

I could say: those mountains have a meaning  
but further than that I could not say.

To do something very common, in my own way.

1970

1971

### 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 5  
the absurd flippers  
the grave and awkward mask.  
I am having to do this  
not like Cousteau<sup>1</sup> with his  
assiduous team 10  
aboard the sun-flooded schooner  
but here alone.

There is a ladder.  
The ladder is always there  
hanging innocently 15  
close to the side of the schooner.  
We know what it is for,  
we who have used it.  
Otherwise  
it's a piece of maritime floss 20  
some sundry equipment.

I go down.  
Rung after rung and still  
the oxygen immerses me  
the blue light 25  
the clear atoms  
of our human air.  
I go down.  
My flippers cripple me,  
I crawl like an insect down the ladder 30  
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 35  
black I am blacking out and yet

1. Jacques-Yves Cousteau (1910–1997), French underwater explorer and author.

my mask is powerful  
 it pumps my blood with power  
 the sea is another story  
 the sea is not a question of power 40  
 I have to learn alone  
 to turn my body without force  
 in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget  
 what I came for 45  
 among so many who have always  
 lived here  
 swaying their crenellated fans  
 between the reefs  
 and besides 50  
 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 55  
 and the treasures that prevail.  
 I stroke the beam of my lamp  
 slowly along the flank  
 of something more permanent  
 than fish or weed 60

the thing I came for:  
 the wreck and not the story of the wreck  
 the thing itself and not the myth  
 the drowned face<sup>2</sup> always staring  
 toward the sun 65  
 the evidence of damage  
 worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty  
 the ribs of the disaster  
 curving their assertion  
 among the tentative haunters. 70

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 75  
 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 80

2. Referring to the ornamental female figurehead that formed the prow of many old sailing ships.

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 85  
 the fouled compass

We are, I am, you are  
 by cowardice or courage  
 the one who find our way  
 back to this scene 90  
 carrying a knife, a camera  
 a book of myths  
 in which  
 our names do not appear.

1972

1973

## Power

Living in the earth-deposits of our history

Today a backhoe divulged out of a crumbling flank of earth  
 one bottle amber perfect a hundred-year-old  
 cure for fever or melancholy a tonic  
 for living on this earth in the winters of this climate 5

Today I was reading about Marie Curie:<sup>1</sup>  
 she must have known she suffered from radiation sickness  
 her body bombarded for years by the element  
 she had purified  
 It seems she denied to the end 10  
 the source of the cataracts on her eyes  
 the cracked and suppurating<sup>2</sup> skin of her finger-ends  
 till she could no longer hold a test-tube or a pencil

She died a famous woman denying  
 her wounds 15  
 denying  
 her wounds came from the same source as her power

1974

1978

1. Physical chemist (1867–1934) who with her husband investigated radioactivity and on her own discovered polonium and radium; she

received the Nobel Prize in 1911.

2. Discharging pus.