



Exploration of the Hollowness of the Modern Men in T.S. Eliot’s “The Hollow Men” (1925): An Analytical Approach

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Abstract

T.S. Eliot has reached a stage of maturity in which he confirms the hollowness of the modern men. This realization may be due to his strong religious belief and his personal experience. His religious belief is a mixture of his previous belief and his new religious belief and these have been clear in “The Hollow Men”. Also his personal experience is quite rich as he has lived in the US and moved to England as well as visited Germany and France. Eliot has started the poems with two epigraphs which carry significant meanings and the beginning of the poem is a great stage as it contains the confession of the modern hollow men who act as Mr. Kirtz of *The Heart of Darkness*. Modern man is empty of spirituality, religion and real love as Eliot presented it in “The Hollow Men”. A textual approach is used along with a historical approach to explore the emptiness and hollowness of the modern man. It was found out that Eliot did not mean to humiliate the hollow men, but he rather praises them for repenting from their sins.

Key words: Hollow men; Modern men; Spirituality; Personal experience

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INTRODUCTION

Eliot has never written any simple piece of poetry that is to say its readers can understand it easily. So, researchers

always need to quest for meaning of Eliot’s poems elsewhere, as Eliot states in his essay ‘Philip Massinger’: ‘One of the surest of tests is the way in which a poet borrows. Immature poets imitate, mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different’ (206). It is clear that Eliot borrowed from the best ages and from the best writers to produce the best for his readers and he was somewhat successful in doing so.

METHOD

Through the use of modern theories the writer uses textual and analytical approaches to explore the core of the poem along with a historical approach the meaning of the poem can be explained. By providing examples from “The Hollow Men” the purpose of the writer in composing this poem can be reached. The nature of Eliot’s poetry is that he intentionally makes his poems complicated because he considered poetry as a science. This has been reflected in his poem.

DISCUSSION

Eliot’s Choice of Allusions

Eliot’s allusive sources are well chosen, as they remind us examples of souls which suffer from the same moral condition as those in the poem. All of those souls that are referenced are taken from works or events that are extremely powerful. Eliot’s use of them adds considerably to the power that his poem can convey. From *The Divine Comedy*, he takes images of souls at every level of the afterlife: hell, purgatory, and heaven. Dante’s lost souls, which never made up their minds to live their lives for good or evil, are denied entrance; therefore, all the three places: hell, purgatory and heaven have the same condition as the modern life. Dante the pilgrim becomes heroic in that he

dares to look at his guilt, shame, and sin and then makes the conscious decision repent. Joseph Conrad's Kurtz is also able to recognize this danger, because in his death he realizes the horror of the modern life, while Marlow, who also realizes a bit of the danger, cannot bring himself to face the truth of it. Guy Fawkes's whimper spells the end of the failed conspiracy with which he was involved. By doing so, he gives up the choice he made for rebellion. The tragedy of the modern man in *The Hollow Men* is intensified because it is presented within the context of possible ultimate meaning: 'it gives the complete impression, not that life as a whole is meaningless, but it has a purpose which the hollow men refuse to acknowledge, and it is, therefore, meaningless for them' (Sullivan, 1973, p. 49).

All his poetry is comprehensive and needs interpretation. To enrich his works, Eliot always alluded to the famous pieces of the past. Weiskel states that Eliot's use of Joseph Conrad in his poem's first epigraph, 'Mr Kurtz, he dead!', makes it easy for Eliot to penetrate the gloomy atmosphere of a place in a particular time, to the gloominess of his famous poem (50).

Moreover, the poem has the second epigraph, 'a penny for the Old Guy'. This epigraph links the poem with the violent act happened in England in 1605, three hundred years ago before Eliot wrote the poem. Guy Fawkes who was a Catholic had a plot to destroy the Protestant monarchy of James I, (Bloom)

Eliot has frankly observed the impact of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* on 'The Hollow Men' by means of his epigraph, 'Mitah Kurtz- he dead'. Eliot has potentially assimilated something of a greater amount of Conrad in the body of his poem, particularly in the conclusion, 'This is the way the world ends/Not with a bang but a whimper' ('The Hollow Men' LL. 97, 98). For on the off chance that we swing to the last scene of Marlowe's monolog, in which Marlow misleads Kurtz's planned, we discover him saying 'it seems to me that the house would collapse before I could escape, that the heavens would fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall such a trifle' (New York: New American Library, 1950; p.157). Mariwan Barzinji has also argued about the significance of epigraphs to T.S. Eliot's poems in his article "The Function of Epigraphs to T.S. Eliot's Poetry", in which he stated that without understanding the epigraph in each single poem of Eliot, it is hard to understand the whole poem.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, so many studies have been conducted on T.S. Eliot's poetry and criticism. Some of those works praise the role of Eliot in composing the hollow men; whereas, others merely say this poem is a prolongation of "The Waste Land". The aim of this study is to demonstrate the delicacy of the poet in the way he expressed his

feeling such as royals and tackles the subject of religion like Catholics.

The Hollow Men' is fundamentally Eliot's examination of the state of his own soul as one of many modern souls suffering the same condition of hollowness. It is a hollowness caused by the condition of the modern world, in which men live only for themselves, failing to choose between good and evil. The souls in the poem, whose condition, one is supposed to be horrified by, are not those who have sinned the most, but those who have not chosen whether or not to sin. They exist in a state in-between; a state in which their failure to make a decision causes an extreme lack of hope and joy or pain. The heroes of this poem are those who clearly see this state and recognize its true horror. Much of the horror of this state is constructed through the use of allusions that refer to past historical and fictitious characters who suffered similar fates, or who realized the horror of that fate in some decisive moments (Unger, p.27). While Eliot's general intent may be clearly understood from the words of the poem, a much richer understanding can only be attained by realizing the allusions he uses as literary tools to construct the work on a basis laid by writers before him. The first and last passages of the final section are useless, immoral and evil parodies of children's game song.

'The Hollow Men' is a poem communicating spiritual deadness, frightfulness and hopelessness and clearly springs from 'Eliot's reverberating of Marlow's response to the destiny of Kurtz in the *Heart of Darkness*, yet it varies particularly from *The Waste Land* in communicating this temperament as a choral serenade with no emotional development. There is no Grail myth, no account, or scene similarity, to convey the first motivation. In *The Waste Land* there is a smaller than usual epic development, the experiences of the quester interlaced with Fisher King's memories of the past. Nothing of the sort happens here. Their circumstance is static, or if there is any development, it is roundabout and bound to the region of their fixity as representations prepared to be burnt.

'The Hollow Men' mourn their own particular void and vacancy. They are not 'lost violent souls' but just empty men, loaded with straw, 'guys' prepared for blazing. (The epigraph, 'A penny for the Old Guy' is the traditional cry of children as they pull their representations through the roads on November 5, gathering pennies. This may propose here that, as children make a session of pretend out of Guy Fawkes and his representation, so we make a comparable diversion out of religion.) They ache for death. Truth is told passing shows up in cheerful appearance, and they are similar to the hordes of dead holding up to be carried over the waters of death by Charon the Ferryman.

Obviously, we perceive Conrad's significance quickly: a lie, for Marlow, is spoiled with profound quality, actually and in addition typically he conveys the wicked load of Kurtz on his back, in that burden he consents to his own mortality. To the abundance of implications officially extricated from Eliot's writing and without

doing violence to any of them—we may not include a further understanding: ‘The Hollow Men’ however unmistakably a difference to both Marlow and Kurtz, (and to Guy Fawkes, acquire the twofold burden. Decreased to immature inarticulation ‘For Thine is/ Life is/ For Thine is the’, they can just splutter their concurrence in the repetitive beat of nursery or Mother Goose mood ‘This is the way we wash.’ They might turn away their eyes; they might wear, similar to the Harlequin deliberate masks, they might ‘avoid speech’ yet nothing can ‘wash’ away their insight, immediate or suggested, of Kurtz or Marlow. Neither will the house breakdown, nor the sky fall, ‘with a bang’ the main sound is the ‘whimper’ of a regularly repetitive ‘papier- mache Mephistopheles,’ the very good whimper that the noiseless wash of the Thames, Congo, Styx does but rather annihilate development (Sanders, 1964).

Since the production of the ‘Hollow Men’ in 1925, a great part of the criticism with respect to ‘The Hollow Men’ has spun around T. S. Eliot’s motivation in comparing and composing together such befuddling and frequently opposing symbolism. With an end goal to encourage the route of Eliot’s to some degree uncertain arrangement of images and pictures, critic Robert F. Fleissner says that the fundamental issue is if the ‘stuffed men’ of Eliot’s regret are typical of an agnostic disposition or if their emptiness for the most part speaks to an void holding up ‘to be filled’ (p.40). While both choices recognize the vicinity of the void of current common learning, the first hypothesis comprises of the conviction that everything will end in nothingness and passing (Howard, 2012).

On the other hand, the second alternative comprises of a dynamic craving that the empty men have for in the long run accepting illumination, along these lines filling their empty furthermore, straw-stuffed bodies with enduring information and intelligence. As indicated by faultfinder Troy Urquhart, ‘In T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Hollow Men,’ the speaker looks for signifying’ or, as such, participates in a journey for important information or insight. Lamentably, the poem’s storyteller is incapable to discover a worthy ‘truth,’ which makes a picture of baffled latency (p.199).

Then again, a few pundits, specifically Freidrich W. Strothmann and Lawrence V. Ryan, feel that “The Hollow Men” holds more than minor baffled energy because of a fizzled quest for individual significance; rather, they co terms of a profound movement or voyage that finishes ‘with a level of trust for the empty men’ (Gillis, p.635). Regardless of all these conflicting perspectives, I trust a blend of viewpoints takes into consideration a more significant translation of the sonnet. The symbolism and imagery of ‘The Hollow Men’ permits for the vicinity of both agnosticism and confident desire with respect to the empty personas in the sonnet. The activities of the empty men in parts I, III, and IV of Eliot’s sonnet (inclining, asking, and grabbing) substantiate this claim, for they come to fruition as the consequence of ideally wishing to

put off or maintain a strategic distance from totally the void or nothingness connected with the drawing closer haziness and passing (Gleckner, 1960), however at last the empty men shift their dispositions by surrendering with would like to the eyeless night of death and the aurora of a potential resurrect. Barzinji has elsewhere clarified the symbolism of Eliot’s poems as seen that in “The Waste Land”.

During the series of pictures to section I, the empty men strike a pose of inclining together (Eliot, p.4), maybe as an endeavor to shape a unified and exceptional similarity, though without genuine substance. They mean to persuade themselves as well as other people that they really have the ability to stop the advancing obscurity. The demeanor and activity of inclining ‘together, back to back and no holds barred, capacities as an impersonation of Janus, the Roman divine force of beginnings, whose two confronts ‘Macrobius thought [. . .] indicated his knowledge: he knew the past and saw the future’ (Harvey, p.227). The hollow men’s act, on the other hand, shapes a fake reproduction of bona fide astuteness incapacitated power, signal without movement (Eliot, p.12). Furthermore, the arid setting of the sonnet, intended to indicate the inevitable vicinity of the dead emptiness and the unimportant tumult which Eliot considers as the pith of an age ‘without religious faith’ (Fussell, 2020), just amplifies the inept exhibit of assumed power. Interestingly, their stance, that of two signs’ or pictures confronting from one another, as indicated by Cirlot, demonstrates graphically the cyclic phenomena, maybe meaning a looming ‘change in form or condition’ (1983). In this lies a sign without bounds change brought on and went before by the looming demise that the hollow omen are rapidly drawing nearer and wanting to evade. Sadly, the unsubstantiated scene of epistemological prevalence comprises totally of void appearance, hence compelling the empty men to depend on another strategy to keep the onset of night.

Therefore, to a limited extent III, the ‘stone images are raised,/and here they receive[...] supplication’ (Eliot, pp.41, 43).

Sara Thorne states that ‘The Hollow Men’ denotes a profound low point in which the speaker demonstrates a condition of gloom and void (p.281). The poem reflects the modern men, who regret their emptiness and their sense of life. They are not ‘lost savage souls’, but rather just empty men and loaded down with straw:

We are the hollow men,
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas! (LL, pp.1-4)

In death’s fantasy ‘kingdom’ the empty men need to stay empty and scarecrows-like; ‘rat’s coat, crow skin, crossed staves’ They dreaded the truth of death, and the after- life beyond as they had trepidation of the truth of this useless life in this world (Batra, 2001). Williamson

believes that the title of *The Hollow Men* is derived from a mixture of *The Hollow Land* by William Morris and *The Broken Men* by Kipling. Williamson also states that Geoffrey Tilloston, in his essays on Criticism and research approves that Eliot, himself has given the reader the expressions of his face. But it is easier to believe that it may have come from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, as Paul Fussell, Tr. reiterates the same:

When love begins to sicken and decay,
It useth an enforced ceremony.
There are no tricks in plain and simple faith;
But hollow men, like horses at hand,
Make gallant show and promise of their mettle;
But when they should endure the bloody spur,
They fall their crests, and, like deceitful jades, Sink in the trial
(IV. ii).

We have to either admit with what Williamson believes that the above lines can be considered as very close to Shakespeare's Play or we might say that they are the same. This can raise questions in the mind of its readers (Williamson, p.155).

The *Hollow Men* is both a portrayal and a revocation. Modern secular man performs his hare brained move, his head loaded with straw, on the grounds that he has rejected disclosure for science, in light of the fact that he has overlooked the other world keeping in mind the end goal to attempt to benefit as much as possible from this. In spite of the fact that what Eliot needed to say in 'The Hollow Men' had been said before in *The Waste Land*, the typical noteworthiness of the book is not extraordinarily decreased by that certainty. For, published that year as alternate indications of a completion what's more, a starting, it speaks to a different option for both: it acknowledges neither the old nor the new naturalism, however super-naturalism (Waggoner, 1943).

In T. S. Eliot's 'The Hollow Men,' the speaker seeks for meaning but finally neglects to strike a harmony between the physical world and the abstract. All through 'The Hollow Men', the speaker's mission is ruined by his inability to accommodate this presence with 'death's other Kingdom' (p.14), his concept of afterlife. The poem demonstrates the quest for importance as far as movement between contradicting circles of presence, yet the speaker's powerlessness to locate a satisfactory truth makes a picture of baffled latency. The dynamic pictures made by Eliot's speaker are stable, and their strain turns out to be all the more pronounced as the poem advances, underlining the speaker's developing discontent and mental awkwardness (Urquhart, 2001).

CONCLUSION

The *Hollow Men* depicts the poet's state of consciousness, in which his great desire for a condition of heavenly purity clashes with the contradictory yearning for a long-lasting kind of order by acts of denial and estrangement.

The prayer of the hollow men can be regarded as a hope. A hop for the hopeless people as they are asking forgiveness from God. The poem explores this border condition in its imageries of inevitability or boundary and in portrays two different states of being in terms of its structure thematically. In "The Hollow Men" the speaker foretells with trepidation that ultimate gathering; the people will mix together in their final place of meeting; the last part, in its general thought of the destiny of the previous ancestors, clarifies that "this is the way the world ends, *not with a bang, but a whimper*". ("The Hollow Men") The state of humanity is predestined, their end is as seen melancholic, however for this, and the ones to be blamed are humans if they do not try to awaken themselves from the deep sleep to prevent humans from suffering.

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