

Title: Love Unscripted | Love's Quiet Desperation... Prufrock's Struggle with Desire

Synopsis:

In this episode of Alchemy, Tim and LeeAnna take listeners into the brooding, balding, existential swirl that is T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Through dramatic readings, mournful laughter, and an awkward peach moment, they explore how internal monologue, regret, and cultural disillusionment can create some of the most enduring (and heartbreaking) characters in literature. Writers, beware: it's about to get quietly devastating in here.

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Discussion Questions

Use these questions to spark conversation and reflection in the classroom:

- How does Eliot's use of internal monologue create a sense of intimacy - and also deep discomfort - in the reader?
- Prufrock talks himself out of everything. Why is it so hard to root for a character who can't act? And yet, why do we still relate to him?
- In what ways does cultural collapse or transition (like the end of the Victorian era) influence the personal despair shown in the poem?
- How might a modern-day Prufrock think or speak differently? (Would he write 87 drafts of a text and still never hit "Send"?)
- How does "being too on the nose" kill a character's emotional authenticity? Can you think of modern novels or shows that do this well - or terribly?
- Why might allowing characters to wrestle internally, without resolving it tidily, create stronger fiction?

Writer's Prompts

Creative exercises to help students apply the themes of the topic:

- **Prompt 1:** Write a short piece where we voyeuristically listen in on a character's internal monologue about some great regret. They don't have to be old. Maybe it's a lost love, a missed opportunity, a stupid mistake they can't undo. Let them fumble through it, imperfectly.
- **Prompt 2:** Write the external version of Prufrock: a character who projects wealth and social confidence on the outside but is internally falling apart. Let the cracks show, but slowly.

- **Prompt 3:** Write a modern setting for a "Prufrock moment." Maybe it's standing outside a party, not going in. Maybe it's typing and deleting the same text message twenty times. Maybe it's scrolling someone's Instagram at 2 AM and feeling like a ghost.
- **Prompt 4:** Write a "coffee spoons" moment: a detail that seems small but symbolizes a massive personal failure or realization. (Bonus points if it's weird and specific.)
- **Prompt 5:** Let your character start to confess something deeply vulnerable - and then chicken out. What happens in the words they don't say?
- **Prompt 6:** Write a dialogue between two characters where one is internally desperate to say something (love, regret, anger) but keeps deflecting with small talk. Let the real tension hide just under the surface.

Class Activities

These activities will help expand on the themes of the topic:

- **Group Discussion:** Split the class into groups and assign each group one or more of the 13 parameters from the alien-building guide (e.g., Moral Dread, Holding a Mirror to Our Fears, Alien Technology). Each group will explore how their assigned parameter could shape the alien's personality, actions, and its interactions with humans. Have each group present their findings to the class, highlighting how their parameter influences the alien's character and story.
- **Group Discussion:** Pick a famous fictional character (e.g., Jay Gatsby, Elizabeth Bennet, Frodo Baggins) and discuss: what is their quiet desperation? How would they monologue if we could overhear it?
- **Design Exercise:** Create a visual map of Prufrock's mental state during the poem: what images keep circling? (Coffee spoons, peaches, bald spots, mermaids...) Now create a similar mind-map for your own invented character.
- **Debate:** "Is inaction a valid dramatic choice in fiction?" One team argues yes (inertia can be powerful!), one argues no (fiction demands change!). Bonus points if someone uses the phrase "peach-induced paralysis."
- **Collaborative Alien Story-Building (because we can't resist aliens):** Imagine an alien species that experiences regret the way humans experience weather: constantly shifting, occasionally paralyzing. In small groups, build a mini-story around one of these aliens trying to navigate human-style relationships—and getting horribly stuck.

Closing note from the Podcasters, Tim & LeeAnna

Sometimes the loudest heartbreaks aren't the grand, dramatic ones. Sometimes they're the quiet moments—the hesitation, the second-guessing, the chances that slip away while you're busy overthinking your haircut.

In Prufrock, T.S. Eliot gave us a man who can barely dream of daring, and in doing so, he captured something brutally, beautifully human. Writers, don't be afraid to let your characters falter. Let them hesitate. Let them miss the moment.

Because real emotion doesn't always arrive with fireworks—it often stumbles in, mumbling and late. Here's to the almost-lovers, the coffee-spoon measurers, the ones who sense the mermaids but know they won't be sung to.

And here's to you—turning all that quiet, aching, almost into something unforgettable. We'll see you next time... maybe with fewer peaches, but definitely with more beautiful chaos.