

Prompt: After reading T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" silently to yourself, read the entire poem aloud. You might also want to listen to T.S. Eliot read it himself at <http://www.punkasspunk.com/prufrock/>.

What did you "see" in the poem after reading and/or hearing the poem aloud? Did you notice anything different? Did it have a different impact on you? Did anything jump out at you?

The Character of J. Alfred Prufrock

After listening to T.S. Eliot read his poem aloud, I found that it helped me to better understand his character J. Alfred Prufrock. In my first readings I noticed the internal monologue that was being used was very different from other poems we have read so far (it being even a bit different than Browning, as our text points out). Understanding what was being communicated about the person, the events, and the "story" (or perhaps lack thereof) required a change of perspective, one that was quite different than the poetry we have read up until now.

Some of the descriptions in the work, such as the plainness of the character which is being attributed through his simple name, the constant returning of his focus to his insecurities, and the attention he gives to women were somewhat lost on me at first. I think that if I had read this at the time it was released and also in a more proper cultural context I would have picked up on details such as these more easily. Another observation I made is that I found it hard to match my own internal dialogue, or even an imagined one, with Prufrock's.

The author's voice, however, went far in helping me to understand that he is a "middle-aged, probably middle-class man" (Nigro) and that there is nothing spectacular about him at all. Of course, the poem does much to suggest this, but while reading it I was oftentimes considering that there might be more to him than what I was able to immediately discern; I found that I was oftentimes looking for qualities about him that weren't there.

Re: The Character of J. Alfred Prufrock

In listening to it I'm hearing Prufrock as being the universal, timeless, milktoast nonstarter, the consummate 4 on a scale of 10, and will never be any more than that.

I agree. This was more apparent to me after hearing the recording. On my initial readings I found the style of the poem too unfamiliar—it was hard to pick these details out even though they are right there. Hearing the tone of Eliot's voice and the qualities of Prufrock's disposition that are communicated through it cleared a lot of things up for me.

Kind of like an "eeyore" but in real life. I don't remember Whinie the Pooh that well anymore, but I remember there's a passage where they followed foot tracks around a tree (in the snow), and every time they went around the tree, magically there were two more sets of tracks - which they interpreted as whatever they're following, there must be more and more of them... never getting it that the extra tracks were their's.

I had forgotten about this. It instantly reminded me of why these stories are wonderful.

I never bothered to ask him: but maybe he thought if he drove his car in reverse, then the gas tank would refill itself, because he was "undoing" miles.

I know this is going to sound strange, but sometimes it's too bad things aren't that simple. I think that, while some people are just clueless, others are making sense out of the world in an it's-too-bad-it's-not-reasonable-but-should-be kind of way. Almost like saying to oneself: "if it's so complicated, then why should I bother?" I have to admit that I can relate to this approach sometimes. Sometimes simple is good. Then again, it's probably good that gas tanks don't refill when people drive backwards. There are already enough accidents on the road.

Re: Prufrock

When it was being read aloud, it sounded very sad and that Prufrock felt there was no way to change his current life. He was stuck within the moment.

I think I understand what you're getting at. To me it was sad hearing a person talk about such things in that tone of voice, although he did not represent the character in a way that suggests Prufrock himself was concerned or sad about his life "dilemmas". Eliot's voice lent the quality of a lackadaisical, perhaps unnecessary existence, which is fitting for the poem.

Re: Week 15

I think the most interesting thing that I found this poem was how much I could relate to this character, feeling as though you are under such scrutiny and having feelings of uncertainty much of the time.

I believe I understand what you're saying but I did not have the same response. A particular quality to this poem I noticed is that the Prufrock character has no self worth and is accustomed to it; on some level or another he accepts this about himself.

Like most people, I have had internal dialogue where I doubt myself, am self-conscious and uncertain about something or everything, but I could never settle with or accept those feelings as the way things are or should be. Eliot's character, however, seems to do this. I think this is an interesting point because it seems that the author was commenting on society when he wrote this poem, and it was relevant then as it is today. As our book writes "Prufrock, like the modern European humanity whom he represents, is unable to penetrate the thick husk of habit, custom, and cliché to arrive at something substantial" (2285).

Re: Week 15

poor Prufrock, muddling his way through life, the perfect example of a 4 on a scale of 10.

Well, maybe on some level he realizes how close he was to being a 3 and somehow this lends a little bit of badly needed encouragement to his life.