

Poem No.

10

The Hollow Men

(T. S. Eliot)

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.

About the Poet

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888 – 1965) was a poet and critic. He settled in Britain. He is well-known for his great poems such as “The Waste Land” and “Four Quartets”. He also wrote plays and contributed many critical essays.

Theme

The theme of the poem is that human beings have become soulless. They try to depend upon each other but they cannot make a society. All their efforts are like the running of rats or the rustling of grass. We do have shapes but inside there is nothing. We only seem to be walking souls but actually we are not even that.

Paraphrase

We are worthless men, either puppets or dolls. We try to rest upon each other and our minds are filled with no wisdom. We are not wise men. We live in dreams. We try to speak to each other but convey nothing. All our speech is no more than the voices made by the grass or the rats. We seem to have no form and no colour. We seem to have strength, but it is only the appearance of strength, otherwise we are weak and without motion. Those who have already departed from this life do not know if we are frustrated or not. We seem to be only puppets made of straw.

Glossary

hollow	having a hole or empty space inside, not solid
stuff	the material or substance out of which anything is or can be made; raw material
headpiece	a covering for the head
whisper	speak softly
cellar	underground room for storing things.

EXERCISES

1. Choose the correct answer.

- i. The poet calls men _____.
 - a) hungry
 - b) thirsty
 - c) hollow
 - d) cruel
- ii. This poem has been written by _____.
 - a) Keats
 - b) T. S. Eliot
 - c) W. B. Yeats
 - d) Byron
- iii. The title of the poem is _____.
 - a) The Hollow Men.
 - b) The Hollow Man.
 - c) The Hollow Woman.
 - d) The Hollow Women.

