

T. S. ELIOT

# *Journey of the Magi*

*'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,*

T. S. ELIOT

*Journey of the Magi*  
*(cont.)*

*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.*

# ROBERT FROST

## *The road not taken*

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

ADRIENNE RICH

*Diving into the wreck*

First having read the book of myths,  
and loaded the camera,  
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,  
I put on  
the body-armor of black rubber  
the absurd flippers

the grave and awkward mask.

I am having to do this  
not like Cousteau with his  
assiduous team  
aboard the sun-flooded schooner  
but here alone.

There is a ladder.

The ladder is always there  
hanging innocently  
close to the side of the schooner.

We know what it is for,  
we who have used it.

Otherwise  
it is a piece of maritime floss  
some sundry equipment.

ADRIENNE RICH

*Diving into the wreck  
(cont.)*

I go down.

Rung after rung and still  
the oxygen immerses me  
the blue light  
the clear atoms  
of our human air.

I go down.

My flippers cripple me,  
I crawl like an insect down the ladder  
and there is no one  
to tell me when the ocean  
will begin.

First the air is blue and then  
it is bluer and then green and then  
black I am blacking out and yet  
my mask is powerful  
it pumps my blood with power  
the sea is another story  
the sea is not a question of power  
I have to learn alone  
to turn my body without force  
in the deep element.

ADRIENNE RICH

*Diving into the wreck  
(cont.)*

And now: it is easy to forget  
what I came for  
among so many who have always  
lived here  
swaying their crenellated fans  
between the reefs  
and besides  
you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck.  
The words are purposes.  
The words are maps.  
I came to see the damage that was done  
and the treasures that prevail.  
I stroke the beam of my lamp  
slowly along the flank  
of something more permanent  
than fish or weed

the thing I came for:  
the wreck and not the story of the wreck  
the thing itself and not the myth  
the drowned face always staring  
toward the sun

ADRIENNE RICH

*Diving into the wreck  
(cont.)*

the evidence of damage  
worn by salt and away into this threadbare beauty  
the ribs of the disaster  
curving their assertion  
among the tentative haunters.

This is the place.

And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair  
streams black, the merman in his armored body.

We circle silently  
about the wreck  
we dive into the hold.

I am she: I am he  
whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes  
whose breasts still bear the stress  
whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies  
obscurely inside barrels  
half-wedged and left to rot  
we are the half-destroyed instruments  
that once held to a course  
the water-eaten log  
the fouled compass

ADRIENNE RICH

*Diving into the wreck  
(cont.)*

We are, I am, you are  
by cowardice or courage  
the one who find our way  
back to this scene  
carrying a knife, a camera  
a book of myths  
in which  
our names do not appear.



# JOHN McCULLOUGH

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At 19, men seemed like mountains, lethal  
but hard to miss. I started with books,

slate-thin volumes by Wilde and Whitman  
that I ambushed with a gang of highlighters,

each topic spelled out on the first page  
like a warning: POWER, ARTIFICE, DESIRE.

I planted thickets of exclamation marks,  
lichened margins with stars, scrawled questions.

I was training myself, I thought, establishing  
the footholds of comprehensible terrain.

Pure bollocks. You cannot learn the contours  
of anything you log to grip and shape

yourself against till your body's been thumbbed  
and underlined. Till you fluoresce.

BRIAN BILSTON

*The power of a homophone*

“Sometimes the power  
of a homophone  
comes out of nowhere  
and hits you,  
like being struck  
by a ten ton truck”,  
articulated Laurie.