

BA ENGLISH II SEMESTER

MODERN AGE I

UNIT III

SPOORTHI CS ASST PROFESSOR JSSCACS MYSURU-25

THE JOURNEY OF MAGI

POEM BY T.S. ELIOT

About the poet

- Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888 –1965) was an essayist, publisher, playwright, literary and social critic and one of the twentieth century's major poets.
- He was born in St. Louis, Missouri, of an old England family.
- He was educated at Harvard and did graduate work in philosophy at the Sorbonne, Harvard and Merton college Oxford.
- He settled in England, where he was for a time a schoolmaster and a bank clerk, and eventually literary editor for the publishing house Faber & Faber, of which he later became a director.
- In 1915 he married Vivien Haigh-wood
- In 1948, Eliot received the Nobel Prize for Literature

- He founded and, during the seventeen years of its publication, he edited the exclusive and influential literary journal *Criterion*.
- In 1927, he became a British citizen and about the same time entered the Anglican Church.
- Eliot attracted widespread attention for his poem *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock* (1915), which is seen as a masterpiece of the Modernist movement. It was followed by some of the best-known poems in the English language, including *The Waste Land* (1922), *The Hollow Men* (1925), *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and *Four Quatrets* (1945).
- He is also known for his seven plays, particularly *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948, for his outstanding, pioneer contribution to present-day poetry.

Historical Background

- It is a dramatic monologue spoken by one of the wise men who, according to the bible, visited the infant Jesus. In the poem, the speaker uses modern conversational language to describe events, making vividly present the spiritual agony of a man who lived long ago.

About the Poem

- The Journey of the Magi is a poem by T. S. Eliot on the subject of the magi who travelled to Palestine to visit the new-born Jesus according to the Gospel of Matthew. The poem was written after Eliot's conversion to Christianity and confirmation in the Church of England in 1927 and published in *Ariel Poems* in 1927.
- The poem is an account of the journey from the point of view of one of the magi. It picks up Eliot's consistent theme of alienation and a feeling of powerlessness in a world that has changed. In this regard, with a speaker who laments outliving his world

Summary

- They are travelling through bad weather with no place to stay. They walk through hostile cities, unfriendly towns and dirty villages. They had a hard time finding such a place to stay that night. Eventually, they make it to temperate valley where they find a tavern where they could stay. They thought it was very satisfying.
- The poem is about awareness and rebirth, and the pain that often comes with learning and new awareness. The Magi narrator is lamenting the spiritual awakening that the birth of Jesus brought upon him; his old life and luxuries and indulgences are lost to him forever and the old way of life is dead. He cannot continue with his own beliefs, and it is for this that he wishes for his own death. The birth of Jesus was for him a rapture between the old and the new, and once having known the new, he cannot stay with the old, either in his beliefs or habits.

Theme and Tone

- Important theme is **Suffering**
- The poet using certain phrases in the poem that let us know he had enough and he is going through a hard time.
- We see things like the very dead winter, the lack of shelters, towns unfriendly, sleeping in snatches.
- This poem has different tones because of the situation. This gives the reader an ominous, negative tone. It is a reflective, dramatic monologue that inhabits the voice of one of the Magi.

Poetic techniques

- The poem is written in free-verse.
- The techniques
 - I. Allusion – the story is in reference to the gospels.
 - II. Alliteration – ‘sleeping in snatches, with the voices singing in our ears, saying’, ‘and the silken girls bringing sherbet’
 - III. Anaphora – ‘And running away, and waiting their liquor and women’, ‘And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters, and the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly, and the villages dirty and charging high prices’”

IV. Persona – character of the first-person narrator in verse or prose narratives invented for the author’s particular purposes. Ex “all this was a long time ago, I remember, and I would do it again, but set down”

V. Synecdoche – character of the first-person narrator in verse or prose narratives invented for the author’s particular purposes. Ex “Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver”

Conclusion

- T.S. Eliot's poem "Journey of the Magi" describes the journey of the "Wise men from the East" towards Christ and thus, symbolically, towards Christianity. Many critics parallel the Magi's journey with Eliot's own journey in search of "satisfaction" in Christianity. Critics suggest that Eliot's "Journey of the Magi" focuses on the affirmation of Christ that comes from the Magi's journey towards faith through birth, death, and rebirth, a journey that parallels Eliot's own struggles with his faith.