

Thesis on the theme in t. s. eliot's poem "hollow men"

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Thomas Stearns Eliot is one of the most important poets of the 20th century of the English language. The American -born turn British poet and playwright was also a literary critic whose works are still influential to this day.

“Hollow Men” is one of Eliot’s major poems published in 1925. Its main thematic concerns include the post war Europe, salvation and to some extent issues of marriage relationships which some critic attribute to Eliot’s own marriage to Vivienne which did not survive their full lives.

In what easily passes as intentional fallacy, Eliot says that he derived the title of the poem from a combination of “The Hollow Land” by William Morris with “The Broken Men” by Rudyard Kipling to produce his title of “The Hollow Men”. And critics are quick to dismiss such fallacious connections since it is very easy and apparent to draw parallels with Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar and from Conrad’s Heart of Darkness where character Kurtz is referred to as a “hollow sham” and “hollow at the core” which are all convincing intertextual connections to the poem.

The theme of salvation is more pronounced in the last part of the poem where Eliot strongly alludes to the Lord’s Prayer as he invokes sympathy from the reader to the men who have just realized their incipient failure and as such looks upon salvation as the only left avenue of hope. It is loaded with pessimism since these men are not turning to God because of some deep belief and conviction but because they have come face to face with their damnation and the only way to add impetus to their struggle is by that leap of faith.

Those who knew Eliot well at that time have likened the treatment of salvation here to his own situation because at the time he was deeply grappling with the decision to decamp from atheism to Christianity. And it is portrayed more clearly here. The men in this poem have blindly followed idealism to no meaningful realizations. The noble belief in idealism has blinded them tautologically back to the origin of the question itself. Their only hope now remains in the belief of God. This is aptly captured in the lines; For Thine is the Kingdom toward the end of the poem. But again this is desperately done prompting one to see the move as one of utter despair.

What Eliot concentrates on however is the political situation of the post world war Europe and the meaninglessness of lives in those nations then. Men went to war without knowing exactly why and what the impacts of engaging in such deadly actions entailed. Sensing defeat, they have nothing to fall back on. As the poem begins, it is clear that these people do virtually nothing but whisper meaningless phrases. They are incapable of action and are completely lacking the motivation truly needed in life. This weighs heavily in the paradox that they are hollow and yet stuffed. The appeal to the departed to see them not as lost but as a people who are just hollow but stuffed is more of Eliot's way of commenting on the despair that has characterized the post war world of Europe. (Barbara, 14)

The disillusionment that has gripped the people here is only comparable to that of captives who have no option but to give their last prayers. They are seeking divine intervention. They are confused and are like on a pendulum they no longer have the ability to control. That they go round the prickly

pear and are unable to choose between idealism and reality for the two is then inseparable, boils down to the shadow which is the height of the confusion itself. The barrenness of such efforts are projected further by the acute diction of the poet in the use of words such as dead land and cactus land which all suggest that the activities being carried out are all in vain. Just like the desert cannot produce anything so are the efforts of these men which are headed for doom. (Joseph, 30)

Eliot's depiction of the situation in the post war European nations is given prominence by the deed allusions that he makes which. Though an alien reader may find it difficult to decode the significations of most of them, any one familiar with the history of Britain and the upheavals of the time in Europe will readily find them as references. In fact, critics have described Eliot as not a poet but a referencer. In deed, great deals of both literary and biblical allusion do exist in the poem but they mainly aid in the illumination of the aspects being described. It is therefore only proper and intelligent that we first have some understanding of those notions being referenced. For instance, the choice of the phrase, gathered on the beach of this tumid river in part four of the poem is an allusion to the separation of the embattled soldiers with those gone before them. Also, the broken bones of our lost kingdoms caption the best biblical allusion especially where Samson slew the philistines and thus reinforcing the theme of salvation. It is strengthened by the idea of a seemingly incapable young man eventually managing to achieve a rare feat. (Conrad, 12)

His utter despair and the total conviction of the worthlessness of the human race in general is very apparent in this poem. The emotions and interpretations surrounding the world in the poem climaxes towards the end of the poem with a strained version of the Lord's Prayer recited in complete despair with just a crumbling of the world repeated in the last lines of the poem to suggesting the people's fear of imminent death. They fear death yet in their lives, it seems that they are somehow dead in one way or other for they live in total despair.

The meaninglessness of life for those living is yet another speculation of the issues that have triggered the search for salvation. They live in abject fear for death since it presents with it a lonely experience that takes one into some kind of abyss which no speculation can unravel. They fear to be forgotten and as such cling to anything that offers them that kind of hope. This is when salvation comes in handy to them. There is that fear of going before the judge unaware of what happens in that next world. (Alighieri, 19)

However, it is quite clear that Eliot is angered by the volatile situation created by the instability in Europe following the political turmoil of the times in Europe.

Works cited

Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Toronto: Random House, 1950 print.

Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972 print.

Gordon, L. T. S. *Eliot: Imperfect Life*. New York: Norton & Co., 1999print.

Barbara Perkins, *American Traditional Literature*. Boston: McGraw-Hill . 1999 print.

<https://assignbuster.com/thesis-on-the-theme-in-t-s-eliot's-poem-hollow-men/>