

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

BY [T. S. ELIOT](#)

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A 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.*

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

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

By, T.S. Eliot

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why does Eliot most likely include an epigraph, quoting Dante's *Inferno*, at the beginning of the poem?
2. In line 3, the narrator describes the evening "spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table." What does the term "etherized" mean, and how does this word choice contribute to meaning of the whole poem?
3. To whom is Prufrock likely speaking? Is it just one person? Cite evidence from the text.
4. How does Prufrock portray himself in the poem? Cite evidence from the text.
5. What is the relationship between Prufrock and women? Cite at least two examples to support your answer.
6. Provide an example of personification from the poem and explain its purpose.
7. How does the poet's use of repetition relate to the poem's meaning? Provide an example from the text and explain your answer.
8. How do the lines 37-38 ("And indeed there will be time / To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?""") contribute to the tone of the poem?
9. What is the most likely reason for the poet to separate line 125 and make it its own stanza?
10. The narrator makes only three decisive choices throughout the poem—what are they? Cite evidence from the text.

PART 2: The Presentation

LITERARY DEVICE ASSIGNMENT: _____

DEFINITION OF THE DEVICE:

--

TEXTUAL EXAMPLE 1	TEXTUAL EXAMPLE 2	TEXTUAL EXAMPLE 3
LINE NUMBERS:	LINE NUMBERS:	LINE NUMBERS:

WHICH QUOTE ARE YOU FOCUSING ON? 1 2 3 (circle one)

CONTEXT: *(where does this quote appear in the text? What is going on at this point of the story? What does your reader need to know in order to understand your presentation?)*

CONCEPT: *(Why is the quote an example of the literary device you have been assigned? Be specific.)*

CONNECTION: *(How does the literary device reinforce and contribute to what is occurring in the larger context? How does it reveal meaning? What do you learn through the use of this literary device? What would you miss if the device wasn't there?)*

PRESENTATION NOTES

DIRECTIONS: As your other group members present their findings, record notes regarding the THEMES they discovered through focusing on their literary device

NAME:	NAME:	NAME:	NAME:
DEVICE:	DEVICE:	DEVICE:	DEVICE:
NOTES:	NOTES:	NOTES:	NOTES:

COLD-READING QUESTION SIMULATION:

In addition to the "comprehension" questions that will appear on your test, you will also see questions similar to the ones below.

GUIDING QUESTION:

How do Hamlet and Prufrock both use literary techniques to portray themselves in their respective texts?

1. What is **similar** about Hamlet and Prufrock's portrayals of themselves?

Textual Evidence	Explanation
PRUFROCK: HAMLET:	

2. What is **different** about Hamlet and Prufrock's portrayals of themselves?

Textual Evidence	Explanation
PRUFROCK: HAMLET:	

3. What common **theme(s)** do each of these texts share?

Textual Evidence	Explanation
PRUFROCK: HAMLET:	

For your cold reading responses, you can use textual evidence from either of these two passages.

<p>Act 3, Scene 1</p> <p>60 To be, or not to be? That is the question— Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, And, by opposing, end them? To die, to sleep— No more—and by a sleep to say we end The heartache and the thousand natural shocks That flesh is heir to—'tis a consummation 65 Devoutly to be wished! To die, to sleep. To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub, For in that sleep of death what dreams may come When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, Must give us pause. There's the respect 70 That makes calamity of so long life. For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, The pangs of despised love, the law's delay, 75 The insolence of office, and the spurns That patient merit of th' unworthy takes, When he himself might his quietus make With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear, To grunt and sweat under a weary life, 80 But that the dread of something after death, The undiscovered country from whose bourn No traveler returns, puzzles the will And makes us rather bear those ills we have Than fly to others that we know not of? 85 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all, And thus the native hue of resolution Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, And enterprises of great pith and moment With this regard their currents turn awry, 90 And lose the name of action.—Soft you now, The fair Ophelia!—Nymph, in thy orisons Be all my sins remembered.</p>	<p>Act 4, Scene 4</p> <p>35 How all occasions do inform against me, And spur my dull revenge! What is a man If his chief good and market of his time Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more. Sure, he that made us with such large discourse, Looking before and after, gave us not That capability and godlike reason To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple 40 Of thinking too precisely on th' event— A thought which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom And ever three parts coward—I do not know Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do," 45 Sith I have cause and will and strength and means To do 't. Examples gross as earth exhort me. Witness this army of such mass and charge Led by a delicate and tender prince, Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed 50 Makes mouths at the invisible event, Exposing what is mortal and unsure To all that fortune, death, and danger dare, Even for an eggshell. Rightly to be great Is not to stir without great argument, 55 But greatly to find quarrel in a straw When honor's at the stake. How stand I then, That have a father killed, a mother stained, Excitements of my reason and my blood, And let all sleep—while, to my shame, I see 60 The imminent death of twenty thousand men, That for a fantasy and trick of fame Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause, Which is not tomb enough and continent 65 To hide the slain? Oh, from this time forth, My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!</p>
---	---

[You may also reference the *No Fear Shakespeare*]