

The Hollow Men
T. S. Eliot

Mistah Kurtz—he dead.

A penny for the Old Guy

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 colour,
Paralysed 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.

Let me be no nearer
In death's dream kingdom
Let me also wear

Such deliberate disguises
Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves
In a field
Behaving as the wind behaves
No nearer—

Not that final meeting
In the twilight kingdom

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 this
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 kingdoms

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.

Online text © 1998-2010 Poetry X. All rights reserved.
From The Hollow Men | 1925

MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

On "The Hollow Men"

Grover Smith

Although "The Hollow Men" is not a mere appendage to *The Waste Land*, it may most profitably be read as an extension of the same design of quest and failure. The quest has already failed once when the poem opens. The history of Kurtz in "Heart of Darkness" conforms to the general pattern. Conrad may often be understood best through the study of primitive rituals of succession, initiation, and fertility. That Kurtz has been initiated into the tribe, becoming its shaman, its "rain and fine weather" maker, and that he has been ceremonially worshiped and appeased, seems an express symbol of his disastrous descent into the dark places. The gracious figure of his "Intended," from whom he has turned to immerse himself in the shadows, represents the light which Marlow, shaken by his own knowledge of the horror, is scarcely able to credit, except as either an illusion of the innocent or an ideal of the courageous. What happens actually to Kurtz happens figuratively to Marlow, who voyages into a hell so dreadful that he comes back unconvinced of any other reality. The sheer Manichaeism of the revelation only narrowly fails to overwhelm with darkness Marlow as well as Kurtz. Kurtz, after undertaking to combat darkness and devils, yields to them and is installed in the midst of them and, despite his final relative victory of self-knowledge, cannot avert his damnation. The whole design approximates that of hero myths, but it combines with curious subtlety the quest to subdue evil with a quest to restore the god overtaken by death in the guise of life. In a sense Kurtz is like the Fisher King and Marlow is like the quester, but Kurtz has been a quester too.

The main parallel between "Heart of Darkness" and "The Hollow Men" consists in the theme, implicit throughout the latter, of debasement through the rejection of good, of despair through consequent guilt. In Part II of the poem the speaker confesses the impossibility of facing "the eyes," even in dreams, in the dream kingdom of his world; and in his imagination he encounters only their symbolic counterparts--sunlight, a tree, voices in the wind. The sunlight, however, shines only on "a broken column" among the broken desert images. His inability to return and brave the eyes resembles Tiresias' state after the scene in the Hyacinth garden. In *The Waste Land* the lost eyes are those of the protagonist himself; here they are the upbraiding eyes of one incarnating his lost redemption: the speaker takes refuge in apathy; he desires to think of himself only as a scarecrow. He shrinks from everything but concealment among the other hollow men and wears, with them,

Such deliberate disguises
Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves
In a field.

What he cannot contemplate is the reproach of

... that final meeting
In the twilight kingdom,

when at length he may meet the eyes in the real world of the dead.

The scarecrow symbol (like Hawthorne's "Feathertop") is appropriate to designate not only the ineptness and spiritual flaccidity of the speaker but, like the "tattered coat upon a stick" in Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" (1927), his inability to attain love. If one turns back to *The Golden Bough* and to some of the most ancient as well as most persistent rituals of pagan Europe, it is the straw man who seems to have functioned in certain of the fire festivals as a sacrificial representative of the vegetation spirit or as a scapegoat ridding his folk of accumulated ill-chance. The commemoration of the fifth of November itself reflects the custom of burning in effigy the bearer of local guilt; the accident of the season--

for Guy Fawkes Day shortly follows All Souls!--may have suggested kindling traditional autumn fires for the modern culprit. A connection between the straw man and the Fisher King will be easily apparent, for Eliot's hollow men re-enact the distress of the mutilated Tiresias.

The figurative straw dummies of the poem suffer both physically and spiritually. How they themselves have erred, the poem does not demonstrate. It is plain enough, however, that they are all but damned; and not for nothing is there an allusion here, as in "The Burial of the Dead," to the third canto of the *Inferno*, where those, who "lived without blame, and without praise," are doomed to abide at Acheron without crossing into hell. But it is meaningful that the hollow men are not bound to such a torment as theirs: to follow the whirling ensign, goaded by hornets and wasps. Instead they are like the throng awaiting (with "pennies for the Old 'Guy'") the barge of Charon to ferry them across to their everlasting sorrow in the depths. The eyes, terrible and unrelenting, even resemble the glowing coals of Charon's eyes, as described in both the *Aeneid* and the *Commedia*, or the streaming eyes of the demon in Kipling's "At the End of the Passage." But the very possibility of descending, of not being forced to remain on the hither shore, paradoxically signifies hope. Miraculously, the eyes that may reappear beyond the river portend salvation. As commentators have recognized, they are comparable to the eyes of Beatrice in the *Purgatorio* (XXX-XXXI). For the pattern of descent and ascent implies that having plunged into hell, the hollow men may find paradise. Part IV of the poem establishes a geography: the scarecrows, loitering beside "the tumid river" (a fixture also of "Heart of Darkness"), are trapped in Ezekiel's valley of bones, where, as in the "circular desert" of *The Family Reunion*, their suffering seems futile. Theirs is the "dream kingdom" where the eyes are but a memory. They must invade the "other kingdom," the "twilight kingdom" of actual death, which, after further purgatorial trial, may vouchsafe to them, through the eyes of pain and joy, a way upward, even to the "multifoliate rose" of the final cantos of the *Paradiso*, to "the perpetual star," a symbol of the Holy Virgin. The way up and the way down are the same; the landscape is not Dantean except in so far as its moral and emotional processes match the allegory of the *Commedia*. And here, apparent hell is potential, though unrealized, purgatory.

In "Heart of Darkness" as in the *Commedia*, the feminine symbol, a prototype of the eyes in "The Hollow Men," charts the quester's pilgrimage into the region of pain; Kurtz's descent is irretraceable. But Dante's leads finally upward to his vision, beyond the eyes, beyond even the celestial spheres. And "The Hollow Men" has a similar pattern; moreover, as Genevieve W. Foster has shown in her Jungian analysis, the eyes, the rose, and the star are equivalent to the "Grail" of *The Waste Land*. So, too, is the tree, recurring in *Coriolan* and "New Hampshire," and, through the children in the leaves, in "Burnt Norton" also. (Here it ironically reminds one of Kurtz, "a tree swayed by the wind.") "The Hollow Men" would re-express the affirmative way by abjuring lust, the false center, the "prickly pear" of Part V, circled in a whirling or whirlpool motion, and by declaring the speaker's hope for the eyes. (In the negative way, the abandonment of lust would have to be ratified by renunciation of the affirmative symbol and by evacuation of desire.) But attainment of the vision, according to "The Hollow Men," is remote indeed. The agony of "Lips that would kiss," the unalleviated "anguish of the marrow / The ague of the skeleton," lacerates the heart with proximate desire.

The first four lines of Part V parody "The Mulberry Bush," substituting for the fertility symbol connoting love (as in the legend of Pyramus and Thisbe) an image purely phallic. And echoing the chant of the May games, "Here we go gathering nuts in May . . . At five o'clock in the morning," with its reminiscence of the Maypole dance and the "country copulatives," they underscore the sexual nature of the plight with which the poem deals. In this terminal section, one is back, so to speak, in the marriage chamber of Eliot's "Ode," where sex has gone wrong. And in spite of the plain statement that the hollow men must remain "sightless" unless the rose reappears, love, along with powers of creation and repentance, is still sought in the world of nightmare.

With every effort to make the potential become actual a "Shadow" interferes. This, whatever its private value, has in the poem no clear conceptual reference. It implies Prufrockian inertia incapable of connecting imagination and reality, a defect of *kinesis*, in part a volitional weakness and in part an external constraint. Deathlike, it hinders even the attempt at prayer through which the speaker might come into the "Kingdom" of pure actuality beyond. Eliot's threefold grouping of contrasts between prospect and fulfilment comprehends three failures. The oppositions of potentiality and actuality are not the Aristotelian or Thomistic ones; they blur as the enumeration passes from "potency" and "existence" to "essence" and "descent," but each constitutes an antithesis compatible with Aristotelian dialectic. Even "motion," normally actual, can fit into the potential category through its special meaning of "initial impulse," by which it contrasts with "act." Each of the three groups (by ambiguities) recapitulates the preceding, until by accumulation all three groups combine in the third, just as, according to Aristotle, the soul includes in its highest powers those of the inferior species. Perhaps the first group

chiefly connotes sex; the second, sex and creation; the last, sex, creation, and salvation.

From *T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.

J. Hillis Miller

In "The Hollow Men" all the richness and complexity of culture which gives "The Waste Land" such thickness of texture disappears. The poem takes place in a twilight realm of disembodied men and forces. The complexity of relations making up the subjective realm in Eliot's ideal descriptions of it is replaced by the vagueness and impalpability of "Shape without form, shade without colour, / Paralysed force, gesture without motion" (CP, 79). The hollow men are walking corpses ("Mistah Kurtz - he dead"), and their emptiness is the vacuity of pure mind detached from any reality. They are cut off from one another. Their voices are whispers, "quiet and meaningless" (CP, 79). Groping together, they "avoid speech" (CP, 81). They are detached from nature, and live in a place which is devoid of any spiritual presence, a "dead land," a "cactus land," a "valley of dying stars," hollow like the men themselves (CP, 80, 81). The eyes of the hollow men are not only averted from one another, but from those other eyes, the returning look from the divine place which those who cross "with direct eyes" to "death's other Kingdom" will encounter. There are no eyes in the hollow valley, and the empty men are bereft of God. Even within their own hollowness detachment is the law. The "Shadow" which falls between idea and reality, conception and creation, emotion and response, desire and spasm, potency and existence (CP, 81, 82), is the paralysis which seizes men who live in a completely subjective world. Mind had seemed the medium which binds all things together in the unity of an organic culture. Now it is revealed to be the Shadow which isolates things from one another, reduces them to abstraction, and makes movement, feeling, and creativity impossible. "The Hollow Men" is an eloquent analysis of the vacuity of subjective idealism, and the state of the hollow men appears in Eliot's later work as the "distraction, delusion, escape into dream, pretence" (CPP, 210) of the unenlightened people in his plays, each one of whom is a "fugitive from reality" (ES, 70), or as that horrid form of hell described in *Murder in the Cathedral*, the hell of "the Void," of "emptiness, absence, separation from God" in "the empty land/Which is no land," where "there are no objects, no tones./No colours, no forms to distract, to divert the soul/From seeing itself, foully united forever, nothing with nothing" (CPP, 210).

If "The Hollow Men" shows where idealism leads, it offers a fleeting glimpse of a way out of emptiness. Though nature, other people, and God have an almost entirely negative existence in the poem, they do exist as something outside the hollow men. The poem places the "stuffed men" in the context of an external world, God's world. Their state is defined as that of the trimmers in the third canto of the *Inferno*, those wretched souls, "gathered on this beach of the tumid river," who lived without blame or praise, and, like the neutral angels, were neither rebellious nor faithful to God, but lived for themselves. Far better to be one of the "lost/Violent souls" (CP, 79), for they were at least capable of damnation, as Baudelaire, in Eliot's essay, "walked secure in this high vocation, that he was capable of a damnation denied to the politicians and newspaper editors of Paris" (SE, 344). To recognize the possibility of damnation is in a way to become capable of it, and therefore capable of the salvation which is denied to the trimmers. The trimmers in Dante have no hope of another death, but Eliot's hollow men understand dimly that if they endure the death which is prelude to rebirth they have some hope of salvation. Though Eliot's language is deliberately ambiguous, it implies that the sightless eyes of the hollow men may see again, and confront the divine eyes which are "The hope only/Of empty men" and will reappear as "the perpetual star/Multifoliate rose" of heaven itself (CP, 81). The idealists of "The Hollow Men" have stepped out of themselves into the barrenness of an external world, and the fragments of the Lord's prayer ("For Thine is/. . . For Thine is the" [CP, 82]) which they mutter at the end of the poem are moving appeals to a God who may be infinitely distant, but who is independent of their minds and therefore may have power to save them.

From *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers*. Harvard University Press, 1965.

David Spurr

The Hollow Men (published 1925) portrays a poetic consciousness in which intense nostalgia for a state of Edenic purity conflicts with the paradoxical search for a more enduring form of order through acts of denial and alienation. To the

common observation that *The Hollow Men* expresses the depths of Eliot's despair, one must add that the poet in a sense chooses despair as the only acceptable alternative to the inauthentic existence of the unthinking inhabitants of the waste land. Eliot himself saw this kind of metaphysical despair as more intellectual than emotional. He says of Pascal, a "Christian thinker" with whom he clearly identifies:

His despair, his disillusion, are ... no illustration of personal weakness; they are perfectly objective, because they are essential moments in the progress of the intellectual soul; and for the type of Pascal they are the analogue of the drought, the dark night, which is an essential stage in the progress of the Christian mystic.

Principles of intellectual order control the despair of *The Hollow Men* as well, in the way the poem consciously evaluates experience in abstract terms, distinguishes between antithetical states of being, and establishes, both in form and subject matter, the archetype of the Negative Way as an alternative to disorder as well as to the illusory order of visionary experience. The following pages examine formal and thematic elements of the poem as representing the progress of Eliot's own "intellectual soul," and then show this progress as frustrated by the poet's attraction to a visionary imagery.

The Hollow Men replaces the richly chaotic style of *The Waste Land* with an austerity of expression that prepares for the contemplative mode of Ash-Wednesday. In what Bergonzi has called "a virtual surrender to the silence," the formal strategy of *The Hollow Men*, like its thematic content, seems designed to demonstrate how effectively the shadow of the inarticulate falls between the conception and the creation of an artistic work. Formal aspects of the poem imitate the characteristics of the hollow men it portrays. For example, their desire to "avoid speech" finds a counterpart in the poem's general paucity of utterance: the technique of constant repetition and negation--"The eyes are not here / There are no eyes here"--manages to employ only about 180 *different* words in a work 420 words long. The "Paralysed force, gesture without motion" applies not only to the men themselves but also to the poem as a whole, which exhibits little narrative progression in the conventional sense and eschews verbs of direct action.

As the hollow men grope together, form prayers to broken stone, and whisper meaninglessly, so the poem itself gropes toward a conclusion only to end in hollow abstraction, broken prayer, and the meaningless circularity of a child's rhyme. The conscious reduction of poetic expression to a bare minimum does away with metaphor and simile and produces a final section of the poem almost completely devoid of modifiers. The poem avoids capitulation to the silence of the inarticulate by relying on a highly structured syntax that tends to order experience in terms of binary opposition: "Shape without form, shade without colour," or "Between the idea / And the reality / Between the motion / And the act."

The quality of a poetic style marked by verbal austerity and relentless negation forms a structural counterpart to a thematic strategy that repudiates the validity of human experience at every level. In this respect the poem expands upon the theme of denial explored as part of the individual's search for meaning in *The Waste Land*. In modern existential terms as well as those of traditional Christianity, the Negative Way leads ultimately to an encounter with nothingness which, paradoxically, can inspire the individual with faith in God. Kierkegaard seeks to explain this paradox by showing that dread [*aengste*], the simultaneous fear and intense awareness of nothingness, opens up the possibility of faith in an infinite beyond human life by "laying bare all finite aims and discovering their deceptions," by revealing the "deadendedness" of life itself: "When the discoveries of possibility are honestly administered, possibility will then disclose all finitudes and idealize them in the form of infinity in the individual who is overwhelmed by dread, until in turn he is victorious by the anticipation of faith." The *via negativa* brings the individual to a terminal point marking the boundary between the finite and the infinite.

The Hollow Men explores this boundary situation in its images of finality or extremity and in a thematic structure comprising two different states of being. The poem's speaker anticipates with dread "that final meeting"; the men grope together "In this last of meeting places"; the final section, in its generalized abstraction of all that has gone before, tells us that "This is the way the world ends." The Dantescan image of the lost souls "Gathered on this beach of the tumid river" belongs to a boundary motif that recurs throughout Eliot's poetry: Prufrock escapes from the world of skirts and teacups to the world of visionary imagination via a "walk upon the beach." The protagonist of *The Waste Land* sits down and weeps "By the waters of Leman," then upon the shore "with the arid plain behind me." The sea of *The Dry Salvages* "is the land's edge also." The persona of *The Hollow Men* has arrived, intellectually and imagistically, at the outer limit of one world only to find that its "deliberate disguises" conceal a finite lack of possibility: between the potency and existence "Falls the Shadow."

Robert Crawford

The epigraph, "*A penny for the Old Guy*," stresses that Eliot's poem relates to ceremonial effigies. Here, as in *The Waste Land*, *Heart of Darkness* is important. "*Mistah Kurtz--he dead*" emphasizes a connection between savage ritual and Eliot's crossed staves. To obtain power by embracing darkness, Kurtz deified himself in line with primitive belief; ironically, Eliot's speaker dresses in relics of forgotten ritual out of a sense of total impotence, wishing to avoid a horrid dusk: "Not that final meeting / In the twilight kingdom." It is landscape like Dowson's, "Hollow Lands" where, in "the twilight of the year", "dead people with pale hands / Beckon" by a "weary river", "where pale stars shine" where, at passion's enactment, "There fell thy shadow." But the poem's world, lit by the half-light of inaction, was a transmutation of Eliot's own suffering. Vivienne, who had felt *The Waste Land* to be a part of herself, saw 'The Hollow Men' as a fitting follow-on, and related it to her own nightmares. But, as before, the personal world and that of late nineteenth-century poetry are sieved through anthropological ideas, emotion distributed among unsettled voices, narrative, optative, and choral. The poem is typographically complex. The first section's 'Kingdom' may not be section three's 'kingdom'. Certainly 'death's *other kingdom*' (my italics) suggests that the speakers' inane life is only another form of death. So, for Sweeney Agonistes 'Death or life or life or death / Death is life and life is death.' Cornford had quoted the Euripidean question, '*who knows if to be living be not death?*' Through anthropology Eliot resuscitates the idea of the living dead, so common in late romantic poetry, where Death-in-Life is the eternal king. Eliot's Hollow Men share their hopelessness with the inhabitants of the City of Dreadful Night.

[. . .]

The poem concerns degradation of language and ritual, failings of word and Word. Eliot's witty 1918 truncation of an Arnoldian phrase prefigures the Hollow Men's predicament; Clive Bell, 'lingering between two worlds, one dead', has the vice of inane mediocrity, incapable of 'icy inviolability, or violent fury'. His being 'the Matthew Arnold of his time' again connects, through the scarecrow image, with the Hollow Men who, like so many of Eliot's literary adversaries, are afflicted with a stuffed language, emptily 'poetic', the degradation of great poetry--

Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!

After the starkly factual 'Headpiece filled with straw' comes that most absurdly poetic word of all, indicating the speaker's weakness. Such childish poeticizing is reinforced, in directing us to the level of the infant, by the '*penny for the Old Guy*' epigraph, by the dressing up as a scarecrow, and by the nursery rhyme, 'Twinkle twinkle little star', which inescapably underlies the line 'Under the twinkle of a fading star'. This use of nursery rhyme looks back to *The Waste Land* with its 'London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down' and anticipates another explicit nursery rhyme which, in slightly distorted form, opens section V of 'The Hollow Men'. Other forms of words instilled into the young are also present. The Lord's Prayer is quoted in the repeated fragment '*For Thine is the Kingdom*' but the earlier uses of the word kingdom, particularly when it has a capital 'K', must already have prompted questions about allusion to this fundamental Christian rite, and about how it relates to those 'prayers to broken stone'. It is hard to avoid thinking that the hope of 'Thy Kingdom come' finds its opposite in

Let me be no nearer
In death's dream kingdom

which becomes an anti-Lord's Prayer, addressed to an unnamed hearer who may be the god of a universe of barrenness and death. 'The Hollow Men', not 'The Hippopotamus', is Eliot's most blasphemous poem.

Ideas of childishness, linguistic degeneration, and confusion support the central theme of the degradation of essential ritual. The barely glimpsed possibility of Christian hope plunges to crazy childishness.

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.

'Ritual,' Eliot wrote in 1923, 'consisting of a set of repeated movements, is essentially a dance.' He called *The Sacred Dance* 'an excellent study of primitive religious dances', and read how these were performed round sacred trees, but also 'how often with the decay of old faiths the serious rites and pageants ... have degenerated into the sports of children'. It was ten years since Eliot had been interested in *Ecstasy and Dance Hypnosis among the American Indians*, and had read in King about the lively 'moonlight dances' of Bushmen. These would resurface, bereft of fun, in the childish dance of 'The Hollow Men', as later, much more lightly in the Jellicle Cats' 'Reserving their terpsichorean powers / To dance by the light of the jellicle Moon.'

Though anthropological theories of religious degeneration were becoming outdated, Eliot was familiar with the version propounded by, for instance, Andrew Lang in his *Making of Religion*. Tylor, about whose theories Eliot had been sceptical, was particularly strong on connecting the mental processes of savages with those of children, connections emphasized by Cornford, Frazer, Oesterley, Webb, Wundt, and others. Cornford's book on some of the greatest Greek drama had as its frontispiece a Punch and Judy show. Eliot was fascinated by the idea which Cornford had put forward 'in "The Origin of Attic Comedy", [that] this [medicine-man] Doctor may be identical with the Doctor who is called in to assist Punch after he has been thrown by his horse'.

Though primitive man may be something of a mystic, the distant voices and fading star in Eliot's poem show no 'prelogical mentality' from a golden age of childlike innocence. The distant fading signals a run-down age of degenerate belief. That it had paradisaic origins is a simplistic assumption. His criticism of Oesterley's work makes it clear that for Eliot a ritual's origins may be as meaningless as is its present form. He attacks Oesterley for falling into 'the common trap of interpretation' by formulating intelligible reasons for the dancing of a primitive. Eliot asserts that it is perfectly possible to claim 'that primitive man acted in a certain way and then found a reason for it'.

The last section of 'The Hollow Men' in particular places its rituals in a crazy emptiness. The verve of the nursery rhyme spins us round in a sinister way, since it is disturbing to see the familiar 'mulberry bush' of the children's rhyme replaced with the arid 'prickly pear', making the rhyme like some distorted survival of a primitive chant. Eliot's substitution makes this seem an infertility dance. As an American plant, 'prickly pear' also connects with his own childhood in a society whose religious values seemed atrophied.

Section V's voices are the most complex. First comes the choral nursery rhyme, linked typographically with the italicized passages placed against the right-hand margin to differentiate them from the rest of the text. These appear to be parts of the Lord's Prayer, but are confused by the addition of the complaint in the same typographical form, '*Life is very long,*' appropriately enough from the more primitive world of *An Outcast of the Islands*. A third voice, represented by normal type and placed in the conventional part of the page, is itself like another ritual, a fact emphasized by the incantatory effect of semantic and lexical patterning in the repeated, only slightly varied form,

Between the *a*
And the *b*
Between the *c*
And the *d*
Falls the Shadow

This tripartite distinction, easy to uphold on the grounds of typography, is complicated, however, by the fact that fragments of the italicized Lord's Prayer passage find themselves brought in from the right-hand margin to form part of the body of the text when, further truncated, they make up the liturgical stutter of

For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the

before a final all-embracing italicized section, looking back in its typography, placing, and, most importantly, its rhythm,

recalls the opening nursery rhyme chorus, but gives it a universal voice which seems to include all that we have heard before in what is now a ritual chant ending with an appropriately childlike sound,

*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.*

This combination of various voices, including the choric, makes the fifth section distinctly dramatic in its fragmentation, and, clearly deriving from the techniques employed in *The Waste Land*, also paves the way for the fragmentary drama of *Sweeney Agonistes*.

From *The Savage and the City in the Work of T.S. Eliot*. Clarendon Press, 1987. Reprinted with permission of the author.

Return to [T. S. Eliot](#)