

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide, consisting of a network of white lines and circles on a blue background, resembling a circuit board or a neural network. The lines are vertical and horizontal, with some diagonal connections, and the circles are small and white.

JOURNEY OF THE MAGI

BY T.S ELIOT

T.S ELIOT (1888-1965)

- Thomas Stearns Eliot was an American-born British poet, essayist, publisher, playwright, literary critic and editor.
- Born on 26th September, 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri, US to a prominent Boston family
- Through his series of critical essays shattered the old orthodoxies and built new ones. (“Tradition and Individual Talent”, “Hamlet and His Problems”, “Poetry and Drama”)
- He would experiment in diction, style and versification which strengthens the English poetry.
- Relation is the important theme that floats over the poetry of T S Eliot
- Eliot discusses its connection with modern age which is attacked by moral degeneration, war and uncertainty.
- Extensively uses Intertextuality, specially Biblical allusions and references.
- 1948 winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature.
- Literary movement : Modernism
- Major Works: ”The Love Song of J..Alfred Prufrock”(1915),”The Waste Land”(1922), “Murder in the Cathedral”(1935), “The Cocktail Party”(1949) etc.

POEM OVERVIEW

- 43 line poem written in 1927 by T S Eliot- free verse movement
- One of the five poems that Eliot contributed for a series of 38 pamphlets (related to Christmas) by several authors collectively titled “Ariel Poems”.
- The poem was written shortly after Eliot’s conversion to the Anglican faith.
- Accordingly the poem is an allegorical dramatic monologue that inhabits the voice of one of the magi(the three wise men who visit the infant Jesus),it’s also considered to be a deeply personal poem.
- Indeed, the magus in the poem shares Eliot's view that spiritual transformation is not a comfort, but an ongoing process—an arduous journey seemingly without end.
- The magus's view on the birth of Jesus—and the shift from the old ways to Christianity—is complex and ambivalent.
- In deeper level it is the Story of man’s spiritual quest and its also the story of T S Eliot’s own search to find the purpose of his life in an everchanging modern landscape.
- The Scripture bases for this poem is Gospel of Matthew 2:1-12

- The poem has two main features: i) written in Eliot's favorite form called **dramatic monologue** which he inherited and adapted from Tennyson and Robert Browning
- In this format, the speaker of the poem is in a state of great agitation and he speaks directly to the reader. This kind of a poem has only one speaker and he is not the poet.
- The revelations of the poem come from inside the heart of the speaker where there is a great amount of emotional distress.

ii) several **symbolist** elements in it, in which entire philosophical position is summed up in one single image. E.g. three trees (symbolize a historical fact of crucifixion of Christ. What it signifies is brought out through the lower skies, which is the nearing or greater reachability of heaven because of Christ's crucifixion), galloping white horse.

- This symbolist element is also related to Eliot's use of what is known as the **Objective Correlative** for which he is famous.
- It often brings together more than one emotion and helps the poet to create a three-dimensional word picture of an idea that he wants to deliver to the reader.
- Though he is not the first one to employ it; but he perfected its use and made it into fine art.
- The poem is written in **free verse** which means there is no meter or rhyme.

Journey of the Magi

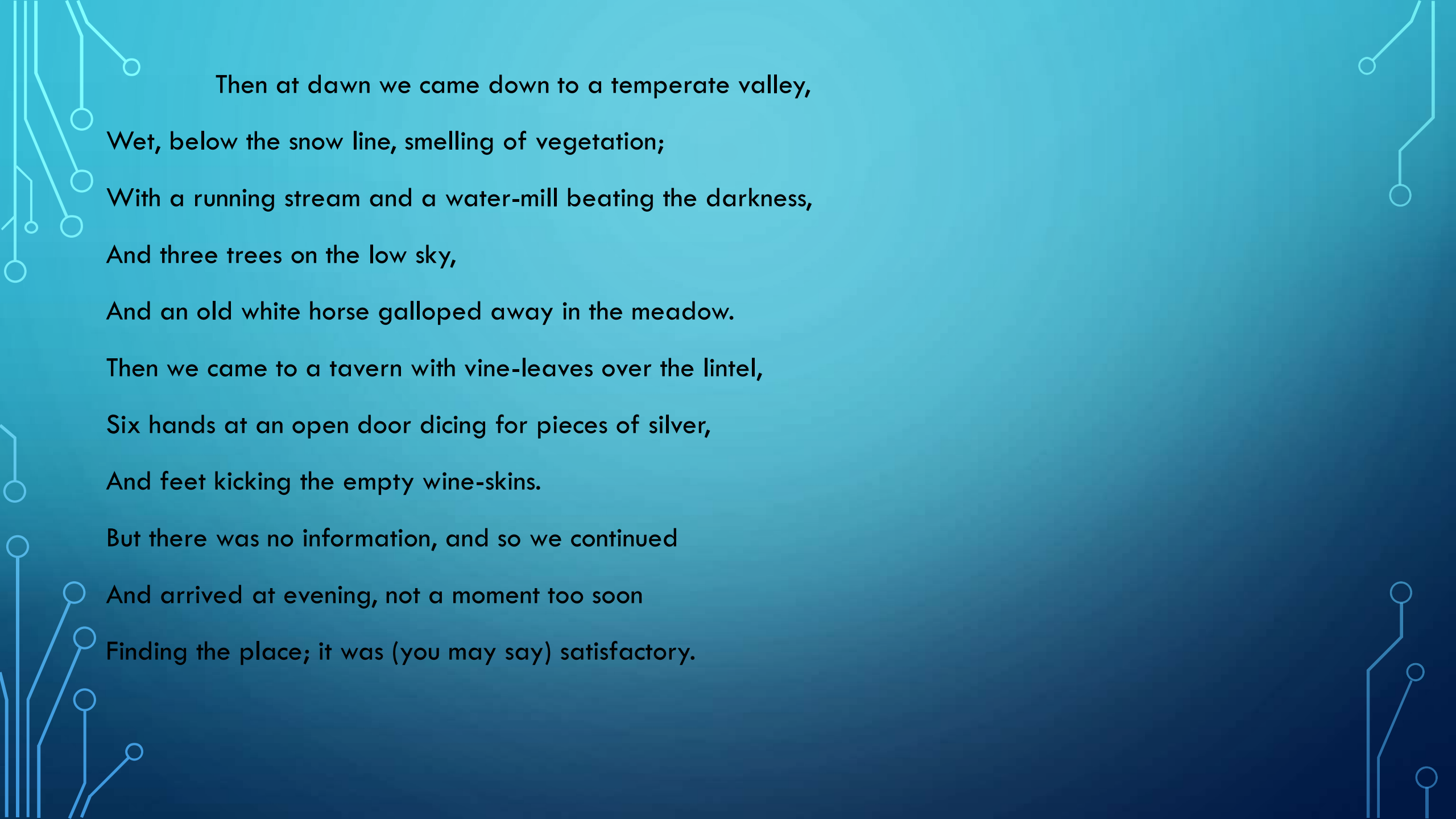
-T S Eliot

“A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.”
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.

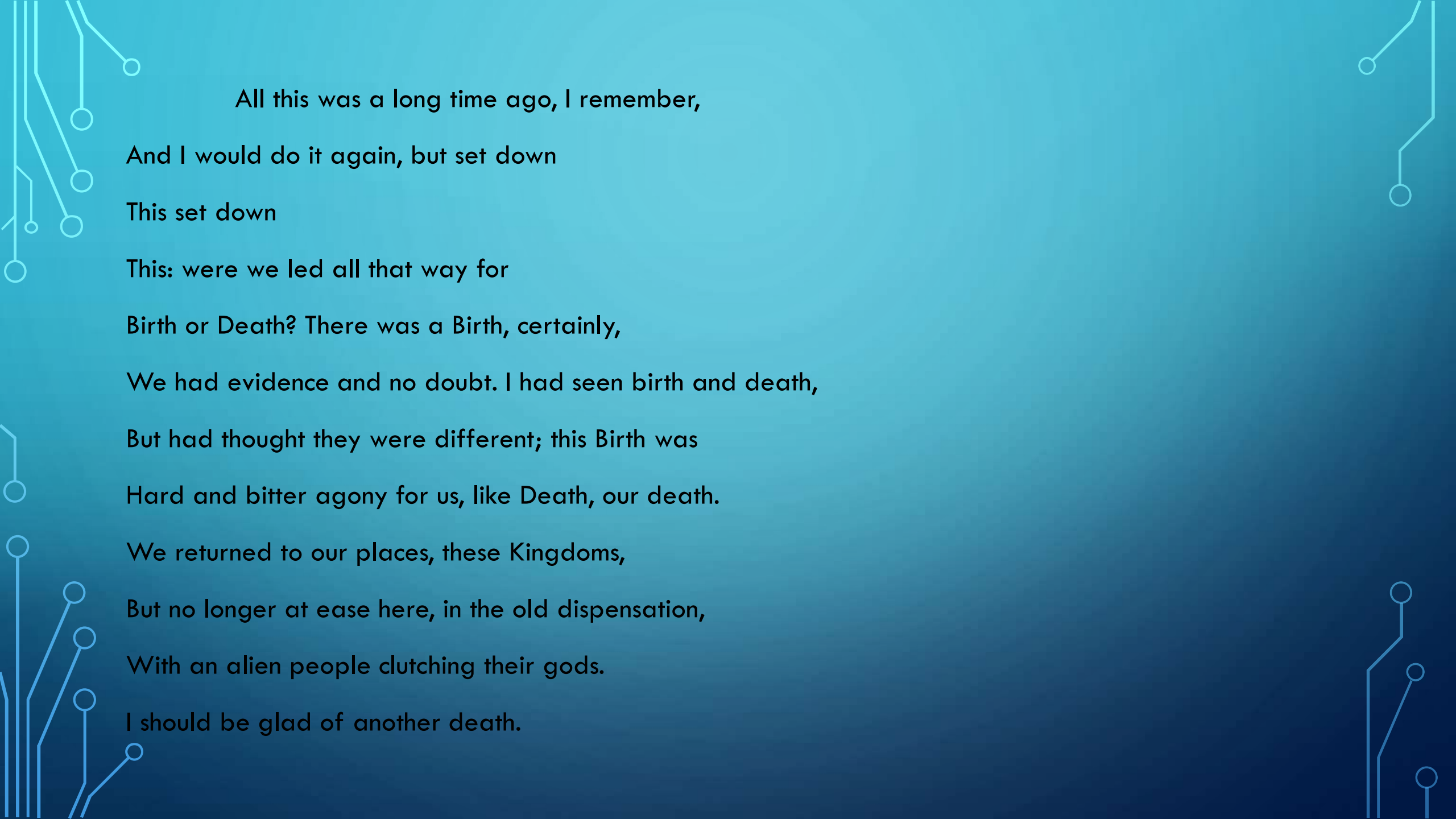


Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.





Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
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.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.



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? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

SUMMARY

- Narrative told from the point of view of one of the Magi that expresses themes of alienation and feeling of powerlessness in a Modern Age.
- The three wise men started their journey in the extreme cold of winter who reached the birth place of Jesus Christ to offer presents to him.
- The weather is very cold, in the course of their journey they got many hardships and deprivations
- In spite of that they continued their journey throughout the night
- According to the bible the three wise men followed a star for direction to visit Jesus Christ
- The paths were difficult and the weather was horrible.
- Their camels were in pain and they got tired due to the snowy way. They were unwilling to go on and they laid down in the snow.
- The wise men miss their old days, the days of celebrations in their palaces, their terrace when beautiful women will bring them sherbet.

- The camel men were constantly cursing the wise men because they did not want to continue with the journey in this terrible weather
- They were unreliable and full of complaints and some of them ran away as they were craving for their luxuries like alcohol and women
- The fires also kept extinguishing and it was hard to find shelters
- Wherever they went the people seemed to be unfriendly
- Villages they visited were filthy and lodging was expensive
- They decided to travel throughout the night, sleeping as per their convenience
- The journey now begin more difficult:
- They heard voices telling them to Stop being foolish and turn back.

- The second stanza.
- The wise men enter to a temperate valley.
- Temperate holds two meanings: the valley is both mild(gentle) and restrained.
- There is symbolic and supernatural shift in the season
- Season has changed into spring, the valley was not snowy but it was wet and was full of plant life
- With the description, it is clear that now they have come to a much better place
- There was a stream and water mill and three trees on the horizon.
- They saw a White horse galloped, means running at a very high pace in a nearby meadow.
- The adjectives "old" and "white" sound like they might symbolize the Christian God. The most famous horses in the Bible are probably the four horses of the Apocalypse, that come down to cleanse the Earth of sinners in Revelation. Here, the gentle image of God is combined with an animal. The horse is running "away" from the scene. This detail could be significant. Maybe it's God, having bestowed his son upon the earth. And maybe the apocalyptic horse is being driven away for the time being.
- This is a Biblical allusion and three trees on the low sky have been interpreted or refer to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, with the two men on the crosses to either side of him
- This is an indication of a future event.
- The magi now arrive at a tavern.(a kind of hotel or inn) with wines above the door.
- The hands and feet in the next two lines are **synecdoche**(a figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole or vice-versa)



- Referring to the people who are gambling and kicking wine skins to call for alcohol
- Wine skin is a kind of bag which is made of animal skin to hold the wine.
- This is a biblical allusion to the bartering for Christ (Matthew 26:14-16), and the parable of the new wine (Matthew 9:17).
- But here in the tavern also the Magi did not get any information regarding the place that Jesus Christ is about to be born
- Here, the poet conveys the message in a metaphorical way that when these magi or wise men are travelling in search of God, some short-sighted-small minded people are indulged into such trivial activities like drinking liquor and dicing
- Dicing here means gambling.
- The Magi already had a pretty Luxurious life and enjoyed all the worldly pleasures before they started their journey.
- The pilgrimage towards Jesus then is both a literal move away from the world and move towards a new spiritual world based on a different faith.
- Jesus Christ-Christians believe that he was the incarnation of God the Son and the awaited Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament.
- Finally by the evening the magi arrived at Bethlehem at the set moment when Christ was born not a moment too soon, but by that time hardly a moment of celebration.
- As in speaker's words, it was you might say satisfactory
- The practical difficulties faced by the magi throughout speaks about the difficulties of spiritual Rebirth
- The poem suggests that any great change comes with its pitfalls because of the hardships of the journey and its long road and terrible weather the magi could not call their journey a happy one;
- Hence he uses the word satisfactory but it was definitely the spiritual rebirth of the magi.

- Last stanza shows that this journey was done a long time ago
- And the magus who has been describing the events recalls everything.
- It is a “Story within a story”, the speaker decides to do it again.
- And the words “set down this” in the second line suggests that he wrote down everything and took rest for sometime
- Then the speaker rhetorically asks the question “were we led all the way for Birth or Death” and he himself answers that it was certainly for Birth.
- Here, another figure of speech that is **Paradox** ,as birth and death are clear-cut opposites.
- He says that they had seen birth and death at the same time but they thought this was different.
- The birth itself was so painful and bitter that it felt more less than a death.
- This experience has changed the meaning of their life and death.
- It was the death of their believes. With the birth of Christianity the speaker senses the death of their old ways
- They had returned to their places but everything seemed changed, it again suggests the pain of their spiritual rebirth.
- Those people who earlier were his companions, are now aliens to him and their homes are no more comfortable
- They felt to be surrounded by strangers with their gods.
- The speaker now wishes for another death coz he is no longer at ease in this world
- Spiritual transformation has made his life terrible and inevitable.

THEMES

Suffering

- Much of the poem is a complaint about the suffering experienced by the Magi on their journey to reach Bethlehem. They endure terrible weather, uncooperative camels and camel men, and hostile townspeople. They also suffer mentally and emotionally as they realize the imminent death of their way of life. The suffering of Jesus is also foreshadowed in the many biblical allusions in the third stanza. The poem suggests that religious conversion is a difficult process.
- This describes the suffering of being homeless in an unfamiliar place, without support. It mirrors the experience of Mary and Joseph seeking a place to give birth to Jesus.

Doubt

- In the first stanza, the Magi struggle with doubting their religious faith.
- They experience mental anguish as they hear the voices of others questioning their decision: “With the voices singing in our ears, saying/That this was all folly.”
- In the final stanza the Magus doubts the purpose of their journey. He thought that they were going to witness a birth,(of Jesus) but what they ultimately saw was a death—his own way of life as a pagan. He says that, rationally, they had evidence of a birth. But the emotional feeling was of the opposite. So he struggles with the paradox at the heart of the experience.

Death

- For the Magi, the birth of Jesus Christ heralds not only his impending death by crucifixion for the sins of humanity, but also the death of their own pagan way of life—their traditions and power.
- Pagan—who believed in number of gods and goddesses at the same time.
- The poem contains many allusions to the life and death of Christ in the New Testament; for example, the “three trees on the low sky” represents the crucifixion.
- "Journey of the Magi" was published shortly after Eliot's baptism into the Church of England. The magus describes Jesus' birthplace as "(you may say) satisfactory," and scholars have pointed to the way that the word "satisfactory" is used in the Anglican Articles: Jesus was sent to “satisfy” the debt of the world's sins being committed in Pagan culture. So this passage thus refers obliquely to the spiritual death of the Magi's culture with the advent of Christianity.

SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS

- **Weather (motif)**

The cold winter weather is a symbol of the hardship of doubt. The summer weather at the palaces represents sensuous decadence. The Magi experience a supernatural symbolic seasonal shift to spring as they descend into the valley. The temperate weather in the valley represents the mild, restrained nature of faith.

- **Sherbet (symbol)**

The sweet dessert is a symbol for sensuous pleasure, and by extension Paganism.

- **River (symbol)**

The water is a symbol of the grace offered by the birth of Jesus. It brings fertility to the valley, represented by the smell of vegetation. The running stream and water-mill gives movement to a landscape that was frozen in the last stanza. This is also a Biblical allusion, a symbol of Jesus: in John 4:10-14, Jesus called himself the Living Water. The stream powers a mill “beating the darkness,” alluding to Jesus’ claim in John 8:12 to be the Light of the World.

- **Three trees (symbol)**

The “three trees low on the sky” have been interpreted variously by scholars to symbolize the crucifixion of Christ with the two thieves on crosses to either side of him, or the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

- **White Horse (symbol)**

The “white horse” refers to the one in Zechariah 6:5, who announces the coming of Jesus.

- **Vine leaves (symbol)**

A symbol of Christ as the “True Vine” (John 15:1, 5)

- **Lintel (symbol)**

The lintel represents the threshold of conversion.

- **Dicing (symbol)**

The men gambling alludes to Judas’ betrayal of Jesus for 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-16) and to the dicing of Roman soldiers for Christ's clothing after he was killed.

- **Wine-skins (symbol)**

An allusion to Jesus’ parable of the “new wine” (Matthew 9:17). Christianity will be the new religion to fill new wine-skins. The kicking of the empty old wine-skins in the passage represents the change of the old dispensation to the new.