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Answers to the Q.no-1

If I thought that my reply would be to someone who would ever return to earth, this flame would remain without further movement; but as no one has ever returned alive from this gulf, if what I hear is true, I can answer you with no fear of infamy."

Let's go then, you and I, when the night sky is spread out like a patient anesthetized on an operating table. Let's walk down half-empty streets, which are marked by sleepless, cheap hotels where people only stay one night, and by shabby, run-down restaurants. The streets follow each other like a boring argument with malicious intentions. They make you think of some urgent question... but don't ask what it is. Let's go and make our visit.

Women enter and exit the room while talking about Michelangelo.

Yellow smoke rubs its back against the windows; it rubs its snout all over the windows, licks the corners of the night with its tongue, lingers above the stagnant water in the drains, mingles with soot from the chimneys, slips by the patio, and suddenly jumps—but seeing that it's a cool autumn night, curls around the house and fades away.

Yes, there will be time to look at the yellow smoke that slides along the street, rubbing itself against the windows. There will be time, there will be time to prepare to meet people; to murder and create; for work and answering questions; time for both of us. And there will be time, still, for a hundred indecisions, to change my mind a hundred times, all before afternoon tea.

Women enter and exit the room while talking about Michelangelo.

Yes, there will be time to ask, "Do I dare?" And again, "Do I dare?" Time to turn around and go back downstairs, worried about the bald spot on the back of my head. (People will say: "His hair is really getting thin!") I'm wearing my morning coat, with my collar buttoned all the way up to my chin, along with an expensive but not overly showy necktie with a simple tie clip. (People will say: "His arms and legs are so skinny!") Do I have it in me, or am I brave enough, to change the world? A single minute contains enough time to make decisions and changes, although I'll just change my mind again a minute later.

That's because I have done it all already. I've seen it all: I've experienced evenings, mornings, and afternoons, and I could measure out my life by the number of coffee spoons I've used. I've already heard the voices singing in the other room. So what gives me the right?

And I already know how people look at me. I've seen all the looks people give—the way people look at me and dismiss me with some clichéd phrase, fixing me in their gaze like I'm an insect specimen pinned and wriggling against the wall. So how should I start to spit out the memories of my life, like the butt-ends of a cigarette? And what gives me the right?

And I already know what women are like. I've known all kinds of women—those whose arms are covered with bracelets and have pale, hairless skin (although in the lamplight I can see that their arms are covered in light brown hair). Is it the smell of perfume from a dress that's making me lose my train of thought? I'm thinking of arms resting on a table, or wrapped up with a shawl. So what gives me the right? And how should I begin?

Should I say: I've walked in the evening through narrow streets and watched lonely men leaning out of windows and smoking in their undershirts?

I should have been a creature with worn-out claws, scurrying across the floors of the silent ocean.

And as it gets later in the day, the night itself seems to sleep so peacefully! It's as if it's been stroked to sleep by long fingers. It's either asleep or tired—or maybe it's just pretending to be asleep, stretched out on the floor beside us. Should I, after afternoon tea, have enough strength left to disturb this moment and cause drama? I cry, refuse to eat, and pray—and like John the Baptist, I've seen my (now slightly bald) head brought in on a plate. But even so, I'm no holy messenger, and I don't have anything very important to say. There was a time when I could have been great, but that moment has passed for good; I've seen death's butler hold my coat, but he just laughed at me. And to put it bluntly, I was scared.

And would it have been worth it anyway? After all the afternoon tea, as we were sitting among the porcelain teacups and talking idly, would it have been worth it to force a smile and bring up the problem I'm thinking about? To have smooshed and simplified this huge, all-encompassing problem into a manageable bit, like a ball, and then have rolled it towards some question that's so big it's hard to articulate or understand? To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead, come back to tell you

seemingly unrelated directions—and by the speaker's sense of his own inadequacy. By depicting the speaker's intense struggle with indecision, the poem suggests that excessive preoccupation with doing the right thing—whether when expressing yourself, forming relationships with others, or simply deciding how to style your hair or what to eat—can actually stop a person from ever venturing forth into the world or, in fact, doing much of anything at all.

From the beginning, the poem sets up a juxtaposition between action and inaction. The first line states "let us go," implying that the poem will move forward in time and space—in other words, that it will go somewhere. But that momentum is quickly stalled. These streets "follow like a tedious argument of insidious intent," suggesting that the various paths they offer up feel both boring and threatening—that there is no clearly good path to take. And though the speaker says that the streets "lead you to an overwhelming question," the speaker doesn't actually pose that question. Instead, he explicitly says not to inquire further: "Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'" Maybe the question is just which direction is best to walk in or, indeed, where they're going in the first place—simple queries that become hurdles in the speaker's mind.

In any case, the speaker's habitual procrastination seems to be rooted in social anxiety, since, paralyzed with fear about making the wrong choice, he appears to find even basic decisions about what to eat or how to dress overwhelming. In fact, the speaker admits that he finds time for "a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions," all before sitting down his afternoon tea! He imagines "descending the stair" and greeting people, but in reality he is too timid to do so because he imagines that people will laugh at his bald spot and shabby clothing (which, in turn, suggest that the speaker is getting older—and that he has been wasting his time with all this indecision).

What's more, it's not just that the speaker can't follow through on his planned actions. He doesn't even seem to know how to begin to ask "the overwhelming question." Instead he asks "how should I begin?" and "how should I presume?"—suggesting that he feels incapable of overcoming the first hurdle to taking action. He repeats those phrases at the end of two different stanzas, giving the impression of a stuttering or repeated failed start.

For the speaker, trying to make the best choice repeatedly results in no choice at all. He is also paralyzed by a feeling of his own inadequacy, as implied by his reluctance to "presume" and his repetition of the phrase "Do I dare?" He doesn't take action, in other words, because he doesn't feel that he has the right to do so. Overcoming indecision requires agency, but the speaker remains trapped in his repeating patterns because he feels that he can't "dare" to do anything.

There are times when the speaker does seem close to doing something, but the poem ultimately indicates that wanting to act isn't enough. Taking meaningful action, it suggests, requires that an individual "dare" to make a choice without being certain that it's the best choice—a risk that the speaker can't bring himself to take. And while the speaker thinks he'll have plenty of time to do things, this seems like wishful thinking. Given his propensity to waffle about every little decision, he'll likely continue to agonize over his choices until there's no time left—his indecision having stopped him from living a full life.

Theme Desire, Communication, and Disappointment

Desire, Communication, and Disappointment

Although the speaker in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" might appear silent and affectless to others, his interior life is alive with hope and desire. In particular, he appears to have a deep longing for romantic connection—but he struggles to communicate that desire, and so it remains mostly unfulfilled. Indeed, despite being a "love song," the poem never quite manages to discuss love itself; instead, it stays bogged down in the false starts and half-finished thoughts that characterize the speaker's attempts at connecting with other people. The poem makes it clear that people like the speaker can only really experience love by breaking through these communication barriers, but it also embodies just how difficult doing so can be.

There are a few key moments in the poem that suggest the speaker feels romantic or sexual desire for women, but is unable to express those feelings. For example, he asks at one point if it is "perfume from a dress" that distracts him, and he is preoccupied with the image of a woman's "arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl"—a fixation that seems erotic. However, his desires are soon stymied by self-doubt and recrimination. He asks himself: "And should I then presume? And how should I begin?" These repeated questions show that he doesn't know how to begin a conversation with a woman and thinks that it would somehow be presumptuous to do so.

The speaker's sense of thwarted communication is so strong that it even colors his fantasies. When the speaker imagines expressing his desires and feelings to others, those scenes inevitably dissolve into disheartening moments of misunderstanding. For instance, the speaker imagines posing what he calls "the overwhelming question," saying "I am Lazarus, come from the dead, / Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all." However, although the speaker compares himself to the Biblical figure and offers the promise of total revelation—"to tell all"—he doesn't actually manage to communicate much of anything. Instead, he imagines his listener falling asleep and needing "a pillow by her head." Even in his fantasies, then, he experiences the disappointment of being unable to communicate, protesting: "That is not what I meant at all; That is not it, at all."

The speaker's attempts at communication only grow less effective as he is overcome by hopelessness and disappointment. By the end of the poem, the speaker's disappointment seems to have hardened to the point that it has become entrenched within him; he doesn't seem to expect that his desires will ever be fulfilled. He describes the singing of mermaids in exquisite detail, but admits: "I do not think that they will sing to me." Instead, he remarks that he "[grows] old." Because the speaker's efforts at communication have been unsuccessful, he gives up on trying, instead imagining that his opportunity to share his hopes and dreams has already passed.

The speaker's exclamation partway through the poem that "It is impossible to say just what [he] mean[s]" underscores exactly how interconnected desire, communication, and disappointment are for the speaker. His frustration suggests that romantic fulfillment requires clear communication—something the poem indicates the speaker might not be capable of.

Theme Modernity and Alienation

Modernity and Alienation

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is often regarded as one of the quintessential "modernist" poems, reflecting the social and intellectual conditions of the early 20th century. The poem emphasizes exciting features of modern life—like electricity and new medical technologies—but it also suggests that modernity comes with a persistent sense of alienation and isolation from others. Through the example of the speaker, the poem indicates that the modern condition essentially results in feeling alienated from the world.

The poem refers to several technologies that would have been relatively new in the early 20th century, like lamplight, industrial factories, and anesthesia in hospitals. At the same time, all this new activity and industry seems to have left the speaker behind. He describes how the "yellow fog" slithers through the streets like a cat that "rubs its back upon the window-panes," but he rarely interacts with actual people, as the streets are "half-deserted." The smog seems more alive to him than the people themselves.

The speaker already seems weary of this new world, in which events follow one another in a repetitive, cyclical fashion. He claims: "I have known them all already, known them all; / Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons, / I have measured out my life with coffee spoons." He suggests that nothing can surprise him anymore or disturb the normal rituals of polite society. For the speaker, taking action would mean "to force the moment to its crisis," which seems an impossible task after the civilized, sedate activity of taking "tea and cake and ices." There is thus something emotionally deadening and alienating about the seemingly empty social rituals that characterize the modern world.



Modernist literature was also often characterized by rejection of traditional figures of authority. In keeping with this tradition, the poem deconstructs the traditionally respected pillars of Western culture, religion, and literature, leaving the speaker feeling isolated and pessimistic about his diminished connection to those traditions. For example, the speaker comments ironically that he is "no prophet," like John the Baptist, and that rather "the eternal Footman hold[s] my coat, and snicker[s]" (basically, death laughs at him).

The poem thus makes its protagonist an object of mockery rather than a figure of greatness. The speaker himself seems to feel an inability to measure up against these literary greats, as when he proclaims that "I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be," and is simply a nameless, subservient "attendant lord" or even "a Fool." He doesn't draw strength or inspiration from these would-be authority figures of literature and culture; instead, they leave him feeling isolated and disheartened. This reaction suggests that modernist trends in literature may only enhance the alienating experience of living in the modern world.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" suggests that, for all the wealth and technological comforts of modern life, there is something profoundly alienating about this new way of experiencing the world. The speaker feels unable to participate in the social life of the world around him or to relate to the literary context that has come before him. Modernity doesn't connect him more with others; it just leaves him feeling even more alone.

☐ The End ☐