

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock Literary Devices

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Symbols

The Fog and Smoke: The yellow fog and smoke move like a slow cat through the streets. They symbolize confusion, dullness, and hesitation. The fog hides vision and truth, just as Prufrock hides his emotions and avoids making clear decisions.

Coffee Spoons: "Coffee spoons" symbolize the dull routine of Prufrock's life. They represent how he measures time through small, meaningless acts. His life lacks excitement or emotion. The image illustrates how modern life can become empty through endless repetition.

The Sea and Mermaids: The sea and the singing mermaids symbolize imagination, romance, and beauty. But Prufrock knows the mermaids will not sing to him. This reveals his sense of rejection, emotional failure, and distance from love and human joy.

The Evening (Etherized Patient): The evening, compared to "a patient etherized upon a table," symbolizes a state of lifelessness and paralysis. It reflects the numbed state of modern civilization and Prufrock's own helpless mind. Both the world and the man seem powerless and devoid of genuine feeling.

Toast and Tea: "Toast and tea" symbolize ordinary and empty social life. They represent polite conversation, superficial gatherings, and a lack of genuine passion. This image contrasts with Prufrock's deep inner thoughts. It reminds readers how his spiritual hunger remains unsatisfied.