

For Matthew

(born December 23, 1978. After T. S. Eliot's
Journey of the Magi)

A cold coming you had of it.
Just the worst time of the year for such a journey,
And what a journey! (Indisputably
The darkest, the most solitary, you'll make)
And the nurses sore-footed, cack-handed, refractory
And the doctors running away amidst contractions
Wanting their beer and women, Crossmaglen,
Bruce Forsythe, Sartre blind and *The Times's* presses still,
Degenerate workers' states and the sperm whale almost extinct
And not a decent sausage to be had on the M6:
A cold coming, Matthew, you had of it for sure.

But you have come at dawn to a temperate valley
Dazzled by water, smelling of vegetation
And the love of friends, where the winding channel
Flowers to a broad path between rocks, and preventing arms
Circle ceaselessly like birds to arrest your fall.
All this happened two days ago but
Set down this set
Down this:
Were we brought here for a birth or a death?
I had seen birth and death before
And thought they were different;
But this is something new, this is
The death of the old dispensation —
Greedy and fickle, grasping at false gods. Let
This be our death, let it flee and wither
Beneath your frail touch,
Matthew, child of winter, the lightbringer.

Terry Eagleton