

T.S. Eliot:

Ladies and gentlemen, as this is the first time I've had the privilege of addressing such a large Harvard audience as this in giving a reading, I'm persuaded by common sense still more than by modesty that the majority of those present will not have heard me read before. So I shall give the usual brief, prefatory explanation of my simple method. In the first place, I take the poems strictly in chronological order, in the order in which you find them printed in the book, trying to choose a few representative poems from each period of my work and varying the choice as much as is possible with such a meager output.

This method of taking them strictly in the order of time has certain advantages. Every author likes to think that his most recent work is his best. Whether that is true or not, it probably helps him to read it better, so I think I shall improve in reading as I go on.

Then again, one becomes rather out of touch with one's very early work. It's not as if it were written by someone else. That would be comparatively easy, but it seems to one to have been written by a young person with whom one is intimately and rather embarrassingly associated and whom one is slightly ashamed. Furthermore, as time goes on, one sees more and more flaws in one's early work, which it's too late to repair because one isn't enough the same person to have the right to tamper with the early poems. Then my second point, I like to interpose a few remarks, when I can think of anything to say, between each poem or between each group of poems. Any remarks I make in that way are not of any slightest importance. Their purpose is to make a break, a slight relaxation for both the reader and the audience, and thereby facilitate the transition from one period or one mood or subject or manner to another.