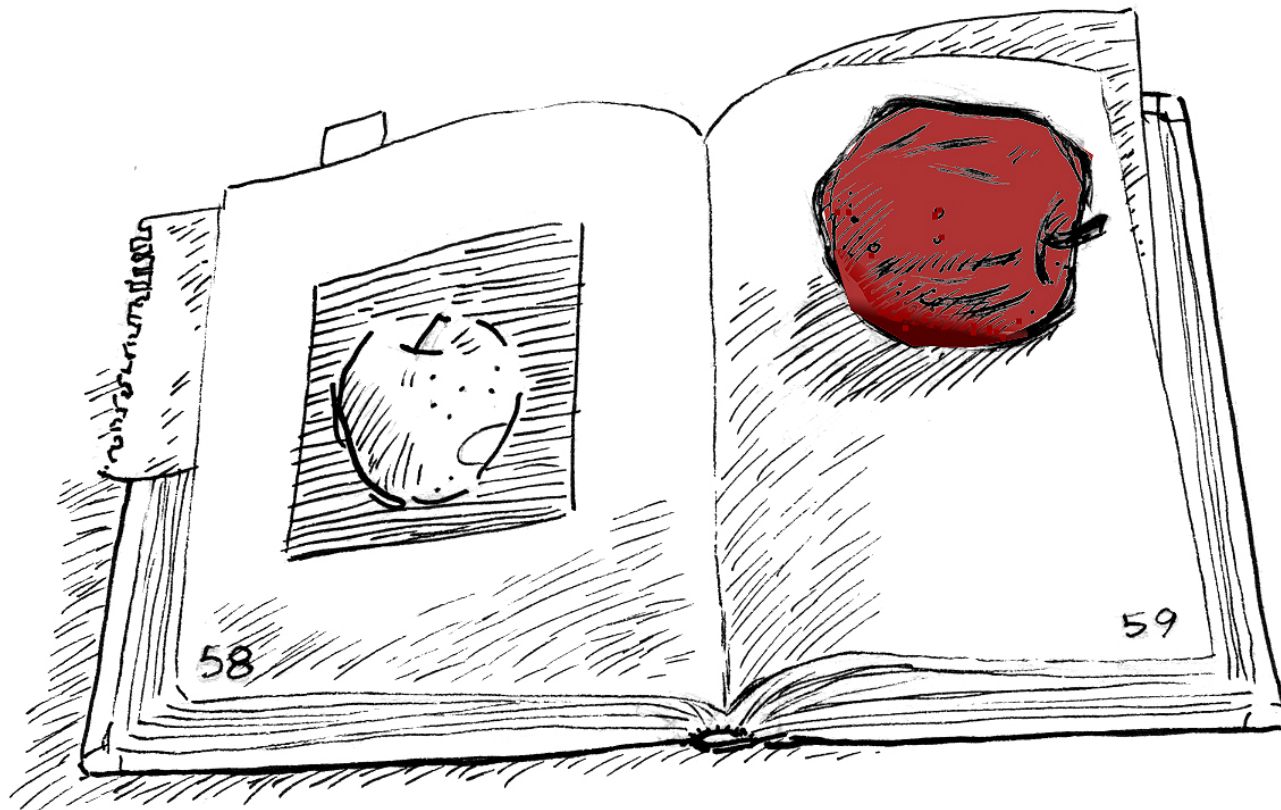


# T. S. Eliot

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# XLIII. “How do I love thee?—”

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Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861)

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.  
I love thee to the level of everyday's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.  
I love thee with a passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints,— I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life! — and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.

# *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

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## **Victorian Periods versus Modernism**

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*Nineteenth Century (1800s)*

rational order to Universe

faith in church and state

morals / strong values

sense of placement / identity

static division between classes

optimistic

conservative, narrow minded

*Twentieth Century (1900s)*

chaotic system

lack of faith

collapse of morality / loss of values

loss of identity:

national / gender / sexuality

fluid division between classes

pessimistic

open minded, free thinking

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## **Industrial Revolution / Darwin's theories / World War I**

# *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

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## **Eliot's Version of Modernism promotes:**

- loss of personality of poet; concentration should be on the poem itself
- emotions should be communicated to the reader by:
  - > chain of events
  - > set of objects
  - > random situations
- psychological portrayal of a character through monologue;  
to define what is meant by “experience” by exposing any possible subconscious influences in a character’s waking life.
- “Prufrock” is an example of stream of consciousness.

# *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

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- While reading this piece you fall into the head of the protagonist Prufrock.
- Eliot displays random thoughts within an uncertain, unspecified time interval.
- The poem shows a *psychological* sequence of thoughts as opposed to a *logical* sequence of dialogue.
- The monologue shows a private voice in a conversational tone.
- Prufrock's personality and character can be determined even without having a full understanding of all the allusions Eliot uses throughout the piece.

# *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

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**The full poem consists of numerous moments of intertextuality and what appear to be random associations of high art:**

- Dante's *Inferno*
- Michelangelo
- Bible
- Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *Hamlet*
- Andrew Marvell
- Hesiod's *Works and Days*

Through extensive study and research, a connection can be made through all the information Prufrock processes in his mind.

# *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

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**epigraph:** a phrase, quotation, or a poem itself which is set at the opening of a document. The epigraph serves multi-functions, acting as a summary, as a counter-example, or a connection for the work to bridge into the wider literary canon. An epigraph enables further commentary or insight into the full work itself, plus inviting a comparison or adding to the text another level of understanding.

One can argue that Eliot chooses to show Prufrock thinking to himself of the quote from Dante Alighieri, the Italian poet of the Middle Ages.

- The verse is from Canto XXVII of the *Inferno*.
- Shows Prufrock is well educated, more so than the average individual.
- The material relates a portion of the speech by one of the damned, Guido da Montefeltro, whose sin is the act of giving fraudulent counsel.

# *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

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The chosen speech provides multi-leveled irony-paradox.

Symbolically, it shows Prufrock is in his private hell and does not know anyone hears him. This in turn clarifies his personality: insecure, disconnected, uncertain, isolated.

The quote refers to is an ironic situation: he knows no one can hear his thoughts so he rambles on about his complaints.

- *However* the reader does hear him; Prufrock technically is not as alone as he thinks he is, despite the fact he is a fictional character.
- Ironically, Prufrock is very intensely aware, painfully obsessed with the external public world, but he is locked in his internal private world.



# *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

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## ***Keep in mind:***

Even if we fail to understand everything in the poem after a few moments of analysis, it is important to experience the various events and seek out as much as information as we can.

Eliot intentionally blends Prufrock's experiences with thoughts emerging into the character's head so it is difficult to distinguish between the personal *act* and the private *thought*. Memories become allusions which become impressions and in turn become associations only known to Prufrock.

Eliot wants the reader to wrestle with the work in order to prove their intellect and sense of worth, *plus* he wants you to experience the emotional sensations of Prufrock's psychological make-up.

# *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

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Furthermore, each stanza represents a different situation or scene from the life of Prufrock.

- Each stanza stands as an individual moment in time and memory.
- Each stanza implies a new “room” of thought and emotional status.
- Some “rooms” echo and repeat key phrases, yet take the information to a different level of thought and understanding.

Finally, much of the poem is contradictory and uses conflicting information.

- This echoes the typical thought process of an individual.
- What is heightened for the reader is the *experience* of being Prufrock.