prufrock lacks the majesty and charisma of Hamlet. Therefore, he fancies himself as Polonius, the busybody lord chamberlain in Shakespeare's play.</p>
<p>I grow old ... I grow old ...</p> <p>I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.</p> <p>Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?</p> <p>I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach</p> <p>I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.</p> <p>I do not think that they will sing to me.</p> <p>I have seen them riding seaward on the waves</p> <p>Combing the white hair of the waves blown back</p> <p>When the wind blows the water white and black</p> <p>We have lingered in the chambers of the sea</p> <p>By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown</p> <p>Till human voices wake us, and we drown.</p>	<p>The speaker realizes that time is passing and that he is growing old. However, like other men going through a middle-age crisis, he considers changing his hairstyle and clothes. Like Odysseus in the Odyssey, he has heard the song of the sirens. However, they are not singing to him.</p>
<p>Texto adaptado. Para texto original, com informações adicionais, acesse o link abaixo.</p> <p><a href="http://www.cummingsstudyguides.net/Guides3/Prufrock.html#Top">http://www.cummingsstudyguides.net/Guides3/Prufrock.html#Top</a></p>	