The Hollow Men
by T. S. Eliot (1925)

Mistah Kurtz—he dead.¹

A penny for the old Guy²

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

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

¹ Quotation from Heart of Darkness, a story by the English writer Joseph Conrad (1857-1924). Kurtz went into the African jungle as an official of a trading company, and there degenerated into an evil, tyrannical man. His dying words were “the horror!”
² Guy Fawkes was one of a group of conspirators who planned to blow up the English House of Commons in 1605; he was caught and executed before the plan was carried out, and the day of his execution (November 5) is celebrated in England in a way similar to Halloween in the United States. Children make straw effigies of the “guy” and beg for pennies for fireworks.
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 home 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

For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow

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.

3 Part III of the great medieval poem *The Divine Comedy*, by Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) is a vision of Paradise. The souls of the saved in heaven range themselves around the Deity in the figure of a “multifoliate rose” (*Paradiso*, xxviii.30).

4 Sardonic allusion to a children’s rhyming game, “here we go round the mulberry bush.” Substituting a prickly pear cactus for the mulberry bush, Eliot meshes this image with others of the modern world as a “cactus land.”

5 Part of a line from the Lord’s Prayer.