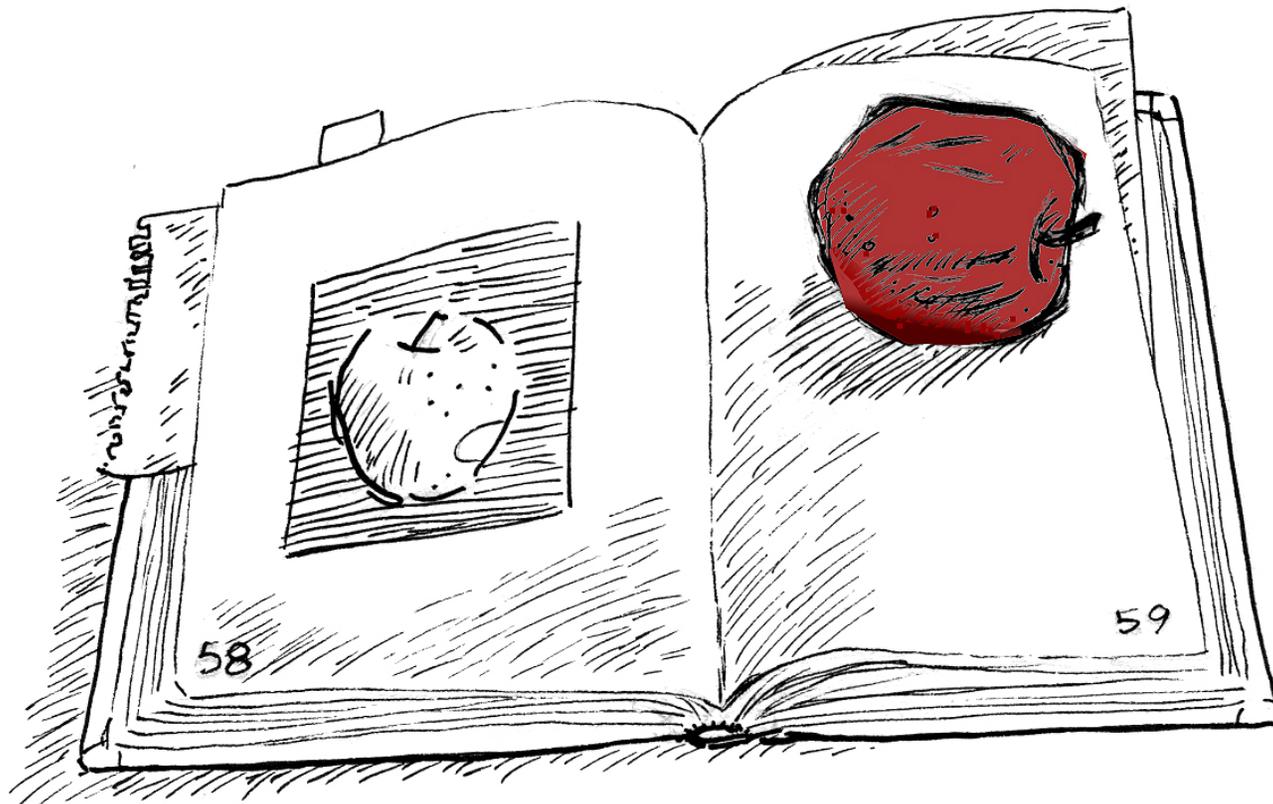


# T. S. Eliot

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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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## **Romantic / Victorian Periods versus Modernism**

*early 1700s to late 1800s*

*Twentieth Century (1900s)*

rational order to Universe

chaotic system

faith in church and state

lack of faith

morals / strong values

collapse of morality / loss of values

sense of placement / identity

loss of identity:

national / gender / sexuality

static division between classes

fluid division between classes

optimistic

pessimistic

conservative, narrow minded

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 on the poem itself
  - emotions should be communicated to the reader by:
    - > chain of events
    - > set of objects
    - > random situations
- } “objective correlative”
- 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 another 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 J. Alfred 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:**

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

# *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.

Eliot chooses to use an epigraph quoting Dante Alighieri, the Italian poet of the Middle Ages, specifically from Canto XXVII of the *Inferno*. 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 chosen speech provides multi-leveled irony-paradox.

# *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

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*What does the epigraph tell you about the nature of the poem?*

*What does the epigraph tell you about the personality of Prufrock himself?*

# *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

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*What does the epigraph tell you about the nature of the poem?*

*What does the epigraph tell you about the personality of Prufrock himself?*

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, for instance the notable couplet:

In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo.

*What room is the reader expected to decipher from the evidence presented?*

# *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

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Some echo and repeat key phrases, for instance the notable couplet:

In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo.

Ironically, the word *stanza* in Italian means *room*.

In other words, Eliot establishes many rooms with various emotional scenes which only Prufrock himself can fully explain and understand.

# *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

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**A short example of the complexity of Eliot's intertextuality strategy:**

Near the end of the poem, line 94 mentions Lazarus; this is *not* alluding to the biblical figure most people associate from the New Testament, with the miracle of Jesus raising a dead man back to life.

Rather this verse refers to a character within a parable named Lazarus mentioned in Luke, chapter 16: 19-31:

Lazarus dies a beggar, goes to Heaven, while Dives, a rich man, ends up in Hell. Dives wants to warn his brothers about the punishments of Hell. The parable allusion echoes the Dante allusion utilized in the epigraph; both are concerned with the (im)possibility of returning from the afterlife.