

The critic Christopher Ricks describes the poem 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' as "the best first poem in a first volume of poems: it opened Eliot's debut collection, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, in 1917". This poem has been interpreted according to many approaches "involving everything from psychoanalysis to biographical readings, but it remains an elusive poem".

T. S. Eliot wrote this poem while he was still a student at Harvard, in his early twenties. Charles Baudelaire, the French poet, has strongly influenced Eliot, especially in this poem, and the following images of the modern civilized world are examples of this influence: 'the cigarette ends', 'the cups of coffee', and 'the vacant lots'. These images, which were quoted from urban life, express "urban social alienation and the landscape of the city rather than on nature and the pastoral". Therefore, this influence partially helps Eliot to be a modernist poet. Eliot tackles his characters and his scenes without emotion, yet his poems comprise an 'emotional intensity' which Baudelaire had explained its use: "modern poetry did not have to be cold and emotionless". Eliot's poetry which depicts modern civil life is profoundly influenced by "Baudelaire's depictions of nineteenth-century Paris".

Jules Laforgue (1860-1887), alongside Baudelaire, was another deep influence on the early works of Eliot. Eliot's poem 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' was profoundly influenced by the French Symbolist Movement whose theorist was Arthur Symons with his book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), "which argued that the poet should go in search of the perfect symbol that would help to illuminate life – poetry is talked up by Symons as being almost a new religion". In Symons' book, Eliot underlined the passages that addressed the method of one particular Symbolist writer, Jules Laforgue. Laforgue's style of writing poetry and technique helped Eliot "to create the stream-of-consciousness style of Prufrock's interior monologue".

'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is a dramatic monologue, but entirely different from those written by Robert Browning and Alfred,

Lord Tennyson in the previous century. Tennyson and Browning essentially created this new form of poetry in the 1830s and 1840s. But Prufrock is "a modern-day, urban speaker, who talks frankly about his failures: chiefly, his failure to 'grasp the nettle' or 'seize the day', his lack of sexual fulfilment, and his overall sense of failure". Prufrock's utterance is totally different from his reality, and this gap leaves a big room for analysis.

Prufrock is a middle-aged bald man, socially weird, living in a strange world he couldn't understand. Even his place in that world could not be determined. He is living on the fringes of his society, and the speaker of the poem or Prufrock tells us that he is not John the Baptist nor Hamlet; he is either Polonius or the Fool. That means, he is marginalized as the modern man is converted to a mere number by the superpowers which govern the whole world. He is a hesitant character like Hamlet not a man of action like Claudius. Critics cannot interpret some of the poem's symbols like 'a pair of ragged claws', however, it is useful to have an open end or some ambiguity to have multiple or endless interpretations for the poem.

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