

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

- The poem starts with an Epigraph in Latin from Dante's *Divine Comedy*.
- Count Guido da Montefeltro, embodied in a flame, replies to Dante's question about his identity as one condemned for giving lying advice:
 - If I believed that my answer would be to someone who would ever return to earth, this flame would move no more, but because no one has ever returned alive from this gulf, if what I hear is true, I can reply with no fear of infamy.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

- Then the poet opens the poem with an intriguing image. The image compares the evening sky to a patient strapped to an operating table and given ether, a kind of anesthetic, to numb the pain of the surgery that is about to happen.
- The etherized patient symbolizes sickness and the absence of well-being and grace in the modern world. A surgery which involves cutting and removing may cure the world of its disease. In other words, a war is a must for the world to recover and becomes healthy again

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

- Prufrock repeats his invitation for us to come along with him. One of things you'll notice about this poem is that it repeats itself a lot.
- If you go on a walk with someone, especially someone you love, you try to pick someplace romantic – a moonlit beach, a tree-lined avenue, that sort of thing. Not Prufrock. He's going to take us through "half-deserted streets," where people walk around "muttering" to themselves.
- These are the kind of streets that are filled with "cheap hotels" where you might stay for one night only as a last resort, if you had no other options and restaurants which are dirty and serve tasteless sea-food.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

- Like a "tedious argument" with "insidious intent"; the streets twist and turn and hence they are so confusing it's as if they were trying to trick us into getting lost.
- Prufrock seems to be no less "insidious" himself by trying to trick us into taking a walk through the seedy part of town.
- The streets are leading somewhere, however. They lead "to an overwhelming question," a question of huge and possibly life-altering significance.
- Prufrock does not reveal that question, and he doesn't even want us to ask what it is. If we want to find out, we're going to have to take a walk with him. He repeats his favorite phrase, "let us go," for a third time.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

Women are entering and leaving a room talking about the Italian Renaissance painter Michelangelo. The quote is adopted from a poem the 19th century French writer Jules Laforgue.

- The women must be pretty high-class to be talking about Renaissance art, but their repeated action of "coming and going" seems surprisingly pointless.
- These lines have an incredibly simple, singsong rhyme. It sounds like a nursery rhyme, which totally doesn't fit with the intellectual subject of famous painters.