



THE TWEETS OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK

BY DAVID LOWE

*I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat,
and snicker,*

There's a twitter site called "@so very British" which claims to express the hidden fears and foibles of the British people. It says in thousands of tweets what T.S. Eliot expressed in a few lines.

Would it have been worth while,

To have bitten off the matter with a smile,

"Shutting yourself in the wardrobe until the window cleaner has finished and left," for example. I don't have a window cleaner, but I have been known to lie on the floor crawling from room to room, not daring to turn the lights on or off, after somebody has knocked on the door. Not daring to go to the toilet until the cleaning lady has left.

And indeed there will be time

To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"

Time to turn back and descend the stair,

Often when I receive a potentially embarrassing letter, I know exactly what it contains, but I don't dare open it, as if keeping the envelope closed and the letter unread undoes the fact of the letter. What's more, I often delay answering a letter until it's too late and the embarrassing reminder is the letter I'm too embarrassed to open.

"That is not what I meant, at all;

That is not it, at all."

There's the empty car park syndrome, where you can't decide which one of the empty spaces you would prefer to park in. I often get this when I arrive very early at an airport car park. Too many parameters, too many variables. I have been known to return to my car after having checked in and change places in an empty car park, which is like playing chess against yourself.

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.

Repeatedly pressing the door button on the train before it lights up, to assure your fellow commuters that you have the situation in hand, or sitting on the folding seat next to the door that's about to be opened, but getting up much earlier than you need to, again just to reassure your fellow passengers.

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,

Overtaking someone on foot and having to keep up the uncomfortably fast pace until safely out of view, I often start singing to myself or whistling, as if I'm happy; it makes the overtaking more polite, more justifiable. Mobile phones provide a great alibi. To avoid social contact with the person you're overtaking, you can pretend you are talking on your mobile. A perfunctory nod replaces the need to explain. If you suddenly realize that you are walking in the wrong direction, then take out your phone and frown at it, then change direction. I even do this when nobody else is present. Of course, mobiles are not always a good thing. The number of times I've stared at my phone in silent horror until the unknown number stops ringing.

Do I dare

Disturb the universe?

In a minute there is time

For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse. Being unable to hand over the change you've just counted seven times without saying "I think that's right," then waiting for permission to leave, while the cashier checks the amount you know to be correct.

And would it have been worth it, after all...

Would it have been worth while,

Never having been able to give a party for fear that nobody turns up, I tend to invite someone to a party, then provide them with a list of reasons not to come in case they don't fancy it. Not hearing someone for the third time, so just laughing and hoping for the best. Watching sadly as someone presses the lift button you've clearly just pressed.

"That is not it at all,

That is not what I meant, at all."

Feeling guilty when you have nothing to declare and you go through the "nothing to declare" exit at the airport. Walking past the security guard at a supermarket with a "I've not stolen anything" expression on your face that makes you look as though you might have stolen something – especially if you haven't bought anything. Spending your life squeezing by people, yet never once completing the sentence: "Excuse me, sorry, do you mind if I just..."

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.

- PS - T.S. Eliot is an anagram and almost a palindrome of "toilets".
- PPS - Our thanks to T.S. Eliot for the quotations from *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.