

Describe "The Hollow Men" ~~The Hollow Men~~ critically.

Part 1 - While distinguishing the function of poetry from that of prose, T.S. Eliot had 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 any religious-metaphysical tradition of Milton, Vaughan, Herbert and Crosshairs. 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 balance". 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

Ans - The present poem "Among School Children" is a remarkable poem of W.B. Yeats, a realist-symbolist-metaphysical poet with a positively uncanny power over words. He began as a late Romantic and pre-Raphaelite with the addition of a stage of contact with Irish mythological, traditional and folk culture. What is remarkable about his whole career is his sustained power of development. It would not remain a part of the Celtic Twilight. The present poem belongs to the volume entitled "The Tower" which was written at the time when the poet was a member of the Senate and a successful figure. At the age 60 of Yeats, he enjoyed a Senate-inspired visit to Waterford Convent School. He was conducted through all the classes of the school by a kind old man, now. The children are at ~~work~~ work and wondered at the sixty-year old smiling public man. But he is reminded of Maud Gonne's childhood and her school days.

The poem cannot be called 'a curse upon old age' as Yeats himself has said once. It does not justify old age but ~~gives~~ gives a response and a contrasting picture of youth and age, ^{the} ideal and ^{the} actual, man's nobility and absurdity. So the poem presents a fact that everything demands its opposite. Youth is ^{not} known but lived only. Maud Gonne has classic Hera-like features. Her past is connected with the present and the personal is the impersonal in the imagination of the poet. The poet is reminded how Maud Gonne had told him once about the ~~scolding~~ scolding of the teacher to her and the starting of tragic songs throughout the day. He could listen to her narration & all their souls become one, like the yolk and white of an egg. He says:

"I dream of a Heraean body, bent
Above a linking fire a tale that she
Told of harsh reports, or trivial event"

The colour of the cheeks and hair of one of the girls reminds him of the complexion of his beloved, his imagination runs wild, and she sees her as if she were actually standing before him. He is also reminded ^{of} Maud's look in her old age. She had hollow cheeks, was old and

decrepit, and looked as if she drank only wine
only shadows for her food, yet she was a fit subject for
a great work of art.

It is no use weeping for lost youth and
beauty: old age and death are dark realities that must be
accepted by us. Decay and decline is the nature of law. The
poet is of the opinion that if mothers knew the decay and
old age of their son, they would bear no children at all. But
the 'Honey' of generation is the drug that destroys in the new-
ly born the soul the recollection of its pre-natal freedom. ~~For~~
The newly-born soul accepts its new and forgets its earlier
freedom. The same case is with mothers because life has to
continue.

The poet has mocked at the greatest philosophers
of his world in a light tone. Plato, the great Greek philosopher,
regarded the world as unreal, Aristotle, the tutor of
Alexander the Great, was more practical and realistic, Pytho-
goras, another great philosopher, was a great musician
listening to the sound of the planets with all these they
became old and could not beat time. Their art was
not useful for their continuation of life. Yet all worship
images. Thus worship images. Mothers love their children
and the lovers love their beloveds. These ideals mock at all
human efforts to attain them. They are the mockeries of
the heart as philosophies are the mockeries of the mind.
Yet youth and beauty ~~can~~ die.

The last stanza of the poem is the forceful statement
of the oft-repeated Pythagorean doctrine that life is a unity,
an organic whole made up of opposites. Just as the chestnut
tree is neither leaf, blossom or bole, but the excessive unity of all
three, so also man is neither mind nor body nor soul, but an
organic unity of the three. ~~Life~~ Life and labour will
be successful only when the body is not ~~not~~ separated from
the soul as the dancer can never be separated from the
dance. Thus the poem ends on a note of mystical acceptance
of the world as it is:

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not divorced to pleasure-soul,
A chestnut tree, great rooted blossom,
Are you a leaf, the blossom or the bole?
How can we know the dancer from the dance?