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ART AND THE ODYSSEY

(THE EXPLORATION INTO THE HOMERIC POEMS - IN
PARTICULAR THE ODYSSEY - AS SYMBOLIC OF
ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE)

Illustrated with etchings by the author

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ART AND THE ODYSSEY

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION : HOMER AND ART

It seems that the lives of great artists are destined to be enshrouded in mystery and misunderstanding. Homer's is perhaps the extreme example.

Academic disputes go on ad infinitum as to whether Homer composed both the Iliad and the Odyssey, and whether there was one Homer or many Homers - or any Homers, for that matter! Paradoxically, the greater the controversy over the 'Homeric Question', the more Homer's existence and his authorship of the two poems are confirmed. In this regard Picasso says: "How many people have actually read Homer? All the same the whole world talks about him. In this way the homeric legend is created."¹ Picasso might well be saying this of himself. How many people have seen and understood his work? Yet everyone knows the name Picasso.

The Greeks never doubted the existence of Homer - and neither shall I. His legend is a great incentive to art. Of his two works, I find the Odyssey particularly relevant to artistic experience.

Homer composed his poems in the oral tradition. Only later were they recorded in the written form. With the advent of writing a systematic approach was made possible for poets whereby they could re-read, correct and 'perfect', so to speak - often at the expense of spontaneity! Homer's poetry was thus saved from any systematic thought. That is why it stands alone. All subsequent poetry conformed to the written tradition.

Homer used the traditional form of the Epic and its themes, which mainly concern the Heroic past of the Trojan war and the homecoming of its heroes. With these he created something new, "...so that the traditional and the new may be found side by side."²

He goes about this by selecting what he wants from the available

material. For instance, although the Iliad concerns itself with the Trojan war, Homer omits any information that he does not find interesting - the kind of information a modern war-novelist would never dare omit. Homer is not concerned with relating the events of the war in chronological order. He selects, and in so doing he makes art, not history.

The Iliad and the Odyssey are the only recorded evidence we have from the Dark Ages. Homer's disregard for historical facts gives the historian many headaches. "He introduces names and even events, from anywhere, and makes quite new uses of them provided that they catch his imagination and help his artistic design."³

Homer merges reality and imagination freely. This is more evident in the Odyssey than in the Iliad. The latter contains no one-eyed giants or sea monsters! It follows then that it should be held in esteem by literary critics, while the Odyssey is often criticised for its 'unclassical' quality. For instance Longinus, talking of the Odyssey says; "...Homer shows that when a great genius is falling into decline, it is a special mark of his old age, that he should be fond of fables."⁴ It seems that critics will never realize that the greatest art merges the inner and outer realities to the extent that the two become indistinguishable!

In the Odyssey Homer talks of 'actual' places like Ithaka, Egypt, Crete and so on. He however also describes places, the names of which do not appear on the map, namely Scheria (the land of the Phaiakians), Ogygia (Kalypso's island), Aiaia (Circe's island) and the land of the Lotus-Eaters, amongst others. His descriptions of these places coupled with archaeological evidence have resulted in the fact that many identifications have been made throughout the ages. The Lotus-Eaters have often been located on the coast of Africa - perhaps Libya. Thucydides, writing in the fifth century B.C., refers to the dangerous

waters of the Messina strait; "It is Charybdis of the legends through which Odysseus is supposed to have sailed."⁵ A strong tradition exists that places the Cyclops in Sicily; and makes Scheria the modern Corfu. Homer's text however is too full of inconsistencies. He successfully eludes any definite identifications. His world remains a mystery.

Only the Greeks could possess the awareness that made them realise art as education. The Odyssey coupled with the Iliad became their 'Bible'. "A kind of Fundamentalism grew up: Homer enshrined all wisdom and knowledge."⁶ This Homeric wisdom prevailed even when another Bible made its appearance. "The Greeks were right to think that poets, apprehended poetically are or should be instructive."⁷ For this reason Plato well realised the danger poets like Homer would present, if allowed in his ideal Republic. He says; "...the only poetry that should be allowed in a state is hymns to the gods and paeans in praise of good man; once you go beyond that and admit the sweet lyric or epic muse, pleasure and pain become rulers instead of law and the principles accepted as best."⁸

Although instructive, Homer is never didactic as is Hesiod, his successor. He has no 'Pandora' to burden his heroes with a kind of original sin. He talks instead of Areté (excellence); a quality which could raise a man above lesser mortals. His Underworld is no hell. It is merely a far-away shore to which Odysseus could travel.

The events of the Iliad and the Odyssey are not shaped by Homer to present any moral proposition. Similarly, the painter, as Picasso says, "does not paste ones ideas on a painting." He continues; "Certainly if the painter has ideas, they come out of how he paints things."⁹ Homer's ideas emerge in the manner in which he uses his words. He singles out the great things in human experience, as well as illuminating the small and familiar things in nature. In this way he gives

us "...the right vision with which to look at the sea in storm, the stars, and the birds, and the pigs, and meals and tables and baths."¹⁰

"Art has a curative function in human experience when it reveals as in a flash intimate absolute Truth regarding the nature of things."¹¹ Homer reveals his truths in this way. No additional knowledge is required by the modern reader to fully apprehend them - as is often the case with many modern poets! "Past, present, and future are clasped and focused in Homeric poetry. There is no sign that it will become obsolete."¹²

Homer's timelessness, no doubt, is deeply integrated with his use of myth. Odysseus, his most interesting character, is not entirely his invention. It seems that a similar mythological hero existed before Homer's archetype. Similarly, the story of the one-eyed giant (Cyclops), has earlier variations.

It is myth - and not history - that is an incentive to art; and therefore life! In this regard Nietzsche says; "A people - and, for that matter, also a man - is to be valued only according to its ability to impress on its experiences the stamp of eternity: for it is thus, as it were, desecularized; thus it reveals its unconscious inner conviction of the relativity of time and of the true, that is, the metaphysical significance of life. The contrary happens when a people begins to comprehend itself historically and to demolish the mythical bulwarks surrounding it: with which there is usually connected a marked secularization, a break with the unconscious metaphysics of its earlier existence, with all its ethical consequences."¹³

CHAPTER 2. THE MYTH OF ODYSSEUS

We need look no further than the first line of the Odyssey to discover why Odysseus has remained a constant source of inspiration for art and literature; "Tell me, Muse, of the many ways,..." It is this essential ambiguity of Odysseus's nature - the seemingly conflicting characteristics he reveals in his thoughts and actions - that has sustained mankind's fascination for him throughout time.

From the ancient Greek point of view, the ambivalent qualities of Odysseus's character were not incompatible with nature. They had observed that; "Everything in the universe existed, as it were on a condition of opposites or contraries."¹ Thus Odysseus was one with Nature.

It follows then that their ideal was the man who acknowledged his latent ambivalent features and was able to reconcile them. This is reflected in their religious system at Delphi whereby Apollo, the god of order and moderation, shared his oracle with Dionysos, god of disorder and abandon.

The ancient Greek instinct was, "...to take the widest view, to see things as an organic whole."² The Post-Homeric mind on the other hand, showed an increasing inclination to divide, specialize, systematize and categorize. Therefore Odysseus's ambiguity presented a problem..... if not perhaps a challenge!

On account of his propensity for unheroic actions, Odysseus cannot appropriately be called 'Heroic', even in an Heroic age. What is more, ambivalent actions imply ambivalent ethics. The latter could find no place in the subsequent moralistic code of 'good' and 'bad'. What makes him interesting to artists is his uncategorizability. It has also remained the reason why moralists and scholars have not ceased in their attempts to categorize him!

Unlike Homer who was "...large-minded enough to comprehend unity in apparent diversity,"³ later writers selected one or a related group of characteristic features in the hero to express their ideas concerning him. Writers generally reflect the thoughts of their age. Thus Odysseus's ambiguity in subsequent literature, is often manipulated for the purpose of expounding current religious, moral, or political doctrines.

Odysseus undergoes many metamorphoses. To mention but a few: Euripides in his *Hecuba* makes Odysseus a villain of "...low and loathsome breed";⁴ the Stoic philosophers see his courage, endurance and resistance against temptation as an example of Stoicism; the Roman writers, reflecting the current rivalry for power between the Hellenistic and Roman world, make Odysseus the despicable character portrayed by Juvenal, for instance; Ovid in his exile from Rome, identifies with him; Dante hurls him into hell for seeking forbidden knowledge; Giambattista Vico uses him as a political symbol; Tennyson sees him as the ever-romantic wanderer, bored with the ordinary life; and Calderon gives him a Christian salvation.

James Joyce and Nicos Kazantzakis however both see him as the man of conflicting characteristics, and portray him as such. For this reason Joyce's *'Ulysses'* and Kazantzakis's *'The Odyssey - A modern sequel'*, have remained the most significant extensions of the Odyssean Myth. "It says much for the vitality of the myth that its greatest extensions should emerge almost three thousand years after its first appearance in literature."⁵

In the visual arts, Odysseus's character suffers less drastic transformation. The artist may well clothe him in a contemporary mode of dress (perhaps a Roman toga or a Pre-Raphaelite gown), but his image is very seldom used in order to express a particular contemporary doctrine.

Even the mode of dress does not necessarily force the work to be viewed only in the light of its historical context. One may look at the Odyssean scenes depicted on very early Greek pottery in the same way as one looks on Turner's 'Odysseus deriding Polyphemos', or Picasso's 'Sirens'.

If any 'message' should emerge from a work of art, it cannot be more than a suggestion, for art, by its very medium (being paint and not words), eludes any dogmatic interpretations. For instance, Marc Chagall's inclusion of an angel in his mosaic depicting the death scene of Odysseus, does not mean that the artist envisages a Christian salvation for the hero. "In this way the artists are closer to the open-minded spirit of Homer in the Iliad and Odyssey than most of his literary successors."⁶

Homer's Odysseus was the foundation for all subsequent creative and non-creative work - and it is this archetypal figure that remains, in spite of all the changes he has had to endure. He is still the Odysseus of 'many ways'.

Homer tells us that the heritage of Odysseus was - significantly - a combination of opposites. His maternal grandfather was Autolykos, "...who surpassed all men in thievery and the art of the oath."⁷ On the other hand his father's ancestry was not only good but divine; he is thus, "Son of Leartes and seed of Zeus."⁸

In the Iliad where there is a strong code of war etiquette and convention and discipline, the paternal restraint operates. His Autolykan tendency is given vent on occasions however; it was Odysseus who devised the cunning strategy of the Wooden Horse! This tendency, coupled with his tremendous faith in himself, prevents him from ever becoming the conventional hero. He is never blinded by Heroic faith. For instance, he would not consider fighting a battle on an empty

stomach for the sake of honour!

"In contrast the Ajax-like hero was superficially firm and strong. His code of conduct and his heroic pride encased his heart like archaic armour. Once this psychological carapace was pierced by some violent shock, the inner parts were as soft as any crustacean's. Odysseus's strength and self-possession did not depend on any outer armour. He could be as firm and enduring in the role of a beggar or in the cave of a Cyclops as in full battle-dress at Troy."⁹

His unconventionality inevitably makes him a solitary figure. In the Iliad Achilles and Patroclus are friends, and Agamemnon and Menelaus are brothers, but Odysseus is never depicted as having any significant friendship. In the Odyssey he travels with his companions, but he never seems to relate to any of them. Perhaps men distrusted his wiliness and self-sufficiency or perhaps he does not need friends! He has, after all the goddess Athena as his constant companion in the Odyssey!

It is however this self-sufficiency that enables him to resist temptations on his mysterious journey; to enjoy what the strange lands offer; to learn from his experiences and finally, to reach Ithaka.

The story of one man is at the same time unique and universal. Every man has a journey but few are aware to the extent that they too can travel to, and experience lands as mysterious as those of Odysseus.

Homer never really 'ended' the Odyssey. There is still part of Teiresias's prophecy that has remained unfulfilled. This might well be unintentional, but it is significant none-the-less; for Odysseus has no end! As his myth continues, he becomes immortalized. He is no less alive in the Greece of today than he was in Homeric Greece.

CHAPTER 3. ODYSSEUS, THE ARTIST

The ambivalent character of Odysseus represented for the Greeks their ideal man. Similarly, the artist may recognize in him the embodiment of the conflicting forces in his, the artist's, nature.

The journey of Odysseus may also parallel the artist's personal voyage of self-discovery. Odysseus wanted to reach his home, Ithaca - the artist strives for his personalization. To achieve this the artist must be able to accept "all the antimonies in nature which are neither good nor evil, moral nor immoral in themselves, and to fuse them in the fire of mystical vision which [arises] nevertheless from a realistic view of nature, microcosm and macrocosm both."¹

Odysseus is "cruel yet compassionate, modest yet boastful, cunning yet straightforward, heavy handed yet gentle, affectionate yet harsh, aristocratic yet public spirited, sensual yet ascetic."² All these conflicting characteristics are one in Odysseus, as they are one in the artist. "The dualities in the art, thought and temperament of Rafino Tamayo come quickly to mind. His pictures are at once sophisticated and childlike, sensuous and austere, immobile and dynamic, violent and melancholy, concerned and stoic."³ It is the unrestrained expression of all these qualities that makes Tamayo, Tamayo.

Individuality need have no superficial distinguishing features. Odysseus does not need the armour of heroic pride to make him Odysseus, the hero of the Greeks. So the artist should not find it necessary to assume the garb of contemporary artistic society, nor feel obliged to conform to its styles. In fact, he should transcend all convention. In this way he creates that timelessness in art to which Picasso refers; "To me there is no past or future in art. If a work of art cannot live always in the present it must not be considered at all. The art of the Greeks, of the Egyptians, of the great painters who lived in other times, is

not an art of the past; perhaps it is more alive today than it ever was."⁴

The need for solitude in the creative process further emphasizes the artist's individuality. Like Odysseus, he is a solitary figure because he is self-sufficient. "It is - by a paradox - the loneliness of self-sufficiency"⁵ He does not separate art from life. Art is not merely a profession. "We are not merely the executors of our work; we live our work,"⁶ says Picasso.

The epic poem, the *Cypria*, a later addition to the myth, tells us that Odysseus feigned madness in order to avoid conscription to the Trojan campaign. This is indicative, if nothing else, of Odysseus's reluctance to leave the home, family and land he loved. It is not unlikely that this intuitive man foresaw the links of his origin endangered by the threat of convention and pride of achievement of war. It was perhaps, this initial awareness that was to sustain his determination to return home. This adequately illustrates the artist's departure from his childhood world - the world where nothing is impossible. It is no less credible for the sky to fall on Chicken-Licken's head, as it is for an acorn!

But, like Odysseus, the artist is compelled to enter the regimented, achievement orientated world of schools, art schools, universities and other such institutions. His quality is judged by his performance in the increasing number of time-limiting memory tests he undergoes. All this is directly opposed to his childhood world which knows no limits. Hence, the further he proceeds in the adult world, the more his childhood world recedes. In much the same way the nearer Odysseus gets to Troy, the further Ithaka recedes into the distance.

Once at Troy, Odysseus fights well and wins his due prizes of honour. He abides by war's conventions simply because he sees in them a means to an end. He uses them to secure the victory which was

essential before he could return to Ithaka.

In a similar manner, the artist may arrive at a very personal self-expression. He should always try his best in the formal educative system. There is nothing to be gained in doing something badly, even if it is done in the spirit of contradiction. A straightforward, honest and unpretentious drawing is always valid! There is much one can learn from this system and much one can discard. But, it is only by learning it all that one can know what to discard. Hence it is best to work and master all techniques. In this way one is more assured of not becoming a slave to it. Technique, like paint, should be used as a means to an end. This applies to all art's conventions.

"Real students go out of beaten paths, whether beaten by themselves or by others and have adventure with the unknown."⁷ Like Odysseus the artist has his Odyssey; it starts when he leaves his 'Troy'!

CHAPTER 4. THE ODYSSEY

In the days of Troy, I learned many things. I learned that there are seven heads in a man's body, that triangular compositions are best and that blue and yellow make green.

In the days of Troy, this knowledge could mould you into one of two things, either concrete or abstract. You could be a pillar, a beautiful, strong, polished marble pillar, upholding Troy's sacred citadel, or you could be the embodiment of the ideals supporting that pillar. The perfect life was to be a pillar! It was not difficult to attain this. All you had to do was remember the words of a song - The Hymn to Troy - and sing it all your life long.

"How great thou ART, oh Troy,
Your dear Old Masters paint so fine.
How great thou ART, oh Troy,
Your sweet young masters keep in line.
How great thou ART, oh Troy,
Your gift of gold makes my life thine."

If you could not remember the words of the song and so forfeit the perfect life, you need not be dismayed. The abstract ideal, though less obvious than the pillar, was more fundamental, for the pillar depended on the continual renewal of the ideal for its support. This renewal was manifest in the code of life which stipulated:

That you should live in poverty (a derelict attic studio
was suitable)

That you should have many lovers (prostitutes were preferable)

That you should wear strange clothing (berets were acceptable)

That you should paint moving scenes (writhing, agonised
bodies were recommendable)

That you should do odd things (ear severing was best, but
rarely attainable).

In the days of Troy, there were some who saw beyond everything. They saw that the gold did not shine, that the old masters were not so fine and they said, "We will not step in line." They looked to yonder meeting place of sea and sky and knew there was a place where they should rather be. I, too, was of their company.

In the days of Troy, we set our hearts to leave, though our learning begged us stay. We sacked her city and took from her many things which would have to be lost along the way, if we were to step on our native land one day.

So we set our hearts to sail upon the lovely, turbulent, lonely sea. We sensed her threat of danger and her offer of salvation too. So we dared to take the route through the world yet unshown, to reach the land which was to us in childhood known.

Good winds filled our sails and blew us on our course. The days of Troy were over and to us it meant that we were free. Mistaken we were, for the marks and songs that Troy had left were strong; only time would see them gone.

The Kikonians

Then an island appeared on the line. We beached our ships on its sands. Here lived the Kikonians, the "Many People" with one mind. Our thoughts and actions were inconsistent with theirs. We felt confined, so we sacked their citadel, disrupting their setting. Outraged, they attacked us, "we stood fast and fought them off, though there were many more of them."¹ They beat us in time. Six of our men from each ship perished and we fled in fear of our lives. Only hard struggle made us wise to the truth that the power always with the "many" lies.

The Lotus-Eaters

We sailed the sea once more; but, this time, she gave us no peace. A storm broke and the winds raged, blowing us off course. At last, we

set foot on the land of the Lotus-Eaters. They showed no signs of Kikonian hostility, but accepted us well....perhaps too well. They offered us the sweet lotus flower of success. "But any of them who ate the honey-sweet fruit of lotus was unwilling to take any message back, or to go away, but they wanted to stay there with the Lotus-Eating people feeding on lotus and forget the way home."² The temptation was strong, yet I knew that I would have to remain on this land evermore in order to continue tasting her sweet success. Then I realised that it would not be long before I grew intolerant of her alien soil with its subtle gradations of tone, its delicate juxtapositions of colour, its perfect balance, its splendid harmony. I would much rather my rugged Ithaka see, no matter how sweet Lotus success might be.

The Cyclops

We sailed the sea once more and came to the island where the Cyclops lived. He never planted or cultivated anything, being content with an uncreative life. Day in and day out he herded his flocks of sheep and goats. At night he returned to his dark cavern home. Then, he set about separating them into their appointed groups, "...the firstlings in one place, and then the middle ones, the babies again by themselves.....the billygoats and rams, outside in his yard with the deep fences."³ We came upon his cave and entered it. He was out herding so we waited there. When he returned he rolled a great boulder over the entrance of his cavern. We were trapped, for we had not strength enough to move it. The Cyclops was a monstrous giant, not like a man at all. He had a single eye in his head with which he noticed us. He saw that we had no woolly fleece and that we could not stand with either the firstlings or the billygoats. I spoke to him explaining how we had been driven off course while on our way home, but he had no insight. He just "sprang up and reached for my



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companions, caught up two together and slapped them, like killing puppies, against the ground....Then he cut them up limb by limb and got supper ready, and,...without leaving anything, ate them, entrails, flesh and the marrowy bones alike."⁴ I was outraged. I knew now that this monster of no insight would delight in devouring anyone who was not a sheep or a goat, anyone whom he could not herd. We had challenged the uniformity of his herd by being ourselves. He would not have this. He would destroy every little bit of our identity if we let him. Determined to survive, I drenched his brains in wine and then, with his very own beam of olive wood, I pierced his single retina-eye. Then, suffering greatly, he rolled away the boulder from his doorway and my men and I made our escape, clinging to the bellies of his very own rams as they left his dark cavern for the pasturelands. I shouted aloud to him; "Cyclops, in the end it was no weak men's companions you were to eat by violence and force in your hollow cave."⁵ With that he cursed me for his blinding: "Grant that Odysseus, sacker of cities, son of Laertes, who makes his home in Ithaka may never reach that home."⁶ He would never know that it was vision and not retina-sight or great might, that gave man the means to survive both day and night.

Aiolos

We sailed the sea once more until we came to the island where Aiolos and his family lived. There we stayed for a while and were well entertained. Then it was agreed that Aiolos would convey us back to Ithaka. "He gave me a bag...stuffed full inside with the courses of all the blowing winds, for the son of Kronos had set him in charge over the winds, to hold them still or start them up at his pleasure. He stowed it away in the hollow ship, tied fast with a silver string, so there should be no wrong breath of wind, not even a little, but set the West Wind free to blow me and carry the ships and the men aboard them,

on their way; but it was not so to be..."⁷ My companions opened the bag. All the courses of the winds escaped and clashed, causing a terrible storm. We were driven across the rough sea and it seemed we had lost all chance of homecoming. We returned to the Aioliens and told them our sad story saying, "...make it right, dear friends for you have the power."⁸ They would do nothing more to help us. Disheartened, we left their island to toil once more on the wide ocean. No matter how good Aiolos's advice might be, it is each man's task to ensure that he his own homeland will see.

The Laistrygones

We sailed the sea once more, and came to the sheer citadel of Lamos where the Laistrygones lived. "There we entered the glorious harbor, which a sky-towering cliff encloses on either side...and there is a narrow entrance, there all the rest of them had their ships on the inward part....I myself, however, kept my black ship on the outside."⁹ I had a feeling that this beautiful bay harboured danger. Then we encountered the Laistrygones. They were a 'many-people' like the Kikonians, but more monstrous. We neither sacked their citadel nor did anything to make them angry. We just looked different to them, for we were different! They were "not like men, like giants."¹⁰ They attacked us and "pelted my men with man-sized boulders, and a horrid racket went up by the ships, of men being killed and ships smashed to pieces. They speared them like fish and carried them away for their joyless feasting....Gladly my ship, and only mine, fled out from the overhanging cliffs to the open water." We had tried to avoid the 'many-people's' bay, but it seemed we were destined to meet them all along the way.

Circe

We sailed the sea once more, in the single ship until we came

to the island where Circe, the dread goddess lived. We were afraid to explore the land for fear of once more being attacked. We were weary and disheartened. We were at our lowest. Then I said; "Dear friends, for we do not know where the darkness is nor the sunrise, nor where the sun who shines upon people rises, nor where he sets, then let us hasten our minds and think, whether there is any course left open to us. But I think there is none. For I climbed to a rocky place of observation and looked at the island, and the endless sea lies all in the middle through the undergrowth and the forest."¹² A group of my men went on ahead to investigate the smoke. They came to Circe's house. She opened her doors and called them in. She gave them a bewitching drink and touched them with her wand, transforming them into pigs. When I arrived, I suspected Circe. I withstood her enchantments, and, at once she changed from the dread goddess enemy into my ally. It was her way to try men; to see if they could see the truth beyond her outward appearance. Circe taught me many things simply by showing me her magic. She "...walked on out through the palace, holding her wand in her hand, and opened the doors of the pigsty, and drove them out. They looked like nine-year old porkers. They stood ranged and facing her, and she,...anointed each one of them with some other medicine, and the bristles...now fell away from them, and they turned back once more into men, younger than they had been and taller for the eye to behold and handsomer by far."¹³ Her transformations were a wonder to behold. First there were men, then there were pigs, then there were better men. Anything could happen on Circe's island. She advised us to stay, and to be strong; for only in this way would we see the possibilities of magic. It was no good lamenting about the hard times we had been through. As she said, "I too know the

pains you have suffered on the sea where the fish swarm, and all the damage done you on the dry land by hostile men. But come now, eat your food and drink your wine, until you gather back into your chests that kind of spirit you had in you when first you left the land of your fathers on the rugged Ithaka. Now you are all dried out and dispirited from the constant thought of your hard wandering, nor is there any spirit in your festivity, because of so much suffering."¹⁴

So we stayed with her, performing our own magic; changing one thing into another and making something out of nothing at all! We felt close to Ithaka; we saw her in our dreams. Much time passed. Then one day I discovered that there was nothing more Circe could show me. So Farewell to Circe we sadly said, the time had come for us to search ahead.

The Underworld

We sailed the sea once more, but for a long time we passed no islands. Circe's wonderworld had vanished. The barren sea showed nothing in its horizon. We wondered whether our journey had any purpose. We began to doubt whether Ithaka was still there. The time had come to consult the prophet Teiresias. So we sailed to a far-away shore, to another land, the Underworld, where Teirsias lived. He told me many things assuring me that my Ithaka was still there. He said, "...You might come back after much suffering, if you can contain your own desire, and contain your companions, at the time when you first put in your well-made vessel at the island Thrinakia, escaping the sea's blue water, and there discover pasturing the cattle and fat sheep of Helios....Then, if you keep your mind on homecoming, and leave these unharmed, you might all make your way to Ithaka, after much suffering; but if you do harm them, then I testify to the destruction of your ship and your companions."¹⁵ I felt more relieved.

I kept close to my heart what Teiresias said to me. My oracle was one which no-one else could see; that is the way oracles must always be.

The Sirens

We sailed the sea once more, and came to the Sirens' isle.

These creatures enchanted men on passing ships with their beautiful singing. These men were tempted to stop, take down their sails and listen. The Sirens sang very well indeed and imparted a great net of grand knowledge. But any poor man who listened too long, got caught in this net. Each knot was logically and firmly tied. There was no escape. He would no longer see his homecoming. For the Sirens' singing takes a man's breath away and, like a fish out of water, he is left to lie - and die - on their island beaches. I had to hear their song. But I would not let myself be caught up in the great net. I got my companions to tie me to the mast of the ship. I was thus assured of keeping in a homeward direction. The Sirens sang their song and I listened. "Come this way, honoured Odysseus, stay your ship, so that you can listen here to our singing; for no one else has ever sailed past this place in his black ship until he has listened to the honey-sweet voice which issues from our lips; then goes on, well pleased, knowing more than ever he did; for we know everything that the Argives and Trojans did and suffered in wide Troy.... Over all the generous earth we know everything that happens."¹⁶ But we sailed well away, out of their reaches; we did not want to join the dead on their beaches.

Skylla and Charybdis

We sailed the sea once more and came to a narrow strait. On either side danger lurked in the forms of Skylla and Charybdis. First we encountered Charybdis, "...who made her terrible ebb and flow of the sea's water. When she vomited it up, like a caldron over



Odysseus and the Sirens.

a strong fire, the whole sea would boil up in turbulence, and the foam flying spattered the pinnacles of the rocks in either direction; but when in turn again she sucked down the sea's salt water, the turbulence showed all the inner sea, and the rock around it groaned terribly, and the ground showed the sea's bottom black with sand; and green fear seized upon my companions."¹⁷ We decided to steer clear of Charybdis fearing the threat of her terrible negative suction. In so doing, we were forced to encounter the mechanical monster, Skylla. She had twelve feet and six long necks, each one terminating in a horrible head, "with teeth in it, set in three rows close together and stiff, full of black death."¹⁸ At the waist her body was attached to the ground of her hollow cave. She usually fished for any natural creature, whether it be a dolphin, dogfish or sea monster; but natural-man was her best catch. We were compelled to suffer her crushing blows for she lurked in the environment which we had to pass in order to reach our home. If we could sustain her blows and pass through her narrow strait, then there was more chance of us seeing our homeland, than if we had allowed ourselves to be sucked by Charybdis into her never-ceasing, ever-churning whirl of black waters. Once in that pool, there was little chance of escape. In a repetitive rhythm one would surface and then once more be sucked down by her black pessimistic pool. Suddenly Skylla, with her six necks peered out of her cavern and snatched six of my companions. They struggled, but they were powerless against this huge mechanical monster; "And as a fisherman with a very long rod, on a jutting rock, will cast his treacherous bait for the little fishes,...then hauls them up and throws them on the dry land, gasping and struggling, so they gasped and struggled as they were hoisted up the cliff."¹⁹ There, at the entrance of the cavern the mechanical monster ate the powerless



Scapis '76

Odysseus and Skylla.

natural-man. Men however preferred to risk this dreadful Skylla as a rule, than be caught up in the ever-circling Charybdis pool.

Helios's island

We sailed the sea once more and came to the island of Helios. I did not steer the ship towards the bay, for I remembered the warning that Teiresias had given. My companions wanted to rest on dry land. They were weary of the hard struggle on the sea. They said to me; "You are a hard man Odysseus....You force us to blunder along just as we are through the running night, driven from the island over the misty face of the water...now let us give way to black night's persuasion, let us make ready our evening meal, remaining close by our fast ship and at dawn we will go aboard and put forth into the wide sea."²⁰ Thus persuaded, I steered towards land. We could not set sail the next day, for the South wind blew - and it continued to blow for many days. When our food supplies were exhausted the men looked hungrily at Helios's fine oxen and fat sheep. They could endure it no longer. One day they slaughtered the best of Helios's oxen, knowing full well that they had performed a fateful deed. But I would not partake of their feast. They foolishly thought that they could escape their doom if they placated the gods by offering some of the meat as a sacrifice and by promising to erect a temple dedicated to Helios, once they had reached their fatherland. They tried to mend their deed by compromise; but all they did was their own doom devise.

Storm and Shipwreck

We sailed the sea once more. Suddenly a dreadful storm broke. "My men were thrown in the water, and babbling like sea crows they were washed away in the running waves all around the black ship, and the god took away their homecoming."²¹ I quickly tied together the keel and the mast of the broken vessel. Perched on this I rode the



stormy sea. The winds carried me back to the dreaded strait of Skylla and Charybdis. "At this time Charybdis sucked down the sea's salt water, but I reached high in the air above me where the tall fig tree grew, and caught hold of it and clung like a bat....Inexorably I hung on,..."²² No matter how it pained my hands I would not let go. I would not be sucked down. Then at length she vomited up the water, and I let go my hold and dropped into the water. I reached out and grabbed my keel and mast. I then paddled away, into the wide sea that before me lay.

Kalypso's island

Alone now I sailed the sea once more, until I came to Kalypso's island. The divine nymph lived alone on this lovely, luscious land. She cared for me and helped me regain the strength I had lost in my hard struggle with the ocean waters. For many, many days I explored its wonders. Then in the course of time I found that I had climbed every crevice, explored every cave and examined the form of every plant and tree. This island was indeed well-known to me. In this way I was imprisoned by Kalypso. She knew how hard it is for a man to risk the 'unknown' out at sea. Many a time I felt the urge to see my homeland and a great nostalgia would come over me. But my head's good sense would prevail, ever reminding me that I had no ship, no companions and no other safe means of conveyance across the wide sea. It always warned of the risk involved in leaving on a raft made by me. So each day I sat on the barren beach watching yonder line of sea and sky while my heart and head battled on. Then one day my heart won. I was prepared to risk the wide sea. I would leave the 'well-known' for the 'unknown'. Only in this way would I my 'known' homeland see. Then Kalypso said to me; "...if you only knew in your heart how many hardships you were fated to undergo



Odysseus on Kalypso's island.

before getting to your country, you would stay here with me and be the lord of this household and be immortal, for all your longing once more to look on that wife for whom you are pining all your days here. And yet I think that I can claim that I am not her inferior wither in build or stature, since it is not likely that mortal women can challenge the goddess for build or beauty."²³ Kalypso offered everything - or so it seemed. Still, I had to leave. I said to her; "...what I want and all my days I pine for is to go back to my house and see my day of homecoming. And if some god batters me far out on the wine-blue water, I will endure it, keeping a stubborn spirit inside me, for already I have suffered much and done much hard work on the waves and in the fighting. So let this adventure follow."²⁴ Kalypso's island was fertile, lush and full of growth; my Ithaka was as rugged as can be. Kalypso was more lovely than my Penelope; but beauty is not only what the eye can see. Penelope was my roots, my home, my family. An immortal life is what Kalypso offered me; my immortality would of my own devising be. In my makeshift raft I sailed the sea. It was this risk that set me free.

Storm

Alone I sailed the wide sea once more, happy as can be. I held my raft on course for many days until at last I saw the Phaiakian land before me. A storm broke suddenly and the heavy waters swirled. "A terrible gust of stormwinds whirling together and blowing snapped the mast tree off in the middle and the sail and upper deck were thrown far and fell in the water."²⁵ I was ducked in the deep waters but struggled to the surface. My thick clothes weighed me down. I was reluctant to discard them. Then the nymph Ino appeared from the sea, and said to me; "Take off these clothes, and leave the raft at the winds will, and then strike out and swim with your hands to

the Phaiakian country, where your escape is destined."²⁶ Once I had taken off my clothes I felt lighter, freer. I used my arms and hands and swam till I came very near to the Phaiakian shore. Then in grief I cried; "Ah me, now that Zeus has granted a sight of unhopedor land, and now I have made the crossing of this great distance, I see no way for me to get out of the gray sea water, for on the outer side are sharp rocks, and the surf about them breaks and roars, and the sheer of the cliff runs up above them, and the sea is deep close in shore so that there is no place to stand bracing on both my feet and so avoid trouble."²⁷ I was confused and disheartened. But there was still spirit in me. I kept my head well out of the water and looked ahead all the time. Then I saw a place where a river joined the sea. I swam into her sudden calm waters. I gripped her banks and "...kissed the grain-giving soil."²⁸ The hardest struggle this had been. Only sheer determination and hard work saved me from sinking into those deep stormy waters. As I stood naked on Phaiakian land I sensed that home was very near to me. Then I knew that only with no clothes, no friends, no ship could I my homeland see.

The Phaiakians

Scheria was a magical island; the Phaiakians were magical people. Nausikaä, daughter of Alkinoös, the king of the Phaiakians directed me to her father's palace. I was amazed. Never before had I seen such a creation. "Brazen were the walls run about it in either direction from the inner room to the door, with a cobalt frieze encircling, and golden were the doors that guarded the close of the palace, and silver were the pillars set in the brazen threshold,... and dogs made out of gold and silver were on each side of it, fashioned by Hephaistos in his craftsmanship and cunning to watch over the palace of great-hearted Alkinoös, being themselves immortal, and all their



Siopis '76

Odysseus on the Phaiakian's island.

days they are ageless."²⁹ There was a large orchard nearby with magnificent fruit trees, "...pear trees and pomegranate trees and apple trees with their shining fruit, and the sweet fig trees and flourishing olive,"³⁰ These were always in season. No fruit ever rotted. "Pear matures on pear in that place, apple upon apple."³¹ The gods visited these people openly without disguise and would join them in their feasts. The Phaiakians were indeed a fantastic people. Their world was not the everyday world. I loved their world. It was as though I were dreaming. But I was awake, more aware than I had ever been. They were so hospitable to me. With feasts and songs I was entertained. They showered me with gifts. They offered me conveyance to my homeland. Like me, they too loved to sail the wide sea. But their ships were magical - as only a magical peoples' can be! Alkinoös told me about these ships; "...there are no steersmen among the Phaiakians, neither are there any steering oars for them, such as other ships have, but the ships themselves understand men's thoughts and purposes, and they know all the cities of men and all their fertile fields, and with greatest speed they cross the gulf of the salt sea, huddled under a mist and cloud nor is there any fear that they may suffer damage or come to destruction."³² To the beach we went to greet the great escorts. I went aboard and lay down on the coverlet that the Phaiakians had put down on the deck for me. I closed my eyes to sleep; I would rest, I thought while the Phaiakians carried me, so that on my waking I would my homeland see.

"...and upon the eyes of Odysseus there fell a sleep, gentle,
the sweetest kind of sleep with no awakening, most like death;
while the ship, as in a field four stallions drawing a
chariot all break together at the stroke of the whiplash,
and lifting high their feet lightly beat out their path, so
the stern of this ship would lift and the creaming wave behind her
boiled amain in the thunderous crash of the sea. She ran on
very steady and never wavering; even the falcon,
that hawk that flies lightest of winged creatures, could not
have paced her,
so lightly did she run on her way and cut through the sea's waves.
She carried a man with a mind like the gods for counsel, one whose
spirit up to this time had endured much, suffering many pains:
the wars of men, hard crossing of the big waters;
but now he slept still, oblivious of all he had suffered.
At the time when shines that brightest star, which beyond others
comes with announcement of the light of the young Dawn goddess,
then was the time the sea-faring ship put in to the island."³³

CHAPTER 5. ITHAKA

Odysseus, the artist finally reaches his Ithaka. He, however does not live happily ever after. He continues to battle with the insolent men who tried to disrupt his household in his absence; he embarks on raids in order to restore his flocks to their original number; he deals with the unfaithful servants, and so on. His struggle is no longer out in the unknown, but at home - on his own soil. And in this he finds his strength for the fight. He now protects that which is his own - and that which is an extension of his own. He has gained, what Nietzsche calls, "The maturity of man - that means, to have reacquired the seriousness that one had as a child at play".¹

His Odyssey has been a long one. He endured much suffering along the way. Hard work on the sea - sometimes calm, sometimes stormy - was his destiny. Picasso expresses this destiny in his own experience as follows; "Where do I get this power of creating and forming? I don't know. I have only one thought: work."²

Odysseus had to be stripped of his 'beautiful' clothing, his ship, his raft, his companions and all the spoils of Troy. He had to swim with his bare hands before he could reach the transitional Phaiakian dream-country.....and then his Ithaka. He arrives alone, and naked!

At this point Nietzsche says, "I need solitude - that is to say, recovery, return to myself, the breathing of free air..."³ Alone, in the private world of his studio, the artist engages in dialogue with himself. It is a kind of unconscious spiritual meditation. "Art is a state of soul before anything else".⁴ The nature of the artist's Underworld is essentially that of 'Know Thyself'.

"Art is the nearest thing to an oracle that our position as modern man can allow us."⁵ Hence there is no need for the artist to

become part of an institutionalized system in which the spirit is regularly acknowledged, so to speak. "I do not go to church or synagogue. Working is praying..."⁶

"Something holy, that's it," Picasso says, "It's a word something like that we should be able to use, but people would take it in the wrong way. You ought to be able to say that a painting is as it is, with its capacity to move us, because it is as though it were touched by God. But people would think it a sham. And yet that is what's nearest to the truth."⁷

"No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature.....the only right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong what is against it."⁸

This does not necessarily mean that the artist is an unbeliever. His belief is merely personal. It is however irreconcilable with the belief of the majority of men - the Laistrygones and Kikonians - who people his environment. The artist's belief and actions remain to them increasingly suspect. "Men are like that about any activity that does not, if unorthodox, conform to a routine aberration."⁹

Odysseus is compelled to live in society of man. He cannot beat the Kikonians and the Laistrygones for they are too many, and he will not join them - although the temptation is always there when the going gets tough. Therefore he must devise a way in which they are able to exert the least possible pressure on his life and work. Throughout the long journey he struggles to attain this state. "It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who, in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude."¹⁰

What the artist creates - or rather destroys - is perhaps more objectionable to these people than the manner in which he lives.

"The gifts of an imaginative artist are often the outriders of the

gifts of his period."¹¹ He is of necessity an iconoclast. He is by nature revolutionary.

With reference to his contemporary culture Nietzsche says; "We can understand why so feeble a culture hates true art; it fears destruction from its hands."¹² To Odysseus, the system which existed to curb this threat was devised by the great Cyclopien rulers. Since they do the herding, they consider themselves superior to the herd. They promote the welfare and culture of the herd. They ensure that the standard of living is high - the sheep are always fat! Their educational policy, by virtue of its rules and laws, upholds its culture.

Every one of the herd has his place and purpose. He is content for he has not been exposed to the truths which lie beyond appearances - the truths no laws or rules confine. The limited sight of the herders - "...the eye in which the fine frenzy of artistic enthusiasm has never glowed"¹³ - has handicapped the vision of the herd.

This is the accepted situation. Therefore the man who 'sees' is difficult to accommodate. He does not belong to any particular group within the herd. He does not support the system. He has no place. "But I will never make art with the preconceived idea of serving the interests of the political, religious or military art of a country."¹⁴

There is, however place in the herd for that very cultured group of pseudo-artists, art appreciators and art critics. They judge the work of the artist according to their own accepted standards: "...there must be nothing ill-favoured about what at length you exhibit, as the result of your search. 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' - you have to remember that. They demand, in other words, a pretty picture."¹⁵

This is not art!

Nonetheless it is the same 'art public' which endowers success on the chosen artist. When this happens it is tempting to cease the

search and join Tennyson's 'Lotus-Eaters', who say,

"Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than toil, the
shore than labour in the deep mid-ocean,

Wind and wave and oar;

Oh rest yet, brother mariners, we will not wander more."¹⁶

It can - and does - happen, however, that this art public's acknowledgement coincides with the artist's own personal success. Picasso confirms, "Where is it written that success must always go to those who flatter the public taste?"¹⁷

Although the artist may resist Lotus-Success he may still be tempted to compromise. He may decide that it is possible to paint for the public as well as for himself. "But the moment you think like that you're sunk....Once you compromise painting becomes the most unhappy pursuit of life."¹⁸ To compromise is to eat the cattle of Helios!

If the artist rejects all superficial success he is well on his way to Circe's island, where he sees what art really offers - magic! He becomes aware of his own magical powers. He transforms, he creates, he destroys at will. A stone suddenly becomes a mountain; folds in the bedclothes become dark crevices in a rocky landscape. He experiences 'vision' which is the antithesis of Cyclopiian sight. He sees the possibilities. "Persons and things are whatever we imagine them to be."¹⁹

For Tamayo, painting, in portraying the world, has the ability to change it. "Rather than serving it, it transforms the world, it becomes an entreaty and an invocation."²⁰

Picasso uses a bicycle saddle and handlebars to make his 'Bull's Head'. He does not alter the form of these two objects. "He has scarcely touched them. What he has done is to see their possibility of becoming an image of a bull's head. Having seen this, he placed

them together. This seeing of this possibility was a kind of naming, 'Let this be a bull's head,' Picasso might have said to himself."²¹

The artist realises now that only his own magic will get him to his homeland. Friends and teachers may give him all the possible attention, help and direction; Aiolos may set the right wind free for him, but ultimately he alone is responsible for his own homecoming. "No matter how good the school is, his education is in his own hands. All education is self-education."²²

Self-knowledge is a combination of intuitive and tuitive knowledge. Siren-knowledge is the latter form. The artist is compelled to experience this Siren-knowledge in order to know what he wants from it. This involvement is not without danger for it is easy to become infatuated with it and so forfeit self-knowledge.

The 'ideal' in Siren-knowledge is directly opposed to creativity. Its 'ideal' man is the theoretical man; its 'ideal' purpose is to offer a rational explanation for everything. Intellectual knowledge, thus distinct from instinctive knowledge, is put on a higher plain. "An artistic subservience to the service of the ascetic ideal is consequently the most absolute artistic corruption that there can be..."²³

Art theories are usually invented by non-artists in an attempt at explaining art. They reveal the 'motives' inspiring the painting; they explain logically the structure underlying the composition; they invent names for the various 'periods'; and they talk much about the 'form' and the 'content'. In this respect Man Ray tells of how it annoyed him, "...to see an art instructor lecturing her pupils before Geurnica explaining how this vertical balanced that horizontal,"²⁴ when he knew for a fact that this was not the case.

The artist should use Siren-knowledge. He should make it an

incentive to art and not a negation of art. He must continually select and reject so that Siren-knowledge may never become so powerful that it crushes his creative knowledge. Nietzsche explains how at one time in his life due to ill health, he had to refrain from reading. "The state of my eyes was enough to stop all bookwormishness, or, in plain English, philology. I was delivered from books; for years I read nothing - the greatest boon I have conferred upon myself! That essential self, which had been buried, as it were, which had lost its voice under the pressure of being forced to listen to other selves continually (which is what reading means!), awakened slowly, timidly, doubtfully - but at last it spoke again."²⁵ To let this self lie buried, is to die on the beaches of the Sirens' isle!

The artist may well escape the outside threat of Siren sterility; but at the same time he must be on his guard against Charybdis who lurks hidden in his own depths and is ready to strike him with a similar affliction - self repetition!

The painter may find that he begins to use a brush or a knife in a certain way, which gives the desired effect. He repeats the process. He becomes proficient at it. He enjoys his proficiency and does not sense Charybdis stirring. She attacks. His lyricism quickly degenerates into a loud hammering on one note. His realisation that he is trapped in a self-imposed formula is often too late. This formula is directly related to his subject matter. Whatever he paints takes on the same form - for instance, that of a rock - whether it be a woman, a flower, or a house. He desperately tries to advance, to rise above this personal mechanical phenomenon. It has however become an appendage and is almost impossible to discard; for it has already become a mannerism, a style. He reacts by sinking into the depths of depression. He becomes a pessimist, which results in the blurring of

his vision. "I have a horror of copying myself,"²⁶ says Picasso, well aware of the Charybdis danger. "Repetition is contrary to the laws of the spirit, to its flight forward."²⁷

This personal mechanical phenomenon is reflective, in a way, of the artist's present-day environment, which is regulated by the machine. There is little opportunity for a natural way of life. Everything is 'pre-packed' or 'vacuum packed' - not by men, by machines. Indeed, it is more evident today than ever before that, "Nature loves to hide."²⁸ The artist in particular is aware of this. For him his external reality must of necessity be a constant source of reference. He is presented with an obstruction, however when this reality takes the form of the monstrous mechanical Skylla, instead of nature.

"The modern metropolis, a giant focus of our unsettled world, spreads out upon the land in widening rings of visual disorder. At its core, bludgeoning us with their vulgar images, massive structures blot out open space;...our containers, advertisements, commercial entertainment, films, our home furnishings and clothes...mount up to grotesque, formless aggregates..."²⁹

Since he is forced to live in such an environment, the artist will obviously be affected by it. Regular contact with nature however ensures that the effect on his work is minimal. He will know that, "Where visual responses are warped, visual creativeness is impaired."³⁰

In this age he finds it difficult to survive 'as an artist'. The prevailing attitude is that art fills museums or that it is rather a useless and expensive luxury. "Even where an artist may appear triumphantly to have 'arrived', a closer scrutiny might cause one to modify one's opinion....Lloyd Wright, the most famous architect, not only in America but probably in the world, has for years had comparatively little to do, except instruct others in his school, who can

scarcely expect to be busier than he had been. In general, the jobbing builder has usurped the role of the architect."³¹

The artist however continues to sail his sea. He battles with the storms and the waves and delights in the calm. "The artist goes through states of fullness and emptiness."³² But he keeps his spirit up. He is always positive. He will hurt his hands clinging to the fig tree, rather than fall into the chasm where Charybdis lurks.

His most difficult task is to allow his subconscious to emerge. Kalypso imprisons him in his own consciousness. She constantly reminds him of her 'well-known' world, and all its logicalities. To leave this world and travel in the 'unknown' so as to arrive at the 'known', involves a great risk. "A man's head is like a grocer; it keeps accounts: I've paid so much and earned so much and that means a profit of this much or a loss of that much! The head's a careful little shopkeeper; it never risks all it has, always keeps something in reserve. It never breaks the string."³³

Dreams can help the artist destroy the limits of Kalypso's 'well-known' world. The realisation of this - and the use of it - brings him to Phaiakian dream-country.

He then becomes increasingly aware of his past - not only of his childhood but of the deeper, more ancient past which has something to do with 'soil' and 'roots'; something that cannot logically be explained, but only instinctively felt. Hence he must go home; he must see his Ithaka. He will break the string - he has to!

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