T.S. Eliots “Journey of the Magi”

- Submitted By
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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.
• 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.
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 newborn 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...
Notes

• There are at least two formal elements of the poem that are interesting. The first is that the poem maintains Eliot's long habit of using the dramatic monologue. The speaker of the poem is in agitation and speaks to the reader directly. His revelations are accidental and born out of his emotional distress.

• As with other works, Eliot chooses an elderly speaker – someone who is world-weary, reflective, and sad (cf. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *Gerontion*, the Tiresias narrator of *The Waste Land*, and possibly the narrator of *The Hollow Men*). His narrator in this poem is a witness to historical change who seeks to rise above his historical moment, a man who, despite material wealth and prestige, has lost his spiritual bearings.
The poem has a number of symbolist elements, where an entire philosophical position is summed up by the manifestation of a single image. For example, the narrator says that on the journey they saw "three trees against a low sky"; the single image of the three trees implies the historical future (the crucifixion) and the spiritual truth of the future (the skies lowered and heaven opened).

As many critics point out, the three trees foreshadow Christ's crucifixion—on the one hand, a negative image relating to Christ's death but, on the other, a positive image relating to Christ's sacrifice for humanity. Many critics have demonstrated that the ambiguity of the nature and conversion imagery in "Journey of the Magi" is reflective of the author's view of the world as an inexact place.
Notes

• 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.

  • Thanks Vipanjeet