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Prufrock and Other Observations

Thomas Stearns "T. S. Eliot (1888 - 1965)

Read by: D. S. Harvey Language: English
 Length: 31 minutes Style: Solo
 Genre(s): Poetry

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Prufrock and Other Observations is the title of a pamphlet of twelve poems by T. S. Eliot published in 1917 by *The Egoist*, a small publishing firm run by Dora Marsden, an English suffragette and philosopher of language. Most of the poems had been published earlier in literary magazines, most notably the "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", which was Eliot's first published poem and appeared in the June 1915 issue of *Poetry: A Magazine of Modern Verse* at the urging of Ezra Pound, overseas editor for the magazine. Prufrock is a dramatic interior monologue of a modern urban man trapped in an inertia of isolation and indecision that has been described as a "drama of literary anguish". The poem was influenced by *The Divine Comedy* and is peppered with references to the Bible, Shakespeare plays, and the works of metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell and the French symbolist poets. It was considered outlandish when it first appeared. One anonymous London reviewer commented that "The fact that these

things occurred to the mind of Mr. Eliot is surely of the very smallest importance to anyone, even to himself. They certainly have no relation to poetry." As it happens, Prufrock and the companion poems in this volume helped effect a paradigm shift away from Romanticism and Georgian lyrics to what came to be called Modernism and introduced one of the most distinctive voices and recognized voices in modern literature.

Thomas Stearns ("T. S.") Eliot (September 26, 1888 - January 4, 1965) was a poet, playwright, essayist and literary critic. He was born in St. Louis to a family with deep roots in Boston. He was educated at Smith Academy, Milton Academy, and Harvard College, earning a degree in philosophy. He immigrated to England in 1914 and became a British subject in 1927 at about the time he converted to Catholicism. He first achieved recognition with "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in 1915, hailed as a Modernist masterpiece, and established his voice as a major poet with *The Waste Land* in 1922. He worked outside the realm of poetry for most of his adult years, finding a position at Lloyd's bank in 1917 and moving to the publishing business in 1925 at Faber and Faber, eventually becoming a director and guiding the careers of W. H. Auden, Steven Spender, and Ted Hughes. He wrote seven plays, several collections of well-regarded essays, and a book of light verse entitled *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, which became the basis of the *Cats* musical adaptation by Andrew Lloyd Weber. He regarded *The Four Quartets* as his finest work, and it led to his being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948.