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Reforming Beliefs

LITURGY AND PREPARATION OF ADVENT IN JOURNEY OF THE MAGI**Mala Issac****Dr. Sadhana Agrawal****ABSTRACT**

Thomas Stearns Eliot (September 26, 1888 – January 4, 1965) was a playwright, literary critic, and the most important English language poet of the 20th century. Although he was born as an American, he moved to the United Kingdom in 1914 at age 25 and was naturalized as a British subject in 1927 at age 39. On June 29, 1927, Eliot converted to Anglicanism from Unitarianism, and in November that year, he took British citizenship. He became a warden of his parish church, Saint Stephen's, Gloucester Road, London, and a life member of the Society of King Charles the Martyr. He was specifically identified as Anglo-Catholic, proclaiming himself classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion. About thirty years later Eliot commented on his religious views that he combined "a Catholic cast of mind, a Calvinist heritage, and a Puritanical temperament.

As Eliot was converted into Anglican his faith began to deepen in Catholicism. His compositions got richly colored in the Christian Calendar and the Christian colors. He started taking allusions from the holy Bible and the Christian feasts and festivals for his writings. Christians celebrate two major festivals, the Christmas and the Easter. Eliot wrote with deep religious feelings on both these festivals. His Ash Wednesday and Journey of the Magi are the two creations that have full coverage of the rituals and the celebrations of these two major festivals of Christianity. Ash Wednesday consists of the Easter Liturgy and Journey of the Magi consists of the Christmas Liturgy and celebrations. Weeks of December before the arrival of Christmas are called as the season of Advent. It means the preparation for the coming of Jesus and the weeks before the arrival of Easter are known as the season of Lent that comprises of recalling the pain and sufferings of Jesus, his death and his resurrection for the good of human on earth. Hence, we can conclude that the creation of Journey of the Magi just after his conversion into Anglicanism is

the reflection of his catholic conscience that was preparing to welcome Jesus in his life as Christians do during the Advent.

Keywords: Lenten, advent, liturgy, birth-death-rebirth.

Introduction

Thomas Stearns Eliot's poem Journey of the Magi was published in 1930 just after his conversion in 1927. It conveys the atmosphere of the three wise men on their spiritual quest. This biblical allusion parallels the poet's own spiritual quest; his receiving into High Anglicanism, a highly ritualistic, morally and theologically conservative version of Anglicanism. Eliot's composition is encompassed by emotions - those of futility, emptiness and indecision. Eliot states: "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by making an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation; a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion. This belief in emotive poetry is reflected in Journey of the Magi through his evocative use of religious allusions[1]. These allusions are of the Advent and the Lenten seasons that tell how difficult is to accept Jesus and how tough it is to reach to the point where Jesus arrives in one's life.

The Birth of Jesus for the Good of Man on Earth

Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary as a fulfillment of the Old Testament's Messianic prophecy [2]. The Bible contains two accounts, which describe the events surrounding Jesus' birth. Depending on one's perspective, these accounts either differ from each other or tell two versions of the same story [3]. These biblical accounts are found in the Gospel of Matthew, namely Matthew 1:18, and the Gospel of Luke, specifically Luke 1:26 and 2:40. According to these accounts, Jesus was born to Mary, assisted by her husband Joseph, in the city of Bethlehem.

According to popular tradition, the birth took place in a stable, surrounded by farm animals, though neither the stable nor the animals are specifically mentioned in the Biblical accounts. However, a manger is mentioned in Luke 2:7, where it states, "She wrapped him in clothes and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." Early iconographic representations of the nativity placed the animals and manger within a cave

located, according to tradition, under the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Shepherds from the fields surrounding Bethlehem were told of the birth by an angel, and were the first to see the child[4]. The Gospel of Matthew also describes a visit by several Magi, or astrologers, who bring gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the infant Jesus. The visitors were said to be following a mysterious star, commonly known as the Star of Bethlehem, believing it to announce the birth of a king of the Jews[5]. The commemoration of this visit, the Feast of Epiphany celebrated on January 6, is the formal end of the Christmas season in some churches. The complete allusion here in the poem is taken from Christmas liturgy, especially the gospel.

Christians celebrate Christmas in various ways. In addition to this day being one of the most important and popular for the attendance of church services, there are other devotions and popular traditions. In some Christian denominations, children re-enact the events of the Nativity with animals to portray the event with more realism or sing carols that reference the event. Some Christians also display a small re-creation of the Nativity, known as a Nativity scene or crèche, in their homes, using figurines to portray the key characters of the event. Prior to Christmas Day, the Eastern Orthodox Church practices the 40-day Nativity Fast in anticipation of the birth of Jesus, while much of Western Christianity celebrates four weeks of Advent. The final preparations for Christmas are made on Christmas Eve.

A long artistic tradition has grown of producing painted depictions of the nativity in art. Nativity scenes are traditionally set in a barn or stable and include Mary, Joseph, the child Jesus, angels, shepherds and the Three Wise Men: Balthazar, Melchior, and Caspar, who are said to have followed a star, known as the Star of Bethlehem that arrived after the birth of Jesus [6]. This same advent preparation is found in the Journey of the Magi.

The Journey of the Magi as an 'Objective Co- relative'

A Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot: A Poem-by-Poem Analysis, George Williamson (RG) [7] analyzes Eliot's Journey of the Magi as a perpetual story of the process of his own conversion. In the poem, one of the Magi recounts the journey to Christ, a journey that brought death to their old life and their rebirth to a new experience, the experience of conversion (RG 164). Eliot uses symbols and images, significant to him, that recur, charged with emotion, such as the "water-mill

and the six ruffians," to bring connection and continuation to the journey (RG 165). The description of the journey--in nature from death to life not only projects the inner struggle of the Magi, but also foreshadows events to come in the life of Christ too that are recalled during the Lent. This same struggle is seen in the lives of the Magi and in Eliot's personal life as well (RG 164). According to Williamson, Eliot has taken an old Bible story, added personal symbols and imagery, and changed it to reflect his personal journey to Christ (RG 164). Thus, celebrating a season of advent of Christ in the Anglican community as well as the advent of Catholicism in his own life.

The Biblical Allusion

Journey of the magi is based upon a biblical story told in Mathew, chap2, verses 1-12. Magi is the plural from the classical word magus- a wise men. These wise men traveled from the east to Bethlehem to behold the baby Jesus. The three wise men from the east were kings is a later tradition. The speaker in the poem is one of the magi or wise men remembering his journey in old age, the initial five lines are a quotation from a sermon preached by Bishop Lancelot Andrews on Christmas day 1622. These lines build up a dispassionate rendering of the journey of the magi with the birth of the Christ, bad weather during the death of the winter and a difficult long journey continue. Later also in the poem the camels refused to move on being injured the magi sometimes regretted undertaking such a difficult journey. They left their warm homes for a freezing zone. The pleasure of their palaces was replaced by trials and problems. The camel men also revolted in want of facilities for pleasure and comfort. Hustle towns, dirty village, costly inns made a hard time of it full of doubt and anguish. This reflects the anguish of a man prone to pleasures and the difficulties he finds in seeking god.

The Biblical Symbolism

Temperate valley: Dean points out that the early morning descent into a temperate valley evokes three significant Christian events: "The nativity and all the attendant ideas of the dawning of a new era, the empty tomb of Easter, as well the image of the Second Coming and the return of Christ from the East, dispelling darkness as the Sun of Righteousness. Wohlpert adds that the Magi's dawn arrival is symbolic of the new life attained from their penance. The message is that if one repents, his sins may be forgiven and salvation can be attained. The poem shows the three

stages of sacrament of penance (contrition, confession, and satisfaction). The message here is that when a Christian has sinned, they should feel guilty, confess to god, and then they will be satisfied.

However, Eliot does not show it in this order, he shows the guild to their sinful life of women and alcohol, then he shows satisfaction with a change of tone, and then confession. Eliot does it as he found no enlightenment after he got converted to Christianity in 1927. In *Journey of the Magi*, he is saying that the soul can never rest in satisfaction; whilst human you are continually confessing sins and feeling guilt. Only when dead will you feel satisfaction and see enlightenment. It could be said that Eliot did not feel satisfied straight away on his spiritual journey, and he believed he would have to continually endeavour for satisfaction until death.

Symbolic value comes to represent the depths of feeling. It seems to offer allegorical exegesis; the valley of life; the three crosses of Calvary; the White Horse of the Second Coming; the Judas-like world. The immediate mystery of the images evaporates under such interpretation, to be replaced by the Christian mystery. The primary sensory associations give way to an idea, and we find we are involved in a meaning beyond the Magi's actual experience. It is the same in the final paragraph, except that here we are confronted directly with the abstract idea. The Magus is bewildered by the obvious contradictions of Birth and Death, and is left simple wanting to die [8].

Liturgy of Advent and Subjective Tone in the Poem

Journey of the Magi is the monologue of a man who has made his own choice, who has achieved belief in the Incarnation, but who is still part of that life which the Redeemer came to sweep away. Like Gerontion, he cannot break loose from the past. Oppressed by a sense of death-in-life, Tiresias' anguish between two lives, he is content to submit to "another death" for his final deliverance from the world of old desires and gods, the world of the silken girls. It is not that the Birth that is also Death has brought him hope of a new life, but that it has revealed to him the hopelessness of the previous life. He is resigned rather than joyous, absorbed in the negation of his former existence but not physically liberated from it. Whereas Gerontion is "waiting for rain" in this life, and the hollow men desire the "eyes" in the next life, the speaker

here has put behind him both the life of the senses and the affirmative symbol of the Child; he has reached the state of desiring nothing. His negation is partly ignorant, for he does not understand in what way the Birth is a Death; he is not aware of the sacrifice. Instead, he himself has become the sacrifice; he has reached essentially, on a symbolic level true to his emotional, if not to his intellectual, life, the humble, negative stage that in a mystical progress would be prerequisite to union. Although in the literal circumstances his will cannot be fixed upon mystical experience, because of the time and condition of his existence, he corresponds symbolically to the seeker as described by St. John of the Cross in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. Having first approached the affirmative symbol, or rather, for him, the affirmative reality, he has experienced failure; negation is his secondary option.

The quest of the Magi for the Christ child, a long arduous journey against the discouragements of nature and the hostility of man, to find at last, a mystery impenetrable to human wisdom, was described by Eliot in strongly colloquial phrases adapted from one of Lancelot Andrews' sermons of the Nativity:

A cold coming they had of it at this time of the year, just the worst time of the year to take a journey, and specially a long journey. The ways deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the sun farthest off, in solstitio brumali, the very deadly winter. Also in Eliot's thoughts were the vast oriental deserts and the camel caravans and marches described in *Anabase*, by St. J. Perse. He himself had begun to work in 1926 on an English translation of that poem, publishing it in 1930. Other elements of his tone and imagery may have come from Kipling's *The Explorer* and from Pound's *Exile's Letter*. The water mill was recollected from his own past; for in *The Use of Poetry*, speaking of the way in which certain images recur, charged with emotion, he was to mention six ruffians seen through an open window playing cards at night at a small French railway junction where there was a water-mill. In vivifying the same incident, the fine proleptic symbolism of "three trees on the low sky," a portent of Calvary, with the evocative image of "an old white horse" introduces one of the simplest and most pregnant passages in all of his work:

Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,

And feet kicking the empty wine-skins. (JM)

Here are allusions to the Communion through the tavern bush, to the paschal lamb whose blood was smeared on the lintels of Israel, to the blood money of Judas, to the contumely suffered by Christ before the Crucifixion, to the soldiers casting lots at the foot of the Cross, and, perhaps, to the pilgrims at the open tomb in the garden.

The arrival of the Magi at the place of Nativity, whose symbolism has been anticipated by the fresh vegetation and the mill beating the darkness, is only a satisfactory experience. The narrator has seen and yet he does not fully understand; he accepts the fact of Birth but is perplexed by its similarity to a Death, and to death, which he has seen before:

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
 And I would do it again, but set down
 This set down
 This: were we led all that way for
 Birth or Death? (JM)

Were they led there for Birth or for Death? or, perhaps, for neither? or to make a choice between Birth and Death? And whose Birth or Death was it? Their own, or Another's? Uncertainty leaves him mystified and unaroused to the full splendor of the strange epiphany. So he and his fellows have come back to their own Kingdoms, where,

... No longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
 with an alien people clutching their gods
 which are now alien gods; they linger not yet free to receive
 the dispensation of the grace of God."

The speaker has reached the end of one world, but despite his acceptance of the revelation as valid, he cannot gaze into a world beyond his own [9].

Images of Christmas and Easter

First Five Lines: The first five lines of JM were as mentioned earlier is lifted from Lancelot Andrews's Nativity Sermon of 1622, and modified. Eliot happened to be himself steeped in

Andrews at the time . . . but he used them because he needed a second voice to precipitate the poetic drama. They must be understood as being read by, or to, the magus and thereby occasioning his own flow of memory" [10]. According to Dean, these are "all places which remind the travellers, by their violent contrast, of the place of contentment they have deserted" [11]. Traveling through these foreboding places, "Eliot's Magus hastens to end an unpleasant journey; what he 'regretted' is the vanishing of 'the silken girls bringing sherbet'.

Dean points out that the early morning descent into a temperate valley, it evokes three significant Christian events: The nativity and all the attendant ideas of the dawning of a new era . . . the empty tomb of Easter . . . as well the image of the Second Coming and the return of Christ from the East, dispelling darkness as the Sun of Righteousness (CC 77). Wohlpert adds that the Magi's dawn arrival is symbolic of the new life attained from their penance (CC 57). Dean notes Elizabeth Drew's view that beating the darkness can refer to the triumph and victory of Christ, a conquering that could occur in the events of Christ's earthly life, or in His resurrection, or in His return in glory at the end of time. (CC 77).

The image of the three trees seems clearly to be a reference to the crosses of Calvary (CC 78). Barbour writes, It is appropriate that his [the Magus'] language . . . unwittingly evoke the Crucifixion (BB 195).

Dean refers to Robert Kaplan and Richard Wall's suggestion that "the white horse is perhaps a reference to the militaristic and conquering Christ of Revelation. However, he continues, there is nothing in the poem to indicate that the horse is being ridden; on the contrary, it seems more natural to assume that the horse is riderless (CC78). Dean also quotes Kaplan and Wall's speculation that the horse is symbolic of the death of paganism under the onslaught of Christianity, and notes Nancy Hargrove's suggestion that the horse's 'being old- perhaps represents the old dispensation that will fade away with Christ's birth(CC 78).

R. D. Brown writes, The obvious meaning of the word "satisfactory" is 'expiatory,' payment for a debt or sin" (137). Barbour, however, sees a more complex connotation: The parenthetical remark/gesture dramatizes a certain drawing back at the end into something between understatement and velleity. The key word is the ambiguous 'satisfactory,' emphasized by

rhythm and position, which for us, though not the magus, evokes the Thirty Nine Articles, expiation, and the Atonement" (BB 194). In addition, E. F. Burgess sees the word satisfactory as evidence that "every condition of prophecy was met, leaving the alienated magus, stranded, suspended between the realization and the consummation of God's plan (36).

Dean quotes Geneviene Foster's comment that the birth of the new era involves the destruction of the old. (CC 79) Barbour writes that the Birth he the magus saw began the death of his old world, old life, but did not, with the same certainty, give him anything new; the magus is therefore "alienated from everything 'in the old dispensation'" (BB195). All of these images showing birth-death-rebirth are the references to the advent and the lent phenomena.

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.

Brian Barbour, in Poetic Form in Journey of the Magi approaches the events in T.S. Eliot's dramatic monologue as a journey of perplexity and spiritual anguish in search of satisfactory faith. Barbour suggests that Eliot's poem presents two journeys related through paradox: it narrates the arduous physical journey and then dramatizes the even more difficult and incomplete spiritual one (BB 193). The spiritual journey leads us to the deepest perplexity and indeed alienation (BB193). At the physical journey's end the spiritual perplexity remains. Referring to the old dispensation of birth and rebirth, Brian Barbour writes, "The Birth he saw began the death of his old world, old life, but did not, with the same certainty, gives him anything new" (BB195). The Magi are caught in the middle between birth and death, moving towards the center of the Christian mystery where death is the way to birth through Christ – the resurrection. Barbour's interpretation of the poem suggests that St. Matthew is the audience that gives the poem its greatest richness and deepest meaning. His search for background information about

Jesus is the poem's occasion, the welcome of the season of advent and the difficulty one can face in achieving Christ in his life is the main theme. The speaker, audience, and occasion all cooperate to define the full poetic significance (BB196). Hence, we can say that it was an effort of catholic turned Unitarian Eliot to prepare for the advent of Jesus in his life and to introspect his own faith and to strengthen the possibility of salvation in Catholic faith. He compares his own struggle and the struggle of the god seekers with the struggle of the magi and provides religious height to his thoughts.

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