

## A. David Moody: On "The Journey of the Magi"

The first paragraph presents the detail of the journey in a manner which arrives at no vision of experience. The present participles and the paratactic syntax, presenting one thing after another in a simple narrative, hold us to the banalities of romantic travellers. The voice recounting them is tired as if repeating the too well known. Only at the beginning and the end of the paragraph is there something to catch the attention of the modern reader, so far as he knows what the Magi did not know. Their 'cold coming' might suggest the cold coming Christ himself had, as the carols now tell it. Again, 'That this was all folly' becomes a commonplace Christian paradox when we know that they were seeking Christ. We are under some pressure to supply the meaning they missed.

In the rest of the poem that pressure increases. Are the images of the middle paragraph really charged with mysterious significance, some 'Symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer'? They do have a dream-like clarity. At the same time they seem to offer themselves rather readily for 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 baffled by the apparent contradictions of Birth and Death, and is left simple wanting to die.

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### **Publication Status:**

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### **Criticism Target:**

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### **Author:**

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