

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

- The streets Prufrock invites us to are filled with a "yellow fog," which sounds really nasty and makes the reader think of London fog.
- Around the beginning of the 20th century, London was a really modern city that also had some of the roughest, seediest neighborhoods anywhere.
- This fog seems pretty acrobatic. It has a "back" and a "muzzle," which sounds like either a dog or a cat. Also, it "licks" things and makes "sudden leaps."
- The poem is comparing the quiet, sneaky, and athletic movement of the fog to a common housecat.

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- The fog is wandering around the streets like a cat wanders around a house. When the fog gets tired, it "curls" around the city houses to "fall asleep" like a cat would curl around something smaller, maybe the leg of a table or chair.
- Eliot being very well-versed in European literature loads his poem with references to other works for instance Marvel's To His coy Mistress in the phrase 'There will be time'.



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- Prufrock, however, uses the reference to "time" in exactly the opposite way. He thinks there's plenty of time for delays and dawdling.
- Just like in Marvell's poem, Prufrock addresses himself to a "mistress," someone he "loves," but here it's Prufrock, and not the mistress, who is being "coy."
- By talking about the smoke, he's trying to justify the fact that he wasted our time with an entire stanza of description of the fog instead of asking that "overwhelming question" he told us about.

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- He keeps repeating that "There will be time," as if he hasn't quite convinced himself, or his lover.
- Plenty of time to get your "face" ready to meet other people. Also, plenty of time to "murder and create," which sounds pretty sinister.
- In the next line, he says there's "time for all the works and days of hands." Allusion alert: *Works and Days* was the name of a work written by the Greek poet Hesiod. It's a poem about the importance of working for a living and not living a lazy, pointless existence.

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- Prufrock indecisively cycles around even the smallest of concerns: "And time yet for a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions, / Before the taking of a toast and tea" (32-34). He seems rooted in the present tense and this, according to Eliot and most Modernists, is an unhealthy approach to time.
- He is clearly a thinker, not a feeler, and his indecisive thoughts contribute directly to his paralysis, perhaps the most important theme in the poem. As the image of the cat unable to penetrate the house suggests, Prufrock cannot make a decision and act on it. Instead of a flowing duration that integrates all of time, he is imprisoned in the present.

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- He describes his appearance next, and the first thing we learn is he has a big bald spot. He's a middle-aged man, or at least close to it.
- Also, he seems worried about what people will say about him and his bald spot and his thin arms and legs.
- However, he seems to think that he is well-dressed. He has a nice coat and necktie, which he wears according to the fashion of the time. He's not a trend-setter, though, he's a trend-follower.

Prufrock's concern about what other people gossip reminds us of Guido da Montefeltro in the epigraph who was also worried about his reputation, even though it didn't matter because he was already in hell.

- Prufrock, too, seems to have nothing to lose by asking his question. He seems like kind of a coward. But now, on top of cowardice, he also seems superficial.