

# Marina

T.S. Eliot

*Quis hic locus, quae regio, quae mundi plaga?*

What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands  
What water lapping the bow  
And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog  
What images return  
O my daughter.

Those who sharpen the tooth of the dog, meaning  
Death  
Those who glitter with the glory of the hummingbird, meaning  
Death  
Those who sit in the sty of contentment, meaning  
Death  
Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals, meaning  
Death

Are become insubstantial, reduced by a wind,  
A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog  
By this grace dissolved in place

What is this face, less clear and clearer  
The pulse in the arm, less strong and stronger—  
Given or lent? more distant than stars and nearer than the eye  
Whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet  
Under sleep, where all the waters meet.

Bowsprit cracked with ice and paint cracked with heat.  
I made this, I have forgotten  
And remember.  
The rigging weak and the canvas rotten  
Between one June and another September.  
Made this unknowing, half conscious, unknown, my own.  
The garboard strake leaks, the seams need caulking.  
This form, this face, this life  
Living to live in a world of time beyond me; let me  
Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken,  
The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships.

What seas what shores what granite islands towards my timbers  
And woodthrush calling through the fog  
My daughter.

## Context

T.S. Eliot's poem "Marina" belongs to the group of poems which have been designated as "The Ariel Poems", composed during 1927 and 1930. After his conversion to Anglicanism in 1927, Eliot began to write a new kind of poetry which "seems to represent a withdrawal from the outer world and an exploration of the inner life under the guidance of Christianity." Drawing on all the small-boat sailing Eliot had done off the New England coast in his youth, the poem was written at a difficult time when the poet was coming to terms with his own childlessness.



The poem explores the theme of paternity by focusing on the rediscovery of the lost daughter of William Shakespeare's character of Pericles. Marina is the name of the daughter of Pericles who has not seen her right from her birth as he was running away from his enemy, facing miseries and threats on land and sea. It is in Act V of Shakespeare's play, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* that Pericles finds out that the dancer and singer performing before him is none else but his daughter. The dancing girl reminds him of his wife Thaisa; he talks to the girl, and is overjoyed to find that Marina is his daughter and her mother had died while giving birth to her.

The **epigraph** is a quotation from *Hercules Furens* (line 1138) composed by Seneca (5 BCE – 65 CE). The Latin quotation is from a moment in the drama where, awakening from a spell of madness, Hercules asks, "What place is this, what land, what quarter of the globe?" After this awakening, Hercules discovers he had killed his own children in his fit of insanity.

While Seneca's illuminates the experience of loss incarnated in "Marina", the second major source for the poem, Shakespeare's *Pericles*, illuminates this revelation of grace. The tension between anguished loss (Hercules) and restoration (Pericles) also forms the tension of Eliot's poem. Eliot attested to this tension in a note of explanation attached to the manuscripts of "Marina" sent to Michael Sadler on 9 May 1930. Eliot wrote, "I intend a criss-cross between Pericles finding alive, and Hercules finding dead - the two extremes of the recognition scene." Thereby Eliot places side by side the recognition of anguish and the recognition of recovery.

