

# The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

- Prufrock has "already" known the eyes that would formulate him, but now he talks as if this event hasn't happened yet.

He imagines himself "sprawling on a pin" and put, "wriggling," on a wall. He's referring to the practice, in his time, where insects that were collected by scientists were "pinned" inside a glass frame and hung on a wall so they could be preserved and inspected. If you go to a really old science museum.

- Prufrock is imagining that the eyes are treating him like a scientist treats an object of study. He doesn't like that so much.

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- Prufrock seems pretty scared of doctors and scientists – maybe because these people can see things for what they really are.
- He thinks that once these scientific eyes have got a hold on him, he'll have to talk about or rather "spit out" the story of his life ("days and ways").
- The "butt-ends" could refer to any kind of end – the little odds and ends of his daily life, the evenings he spent, etc. But it's also the word people use for the end of a cigarette, the part that doesn't get smoked. Prufrock is comparing his life to a used-up cigarette.

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- Considering how much he dislikes scientific observation of himself, he sure does it a lot to other people. Here he sees women merely as "arms," and he uses the same repetitive phrase about how he has "known them all."
- He sounds tired and bored, as if he were saying, "If I have to see *one more* white arm with a bracelet on it .
- Prufrock admits that he has been "digressing," or wandering away from the main point.
- He blames his digression on the scent of a woman's perfume. For a guy that claims to have known all the women, he's still fairly preoccupied with all things feminine.

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- Then he wonders how to "begin" to talk about that difficult subject. And the difficult subject

This is the story of his "days and ways" from line 60, and it begins "I have gone at dusk through narrow streets."

- He's basically taking us back to the beginning of the poem. The most interesting new detail he has to offer us is that he saw "lonely men" smoking pipes out of their windows.

- Prufrock is tormented by his loneliness. It would have been more fitting, he says, to have been born as a pair of crab claws that "scuttle" across the floor of the ocean. The crab is the perfect image of Prufrock, because it seems suited to a single over-riding goal: self-protection.



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- The afternoon and evening are "sleeping," much as the cat-like fog was asleep outside the house in line 22.
- He's wondering if he should "wake" the day up somehow, say, by asking (cough, cough) a certain question? But he's hesitant because the day seems so peacefully asleep, as if it were being "smoothed by long fingers."
- This image of the fingers makes us think of petting a cat, but it may remind you of something different. The evening is "asleep" and "tired" - nothing is happening. But it might also be "malingering," or pretending to be tired.

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- Prufrock doesn't want to be confused with a prophet. Even though he weeps, fasts, and prays like a prophet, he isn't one. Even though, um, he has seen his head on a platter! In the Bible, the prophet John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus, dies after the stepdaughter of a powerful king asks for his head on a platter.
- He doesn't want us to think he feels sorry for himself, though – he says it's "no great matter." But if we lost our head, we would probably beg to differ.
- He already feels as if his best days are behind him, like a candle that flickers and goes out.



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- In the old days (even older than Eliot's poem), a "footman" was like a butler who would help rich people do things. One of the things a footman would do is to hold your coat as you got in a carriage or entered a house.
- But this footman isn't so friendly. He's the eternal Footman – "death" – and if he's holding your coat, it means you are probably about to enter some place that you won't come out of again.
- Prufrock has another rare moment of honesty when he admits to being afraid.