

Describe "The Hollow Men" existentially.

Notes: While distinguishing the function of poetry from that of prose, Eliot has remarked once: "In prose compositions a writer is free to deal with his ideals and fancies; but a poet has no other option but to deal with the reality of life. This observation of Eliot is pertinent to the proper comprehension of his poetry. It explains away the apparent dichotomy between Eliot's interest in religion and his concern with the representation of reality. Religion serves the background against which the drama of human emotions and passions is enacted. The devotional nature of Eliot's poetry has, therefore, altogether a different quality and import. He does not belong to the religious metaphysical tradition of Milton, Vaughan, Herbert and Crossman. Religion, in the hands of Eliot, is only a ~~means~~ means to an end - the end being the authentic representation of the reality of human behaviour and human aspirations. His poetry demonstrates the facts of religion can and do enlighten the facts of life.

"The Hollow Men", the poem under discussion is a sardonic elegy on the unreal being in the previous poems. "Ash Wednesday" marks a decisive turning to religious faith. Nevertheless, the "Four Quartets" can still be described as a return to early themes and symbols; a return to the garden glimpsed in "The Waste Land" and to "the heart of light, the centre". The central problem, both personal and universal, is still the unreality of time, the unreality of human life so governed by time that

the present dissolves into past and desire.

for the future, each of the Quakers follows  
a pattern foreshadowed in the earlier work.

The opening lines of the poem bring  
the title and the epigraph into a close relation-  
ship. There there is a realization of total  
futility. The hollow men are like white masks  
men, whose hearts had been white washed  
the time into hell. They were hated loyal  
and his enemies both. Here there is a shape  
without form, a shade without colour and  
a gesture without motion. They are not fully  
alive. This can be observed in the following  
lines:

Shape without form, shade without colour,  
Paralysed force, gesture without motion."

In the second section of the poem, we  
find that there is a sense of refusal and  
yearning. The joy is a remote and distant  
idea, but pain becomes unbearable when  
it joins the hands of joy. Thus the vision  
of happiness, has become "that final  
weeping in the twilight kingdom" which when  
reality approaches it

In the third and fourth  
sections of the poem we find desolation here  
and there. The dead in like strokes out their  
hands, do only to the blind and dumb images  
they themselves have raised. We can cheat  
ourselves in death's other kingdom because  
there is no object for our tenderness but our  
own broken idols. The blind move without  
speech in the final darkness. The hope of the  
hope can be seen only.

Thus the poem ends on  
an ambiguous note. Here there is a shadow  
falling between idea and reality. The last

low lies answer, the funeral of life. They end the world with the cry not with a bang but with a whimper. The world is the world without any grandeur and splendour of pain. In this way the poem ends with a prayer that is impossible.

"This is the world that ends not with bang but with a whimper."

In this way we see that the life of the modern people is death in life. That is, the people of the world are only physically alive but spiritually dead. The death of spirit has rendered them unfit to live a meaningful and purposeful life. They are unable to face the fact of life as well as the reality of death. They put on various disguises to ward off "that final meeting in the twilight kingdom." Though a brief poem, it emphasizes the dilemma of choice which the denizens of the materialistic world have to face. The expression and rhythm of the poem has sharpness of irony and clarity of meaning. The figurative expressions like "The eyes are sunlight on a broken column and voices are the wind's singing more distant and more solemn than of 'fading stars'" emphasizes the unreality of contemporary human existence.