4. Quirk shows that “Stevens could claim to be a poet of reality” and “moreover, [it] is his insistence that poetry helps us ‘live our lives’” (36). The argument clearly relates the didactic significance of Steven’s poetry.

WORKS CITED


Eliot’s THE HOLLOW MEN

In T. S. Eliot’s poem “The Hollow Men,” the speaker searches for meaning but ultimately fails to strike a balance between the physical world and the abstract. Throughout the poem, the speaker’s quest is hindered by his inability to reconcile this existence with “death’s other Kingdom” (14), his idea of the afterlife. The poem presents the search for meaning in terms of motion between opposing spheres of existence, yet the speaker’s inability to find an acceptable truth creates an image of frustrated inertia. The kinetic images created by Eliot’s speaker are immobile, and their tension becomes more pronounced as the poem progresses, emphasizing the speaker’s growing dissatisfaction and mental imbalance.

Although images of suppressed motion are present in the first section, the images create a passive, rather than an active, tone. In the first two lines, Eliot’s speaker introduces himself by using the first person plural “We” (1, 2), which not only indicates the association of other people with the speaker’s situation but also suggests a duplicity of character within the mind of the speaker similar to that in Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” The image of “hollow men” (1) who are “Leaning together” (3) is one of immobility. “Leaning” denotes the application of force, but force directed toward a central point and merely providing self-support. The balance of such an arrangement also suggests that it is precarious: should one part change the force with which it leans, the arrangement is likely to collapse. If the speaker’s “We” is interpreted as different aspects of one person, the image suggests mental stability that is maintained only through the careful balance of different personas. The “Paralysed force, gesture without motion” (12) confirms this image, for energy is expended without visible result. Further, people who have
“crossed / [...] to death’s other Kingdom” (13–14) do not remember the speaker’s “We” “as lost / Violent souls” (15–16), but “As the hollow men / The stuffed men” (17–18). The kinetic energy of this scene is directed inward, and the description of nonviolence suggests that the motion goes unnoticed by those outside the speaker’s “We.” Throughout the first section of the poem, the speaker’s efforts are directed inward and are therefore “meaningless” (7) because they do not influence the outside world.

In the concluding section of the poem, the images of suppressed action reach an almost irrepresible level as the speaker searches for meaning. Through the recitation of rhyme, the speaker returns to his childhood to seek relief from the building tension, but his childhood is a perverted one. In the traditional children’s rhyme, the speaker substitutes “the prickly pear” (68) for the mulberry bush, and this substitution connects this section to the “cactus land” (40). Even though the childhood rhyme brings a melodic, chanting rhythm to the poem, the implication that the speaker’s childhood resembles the “prickly” cactus rather than the sweet mulberry is unavoidable. The circular motion “round the prickly pear” (68) reiterates the theme of effort without result. It also builds the level of activity: motion has progressed through “leaning” (3), “swinging” (24), “trembling” (49), and “grop[ing]” (58) to the image of a child dancing or running.

The reference to the Lord’s Prayer in section 5 (“For Thine is the Kingdom” [77, 91]) is in sharp contrast to the motion of the child’s rhyme: whereas the rhyme suggests activity, the Lord’s Prayer creates an image of kneeling and meditation. Although the contrast of prayer with childhood activity suggests a comparison of contemplation with action, it also implies that the speaker’s childhood has become an internal force in his search for meaning. The Lord’s Prayer also connects the concluding section to “The supplication of a dead man’s hand” in section 3 (43) and therefore suggests that the speaker views himself as dead or dying.

The speaker intertwines pairs of contrasting ideas with these lines, emphasizing the conflict of repressed motion. Through the repetition of “Falls the Shadow” (76, 82, 90), the “Shadow” becomes the pervading image of the last section, and it suggests something undefined, connecting to “Shape without form, shade without colour” (11). As an indeterminate image, the “Shadow” is neither “the idea” (72) nor “the reality” (73), neither “the potency” (86) nor “the existence” (87), but rather something between the abstract and the physical. It suggests that the speaker vacillates between contrasting interpretations of reality in the search for a balance that exists only outside both the physical and the abstract spheres.

In the final lines of the poem, the energy of the speaker implodes. The thrice repeated line “This is the way the world ends” (95–97), recalls both the chanting of the Lord’s Prayer and the children’s rhyme and creates an image
of stagnation, for although the speaker searches for meaning in the lines, he fails to achieve motion. The inner balance suggested by the “Leaning” figures of the first section is lost in the final line, as the poem ends “Not with a bang but a whimper.” The kinetic energy that begins “quiet and meaningless” (7) increases during the poem and peaks in the utterance of the word “bang.” The increase in the tension of suppressed motion suggests that the speaker’s agitation and mental imbalance increase as the work progresses. However, the speaker remains nonviolent (15–16) even in his state of mental collapse, for he denies the explosion of energy that “a bang” would denote, choosing instead to conclude the world—and the work—with an implosive “whimper.”

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WORK CITED


Faulkner’s TURNABOUT

William Faulkner’s seven tales and three novels that deal directly with the Great War constitute a sizable component of his total artistic output. This part of the Faulkner canon belongs to a stylized body of literature informed by the experience and aftermath of what Paul Fussell has called “the matter of Flanders and Picardy”(x): a corpus produced in response to the devastating experience of modern, mechanized, total war. The protagonists are typically starry-eyed young men forever changed by their suffering. In a postwar era dominated by the search for a reason for or the “truth” about the war, Faulkner’s World War 1 stories were eminently fashionable.¹ It is the view of the war as a key to the malaise and dissatisfaction of a generation that Faulkner works with. His short story “Turnabout” is exemplary of the contention that “this life [in and after war] is nothing” (Collected 426).²

Writer’s wanted to “show” the true story of the Great War to set the record straight and to emphasize its horrors and shocks. They suspected that the official accounts distorted what the soldiers alone knew and experienced. They were also concerned that the morale-boosting propaganda back home and the press/mail censorship seriously distorted the view of the soldiers’ suffering. “Turnabout” is carefully designed both as a tribute to the craft of the soldier and as a reflection on the sorrows of war.

Captain Bogard is an American bomber pilot, a man of sober and careful