

The Journey of the Magi: A Lyric Monologue for First and Second Voices and Three-in-One Character(s)

Robert Keir Shepherd

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid, Spain

Although T. S. Eliot's "The Journey of the Magi" is a religious poem in the profoundest sense, the title of my paper is intended to give only a sly wink at Trinitarianism. My real object is to explain how Eliot contrived to manufacture a poem which, at first glance, resembles a dramatic monologue (generally understood as a poem for one voice—that of a historical/fictional/ mythological character addressing a silent listener, group of listeners or reader), yet which is slowly revealed as a lyrical monologue (for the poet's own voice) which yet—and this quite intentionally—contains considerably more than mere echoes of another two speakers: namely a Magus and the biblical translator and, most famously, sermon writer Archbishop Launcelot Andrewes (1555-1626) court preacher to James I and Charles I of England. I wish to show how Eliot, in writing what is ultimately confessional verse, goes out of his way to hoodwink the reader by allowing the first two of his "{The} Three Voices of Poetry" (1957) to overlap with and then incorporate the third. His own descriptions of these voices are (i) lyric, defined as "the poet talking to himself", (ii) that of the single speaker who gives a (dramatic) monologue¹ "addressing an {imaginary} audience in an assumed voice" and (iii) that of the verse dramatist "who attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse when he {i.e. the author} is saying... only what he can say within the limits of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character" yet adding "some bit of himself that the author gives to a character may be the germ from which that character starts" (Eliot, 1957, pp. 38, 40). The basis of my argument is that such an act of "giving of the self" as the raw material for the creation of a dramatic monologue persona as well as a character designed for the stage had been part and parcel of Eliot's *modus operandi* up to and including "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*; further, that in "The Journey of the Magi" and his later commentary upon it he finally comes out and admits the fact, and in far clearer a manner than he does when defining the Objective Correlative in his essays on *Hamlet*. Far from attempting to erase the sense of selfhood from his poetry, I believe that Eliot, consciously or not, ended up by demonstrating to those who worshipped the Romantics and their cult of personality just how difficult it was to express the purely subjective self in poetry.

Keywords: dramatic monologue, dramatic poetry, lyric monologue, peritext, subjective self

Introduction

One tendency of Eliot's poetry—actually the very first thing that catches one's eye when reading it—is to

Robert Keir Shepherd, Ph.D., Professor, Department of English Philology, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

¹ For my difference of opinion with W. R. Johnson (1982) over the precise nature of the second voice, see below pp. 18-19.

destabilize the relationship between the work itself and what surrounds it on the page in the form of epigraphs and, in the case of *The Waste Land*, notes: the disturbance of the relationship between text and peritextual apparatus, to employ the terminology of Gérard Genette. In no work is this more- though simultaneously and ironically enough *less-obvious* than in the first of what came to be known as *Ariel Poems* (1927 and, with one addition, 1956) “The Journey of the Magi”. In its original form as a Christmas card verse and the edition of Eliot’s complete poems and plays edited by Valerie Eliot in 1956, the first five lines are placed within quotation marks even though the verse sentence beginning on the sixth appears to be a seamless continuation of them—apparently the same speaker, certainly the same subject. In more recent presentations—notably those which appear on the internet—these same lines are italicized, effectively creating a cut-off point. In the latter cases the opening most closely resembles an epigraph, though one which is embedded in the poem rather than standing apart as a subheading. It is now universally acknowledged that the lines are lifted from Launcelot Andrewes’ 1622 Christmas sermon on the text of Matthew 2:1-2 which describes the coming of “wise men from the east” (Story, 1967), the only really significant alteration between hypo- and hypertext being that Eliot has transformed Andrewes’ narrative voice from third to first person plural—“A cold coming they/we had of it”. It is the object of this paper to explore the significance of this small yet extremely telling alteration and, in so doing, explain how Eliot deploys the most obvious and normal usage of this kind of peritext—i.e. as a simple *mise-en-scène*—as a means of introducing his own subjective voice into the poem. The simple fact of the matter is that if Andrewes’ original wording had been faithfully retained and the usual physical space on the page between epigraph and text observed, “The Journey of the Magi” might have more closely resembled a dramatic monologue in the style of Browning, Tennyson or Swinburne, where the poet simply assumes the character of a historico-mythological persona—Fra Lippo Lippi, say, Ulysses or Julian the Apostate respectively. Something much more subtle and suggestive is afoot here, however, as Eliot himself made crystal clear in his 1932 essay “The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism” where certain experiences described by the “narrating Magus” are openly claimed as the poet’s own; it is not that certain sights recorded do not strike the reader as oddly displaced anyhow. In summary, the poem stands as further proof—if any were really needed after *Prufrock*—that Eliot used a variety of “sleights of hand” falling under the *aegis* of intertextual allusion to nudge his poetry much further than is generally accepted towards what came to be called the confessional mode.

Two Sets of Magi: Dogma and Doubt

Eliot was baptized and confirmed into the High, also known as the Anglo-Catholic, Church of England on June 29th, 1927. The High Church had gathered fresh impetus in the 1830s through the influence of the Oxford Movement (spearheaded by John Henry Newman until his conversion to full Catholicism in 1843). The High Church had been referred to as such since the late 17th century, however, coming into being as a direct result of Elizabeth 1st’s ecclesiastical policies. Launcelot Andrewes, a deacon since 1580, Bishop of Chichester (1605-9) Ely (1609-19) and Winchester and Dean of the Chapels Royal from 1619 until his death in 1626, was thought by contemporaries and Newmanites alike to be the most obvious exemplar of an Anglican High Churchman in Elizabethan and early Stuart times. To profess overt Catholic sympathies would obviously have cost him his head, yet his unshakable belief in the sacraments, liturgical worship and the Episcopal form of church government placed him in the highest echelons of the ecclesiastical body in England for practically the entirety of the reign of

James 1st. It was obviously his literary achievements—in the form of devotional writings, particularly sermons—which impressed Eliot; in the 1926 essay “Lancelot Andrewes” one notes his bias towards the Oxford movement in the sentence “...{H}is prose is not inferior to that of any sermons in the language, unless it be some of Newman’s” (Eliot, 1999, p. 353).

All the above will just about serve as an introductory paragraph, but only *just* about. What has been omitted is the simple fact that, after stating what it is that he admires about Andrewes’ theology and his mode of expressing it, after all but copying part of a short section of the 1622 Christmas sermon—more accurately an Epiphany sermon, delivered five days before schedule on Christmas Day—Eliot goes out of his way to turn the rest of the poem into the stylistic and ideological obverse of both what the Archbishop stood for and the usual mode he employed when writing about it.

It is not that the original prose passage does not lend itself, both rhythmically and stylistically, to poetry. Take “A cold coming they had of it at this time of the year, just the worst time to take a journey, and specially a long journey in. The ways deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the sun farthest off, in solstitio brumali,² the very dead of winter” (Story, 1967, p. 109): cut out the filigree of the Renaissance Latinist parading his learning, ensure that the third line does not end awkwardly in an unstressed preposition, change from third to first person to suggest the dramatic monologue and we have;

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter. (Ricks & McCue, 2015, p. 101)³

This is not the only such passage in Andrewes—far from it. Eliot himself writes of the Archbishop’s love of inserting such slow-paced lyrical descriptions amidst a bulk of short, clipped expository phrases.

But then, after this succession of short sentences—no one is more master of the short sentence than Andrewes—in which the effort is to find the exact meaning and make that meaning live, he “slightly but sufficiently alters the rhythm in proceeding more at large...” (Eliot, 1999, p. 349).

For one of, quite literally, thousands of examples of the normal technique of exposition one need only quote from his dissection of the verse from *Matthew* 2⁴ on which the entire sermon is based (Ecce Magi ab Oriente venerunt Jerosolymam, Dicentes, Ubi est Qui natus est Rex Judaeorum? vidimus enim stellam eius in Oriente et venimus adorare eum. / Behold, there came *Wise Men*, from the East to Hierusalem, *Saying, Where is the King of the Jewes, that is borne? For we have seen His starre in the East, and are come to worship Him*).

And for all this they came. And came it, and quickly; as appeareth, by the speed they made. It was but Vidimus, Venimus, with them. They saw, and they came. No sooner saw, but they set out presently.... they tooke all these paines, made all this haste, that they might be there to Worship Him, with all the possible speede they could. Sorie for nothing so much as that they could not be there soone enough, with the very first, to do it even this day, the day of His Birth... It

² The Latin is a paraphrase of any one of a number of sources, including Ovid’s *Epistulae ex Ponto* and the *Noctes Atticae* of Aulus Gellidus.

³ Note that in this edition italics are used in preference to quotation marks. I have retained this format when quoting from the poem in this one case to give the reader some idea of the different effect.

⁴ “Andrewes customarily, and always in the texts which head the sermons, used the Geneva version of the English Bible side by side with the Vulgate (Story, 1967: Introduction p. lii. Note 1).

was not for nothing, it was said (in the first Verse) Ecce Venerunt; their coming hath an Ecce on it: it well deserves it.⁵
(Story, 1967, p. 99)

The Magi, then, according to Andrewes, are reflections of his own unshakable sense of duty and belief; one would even go so far as to say that the doggedness and unwavering sense of purpose with which they undertake their quest is reflected by the step-by-step progression with which the good Archbishop analyzes every word—for him, each a *key* word, divinely inspired—in the short biblical text. Here was a man who took the expression “gospel truth” quite literally.

Such is not the case with Eliot’s narrator, however. Not once does he cease to complain about the hardships of the journey he has voluntarily undertaken. The anaphora of lines 12-15 lends his words the nagging edge of insistent complaint;

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. (Ricks & McCue, 2015, p. 101. ll. 13-15)

Even the punctuation underscores the rising querulousness of these lines. A comma indicates pause for breath—and a respite for the scribe to whom the Magus is dictating—in the middle of 11, then there is no further break until the colon at the end of 13; a colon, mind, not a full stop. The magus is hesitating before having committed to paper the shameful revelation he has been suppressing all along;

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. (Ricks & McCue, 2015, p. 101. ll. 17-20)

This is a cunning reversal of Andrewes indeed; Eliot’s Magi travel so fast not because of anxiety to reach their goal, but out fear of the temptation to return home. We may detect such hesitance as far back as lines 8-10. Eliot is fully aware of the double-voicedness of the verb “regret”;⁶ the use of “And” at the beginning of 9 could be classified as an example of Derridean *différance*, as it might actually be said to anticipate rather than counterpoint the *anaphora* which signpost the grumpy litany of inconveniences referred to above (ll. 13-15);

There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet. (Ricks & McCue, 2015, p. 101. ll. 9-11. Italics mine)

In other words, were the Magi feeling guilty for past sensuality or already lamenting the foresaken ability to indulge in carnal pleasures without conscience pangs? If Andrewes expresses outright and unambiguous faith in what Bakhtin would classify as a monological text, Eliot creates a dialogue between faith and belief and even an argument between hope and despair. Christ is not even crucified as yet, let alone risen from the dead—in the case of the Magus the “three trees on the low sky” (Ricks & McCue, 2015, p. 101) have not been transformed into

⁵ Story, 1967, p. 110. Original italics retained in this one case of quotation from Andrewes’ works.

⁶ See Ricks & McCue, 2015, p. 762 reference 8: “*Unger* 1956 232-233 quoting from Conrad’s {*An Outpost of Progress*} two further uses of OED’s first sense of “regret”: “To remember, think of (something lost) with distress or longing.” Obviously, however, more than a trace of the current most obvious usage 3 (“Sorrow or pain due to reflection on something one has done or left undone”) is retained.

symbols of crucifixion and resurrection. Despite this fact, the Magi have not only acknowledged their own conversion to Christianity but—perhaps—even attempted to convert their subjects, with potentially disastrous results. Do they now run the risk of usurpation, even of assassination, with nothing but their own potentially fallible instincts to blame for it? (“But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation/ With an alien people clutching their gods.”) In the last line of the poem is it Christ’s crucifixion anticipating resurrection that they long for, or their own speedy demise after having put everything at risk for no valid reason? In his poem, even Eliot’s shortest verse sentences express troubled doubt rather than, as in Andrewes’ text, blissful acceptance of Christian dogma. Andrewes is running through the logical steps to an answer he has already found; Eliot’s Magus is an eyewitness to a promise which is as yet unfulfilled;

...this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death...
I should be glad of another death.

One is bound to admit that, beyond certain comments on Eliot’s deployment of oratorical tropes and punctuation, we have said little about the poem which has not been said before. This is inevitable. In point of fact we appear to have left a very important question—*Who is the narrator? Eliot? The Magus? Andrewes? All three?*—hanging in the air. This has been deliberate.

The Two and a Half Voices of Poetry

First, I wish to argue that there are three basic misconceptions about Eliot’s poetics. The first is that he had said all he was going to say about the Objective Correlative in the two versions of the same essay entitled “Hamlet” (1919) and “Hamlet and his Problems” (1921); the second that “The Three Voices of Poetry” (delivered as a lecture 1953, published 1954) is a basic restatement of the Hamlet essays with a discussion of lyrical poetry and the dramatic monologue thrown in for good measure, and the third that the subjective voice was the last item on the list of Eliot’s priorities when it came to presenting a work—particularly a poem—to the public.

To begin with, as early as the mid-1970s Frank Kermode, in his introduction to *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, was freely acknowledging that all three of these essays dealt with the Objective Correlative, even if in “The Three Voices” it is not actually mentioned by name. He quotes from that part of the text in which Eliot, himself paraphrasing and glossing Gottfried Benn’s 1951 (published 1954) study “*Probleme der Lyrik*”, writes of the “creative germ” of an idea which is initially neither really formed nor even properly active, and the process of its transformation into a fully-fledged poem;

He {the poet} has something germinating in him for which he must find words; but he cannot know what words he wants until he has found the words; he cannot identify this embryo until it has been transformed into an arrangement of the words into the right order. When you have the words for it, the “thing” for which the words had to be found has disappeared, replaced by a poem....When the words are finally arranged in the right way—or what he comes to accept as the best arrangement he can find—he may experience a moment of exhaustion... and of something very near annihilation. And then he can say to the poem: “Go away! Find a place for yourself in a book—and don’t expect *me* to take any further interest in you!”

Kermode's comment on this is;

This passage appears to account more satisfactorily⁷ for the process by which the surrender of the personality produces the impersonal objective correlative. (Kermode, 1975, pp. 17-18. My interpolation)

Yet he continues by providing what is surely the clearest “no nonsense” definition of the term to be found anywhere;

The difficulty [i.e. in making real sense of the term] arises from the fact that *what the object is correlative with is the emotion of the poet*. (Kermode, 1975, p. 17. Interpolation and emphasis mine)

What Kermode perhaps hints at but is too much of a gentleman to say outright is that the writer's struggle simultaneously to express and depersonalize an emotion, while in many ways comprehensible, is still odd. It is a psychological truth that once anyone understands, say, the nature and origins of a personal phobia that is barely acknowledged, let alone understood, he/she will be better able to be rid of it. Writing, or the type of consciously objective writing that Eliot contemplates, would seem to serve a dual—yet still extremely limited—function. It is therapeutic and it helps the readership to fathom out the roots of the writer's malaise. Yet where is the poet worth his salt whose only aim is to “compose” both himself *and* a self-help manual? Is it not rather the case that a moment of maximum artistic intensity *as well as* clarity is the central aim? Would it not be the mark of any but the most didactic of poets to safeguard the latter at all costs, often at the expense of the former? If clarity is so far preferable to obfuscation (little as one might sympathize with *that*) why not simply resort to the declarative prose sentence?⁸ My belief is that a good deal of Eliot's poetry represented unfinished and partially comprehended business—textual productivity in the Kristevan sense, but where as much emphasis is placed on the author as the reader as the insatiable manufacturer of “conclusions” which only beg further questions: poetry as the eternally incomplete linguistic message transmitted both to others *and* to its creator. Moreover, and *pace* Kermode, I believe that it was in “The Three Voices of Poetry” that Eliot came closest to admitting this. As for “The Journey of the Magi”: why, it is the clearest example of the unfinished process—of *questioning* faith, in this case, despite all Andrewes had to say on the matter.

Central to our argument here is the connection between the three types of poetry referred to in the title of the 1953 essay: lyric, the dramatic monologue and the verse used to compose works intended for the stage. Once again the relationship is rather left to be inferred from a series of grudging admissions and wilful omissions than spelled out.

It is almost necessary to remind ourselves that the type of poetry just discussed is the lyric. Eliot's dismissive attitude towards the form which “I should prefer to call ‘meditative verse’” (Eliot, 1953, p. 42) is underlined by the seeming inability of the Oxford Dictionary to define it satisfactorily. According to the compilers of the edition

⁷ “More satisfactorily”, that is, than the definition of the term given in the “Hamlet” essay(s); “[A] set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked” (Eliot, 1999, p. 145).

⁸ It is true, of course, that in “The Three Voices” Eliot says “*Surely the proper language of love—that is communication to the beloved and no-one else—is prose.*” Does that mean that, for him, the author's amatory feelings and poetics did not mix, or that he could never find it in himself to write a love poem to Vivienne? Certainly, if rumours be true, he wrote a poem a day to Valerie. While it is undeniable that the sonnet—even penned by Shakespeare or Cavalcanti—cannot be accepted as heartfelt personal expressions without a deal of analysis and counter-argument (and see below p. 9 for a comment on Shakespeare sonnet 129) the statement seems facetious in the extreme.

in question⁹ it is “[a] short poem, usually divided into stanzas or strophes, and directly expressing the poet’s own thoughts and sentiments” (Eliot, 1954, p. 41) but he immediately cites examples of short poems which are not subjective and intensely subjective poems which are long. In short, he believes—or affects to believe—that the supposed existence of lyric poetry is partly the result of sloppy classification. And he goes further: the simple process *per se* of putting a “creative germ” into the most fitting words the poet can produce for his own benefit can never be worthwhile: “if the poem were exclusively for the author, it would be a poem in a private and unknown language; and a poem which was a poem only for the author would not be a poem at all” (Eliot, 1954, p. 43). This might be said to support what we said above about the contemptuous tossing away of the elusive emotion transformed into Kristevan *genotext* at the readership’s feet were it not for the fact that, for Eliot, the “text which unleash or signal semiotic forces which derive from the earliest stages of a subject’s existence when drives and desires are not controlled and channeled into the ‘Symbolic Order’ (the social characteristics and divisions of language)”¹⁰ is anathema. Yet may the *geno*—be transformed into *phenotext*, becoming a possible “object of [traditional] linguistic analysis” (Allen, 2003, p. 213)? Eliot seems to admit that this is not only viable but desirable. If the first of the three voices—that of “*the poet talking to himself—or to nobody*” (Eliot, 1953, p. 38) is merely uncreated chaos, then that which fails to acknowledge the creator’s engagement with his text is the wind-as-hot-air that blows through it;

If the author never spoke to himself [and, presumably, left the impression that he did so in the finished article], the result would not be poetry, though it might be magnificent rhetoric... (Eliot, 1953, p. 43. Insertion mine)

The author writing for himself in such a way as to enable self-understanding must be worth *something*, then, but far be it from Eliot to admit such an outrageous idea directly. Yet again, though, when dealing with the great man’s poetical “do’s and don’t’s”, it is often worth one’s while to take the “tablets from the mount” with a healthy pinch of salt and dip into the small print of the divine prescription. One sentence which contains, I believe, an example of deliberate *double-voicedness* (to employ Bakhtinian terminology) may well transform everything. In the fourth paragraph of “The Three Voices” Eliot is engaged in a full-tilt attack on Robert Browning’s claim that love poems are addressed to one person only (“We know that Mr. and Mrs. Browning liked to write poems to each other, *because they published them...*” (Eliot, 1953, p. 38. Emphasis mine) when he suddenly says;

Now I do not deny that a poem may be addressed to one person; there is a well-known form, not always amatory in content, called the Epistle. (Eliot, 1953, p. 38)

Now one’s first reaction is to believe that classical *Epistulae*—those of Horace or Ovid, say—are being referred to here. Think again, however, and remember that one of Browning’s most famous dramatic monologues is entitled “An *Epistle* Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician” (italics mine). After all, talk of the Brownings leads us to this connection, and discussion of his verse—lyrical and dramatic poetry (that is, plays written in verse) but particularly his dramatic monologues—will take up more than its fair share of Eliot’s paper.

⁹ I have not been able to track down the exact version of the OED from which he quotes, though the definition is more or less the same in my 1978 version (Vol. 6).

¹⁰ Kristeva paraphrased in Allen, 2003, p. 213.

At first this would seem to be another red herring, since Eliot's admiration of the Victorian's use of the *persona* hardly matches that of Ezra Pound, who was the first to apply the word to those historical characters through whom Browning spoke. This is the second voice to which Eliot refers, and note that he is careful to define it as that of "the *poet* addressing an audience, large or small" (Eliot, 1953, p. 38. Emphasis mine). He is under no illusion that a Browning—or a Tennyson or a Swinburne or, presumably, even a Frost or Lowell (the latter in his earlier phase, before the objective correlative became its subjective counterpart)—ever became even believable English-speaking inhabitants of the skins they attempted to slip into. The author is just as likely to identify the character with himself as himself with the character, as Eliot quite reasonably points out. So much is obvious, yet whereas most commentators would—and still tend to—concentrate upon the success with which a Victorian writer of dramatic monologues (say) gives a more immediate though no less illuminating version of the figures outlined by a Gibbon or Macaulay, Eliot emphasizes the literary sleight-of-hand involved in a creative medium which seeks as much to highlight aspects of the age in which it was written as it does those of a past era. What does Tennyson's "Boödicea" have to tell us about the effects of British imperialism in India? Isn't Browning's Karshish a fleshed out metaphor for all who struggle to balance scientific fact with a blind leap of faith, especially in a post-Darwinian universe? It is quite true that Eliot tends to hide Browning's light under a bushel in what I believe to be affected disdain, but this may have been because both he and Pound tended to ignore or partially disparage each other's idols:

The poet, speaking, as Browning does, in his own voice, cannot bring a character to life: he can only mimic a character otherwise known to us. And does not the point of mimicry lie in the recognition of the person mimicked, and in the incompleteness of the illusion? We have to be aware that the mimic and the person mimicked are different people. (Eliot, 1953, p. 41)

My belief is that Eliot's main reason for privileging verse drama over the dramatic monologue was his conviction that, properly handled, the former represented a medium in which he might simultaneously express his own innermost feelings—especially those he preferred not to acknowledge—and hide them in the words of characters which, on a stage, would provide the most effective shield possible between himself and the audience. This, he claimed, was what Shakespeare had achieved—"In 'The Tempest', it is Caliban who speaks; in 'Caliban upon Setebos' it is Browning's voice we hear" (Eliot, 1953, p. 41). In verse drama—the medium in which the third of the voices was to be used—"the poet... is saying...not what he would say in his own person, but only what he can say within the limits of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character" (Eliot, 1953, p. 38). Simultaneously, however, it meant that he would have to dig deeper into his own psyche than—so he professed to believe—any other form of poetry, dramatic or otherwise—would make necessary;

It seems to me that what happens, when an author creates a vital character, is a sort of give-and-take. The author may put into that character, besides its other attributes, some trait of his own, some strength or weakness, ... some tendency to violence or to indecision..., something that he has found in himself. Something perhaps never realized in his own life, something of which those who know him best may be unaware, something not restricted in transmission to characters of the same temperament... and least of all to the same sex.... On the other hand a character which succeeds in interesting its author may elicit from the author latent potentialities of his own being. (Eliot, 1953, p. 40)

What a field-day the biographical hordes can have with this: Eliot the leashed homicidal maniac; Eliot's transgender fantasies! What is interesting for us, though, is that this "restrained outburst" of creative urges

dredged up from the subconscious is that of the *author* as opposed to *dramatist* pure and simple. While it was speculation about how he might create a believable *stage* villain that led up to it, the examples of successful creations of this type include George Eliot's Rosamund Viney as well as Iago and Richard III. Might he not also have mentioned the unnamed husband of Browning's "My Last Duchess", Tennyson's thoroughly obnoxious St. Simeon Stylites, one of the multiple sketches of himself penned by the Earl of Rochester or even Milton's God or Satan, depending upon one's interpretation of *Paradise Lost*? Certainly the latter is a perfect embodiment of all the conflictive urges that make the best villains interesting—and even turn them into anti-heroes. Certainly though, many of the purely poetical villains that Eliot ignores come to (half?) life in the context of the dramatic monologue. And this does indeed beg a question; is there a sense in which Eliot dismisses both the dramatic monologue and the lyric—and is it not the case that Shakespeare's sonnet 129, "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame" is one of the most convincing expressions of self-disgust ever penned?—*because they represented what he knew to be two his own most potent ingredients for creativity?* Though he affects to despise the *dramatic* monologue because there is too much of the subjective *lyric* drive detectable within it—it is neither one thing nor the other, *half* apoeitical voice—he is not half so fussy when it comes to the germ of subjective expression which exists in theatrical compositions set in verse. Is he not squirming uncomfortably around the home truth that there is a lyric, personal element in *every* creator's work—his own included?

It is certainly true, as Eliot admits himself—though careful to distance himself from that admission by inserting literary commentators in the space between himself and his purely poetic output—that "*as I have read... there is a dramatic element in much of my early work.*" While he might easily have wriggled past this contradiction by insisting that he was referring to *Sweeney Agonistes* or *Choruses from "The Rock"*¹¹, it seems much more likely that "*Prufrock*" and *The Waste Land* are the works which are uppermost in his mind. "*Let us go then, you and I*", begins the former, as if the "I" were addressing a speechless listener. It is only as we read on that the realization dawns that these are more probably the first words of a dialogue between Prufrock's Ego and Id. And while, by the poet's own admission "Tiresias is the most important *personage* in the poem, uniting all the rest" (Eliot, 1975, p. 78. Emphasis mine) and the careful choice of the word *personage* might indicate a nod in the direction of *dramatis persona(e)*, we remember two things. First, there is Eliot's approval of the word *personae* as a label to describe Browning's dramatic monologue narrators; second, there is more than a slight hint that the blind, dual-sexed Theban prophet *unites* all the other voices in the poem, male and female and that as a *conduit* for them, he actually assumes the role of the listener who yet occasionally speaks out in his own voice "*And I Tiresias have foreshadowed all*" (Eliot, 1975, p. 69. l. 242) as opposed to the mute listener of the dramatic monologue through whom the *personae* (multiple) communicate with the world, with the readership.

They sometimes express themselves dramatically, it is true. Actual quotes from Shakespeare, Webster and Kyd are scattered throughout *TWL*, and in "*Prufrock*" one part of the character addresses the other with words that seem to be a pastiche of *Hamlet* and actually do come from a work of that name, but written by Jules Laforgue (1887) in French prose, translated and broken up into lines by the speaker. And just like Laforgue, Eliot seems to be reshaping *Hamlet* to fit the persona of an individual who acts just like himself, down to an obsession with formal headwear and premature balding. Following Kermode, let us call a spade a spade: is this not as much

¹¹ Of course, he goes on to dedicate a paragraph or two to the latter.

the deft lyric, personal reference as the theoretical shovel of the Objective Correlative rearing its somewhat ugly handle?

And the more one reads Eliot, particularly the two poems in question, the more one realizes how useless it is to ignore the presence of autobiographical references which are actually documentable. The whole “Hyacinth Garden” passage (*TWL*: ll. 35-41) is paraphrased from a description of a visit to the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris with Jean Verdenal in 1911; certain lines in *TWL* are lifted practically verbatim from conversations—arguments with Vivienne (See Crawford, 2015, pp. 156, 374). It seems ludicrous to dismiss the (granted, rarely unmediated) presence of such lines in Eliot’s work. Surely Pound’s wholesale “cutting and pasting” of extracts from personal letters and documents into *The Cantos* had shown him that one would hardly create a collage without some form of citation of this type, that one could not bypass the “creative germ” in its rawest form completely. If I myself bypass discussion of these examples, so relatively loosely cited, it is only because the main aim is to centre on one specific example from “The Journey of the Magi” itself. We have now dug down to the root of the matter: namely that, in creating the first in the *Ariel Poems* sequence, Eliot set out to fuse those two of the three poetic voices for which he affected the most disdain—the first and second. Think of it as a daring experiment: the lyric medium by which the poet might communicate half-formed private thoughts (perhaps better, the sense of a half-formed belief) to the readership is disguised as a dramatic monologue, creating the mirage of that selfsame poet attempting to operate from within the head and heart of a Magus. In this case, however, the sense of the author playing a role, the sense of division between himself and his character, is obliterated. Not that this manoeuvre had gone unsignposted: if Eliot was patently not Andrewes in the five line “epigraph” which, in turn, was plainly no epigraph at all, then how could he really be the Magus in what followed on from it? Despite the illusion of three speaking voices, it is really Eliot who is addressing us throughout.

Q: When Is a Dramatic Monologue Not a Dramatic Monologue?...

The opening five lines of the poem are *almost* neither fish nor flesh. They are not an epigraph because the *peritext* is physically incorporated into the text itself. On the other hand they do not serve as a species of overture, since their tone of glad acceptance of a miraculous birth is called into question by that of the rest of the poem; one could say that *they might as well be* an epigraph since, at very least, they reveal the poet’s source. Despite the change of third to first person from the *hypotext*, they echo Andrewes’ tone in the specific passage of the 1662 sermon from which they are taken, yet while the Archbishop will use the foul weather to emphasize *his* Magi’s determined and unflinching belief, “Journey” seeks to undermine the latter.

Yet they do accomplish one major function, a function that is patently Eliotesque. They serve as the *subjective* correlative to feelings which are most certainly not those of Andrewes, but which the narrator might wish actually *were*; “...for all that they came, and came *quickly*”. This is to say that, at first glance and torn from their original context, even the Archbishop’s description of the weather seems destined to create the “polar” opposite of “happy campers” under the star (singular)! What Eliot has done is to use the winter-tide as a pathetic fallacy highlighting a spiritual discomfort that Andrewes’ Magi *may* never experienced either during the trek *or, presumably, after it*.

The last four words of the previous paragraph are italicized for a very good reason: while Andrewes writes of the journey alone, Eliot focuses upon its aftermath. What we have forgotten to take into consideration is the

passage of time—the time that has elapsed between the Magus’ journey and the dictation of this memorandum. All those years ago there was hope—the promise of a Saviour. Doubtless the journey was at least *undertaken* gladly, yet memory is deceptive, almost certainly coloured by present experience. Did a sensation of hardships suffered rather than accepted, of dalliances with sherbet girls missed more than repented, of potential folly riding roughshod over hope for the future willingly embraced emerge *over* time or were these feelings really experienced on say, just for example, December of the last year BC? Difficult to tell, when a man embittered by being granted no sense of vindication or even closure after—what?—thirty-two years of fruitless waiting is treating hindsight as a burden, not a blessing. He is too disappointed to call even finding the stable and its occupants more than “satisfactory” and even qualifies that assessment—“it was (*you may say*) satisfactory”. It was then, it isn’t now. And is it not understandable that Andrewes, a millennium and a half later, having received proof that at least satisfied himself of Christ’s Resurrection, would wish to focus rather upon the pilgrimage-as-leap of blind faith instead of the prolonged, numbing aftershock of “post-partum”, post-epiphanic depression? After all, time breeds lethargy as well as the hope or even despair of eternal bliss. What Andrewes is attempting to do with all this talk of urgency is to shock his congregation out of complacency or even lapsed faith; to goad it with unflattering comparisons with Christ’s first gentile converts;

With them, it was but *Vidimus. Venimus*. [We saw. We came] With us, it would have been but *Veniemus* [We will come] at most. Our fashion is, to see and see againe, before we stirre a foot: Specially, if it be to the worship of *Christ*. Come such a Journey, at such a time? No: but fairly have put it off to the Spring of the yeare, till the dayes longer, and the waies fairer, and the weather warmer; till better travelling to *Christ*. Our *Epiphanie* would (sure) have fallen in *Easter-weeke* at the soonest. (Story, 1967, p. 110. Insertions mine)

Is it not straight common sense to remind a flock with a potential for straying of faith which remains strong under duress and uncertainty rather than of human frailty, even if he has to tell little white lies to do it? He never even apologizes for his own knowingly undue promptness in delivering an Epiphany sermon five days early; “This Text may seeme to come a little too soone, before the time, and should have staid till the day, it was spoken on, rather than on this day.” He quickly justifies himself by quoting from Hebrews 1:6, however—“For when He brought His onely begotten Sonne into the World, He gave in charge, Let all the Angels of God worship Him: And when the Angells to do it, no time more proper for Us to do it, as then.” (Story, 1967, p. 100). Better early than late or never, then, and he has set the congregation up for the jokes on time—and at their expense—which will follow. It matters little about quibbling with the historians over dates: no time like the present for worshipping Christ at any point in His existence. So dating, like the questions of whether Christ was born on a Christmas Day that was essentially English, white and Stuart or whether one should question the veracity of representations in which Epiphanic Wise Men shared a visit to the stable with shepherds on Christmas Eventide, were irrelevant.

Every ex-pupil remembers perhaps the first question asked by a history master. “An archaeologist claims to have found a coin inscribed 1 B.C. How do we know that he was presenting falsified evidence?” Simply because the concept of dating time Before and After Christ was not exactly an overnight phenomenon, is the answer. The same applies to the attempt, on the part of the Church Fathers, to christianize the pagan Saturnalia by deciding that not only the date of birth of the Saviour should occur within it, but also that such holy days as that of the Annunciation and Epiphany should also contribute to the disappearance of Carnival and the Feast of Fools. Biblical

historians now place the birth in March. In any case, one would be hard put to it to find snow to clear in Judaea on December 24th—or on January 6th, for that matter, on which the modern Armenian church still celebrates Christ's birth, abiding by the custom of Christians in Egypt and Asia Minor in the fourth and fifth centuries C.E.

Easter-weeke, it should be remembered, may begin as early as March 22nd, and Andrewes was most certainly aware that Clement of Alexandria, writing in 200 A.D., together with other early Christian theologians, had proposed March 25th as well as April 20th/21st as dates for the Nativity, their idea being to make the (V)irgin birth coincide with the date given by St. John (the 14th of Nisan) and calculated by Tertulian as March 25th on the Roman (solar) calendar. The same date was also later recognized as the Feast of the Annunciation, meaning that over the centuries Christian writers made every effort to ensure that Christ's crucifixion was seen to occur on the same day as his conception and/or birth. Ironically enough, the most likely period for shepherds to be watching their flocks in the open air would be after the middle of March, since the 14th of Nisan is the day of celebration of the Passover, the feast of the sacrificial (L)lamb. Small wonder, then, that Andrewes only mentions the shepherds once—to compare the shortness of their trip to Bethlehem (and that of lazy 17th century Christians to the nearest church) with the trek of the Magi (Story, 1967, pp. 109-110). Even a scholar as well-informed as himself may have thought that December in Judaea would have been too cold for overnight pasturage.¹²

In point of fact, however, he is as canny when it comes to dealing with weather conditions in the Holy Land as he is with dating. Few have commented on the artfulness with which he disguises the *precise* nature of arduous of a passage which may well have taken in the Syrian desert, Aleppo and Palmyra before reaching Damascus as a slog through the winter weather from, say, Norfolk to London (knowing full well that his congregation would have no trouble imagining an English landscape with so few proper highroads and no snowploughs!). While stressing that the ways are deep, he does not say why; is he referring to snow, sand or crevasses? If Andrewes is unsure about the nature of the geography (as seems likely, given that the route mapped out above is only one of the multiplicity suggested, depending upon the point(s) of origin of the travellers, whether they set off from the same spot or went their ways singly to the rendezvous, etcetera) he uses this type of ambiguity to cover his own tracks. He even inserts a biblio-geographic teaser for the most important member of the congregation—King James himself, who took great pleasure in such things. The reference to close contact with “[T]he Black Tents of Kedar¹³, Nation of Theeves and Cut-throates” (109) may well have been intended to keep the King hunting through his new Bible and the source language texts to double-check that the best known reference to the black goatskin tents in *Song of Solomon* (as the loved one describes herself) implies that their colour is beautiful—“*I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar*” (1:5).

All in all, there are traces of knowing, metaphysical wit in Andrewes' sermon which are conspicuous by their absence in Eliot's poem. As far as weather and time is concerned, rather than covering his tracks and miscalculations in smiling ambiguity, he simply and deliberately gets it all wrong. In a letter to him dated October 12th 1927, Horace M. Kallen commented on his description of the penultimate stage of the odyssey “Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley/Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation”.

¹² Though this, of course, is a miscalculation. The information on the dating of Christmas and Epiphany has been gathered from a number of sources, some of it by word of mouth from colleagues. I have also consulted Wikipedia and S. K. Roll's *Towards the Origins of Christmas* (1995) however.

¹³ Now spelt Qedar, area of the Transjordan and southern Syria.

There is no way that men travelling with horse and camel can pass from snowline to vegetation over-night and reach Bethlehem. That sink lies in the arid Judean hills, which stick up sharp and nude all around. They slope eastward to the waste lands of the Dead Sea, south to the Desert. There is no snow nearer than Hermon, to the north, several camel-journeys away. (Ricks & McCue, 2015, p. 101)

With this criticism in mind, and writing to Alan Porter on December 13th of the same year, Eliot has this to say;

... I felt a certain liberty to treat it [the story of the Magi] *according to my fantasy of realism*. (Both extracts Ricks & McCue, 2015, p. 760. Insertion and italics mine)

In other words, Eliot admits that he is doing exactly what he accused Browning of. The Magus is the narrator, and he is being mimicked in the poet's voice (not very convincingly at that). The question, however, is, how far to trust Eliot when he is talking about his own poetry. We have already noted a propensity for mixing the dramatic monologue with the unmediated lyric voice, writing through a persona while actually talking for or to himself. Is this what he is doing here?

In accordance with the rules of the dramatic monologue form, Eliot's Magus has an audience—an audience of one. Everything he says or has read (with intentional anachronistic irony he is made to quote from a 17th century text) is being dictated to a scribe. "...[B]ut set down/This, set down/This," run lines 33-35, enjambment and repetition emphasizing the both the firmness with which he records his own present doubts yet also his guilt at so doing; "were we led all that way for/Birth or death?" And Eliot has the nerve to imply in "The Three Voices" that Browning was a lesser poet? From where else would an *adapter* (as opposed to creator) have taken the basic narrative framework for, not to mention a deal of the substance of, "his own poem" if not "An Epistle Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician"? It is indeed true that his Magus dictates a memoir/memorandum to a listener while the doctor and would-be chemist writes a letter for a reader, but the basic intent is the same. When a poet realizes that the theme of a monologue renders any pretence of direct expression dramatically clumsy or unbelievable without some form of verbal interjection from the listener, the written document's the thing. Every poet from Swinburne to William Carlos Williams (from lost discourse of a pagan apologist to a spiteful note taped to a fridge)¹⁴ has resorted to this alternative to direct speech. For those unfamiliar with what may well be Browning's masterpiece, Karshish, a fictional precursor of Galen living around a century before Marcus Aurelius court physician, has been trekking through Syria, Palestine and Judaea on the hunt for herbal remedies for common ailments. In a letter to his equally fictitious patron and teacher Abib he recounts a meeting with Lazarus in Bethany a year or two before Titus' sack of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Lazarus, of course, has recounted how Jesus raised him from the dead just before his own crucifixion nearly forty years before, and Karshish's reaction is, unsurprisingly, ambiguous. Unwilling to make a fool of himself before the senior physician he hedges around a description and analysis of the meeting for approximately a third of the letter, and when he finally does mention it sounds at one and the same time dismissive and confused;

And first—the man's own firm conviction rests
That he was dead (in fact they buried him)
—That he was dead and then returned to life
By a Nazarene physician of his tribe... (Loucks & Stauffer, 2007, p. 176)

¹⁴ In, respectively, "Hymn to Proserpine (After the Proclamation in Rome of the Christian Faith)" and "This is Just to Say".

Little by little, however—doubtless upon reflection that his Syrian messenger is unreliable and that it is highly unlikely that Abib will ever receive the letter—he becomes bold enough to rather more than imply that he wishes Lazarus' claims were true. In the postscript real enthusiasm and desire tumble onto the page: desire that the Almighty might, after all, have a humane heart, transferred by Him to His creation;

The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?
So, the All-Great were the All-Loving too—
So, through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying “O heart Imade, a heart beats here!” (Loucks & Stauffer, 2007, p. 180)

All Eliot had to do with this material was to reverse the process of scepticism giving way to enthusiasm and the Magus would become a kind of inverted Karshish, a semi-lapsed believer whose initial flush of joy and faith had turned to a struggle to keep that faith intact. The journey—from Syria to Judaea via Jericho—was already in place. It is certainly true to say that Browning's itinerant physician is nowhere near as fully confirmed in the faith as Andrewes with his projection of his convictions onto the biblical Magi, but that also suited Eliot's conception of them. And, despite all the Modernist poet's qualms about the desirability or even possibility of coherent lyrical first person confessional, here was an ideal opportunity for embedding his very real fears and doubts about committing himself to Anglo-Catholicism into his own rewriting of the Archbishop's personal interpretation of the Nativity story.

As I demonstrated in a previous paper on Tennyson's “Boädicea”,¹⁵ the art of the Dramatic Monologue involves a good deal more than simple mimicry of an historical figure or a fictional character who might well have lived in the historical past. When Eliot comments all too flippantly that the effectiveness of this mimicry, its liminal existence between the character's past and the reader's present, turns upon “the incompleteness of the illusion” (Eliot, 1957, p. 41) he knows very well indeed that he is trivializing the principle *raison d'être* of the recreated *persona*—that is his or her connection with important events of the author's own time. This being the case, the revolt of the Iceni becomes a metaphor for the Indian Mutiny, Boädicea's bloodlust a comment upon how the worm of a subject yet proud nation “turns” into a deadly serpent.

Browning's poem, originally entitled “Karshook (Ben Karshook's Wisdom)” was written in 1854, thirty-five years before its eventual publication with the poet's complete literary works in 1889¹⁶. In point of fact both dates are extremely suggestive: the early 1840s and 1850s witnessed a substantial rise in the number of adherents to Nonconformist evangelical creeds—Baptists, Unitarians, and the hard line Presbyterianism of any number of such figures as Tennyson's aunt Mary Bourne, whose extremism turned him against all forms of so-called “Low Church” religion for life.¹⁷ The proliferation of Methodist chapels in the first part of the 19th century created almost as much unease amongst Anglican conservatives as the creation of the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement in the 1830s, even if the taint of Papistry ensured that the latter received wider and more hysterical press coverage. On the other side of the coin, while the Chartists certainly did not reject religion

¹⁵ See Robert K. Shepherd 2016, pp. 121-134.

¹⁶ That is to say, it was earmarked for inclusion in the 1855 two-volume edition of *Men and Women* but was withheld until the 1888-9 sixteen volume edition of *Poetical Works* in which it was finally incorporated into Browning's most famous and popular original collection. The title was changed in 1872. See Sutherland Orr, 2013: pages unnumbered, first paragraph of Chapter 12.

¹⁷ See Batchelor, 2012, pp. 11-12.

outright and “Christian Chartism” actually became something of a creed in the 1840s, the Owenites quite unequivocally embraced atheism as well as radical social reform, and at least in the late 1820s and first part of the 1830s the two organizations were associated, often in fact and nearly always in the conservative public mind. Potential frictions were exacerbated by the growing influence of science¹⁸, an inheritance from the Age of Reason against which Wesley himself was a species of bulwark, and Darwin’s *The Origin of the Species* (published 1859) had its theological interpretation of natural selection turned into a potential anti-ecclesiastical weapon after the biologist John Huxley trounced the Bishop of Oxford with a few choice words about the timidity of superstitious ignorance in the face of proven scientific fact in the 1860 Oxford Debate on Evolution. In fact a raging storm of ecclesiastical thunder and scientific (en)light(e)ning blazed on into the next century and beyond, as Humorism gave way to phrenology, mesmerism and psychology, Newton’s faith to Einstein’s “problematic God”.

Ironically enough and *pace* Eliot, of the two poets Browning had all the reasons in the world to keep his own voice out of the poem. It was written in English-granted. It was prolix and circumlocutory in way that was typical of Browning, yet at one and the same time amounted to an ideal stylistic fit for a particularly excitable character, one who talked all the more the less sure he was of what he actually meant. As indicated in the last paragraph, moreover, the issues at stake were common knowledge to readers in the mid nineteenth century: there was absolutely no need for the poet to suggest some form of personal agenda in this of all works. In short, here is one example of a Browning monologue in which the “historical” character-as-mask fits the worries and speculations of the mid nineteenth century so perfectly that questions of acting and self-revelation become irrelevant. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who had a particular affection for the poem, died two years before her husband opted to make it part and parcel of his most famous collection. Sense of her loss may have influenced his decision but, frankly, who knows or-excluding the biographer-cares? With or without quotation marks, “Karshish” speaks perfectly well for him/itself.

Yet oh that we might say the same of “The Journey of the Magi”. Eliot’s claim that he “wrote it in three quarters of an hour after church time and before lunch one Sunday morning, with the assistance of half a bottle of Booth’s gin” (Eliot to Conrad Aiken, 13/9/1927, quoted in Ricks & McCue, 2015, p. 760) does not ring entirely false. While my personal opinion is that he probably had the narrative shifts developing out of the Andrewes extract in his head long before he broke the seal and twisted the top off the bottle, it may well have taken a little Dutch courage for him to work in the confessional/genotextual element, that part of the poem that, by his own admission, he would normally tell to go away, find a place for itself in a book and not bother him anymore; perhaps he might not even reach that stage if he had not even found “the least wrong words” (Eliot, 1953, p. 42) to express that which one might call “the creative yet not wholly created” germ of an idea. In order to emphasize just how “increate” said idea was, he attempted to trace it back to its origins—geographical if not psychological/spiritual—in the 1933 essay “The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism”. The context here is automatic writing—“a present from a friendly or impertinent demon” scribbled down or indelibly committed to memory in a state of “ill health, debility or anaemia” and accompanied by “the sudden burden of anxiety and fear” (Kermode, 1975, p. 89). It sounds very much as though one of the “presents” he described was delivered on

¹⁸ The term “scientist” was actually coined in 1834, indicating that its transformation from the status of an “amateur’s hobby” to a fully-fledged profession had actually begun, however tentatively; see E. J. Evans, 2013. I am indebted to Evans for the facts and dates in this paragraph.

the way to or from the many health cures he undertook during his time with Vivien, probably at Lausanne under the care of Dr. Roger Vittoz in late 1921 in this case;

Why, for all of us, out of all that we have heard, seen, felt in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others? ... six ruffians seen through an open window playing cards at night at a small French railway junction where there was a water-mill: such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer. (Kermode, 1975, p. 91)

This seed-germ of a semi-coherent idea did not fall onto fruitful ground until Eliot watered the plot with gin at around the time of his 1927 “conversion. It is all too pathetically human to think of a “spiritual” epiphany occurring at this moment. The Magi certainly did not travel in a first class railway carriage; not even the Stations of the Cross had as yet been fixed in the collective consciousness. It is true that, according to Örjan Wikander¹⁹ a species of water—powered fulling mill was installed by the Roman settlers at Antioch in 73/4 C.E., though the existence of a similar device in the Bethlehem hills the best part of a century before seems a little farfetched. Nevertheless, though the station was erased from the Magus’ memory, all the other components of Eliot’s visionary moment were retained pretty much intact within it;

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... (Ricks & McCue, 2015, p. 101)

Despite his disappointment the Magus has been taking everything down for future reference, on the off-chance that everything he sees may prove to be of symbolic religious significance. With the three crosses he has scored, and the same may be said of the anticipation of the Pharisees financial arrangements with Judas and the Roman soldiers dicing for Christ’s rainment (*Matthew* 26:15; *Matthew* 27:35). The empty wineskins anticipate Christ’s teachings on the need for spiritual renewal in *Matthew* 9:17. All these equivalences have been noted again and again by commentators, and the attempts to equate the white horse with that of *Revelation* 19:11-14 have actually led to quite a number of critical tumbles at the antepenultimate fence as commentators fail to explain why the steed bearing the Word of God should age and turn tail on the Day of Judgement. The water-mill, the aged nag, are elements which Eliot hoped *might* assume spiritual-religious significance. Just like the Magi he is recording potential signs of salvation, not cross-checking with the Bible. That the six gamblers resonate sufficiently for him to make a scriptural connection is enough; given time, the galloping animal might also make inspirational horse-sense.

Any attempt to classify the poem as a dramatic monologue pure and simple is thus doomed to failure. Granted, for at least three quarters of the time it looks like one, so perhaps the mistake is almost excusable. Yet danger signs to the effect that this is a poem which defies such facile generic pigeonholing are not hard to find. The quotation

¹⁹ See Wikander 2000, p. 400: *Handbook of Ancient Water Technology*, Technology and Change in History, Vol. 2, Leiden: Brill, 2000, pp. ix-xi, 371-410, 607-630, 649-660, 703-741.

marks/italics which highlight Andrewes' liminal position as a speaker but not a narrator are the first warning signs. How would any dramatic monologue have not one, but two narrators, the second—as becomes obvious after a little background reading—ideologically at odds with the first? And if the first five lines are obviously a slightly doctored excerpt from a hypotext and practically all the others echo the writings of everyone from Rudyard Kipling (the descent into the “temperate valley” recalls that of Carnehan and Dravot into Kafiristan in *The Man Who Would Be King*) and Joseph Conrad to the Old Testament prophets and New Testament Evangelists, many of whom Andrewes himself had translated into English as part of the team brought together by James 1, then the point should be obvious to all but the most careless of readers, whose numbers are yet legion. One cannot discount the notion of a dramatic monologue collage centring on a pastiche of Robert Browning, but what we would then be dealing with is an experimental new form of dramatic monologue at very least. Eliot would have been practically inviting commentators to pay more attention to the form than the context, and given the importance of the subject matter to himself as the third and most important of the narrators, that would have been the last thing he wanted.

Most importantly, however (and returning to the penultimate paragraph) what Eliot is really doing here is breaking the cardinal rule of the dramatic monologue form. He faulted a genre he was so fond of (else why, *pace* himself, did he base the greater part of his pre-and immediately post-conversion output on variations upon it?) because it was based on authorial sleight-of-hand. *Journey*, in much the same way as the other poems in the *Ariel* sequence, takes up the gauntlet that he was to throw down officially before Browning in “The Three Voices”. The author plays at being the character-as-narrator but can never do so with any real degree of verisimilitude. Even in the most convincing attempts there is the language barrier set up between the English reader of a supposedly foreign language text and suspension of disbelief. Eliot's solution was simple: insert a piece of his own most subjective writing slap-bang into the middle of the text and, if that was not obvious enough, write an essay that showed the readership that this was precisely what he had done. The result represented not the donning of an ultimately unconvincing mask, but a gradual slippage of the same, revealing the real doubts of a real author beneath. Such a manoeuvre had been signposted in the implied misinterpretation of Andrewes of the first verse paragraph and its revelation of what he-the author-imagined the “real life” Magus' feelings to have been. The emphasis would be placed, of course, on the feelings of the author who created the character's voice. By inserting a thirty-year gap between the “Magus” narration and the journey upon which *Andrewes'* conception of his feelings was based, by inserting the passage of time and attendant growth of doubt into the picture, Eliot was expressing more his own doubts and those of his generation than the heart-searchings of a mytho-historical figure in (very approximately) 32 C.E.. Andrewes' aim was to convince a congregation to dispel doubt, Eliot's to voice it. To do so he made use of the same figure, even aimed his writing at a similarly hesitant and lapsed audience. In 1927, however, Eliot was his own audience.

Conclusion: ...A: When It's Really a Lyric

There is a good reason for not blessing this section with a real number—(4)—of its own—namely that we have not answered an all important question implied throughout the paper. If we take Eliot's definition of the three poetical voices as a template and state that *Journey* is not a dramatic monologue, then may we use either of the remaining two genres to classify it? “Yes”, is the ultimate answer, “as long as you take his definition of lyric with the aforementioned pinch of salt.”

Let us first state the perhaps not so obvious: when it comes down to it, this is not poetical drama, though it is not the absence of other speaking characters that makes this statement true. On the contrary, what we have come to realize is that there are actually three; Andrewes speaking for himself in the epigraph, the Magus apparently speaking for himself in the main body of the poem and Eliot gradually emerging to share the Magus' doubts towards the end. On the other hand, were it not for the italics of the opening lines and the evidence of his own identification with the character he has created, we might read the trio of voices as a single mournful chorus. Andrewes' evocation of joy under hardship is nullified by Eliot's recontextualization of it to fit the voice of unease generated by overmuch hindsight and attendant fears for the future. The unease is generated by Eliot's own fear that that he may have committed himself to a future which brings only suffering and unrewarded disaster. The Magi lack a sign which, at best, will bring a confirmation of spiritual rebirth by crucifixion and resurrection out of the nativity that replaced their old "passions" with suffering pure and simple; at worst it will subject them to a death agony as substitution for Mary's agonizing birth pangs;

... this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
I should be glad of another death.

That last low case—as opposed to capital—"d" might be attributed to a scribal slip, but because Eliot *is* the scribe as well as the Magus and decontextualized Andrewes, we are bound to accept a personal death wish as the first interpretation and Christ's long overdue Passion as only the second. And if Eliot's state of mind when writing the poem is indicated by his liquid lunch, one is inclined to doubt that he felt much better than the *persona* with whom he was identifying himself. At very least the Magus had seen the Nativity, once believed in an omen as promise. Eliot had not even had that cold comfort. It was bad enough that 1927 saw the first Nuremberg rally, the growth of fascism in Austria and Benito Mussolini's consolidation of power in Italy; Eliot had so many personal and spiritual problems of his own that, unlike Browning, he had no need to act out the potential socio-religious neuroses of the world vicariously. And it is this overwhelming sense of potential doom that stops *Journey* from being a drama *in potentia*. One might even say that centralizing his personal struggles with belief was a foreshadowing of his first work written specifically for the stage. In *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) Thomas à Becket dominated the stage and Eliot dominated Becket, just as he comes to dominate Andrewes' Magus. Art, to Eliot, was still very much a one-man show, and he was the star, however much he attempted to hide a home truth which had always frustrated him as a (stage) artist.

In his quite excellent short study *The Idea of Lyric* (1982) W. R. Johnson commits what I believe to be a technical error, but shows that sidestepping technicalities is often a wise move. On the first page he associates Eliot's second voice with didactic poetry rather than the dramatic monologue and goes on to relate the poems we have been discussing with the lyric voice. While I cannot concur with the first point *when the context is "The Three Voices" alone*, I believe that he is perfectly justified in terming such works as *The Waste Land*, *Prufrock* and the bulk of *Ariel Poems* as examples of the lyric monologue. This does not imply that the works in question are narrowly monological in the Bakhtinian sense—far from it. Rather, they portray the fragmented psyche at continual war with itself—hope struggling with crushing despair, the miserable present with the past that it has demonized, the desire for human love and contact with helpless solipsism;

[Lyric monologue] can, in the most natural way (a person speaking to himself) imagine and attempt to order the most intense and the most discordant experiences without the need to communicate them; in the mode of lyric monologue the anguished private world, carefully hidden in and structured by a private, intricate, ironic art, is allowed its pure, full voice. (Johnson, 1984, p. 174)

Needless to say, I am at odds with the idea that the communication of such experiences was not a priority for Eliot. While I believe that he found such communication hard and even foreign to his nature, I would also insist that clarity of even the most complex idea was what he strove for and that many of the poems to which he bid a less than fond farewell yet *did*, thankfully, publish bear witness to this. And if he had not wished to share such thoughts with others, then why did he take such pains to interweave this species of private lyricism into a framework—the dramatic monologue—in such way as to adopt the voice of a communicator, that second voice, the one which a poet uses when “addressing an audience”? In Eliot’s best work—and “The Journey of the Magi” falls into that category: the dramatic monologue not only intertwines with lyric—it becomes it.

References

- Allen, G. (2003). *Intertextuality*. London: Routledge.
- Anonymous. (No editor cited). Christmas. Retrieved from <https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas>
- Batchelor, J. (2012). *Tennyson: to Strive, to Seek, to Find*. New York: Vintage.
- Benn, G. (1954). *Probleme der lyrik*. Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag. Retrieved from [http://nms.kcl.ac.uk/andreas.recknagel/BennProblemeDerLyrik/Benn,%20Gottfried%20-%20Probleme%20der%20Lyrik%20\(2010\).pdf](http://nms.kcl.ac.uk/andreas.recknagel/BennProblemeDerLyrik/Benn,%20Gottfried%20-%20Probleme%20der%20Lyrik%20(2010).pdf)
- Crawford, R. (2015) *Young Eliot: From St. Louis to The Waste Land*. London: MacMillan.
- Eliot, T. S. (1954). The three voices of poetry. *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 1954 Issue. Retrieved from <http://www.unz.org/Pub/AtlanticMonthly-1954apr>
- Eliot, T. S. (1999). *Selected essays*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Evans, E. J. (2013). *The shaping of modern Britain: Identity, industry and empire 1780-1914*. London: Routledge.
- Johnson, W. R. (1982). *The idea of lyric: Lyric modes in ancient and modern poetry*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kermode, F. (Ed.). (1975). *Selected prose of T. S. Eliot*. London: Faber & Faber.
- KJV (King James Version) Reference Bible*. (No editor cited). (1994). Michigan. The Zondervan Corporation.
- Laforgue, J., & Bene, C. (2012). *Hamlet et Suite*. Paris: Éditions Vagabonde.
- Loucks, J. F., & Stauffer, A. M. (2007). *Robert Browning’s poetry*. New York: Norton.
- Ricks, C., & McCue, J. (Eds.). (2015). *The poems of T. S. Eliot volume 1: Collected and uncollected poems*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Roll, S. K. (1995). *Towards the origins of Christmas*. G. A. Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House.
- Shepherd, R. K. (1990). Eliot and Lancelot Andrewes. A question of punctuation and belief. *Parole: Revista de Creación Literaria y Filología*, 3, 151-153. Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, España: Servicio de Publicaciones.
- Shepherd, R. K. (2016). How the red ring became the bronze horse and the horse became the ring. *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 6(2), 121-134.
- Story, G. M. (Ed.). (1967). *Lancelot Andrewes: Sermons*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Sutherland Orr, A. (1903). *Life and letters of Robert Browning*. Retrieved from <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/655/655-h/655-h.htm>
- Wikander, Ö. (2000). *Handbook of ancient water technology*. Lieden: Brill.