

Looking inside the hollow men



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Looking Inside The Hollow Men A Look Inside " The Hollow Men" Eliot, a master of the written craft, carefully thought out each aspect of his 1925 poem " The Hollow Men." Many differences in interpretation exist for Eliot's complex poetry. One issue never debated is the extensive range of things to consider in his TS Eliot's writing. Because TS Eliot often intertwined his writing by having one piece relate to another " The Hollow Men" is sometimes considered a mere appendage to The Waste Land. " The Hollow Men," however, proves to have many offerings for a reader in and among itself. The epigraph contains two pertinent references (http). First, " Mistah Kurtz - he dead" is an allusion to Conrad's Heart of Darkness. In his novella, Conrad portrays the empty nature of men.

Mistah Kurtz is a character that lacks a soul, thus, a true " Hollow Man." In the second quotation the epigraph alludes to England's November 5 tradition of Guy Fawkes Day. In 1605, Guy Fawkes unsuccessfully tried to blow up the parliament building. Eliot's quote " A penny for the old guy" is called out by children on this holiday who are attempting to buy fireworks in order to blow up straw figures of Fawkes. Within the first stanza Eliot establishes the speaker, setting, theme and begins a rhythmic pattern that will hold true for four of the five sections of the poem. The speaker in the poem is not human, or at least prefers to be thought of as a scarecrow over a " ..

lost / Violent soul .. " (lines 15-16). The powerful comparison between the worthlessness of " rats' feet over broken glass .. " (line 9) to their " dry voices" (line 5) illustrates how meaningless they (the Hollow Men) truly are. Two lines detached from the first stanza contain a series of paradoxes which further the idea of meaninglessness, " Shape without form, shade without

color, / Paralyzed force, gesture without motion" (11-12). Although difficult to discern exactly what is going on and where in the poem, the reader easily perceives the overall feeling of the hopelessness in just the opening lines, " We are the hollow men / We are the stuffed men"(lines 1-2) establish a grim feeling of emptiness.

Images like " This is the dead land / This is cactus land .. Under the twinkle of a fading star" (lines 39-44) create a bleak, dry, desert land setting. The theme of the poem parallels those of Conrad's Heart of Darkness (Smith). The degradation of ritual (religious or otherwise) and the emptiness or reduction of human to childish behavior is parallel concepts in both pieces. Part I of the poem describes the insignificance of the " hollow men." Part I gives the vague setting and shows the request of the hollow men to be viewed as empty; " Remember us .. not as lost / Violent souls [which Kurtz and Fawkes both were], but only / As the hollow men" (lines 15-18).

It also introduces two motifs, that of eyes and kingdom. " Those who have crossed / With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom" (line 13-14) is an allusion to Dante's Paradiso (Bowler). Kingdom with a capitalized K may refer to Heaven (although all references to a " kingdom" do not), and those with " direct eyes" are allowed to go there and become blessed. " Eyes" in the poem refer to those of Charon in Dante's Inferno (Williamson, 157). With the line, " Eyes I dare not meet in dreams" (line 19) the speaker states that the " eyes" are a source of fear.

Playing a connective role in the poem, the first two lines in the first four sections have a specific rhythm. Section I's, " We are the hollow men / We

are the stuffed men" (lines 1-2) is like II's " Eyes I dare not meet in dreams / In death's dream kingdom"(19-20), Part III's " This is the dead land / This is the cactus land" (39-40) and IV's " The eyes are not here / There are no eyes here." This language serves as a rhythmic refrain tying each section together while setting off the last. The use of literary devices in " The Hollow Men" is seemingly endless. Rhyme also plays an important role. In I, like all of the other parts (except the fifth) the final line of the stanza rhymes with one of the previous lines. For example the scheme in the first stanza is AABCABDCCB.

Although the last line could have ended with the two C's, it reverted back to a familiar rhyme ending. This tactic gives the feeling of familiarity and completion at the end of each stanza. Possibly the most powerful literary device used in " The Hollow Men" is repetition. The poem contains not only the repetition of rhyme, rhythm, and images, but also of actual words. In fact, the 420-word work only has 180 different words (Spurr).

The repetition is seen throughout the poem and sometimes even within the same line " behaving as the wind behaves" (line 35). Repetition not only serves to reinforce the meaning, and also to connect the sections. Part II opens with image repetition and the use of alliteration " Eyes I dare not meet in dreams / In death's dream kingdom / These do not appear" (19-20). In relating his fear of " the eyes" the speaker prefers to be emotionless. He would like to think of himself as a scarecrow " Let me also wear / Such deliberate disguises ..

In a field / Behaving as the wind behaves" (lines 31-35). The scarecrow may apply to the ineptness of the speaker, to the ritual of Guy Fawkes Day, and other pagan rituals (Smith). Throughout time straw men have functioned as sacrificial spirits or scapegoats riding their people of accumulated sin. This speaker's willing reduction to a soulless object pertains to Conrad's theme. Part III presents a dreary image along with a familiar rhythm in the lines " This is the dead land / This is the cactus land" (line 39-40) along with the lifeless setting. The final line of the first stanza " ..

twinkle of a fading star" (line 28) has two functions (Crawford). First, because it is not " fading," it implies the remoteness of the dead cactus land. Second, it suggests the nursery rhyme " Twinkle twinkle little star." This alludes to the theme of childlike behavior and preludes the upcoming nursery rhyme. Part IV contains the familiar images of eyes, stars, and kingdoms. Within this section are the darkest most desolate images of the setting. These include " valley of dying stars ..

" and " .. broken jaw of our lost kingdoms" (lines 54-55). Even the hollow men must " .. grope together / And avoid speech" (58-59). There is a slight relief in the despondent ness of the poem. However in this section is no longer fading or dying but is " perpetual." The " perpetual star," an allusion to the Holy Virgin and the " Multifoliate rose" are symbols of religious hope (Smith).

However, this hope is quickly dashed in the Part V. The fifth part of the poem is the anomaly. It develops reality, not the hope of the hollow men (Williamson, 159). It begins with a stunning adaptation of a familiar nursery

rhyme replacing " mulberry bush" with " prickly pear." The cactus instead of the rose and the nursery level make-believe makes fun of the men's hope. This change causes ideas of childishness, linguistic degeneration and confusion to occur (Crawford). The next three stanzas are composed in a rhythmic formula.

Almost like a boxing routine the phrases make a rhythmic one, two, one two, and then, " Falls the Shadow" equals 3. Between the (1) And the (2) Between the (1) And the (2) Falls the Shadow (3, or the punch). The " Shadow" is a kind of gray nothingness representative of the fear and emptiness in the hollow men and in humankind. Finally, to add to the confusion, pieces of the Lord's Prayer appear. As if the reader is supposed to fill in the blanks, the prayer is written, For Thine is Life is For Thine is the (lines 91-93). The final lines are a powerful childlike chant, This is the way the world ends This is the way the world ends This is the way the world ends Not with a bang but a whimper (lines 95-98). " The Hollow Men," rich in allusions ends a hollow abstraction. This ending seems fitting because it mirrors the hollow men, who themselves have reached the edge of the " tumid river" and are whispering (thus the whimper) broken prayer (Spurr).

The last and most powerful line is, perhaps, a daring prediction of the fate of the world and human kind. Eliot presents a dreary picture of his generation and of mankind. The poem can be construed to mean a variety of things, however, the one inevitable factor is the inescapable existence of emptiness in the poem. However, it contains a brief glimpse of hope in the " perpetual star" thus, man may have a chance to achieve a brighter future. Bibliography

Works Cited Bowler, Ellen, editor, et al. Prentice Hall Literature: The British Tradition.

Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994. Crawford, Robert. The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot. Clarendon Press, 1987. Online.

Modern American Poetry. " On 'The Hollow Men.'" July 7, 2001. http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a_f/eliot/hollow.htm Eliot, T. S. " The Hollow Men" in Bowler, Ellen, editor, et al. Prentice Hall Literature: The British Tradition. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994. http://users.harker.org/hs/DeirdreM/projects/abush/mistah_kurtz.htm Miller, J.

H. Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers. Harvard University Press, 1965. Online. Modern American Poetry.

" On 'The Hollow Men.'" July 7, 2001. http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a_f/eliot/hollow.htm Smith, Grover. T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning. Chicago: University: Chicago Press, 1956. Online. Modern American Poetry. " On 'The Hollow Men.'" July 7, 2001. http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a_f/eliot/hollow.htm Spurr, David.

Conflicts in Consciousness: T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Criticism. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984. Online. Modern American Poetry. " On 'The Hollow Men.'" July 7, 2001. http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a_f/eliot/hollow.htm Williamson, George. A Reader's Guide to T. S.

Eliot: A Poem-by-Poem Analysis. New York: Octagon Books, 1979. Poetry Essays.

<https://assignbuster.com/looking-inside-the-hollow-men/>