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The poet and the underworld: metaliterary katabasis in Eavan Boland's 'The Journey', Derek Walcott's Omeros, and Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills

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The Poet and the Underworld

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Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, and Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills*

Amarantha Gertruda Balten Maria Feuth

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The Poet and the Underworld

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*quam paene furvae regna Proserpinae
et iudicantem vidimus Aeacum
sedesque discriptas piorum et
Aeoliis fidibus querentem*

O how narrowly I came to beholding
the realms of gloomy Proserpine,
and Aeacus judging,
and the abodes set apart for the Good,
and Sappho lamenting on her Aeolian lyre

*Sappho puellis de popularibus
et te sonantem plenius aureo,
Alcae, plectro dura navis,
dura fugae mala, dura belli!*

about the girls of her island. And you, Alcaeus,
sounding in deeper strains
with your golden plectrum the trials of seafarers,
the hardships of exile, the woes of war.

From Horace, *Carm.* 2.13 ll.21–8. Trans. Sidney Alexander

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.

From 'Diving into the Wreck' by Adrienne Rich (Rich 2013: 24)

Things were different back then.
For the men, verse-wise,
Big O was the boy. Legendary.
The blurb on the back of his books claimed
that animals,
aardvark to zebra,
flocked to his side when he sang,
fish leapt in their shoals
at the sound of his voice,
even the mute, sullen stones at his feet
wept wee, silver tears.

Bollocks. (I'd done all the typing myself,
I should know.)
And given my time all over again,
rest assured that I'd rather speak for myself
than be Dearest, Beloved, Dark Lady, White Goddess etc., etc.

From 'Eurydice' by Carol Ann Duffy (Duffy 2001: 59)

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