



Art Versus Racism: T. S. Eliot's *the Hollow Men* and Black Identity

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Abstract: The Anglo-American poet T. S. Eliot refers to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, among other literary and historical sources in his well-known poem entitled *The Hollow Men*. The link of this poem to his earlier works in the neo-Metaphysical tradition has already been established by various scholars and critics of twentieth century English literature. What eludes the awareness of Eliot's readers is the specific relevance of his verse style to White supremacists' apprehension of issues which concern poetry, culture and society in the West. One central theme of *The Hollow Men* is duncehood insofar as this human condition reveals itself in supposedly meaningless or barren engagements like rustic dance, singing, verbal (folk) expression and festivity outside a typically European landscape. In previous studies, literary commentators have failed to read Eliot's poem correctly by relating it to the behavior of African-Americans of Harlem Renaissance, or of Blacks in exile generally. This study is an analysis and interpretation of Eliot's writing that suggests his racial bigotry and intolerance, but everything can be seen in terms of the Western conservative outlook on politics, culture, and man's destiny in the modern world.

Keywords: Duncehood, Alienation, Black Identity, Culture, Anglo-Catholicism

1. Introduction

It is one of the great ironies of literary scholarship that T. S. Eliot has employed modernism in *The Hollow Men* to dazzle every generation of English readers, who totally fail to appreciate the depth of his language and meaning. Compared with his earlier masterpiece, *The Waste Land*, this poem is a highly successful "drama of modern life" centered on more or less the same "furnished flat sort of people" who always recur throughout his writing (Bush 1985, 81). But, to the researcher's best knowledge, nobody has yet explained whose portraits are exactly suggested by the characters on this occasion, or why no appropriate names are given to them as modern life's special representatives good enough to justify any separate treatment for us. The truth is that the blacks in North America who came up for scrutiny really have no serious appeal to T. S. Eliot and his prospective readers as Anglo-Catholics, Tories, and Classicists with whom he shares a lasting political and socio-cultural sympathy. Intellectually, of course, the poet is alienated from his contemporaries to such an extent that he can tease them at

all levels and get away with his ingenious method. As in John Dryden's and Pope's poetry, the use of form and style in *The Hollow Men* triumphs over moral nonsense or "dullness: which is the work's authentic but disguised theme (Bush 81-101).

The climax of Eliot's neo-Metaphysical verse about Western Civilization is reached in his very outstanding modernist poetic achievement, *The Waste Land*. After its publication in 1922, Eliot seems to have lost interest momentarily in further satiric wit and social commentary that everybody notices in his shorter poems, including the ones written before the First World War. Eliot habitually mocks his fellow city dwellers regarded as an uprooted and barren generation in dire need of spiritual rebirth and cultural beauty. Perhaps it is not strange, therefore, that he can spare a moment to focus on Africans in the Diaspora and represent their lifestyle, environment, and identity with his characteristic sense of humor. Eliot, as we are told, avoids unnecessary repetition in terms of his subject-matter and literary techniques. Hence we are much obliged to look out for new surprises, considering his apparently big claim to artistic innovation and diversity. But at this stage one should

have some concrete insight into the background of *The Hollow Men* if, as I stated above, it concerns "Negro-Americans" in particular and black humanity today generally.

After his remarkable book, *Joyce Cary and the Novel of Africa*, Professor Michael Echeruo (1978) published about three and half decades ago another interesting critical study of what he regarded as "exo-cultural theme" in English creative writings which have a varied level of significance. According to him, European authors through the ages demonstrate a consistently biased view of the black identity. Africans as portrayed in works of drama and prose fiction come out to be either villains or mean heroes. This is evident, for instance, in the contexts of stage entertainment by William Shakespeare and documentary narrative by Daniel Defoe in early seventeenth-century England. Since the late nineteenth century, the rapid expansion of trade and colonial rule in tropical Africa has intensified the creative writers' ambition to focus on not just isolated black figures but also on the entire African race. One sees a link here with the European sense of power, imperialistic adventure, and hostility towards Africans and the Red Indians beyond the Age of Discovery which may have inevitably brought about some polarized racial attitudes in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, *Othello*, and *The Tempest*. All these Elizabethan English plays for a Eurocentric audience depict an image of Africans as ignoble slaves, paupers, and victims in exile far away from their original homeland. Thus literary creativity for the sake of entertainment seems to be relegated for political and racist causes by Shakespeare, Defoe, and others. The Polish-born writer, Joseph Conrad, in early twentieth century continued to do more or less the same thing. His stories *Heart of Darkness* and *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* are notorious for the tendency to treat black people with blatant contempt. Taking up this method deeper than necessary into the last century are Joyce Cary in *Mister Johnson*, Evelyn Waugh in *Black Mischief*, and Graham Greene in *A Burnt-Out Case*. There have been, as a reader may expect, numerous reactions from different quarters in each generation to this brand of imaginative literature (Killam 1968, Echeruo 1978, Achebe 1988).

Not surprisingly, of course, the poets are well represented in the assembly of authors who have chosen to write negatively about Africans and their social milieu. The best known poet from England in the heyday of imperialism was Rudyard Kipling, in "The White Man's Burden." Before Kipling, some references had been made to black people in Alexander Pope's and John Dyer's texts. An element of satiric irony exists everywhere, despite the romantic and separate image of naturalness given to Ethiopians or "Africa's sable sons." Pope could detect folly or madness in anyone who tried after 1700s to go on an overseas voyage to seek wasps, bees, apes and Negroes as their neighbors in the savage lands outside Great Britain. The valuable "pearls" worn by Ethiopian women and youths did fascinate John Dyer, in his descriptive nature poem *Grongar Hill*. Moreover, just like Dr. Samuel Johnson in his prose narrative *Rasselas* at the end of

eighteenth century, William Blake in "The Little Black Boy" intended to romanticize an individual with fanciful ideas or beliefs concerning riches, power and beauty. After all, whether in youth or old age, an African is someone who seems to dream of changing the human condition in an unrealistic manner. The little slave child in Blake's verse is only half-alive in being ruled by hopes and fears of a curious nature (Ogude 1976, 85-96). And Dr. Johnson might have associated *Rasselas* the Prince of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) with Othello, the Moor of Venice, who as an army general kills his very beautiful wife called Desdemona. Achieving self-awareness too late, this unfortunate Blackman sees the European woman as an indispensable jewel ("Pearl") which he once possessed but now decides to throw away in his fit of uncontrollable anger (Echeruo 137-159).

W. H. Auden is the leader of British authors of poetry since 1930s. Although he too wrote a lyric that is not directly centered on the Blackman, one of his stanzas alludes to Africa at a remote polar distance from China. Auden's nameless modern lover in "As I Walked Out One Evening" appears young and quite thoughtless, a person behaving as Africans are said to do in European literary works of propaganda interest. In racist terms, he says, it is impossible today for human beings on the Asian and African continents to meet together and attain peaceful co-existence. Implicit in this argument is the fact that blacks are immature lovers who can always hope for an unusual event like the chance to remain virtuous in spite of time, change, and evil in the world. The black mind with a shift towards unreason or depravity is generally backward, hence Rudyard Kipling before Auden could urge the British and other Europeans to supervise a Negro race of cannibals in their colonial empires. Kipling was greatly admired by T. S. Eliot, the Anglo-American man of letters, who wrote "*file Hollow Men*" for his public in Europe and America (Eliot 1974).

2. Cosmopolitanism and Racial Identity

We have a long tradition of regarding Africans at home and abroad as simpleminded and liable characters. They are either compared with children, imbeciles, or rogues. The issue at stake here is not what the Whiteman thinks of his racial antagonists but how well it is put across to each age and class in his society. This problem is less difficult to solve in poetry than in drama and fiction. For example, let us take the anger perennially generated by Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. From the latter narrative, we find that a "nigger" who faces danger on a ship at sea shown to the pursuing an unrewarding career. Conrad doubts the sincerity of "Jim" as a black sailor. Indeed, one scholar remarks:

Without James Wait, the disciplined ships community
Can once again act purposefully, "wringing out
Meaning" together (Newhouse 1966, 43).

The blacks in *Heart of Darkness* do not act as seamen,

instead they are migrant workers recruited for a European trading company in the Belgian Congo. They are poor villagers suffering from malaria, starvation, terror or insecurity, and daydreaming. Their fatal state of ill-health, poverty, and ignorance is contrasted with the expatriate's callous treatment of everything they stand for in life: innocence, ambition, and material wealth inside their hot tropical climate. But the whites themselves are known to underrate imminent tragedy of all human actors deep in the "heart of darkness," in view of their lust for violence and racial supremacy.

A sensible appreciation of T. S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men* must involve a prior knowledge and close scrutiny of both "The Little Black Boy" by William Blake and *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. European man's imagination delights in creating fictitious African characters with a retarded and malignant growth as much in physical appearance as in spiritual, mental and intellectual capability. They can manifest undisguised wantonness, barbarism, and low ethical consciousness as aspects of human pathological disorder in a primitive jungle state of existence. But even in an urban setting today, the African is still portrayed as a simpleton or neurotic. His fanciful, child-like, and almost inexplicable manners may be illustrated by "Incident," a short poem that one of Eliot's and Auden's black contemporaries published before his death in 1946:

Once riding in old Baltimore,
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee, I saw a Baltimorean
Keep looking straight at me.
Now I was eight and very small,
And he was no whit bigger,
And so I smiled, but he poked out
His tongue and called me "Nigger."
I saw the whole of Baltimore
From May until December:
Of all the things that happened there
That's all that I remember (Adoff 1973, 91-92).

This private experience resembles that of the slave boy we noted earlier. Yet it is the story of the blacks as a whole, and it seems to wear a new outlook. Pleasure-seeking but easily undermined and depressed, they are by implication unfit to learn from experience or to assume a position of honor and leadership in society. This is obviously true of Othello, the army general who destroys his own life and the achievements of his spectacular career among Europeans. Also, the above poem suggests that a black child in America is doomed because of his extra-sensitivity to violence and failure. He cannot possibly run away from Baltimore to another city where and would encounter racial intolerance again in adulthood.

T. S. Eliot does not think highly of Othello as a black expatriate who arrogates to himself the "civilized" cultural idea and value of Europeans. In one of his critical discussions, Eliot wrote (1951, 130).

I have always felt that I have never read a more terrible exposure of human weakness - of universal human weakness - than the last great speech of Othello.

After quoting Othello's valedictory utterance, Eliot went further to say:

What Othello seems to me to be doing in making this speech is *cheering himself up*. He is endeavoring to escape reality, he has ceased to think about Desdemona, and is thinking about himself... Othello succeeds in turning himself into a pathetic figure, by adopting an *aesthetic* rather than a moral attitude, dramatizing himself against his environment. He takes in the spectator, but the human motive is primarily to take in himself. I do not believe that any writer has ever exposed this *bovarysme*, the human will to see things as they are not, more clearly than Shakespeare (1951, 130).

Perhaps with this in mind, A. L. Rowse in *Shakespeare's Globe* considered Othello an ass or a beast of burden like the cow that is notorious for its stupidity. Indeed Othello manifests "bovarysme" (narcissism or self-love) as a human weakness the white people - particularly Iago and Desdemona's father who calls him a black ram - refuse to tolerate. The main reason is because it always underlies his relationships, activities, and value judgments.

More than other Shakespearian characters such as Caliban (anagram of cannibal) and Aaron, the alienated Moor of Venice touched Eliot's imagination and intellect before his graduation from Harvard University. At the same time Eliot was also reading Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* on the pathetic state of blacks in rural Africa and elsewhere (Ackroyd 1984, 30-37). They are unique human beings neither feeling comfortable in their impoverished homeland nor in the wealthy European cities and Trans-Atlantic dreamland of freedom, where backward elements can go to find support in times of despair. The realities of slavery and slave trade coupled with the American Civil War and Wars of Independence, which originated from Southern States keeping large plantations and a majority of African slaves, were definitely enough to make the young Eliot flee to England as the birthplace of his great ancestors like Marlowe and Shakespeare.

As is well known among scholars, Eliot most probably had no other place on earth to choose for a new home. He regretted the Jewish and Black exodus to the American continent, and he questioned multiculturalism especially as it affected the outlook of New World politics and society. He naturalized in England, married an English girl, and declared his own precise and definitive values as those of traditional English citizens. In short, Eliot was a Classicist in Literature, an Anglo-Catholic in Religion, and a Tory in Politics. It is necessary furthermore to say that Negroes or Afro-Americans of the same period could not admit his position on things which put him securely in a class of their age-old oppressors from Europe and America, whose arguments were in defense of racial conflict and Western Civilization (Ackroyd 137-138).

3. African Diasporic Cultural Renaissance

Another very useful information about the genesis of Eliot's poem can be cited here. Many scholars of American literature and history have recorded that the exponents of Harlem Renaissance and Black Power Movement, who organized a revolt against Whiteman's tyranny in America, had done so on multiple grounds; socio-economic, political, racial and intellectual. But at first this activism on the part of freedom-loving Negro-American (now African-Americans) erupted mostly in cultural and political spheres. Blacks in exile, as the activists erupted, must try to return to Africa their homeland and thereby reject the Western system of modernization and self-development. Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. DuBois, and others led a vigorous campaign to enlighten black ex-slaves and afterwards ensure that they would have a means to complete favorably with non-African immigrants. Of the Jamaican crusader, one scholar observed:

It is no accident that Marcus Garvey had his greatest success in the United States among Black Americans in the community called Harlem. He came to the United States and began to build his movement at a time of great disenchantment among Afro-Americans who had pursued the "American Dream" until they had to concede that the dream was not dreamed for them. They had listened to the "American Promise" and also conceded that the promise was not made for them. Marcus Garvey gave them the vision of a new dream, a new promise, and a new land. He restored hope where hope had been lost. This is the real relevance of Marcus Garvey for today (Clark 1974, 14-15).

Also significant to our study is the revelation that:

The personality and the movement founded by Marcus Garvey, together with the writers and artists of the Renaissance period, helped to put the community of Harlem on the map. While the literary aspect of the renaissance was unfolding, Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association, using Harlem as his base of operation, built the largest mass movement among black people that this country had ever seen. This movement had international importance and was considered to be a threat to the colonial powers of Europe which were entrenched in Africa (Clarke 15).

Other self-conscious and outspoken figures, like W. E. B. DuBois and Langston Hughes, may have shocked Eliot with their seemingly impudent writings on the Blackman's identity theme. For instance, a droll verse by DuBois is entitled "The Song of the Smoke." This outburst of satiric humor is, of course, depressing when it originates from a great alumnus of Harvard University. DuBois's song with its refrain ("I am the smoke king/I am black") is something quite absurd which the modern poetry lovers cannot comprehend in isolation from the context of black agitation and revolt against racism:

I am the smoke king,
I am black.
I am swinging in the sky.

I am ringing worlds on high:
I am the thought of the throbbing mills,
I am the soul of the soul toil kills,
I am the ripple of trading rills.
Up I'm curling from the sod,
I am whirling home to God.
I am the smoke king,
I am black.

.....
I am the smoke king,
I am black.
I am darkening with song,
I am hearkening to wrong;
I will be black as blackness can,
The blacker the mantle the mightier the man,
My purpl'ing midnights no day dawn may ban
I am carving God in night,
I am painting hell in white.
I am the smoke king,
I am black (Adoff, 1).

T. S. Eliot was no doubt upset by the First World War and the Great Depression that followed in Europe and America, but as usual he appeared not too specific in his condemnation of those people held responsible for what he saw as another phase of a recurrent crisis and confusion in Western society. His greatest poem, *The Waste Land*, depicts the Whiteman's civilization as already decadent and unlikely to be improved, on account of the city inhabitants' drift towards violence and barbarism. Immediately Eliot published *The Waste Land* in 1922, he embarked on writing *The Hollow Men*. Nowhere in the latter poem does he refer to black literary and political champions after 1900, such as W. E. B. DuBois and Langston Hughes and Marcus Garvey. However, Eliot has brought the so-called "slave singers" among Black Americans into his comic poem, whose earliest version is entitled "Doris's Dream Songs." The nickname "Doris" could be applied to any black activist and spokesman for numerous frustrated Negroes (Bush 86-95).

Moreover the publication of *The Hollow Men* had coincided with the death of Joseph Conrad and Sir H. Rider Haggard, in 1924 and 1925 respectively. Apart from Conrad, we may recall that the South African novelist wrote several books on Africans vis-a-vis the on-going effort of empire-builders to spread Western religion, education, and culture as three aspects of this civilized age apparently unknown to human existence in "dark" Africa. Indeed it is true that *Alan Quartermain*, *King Solomon's Mines*, and *She* were read in African countries alongside Conrad's allegorical tales of sea adventure. The undertone of racism in Conrad's and Rider Haggard's works must have eluded the first educated members of black elites but certainly not the fiction writers' target audience in Europe and America.

A strange concourse of events therefore completed T. S. Eliot to write *The Hollow Men*, in obvious commemoration of poetic distinction symbolized by the Polish and South African novelists and also in view of his urge to mock in this verse narrative any proud leader of American Negroes

searching for equality, solidarity and freedom, though opposed in theory to the use of white racism to defeat black underdogs' emotional display. Eliot would still like to remain on the side of Westerners in North American states where puritan adventures and peace-makers had settled since the earliest times. At Harlem of 1920s, in his opinion, the black ex-slaves, were trying to reverse the process of cultural development. They were not merely asking for self-expression via a revolution in artistic and intellectual achievements, but here was an opportunity for W. E. B. DuBois and his gang to press for the same benefit as a White supremacist has got before lording it over them.

In his poem *The Hollow Men*, Eliot is ready to show that imperialism and colonialism may not affect everybody equality in the New World. After all, here is a "kingdom: without an authentic leader of the masses singing, jesting, grumbling, or simply shouting at random for a salvation that comes not from man-made peaceful arrangements. The "we" of Eliot's writing hardly recurs so often on another occasion in his poetry, which points clearly to the fact that he is suggesting a mass rally or demonstration of black people who are outsiders, and by inference the victims of neglect as well as material poverty. Such a new movement or crowd of protesters will have to be dreaded throughout America and any other civilized kingdom for one major reason. The Tory politicians and especially T. S. Eliot the Anglo-American literary champion are always speaking with conviction and authority on evils of sudden popular revolt, like the earlier one in France or America's southern states.

Karl Marx once predicted for Europe something close to anarchy long after the troubles of Industrial Revolution in 18th and 19th centuries. And of course, the whole civilized world after 1920 had been shaken up by Garvey defending the blacks in Harlem, New York City, and other parts of United States of America. His influence reached far beyond European nation to the African, South American, and Caribbean colonies at large:

Marcus Garvey's reaction to color prejudice and his search for away to rise above it and lead his people back to Africa, spiritually if not physically, was the all-consuming passion of his existence. His glorious and romantic movement exhorted the Black people of the world and fixed their eyes on the bright star of a future in which they could reclaim and rebuild their African homeland and heritage. Garvey succeeded in building a mass movement among American Blacks while other leaders were attempting it and doubting that it could be done. He advocated the return of Africa to the Africans and people of African descent (Clarke 17).

T. S. Eliot was suspicious of the Harlem Renaissance, particularly "the historic First UNIA International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World in 1920" which had as its slogan: "Africa for the Africans, those at home and those abroad." (Clarke 17). He predicted the failure of black leaders such as DuBois and Garvey who appeared irreconcilable in their solutions to common problems. One year after *The Hollow Men* was published. Garvey went to prison before his deportation home to

Jamaica from the United States in 1927

The actual motivation for writing *The Hollow Men*, therefore, is traceable to black activism as manifested by either the Harlem Renaissance or Negroes' Revolt down south on American farmers' plantations that initially created a northward migration of ex-slaves then arousing great fear in New York City and elsewhere. In his scathing attack on black political and intellectual leadership Eliot dismisses the Harlem Renaissance dominant view of Africans as a race from another land of human nobility and civilization. A slum culture in Harlem is known to have inspired an imaginative vision of Africa itself which sentimentalizes for today or perhaps tomorrow the past values as well as claim to greatness of African kings and artists. But the more convenient position for Eliot and his generation is, of course, to assume that Europeans and Americans have endowed the black man and woman with a tradition of song or poetry, rhetoric, and material resourcefulness. Short of this, every Harlem Renaissance dream is stillborn and irrelevant: "We are the hollow men We are the stuffed men/Leaning together/Headpiece filled with straw..." In other words, all Africans and people of African descent have left their remote and unworthy past of savagery behind as they are living today in exile under the shadow ("dry cellar") of whatever structures European and American gentlemen may claim to build in line with a classical Greek and Roman heritage. Eliot's magisterial pronouncements in his 1920 essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," underlie the censure of W. E. B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson, and other Harlem Renaissance artists as daydreamers in the twenties. He offers a parody of their works that he must have read either in America or Europe after the First World War (Ackroyd).

The Negro American Dream which nauseates T. S. Eliot has been explained in more recent times:

On the whole there is a marked self-consciousness in that vision. In lesser hands it becomes a ludicrous self-indulgence. But at best that self-conscious preoccupation with the African heritage, and with the black past in general, stems from the period's conviction about its pioneering role. On the one hand there is a felt need to explore their heritage, and on the other hand, there is the fear, or assumption, that such a heritage is elusive at best. The point is not that the Renaissance writers were ignorant of a black past: the anthologies of the period offer ample proof to the contrary. But the literary exploration of the past is self-consciously tentative because of a prevailing sense. Detectable in the tone of the works, that this kind of thing is really a new undertaking - a new problem for the black artistic imagination and for a collective black psyche. In short, their relationship with their African themes is rooted in a sense of distance which is heightened by the fact that Africa was, quite simply, far less accessible, in every sense, to black America of the twenties than it is in the seventies. They therefore undertake their African themes as self-appointed pioneers in a period in which first-hand knowledge of Africa

was rare; and precisely because of these reasons their pan-African themes are fraught with ambiguities which are significant in the role of cultural roots in the black experience (Brown 1978, 3).

Negro spirituals, jazz music, and ballad songs come up as new kinds of folk artistic performance that are parodied in Eliot's verse. The essentially African speech habits, and thought process are reflected here, and quite understandably all non-African characters in his other poetic compositions have a different linguistic and socio cultural identity. The Anglo-American or British genteel attitudes, idioms, and notion of individuality pervade his writing up to this stage and even extend far beyond into *Ash -Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*. Actually language is a valuable mirror of and claim to personal or group self-image; and Eliot's audience is aware of this, particularly the idea that blacks in America are still ignorant and thus maintaining an important and necessary connection with their brothers elsewhere but chiefly in the Congo. As he implies, a whole population of hungry and sick rural inhabitants may lack the resources plus will-power to go back to African jungles, but nonetheless they have a strong desire to fantasize or chant magical words around some pagan trees in the twilight or dawn. The "hollow men" are primitive outcasts from distant hamlets and villages in a forgotten "kingdom," who in time could gather themselves together for an insurrection or wield a dangerous influence on hapless white (Belgian or Anglo-American) supremacists as tools of destiny:

I

We are the hollow men
 We are the stuffed men
 Leaning together
 Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
 Our dried voices, when
 We whisper together
 Are quiet and meaningless
 As wind in dry grass
 Or rats' feet over broken glass
 In our dry cellar
 Shape without form, shade without color,
 Paralyzed force, gesture without motion;
 Those who have crossed
 With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
 Remember us-if at all-not as lost
 Violent souls, but only
 As the hollow men
 The stuffed men.

II

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
 In death's dream kingdom
 These do not appear
 There, the eyes are
 Sunlight on a broken column
 There, is a tree swinging
 And voices are
 In the wind's singing
 More distant and more solemn

Than a fading star.

We are generally sure in academic circles of how T. S. Eliot's artistry operates although very few commentators would admit having found an insight into the full range of allusions, symbols, and other literary devices used in this work. Everybody says that *The Hollow Men* is especially complex since it reads just like any neo-Metaphysical poem. Take for example the opening lines above in which "Headpiece filled with straw" appears as a close imitation - that is, an ironic echo-of Countee Cullen's simple phrase in "Incident." Eliot revisits the little black boy's "Heart-filled, head-filled with glee" and warns that in the young lad's mouth it is a fairly innocent, empty and humorous utterance. But then, in a chorus ascribed to strange-looking and perhaps uniformed adults, such a verbal outburst reveals Negro-American backwardness that shocks any civilized listener from Eliot's community in New York or Missouri. The simplicity and ostentation of W. E. B. DuBois in "The Song of the Smoke" can be detected also throughout Eliot's phraseology and rhyme scheme. Besides, in 1922 Claude McKay as one of the black literary giants published *Harlem Shadows*. This anthology of poems contained innovation exercises in the old sonnet tradition such as "Outcast," "Africa" and "America". Various ideas and reference from these works, including others by Langston Hughes, are scattered throughout Eliot's writing devoted to one main purpose which is to ridicule the "furnished flat sort to characters" as human figures drawn exclusively from modern life.

4. Of Harlem Shadows, Ghosts and Hollow Men

Conrad's niggers are, in their feeble and shadowy existential realities, alluded to in *The Hollow Men*. In a sense, black activities and intellectuals from the Harlem ghetto resemble them. They are human beings full of hunger, disease and fear which situate their condition not in ancient Africa or Europe but America as limbo itself. Having experienced acculturation or alienation, the black ex-slaves become neither African nor European in outlook. Their sad king or leader named Doris ("I" in this verse) is "Shape without form, shade without color". He lives in exile at a place of humiliation and self-indulgence. The slave singers are perhaps realistic to identify themselves with the ghosts of non-humans constituting a mystery and danger to normal people. In a more or less comparable language and technique, Eliot is willing to turn a characteristic African-American style of droll wit and mockery against the major Harlem pioneers.

III

This is the dead land
 This is cactus land
 Here the stone images
 Are raised, here they receive
 The supplication of a dead man's hand

Under the twinkle of a fading star.
 Is it like thin
 In death's other kingdom
 Waking alone
 At the hour when we are
 Trembling with tenderness
 Lips that would kiss
 Form prayers to broken stone
IV
 The eyes are not here
 There are no eyes here
 In this valley of dying stars
 In this hollow valley
 This broken jaw of our lost kingdom
 In this last of meeting places
 We grope together
 And avoid speech
 Gathered on this beach of the tumid river
 Sightless, unless
 The eyes reappear
 As the perpetual star
 Multifoliate rose
 Of death's twilight kingdom
 The hope only
 Of empty men.
V
 Here we go round the prickly pear
 Prickly pear prickly pear
 Here we go round the prickly pear
 At five o'clock in the morning
 Between the idea
 And the reality
 Between the motion
 And the act
 Falls the Shadow
 For Thine is the Kingdom
 Between the conception
 And the creation
 Between the emotion
 And the response
 Falls the Shadow
 Life is very long
 Between the desire
 And the spasm
 Between the potency
 And the existence
 Between the essence
 And the descent
 Falls the Shadow
 For Thine is the Kingdom
 For Thine is
 Life is
 For Thine is the
 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.

Properly focused on sub-Saharan Africa or the black man's homeland as much as America's southern regions from where Negroes migrated to New York and other cities, *The Hollow Men* contains fragments of comedy and satire in the authentic Graeco-Roman tradition. Eliot said in 1923 that he would like to copy Aristophanes in such a poetic utterance as this "song" in which he could embody political, religious, and psychological dilemmas and struggles to achieve a perfect state of peace and harmony. The blacks had employed witticism and sloganizing phraseology and dared to sing songs full of racism and social protest. They likewise danced in an attempt to forget or minimize their sorrows which America's harsh laws and surroundings chiefly brought to African slaves or their modern survivors. The mock songs of early Black Americans using an "un-Negro tongue" are well apprehended and mimicked by Eliot as a man of genius who leads the modernist writers including Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats.

The recurrent multiple allusions to shadow, rose, star and kingdom need some explanation here. The nigger in Conrad's tale is really shadowy figure of a laborer or seaman. "Harlem Shadows" as the title of McKay's anthology of verse can also be recalled by the satiric wit in this poem. About 1920, Marcus Garvey started an abortive project, the Black Star Line, for which in the end he was charged and sent to Atlanta Prison. His ambitious economic program created more problems for blacks in Eliot's day, just as a declaration by Garvey that African colonies must be taken away from European powers did considerable harm to the Negro cause of liberty. At one stage Garvey even proclaimed himself president or king throughout the African world and as Clarke (1974, 15) observed, Garvey was rather too radical and flamboyant:

He taught his people to dream big again; he reminded them that they had once been kings and rulers of great nations and would be again. The cry "Up you mighty race, you can accomplish what you will" was a call to the Black man to reclaim his best self and re-enter the mainstream of world history.

Garvey used his forceful personality to incite blacks to engage in mass movement from Southern to northern states of American federation, from America to Black Africa, and from a condition of relative calm to enormous upheavals that coincided with the First World War. It is therefore understandable if Eliot chose to make a scapegoat of Marcus Garvey. His favorite neo-classical poet, John Dryden, had once adopted the same thoroughness in defense of "bitter anger" (*saeva indignatio*), when Thomas Shadwell as his antagonist on the English stage of 1670s was exposed to laughter in *Mac-Flecknoe*.

5. Eliot and Cultural Imperialism

The fear of strangers and popular revolutions in history, including the fall of Bastille in France in 1787 and its American parallel shortly afterwards, is behind Eliot's desire to castigate Negro-American intellectuals and exiles. He calls

them "empty men" struggling for instant change or modification in their economic, socio-cultural, and political status as underprivileged minority group of people in a foreign land. On the turbulent landscape of an American "waste land" that is not like London, Eliot cannot associate with the Blackman's image and presence. For it is only the Europeans who retain a high sense of culture available in form of an upper-middle-class cocktail party, sitting room conversation, and October evening visit to enjoy Chopin's music or see the movie and opera in well-furnished theatres. It is remarkable that Eliot's poems *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *Preludes*, *Rhapsody on a Windy Night* and *Portrait of a Lady* give us a recognizable locale of human beings at the crossroads of 20th-century industrialized society. However, this artistic pattern may not be linked to a "song" of segregated blacks with the appearance of wild-looking rats; they are rustics inhabiting a "dead land" as the dark or shaded "valley" (or abyss) of physical weakness, mental depression, broken column and glass, famine and solitude. A Hollow Man is naturally resident far from the city centre where a lover named Prufrock has lately acquired prominence for his inertia. The question one may then ask is: Why does a Hollow Man with his brothers descend so fast below the constructed houses and mountain peaks so as to sing, dance, and behave in other ways unknown to modern Americans and Europeans'?

The answer to this interesting question is to be found in subtle references to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the Gunpowder Plot in English history, Shakespeare's *Othello*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and Pope's *The Duncaid*. This list is by no means exhaustive, as many scholars who are familiar with Eliot's poetry will realize. Eliot owes to Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats and James Joyce in 1920s the seemingly endless wealth of his mythology, symbolism and imagery regarded as an all-important component of the new literary movement. It has been noted too that like Alexander Pope and the later French models. Eliot is not ostentatious and irrelevant in choosing his words, phrases, and idioms in poetry. Indeed we may admire previous works of criticism and scholarship aimed at conveying the mystery of this poem's subjects matter and theme. In my opinion only the reference to Conrad shows vividly *The Hollow Men* deals with a critical situation of black exile after the First World War (1914-1918).

But as I shall demonstrate, an English festival and idiom built around Mr. Guy Fawkes ("A penny for the Old Guy") ought to warm modern readers that Eliot's bias for Classicism Tory politics, and Anglo-Catholic religious morality is exposed adequately here. The revolutionary tendency in France and America towards a cessation of governmental control of social classes, first observed in eighteenth-century history as Eliot says, can move to remote land of Africa and South America populated by Negro farmers and crusaders for independence. The gist of Eliot's response to the Black's argument is that there is no need for change to popular rule in their favor until one or more Anglo-Catholic and reasonable members of British

parliament are ready to support such a risk to every Tory Loyalist and his ideals. The wayward Negroes could never have heard of what another ambitious rebel. Guy Fawkes, originally planned in 1605 when he joined certain felons to store massive gunpowder beneath the English House of Lords. Then who is more willing to condone satire against civil unrest and human suffering than Eliot who survived just recently the global war and its attendant hardships? James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and W. B. Yeats may have strengthened Eliot's prejudice against socialism that caused fear in the minds of all who did not embrace his Anglo-American conception of life.

The bulk of wit, images, symbols, and allusion in *The Hollow Men* can be traced to Conrad's novel of 1899 and Pope's mock-heroic, published in 1742. As the Hollow Men tell us in a shocking and chorus-like fashion, "we" are a group of sexually weak and faithless people close to imbeciles rather than Milton's devils. Yet "we" are sinful like Satan who is England's spokesman for dynamic (puritan) invaders of the New World. If a Hollow Man resembles the fool or micro-devil, how wrong are his superiors ensuring that he does not stay upstairs in their furnished apartment? Of course he prefers the dungeon or bush where his true identity as a mischief-maker is hidden and temporarily ignored by the lords and ladies of honor he is serving. The "dry cellar" home of black skinned chanters gives a similar but not exact impression as the "waste-land" of characters like Marie and her uncle, Gerontion, and a middle-aged financier Alfred Prufrock. These human figures are drawn from a sophisticated and industrialized Western society that must not be placed side by side with a desert place for Hollow Men. An allusion to grass, cactus, broken jaw, stone and others is meant to reveal the different level of economic, social, and cultural experience in today's village and not cosmopolitan world.

Guy Fawkes, who failed in his strategy to blow up the parliament in London during the reign of James I, symbolizes a recurrent principle of chaotic existence. Likewise Conrad associates African villagers with disorder and brutality. *Heart of Darkness* and *The Hollow Men* emphasize that a Blackman's destructive power, though less than that of Othello and James Wait and Satan the Arch. Enemy, is a source of perennial anxiety since the journey to city culture began in eighteenth century Europe. With a suburban dunce or madman like Guy Fawkes hiding at the basement of a royal house, the occupants are facing great and imminent disaster. A very large population of uncivilized individuals may, finally, be equated with the Moscow or New York rats. These invaders too can emulate dunces, for they are savage and not too comfortable to have around where food is scarce and mortality is rampant. In short, the Guy Fawkes festival and its role in social history manifest the opposition of Western culture or civilization to decay, violence and indiscipline. Conrad suggests that the Black worshippers of Mr. Kurtz along the banks of River Congo ("tumid river") in an African primordial jungle, lay no claim to innocence as well as mental and physical health

or verbal finesse in sobbing out his decease: "Mesta Kurtz - he dead." Weary and frustrated while most of his compatriots live in mysterious circumstances, one of the Congolese railway workers and a servant of Kurtz is mourning the late European boss. Conrad sees then no bright future and no way forward in the Black people's cannibalistic society. Linguistic inelegance here combines with moral and intellectual as well as economic disorder to rob niggers of their pre-colonial identity at dawn.

Eliot in our belief is writing a "song" or musical composition in the Hollow Men's school: the language makes us think of a drummer who is about to fall asleep while rehearsing at nightfall. The utterance is accompanied with physical gestures and other mannerisms evidently peculiar to the African race. The crude behavior of Pope's literary fools is recalled furthermore in a Hollow Man's ironic self-eulogy. We feel that Shakespeare, Dante, Handel, Beethoven or Chopin stay forever in the upper chamber of light and fun whereas the slave singers in a well-shaded cellar or valley as their graveyard may be contented not to emulate the classic example of Western genius. They can succeed in dubious achievements because of their geographical setting and cultural inferiority. To cross over from one poetic kingdom and social class structure to another often involves untold acts of violence and self-torture. A Hollow Man is ambitious to do so, but he quickly sinks in his contest back into an abysmal realm of failure and despair, two negative forces behind a strange way of singing or falling asleep or merely herding together for love and mutual protection. Crows are a species of North American birds, they may also be found elsewhere in large numbers. Aside of possessing black feathers, they generally go in a straight line or form a crowd on the plain or valley where they are seen to make unrhythmical noises in daytime. The crow feeds on vegetables, and it is a bird of prey and ill-omen as well. Just like the raven, it is never used as symbol of poetic beauty and youthful mental enterprise. Since Eliot's Hollow Men are unhappy in the dead land beneath a fading star temporarily depicted in DuBois's and Garvey's writings, they can be represented by the crow and other creatures notorious for their wildness, poverty, love of idle assembly, and monotony in color or shape. The Images, symbols, and ideas lifted by Eliot from Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Blake and Conrad further reveal that a display of inferiority and recourse to atavistic criminal motives is associated with life in an unchanging environment.

The various "movements" replacing a narrative in the five sections of *The Hollow Men* focus on spiritual sterility, animal lust for violence, frustration, and linguistic nonsense as the characteristics of non-European waste-landers. Of course, it is pathetic that Dunces or Hollow Men do clearly see these existential problems as universal, though more ridiculous in their own context than elsewhere. The thought, speech pattern, physical appearance, and manners of a rustic people in all ages come under strict criticism here. One of the issues discussed, in particular the one of hair and

skin color, tends to generate emotional antipathy and intellectual hatred. Therefore Eliot selects his poetic ideas, images, and symbols in a cunning way. The cactus in a grassland or desert is preferred to Congo's equatorial forests, since he identifies a common savage trait in Hamitic and Semitic races as well as geographical locations where ignorance, boredom and poverty underlie the migratory habit and low morale his image suggests. The rat image at any rate emphasizes a non-existent mental strength, bad human character, blindness ("The eyes are not here/There are no eyes here"), and unreason (i.e. lack of vision) that guarantees ill-success in any literary-creative adventure. Cannibalism, mortality, bacchanalian urge, and fatigue or drowsiness ("This is how the world ends") single out the Hollow Men as mere triflers or pretentious imitators of old customs. Paralysis is a Hollow Man's handicap in conversation and any other human (erotic) activity. The protagonist of Shakespeare's *Othello* suffers likewise from what Eliot called "paralyzed force" emerging in his black nature as the source of Desdemona's (Europe's) tragedy and that of Othello African race). Moreover, as was noted before, James Wait in Conrad's story disturbs crew members of the Narcissus ship on high seas. At last he is disposed of so that order and security may return to the ship (a microcosm of human world) on its journey towards something akin to Adolf Hitler's Promised Land.

In his terse and almost obscure poetic method in *The Hollow Men*, Eliot concentrates on an essential idea and impression that Conrad among other writers gave him. Eliot's wit is not like that of Milton or even Pope in his elaborate 1742 mock-epic satire. The public in 1920s required, however, some commentary on the modern man's tragedy especially that of Negro rebels and outcasts omitted in his monumental achievement *The Waste Land*. It is true that *The Hollow Men* really possesses no vision of a political, socio-cultural, or artistic greatness to be celebrated in a poem conceived and arranged as symphony on erotica by a genius. Eliot and his friends needed this sort of amusement during the years of the Great Depression. Let us remember also that at the time of Western imperialism and colonialism in Africa, when Eliot was writing his verse, an argument developed among intellectuals and elite groups as to whether or not black people could be trusted to govern themselves without any supposedly energetic political and cultural framework of their own fabrication. Africans south of the Sahara were nicknamed and their land became a neutral jungle or "dark continent." Africa was then seen as requiring material and other beneficial kinds of assistance to make the inhabitants come out of their isolation and meagre forest lifestyles. But again most Africans at home and abroad, who had received Western education, regarded the debate as unnecessary if not totally biased and doomed from the start. A viable African prototype of Culture in Oyo, Abeokuta, or Benin existed (and still flourishes) despite the vandalism of European imperialists and adventurers. Eliot may be considered, therefore, in the light of this historically inspired but sometimes exaggerated discussion on the merit of Western

cultural heritage.

Odia Ofeimun (2000) once said, in a lecture delivered at the University of Lagos, that Conrad was unjust in his viewpoint regarding the African ways of life and pre-occupation with ancestral glory. He (Conrad) did not know or try to find out as much as possible about Congolese villagers he satirized as lost souls and cannibals in *Heart of Darkness*. The same thing may be said of the Anglo-American poet, T. S. Eliot, who read and enjoyed social anthropology in Fraser's *The Golden Bough*. But seeing the Blacks, in his youth at Harvard and Oxford later on, further exposed his impressions to an unintended height of smugness and indulgence in hyperbole. Tory sentiments and fears also under-pin his idea of treasonable felony attached to the plot of Marcus Garvey or Guy Fawkes.

In Britain, America, and elsewhere the Blacks are not all sightless beggars singing in public and taking alms from Moslem and other passers-by who willingly or grudgingly carry out their religious and humanitarian duty. Chiefly because of this, as M. J. C. Echeruo and Chinua Achebe have argued, the Whiteman's story of Africa poses a serious challenge to African intellectuals and scholars as critics of drama and prose fiction. Western racism has already influenced some creative writings published since the age of William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Daniel Defoe. We are conscious that an age-old sentimentality has not yet been removed from the works of modern authors like Conrad, Cary and Greene. Eliot himself shares a prejudice of conservative politicians in Westminster and their academic sympathizers. Ordinarily they do not want to appeal to Reason if the absolute truth of governmental authority lies in the West as regards the past, present, and future of any social class or group of individuals unable to fare well in the dialectics of human culture and progress.

On the surface level, *The Hollow Men* is a farce. The author is correct by saying Marcus Garvey's Pan-African organization for cultural or economic activity had been a huge failure and misadventure. However, this history of an ill-fated political struggle against White America had set a precedent for the Negritude Movement in 1930s, or other similar revolutions in subsequent decades. In that case it was thoughtful and valuable, if only because Westerners resolved afterwards to grant independence to their colonies everywhere. The oppressed and impoverished blacks on the continent of Africa did not at anytime ignore what Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. DuBois stood for, even if colonial masters sided by an outspoken intellectual world around them could blame Garvey especially on account of his fanatical reaction to institutionalized practices of slavery and brutality. Eliot certainly belonged to those from the West who saw nothing good in his anti-colonial and anti-imperialist campaign for the black people's emancipation and self-identity.

6. Conclusion

One interesting issue arises in *The Hollow Men*: Can the

wasteland image throughout Eliot's work be fully understood without reference to the decadence created by a crisis of European capitalism in the post-World War era? This question would not have bothered T. S. Eliot at all, since he was a product of and staunch believer in the social classes which inspired and benefited from capitalist exploitative measures such as Marcus Garvey had tried to substitute with socialist egalitarian alternatives in the early years of 20th century. Eliot did not seem to regret his Tory outlook or his classical taste in poetry. He advocated instead, for all the imperialists and their underdogs, a timely engagement in spiritual rebirth and conversion to traditional Eurocentric rather than Afrocentric patterns of existence. His rejection of Liberalism and Pan-Africanism was, of course, necessary if Europeans had to continue maintaining their leadership role in the modern world. Eliot followed the concept of hierarchical order, obviously in agreement with his religion and what ancient authorities say about the divine plan for humankind. To condemn life as a whole, he said, would be unreasonable: it is symptomatic of adolescent fear and immaturity. Presumably God is still keeping in touch with Anglo-Catholics, or the race of wealthy British overlords, while black paupers in Abyssinia and America are occasionally driven to excessive anxiety plus vandalism for understandable causes.

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- [4] Bush, Ronald (1984). *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style*, New York and Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1984; O. U. P. Paperback edition. Bush is outstanding in his analysis, but he omits the crucial point that Eliot undoubtedly wants us to get from an allusion to African traditional (folk) music and poetry relying on prose style in verbal performance and some drum-beats for effective artist-audience participation. Recital here can be as in dramatic (i.e. open-stage or public) entertainment. This method has no earlier European parallel in verse writing.

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