

Reading Guide for *The Goat Bridge*

By T. M. McNally

1. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell suggests that all adventures begin with a fumble, a mistake, a grave error. In addition, Campbell suggests that there is always the call of the herald—the figure who summons, or invites. What is the grave error in *The Goat Bridge* and where does it take place? What do you make of the mysterious presence of Antonio Bianchi?
2. Four of the chapters are titled the same: “The Return.” What do these chapters have in common? To what is Stephen Brings returning? And from what?
3. Though Gulliver is lost, he is never missing. How does the novel evoke the presence of Gulliver throughout the story?
4. Why do you think two of the central figures in the novel—Peter Messinger and Elise Kohlhaus—are German? Why is another figure, David Summerville, from the American South?
5. At times the novel juxtaposes the Politics of Identity with the Policies of Ethnic Cleansing. What prevents one from becoming the other?
6. Why does Stephen tell Elise the story from *The Arabian Nights*? How might the Parable of the Hawk be applicable to the crisis in the Balkans as well as to Stephen’s own private turmoil?
7. Do you agree with Elise that Evil begins by way of a lack of self-forgiveness? By indifference to the suffering of others? How does indifference to others (or compassion for) influence one’s understanding of oneself?
8. What do Elise and Renée Metcalf have in common? How are they different?

9. McNally inserts contemplative elements into *The Goat Bridge* that suspend the flow of the narrative. Do these elements reveal information not otherwise available? Do they foreshadow? Are they suggestive of particular concerns?

10. Light, like Fire, is a recurring motif in the book. Is it possible to make a photograph, or tell a story, without the fact of darkness? Why do you think the novel ends on a note of tenderness and warmth? Or does it?