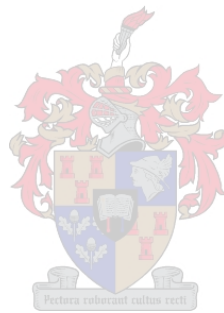# Poetics of Passage in Modernist Reconfigurations of Odysseus

Talitha Slabbert

Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts (English Studies) in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University

Supervisor: Dr Dawid de Villiers

December 2017

DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

While the prevalence of the figure of Odysseus in Western literature has been much studied, insufficient attention has been paid to its associations with epistemology, and to the semiotic potential of the navigator-hero's contest with the sea in figuring the relation between the episteme and the world it seeks to know. This thesis draws on Hans Blumenberg's notion of "absolute metaphor" and Giambattista Vico's notion of "poetic wisdom" to argue that Odysseus – in his ineluctable association with the image of the sea – serves, for modernist authors, as a means through which to represent the uncertain and difficult movement of existence and interpretation in the early 20th century, and that it becomes, for certain authors, an exceptionally intelligible means through which to figure their own hermeneutic ventures. The primary examples of this self-implicated hermeneutics studied in this thesis are Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* and on James Joyce's *Ulysses*, but, in order to contextualise these authors' respective reconfigurations of the navigator-hero, I commence with a survey of some of the most influential reconfigurations of Odysseus that lead up to the 20th century, and of the disparate inflections given to the figure according to the epistemological attitudes of different authors and of their various historical contexts. This groundwork includes a consideration of the epistemological specificities of the 19th century, as the matrix from which the self-conscious hermeneutics of modernist literature would emerge.

This project ultimately aims to lead to a more nuanced understanding of the way in which the figure of Odysseus operates within literature, and to an appreciation of the protean semiotic resources which it presents to authors, given its long history and its association with the similarly resonant image of the sea. In this thesis, I go on to reconsider Horkheimer and Adorno's influential – but potentially reductive, if taken as absolute – claim that Odysseus is essentially a literary instantiation of Enlightenment reason on its trajectory towards a final disenchantment of the world. Instead, it is the argument of this thesis that the figure tends to exceed the specific configurations it is given, subtly destabilising – and potentially enriching – authors' intended meanings through the inflections and the echoes of the multiple other configurations associated with it. As such, the figure operates in the milieu between determinate meaning and meaninglessness, providing authors with a provisional vehicle for their hermeneutics, a sort of poetics of passage through which to navigate an 'oceanic' and unhomely modernity.

OPSOMMING

Alhoewel die voorkoms van die Odusseus-figuur in Westerse literatuur al baie oorweeg is, is daar onvoldoende aandag geskenk aan sy epistemologiese assosiasies, asook die semiotiese potensiaal van die seevaarder-held se stryd met die see in die uitbeelding van die verhouding tussen die episteem en die wêreld wat dit poog om te ken. Met verwysing na Hans Blumenberg se konsep van die "abosolute metafoor" en Giambattista Vico se verwoording van "poëtiese wysheid" stel dié tesis dit dat Odusseus – in sy onwrikbare assosiasie met die beeld van die see – vir Modernistiese outeurs dien as 'n middel waardeur die verloop van die bestaan en die interpretasie binne die weerbarstigheid van die vroeë twintigste-eeu uitgebeeld kan word. Verder word dit vir sekere outeurs 'n beeld wat hulle hermeneutiese ondernemings op 'n besonder verduidelikende manier vervat. Die primêre voorbeelde van dié self-betrekkende hermeneutiek wat hierdie tesis ondersoek is *The Cantos* van Ezra Pound en *Ulysses* van James Joyce, maar om die outeurs se hervatting van dié seevaarder-held deeglik te kontekstualiseer, sluit ek 'n oorsig in van party van die hervattings van Odusseus tot en met die twintigste eeu, sowel as die uiteenlopende verwesentlikings van die figuur volgens die epistemologiese sienings van die betrokke outeurs en hulle verskeie historiese agtergronde.

Hoofsaaklik beoog die projek 'n meer genuanseerde verstaan van die manier waarop die Odusseus-figuur in literatuur funksioneer, asook 'n beter waardering vir die proteïese semiotiese bronne wat hy aan outeurs bied gegewe sy lang geskiedenis sowel as sy assosiasie met die eweneens kultureel-resonante beeld van die see. Dit sou lei tot 'n heroorweging van die stellings – moontlik 'n reduksie as hulle absoluut geag word – van skrywers soos Horkheimer en Adorno, wat meen dat Odusseus bowenal 'n literêre verwesentliking is van 'n Verligtingsrede wat afstuur op die finale onttowering van die wêreld. Vervolgens stel dié tesis dat die Odusseus-figuur neig om spesifieke definiëring te oorskry, wat lei tot 'n subtiele destabilisering, of selfs 'n verryking, van die outeurs se voorgenome bedoelings deur die infleksie en weerklinking van die talle ander vergestaltings wat daarmee geassosiëer word. Vervolgens behoort die Odusseus-figuur tot die milieu tussen voldonge betekenis en betekenisloosheid, en dien hy vir outeurs as 'n voorlopige hermeneutiese weg, 'n poëtika van deurgang waardeur die "oseaniese" en ontheemde moderniteit genavigeer kan word.

<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>

To my supervisor, Dr Dawid de Villiers: thank you for your patient reading and re-reading of my drafts, and for your many helpful suggestions and thoughtful critique. Your input has been invaluable, and you are one of the most inspiring and brilliant mentors I've had.

To my family: thank you for putting up with me even when writing deadlines rendered me somewhat miserable and antisocial. Thank you, too, for not indulging my intermittent self-pity, and for the beneficially grounding reality of life in a large family. Above all, I would like to thank my father for teaching me by example to follow my own personal curiosities and intellectual interests in my studies, and not to pursue degrees and qualifications purely for their perceived merit.

To my sister, for her generosity in undertaking to translate my abstract into Afrikaans.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

ODYSSEAN HERMENEUTICS: POETIC WISDOM, THE SEA-VOYAGE, AND BEING-IN-THE-WORLD

He who took harbor here
Was through his non-existing
Without existing he sufficed for us
Through not coming he created us.

Thus the legend unravels
Entering reality
And begins to fertilize it
Fernando Pessoa, 'Ulisses'[1]

There is a famous moment in Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man*, where the author, a prisoner in Auschwitz, invokes the figure of Dante's Ulysses in an attempt to give form to an intractable insight regarding his incarceration in the Lager. The book itself is structured as a sort of katabasis – a descent into the underworld – and Levi, narrating his odyssey through the hellish world of the labour camps, often reaches for images from Dante's *Inferno* to give voice to his experiences. The entrance to the camp, with its "*Arbeit Macht Frei*," recalls Dante's Gates of Hell; a German guard who strips the prisoners of their personal belongings takes on the character of Charon; the train that transports them to Auschwitz becomes their ferry across Lethe. In the 11th chapter, entitled "The Canto of Ulysses," Levi recounts walking to collect soup with a fellow prisoner, and trying to recall and explain to him the words of Ulysses to his companions in the 26th Canto of Dante's *Inferno*, words which strike him now, in Auschwitz, with a new significance:

> Think of your breed: for brutish ignorance
> Your mettle was not made; you were made men,
> To follow after knowledge and excellence. (*If This Is a Man* 133; *Inf.*26.118-120)

Ulysses' "mad flight" beyond the Pillars of Hercules (*Inf.*26.125), serves for Levi to affirm his own fundamental humanity, inalienable even within the camps. As Rachel Falconer writes, drawing on one of the caption titles in Levi's *Search for Roots*, "'The Canto of Ulysses' becomes a metaphor for 'the stature of man'" (65). In this context, the will of "Another" that condemns Ulysses and his companions to shipwreck serves for Levi as a metaphor for his own dehumanization at the hands of the Nazi regime (*If This Is a Man* 134; *Inf.* 26.141). As

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[1] In Piero Boitani, *The Shadow of Ulysses: Figures of a Myth.* p 126.

the two companions rejoin the crowd of prisoners at the soup kitchen, ending their momentary respite, the chapter concludes: "and over our heads, the hollow seas closed up" (*If This Is a Man* 134; *Inf.*26.142). Auschwitz is an event which defies comprehension and communication. Yet, through images from *Inferno*, and particularly in the crucial invocation of the figure of Ulysses, Levi finds the means to give figural form to the inexpressible, to grant a measure of intelligibility to the unutterable.

Such use of the figure of Odysseus[2] as a personal means of making sense of a precarious world is hardly unique to Levi. Since its Homeric inception, through its many and disparate configurations, the myth of Odysseus has continued to fascinate writers, poets and thinkers. Crafty and venturesome, taking on a multitude of voices and personalities, the artful and eloquent Odysseus has been read as a master manipulator, as the first humanist, as a kind of Faust, and as a symptomatic image of man's existential homelessness. From the homeward-bound wanderings of Homer's hero, through Dante's reinvention of the figure as a transgressive voyager, venturing beyond the limits of what is permitted to man, through countless historical and literary invocations and self-stylizations, the myth has been reworked according to the specific concerns of various times and individuals. It is the aim of this project to study a few of these reconfigurations, focusing on the early 20th century, and to argue that they are not merely empty reiterations of an image which held significance only in the age of antiquity, but that they rather renew and enrich it in each new invocation, reworking it according to the specificities of various contexts.

This also means that the figure has no one, definitive value, but can be reworked into different and even conflicting accounts. That is, Odysseus can simultaneously serve as a personal model for Mussolini, and for writers like Levi and Umberto Saba, who suffered under his fascist regime. In the same way, while for Levi, Odysseus serves as a symbol of human dignity, even within Auschwitz, for Horkheimer and Adorno, he is one of the first literary exemplifications of instrumental reason, the first symptom, as it were, of a social disease that will eventually culminate in the Holocaust.

Horkheimer and Adorno's "Odysseus, or Myth and Enlightenment" is interesting, for the purposes of this project, insofar as it embarks, through a reading of the story of Odysseus, upon an extensive consideration of myth and reason. For these writers, Homer's hero

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[2] Though in the discussion of primary texts I will defer to the author's preferred rendering of the name, for the purposes of this thesis I will employ the Greek "Odysseus" rather than the Latin "Ulysses" when referring to this figure.

represents the first literary exemplification of the trajectory of logos in Western civilization, as it seeks to liberate itself from myth, and from the threatening forces of nature which the invention of myth was supposed to allay. While their contemporary Erich Auerbach would famously characterise Homeric style as "uniformly illuminated": operating by a "complete externalisation of all the elements of the story and of their interconnections as to leave nothing in obscurity" (3, 4), Horkheimer and Adorno read Odysseus himself as representative of the impetus towards such illumination. They read the Homeric hero's course towards Ithaca as the movement of Western thought towards its *telos* of total enlightenment, and interpret his overcoming of figures like Polyphemus, Circe, and the Sirens as images for the subjugation of myth by reason.

Yet Horkheimer and Adorno problematize this schema, blurring the distinction between myth, which "is already enlightenment," and enlightenment, which "reverts to mythology" (xviii). In the first chapter of their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, they explain this kinship in terms of fear and familiarity. We read that

> [h]uman beings believe themselves free from fear when there is no longer anything unknown. This has determined the path of demythologization, of enlightenment, which equates the living with the nonliving as myth had equated the nonliving with the living. Enlightenment is mythical fear radicalized. The pure immanence of positivism, its ultimate product, is nothing other than a form of universal taboo. Nothing is allowed to remain outside, since the mere idea of the 'outside' is the real source of fear. (16)

Myth and enlightenment thus have their common birthplace in the primal fear that springs from man's confrontation with a reality that surpasses him. If the *telos* of the Enlightenment is a world that is transparent and familiar to man, a world in which he can be fully at home, then, despite the differences and antagonisms between them, myth and enlightenment respond to the same predicament: man's sense of his own unhomeliness in the face of a reality that exceeds and threatens him. Not only do both myth and enlightenment function as attempted answers to this unsettling unknown, they operate according to analogous principles. As Horkheimer and Adorno write, "the principle of immanence" – of bringing everything within the sphere of the familiar and the known – and "the explanation of every event as repetition, that the Enlightenment upholds against mythic imagination, is [already] the principle of myth itself" (80), which seeks to familiarize the unknown in the figures of its deities, and to render it predictable in the repetition of its rituals.

This blurring between myth and enlightenment informs Horkheimer and Adorno's reading of *The Odyssey*, which as the "basic text of European civilization" (37), grants them an effective and foundational exemplar for their argument. Importantly, for Horkheimer and Adorno, epic poetry is already no longer synonymous with myth (35), and as myth had in some measure already overcome the threat of nature through its images and rituals, now myth itself is overcome by better, more exhaustive classifications and more powerful explanations. For these authors, the Homeric epic occupies the threshold between primeval myth and the classifying reason of an emergent enlightenment (35). The undifferentiated spirit of *mana* worshiped by primitive man had by now been organized into a complex system of Olympian deities, and the chthonic gods and spirits which preceded them had, under the religion of Zeus, been relegated to the underworld. Yet as Horkheimer and Adorno point out, there remains a link between the heaven and hell of the Homeric world, and the distinctions between the newer and the more primitive powers are all but stable (10). Zeus was both "a god of the underworld and a god of light, in cults that did not exclude each other" (10), and the Olympians and the earlier chthonic gods interact, and at times grow indistinct (10). As Horkheimer and Adorno put it: "the murky, undivided entity" of *mana* – and so, too, we imagine, the bewilderment it was meant to allay – "lives on in the bright world of the Greek religion" (10). The text of *The Odyssey* itself, we are told, consists of different strata. "[T]wo phases of an historical process" (35), the earlier mythic content now organized into a unified whole, still show at the "joints where editors have stitched the epic together" (35). Horkheimer and Adorno call this organising principle the "Homeric spirit" (35), and they read in it the early evidence of an enlightenment consciousness, already tending, in its quest to render the world transparent to itself, towards the subjugation of the mythic, but also itself reverting to mythology.

For Horkheimer and Adorno, *The Odyssey* comprises a commingling of these mythical and anti-mythological tendencies. At the one terminus lies Ithaca, and the faithful Penelope: a state of happy marriage and being at home in the world. This realm, like the Enlightenment ideal which Bacon formulates as "the happy match between the mind of man and the nature of things" (qtd. in Horkheimer & Adorno 3), is itself myth, but in *The Odyssey*, it has become man's predominant and guiding fiction, and its "mythic solidity and permanence jut from myth, as the small island realm rises from the endless sea" (Horkheimer & Adorno 59). At the opposite terminus, the farthest point reached by Odysseus, lies Hades, the realm of disempowered chthonic myths, left behind by the trajectory of thought's advance through

time (Horkheimer & Adorno 59). It is here the threat of man's dissolution in the face of nature finds its most acute expression, as Odysseus finds himself quite literally on the threshold of death. Yet, if this purportedly oldest of strata in *The Odyssey* is the point which lies closest to myth and to the threats which myth was meant to allay, it is also the source, Horkheimer and Adorno point out, of the greatest promise for an eventual transcendence of myth (Horkheimer & Adorno 59-60). This germ of hope is "contained in Tiresias's prophecy of the possible placation of Poseidon," and lies in the prospect of a cessation of hostilities with the hero's "elemental enemy" (Horkheimer & Adorno 60). The poles of myth and rational being-at-home thus contain their opposites: the Enlightenment *telos* of Ithaca is itself a supreme myth, and the chthonic underworld of abandoned myths in turn contains the clearest promise of homeliness.

For Horkheimer and Adorno, the contentious space between Ithaca and its antithesis in the 'Other' *par excellence* of death or non-being (represented in *The Odyssey* by the underworld) constitutes the realm which reason must navigate, and within which man must stake out his path and constitute his identity. Figurally, the sea becomes the space of life and history, insofar as man finds himself, ineluctably, caught between the *telos* of his self-actualisation and its antithesis in his annihilation. Yet if, as Horkheimer and Adorno write, "the old demons populate only the distant margins and islands on the civilized Mediterranean, retreating into the forms of rock and cave from which they had originally sprung in the face of primal dread" (38), the space of Odysseus' travels still remains an intractable one. For all his *metis* – his oft-lauded resourcefulness and cunning – Odysseus never quite manages to bring his world wholly within the sphere of the familiar, and though he ultimately reaches the island realm of Ithaca, this homecoming is offset by the necessity of another voyage to be undertaken: Poseidon is not yet placated.

Horkheimer and Adorno's rendering of Homer's hero constitutes but one of an abundance of literary and critical reconfigurations that mark Western modernity, yet it is a useful point of reference insofar as it reads Odysseus in terms of myth and logos, calling our attention not only to the conflict and kinship between the two, but also inviting us to consider more closely the ways in which the authors' own deployment of the figure might be read in relation to such categories (Fleming 117).[3] For even if we accept Horkheimer and Adorno's claim that

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[3] It is interesting to note that one of the criticisms often advanced against the philosopher Hans Blumenberg is that, in his studies on non-conceptual metaphors and figurative language, he himself must inevitably revert to metaphor. On Blumenberg's part, this seems consciously done. For example, the title of his *Work on Myth*

Homeric epic is indeed opposed to myth, and that Odysseus can be seen as the archetype of an emergent logos, we should pay equal attention to a somewhat subtler argument that is woven through the *Dialectic:* that of the implacable nature of enlightenment. As present changes to past, it inexorably morphs into the realm of vanquished myth, overcome and disempowered by man's teleological flight forward. For this reason, even Bacon's characterisation of Enlightenment, once definitive, arguably, has a somewhat embarrassing ring of myth about it by the time Horkheimer and Adorno write. Similarly, if Odysseus, in the Homeric world, is the paragon of the rational man, what then are we to make of the figure when Horkheimer and Adorno invoke it, centuries later? If indeed the hero of *The Odyssey* had striven to escape myth, and quested for the lasting stability and satisfaction in an Ithacan logos, by the time of the *Dialectic*, Odysseus has long since become part of the stockpile of images and poetic characters that make up the "fantastic wisdom" to which Horkheimer and Adorno oppose him (8).

Since my project is concerned with precisely this sort of "untimely" redeployment of mythical figures (De Villiers 509[4]), I would like, in this chapter, to give some consideration to the historical pertinence and the legitimacy of such persistence: with regard to myth, but indeed with regard to all recurrent forms of figurative and non-conceptual language. Such considerations are by no means new, and some of their concerns might be traced back at the very least to the literary chapter of the famous (and itself persistent) Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns, particularly in its culmination in the *Querelle* of the French Academy, and the English Battle of the Books, at the turn of the 18th century (Levine, "Vico and the Quarrel Between the Ancients and the Moderns" 56). The Quarrel, or that part of it concerned with literature, might in some sense be read as an attempt, on the part of both sides involved, to make sense of their own relation to the literature and art of antiquity, which in its persistence as a model for modern education, and in its undeniable distance from the historical context of the late 17th century, became a contentious issue around this time. In the midst of this polemic, with the so-called 'Ancients' contending for the timeless superiority of

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already suggests an acknowledgment on his part – one he makes explicit in the book itself – that the study of myth cannot itself escape myth, or contemplate it as uninvolved spectator from some stable theoretical standpoint. The study of myth remains, inescapably, work *on* myth. So, too, my own argument with regard to reconfigurations of Odysseus remains itself implicated in the object of its study, and is itself, to a certain extent, one more such reconfiguration.

[4] See Dawid de Villiers' "Okeanos contra oikoumenè: The Nineteenth Century Resurgence of an Adversarial Paradigm" for a discussion of the "untimely" role of myth and metaphor in literature, whereby these anachronistic images, while redolent of the past, simultaneously open up future potentialities in meaning through their disruption of the present.

the Greeks and the Romans, and the 'Moderns' rejecting them as archaic anachronisms that stultify the vastly superior potential of modernity, Homer too became a polemical figure, with a variety of prominent writers and literary figures either praising him as a sort of timeless sage, or condemning him as a barbarian ("Vico" 69-71). For the Ancients, Homer was a repository of universal wisdom. For the Moderns, he belonged to the darkness and barbarity of an age vastly inferior to their own ("Vico" 64-71).

It is Giambattista Vico, however, writing in the 18th century, who propounds the most original view on Homer. Previously, in his *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, Unearthed from Origins of the Latin*, Vico had already defended against Descartes the value of the kind of figurative language and probable knowledge that the French philosopher had rejected as uncertain and precipitous (Levine 66; Blumenberg, *Paradigms* 2). Rather than a linear trajectory towards the ultimate *telos* of a conceptually transparent world, Vico emphasizes the role of human "making" in truth, and contends that "*verum et factum convertur*": that "the true and the made are convertible" (Miner 53). At the same time, this does not mean that man is omnipotent – Vico emphasizes that, with regard to his creative powers, "man is neither nothing, nor everything" – nor does it mean that his constructions are arbitrary (Miner 64). Rather, human *factum* must remain articulated with its cultural precedents, and with the nature of reality, with the *elementa rei* of Divine creation (Miner 64). Creation is thus, for Vico, the *primum verum*, or "first truth," which man can only approximate (Miner 64). As Miner writes, human *factum* remains finite, and partial, "confined to the outside edges" of the infinite *elementa rei* (67). This accounts for the inexhaustibility of human *factum*, which is directed towards the "*finis*" of the *primum verum* (Miner 67), but remains ultimately unable to reach it. It is precisely man's lack that becomes the wellspring of his creativity. This insight regarding lack and creativity was one Vico would further develop in his magnum opus, *The New Science*, and apply specifically to the case of Homer. Human civilization originates, writes Vico, when man, baffled by the world which confronts him, and lacking means by which to understand it, creates "imaginative universals" for himself in poetic characters (381). With awed bewilderment, he hears the thunder in the sky and needing to explain it, he names it Jove (Vico 377).

In Vico's view, Homer is a figure of lack and of ignorance, but counter to the assertions of the Moderns, this does not detract from his poetry, instead being the very source of its pre-eminence (Vico 825-832). His poetry is thus neither a sign of timeless conceptual wisdom, nor is it delegitimized by a lack of such wisdom. Rather, Vico writes (and calls this insight

the "master key" to *The New Science*) that "the first gentile peoples, by a demonstrated necessity of nature, were poets who spoke in poetic character" (34). For this reason, Vico claims that the "fables or myths" of antiquity "contain meanings not analogical but univocal, not philosophical but historical, of the peoples of Greece of those times" (Vico 34). As opposed to the positions of both the Ancients and the Moderns, Vico's approach combines two seemingly disparate 18th century disciplines – philosophy, with its attention to universals, to unchanging *eidos*, and philology, with its attention to historicity – to consider Homer's creations in relation to their historically specific function, as legitimate poetic responses to the epistemological perplexities of antiquity (Levine 74-76; Haddock 590).

While Vico relegates such "poetic wisdom" to the early stages of human civilization (374-384), his philosophy contains the germ for its own extension, the suggestion of an argument for the legitimacy of the persistence of figurative language beyond the confines of any one historical period. Already, his cyclic schema of history, with its *corso* and *ricorso*, suggest the possibility that different moments in history might have analogous, though not identical imaginaries. One such parallel, Joseph Levine argues, is found between Homer and Dante, a kinship Vico notes in "The Discovery of the True Dante," and in *The New Science*, dubbing the Italian writer "the Tuscan Homer" (Levine 75; Vico 564, 786). What is more, Vico's theories with regard to the poetic creations of primitive man might be extended to modern man, insofar as in modernity too, we find ourselves confronted by intractable realities, and reach for intelligible images to give form to our experiences. While there are differences in the kinds of images we invoke, and in the degree to which we believe in them, it is perhaps possible to read the persistence and reconfiguration within different historical contexts of characters like Odysseus in terms of Vico's argument. If, as Vico argues, the poetic characters of early mankind are born because the human mind "wherever it is lost in ignorance makes [man] the measure of all things" (Vico 120), and if, "whenever men can form no idea of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar and at hand" (Vico 123), one might read Modern writers' reworking of mythic figures according to the specificities of their own historical realities[5] as a 'judging' of a distant past by a familiar present (that is, they make themselves the measure of the figure). At the same time, Odysseus, as part of the cultural repertoire of Western civilization (and thus something familiar and at hand), comes to be deployed as an intelligible means through which to articulate the

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[5] See Haddock, p.589, for the argument that both the Ancients and the Moderns in the famous Quarrel in fact do nothing more than construe Homer – a "distant and unknown thing" – in their own image (i.e. in terms of what is "familiar and at hand") (Vico 123).

bewildering realities of modernity, and thus serves as a means through which these might be measured.

This, I would like to suggest, is precisely what occurs with regard to the figure of Odysseus, as it is taken up and reconfigured at different moments in time as a poetic response to a sense of lack, or of existential or epistemological aporia. Nor is this a novel way of understanding the persistence of the figure. I have already referred to Horkheimer and Adorno's reading of Odysseus, and to the way in which they situate him with regard to myth and enlightenment. I would like to note here the similarity between the German authors' account of the origins of myth, and Vico's poetic logic. In both, myth is born out of a human deficiency in confronting reality, and from the necessity of rendering this reality in some way intelligible. Whether or not Horkheimer and Adorno were conscious of the degree to which their own deployment of the figure of Odysseus might itself be understood as an instance of such myth-making, they were certainly sensitive to the mythologizing of Greek antiquity by writers like Nietzsche and Wilamowitz, as well as by the German Fascists of their own historical context (Fleming 123-124). When they write that the "arid wisdom" of a reason that has superseded myth merely ends up reproducing the "fantastic wisdom" that it had supposedly rejected (Horkheimer & Adorno 8), this is surely an echo of Vico, whom Horkheimer and Adorno had read, and cite elsewhere in the *Dialectic* (16).

Another author, writing around the same time as Horkheimer and Adorno, who takes up the issue of myth in this way is Cesare Pavese. In his essay "Il Mito," Pavese draws on and expands Vico's conception of man's "*caratteri poetici,*" that serve as "*generi*" or "*universali fantastici*" by which man gives form to a reality that exceeds his understanding (346). Whereas for Vico such myth-making belongs to the primitive stages of humanity, for Pavese, it belongs to all the moments of epiphany or ecstasy that mark the life of every individual, to all experience that exceeds his rationality. In the perplexity of such "*istanti aurorali,*" an image is formed in the individual consciousness, as a sort of conjecture or divination in the face of the amorphous: a "*sussulto divinatorio davanti all'amorfo*" (347). For Pavese, these moments form the nuclei from which poetry draws its cogency, they are the beacons with which we orient ourselves and find our place in the world: a task for which reason can give us but limited guidance (Pavese 348).

If we accept this argument, it still remains to ask about the specificities of Odysseus as one such mythical image. Indisputably, evidence of the persistence of the figure in Western

literature abounds. Even in antiquity, he finds reconfiguration in the work of a wide range of authors, including Antisthenes, Euripides, Plato and Aristotle. From Dante, through to Tennyson, and more recently, in writers like James Joyce, Ezra Pound and Nikos Kazantzakis, we find Odysseus reincarnated. Moreover, this persistence has been well noted, and studies on what W.B. Stanford called the "adaptability" of the figure of Odysseus likewise abound (1), even though more often than not these focus on cataloguing Odysseus's literary progeny rather than attempting to account for their metaphoric potency and impact at a specific moment in history.[6] Piero Boitani, by way of contrast, understands the figure as one which, at certain historic moments, comes to serve as a metaphor for human existence as a whole. In *The Shadow of Ulysses: Figures of a Myth*, Boitani attempts to trace the way in which the figure of Odysseus operates within history, becoming, in various eras and for dissimilar cultures, a representative image through which artists give expression to their situatedness in the world. As Boitani writes, "literature, with its weight of being and existing, dovetails into history, the world of becoming" (vii), and the wanderings and travails of Odysseus come to configure the concerns of various presents. Drawing on Frege, he characterises Odysseus as a 'figure' in the sense that he is "a sign having only sense" but no definite meaning, constituting rather "a model and multiform (*polytropos*) of human life which is full of potential" (4). This understanding of the figure he then complements with Erich Auerbach's concept of *figura*, or *umbra*, claiming that, as an Old Testament figure or type can foreshadow a character in the New, the figure of Odysseus 'prefigures' and 'is fulfilled in' its various reconfigurations (Boitani 9). Ulysses as figure, he writes, "becomes a mythical and literary character whom commentators, poets and historians read rhetorically and prophetically as a *typos* – a shadow which is transformed and extends across the Western imagination" (9), and takes on the shades and tinctures specific to the various historical moments in which it is deployed. "To adapt Beatrice's words in *Paradiso* XXX," Boitani writes, "Ulysses is the 'shadowy forecast' of poetic truth and historical reality, in which he is then incarnated, marking all its crucial moments, its 'crises'" (Boitani 9).

Boitani's argument assumes the legitimacy of the persistence of the figure of Odysseus. Rather than seeing in it the anachronistic replication of a character properly belonging to a bygone past, or reading its enactments as aberrations from one canonical figure, Boitani suggests that Odysseus is reconfigured to articulate the concerns of different historical contexts, and comes to serve, for various writers, as a means through which to read their own

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[6] See, for example, William B. Stanford and Edith Hall.

being-in-the-world. Moreover, Boitani invokes Odysseus as a figure that seems to take on a specific significance in moments of crisis, and chooses as the central motif for his study that of wonder (ranging from astonished amazement to horror, perplexity and stupefaction (8)), thereby giving his argument a certain kinship with Vico's notion of "poetic wisdom" (374-384), insofar as both posit the poetic character as closely related to, and perhaps responding, to a sense of human lack in confrontation with the world.

While Boitani spends some time exploring the specificities of various crises marked by these Odyssean reconfigurations, ranging from the growing secularism of Dante's Middle Ages to the epistemological uncertainties of the 20th century, and while he emphasises the various kinds of wonder and stupefaction that colour each reworking, he pays little attention to the qualities of the figure itself that might make it particularly suitable for deployment within such crises, to the idiosyncrasies that might make Homer's hero an exceptionally intelligible means through which to navigate, poetically, conditions of aporia or perplexity. I have argued that the figure of Odysseus seems to have no one, stable meaning, that it can be reconfigured according to the concerns of various times and individuals. Yet what is it that nonetheless gives this figure its specific identity, what are the essential traits shared by its various reconfigurations, the traits that lend themselves towards re-enactment in moments of crisis?

Here, I would like to take as an example Cesare Pavese's relation to the figure of Odysseus, which recurs throughout his oeuvre. It is at times merely hinted at, as in the poem "I Mari del Sud"; at other times, as in "L'Isola," from *Dialoghi con Leucò*, the invocation is more overt, as the author, imagining Odysseus in dialogue with Calypso, engages with concerns like the *telos* of Ithaca and the disempowerment of ancient myths and fictions after the death of the old gods. One fascinating theme in this regard is the ambivalent relationship Pavese has to the image of the sea.[7] While he often expresses aversion to it, and states, in the preface to the *Dialoghi*, a distaste for all that is formless and chaotic, it remains, nonetheless, a pervasive presence throughout his writing, although one that is often threatening and hostile. I would like to suggest that the sea, for Pavese, might to some extent come to stand for all that amorphous, chaotic reality he has a horror of, and to which he opposes the meaning provided by mythology. If, as Pavese holds, it is precisely in response to a bewildering reality that we resort to myth, it is not surprising that the image of sea, symbolising this reality, becomes an important figural presence in much of his own writing that deals with myth. Building on this

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[7] See Olivier Burckhardt's "Of Sea and Words and Toil: the Poetry of Cesare Pavese."

proposal, I would like to suggest – and it will be my aim, in this thesis, to explore this hypothesis in more depth – that the central, enabling characteristic of Odysseus as a cogent poetic figure might be his irreducible association with the image of the sea. Insofar as we might think of the sea voyage as a metaphor for existence, Odysseus, embarked on a perilous sea, repeatedly impeded by Poseidon from returning to the homeliness and security of Ithaca, might become a privileged means through which to figure the uncertainty and the intractability of the tortuous trajectory of human existence.

For the philosopher Hans Blumenberg, the sea voyage is an instance of what he calls "absolute metaphor," a means through which man seeks to give expression to the difficulties and the inescapable anxieties of living. "Humans live their lives and build their institutions on dry land," he writes in *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, yet they nevertheless "seek to grasp the movement of their existence above all through a metaphorics of the perilous sea voyage" (7). This text is an extension and an application of the argument Blumenberg first puts forth in *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, that the importance of metaphors is not exhausted in their decorative function, but that they function as a set of hypothetical 'answers' to the "in principle unanswerable questions" with which man finds himself confronted (14). These are Blumenberg's "absolute metaphors" (3), and, importantly, they are not a permanent, ahistorical set of images, but are foundational and unconceptualised elements that occur within historical "horizons of meaning" and "ways of seeing" (5), subtending conceptual formulations, and 'stepping into' the aporias of reason. This also means, Blumenberg argues, that absolute metaphors cannot be reduced to or translated into concepts. Rather, they occupy the milieu, or the threshold, as it were, between the sphere of conceptual comprehension and the bewildering chaos of unanswerable and conceptually unresolvable challenges. In a sense, they guide or preserve the possibility of thought where reason loses its way. If we accept Blumenberg's claim that the image of the sea voyage is one such metaphor, this means that it might be repeatedly appropriated as a provisional means of thinking through or 'answering' the questions which confront man[8] at a given moment in history, particularly with regard to his place in the world. It is this adaptability that makes the absolute metaphor both untimely, insofar as the image invoked needs not form part of that moment's historical reality, and eminently timely, insofar as it

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[8] Regarding this gendered subject of seafaring: I have opted to retain the usual masculine noun because I am not convinced that the claim to universality that a gender-neutral alternative might imply is readily accommodated by the works I am considering here. Of course, this means that a gender-inflected reading of the material is undoubtedly worth pursuing, even though this falls beyond the ambit of the present study.

responds to historically specific concerns. This understanding of metaphor resonates to a certain extent with Boitani's reading of Odysseus as a *figura* finding various 'fulfilments' and reconfigurations within different historical horizons, and I would like to read this claim in conjunction with Blumenberg's claim concerning maritime metaphorics, to argue that one might read the figure of Odysseus, in its irreducible association with the sea voyage, as a metaphoric means through which to register the uncertainties and intractability of human life and hermeneutics in the context of the epistemological perplexity of modernity.

If the sea voyage metaphor, as Blumenberg argues, seems to hold a privileged place in man's thinking through and giving expression to the trajectory of his existence, it too, like the figure of Odysseus, seems to hold an additional pertinence for moments of historical crisis. In arguing for the particular significance of the figure of Odysseus in the modern moment, in his role as a maritime wanderer, I am mindful of the contested and unstable nature of 'modernity', and of the differing historical demarcations and nuances that have variously been associated with this term. Yet despite their differences, most accounts concur in characterizing modernity as a kind of crisis, and in emphasizing the highly self-conscious experience of this crisis as it is found, at the turn of the 20th century, in the literary and artistic phenomenon of modernism. If one might indeed argue that every age is 'modern' in relation to its past, there is a sense in which, in the past two centuries, man has become increasingly mindful of his own modernity. Perhaps this was in some measure already hinted at by the protracted Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns. We certainly find in Vico, for example, a heightened consciousness of history, and of the contingency of our own place within it. This self-reflexivity doubtless adds to the aptness of the image of the sea in modernity for thinking about our being-in-the-world. If, in the 17th century, Descartes' doubt could still find its Archimedean point in what Hannah Arendt called the "inexplicable goodness" of God (282), post-Enlightenment modernity no longer has recourse to such transcendent validations, and when reason begins to think its own foundations, these turn out to be far less solid than was assumed, and give way before our own scrutiny.

This suspicion of groundlessness is already nascent in the 17th century, in the writings of authors as disparate as Descartes (who counteracts his doubt with his discovery of the *cogito ergo sum*) and Pascal. Yet during the course of the 19th century, this consciousness intensifies, to take on the nature of a pervasive epistemological crisis that reaches its height around the start of the 20th century. The intelligibility and legitimacy of the metaphor of the sea voyage

as a means of registering human existence in the context of the 19th century has been convincingly argued by Dawid de Villiers in his "Okeanos contra oikoumenè: The Nineteenth Century Resurgence of an Adversarial Paradigm." Drawing on Blumenberg's theory of absolute metaphor, De Villiers argues that the persistent characterization of the ocean as adversarial and 'other' to man's being-at-home in the world, at a time when the maritime had become very much a part of this being-at-home, constitutes more than fanciful historical anachronism, as it is characterized by critics like Margaret Cohen, in her *The Novel and the Sea*, but rather serves as an "increasingly indispensable […] means of registering a nascent modern agnosticism," a sense of unhomeliness, of groundlessness that comes to subtend man's most familiar and solid 'land' (507). We have seen Horkheimer and Adorno's argument that the "disenchantment" of the world by the Enlightenment is the result of human fear of the unknown, and of the drive to bring every aspect of reality within the sphere of the familiar (1, 16). De Villiers argues that, in their persistent invocation of the image of the ocean as an adversarial 'other' to human endeavour, at a time when it was in fact well-travelled and central to culture and commerce, 19th century writers do not merely lapse into anachronistic cliché, but instead challenge the assumptions of an Enlightenment discourse that would reduce reality to the known, instead consciously emphasizing the irreducibly unsettled, unhomely relationship between man and his world (507).

Given the pervasiveness of the image of the adversarial ocean in the 19th century, I would like to argue that the prolific reconfigurations of the figure of Odysseus that mark the start of the 20th century might be understood as importantly enabled by the hero's characteristic maritime wandering, and his association with the antagonism of Poseidon. There are, of course, important differences between the various deployments of the figure, but it is interesting to note that many feature a kind of dialectic between home, safety and familiarity on the one hand, and dangerous, dissolutive forces on the other: between Ithaca and the threatening unhomeliness of the sea. It is worth noting, for example, how often writers like Primo Levi and Cesare Pavese invoke the image of the sea to figure conditions of unhomeliness or adversity.

The dialectic between an elusive (or even disappearing) *nostos* and the "adversarial ocean" (De Villiers 507), is one that has striking echoes in many studies on modernist writing. For example, critics like Marianne DeKoven and Cesare Casarino characterise modernist literature as a locus that registers the conflicting presence, at the same moment in time, of both old and newly emerging thought paradigms. The old certainties and systems inherited

from the Enlightenment become increasingly suspect, and solid foundations start giving way from under man's feet, so that the modern individual is increasingly confronted with the contingency and instability of the structuring paradigms by which he has hitherto lived. For example, the accelerating urbanization and industrialization of society throws into relief the crumbling structures of an old world – pertaining both to man's relation to fellow man as well as to his relation to his environment – but also highlights an emergent sense of fluidity and mutability that are replacing it. If what is often called postmodernity is what Zygmunt Bauman calls a "liquid modernity" (12), then perhaps the modernist moment might be described as that in which we are first overwhelmed by the "melting of the solids" (Bauman 3), which, if they still exert a nostalgic pull on the modern consciousness, increasingly thin out and dissolve into a disconcerting contingency. For DeKoven, modernist literature is characterized precisely as the milieu in which we encounter the "rich and strange" mixture of a dissolving past and a fluid future, the locus of an irreversible "sea-change" (3).

At the same time, modernist literature is characterized by a heightened self-consciousness, a self-reflexivity which the philosopher Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht argues might be traced back to the habitualisation of second-order perception in Western Civilisation at the start of the 19th century. Gumbrecht draws inspiration for his argument from the ideas of Michel Foucault, who in his 1966 publication *Les Mots et les choses*, had noted a shift towards reflexivity and historicity at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as man seeks in things "the principle of their intelligibility," but looks for it "only in their own development" (xxv). This, Foucault had argued, leads to man's heightened sensibility of his own hermeneutic activity, and the human or interpretational sciences are born (xxv). For Gumbrecht, the epistemological crisis that characterizes modernity is concomitant with such self-reflexivity.[9] Thus, if the sea serves as a particularly apt image through which to give expression to the uncertainties and complexities of modernity, this moment is also characterized by man's self-consciousness of his own place within it, and of his attempts to navigate its concerns and respond to its challenges. In this capacity, the deployment of the metaphor of the sea voyage serves, for modernist writers, as a means through which to figure their own hermeneutical activity within the modern milieu.

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[9] This is not to argue that second-order observation is unique to the modern world, but to propose that the start of the 19th century saw a heightening and habitualisation of such reflexivity, at least for a specific social class, to the extent that it became an ineluctable part of modern thought.

One instance of the sea voyage metaphor that might be read as pre-emptive – or in Boitani's terms, figurally prophetic – of modernist enactments of this image is to be found in a passage from Pascal's *Pensées*, which registers the thinker's response to the disorientation and instability resulting from the 17th century emergence of a consciousness of infinity. [10] Characterising man's state of being in the world as a bewildering and erratic existence between the equally threatening poles of nothingness and infinity, he writes: "*[n]ous voguons sur un milieu vaste, toujours incertains et flottants*, *poussés d'un bout vers l'autre; quelque terme où nous pensions nous attacher et nous affermir, il branle*, *et nous quitte*" (58). As W.F. Trotter translates it: "we sail within a vast sphere, ever drifting in uncertainty, driven from end to end. When we think to attach ourselves to any point and to fasten to it, it wavers and leaves us" (§72.27). The translation, while capturing the maritime dimensions of Pascal's words, does not quite do justice to the term "*milieu*," in rendering it as "sphere." Although it is used quite indiscriminately to mean just that in common parlance, the "mi" in "*milieu*" is roughly analogous to the English "mid," so that "*milieu*" already suggests a sort of midway or halfway space: a space in-between. That this is indeed the sense in which Pascal uses the term is evident, as he writes of our existence as a "*milieu entre deux extrêmes*" (57) (here translated as a "mean between two extremes") (§72.26). He even goes so far as to refer to man himself as a 'milieu': "*Un néant à l'égard de l'infini*, *un tout à l'égard du néant, un milieu entre rien et tout*" (57), or "nothingness in the face of the infinite, everything in the face of nothingness, a midway between all and nothing." What is more, this condition is one in which man feels profoundly ill at ease. Pascal laments that man's predicament in the face of the Infinite – a being-in-the-world which is described, in this passage, as being adrift in an oceanic milieu – is simultaneously "our natural condition," and "most contrary to our inclinations": "we burn with desire to find solid ground and an ultimate sure foundation whereon to build a tower reaching to the Infinite. But our whole groundwork cracks, and the earth opens to abysses" (§72.31-34). The solid ground of any final certainty eludes our grasp, and we remain condemned to the oceanic unhomeliness of our existential milieu. We have already seen how thinkers like Vico and Blumenberg read man's lack and perplexity as the source of his figurative creations. Here, the metaphor of the sea voyage becomes figurative of both life and hermeneutics, as being-at-sea comes to represent man's existential and epistemological deficiency: a condition that gives impetus to his resultant search for meaning.

[10] The relation between Pascal's thought and the threatening idea of infinity, as it emerged from the theories of Giordano Bruno, amongst others, has been noted by several critics, including Catherine Gimelli Martin, in her "'Boundless the Deep': Milton, Pascal, and the Theology of Relative Space" and M.J Orcibal, in his "Le fragment infini-rien et ses sources."

This tendency to use the metaphor of the sea voyage to give expression to hermeneutics is remarkably pervasive in studies on modernist literature, like those of DeKoven and Casarino. I have already referred to DeKoven's characterization of modernist literature as indicative of a "sea-change" in the early 20th century, and as characteristically "rich and strange" (3). While DeKoven's study traces the use of water imagery in the writings of modernist authors, when she invokes this Shakespearian image of shipwreck, decay and transformation as characteristic of modernist literature, she reaches for the same image these self-reflexive writers themselves made use of to reflect upon their own hermeneutic activity. The potential of this maritime metaphorics to characterize man's self-reflexive existence in the world is likewise evident in Casarino's *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx and Conrad in Crisis*, of which the title implicitly characterizes the "crisis" of modernity as a state of being "at sea." While he does not elaborate on this oceanic metaphor as a possible means for thinking about modernity, focusing instead on the socio-political realities of the 19th century as reflected in the microcosmic heterotopias of ships, the image of the sea remains a strong figural presence in Casarino's own thought. For Casarino, all our conceptual practices, including that of philosophy, are circumscribed and animated by a "chaotic and troubling outside" that both animates and threatens them, destabilizing the certainties of conceptual thinking, and giving impetus to new concept formation. This porous border between concepts and chaos is what Casarino, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, calls the "plane of immanence," and it is a space he persistently characterizes in terms of the sea. This border is the space that

> on the one hand, separates philosophy from the outside, thereby ensuring that philosophy does not fall into the outside and disintegrate into sheer chaos, and that, on the other hand, allows the inescapable and irrecusable demands of the outside to filter through and make themselves felt on philosophy as a practice. If philosophy is the practice of concepts, the plane of immanence is the nonconceptual space and fluctuating surface that concepts occupy without any remainder, much like the waves in the sea. (xix)

Here, the sea becomes the image of an unknowable 'outside' that remains resistant to human meaning, while at the same time, insofar as man feels himself threatened by the unknown, giving impetus to his hermeneutical activity. Our constructed meanings, if they are to obtain, must remain intimately connected with this threatening unknown, serving as the means through which we respond to the challenges it poses to us.

Though there are significant ideological distinctions between the two thinkers, there are nonetheless similarities between Casarino's porous plane of immanence (and his understanding of thought as operating on the threshold of the known and the unthinkable) and Blumenberg's absolute metaphor: both authors here emphasise the sense-making structures of human interpretation and the amorphous and threatening forces that animate and challenge such hermeneutics. When Casarino cites Deleuze and Guattari to characterize thinking as "a sort of groping experimentation" that "head[s] for the horizon, on the plane of immanence, and return[s] with bloodshot eyes," that remain, nonetheless, "the eyes of the mind" (xix), it has a certain resonance with the twofold objective of Blumenberg's metaphorology:

> To burrow down to the substructure of thought, the underground, the nutrient solution of systematic crystallizations; but also […] to show with what 'courage' the mind preempts itself in its images, and how its history is projected in the courage of its conjectures. (5)

This 'projection' is likewise implicit in the terms with which Blumenberg describes the metaphor of the maritime voyage when he writes that humans "seek to grasp the movement of their existence above all through a metaphorics of the perilous sea voyage" (7). This "movement of existence" comprises the trajectory of human life, but if we accept Heidegger's understanding (best formulated in his 1927 *Being and* Time) of *ex-sistere* as *Entwurf*, as an interpretative projection into the unknown, then the hermeneutic aspect of this movement cannot be ignored. Insofar as the movement of human existence also entails the hermeneutic activity of a the mind that courageously 'pre-empts' itself in its interpretive projections, the metaphor of the sea voyage is thus doubly apt, figuring both human existence and the activity of reading that existence, both living and interpreting. I have already noted how, in the arguments of DeKoven and Casarino, water becomes more than an incidental motif in the works of modernist writers, how thinking and even modernist literature itself become characterized in terms of the sea. If we accept Gumbrecht's claim that the habitualisation of second-order observation at the start of the 19th century brings about an epistemological crisis that results in an increasing synonymy between life and hermeneutics, this perhaps explains the seeming aptness of the maritime metaphor to characterize both the factical and the hermeneutic aspects of modern existence. In a sense, man's meaning-making becomes implicated in his own metaphorics, as the image of the sea is invoked to express both living and interpreting.

Given the arguments touched on above, I suggest that the prolific invocations of Odysseus in modernist literature, while they have been much studied, merit still another look. Specifically, it seems that the association of Odysseus with maritime wandering, and with his contest with the adversarial sea, make of this figure a favoured means through which to represent the movement of existence and hermeneutics in the contentious space of the modern milieu, as a poetic embarkation on the aporetic gap that opens up between the episteme and the world it seeks to know. As a means of evoking this space in-between, the sea becomes, symbolically, the proper realm of Odyssean hermeneutics, and maritime wandering comes to figure the courageous *Entwurf* of an itinerant interpretation, a poetics of passage that is at best an approach and an approximation, rather than a conceptual homecoming.

In my second chapter, I will explore a few of the key reconfigurations of Odysseus that lead up to the 20th century. These are numerous and disparate, but perhaps the most influential of them is the restless Ulysses of Dante's *Inferno*, whose quest beyond the Pillars of Hercules seems completely contrary to the homeward-bound voyage of Homer's hero, kept from Ithaca only by the adversity of Poseidon. In some sense, most reconfigurations of Odysseus could be described as either roughly Homeric or roughly Dantesque: a cunning survivor struggling to reach land and hampered by an adversarial sea, or a questing adventurer who embraces the voyage and spurns the safety and familiarity of land. Yet this is not an absolute dichotomy, and Dante draws on and foregrounds centrifugal characteristics already latent in Homer's Odysseus. Drawing on the arguments of Victor Bérard and Ernst Bloch, I will examine some of these tensions, as well as exploring the relationship between land and sea that remains central in these reconfigurations. In doing so, and taking my cue from Blumenberg, I would like to focus specifically on the association the figure of Odysseus has had, across the centuries, with knowledge and curiosity. In a brief overview of some of the reconfigurations given to the navigator-hero from Homer to the start of the 20th century, I will argue that Odysseus has historically been invoked in relation to questions of knowledge and its pursuit, and that the figure has been given different inflections according to the specific cultural and historical thought paradigms within which it found expression, and specifically according to prevailing conceptions of knowledge and curiosity.

If Odysseus is indeed closely associated with questions of epistemology, then the prevalence of the figure in the self-conscious hermeneutics of modernist literature is hardly surprising. It is noteworthy that the figure is central to two of the most ambitious and self-consciously canonical texts of European modernism: *The Cantos* of Ezra Pound and James Joyce's

Ulysses. It is to these two works that I will devote my third and fourth chapters. In my third chapter I will examine the aptness of a metaphorics of voyage and maritime wandering, particularly that represented by the *periplum* (or the coasting sea-voyage), as a structuring theme in *The Cantos* of Ezra Pound, and the way in which Pound makes use of the periplean Odyssean voyage to figure his own artistic practice. To this purpose, I will trace the way in which the image of the sea operates within *The Cantos*, as well as Pound's overt invocations of Odysseus, and I will attempt to show how his use of the figure relates to his own personal quest for a *paradiso*. As Odysseus voyages across a sea fraught with antagonistic forces to reach his Ithaca, suffering shipwreck and all manner of disasters along the way, and as he is guided on this journey by ghostly counsel and by his own adaptability and self-adjusting buoyancy, so Pound seeks, through *The Cantos*, to reach or to create, though his art, a poetic cosmos or paradise out of the chaos of modernity, and like Odysseus, he draws on voices from the past – his poetic predecessors like Robert Browning, the Provençal troubadours, Dante, and Homer – in order to reach this goal. By Pound's own admission, remarkably, it is a quest that ends in failure, and I would like to explore this simultaneous wish for, and impossibility of homecoming in *The Cantos*.

In my fourth chapter, I will trace the metaphor of the sea and the figure of Odysseus as maritime wanderer in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, not so much returning to the much-elaborated textual parallels between Joyce's text and *The Odyssey* as focussing on the way in which the figure becomes representative of Joyce's own hermeneutics. While both Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom might be read as Odyssean characters, it is Joyce's text itself that is most deserving of that title, enacting an Odyssean voyage in the interplay between its structuring myth and its protean contents, thereby maintaining a creative conflict between the overwhelming details of the text, and the leitmotifs and recurrent images that create order within it, without ever quite mastering its chaos. Joyce's text is interesting, furthermore, insofar as it foregrounds its own meaning-making as survival strategy. In the wake of the shipwreck of any final 'truth', the provisional meaning provided by what Vico might call man's "figural wisdom" keeps him afloat. Odysseus's voyage thus moves from the political or personal sphere to become linguistic, figural, and the text itself enacts a provisional, inconclusive 'poetics of passage': the polytropic survival that Odysseus comes to signify for the 20th century modernists.

CHAPTER 2

"TO VENTURE THE UNCHARTED DISTANCES": ODYSSEUS, SEA VOYAGE, AND EPISTEMOLOGY FROM HOMER TO D'ANNUNZIO

In the two volumes of his influential *Les Phéniciens et L'Odyssée*, published between 1902 and 1903, Victor Bérard argues that *The Odyssey* consists of a Greek poet's reworking of Phoenician *periploi*: documents that were geographical accounts of seaports and coastlines, as observed from the perspective of the shipboard. The Homeric text is strange, Bérard contends, in that it describes, in intricate detail, geographies not yet known to Greek sailors, and with names and words that were not Greek. Taking his cue from Strabo, the French author argues, through a study of the topology and geography of the poem, that "[t]he poet – Homer, if you like – was Greek; the navigator – Ulysses, to give him a name – was Phoenician" (*Les Phéniciens et L'Odyssée II*, 557). This explains for Bérard the conflict between the inordinate wanderings of Odysseus and the homeward impulse that nonetheless structures the poem. In *The Odyssey*, centripetal and centrifugal tendencies exist side by side, the insistence on return to Ithaca counterbalanced by episodes like the journey to the underworld and the encounter with the sirens: the former sees the hero voyaging to the limits of the world, only to obtain information Circe repeats upon his return to her; the later suggests the irresistible lure of knowledge which, while the hero resists it, nonetheless remains an unresolved element within the text. For Bérard, Homer, as a Greek, would have felt the seas to be profoundly uncanny: an uncomfortable 'other' to land and stability. On the other hand, the Phoenicians were masters of the sea before the later rise of a Hellenic "thalassocracy" (a word Bérard uses to describe the powers that, at different times, dominated the Mediterranean): the sea voyage would have been a way of life for them, and their explorations already reached beyond the limits of the Pillars of Hercules (*Phéniciens I*, 15).

Bérard, like Horkheimer and Adorno, views Homer as the organizing spirit behind the disparate material of *The Odyssey*, but in the argument that the navigator-hero was a Semitic merchant rather than a "Greek *conquistador*" (*Phéniciens I*, 13), he troubles their characterization of Odysseus as the first literary instantiation of man's drive to master the world. Furthermore, in his claim that *The Odyssey* constitutes a Greek poet's reworking of Phoenician *periploi*, and in examining the tensions that result from the pairing of Hellenic and Semitic worlds, Bérard somewhat undermines the cultural authoritativeness of the Homeric epic. The suggestion is that Homer's Odysseus is already itself a reconfiguration, rather than the origin and archetype of all future reworkings of the figure. What is more, in

calling attention to the irregularities in *The Odyssey* that result from a Greek reworking of older Phoenician texts, Bérard points to the ways in which the character of Odysseus might exceed or 'get away' from the specific reconfigurations given him by various authors, and their specific intentions in reworking the figure. His argument challenges the view of Odysseus as a sort of 'founding father' of Western civilization, and Bérard was quite aware of the potential implications a Semitic source for *The Odyssey* would have for the text's place as the foundational text of the Western world. He remarks wryly, for example, that "we shall still find, for a long time to come, valiant hearts who wish to defend the sacred patrimony of their Indo-European ancestors, and to repulse any invasion of Semitic influences from the sacred realm of Greece: temple and citadel of Western Civilisation" (*Phéniciens I*, 5, my translation).

The elusive nature of the figure and latent tensions in Homer's rendering of him would prove fruitful ground for further reconfigurations of Odysseus, and they allow for the incongruities between different authors' reworkings of the figure. Thus, while Homer figures Odysseus as resourceful ruler, whose trials are ultimately resolved in the establishment or restoration of a rightful kingdom, the image which Dante, centuries later, presents to his reader in his *Inferno* is one of incurable restlessness. Odysseus, having returned to Ithaca, cannot but renounce it again, and leaves once more to search out the new and the unknown, to "venture the uncharted distances" beyond the Pillars of Hercules. In doing so, he transgresses the given boundaries prescribed to man by the gods, and crosses the line it was ordained he should not pass. In some sense, it might be argued that Dante isolates and foregrounds an aspect of the figure already latent in *The Odyssey*, imagining a hero for whom voyage is his proper mode of being. Bérard notes, for example, the transitory and provisional nature of the major sites in *The Odyssey:* they are never more than a resting or a watering place, a passage, a momentary respite before Odysseus puts to sea again (*Phéniciens II*, 558). In Homer, this is duly accounted for by the hero's desire to return to Ithaca, but Dante removes this goal, and makes restlessness the principal characteristic of his Ulysses.

Bérard's account is interesting, furthermore, insofar as it foregrounds the author's reworking of an earlier text. This is a recurrent theme throughout his study, but its penultimate chapter is dedicated exclusively to some of the techniques Bérard believes the poet to have employed in transforming the Phoenician *periploi* into a Greek poem. *Les Phéniciens et L'Odyssée* was published at the turn of the 20th century, and influenced the Odyssean reconfigurations of both Ezra Pound and James Joyce, but before considering how the figure functions in these

authors' texts, it is necessary to examine some of its metamorphoses that lead up to and feed into their respective reworkings of the navigator-hero. Given the ubiquity of the figure in Western literature, and the multitude and variety of its redeployments, such a survey will inevitably remain cursory and broad, and it cannot do justice to the unique nuances and complexities that characterize and differentiate its individual reconfigurations. However, since this project's specific focus is on the self-reflective enactments of the figure found in the modernist moment, I would like to pay special attention to the associations of the figure of Odysseus with knowledge and with curiosity, and will attempt to examine, in this chapter, some of the historically specific epistemological attitudes and assumptions that are registered in the many and disparate reconfigurations of Odysseus that precede the 20th century.

To this purpose I would like to commence with a brief outline of Hans Blumenberg's genealogy of theoretical curiosity, which comprises the third section of his *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age.* In this section, Blumenberg traces the historically changing valuations of man's drive for knowledge from antiquity to the waning of the Enlightenment, and he draws, from time to time, on authors' invocations of the figure of Odysseus and of the Pillars of Hercules in order to illustrate these intellectual developments. In Greek Antiquity, theoretical knowledge, while not necessary for human survival, is the route towards human flourishing. For Aristotle, the pursuit of knowledge is the essential constituent of human nature, and thus the means to attain happiness. As such, it is legitimized as an end in itself. In this very association with happiness and human flourishing, however, also lies what Blumenberg calls "the first epochal injection of mistrust in theory, when happiness had become a matter for hope directed at the next world, for a salvation which man could not bring about, though it was still defined as *visio beatifica* [beatific vision] – as the acquisition of truth, fulfilment through theory" (*Legitimacy* 232). In the Late Middle Ages, Blumenberg writes, "the premise that only the final possession of truth could guarantee man's happiness went over from ancient thought into the interpretation of the biblical eschatology" (*Legitimacy* 232). In this light, the excessive pursuit of knowledge of this world becomes a potentially dangerous distraction from the hereafter, and the promise of full truth and full happiness is displaced to the thither side of the grave. Such misgivings about the value of theoretical knowledge are not limited, Blumenberg is careful to note, to the Middle Ages, nor to the displacement of full knowledge into the spiritual world, but they are already suggested in the works of philosophers like Cicero and Lucretius. For Cicero, writing in the Stoic tradition, the mere fact that "we are all drawn and directed to the appetite for knowledge and science" does not

make the pursuit of knowledge a justifiable end in itself (*Legitimacy* 280). Rather, knowledge is valuable insofar as it is conducive to the flourishing of human society, and it is useful for counteracting ignorance and blind compliance in political matters (*Legitimacy* 281). For the Epicurean Lucretius, whom Blumenberg discusses in a similar vein both in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* and in *Shipwreck with Spectator*, the "cosmos is no longer the Order whose contemplation fills the observer with happiness," as in the case of Aristotle, but it has become a chaos of randomly moving atoms, an "ocean of matter" from which man seeks to distance himself through theoretical contemplation, thereby establishing some distance between the chaotic world and his own observing consciousness (*Shipwreck* 27). Finally, in an understanding that is pre-emptive of the Middle Ages and its displacement of Truth into the sphere of the immaterial, Neoplatonism composes *curiositas* as the soul's forgetting of its origin in the Divine Spirit as a result of the distractions of the material world (*Legitimacy* 288-289). In this forgetfulness the soul falls further away from its original unity with the Divine Spirit. The counter-action to this descent through forgetfulness is one of ascent towards union with the Divine Spirit, which occurs when the soul remembers its origin (*memoria*) (*Legitimacy* 288-289).

In the Middle Ages, the restrictions placed upon the pursuit of knowledge are likewise of a spiritual kind. The eschatological view of God and History means that we cannot expect true revelation in this world, and even salvation, as an act of God, is something in which man can play but little part (*Legitimacy* 232). However, during the Early Modern Period, the prospect of knowledge and flourishing is again restored to the material world from the immaterial, and the limits that had been imposed on the cognitive drive become incentives to further discovery (237-238). This "rehabilitation of theoretical curiosity" persists into the Enlightenment (233), and the cognitive drive becomes enshrined at the centre of its project, as the vehicle through which humanity will attain total knowledge and bring about unprecedented flourishing. At the same time, the apex of the Enlightenment already marks the beginnings of its destabilization by the same implacable inquiry that defined it. Both Blumenberg and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht cite, as an example of this destabilisation, the project of the *Encyclopédie*: embodying the optimism of the Enlightenment, in its aspirations to compile a total body of knowledge, it simultaneously contains within itself the seeds of its own impossibility, manifesting in its infinite perfectibility, in the rapidity with which entries became outdated, and in the destabilizing threat of perspectivism (*Legitimacy* 236-237; Gumbrecht 53-54). Interestingly, 20th century writers like Joyce would later use the

encyclopaedic tendency precisely to draw attention to the instabilities of knowledge. In the 18th century however, if the *encyclopédistes* were still initially optimistic about their project, later writers like Kant already acknowledge the limits of the cognitive drive: limits which would be even more radically emphasised in the 19th century by writers like Nietzsche and Freud.

This is but an extremely cursory synopsis of Blumenberg's much more nuanced and sophisticated genealogy, but it should serve as a sufficient framework within which to situate some of the enactments of Odysseus that lead up to the 20th century, and it provides a useful point of departure for their closer examination. It is only fitting to start with Homer. It is true, of course, that Homer's Odysseus is far removed from the figure of insatiable curiosity and restless wandering we later find in Canto XXVI of Dante's *Inferno*, and which will dominate many of the hero's subsequent reconfigurations. By contrast, Homer's long-suffering hero wishes only to return to Ithaca, and his maritime wandering is the result not of any inordinate appetite for knowledge, but rather of the antagonism of the sea-god Poseidon. Nonetheless, there are elements of the Homeric text that seem to have a rather unquiet afterlife, episodes that are not quite satisfactorily concluded by the hero's final homecoming. Whether we accept Bérard's argument that the text is a reworking of Phoenician *periploi*, or whether we simply remain cognisant of its sources in oral tradition, there is, in *The Odyssey*, a natural presence of elements that sit uneasily within the overarching narrative trajectory. Certain elements seem particularly persistent: the luring temptation of knowledge found in the siren song; the threatening groundlessness of the whirlpool of Charybdis; the voyage to the underworld and the prophecy of yet another voyage to be undertaken which he hears there from Tiresias. Some critics, like Bernard Knox and Peter Jones, dismiss the possibility that this prophesied final voyage would influence the subsequent tradition of Odysseus as a perpetual wanderer, pointing out the explicitly land-based nature of the mission Tiresias foretells, in contrast to the maritime dimensions of wanderings of Odysseus in later literature. Others, like David Quint, contend that "the further expiatory voyage to the ends of the earth that Tiresias imposes (*Od.* 11.121-31) on the hero after his return to Ithaca" already threatens Odysseus "with the fate of the Flying Dutchman" (58), and he suggests that the oceanic dimensions of this venture simply result when later writers conflate the suggestion of endless travel contained in Tiresias's prophecy with Odysseus's extensive and errant maritime wanderings as found in *The Odyssey.* At any rate, the reception of *The Odyssey* even prior to Dante's famous reconfiguration illustrates the extent to which Odysseus's homecoming was

already felt to be inconclusive, or at least problematic, by ancient writers. Blumenberg notes, for example, that Cicero cites Odysseus's encounter with the sirens as a symbol of inordinate curiosity. While admittedly Odysseus does not act on his desire to pursue the siren song, Cicero maintains that the very length and extent of his wanderings prove that the hero valued knowledge above his homeland (*Legitimacy* 281-282). So, too, writers like Eugamnon, Tacitus, Solinus, and Strabo all imagine an Odysseus whose wanderings do not end upon return to Ithaca (Boitani 18). These reconfigurations all precede Dante, and suggest, as Ernst Bloch argues with regard to Homer, that the image of "[a] Sinbad for whom the perils of the sea and marvels had become a natural element was inherent in the long-sufferer" of *The Odyssey*, "but he was not acknowledged" (1024).

Even in *The Odyssey*, Bloch argues, "if Ithaca were not a symbol it would be a problem," and Homer must "bring down the curtain on it" as soon as his hero has returned home (1023). As the image of a lost state of security and being-at-home in the world, it operates in *The Odyssey* in an analogous way to the memory of unity with the divine spirit in Neoplatonism, serving as a goal towards which man must orient himself, steering clear, through *memoria*, of the distractions of the world. This is also essentially the argument Horkheimer and Adorno put forward in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: Ithaca becomes the symbol of the Enlightenment ideal of a world in which man can be fully at home, a world wholly transparent to him and subject to his command. Regardless of the specific way in which it is deployed, reading Ithaca as a symbol enables future writers to transpose it elsewhere, and to inscribe it on the horizon of the future as the goal of being-at-home, or of salvation, or of Eudemonia. The degree to which the goal remains elusive perhaps contributes to the fact that, as Bloch posits, "the legend [about Odysseus] did not remain silent, [but] worked on in a kind of Flying Dutchman motif about Odysseus, a late, wild, unknown Odysseus" (1023).

As the antithesis to the *telos* of Ithaca, and that which prevents its attainment, the maritime space of Odysseus's wanderings is one of unhomeliness and exile. It worth noting the two principal aspects Blumenberg ascribes to maritime metaphorics, in his *Shipwreck with Spectator:* "first, the sea as a naturally given boundary of the realm of human activities and, second, its demonization as the sphere of the unreckonable and lawless, in which it is difficult to find one's bearings" (8). Being at sea is a condition hostile to man, and it is the inverse of the safety, stability and familiarity represented by land. It is worth noting, too, that this is not a condition Homer's hero chooses for himself. His initial journey to Troy is imposed on him by King Agamemnon and his subsequent maritime wandering results as Poseidon frustrates

his attempts to return home. While Homer's Odysseus encounters many adversaries, the sea and Poseidon's antagonism constitute the principal forces that prevent his return home, and his presence at sea is an intensely unhomely, unwelcome one. This sense of seafaring's impropriety is famously expressed by Horace, in his "Sic Te Diva," which Blumenberg quotes: sailing is that activity in which "[b]rashly challenging every law, / Mankind plunges ahead into forbidden things" (*Odes* 1:3, lines 25-26), and it is tantamount to a defiance of the gods, who "set the dry lands apart by the estranging sea" when in "impious boats" man nonetheless "probe[s] the watery ways, rating the ban as naught" (*Odes* 1:3, 21-24). Horace goes on to compare this transgression to those of three other mythical figures: Prometheus's theft of fire from the gods; Daedalus' venture into the vacuous skies; Hercules's crossing of the Acheron into Hades. The mythical seafarer in Horace's poem is Aeneas: "who saw dry-eyed the monsters of the deep, the swelling waves, and Acroceraunia, crags of evil name" (*Odes* 1:3, lines 18-20; D'Ooge 5). Aeneas's adventures recall those of Odysseus, who in his role as seafarer is thus a boundary-crossing figure in the same style as Hercules and Daedalus. In Horace's poem, Blumenberg argues, "[f]lying through the air, seafaring, and stealing fire are brought together in one context" (*Shipwreck* 12). To these I would add the journey into the underworld, as figured here by Hercules.

This association of the sea voyage with the transgression of boundaries also points to the association that Odysseus would come to have with the Pillars of Hercules, set up by the eponymous hero when he stole the cattle of Geryon, to mark the limits of the human world. The island of Erytheia, where the cattle were located, constitutes the westernmost point of Hercules's travels, and was situated beyond the world-encircling river of Okeanos (Beaulieu 27, 48). Further West still was found the realm of Hades (Beaulieu 27, 43). Odysseus travels here in Book XI of *The Odyssey*, but Dag Øistein Endsjø argues that Hercules, too, took this route when he travelled to Hades to capture the hound of Cerberus:

> [M]ost versions will recount how Heracles descended into Hades through some crevice in the earth's surface, usually in Greece proper. When Odysseus met Heracles at the border of Hades, the implication is nevertheless that Heracles, when alive, had travelled the same route as Odysseus, that is, sailing across Oceanus to the uttermost end of the world and there entering Hades (Odyssey 11.620-26; cf. ibid. 10.508-12). Also the late fifth century B.C. tragedian Euripides writes of Heracles's sailing to Hades […] though he also at the same time operates

with the more traditional descent. […] This suggests again that crossing the Oceanus to the literal end of the world could have been Heracles's original way of reaching Hades.[11] (352n5)

This means that for Homer and his contemporaries, crossing Oceanus and venturing beyond the Pillars of Hercules literally constitutes a passage out of the world of men into the realm of the dead or of the gods, and thus entails a transgression of the highest degree (Beaulieu 44-45).

By the time of Herodotus, the narrowness of this cosmology, which confined realm of men to the Mediterranean World and ascribed whatever lay beyond it to the realm of gods and of the dead (Beaulieu 44-45), had already been transformed by Atlantic explorations beyond the Pillars of Hercules (Fernándes-Armesto 27). Yet, while they were now no longer the limit of the existing world, Heinz-Günther Nesselrath maintains that the Pillars still retained their symbolic value as a limit figure (159). Despite its exploration by Greek and Carthaginian expeditions like those of Pytheas and of Hanno the Navigator, the realm beyond the Pillars remains an uncanny space, one inhabited by monsters and indeterminable forces, and distinct from the familiarity of the Mediterranean World (Fernándes-Armesto 28-30).

If the Hellenic empire, at its height, expanded its exploration beyond the Mediterranean World, the political instabilities that marked the end of antiquity and ushered in the Middle Ages prompted a repudiation of such geographical ventures, as different nations cloistered themselves in the interests of self-preservation. For a time, exploration was largely abandoned. By the time of the most famous literary instance of the transgressive crossing of the Pillars of Hercules, however, attention was once more gradually turning outward. The Ulysses we encounter in Canto XXVI of Dante's *Inferno* is perhaps the figure *par excellence* of inordinate intellectual appetitiveness. Unlike Homer's hero, who ultimately regains Ithaca, Dante's Ulysses, contrary to all "tenderness for son, […] duty owed / to ageing fatherhood" or "love that should have brought […] Penelope delight" (*Inf.* 26.94-96), cannot help but undertake yet another voyage: to gain experience of the world, and to know "of human vices, worth and valour" (*Inf.* 26.99). When he arrives, with his small company of men, at the Pillars of Hercules – the signs or "*segnò*" that indicate the limits of the realm permitted to man (*Inf.* 26.108), he persuades his crew to sail beyond them, urging them to "not / deny [their] will to win experience, / behind the sun, of worlds where no man dwells" (*Inf.* 26.115-

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[11] Marie-Claire Beaulieu makes a similar argument in the chapter "Paths of the Sea," of her *The Sea in Greek Imagination.*

117). This, he argues, is only in keeping with their dignity: "You were not made to live as mindless brutes, / but to go in search of virtue and true knowledge" ("*fatti non foste a viver come bruti, / ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza*") (*Inf.* 26.119-120). Their journey, which Ulysses describes as an "*alto passo*" (*Inf.* 26.132), a "high venture," as Robin Kirkpatrick translates it (although "*passo*" literally means "passage"), ultimately ends in tragedy, when, within sight of the mountain of Purgatory, a whirlwind rises from the New World, and they are shipwrecked: "the sea closed over us" (*Inf.* 26.142), "as pleased Another's will" (*Inf.* 26.141).

It has often been noted that Dante seems somewhat ambiguous towards the figure of Ulysses. While he is consigned to the eighth circle of Inferno for his fraudulent council, he is granted ample time to tell his tale, and Dante in no way demurs or criticizes him upon its conclusion. As critics like Benedetto Croce and Bruno Nardi have noted, there are in fact important similarities between Ulysses, in his "mad flight" beyond the Pillars of Hercules (*Inf.* 26.125), and Dante, who in his pilgrimage through the underworld also trespasses into a realm not permitted to living man (Thompson 49; Sturm 101). The two journeys are described in similar terms: in the second canto Dante inquires of Virgil whether he is truly strong enough to be trusted on such an "*alto passo*" (the very term with which Ulysses refers to his own voyage, here translated by Kirkpatrick as "arduous road") (*Inf.* 2.12). What is more, in Canto I, as Dante looks up from the dark ravine to the hill already bathed in sunlight, his thoughts "turned around to marvel at that strait [*passo*] / that let no living soul pass through till now" and he compares his feelings to those of a shipwrecked sailor who "safely reaching shore from open sea, / still turns and stares across those perilous waves" (*Inf.* 1.23-24). This passage, while it describes Dante's emotions upon emerging from the dark ravine, and thus before undertaking his pilgrimage through Inferno, might perhaps be read as pre-emptive of Dante's ultimate salvation – his safe arrival upon shore – in contrast to Ulysses' shipwreck. The essential difference between the two travellers, of course, is that Dante is guided both by Virgil – a figure of reason – and by Beatrice – signifying religion – and so he does not rely on his own powers to achieve his goal.

Motifs of human limits and transgression and of divine sanction or condemnation are recurrent themes in the *Divine Comedy*. Natalino Sapegno argues, for example, that while in Limbo we might indeed find the beginnings of a humanistic idealization of intellectual enterprise, the more important motif that dominates the entirety of the *Divine Comedy* is that of "the limits of human intelligence and grandeur" apart from the guidance of God (41). In

Paradiso, Adam describes his sin to be not the simple act of eating the fruit, but "*il trapassar del segnò*," the transgression of the sign that God had set to mark the limits of what was permitted to man (Sturm 106; *Par.* 26.117). The sin of Adam thus parallels the transgressive voyage of Ulysses, who sails beyond the circumscribing "*segnò*" of the Pillars of Hercules (*Inf.* 26.108). The Greek hero, without the saving limits or guidance of reason and religion, ends up pitting himself against the immovable and insurmountable will of God, and is ultimately shipwrecked. If this voyage is not the reason for Ulysses' confinement to the 8th circle of Inferno, it is ultimately the cause of his death, which results from the hero's attempt, unaided and unsanctioned by God, to reach the Mountain of Purgatory. It is noteworthy, by contrast, that Dante and indeed all Christian souls *do* successfully reach the Mountain of Purgatory (at the summit of which Paradise is located).

The last "mad flight" of Ulysses would prove an immensely influential and enriching reconfiguration for subsequent tradition, and it provides a grounds for comparison between Ulysses and figures like Milton's Satan, Goethe's Faust, and the Flying Dutchman, all of whom, in some form, are blasphemously and disastrously committed, one might say, to the quest for "*virtute e canoscenza*" (*Inf.* 26.120) It is in this guise that Ernst Bloch, writing from 1938 to 1947 the third volume of his *Principle of Hope*, views Odysseus, including him along with Faust as one of his "Guiding Figures of Venturing Beyond the Limits" (1000). Bloch writes that "the legend [of Odysseus's wanderings] did not remain silent," but "worked on in a kind of Flying Dutchman motif about Odysseus, a late, wild, unknown Odysseus" (1023). Dante's Ulysses, for Bloch, transforms the figure from Homer's "reluctant long-sufferer" into "a sea-Faust" (1023). For this new, "Gothic Odysseus," akin to the figure of the knight, and related, in his "unconditionalness" and "monomania" to Don Juan and Faust, "the perils of the sea and marvels had become a natural element" (1024-1025).

While Dante ultimately censures this hero with shipwreck and Inferno, his Ulysses nonetheless embodies, Boitani argues, citing Hans Blumenberg, "the epoch's incipient doubt about the finality of its horizon and its narrowness" ("Shadows of Heterodoxy in Hell" 77). For Bloch, Dante first intimates to us an understanding of "life [that] becomes the same as sustained venturing beyond the limits, per seguir virtute e conoscenza" (1026). The lasting legacy of this Odysseus, his lasting appeal and relevance, lies for Bloch in the fact that his goal "to know oneself in action, towards the unknown earth," "cannot, like a chivalric ideal, become obsolete" (1027).

If this figure finds its inception in Dante, it is one towards which the author still seems largely ambivalent, and the reader is at pains to determine whether the journey beyond the Pillars of Hercules constitutes a noble, tragic gesture, or whether it rather evinces deplorable arrogance and recklessness on Ulysses' part. Yet not long after Dante, in many texts from the Early Modern Period, the very prohibitive limits of the Middle Ages that would displace full happiness and the *visio beatifica* beyond this world into the hereafter become re-inscribed into the material world as yet untried possibilities, promising a wealth of knowledge yet to be discovered. This transformation is strikingly illustrated by the way in which the image of the Pillars of Hercules is taken up in Early Modern Europe, and transformed from a prohibition into a symbol of vast, as yet unactualised potential. As Blumenberg writes,

> [t]he self-consciousness of the modern age found in the image of the Pillars of Hercules and their order, *Nec plus ultra* [No further], which Dante's Odysseus still understood (and disregarded) as meaning "Man may not venture further here," the symbol of its claim directed against what had been valid until then. On the title page of Bacon's *Instauratio magno* [*Great Renewal*] of 1620, Odysseus's ship was to appear behind the Pillars of Hercules, interpreted by this self-confident motto: *Multi pertransibunt et augibetur scientia* [Many will pass through and knowledge will be increased]. And in 1668 one of the first attempts to draw up a balance sheet of the new age of science will appear under the title *Plus ultra* [Further yet].[12] (*Legitimacy* 340)

Ernst Bloch, among others, argues that the Ulysses we find in Dante is already informed by the newly emerging image of the "Atlantic explorer" (1026). In passing beyond the Pillars of Hercules he anticipates the voyage of Columbus (Nohrnberg 116). As humanistic tradition and secularization begin to efface from Dante's universe the limiting influence of the medieval God – the divine "Other" who dooms Ulysses to shipwreck (*Inf.* 26.141) – voyaging beyond the Pillars of Hercules becomes something to be praised rather than condemned, a fruitful or perhaps even necessary task, rather than a blasphemous venture. Both Tasso and Pulci, for example, invoke Ulysses as the forbear of Columbus, who passes beyond the Pillars of Hercules and actually sets foot on the "*nova terra*" seen but not reached by Ulysses (Nohrnberg 124-125; *Inf.* 26.137). Columbus set sail under the commission of Ferdinand II, and already in the coat of arms of Spain's next king, Charles V, the Pillars of Hercules are seen rising from the sea, surrounded by the motto "*Plus Ultra*," or "further beyond" (Nohrnberg 116). This transformation of the mythical prohibition of the Pillars into

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[12] Blumenberg is here referring to Joseph Glanville's *Plus Ultra or the Progress and Advancement of Knowledge since the days of Aristotle* (1668).

an invitation to further exploration is evidence of the extent to which the voyage of Columbus was already read, by his near contemporaries, as the historical fulfilment of an enterprise first attempted by Dante's Ulysses, in his pioneering transgression of the Pillars of Hercules. For Ernst Bloch, the "nova terra" of Dante's Canto XXVI is already the New World of America (*Inf.* 26.137). He claims it to be evident, "from his course" westward that Dante's Ulysses "discovered America, so to speak" (1026). Not that Ulysses can be said to have been explicitly questing for America, but Bloch argues that the "attempt to reach beyond the known world" is already very much present in Dante's time (1026), as seen not only in the naval exploits of explorers like the Vivaldi brothers, but also, for example, in a passage from Seneca's *Medea*, "demonstrably known in Dante's time," and later "often cited by Columbus" in reference to himself (1026), which prophesies years to come "in which the ocean breaks its chains and the earth opens up, when the sea-goddess Thetis reveals new lands and Thule will no longer be the outermost limit of the earth" (qtd. in Bloch 1026). For Bloch, Dante's Ulysses already breaks such chains, which would have confined him to a small and stultified lordship over Ithaca (1026). And in applying this passage to himself, Columbus (implicitly) aligns himself with a Dantean Ulysses, one who looses the chains of the ocean, and renders it open for further exploration and conquest.[13]

However, Blumenberg notes that the modern world cannot, in its newfound rehabilitation of the cognitive drive, abruptly sever itself from its Christian heritage in the Middle Ages. The theoretical curiosity we find in the Early Modern Period does not, therefore, constitute a return to the *a priori* justified cognitive drive as it is found, for example, in Aristotle, but it must come to terms with the theological worldview from which it now newly emerges, and must situate itself in relation to this worldview. Drawing on the argument Blumenberg makes in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Bradley Brassler points out that Francis Bacon's optimistic frontispiece, with its depiction of two ships sailing through the Pillars of Hercules, includes with this now rehabilitated image of theoretical curiosity – here become an emblem of human progress and self-assertion – a quotation from the biblical book of Job: "many shall pass through and knowledge shall be increased" (Brassler 166). In Bacon, Brassler argues, the theological worldview of the late Middle Ages and its inscrutable God who can only be

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[13] It is worth noting that, for his part, Columbus avoided styling himself as another Ulysses, preferring instead to invoke a number of biblical texts to legitimize his voyages (Marsh 134). One might say, perhaps, that he is careful to portray himself as dutiful and divinely sanctioned pilgrim, rather than an irreverent adventurer. His self-stylizing did not, however, hinder subsequent writers like Tasso and Pulci, but also, for example, James Russell Lowell and Arthur Hallam in the 19th century, from making a New Ulysses out of him (cf. Nohrnberg 102-124).

known in the post-worldly eschatological revelation of the *viso beatifica* is now replaced by a providential and self-revelatory God, who progressively grants man knowledge of Himself, and insight into the natural world (166-167). This theology is mingled, at the same time, with claims to a godlike human self-assertion, which would prompt Bacon to assert that, in the beneficence of his inventions and in his self-actualisation, "man is a god to man" (Brassler 176). This (at times uneasy) coincidence of theological acquiescence and human self-assertion is the result, Brassler writes, of the removal of limits brought about by man's reclaiming of theoretical curiosity: a removal which leaves man with a disconcertingly open world, and prompts him, in order to contain or structure this threatening openness, to invoke the guidance of Providence (166).

It is in this sense that one might read Milton's use of the figure of Odysseus in his characterization of Satan in *Paradise Lost.* Milton models his charismatic Satan on the figure of the mythical seafarer and, problematizing epic heroism, he posits over and against it the model of Adam and Eve, who despite their initial rebellion and fall, leave Eden acquiescent to God, and with "Providence their guide" (XII.647). Satan, by way of contrast, embodies the refusal of such acquiescence in his blasphemous over-reaching: both in his initial rebellion against God and in his later quest to seduce newly created humanity. After their first rebellion Satan and his followers are expelled from heaven, and fall through chaos for a period of nine days, before they ultimately find themselves in Hell, stripped of any capacity for meaningful choice or self-assertion: further rebellion or acquiescence cannot ultimately change their fate, or counteract their reality of eternal torture. Yet despite his condition in Hell and his unchangeable fate, Milton's Satan remains a persistently restless and transgressive figure. In his journey through chaos back towards Heaven and the Earth, he recalls the figure of Odysseus: both that of Homer, in his trajectory towards his forfeited home, and that of Dante, in his transgression of the boundaries of Hell and his daring traversal of chaos, which recalls Ulysses' sea voyage.

An interesting argument in this regard is David Quint's claim that Milton's characterization of the fallen Satan and his relation to the divine order responds to Lucretius's view of the universe, which was resurfacing around this time, and which posits that worlds arise out of the chaotic flux of atoms by chance accidents, before inevitably falling back, through entropy, into disorder (74). Quint argues that Milton counteracts the threat of absurdity and meaninglessness posed by this view by contending that God's creative power gives meaning and form to original disorder (Quint 74-75), a view strikingly illustrated in *Paradise Lost* by

the contrasting images, especially in the second and third books, of oceanic Chaos and the islands or promontories of order and stability formed by Heaven, Earth, and God's other created worlds, which limit the reaches of Chaos. For example, when Satan finally reaches the outskirts of Heaven after his voyage across Chaos, his approach is described as that of "a weather-beaten vessel" which "holds / Gladly the port, though shrouds and tackle torn" (II.43-44). In their first revolt against divine order, and in their aspiration to usurp the rule of God, Satan and his rebel army have, however, forfeited the benefits of his stable and meaningful world. Thus Quint argues that the rebel angels' nine-day fall through Chaos subsequent to their defeat constitutes the penalty for their disobedience: they are abandoned, as it were, to the chaos and non-meaning of existence apart from God (75).

What is more, this disorder is not merely an externality to which Satan is condemned, but it is also internalized. As Quint writes:

> Having cut himself off from the divine source of meaning and creative order, Satan's fall into the confused meaninglessness and random disorder of Chaos is both the result and emblem of his sin. So Satan internalizes his falling in his soliloquy in book 4.
>
> > Which way shall I fly
> > Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
> > Which way I fly is hell; my self am hell;
> > And in the lowest deep a lower deep
> > Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
> > To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven (4.73-78)
>
> When he speaks these words Satan is no longer in Chaos, but on the terra firma of the earth in the new, solidly built universe that God has created in his absence. But he still feels that he is falling. Miltonic wordplay transforms Satan's flight into a vain attempt to flee both from an angry God and, more powerfully, from his own inner torment. (75)

This complex of order, disorder, and inordinate aspiration implicitly associates Milton's Satan with two mythical heroes who, over-reaching their limits, were drowned in the sea: Icarus and the Ulysses we encounter in Dante's *Inferno*. Quint writes, for example, that Satan's journey through chaos recalls the Ulysses we find in Dante and later in Tasso, "who committed himself without divine guidance to the randomness of adventure" (73). Quint further notes that in both Dante and in Tasso, the figure of Ulysses is associated with that of Icarus. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the flight of Daedalus and Icarus is described in terms of a sea voyage – they make their way with "the oarage of wings" (qtd. in Quint 72) – while in Dante, conversely, the voyage of Ulysses is described in terms of flight: "we made our oars

into wings in mad flight" (*Inf.* 26,125). In Dante's *Inferno*, Quint argues, this failed flight is implicitly contrasted to the successful transcendence of Elijah, in his fiery chariot, so that the failures of Icarus and Ulysses, who lack divine guidance, find their counterpart in the ascension of the godly Elijah (73). In Tasso, this Icarus-Ulysses compound is maintained, and here again their failure is contrasted both to Elijah, and to the ultimate success of Columbus, whose name means "dove," and whose successful voyage is likewise described in terms of flight (70-71). When we get to Milton, Quint writes, "an epic tradition that begins with the flying Daedalus and Icarus as metaphorical sailors, travelling with the oarage of their wings, and then describes sailors such as Ulysses and Columbus as metaphorical fliers who make oars or sails into wings, now comes full circle with the Satan of *Paradise Lost*" (72). In contrast to Satan's blasphemous flight and his resultant fall, we find Milton himself aspiring to Icarian heights, with the important difference that he is sustained by God, who grants him the "special grace" of the Muse of Poetry (Quint 92), and thus enables him to spurn "middle flight" and to aspire (I. 13-14), through his verse, to greater and theologically more dangerous heights.

This God-guided overcoming of limits is likewise characteristic of the stylization found around this time in the scientific works of Bacon, although in the latter's assertion that "[m]an is a god to man" (qtd. in Brassler 176), we might perhaps detect the beginnings of the more radical human self-sufficiency we find epitomized in the Enlightenment. Brassler argues that the disconcertingly tremendous potential opened up through the post-medieval transformation of the boundaries imposed on the cognitive drive into inviting gateways to further knowledge necessitated containment by recourse to the idea of a guiding Providence (166). Yet as this solution became progressively less convincing, the implacability of the cognitive drive became the mechanism for the destabilization of the very project that enshrined it, relentlessly transgressing and calling into question any stabilizing limit or Archimedean point.

While writers like Bacon and Milton drew on Dante's Ulysses in their own writing, the Italian author's influence would see a massive increase at the start of the 19th century. Already in the latter half of the 18th century there are signs of an increased interest on the part of the English public in Italian literature. Andrew Thompson notes, for example, that while only three translations of Dante were published during the first half of the century, nine appeared in the second (16). Thompson further argues that the havoc wreaked on Italy by the Napoleonic Wars and the fragmentation of the country by the 1815 Congress of Vienna

aroused sympathy for the Italian plight, and the struggle for unification of the Risorgimento, which looked to eminent historical figures like Machiavelli, Pope Gregory VII, and above all Dante Alighieri as testaments to Italian greatness, doubtless contributed to a revival of interest in Italian history and culture, in Italy itself, but also in England, Germany, and France, where, after a number of failed uprisings, several hundred Italian exiles were residing (Thompson 7-9; 16-18). Among the Italians residing in England, there were influential writers, several of whom, including Ugo Foscolo, Antonio Panizzi, and Gabriele Rossetti, published critical works on Dante and other Italian writers, and a number of whom made a living by giving lessons in Italian (Thompson 16, Friederich 52). William Cary's translation of *The Divine Comedy*, appearing in 1814, praised by Foscolo and popularized by Coleridge in his address on Dante in 1818, proved wildly successful, and was read and admired by writers like Tennyson, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, and the Brownings (Thompson 16-17; Friederich 51-52).

It is thus hardly surprising that the 19th century saw a number of important reconfigurations of the Dantean Ulysses, often mingled, as in Walt Whitman's "Passage to India," with the figure of Columbus. While the importance of the figure of Columbus and of the sailor as an image of the philosopher-adventurer in Friedrich Nietzsche's writing has been well noted, it is worth emphasizing the allusions to Dante's Ulysses that temper these enactments. The 1884 version of Nietzsche's "New Columbus" provides a good illustration. The figure of Columbus we find here is hardly that of the historical explorer who invoked Providence to legitimize his voyages of exploration, but it is rather one filtered through and transformed by writers like Tasso and Pulci: Columbus as the New Ulysses. In Nietzsche's poem, Columbus is "lured" too far out to sea (line 4), the unknown becomes dear to him, and Genoa fades from his memory (lines 5-6). Importantly, there is no longer any certainty here of land. There is a hope for it, expressed in a tentative "Before me sea—and land?—and land?" (8) – but this is no longer the boundless optimism and faith in the claiming of the *Nova Terra* we find, for example, in Bacon. Instead, the voyage itself becomes important in its own right, and the voyager's dignity is already constituted by the mere fact of his embarkation, of his venturing beyond where others have dared. Voyaging is a necessity, regardless of the possibility of land. The poem concludes:

> We can never return!
> Out there, the beyond: from the distance to greet
> Us with death, glory, fortune! (lines 10-12)

We find a necessitation of voyage and a similar effacement of any recognizable goal in Tennyson's "Ulysses," one of the most emphatic reworkings of Dante's reconfiguration of the hero. Writing in mid-19th century England, in the midst of rapid advances in science and technology, Tennyson registers, in "Ulysses," the valorisation human progress typical of his intellectual milieu. His hero languishes in Ithaca, frustrated with his own idleness and with its brutish and impassive populace. He compares remaining in Ithaca to "stor[ing] and hoard[ing]" himself (line 29), in the same way his deplorable subjects do nothing but "hoard and sleep and feed" (line 5). As Dante's Ulysses urges his men to their "high venture" by reminding them of their high birth, and of the fact that they "were not made to live like mindless brutes" (*Inf.* 26.119), so Tennyson's hero complains that to remain in Ithaca is to lead a brutish existence. It is to "rust unburnished" and "not to shine in use" (line 23), not to live well, not to live up to one's proper nature. In contrast to the complacent and brutish lives of his people, for Tennyson's Ulysses, as for Dante's, a truly excellent life, one truly drunk to the lees (line 7), is to sail after "*virtute e canoscenza*" (*Inf.* 26.120), "to follow knowledge like a sinking star" (line 31).

The poem commences with Ulysses' reflections on his condition in Ithaca, "an idle king" by a "still hearth" and "match'd with an aged wife," meting out laws for "a savage race" (lines 1-4). He emphasizes the brutish condition of this populace, who do nothing but "hoard, and sleep, and feed," (line 5). We feel his contempt for this manner of living in the animal connotations of the verb "feed" (rather than the more neutral 'eat') and we sense his horror at the repetitive tedium of such a condition in the repeated "and" (line 5). In monotonous Ithaca, Ulysses is restless. He then reflects upon his past: upon all he has experienced during the course of his wanderings. A man "always roaming with a hungry heart" (line 12), Ulysses has "seen and known" much (line 13). Yet for all this, he cannot find rest. Mere subsistence is not existence, mere breathing is not life (line 24). Rather, he is compelled ever to seek new experiences, never to rest on what has already been lived, in a quest that finds finality only in death. As Tennyson succinctly puts it: "all experience is an arch wherethro' / Gleams that untravell'd world, / whose margin fades / For ever and ever when I move" (lines 19-21).

For Tennyson's Ulysses the aim of his voyaging is to seek new experience, "[t]o follow knowledge like a sinking star, / [b]eyond the utmost bound of human thought" (lines 31-32). Newly attained knowledge inevitably shifts this "utmost bound" (line 32), as what becomes familiar or known serves to demarcate what is still unknown, and to suggest further routes for exploration. In a sense, this ever-shifting boundary between the known and the unknown

becomes our Pillars of Hercules, which invite a perpetual passage beyond, a perpetual displacement, and which are thus never abolished but make passage our constant state of being, our fundamental milieu, until we die. In the latter half of the 19th century, Nietzsche would write of the moment as a gateway, a threshold between a past and a future that reach backwards and forwards into eternity (*Zarathustra* 136), and of man as an in-between: "a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back," a bridge over an abyss (*Zarathustra* 11). For Tennyson, the inconclusiveness of this in-between is what ceaselessly invites us to undertake new ventures. Rest is repugnant, it is like death, and the only sufficiency or satisfaction we have is in the quest, in the "*alto passo*" of the in-between (*Inf.* 26.132), in what Boitani calls the "liminality" of our condition (*The Shadow of Ulysses* 99).

This condition of oceanic voyaging which we find in "Ulysses" is Janus-faced. On the one hand, it is one of immensely rich promise and dignity, worthy, as Tennyson's hero puts it "of men that strove with gods" (line 53), of men "not made to live like mindless brutes" (*Inf.* 26.119). This is the promise of the "untravell'd world" that "[g]leams" through the archway of every lived experience (line 20), and the "newer world" it is "not too late to seek" (57), the thrilling suggestions of the "deep" that "[m]oans round with many voices" (lines 55-56), inviting Ulysses to embark.

On the other hand, there is also a darker note to Ulysses' ventures. For Hunt, the poem reveals "grave epistemological doubts about the value of experience" and might even be said to constitute "a covert commentary on the course of intellectual history in the nineteenth century, particularly on the rapid accumulation of scientific knowledge" (47). Despite its resolute and defiant tone, the poem suggests an insurmountable insufficiency and even vacuity to life itself. Regarding this sort of insufficiency, as we find it in conjunction with the maritime in 19th century, Dawid de Villiers writes that the "oceanic alterity" which, though we often encounter it in Romantic literature in relation to "a traditional sense of oceanic richness" – of the kind posited by Auden (512) – might conversely "be registered in its uncanny ability to obtrude a quality of dearth – the ebb to the flow of plenitude and possibility" (512). In "Ulysses," despite its fascination with the mesmeric voices of the ocean, and the optimism and enthusiasm with which Tennyson's hero follows these voices, there is nonetheless something disconcerting in the claim that "[l]ife piled on life / Were all too little" to yield knowledge or experience enough to satisfy this "gray spirit burning with desire" (lines 24-25, 30). The margin ever fades and compels further pursuit, and what is lived and known could only turn into another, equally insufficient Ithaca. The oceanic in-between is

thus simultaneously a life-giving space, a breathing room, as it were, and indicative of man's fundamental homelessness, of the "dearth" of his condition in the world (De Villiers 512). It is noteworthy that Ulysses' indifference to his final fate or destination is testament to this condition: "[i]t may be that the gulfs will wash us down: / It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles / And see the great Achilles, whom we knew" (lines 62-64). Yet none of these constitute the purpose of the voyage. These are possible eventualities, but Tennyson's Ulysses voyages for the sake of the voyage itself.

This suggestion of insufficiency is far more pronounced in the work of the 19th century poet, Charles Baudelaire: a younger contemporary of Tennyson, who read and admired the work of the English poet. Baudelaire, writing in the context of mid-19th century France, was one of the first theorists of what he called "modernity," and his oeuvre responds to the malaise of a society under the stress of rapid urbanisation and political upheaval, the latter exemplified most vividly in the French Revolution of 1848.[14] Baudelaire opens his poem "Le Voyage" as follows:

> The child enthralled by lithographs and maps
> can satisfy his hunger for the world:
> how limitless it is beneath the lamp,
> and how it shrinks in the eyes of memory. [15] (line 1-4)

In these lines, we encounter two temporal orientations: the future-oriented idealism of the child, and the retrospective disillusionment of the traveller. These persist throughout the poem. The voyagers, as they set out, are motivated by the desire to escape some past lover or homeland, and at the same time by the potentialities of the sea voyage. Later, the litany of experiences with which the inured travellers regale their listeners in the fourth and sixth sections of the poem are counterbalanced by the eager "Yes, and what else?" of the audience (line 84).

"Le Voyage" consists of eight sections and, as critics have noted, these roughly imitate points along the course of a life, beginning in childhood with a first, buoyant embarkation and ending with a final journey, captained by death (Putnam 198). The tone of the first section is

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[14] See Andrew Hussey's "Paris: Symbolism, Impressionism, Cubism, Surrealism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms* (pp. 655-668).

[15] All translations in this section, unless otherwise indicated, are by Richard Howard, who provides one of the most readable and aesthetically pleasing translations of *Les Fleurs du Mal.* Where, however, I feel Howard strays from too far from Baudelaire's original, I will refer to the more literal, if more clunky, 1954 translation by William Aggeler, or provide my own translation.

predominantly positive, yet is already tinged with the "*amer savoir*," the "bitter truth" that the narrator will come to glean from the voyage and which he presents as his bleak summation of life in the penultimate section of the poem (line 109). The opening lines contrast the child, dreaming by lamplight over maps and potential journeys to be undertaken, with the retrospective speaker, for whom the world is characterized by dearth. The child's idealism is dissipated by experience, and his thirst for knowledge or adventure is incommensurable with what the world can actually offer. This idea of incommensurability remains latent in the lines that follow, and for "nous" (line 5) – the voyagers who set out filled with a childlike idealism – Baudelaire already intimates that the desire that compels us is fundamentally unappeasable: we embark with "mind ablaze" (line 6), following the rhythm of the waves, each to set his "infinite self awash on the finite sea" (line 8). It is a striking image, since the traditional image of the boundless sea is displaced, and the illimitable is transposed to man. If, for the child, his appetite finds commensuration in the world he imagines, the image we find already in the second stanza of the poem suggests a world that is insufficient to human desire. The world is small, and the sea is finite, and it is we ourselves, in our appetites, are creatures of implacable, oceanic appetites. At the same time it is the sea, although it is circumscribed, that most closely mirrors our own intractable infinitude, and thus, as Baudelaire writes, we "soothe" ourselves in its milieu (line 8, my translation).

A few words on the image of the sea in Baudelaire's poetry might be of value here. Images of the sea abound in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, often evoking conditions of epistemological uncertainty or disorientation, as for example in the poem "Les Sept Veillards." However, Baudelaire's most famous treatment of the image, and of man's relation to it, is to be found in his "L'Homme et la mer," and it is to this poem I will now briefly turn. Man sees himself in the sea, and finds in its "endlessly unrolling surge" and bitter gulfs the image of himself (lines 2-4). To refer back to Vico, we might say that in the case of the sea, too, man populates the world with his own image, but here it is interesting to note that it is man himself rather than the sea that represents a challenge to our understanding. What is at stake here is thus not purely the difficulty of navigating the physical sea, but also the epistemological challenge posed to man by his own person (perhaps more acutely than ever in the crisis of modernity): a challenge for which the sea, given its material characteristics, becomes an apt image. For this reason, Baudelaire writes, man is drawn to the sea: a sea into which, as an "image of himself" (line 5), man plunges, "arms and eyes wide open and his heart / sometimes diverted from its own dead march / by the tides of that untameable complaint" (lines 6-8). As in "Le Voyage,"

the sea serves as a figural solace, as it were, for our intractable condition, for our implacable malaise. In other words, we reach for the image of the sea as something that is like to our own condition, and in doing so we make it into ourselves, or at least into the condition of our being-in-the-world, and we go in search of ourselves there. Of the inscrutability of both man and of the sea, Baudelaire writes: "who has sounded to its depths the human heart? / and who has plucked its riches from the sea?" (lines 10-11) and he concludes the poem by calling the two "implacable brothers" and "eternal foes" (line 16).

This mirroring between man and the sea occurs in "Le Voyage," too, in the voyagers' attempt to lull their "infinite sel[ves]" by putting to sea (line 8). Here, however, the disjuncture between the infinitude of man, and the sea, which is, unusually for Baudelaire, described as "finite" (line 8), serves to intimate the notion of insufficiency that is developed more fully later in the poem. By the time we reach the seventh section of the poem, Baudelaire has summarized everything that can be gained from the voyage as "bitter truth" (line 109), incapable of alleviating man's ennui, or of delivering him from the horror of his own image (lines 111-112).

Various possible motivations for voyage are set out in the first section, and it is interesting to note that the goal, for many, is an escape of sorts from self, from "their country's shame" or "the horror of life at home" (lines 9-10). For others, the goal is to escape from some woman, from some suffocating love: they are "fugitives from Circe's tyranny" (line 12). The following stanza is cleverly crafted: its opening – "so as not to be changed into brutes" (line 13, my translation) – continues the motivation from the preceding lines: escape from Circe and her power to change men into beasts. At the same time, it recalls the speech of Dante's Ulysses, and his exhorting his men to the voyage, based on the fact that they "were not made to live like mindless brutes" (*Inf.* 26.119). In recalling this famous speech, Baudelaire's line thus subtly displaces the goal of the voyage onto the horizon of the future, as the promise of a kind of self-actualization.

Yet in contrast to the relative positivity with which such voyaging is treated in the opening section, the second part of the poem is pronouncedly bleak: if it seemed, in the first section, that, on this voyage, we follow our dreams and desires light-heartedly and voluntarily, we now realize the inescapability of our condition. Far from being free, we are horrified to discover that in our movements, we imitate the motions of spinning tops and bowls, and that curiosity torments and toys with us even in our dreams (lines 25-28). Hunt remarks on the

virtuosity of Tennyson's lines, "all experience is an arch wherethro' / Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades / For ever and ever when I move" (lines 19-21), claiming that they constitute a "brilliant reversal of the circle metaphor which lies at the centre of the original *Odyssey* legend" (Hunt 47). Baudelaire accomplishes a similar feat with his "Preposterous quest! whose goal cannot be known / but, being nowhere, can be anywhere" (lines 29-30). In conjunction with the subsequent lament that man, his hope being inexhaustible, ever runs like a madman in search of rest (line 32), these lines recall Pascal's thoughts on man as floating "on a vast milieu" (line 58), where whatever point at which we seek to find anchorage "wavers and leaves us" (line 58), and even as we incessantly seek some secure harbor, we are ever left groundless, and in pursuit of what has vanished before us.[16] As, for Pascal, man sails in an unhomely milieu, ever in search of stability, Baudelaire writes, "Our soul is a schooner seeking a free port"(line 33), without ever succeeding in this quest.

Here there is an interesting comparison to be made with the condition of Milton's Satan, as described by Quint. According to Quint, part of the curse to which the rebel angels are subjected is their essential lack of choice: they know from experience that they are unable to overthrow God, and there is no real value to be gained either from the acquiescence proposed by Belial, or from the desperate, suicidal defiance proposed by Moloch (47-48). Their immortality removes any possibility of escape from their condition. This absurdity, argues Quint, is part of the consequence of their rebellion against divine order, through which they forfeit the stability and meaning it offers, and are plunged into disorder and a permanent state of restlessness (75). In contrast, while such restlessness and instability likewise characterize Baudelaire's voyagers, the essential difference lies in their mortality, and in the real value which time and history still has for them. The limits of time constitute, for Baudelaire's voyagers, the only remaining boundary on an otherwise boundless enterprise – to use Tennyson's formulation "[d]eath closes all" (line 51) – and it is the only finitude that can quite allay and bring to a close their infinite desires. It is also, therefore, a constitutive ingredient of novelty – which is ultimately what the voyagers seek – and it is only the inescapable historicity and finitude of human existence that ultimately allows it to be meaningful.

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[16] So, too then, this fragment, which is indeed known as "le fragment infini-rien" might inform our understanding of that line in section one: "our infinite self awash on the finite sea" (8).

Babuts draws on the penultimate section of the poem section to illustrate his argument, developed elsewhere, that the past – its images, memories, and metaphors – provides us with "dynamic patterns" through which to navigate and make sense of the present, and to move into the future ("'Le Voyage'" 353-354; *Memory* 1-2). It is worth noting the analogy of this argument to those made by Blumenberg in a number of his works on myth and metaphor, and also to Heidegger's account of the hermeneutic circle and of ex-sistence, in which the past informs the inquiries of the present, and synthesizes new interpretations and experiences. In his analysis of this section, Babuts points out that the voyage described when Time, our implacable enemy, "sets his foot upon our spine" (line 121, Aggeler's translation), is characterized by memory and by familiar shades. While the momentum here remains "Onward!" (line 122), it is oriented towards the alluring voices that promise, in "familiar accent" the attainment of the desires already ensconced in the travellers' hearts (line 133, Aggeler's translation). So, too, the mythological figures evoked in the final stanza – Pylades and Electra – are respectively the friend and sister of Orestes, the figure with whom the voyagers are now compared, and so, as Babuts argues, "the strength of the Electra model resides in its mnemonic associations" ("'Le Voyage'" 353). Richard Howard translates the stanza as follows:

> Pylades is there, his arms held out;
> we know the sound by heart, we guess the ghost!
> It is her voice - we used to kiss her knees'
> Orestes, come - Electra waits for you. (lines 133-136)

Rather than the linearly progressive voyage of Dante's Ulysses, questing for "the Forbidden Knowledge of Genesis" or "the occult knowledge of the Faust legend" (qtd. in Babuts 353), the penultimate stanza of "Le Voyage" is suggestive of the Homeric Odysseus's journey to the underworld, and his subsequent encounter with the sirens (Babuts 353). The saving, guiding knowledge the voyagers seek thus pertains to the past (the sirens sing of all things that have already happened), to their memories and forgotten selves, representing an encounter with the kind of Freudian uncanny Falconer associates with the descent narrative (69, 82), and contrasts with the future-oriented, open-ended trajectory of the Dantean sea voyage (82). This orientation towards the past is perhaps the reason why Baudelaire merges the image of the sirens with that of the lotus eaters in section VII of the poem: the singing voices summon those "who would eat of the perfumed Lotus" (line 129), who would abandon themselves to the intoxicating lure of the past. The fact that this descent to the underworld here merges with the image of the maritime voyage gives a striking significance to the "Sea

of Shades" upon which the voyagers here embark (Baudelaire, line 125), as the maritime milieu and the Hades become superimposed (something that might arguably be traced back to Homer and Ovid, and the dual sea voyages and katabases of Odysseus and Hercules). The combination enables Babuts to call the oceanic milieu of Baudelaire's poem, rather beautifully, "a mnemonic sea" (351), thereby not only evoking the way in which his "dynamic patterns" function (*Memory*, *Metaphor*, *and Meaning* 1-2) − i.e. past patterns of experience guiding the way in which we navigate our world − but also thereby beginning to efface the hitherto unequivocal distinction between Ithaca and the sea. No longer is man separated from the Ithaca he remembers by the intractable sea, but here in Baudelaire's poem images of home begin to populate the oceanic milieu itself, as though, in the impossibility of attaining a final, satisfactory truth, the inconclusive in-between of hermeneutics becomes an intelligible, liveable alternative: a being-at-home in the unhomely milieu of the voyage.

This is arguably the sort of hermeneutics we find in texts like Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, in which the interpretive voyage becomes the most important aspect of the text, and in which the provisional meanings the authors reach for and rework from the myriad fragments of the past serve as sufficient vessels to keep their works afloat. However, before moving on to consider these texts more closely, I would like to turn briefly to another 19th century text that enacts this emerging hermeneutics through the image of the sea voyage, and which might be read as pre-emptive of some of the reconfigurations of Odysseus found in modernist literature. In Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, we encounter two contrasting, if at times overlapping hermeneutic responses to the demands of navigating an intractable world. The text is, in many ways, a simultaneous reflection upon and enactment of interpretation, and its characters are challenged to read and respond to the threatening blankness, or the intimation of meaninglessness, that pervades their world, and finds its ultimate incarnation in the White Whale Moby Dick.

The first response is that of Ahab, the captain of the Pequod who, having lost his leg to the whale in a previous encounter, sets out from Nantucket to seek his revenge. Ahab acts out of an injured sense of justice, and his mad quest results from his inability to acknowledge the reality of an irrational and indifferent world: it is, in a sense, his insistence upon his own personal significance over and against the fearful meaninglessness that confronts him. Ahab, in his mad quest, his "fixed purpose" and relentless pursuit of the White Whale (Melville 183), through which he hopes to assail the "inscrutable thing" that torments him (Melville

178), to pin down the elusive phantom, is not dissimilar to the Ulysses we find in Dante's *Inferno*, or to Ovid's over-reaching Icarus, and the shipwreck that ultimately ends his quest likewise recalls the drowning of both of these mythical figures. It has been suggested, by Jorge Luis Borges amongst others, that Canto 26 of Dante's *Inferno* was one of Melville's sources in writing his mad captain (Borges 51-52). It is certainly not hard to see a parallel between Melville's mad captain and Bloch's description of Dante's Ulysses as a figure of "unconditionalness" and "monomania," akin to Don Juan and to Faust (Bloch 1024-1025). As is the case with Dante's Ulysses, Ahab leaves behind wife and child to embark on a perilous and 'unnatural' quest, eloquently persuading his men to join him. Yet his insistence on striking through the "pasteboard masks" (Melville 178), of going beyond the inscrutability and intractability of the phenomenal world to pinpoint a solid and final Truth, is inevitably doomed to failure. As for the Ulysses of Tennyson's poem, and Baudelaire's initially optimistic voyagers, there is, for Ahab, no satisfactory conclusion to his journeying. Unable to fulfil his quest, he is ultimately shipwrecked, and death alone brings his relentless pursuit to a close.

If Ahab is the text's more obvious Ulysses – in the Dantean vein – a case might similarly be made for reading Ishmael through the lens of this mythic seafarer. As is the case with the rest of the Pequod's crew, Ishmael shares in Ahab's personal odyssey, insofar as he, along with his shipmates, adopts Ahab's quest. He partakes in the initiatory rite on the quarterdeck, informing the reader: "I, Ishmael, was one of that crew, my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs" (Melville 194). He is, however, the only crewmember of the Pequod to live to tell the tale, the only person to survive shipwreck, a role he communicates to the reader in the words of Job: "and I only am escaped to tell thee" (Melville 625). In his role as narrator, and in his buoyancy and survival, Ishmael is not unlike Homer's resourceful hero, who "saw the cities of many peoples and learned their ways," who has "suffered great anguish on the high seas" (*Odyssey*.1.3-4), and who survives to tell the tale. Dante's Ulysses is shipwrecked and drowned by the will of Another, but Homer's hero repeatedly survives shipwreck – in Book 12, after a storm sent by Zeus in retribution for his crew's having slaughtered the Cattle of Helios, but also in Book 5 when, during Poseidon's tempest he jumps from his raft and is swallowed up by the sea. In the same way Ishmael is cast from his whaleboat, and becomes the sole survivor of the shipwreck that obliterates his companions, and the subsequent narrator of this account.

What is worth noting is that Ishmael's entire hermeneutic project – the tale he ends up telling in *Moby-Dick* – is characterized by such 'shipwreck' and 'survival.' Ishmael constantly renounces his readings of the world, or accompanies them with caveats. He lets them sink, as it were, and he survives their shipwreck. This repeated renunciation – as opposed to Ahab's monomaniac insistence on his reading of Moby Dick – is evident not only in Ishmael's handling of his elaborate cetological "System", which he calls but "a draught of a draught" (Melville 157), but also with regard to his own person. In the chapter entitled "Loomings," Ishmael's going to sea – his farewell to land – is presented in terms of what is likewise a farewell to self: "[w]ith a philosophical flourish, Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship" (Melville 3). So, too, in "The Hyena," after his first encounter with the perils of whaling, Ishmael writes his will, resigns himself, as it were, to his "death and burial" (Melville 249). In both cases, this kind of 'philosophical suicide' is presented not as some monumental event, but as a recurrent one: Ishmael's taking to ship occurs as often as he can no longer stand his landed existence, and the will he writes is the fourth of its kind. These cycles of return and departure might be read as characteristic of what William Spanos, in Heideggerian terms, calls the openness of the hermeneutic circle, into which Ishmael casts himself "primordially and wholly" (*Errant Art* 78). Unlike Ahab's monomaniac and solipsistic quest – already closed-off in its inception – Ishmael's project involves a perpetually reiterated launching forth, a perpetual ex-sisting or stepping out from the temporary and provisional anchorage of his own interpretations, and the self of which they are reflections. Ishmael's narrative suggests, in its very structure, a constant cycle of plunging and resurfacing, of descent and re-ascent, a perpetually reiterated odyssey. In this incarnation, Ishmael becomes an Odysseus who accepts the impossibility of any final Ithaca, a symbol not of the searcher but of the survivor: someone who can endure the intractability of the maritime milieu, and who is at home in his oceanic wandering.

Due to constraints in space I can refer but in passing to Leopardi, whose poem "Angelo Mai," written upon the discovery of significant portions of Cicero's *De Republica* by the eponymous cardinal and philologist, constitutes a kind of excavation of glorious figures from Italy's past, central amongst whom is Columbus, represented in the poem as a sort of New Ulysses, travelling yet further beyond the Pillars of Hercules (Leopardi 29-41). What is noteworthy is that by the end of the poem, the figure of the philologist, for all his delving into Italy's ghostly past, himself takes on the character of a new Odysseus, as the harbinger of new potentialities, and of the possibility of cultural renewal (Leopardi 41). Likewise

Mallarmé must be passed by with only the briefest of comments, despite his frequent invocation of the image of the sea voyage as a metaphor for his own poetic enterprise. The poems "Salut" and "A Throw of the Dice" are both apt illustrations. "Salut" introduces Mallarmé's first collection of verse, and evokes the poet making a toast to his fellow writers, whom he describes as sailors, embarked upon the "wintry seas" in the craft of poetry (8). The title can mean alternatively "toast" – in the sense of being a celebration of his new oeuvre, and of his fellow poets – or "salvation," suggesting their hermeneutic preservation and survival, as it were, through their poetry. The effervescence of the champagne in the cup he holds comes to mirror the sea-spray and foam, and the effects of the alcohol becomes the "fine intoxication" of the voyage (9). Elizabeth McCombie notes that the sirens that adorn the cup become, in the metaphor of the poetic sea voyage, the invitation to voyage: to visit, with poetic craft, "things of any kind deserving / of our white sail's preoccupation" (Mallarmé 13-14; McCombie xxii-xxiii). So, too, "A Throw of the Dice" enacts a poetic sea voyage: an old captain in defiance of the tempestuous sea, his ultimate destruction, and a siren that emerges from the wreckage. The very words of the poem lie scattered across the page like debris from some shipwreck, each cluster awash in blank spaces, and the meaning we try to make in lashing them together is ever threatened by obliteration.

Whereas Mallarmé's figure has more in common with the later reconfigurations we find in Pound and Joyce, the image of an idealistic and implacable seeker in pursuit of an elusive *telos* (whatever form this might take) is one that persists in many early 20th century reconfigurations of Odysseus, and it is notably found in many of its Italian incarnations. In D'Annunzio's *Maia*, for example, Ulysses "King of Storms" is a figure who wishes to experience and to grasp Everything, asking of Nike "only one palm": "the Universe!" and lamenting that "human power is not as infinite as longing" (qtd. in Boitani 131, 132). D'Annunzio's figure is a Nietzchean Übermensch (Schironi 349), who is not shipwrecked, but is idealised as the model for a truly excellent life, as opposed to the bourgeois torpor embodied in the characters of Penelope and Telemachus (Schironi 351). As opposed to D'Annunzio's idealised Ulysses – a character that might be read as presaging Mussolini's own adoption of this figure – Giovanni Pascoli and Guido Gozzano, in their respective reconfigurations, problematize the mythic over-reaching seafarer. Gozzano, a contemporary of D'Annunzio, completely inverts his lofty treatment of the figure, making his own Ulysses "King of Storms" a bourgeois philanderer who wants to sail to America to make his fortune (Boitani 136), but who is ultimately shipwrecked off the coast of Purgatory rather than off

California, and who subsequently finds himself stuck in Hell, "where he still is" (Boitani 138). Pascoli's reconfiguration of Ulysses in his "The Last Voyage" is less humorous, and more tragic: here the figure is an old man who leaves Ithaca to search once more for his past adventures, and finally to seek the knowledge he was once promised by the siren song. However, the world is no longer the one Ulysses once navigated (it becomes questionable whether his adventures ever truly happened): Circe has long since vanished from Aeaea, Polyphemus has become a distant folk-tale to peaceful farmers who now inhabit his cave, the sirens remain stubbornly silent, and Ulysses is shipwrecked beseeching them to confirm to him his own identity. His drowned body washes up on Calypso's shore, and the poem ends with her mourning howl: "Not to be! Not to be! More than nothing, / but less than dead, not ever to be again" (XXIV lines 51-52). It is a cry Boitani describes as "the lament of a whole epoch for its own fate" (134). Regarding Pascoli's Ulysses, he writes as follows:

> [f]or Pascoli myth is not, as for Pessoa, the nothingness which is everything, but quite the reverse; in his search for a truth which can make sense of life his Odysseus proclaims 'ciò che non è tutto, è nulla' ('that which is not everything is nothing'). But the germ of remorseless annihilation lies precisely in this desire for absoluteness and totality. Nineteenth century man wanted to possess the entire universe. At the end of the journey he is left clutching a few grains of sand. (130)

It is noteworthy, however, that the two major reconfigurations of Odysseus in Anglo-American modernism – those of Ezra Pound and James Joyce – move away from what we might call the Dantean Ulysses (although elements of this reconfiguration still persist) and towards a foregrounding of the buoyant wanderer-survivor, Odysseus polytropos, who must now remain afloat in and navigate intractabilities of the 20th century. If Dante had transformed the figure of Odysseus from Homer's long-suffering survivor into an adventurous sea-Faust, and if Early Modern Europe had adopted the Pillars of Hercules as a symbol of their own vast potential, by the end of the 19th century this idealism becomes largely problematized. It persists in certain 20th century reconfigurations, like that of D'Annunzio, whose questing, conquering *übermensch*-Ulysses is enabled by a general optimism surrounding Italy's rise out of political upheaval at the start of the 20th century, and the bourgeoning of Italian nationalism. Notably, this Ulysses, and the optimism surrounding his voyage, remains discernible in Ezra Pound's early use of the figure, and it is only after the collapse of Mussolini's Italy, in which Pound had come to place his hopes for the revitalisation of Western Civilisation, that his Odysseus becomes, like Mallarmé's, a sort of

bricoleur salvaging provisional meaning out of the shipwreck. It is to Pound's reworking of the figure that I will now turn.

CHAPTER 3

POUND'S ODYSSEUS: POESIS AND PERIPLUM

In a series of articles entitled "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris," published between December 1911 and February 1912, Pound first outlined what he called "the method of Luminous Detail" according to which the role of the artist was to "seek out the luminous detail and present it," without comment or interpretation, but rather, by recovering these precious elements from bygone tradition, constituting "the permanent basis of psychology and metaphysics" (*Selected Prose* 21, 23). These details would be "certain facts that give one a sudden insight into circumjacent conditions, into their causes, their effects, into sequence, and law" (*SP* 22), and he gives as examples the Anglo-Saxon poem, "the Seafarer"; certain poems by Guido Cavalcanti and Arnaut Daniel that embody, for Pound, the mystical dimensions of the love cults or the "gai savoir" of the troubadours (Moody *Vol. I*, 190); some of Dante. Pound read each of these authors as being in some way representative and instrumental in shaping the times they belonged to, and he aspired to a similar role in his poetry. The title of the series is itself significant, referring to the myth of Isis gathering up the limbs of the murdered and dismembered Osiris (who is associated with vegetation and with agriculture) and thereby revitalising the god as well as the crops associated with him (Frazer 367, 377-378). In Ancient Egypt, fertility rites surrounding the god would celebrate his death and resurrection, symbolizing the annual revivification of dead seed to produce new crops (Frazer 173-377). In propounding his "method of Luminous Detail" as something that will contribute to "the growth of literature" (*SP* 21, 23), Pound is thus essentially claiming for himself the role of Isis, gathering up and revivifying the lifeless fragments of his civilization (Moody *Vol. I*, 169). This aspiration is central to Pound's intention, which would develop over the following years, to write a modern epic that would save or restore what he saw to be a deteriorated civilisation.

In the second article in the "Osiris" series, Pound distinguishes between minds given to active interpretation, cultivating their world – "germinal" minds, he will call them elsewhere (*Poetry and Prose Contributions* 90) – and those that simply reflect tendencies already present in their given social and historical context:

> [T]he 'donative' author seems to draw down into the art something which was not in the art of his predecessors. If he also draw [sic] from the air about him, he draws latent forces, or things present but unnoticed, or things perhaps taken for granted but never examined.

> *Non e mai tarde per tentar l'ignoto.* His forbears may have led up to him; he is never a disconnected phenomenon, but he does take some step further. He discovers, or, better, 'he discriminates'. We advance by discriminations, by discerning that things hitherto deemed identical or similar are dissimilar; that things hitherto deemed dissimilar, mutually foreign, antagonistic, are similar and harmonic. (*SP* 25)

This bringing of things into harmony, this awareness of connections and of relations, is key to Pound's *Cantos*, in which seemingly unconnected details are composed so as to bring out the identities and antagonisms between them, thus bringing into existence a new poetic creation, a new germination from this re-collection of "luminous details" from the past (*SP* 22). Here, however, there is something more besides the Isis-Osiris fertility rites and the renewal promised by the method of Luminous Detail. The phrase "*Non e mai tarde per tentar l'ignoto*" – "it is never too late to venture the unknown" – is from Gabriele D'Annunzio's 1908 poetic drama, *La Nave*, which concerns the founding of Venice (*SP* 23, note 1). It is spoken by the helmsman of the titular ship, Lucio Polo, who is a recognizably Ulyssean character, having seen many people and places across the wide world (230), having been shipwrecked thrice and having passed seven times beyond the Pillars of Hercules (231). From the outset, D'Annunzio identifies the sailors as questing *übermenschen*, striving in their establishment of Venice to conquer the ocean and to make "*di tutti gli Ocèani il Mare Nostro*" (15): of all the Ocean a "*Mare Nostrum.*"[17] This reference alerts us to an interesting tension between this wilful quest to conquer the unknown and the measured organic imagery that dominates the article.[18] In this early formulation of the poetic project we thus already encounter, in some form, the difference David Moody will note between Cantos I and II, and between the two poems he considers to be the central pillars of Pound's *Ripostes*: "The Seafarer" and "Salve Pontifex" (*Vol. I*, 176). In each of these pairs (in which all four poems, notably, centre on the image of the sea) a difficult, 'adversarial' sea-voyage finds its counterpart in a vision – or more properly, a theophany – of the sea as Dionysian life-force.

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[17] This is Latin for "Our Sea," which was the Roman name for the Mediterranean (*OED*).

[18] To "advance by discriminations" is a formulation more evocative of natural evolution than of D'Annunzian conquest. Pound was fascinated by naturalism and biology, and at times defines tradition and artistic expression in almost evolutionary terms. He goes as far as to claim, for example, that "art is part of biology" (*Machine Art and Other Writings* 112): a choice of expression that resonates with Hans Blumenberg's account of myth as a sort of "Darwinism of in the realm of words" (159), in the persistence and reconfigurations of its forms.

There is thus a tension, in these poems, between a vision of life as difficult reality that poses a challenge to man and his epistemology – that requires him to take up the struggle to tame and familiarise the "*Ocèani*" into a "*Mare Nostrum*" – and an outlook that emphasises a fundamental unity between man and his world, an order already present in the seeming chaos, which man needs only to gain insight into, to align his vision with. It is this tension I would like to examine in this chapter, as well as the central role of the sea in figuring each of these approaches. I would like to suggest, furthermore, that these are not mutually exclusive, in Pound's *oeuvre*, but that they reflect an unresolved tension in the poets own hermeneutic venture.

Prior to *The Cantos*, these two visions of life already find expression in *Ripostes*, in the two poems "Salve Pontifex" and "The Seafarer," and here already, the image of the sea is central to the representation of the two approaches. The vision of life which Pound presents in his translation of the Anglo-Saxon poem "The Seafarer" is one of adversity and struggle. The sea is a wretched realm, yet for all its miseries, the speaker is irresistibly drawn to it. Land may well be where man "loveliest liveth" (line 13), but for all the "winsome life" it offers (line 28), the seafarer admits that there

> Moaneth alway my mind's lust
> That I fare forth, that I afar hence
> Seek out a foreign fastness. (lines 37-39)

The cuckoo's mournful call "[w]hets for the whale-path the heart irresistibly" (line 64). Throughout the poem, land is seen as a somewhat contemptible alternative to sea travel, but in the latter part of the poem even landed existence becomes suddenly unhomely, as the speaker declares his belief that no "earth-weal eternal standeth" (line 68), but that calamity, death and time erase all. Although not explicitly presented in terms of the sea, the undermining effect of time and death take on oceanic undertones in the undoing of the security of landed life, which the seafarer initially posited in contrast to the struggle of life at sea, and the grave that swallows all things in the end recalls the threatening seascape with which the poem opens.

The counterpart to "The Seafarer" in Pound's *Ripostes* is to be found in the early poem, "Salve Pontifex," which is reprinted in the 1912 poetry volume. The poem centres on the

Bacchanalia and the Eleusinian mysteries,[19] and though the sea here too figures time and the processes of nature, it offers a far more benevolent vision of the world than that presented in "The Seafarer": an affirmation of the renewing ebb and flow of life, as opposed to the dread of age and annihilation. The worshippers in the poem affirm:

> And the sands are many
> And the seas beyond the sands are one
> In ultimate, so we here being many
> Are unity (lines 5-8)

The worshippers depart to "mingle with the sea" (line 69), where they are joined by the High Priest on "the border of the sands / Where the sapphire girdle of the sea / Encinctureth the maiden Persephone / Released for the spring" (lines 77-80). The moment of transformation will come when the worshippers,

> Standing on the verge of the sea
> Shalt pass from being sand,
> […]
> And becoming wave
>   Shalt encircle all sands.
> Being transmuted through all
> The girdling of the sea. (lines 93-99)

The ecstasy or *mania* which seizes the worshippers thus finds its strange articulation in the image of its disparate worshippers suddenly fused together and united not only with each other but with "the infinitude / Of the blue waves of heaven" (lines 16-17). Marie Claire Beaulieu writes about the connections between Dionysus and the sea in her *The Sea in Greek Imagination*, noting the association of the deity with dolphins, and the presence of these animals depicted on a number of mixing bowls intended for use in the Dionysian mysteries. When these were filled up, she writes, the dolphins would give the impression of diving into the wine, thereby alluding to "the connections seen by the Greeks between the sea and wine (οἶνοπα πόντον "the wine-dark sea," e.g. *Il.* 2.613) as the wine replaces the sea and dolphins leap into the cups" (177). If this holds, then the sea, like the wine in the Dionysian mysteries, becomes the motus for *mania:* the release from the strictures of class, custom and individual consciousness, and a chaotic celebration of the overwhelming, vital, but also potentially destructive force of the living universe. Anthony Woodward notes that Pound had "vigorously endorsed" in his copy of Euripides's *Bacchae* a passage in its introduction by

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[19] Although these are distinct rites in Ancient Greece, Surette argues that Pound makes use of Dionysus's role in both cults in order to conflate the two (40).

C.R. Dodd, which describes Dionysus as a symbol of "all the mysteries and uncontrollable tides that ebb and flow in the life of nature" (Woodward 114; qtd. in Woodward 28).

These two opposite visions of the sea would suggest that at least part of Pound's poetic venture is concerned with different ways of looking at the world, with different modes of reading or interpreting. What is more, we often find such perspectival contrasts in relation to the image of the sea, an important presence in *The Cantos*, and often appearing in relation to the gods, to time, and to the force of the vital universe as a whole.[20] It is a decidedly ambiguous force, manifesting itself both in destruction and in epiphanies of the sacred, of the universal, and of the proper relation of things even within the flux of experience. Canto I, for example, opens with the "godly sea" (3[21]) – Pound's translation of Andreas Divus's translation of a word more commonly rendered as "bright" (*Od.* XI.2; Kenner "Homer and Pound" 6-7) – and closes with "spiteful Neptune" (5). In Canto II, the sea is perilous to Tyro and to the pirates who abduct Dionysus, is a source of frustration to So-Shu, whose churning can impose no lasting form or coherence upon it, but is the site of divine revelation for the helmsman Acœtes, and of inspiration to Homer, with his "ear for the sea-surge" (6). In Canto II, the sea is thus inextricably associated with vision, or non-vision, of the divine in it. There are Picasso's protean eyes, able to see a world more variform than his contemporaries. There is Homer's sensitivity to the world around him: a heightened perceptiveness despite his physical blindness. There is Tyro's non-recognition of Poseidon, and the pirates' non-recognition of Dionysus. Then there is Acœtes's affirmative testimony to what he saw ("Aye, I, Acœtes") (Canto II, 7), and a warning to King Pentheus to give due recognition to the god Dionysus. Here already there is an instantiation of Pound's later claim that "Art does not avoid universals," but "strikes at them all the harder in that it strikes through particulars" (*Literary Essays* 440). So-Shu's efforts to impose form onto the flux of the sea are futile, but the mind of Acœtes perceives the presence of the permanent, of Dionysus, even in his particular, disguised form.

Dionysus, the central deity in the Canto, is himself closely associated with vision. David Moody notes that

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[20] It is worth noting that in Pound's oeuvre, 'gods' are moods or states of mind, "psychic experience[s]" ("Psychology and Troubadours" in *Poetry and Prose Contributions* 90-91). See also Pound's "Religio" (*SP* 47-48). There is an interesting resemblance to be found, I think, between Pound's gods and those of the later Heidegger.

[21] The reference and those to follow give the page number on which the citation appears in the 1996 New Directions edition of *The Cantos*, which does not provide line numbering.

> [a]s a son of Zeus Dionysos was associated with the divine light which is at once the light of life and the light of intelligence; and he was held to generate both the myriad forms of living beings and their power to sense things and to make sense of their experience. He would figure then as the cause of our responsiveness to light and of the intelligence that is developed from seeing; thence of its power of orderly visualization, and of its further power of original thought ('the new juxtaposition of images'). He would be active in the 'germinal mind' interpreting his universe. (*Vol. II*, 11-12)

Pound's own description of the "germinal mind" in his "Psychology and Troubadours" runs as follows:

> Their thoughts are in them as the thought of the tree is in the seed, or in the grass, or the grain, or the blossom. And these minds are the more poetic, and they affect mind about them, and transmute it as the seed the earth. And this latter sort of mind is close on the vital universe; and the strength of the Greek beauty rests in this, that it is ever at the interpretation of this vital universe, by its signs of gods and godly attendants and oreads. (*Poetry and Prose Contributions* 90-91)

This description calls to mind a number of important vegetation rites that recur throughout *The Cantos*, most notably those of the Eleusinian mysteries, which in Pound's oeuvre are associated as much with poesis as with the vegetal processes in nature. The mysteries were vegetation rites which celebrated and re-enacted the release of Persephone to her mother Demeter from the underworld, and the return of spring which this event marked. It is often associated, in *The Cantos*, with similar rites: those of Aphrodite and Adonis, and also of Dionysus, who in one of his personas, as Zagreus, similarly died and was yearly resurrected from the underworld.

Moody contends that the active interpretation or the germinal mind which Pound often writes of in his prose works might be seen as the "true protagonist" of *The Cantos* (*Vol. I*, 309). Discussing "Canto I," Moody notes the way in which Pound succeeds in gathering both the Roman Aeneas and the Anglo-Saxon seafarer into this 'translation' of Book XI of *The Odyssey*, while simultaneously drawing attention to his own poetic activity, and thus situating the poem in the present. "Canto I" is written in the rhythm of "The Seafarer," and addresses Andreas Divus, the Latin translator of *The Odyssey*, whilst also translating "Avernus" and the figure of Aphrodite into the poem. Moody writes:

> The action is, on the face of it, what Odysseus does; but the real action is in the poet's editing, performing and interpreting Odysseus's story.

> Throughout *The Cantos* the continuing action will be the struggle of the poetic intelligence to inform, to present and to relate all the fragments of its world in its effort to make a unified whole of it. Its method will be to sort things into categories according to their nature, and then to arrange them by likenesses and differences. Along with that there will be a searching out of their relations and interactions. (*Vol. I*, 309-310)

Or, in Pound's own terms, "we advance by discriminations" (*SP* 25). Canto I thus enacts the aim and one of the central themes of *The Cantos* as a whole, and this first Odyssean embarkation of the poetic mind, navigating and interpreting fragments and facts from the past, finds its continuation and its execution – implied in its closing, suggestive "So that" (Canto I, 5) – throughout the cantos that follow. It is significant that "Canto I" ends inconclusively in "So that": a phrase that simultaneously emphasises the significance of what comes before and is suggestive of more to come. In some sense, then, as suggested by this "So that," the interpretive embarkation of the poetic mind enacted in Canto I figures the initial, enabling act that brings the rest of *The Cantos* (in themselves a vast interpretive venture) into being.

While Pound's translation of *The Odyssey* in "Canto I" provides an insight into the way in which the poet interpretively creates the new from the old, the figure of Odysseus itself serves in *The Cantos* as an image of such interpretation. Moody associates the Odysseus we encounter in "Canto I" with the speaker in "The Seafarer": that is, he relates to the world in an agonistic and embattled way, as opposed to the theophanies and affirmations of unity that characterise "Canto II" and "Salve Pontifex" (*Vol. I*, 176). In other words, Odysseus and the seafarer represent, for Moody, minds not attuned "to the divine light which is at once the light of life and the light of intelligence" (*Vol. II*, 11). So, in his reading of "Canto XLVII," Moody is fairly dismissive of knowledge that Odysseus might glean should he "sail after knowledge": it is but the shade of a shade, not vital, and the hope of a mind that cannot read the traces of the divine in the world around him ("knowing less than drugged beasts"). As the counterpart to this, Moody posits the second part of the canto as a ritual enactment or sacramental fulfilment celebrating the fruitful union of mind and nature. Leon Surette suggests, however, that the presence of Aphrodite and her golden bough at the end of "Canto I" indicates that here already the difficult descent and communion with the dead is the first step towards epiphany. Surette argues that this blending of the two motifs of descent and theophany is the central (though not exclusive) key to the structure of *The Cantos*, and that they account for the intermingling of paradise and adversity throughout the oeuvre.

Pound himself presents such descent and visionary transformation as the thematic core of *The Cantos.* In a letter to his father in 1927, he outlines the schema to his *Cantos* as follows:

1. Live man goes down into world of Dead
2. The "repeat in history"
3. The "magic moment" or moment of metamorphosis, bust thru from the quotidian into "divine or permanent world." Gods, etc. (*SL* 210)

In this schema, the paradise-bound progression of Dante's *Commedia* and the descent in *The Odyssey* become intertwined. That is, while Pound is still in search of divine epiphany, or a knowledge of the real, of a "permanent world" (*SL* 210), he no longer has recourse, as he puts it in his letters, to an "Aquinas-map" that can give him objective guidance how to proceed (*SL* 323). His method thus can no longer be that of Dante, whose path out of the dark forest to Paradise, even if it does go via Inferno, is firmly based on a rigidly structured worldview: to the extent that Dante can carefully map out the structure of Inferno, Purgatory and Paradise (and can for the most part, find theological basis for such structure). By contrast, Pound writes of his *Cantos:* "[a]s to the *form* […] all I can say or pray is: *wait* till it's there. I mean wait till I get 'em written and then if it don't show, I will start exegesis. I haven't an Aquinas-map" (*SL* 323).

This should alert us to the radical differences between Dante's and Pound's poetic projects. In the formulation given above, there is an acceptance that form and order, if it is there, will have to be reached gradually and as the work unfolds, as the miscellaneous, if 'luminous' details are gathered together and placed in ever new relations: relations which emerge as the poems are written, as the interpretive 'gathering' is continually being effected by the poet. Surette is right, I think, to associate the descent that commences in "Canto I" with the "*periploi*" that pervade the *Pisan Cantos.* He argues that

> [o]nce we have made the descent with Odysseus in canto I, we are in a fluid and Protean world. We are, of course, in the Underworld where 'chance directions, difficult detours, disquieting and endless walks through the darkness' confuse and frighten us. And it is Odysseus' *periplus*, or tortuous sea-coasting journey, that is the metaphor for these Underworld wanderings. (53)

The *periplum*[22] is remarkably recurrent in the *Pisan Cantos*, and is indicative of Pound's eschewal of abstraction in favour of a "phalanx of particulars" (Canto LXXIV, 461). In his

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[22] This is Pound's rendering of *periplus*, of which the plural is *periploi.*

ABC of Reading, Pound had expressed his admiration for *The Odyssey*, writing that a "French scholar [Victor Bérard] has more or less shown that the geography of the Odyssey is correct geography; not as you would find it if you had a geography book and a map, but as it would be in a *periplum*, that is, as a coasting sailor would find it" (43-44). We first find it in Canto LIX, in which Pound gives it as "periplum, not as land looks on a map / but as sea bord seen by men sailing" (Canto LIX 324). If it is indeed Pound's aim to reach his divine vision not by removing himself from time and from the material world, but by discovering patterns by an immersed interpretation of the world 'from within', as it were, then it is indeed the *periplus* rather than the map which provides the apt metaphor for this approach to interpretation, recording as it does the world from the vantage point of the voyage, and as it unfolds, place by place, rather than providing the map's god's-eye view, and offering its finalised, total record of what was once experienced a little bit at a time. It is interesting to note, moreover, the close connection, in the *periploi*, between the sea voyage and the coastline. The seafarer remains within view of land, and the concern of the *periplum* is with giving an account of the coast, and yet at the same time, this vision of land remains one informed by the voyager's position at sea. Bérard, in *Les Phéniciens et L'Odyssée*, remarks on the way in which the sea impinges upon the periplean vision of land, noting that all land we find in *The Odyssey* seems to be insular or peninsular, "belonging only to the sea," and "nowhere connected to the rest of the world," or connected only "vaguely" with some tenebrous but not very well defined larger land mass (*II*, 550). Bérard writes that

> [a]ll Odyssean lands present themselves to the eye in this guise of almost-floating islands, or of coastal strips or maritime peripheries. On one front the sea cuts them neatly into ports, mooring places and promontories. But as for their landed dimensions, they seem to belong only to vague countries, to almost unreal continents.[23] (*II*, 550; my translation)

If we read Pound's "phalanx of particulars" as a periplean interpretation of the world, this also accounts, perhaps, for the seeming abandon with which he associates various times, cultures and literatures: often in a deracinated, almost gratuitous manner. Without commenting on the degree to which this this is a justifiable practice, I would like to suggest that these strange connections result, as it were, in *periplum*: associated by their seaboard appearance as the author interpretively 'sails around' through the variously accumulated

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[23] « *Toutes les terres odysséenes s'offrent à nos regards avec cet aspect d'îles presque errantes ou de bandes*, *de franges maritimes. La mer sur une façade les découpe très nettement en mouillages*, *ports et promontoires. Mais leurs autres façades ne semblent tenir qu'à des vagues contrées*, *à des continents presque irréels* » (*Phéniciens II*, 550).

cultural materials and meanings available to him. If we take Homer's hero as representative of such an interpretive *periplum*, then in some sense the Odyssean voyage that commences in Canto I might be read as a hermeneutic enterprise that extends throughout and constitutes the rest of this (heterogeneous) work. At the same time, the Odyssean voyage has ritual, almost religious, associations for Pound, with the suggestion of a sort of integrating epiphany to be reached through its enactment. There is a strange passage near the end of *Les Phéniciens et L'Odyssée* in which the author compares the Odyssean *periplum* with the Rosary. Bérard argues that the Rosary's separate, independent beads, which the worshipper "brings together or separates" in the act of prayer resembles the various entries in a *periplum*, which the reader of the document might associate or differentiate from each other "according to his imagination" (546). Whether or not Pound was familiar with this specific passage, the author certainly saw the movement of *The Cantos* through a vast "phalanx of particulars" as having a redemptive function.[24] At any rate, the ritual character given to the Odyssean voyage that opens *The Cantos* clearly links the Homeric journey to the Underworld, as well as the difficult sea voyage which Surette argues it is associated with, with the epiphany, the "magic moment" of the Eleusinian rite (*SL* 210). This connection is already present in the trajectory between Canto I and Canto II: the descent into the underworld, the voyage over "spiteful Neptune" and the invocation of Aphrodite and the golden bough (5), which finds its first fruition, its first "So that" (5), in the epiphany of Canto II. Yet the bringing together of the Eleusinian mysteries and the Odyssean voyage perhaps nowhere finds clearer or a more sustained treatment than in Canto XLVII. The canto opens with Odysseus's voyage into the underworld:

> Who even dead, yet has his mind entire!
> This sound came in the dark
> First must thou go the road
> to hell
> And to the bower of Ceres' daughter Proserpine (236)

And then a few lines later:

> Knowledge the shade of a shade
> Yet must thou sail after knowledge
> Knowing less than drugged beasts. (236)

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[24] Pound's association and blurring, throughout the Cantos, of the distinct, but universally redemptive figures of Aphrodite, Demeter, and Mary make it tempting to think that he would have associated the Mysteries of the Rosary with the Mysteries of Eleusis and of Aphrodite.

This is followed by the last line of Polites' speech at the gates of Circe in Book X of *The Odyssey*: "*phtheggometha thasson*" or "let us call to her" (236, Terrell 161). These scenes then give way to the rites of Adonis and Aphrodite, although the "small lamps" that "drift in the bay / And the sea's claw [that] gathers them" keep the Odyssean sea voyage in the mind's eye (236), while now also associating it with the fertility rites, as the passage of the lights over the sea and into darkness evokes the death of Adonis. Read in this light, the journey "to the bower of Ceres' daughter Proserpine" also calls to mind similar vegetation rites in the Eleusinian mysteries (236). Odysseus's journey into Hades takes on the character of the ritual initiate's progress through the mysteries. He is summoned underground, with the injunction: "[t]o the cave art thou called, Odysseus" (Canto XLVII, 237), and the herb "Molü" (237), which he receives from Hermes to enable him to resist Circe's spell and escape the state of "drugged beasts" here becomes sacramental. The first section of the canto is closed by a series of initiatory questions (Moody *Vol. II*, 221):

> Hast'ou a deeper planting, doth thy death year
> Bring swifter shoot?
> Hast thou entered more deeply the mountain? (Canto XLVII, 238)

The journey into the underworld, which is represented in this Canto in the guise of an initiatory movement in the Eleusinian mysteries, reaches epiphany in the ecstatic affirmation:

> The light has entered the cave. Io! Io!
> The light has gone down into the cave,
> Splendour on splendour!
> By prong have I entered these hills
> That the grass grow from my body
> That I hear the roots speaking together,
> The air is new on my leaf… (Canto XLVII, 238)

This is the beginning of new growth, and "Fruit cometh after" (Canto XLVII; Moody *Vol. II*, 221). In Cantos I and II, the vision of the life-principle follows upon the Odyssean sea voyage to the underworld. Here, the two movements are combined in the fertility cult of Aphrodite and Adonis, and of the Eleusinian mysteries, which celebrate this life-principle in the death and renewal of its gods, as the worshippers enact this same life-principle in their rites. It is worth noting that ecstasy here is not linked to an escape from or a conquest of the sea, as in the case of the will to "*tentar l'ignoto*" in D'Annunzio, but occurs on the shores of its very uttermost reaches, where the ocean takes on its most threatening and unhomely demeanour, in Hades. Even in the ecstasy of the sacramental movement of the canto, "Adonis falleth," and "[t]he sea's claw draws the lamps outward" (Canto XLVII, 238).

So, too, in Canto II, the vision of the vital universe is inseparable from the sea. There we had "grapes with no seed but sea-foam" suddenly grow from the water (Canto II, 7): an analogue, perhaps, to the new life springing from death in the fertility rites, and possibly a reference also to Aphrodite, born from the sea-foam. Eighty-one cantos after the Dionysian vision of Canto II, water and vision persist, in the opening of Canto LXXIII:

> ὕδωρ
> HUDOR et Pax
> Gemisto stemmed all from Neptune (548)

Gemisto, a Neoplatonic philosopher whom Pound also quotes in Cantos VIII, XXIII, XCVIII, had posited Poseidon as the first god, from whom all other things flow, including mind or *νούς* (Terrell *Vol. II*, 459). The entirety of Canto LXXXIII, which Moody argues is the climax to the *Pisan Cantos* (*Vol. III*, 161), is pervaded by water (*ὕδωρ*), and notably, also by eyes and by light. In Canto II, Moody argues, the description of the sea as "hyaline" echoes not only similar descriptions of the "crystalline sea" in Greek poetry but, due to its association with "the membrane and vitreous liquid of the eye," suggests possibilities for reading the sea itself as a sort of eye:

> [T]he sea is being seen, fleetingly, as itself an eye taking in and reflecting back the light of heaven. That reciprocity mirrors the reciprocity of a light-illuminated world and an intelligent eye reflecting back upon it what it is making of it. The process of perception is then, when it is precisely focused on its object, a continuation of the process of light-energies in nature. (*Vol. II*, 15-16)

This reading of the "hyaline" sea in Canto II might easily be transferred to the passage near the end of Canto LXXXIII which reads:

> The eyes, this time my world,
>   But pass and look *from* mine
>   between my lids
>   sea, sky, and pool
>   alternate
>   pool, sky, sea, (555)[25]

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[25] This recalls and earlier episode in Canto LXXXI, when Pound writes, "there came a new subtlety of eyes into my tent":
> sky's clear
> night's sea
> green of the mountain pool
> shone from the unmasked eyes in half-mask's space. (Canto LXXXI, 540)

In Canto II, the image of eyes and vision is associated with the perception of the divine in the vital universe, and Canto LXXXIII affirms this perception as a personal reality for the poet, who we here understand to be the speaker: the "eyes" of the godly world and its light-energies now inhere within his own vision. Earlier in the canto we have "the caged panther's eyes" looking out onto or perhaps each one itself forming a "green pool, under green of the jungle" (550), but despairing: "caged: 'Nothing, nothing that you can do'" (550). It is an animal closely associated with Dionysus and one with which Pound feels an affinity in his captivity ("[n]o man who has passed a month in the death cells / believes in cages for beasts" (550)). Yet in addition there are also the eyes of H.D., "Dryad": "like the clouds over Taishan / When some rain has fallen / and half remains yet to fall," holding the promise of benediction. There is a further significance in the sort of vision implied here. We have already seen that Dionysus serves as a symbol of "all the mysteries and uncontrollable tides that ebb and flow in the life of nature" (qt. in Woodward 28). H.D. – the poet Hilda Doolittle – was Pound's "boyhood's friend" who, Moody writes, "first initiated him into her mytho-poetic vision of 'the universe of fluid force… the germinal universe of wood alive, of stone alive'" (*Vol. III*, 162; Moody quotes from Pound's "Psychology and Troubadours"). The vision at stake here is thus a sensitivity to the flux of the vital universe, to the coherence of change and permanence in its constitutive processes. This is further affirmed, here and elsewhere in *The Pisan Cantos*, with Heraclitus's *phanta rei:* "all things flow" (549, 453, 532). When these eyes then become those of the poet and their vision become his own ("[t]he eyes, this time my world, / But pass and look *from* mine" (555)), and when "sea, sky, and pool" is mirrored by "pool, sky, and sea" (all of these have already been associated with vision or with intelligence earlier in this canto), Moody's reading of Canto II readily suggests itself: the vital universe and the active intelligence interpreting it are here composed into a reciprocity that "mirrors the reciprocity of a light-illuminated world and an intelligent eye reflecting back upon it what it is making of it," and makes proper perception "a continuation of the process of light-energies in nature" (*Vol. I*, 16). There is an intuition or an epiphany here of the mind's unity with the flux of the universe.

In Canto LXXXIII, water is thus inextricably linked to vision and to the workings of the interpretive intelligence.[26] This is borne out by earlier cantos. For example, in the epiphany that makes up the coda to Canto LXXIV we read:

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[26] In this sense, water becomes an analogue for the Neoplatonic light-philosophy that pervades *The Cantos.*

> This liquid is certainly a
> property of the mind
> nec accidencs est   but an element
> in the mind's make-up
> est agens and functions   dust to a fountain pan otherwise
> Hast'ou seen the rose in the steel dust
> (or swansdown ever?)
> so light is the urging, so ordered the dark petals of iron
> we who have passed over Lethe. (Canto LXXIV, 469)

Thus water becomes more than an external milieu to be navigated, but a property of the interpretive mind itself. This is beautifully illustrated if we accept Jean-Michel Rabaté's argument that we find in *The Pisan Cantos* a self-reflexive 'turn' similar to the one often ascribed to Heidegger (3-4). If the cantos preceding *The Pisan Cantos* to some extent concern the odyssey of an ordering and interpretive intelligence through history, and the attempt of the poet to revitalise his civilisation, then there is a sense in which, now in the "wreckage of Europe" (Canto LXXVI, 478) the recuperative sea voyage which opened *The Cantos* becomes a voyage of personal recovery and psychic reintegration.[27] Whereas at the start of the century, Pound might still have held hopes of 'making new' European culture through his poetry project, he writes the *Pisan Cantos* in the wake of two disastrous World Wars, and more immediately, in the wake of the failure of Mussolini's Republic, in which Pound had come to place his hopes of an actual *paradiso terrestre*. What is more, Pound had been arrested for treason, and being initially imprisoned in a cage, exposed to the elements and isolated, had suffered a mental breakdown before being moved to more benevolent quarters. In some sense, the *Pisan Cantos* might perhaps be described as a mental odyssey, as Pound's attempt to re-order his own mind in the wake of personal and political crisis, which is presented in Canto LXXX in terms of Odysseus's shipwreck: "when the raft broke and the waters went over me" (Canto LXXX, 533).[28]

In the *Pisan Cantos*, as in many of those which precede them, the voyage is one aimed at the recovery of a lost *nostos*, of a lost being-at-home in and at one with the world. As such, it is a

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[27] Leon Surette notes that *The Cantos*, in their inception in the discarded "Three Cantos," started out with autobiographical inflections, with the author intruding into the poems and stating his intention to make of them a "rag-bag" for the "modern world" to "stuff all its thoughts in" (9-10). The autobiographical vein was later abandoned, but Surette holds that "the uncertainty about just what sort of poem he *was* writing, apparent in these early beginnings, was never entirely overcome," and that the *Pisan Cantos* "unexpectedly, pathetically, but unmistakably revive those latent autobiographical dimensions" (10).

[28] In Book V of *The Odyssey*, spying Odysseus en route back to Ithaca from the Island of Calypso, Poseidon stirs up great waves that "curled above his head, then hurtled down and scattered the long timbers of his raft" (*Od*. V, 366-368). The prevalence of other Odyssean imagery in Canto LXXX allows for Pound's description here to be identified as a reworking of the Homeric hero's shipwreck. It is interesting to note, moreover, the increasing prevalence of such shipwreck imagery from *The Pisan Cantos* onward.

recuperative – one might almost say commemorative – trajectory. In his early publications, Pound claimed for himself the role of an Isis, gathering up the limbs of Osiris, restoring and revitalizing civilization. And arguably, this gathering up is nowhere effected with more skill and more intricacy than in the *Pisan Cantos*, although the aim is no longer the salvaging of Western civilisation, but rather his own salvation. The rites and epiphanies which pervaded the earlier cantos still recur in the *Pisan Cantos*, but they are small, personal, talismanic. Not that this weakens them: these are some of the most beautiful and truly life-affirming passages of *The Cantos*. Celestial bodies enact the voyages of gods and heroes (Canto LXXIV 445 and 451, Canto LXXX 530); mint leaves under the tent-flaps recall the herb that saves Odysseus from transformation into a brute beast (Canto LXXIV 458); a wasp enacts the Eleusinian mysteries (Canto LXXXIII 552-553).

It has become something of a commonplace to point out that Pound never managed to achieve his "*paradiso terrestre*" (Canto XXII 102; *SL* 30). While this paradisal aspiration colour much of *The Cantos*, and finds expression in some of his letters, in his late fragments, Pound acknowledges the failure of his venture:

> That I lost my center
>   fighting the world.
> The dreams clash
>   and are shattered –
> and that I tried to make a paradiso
>   terrestre (822)

Certainly, his political vision – which was, for the most part, terribly wrong[29] – never was actualized, and there seems to be nothing that might be called a sustained or lasting *paradiso* in his poetic oeuvre. Yet even in his last fragments, Pound maintains a belief in a *paradiso*, despite the fact that he has not been able to achieve it in his oeuvre:

> But the beauty is not the madness
> Tho' my errors and wrecks lie about me.
> And I am not a demigod,
> I cannot make it cohere. (Canto CXVI, 816)

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[29] In the years leading up to the Second World War, Pound became increasingly interested in Major Clifford Douglas's economic theories, and came to see the malaise of European civilisation as rooted in a warped economic system. In Pound's case, these views would ultimately lead to anti-Semitism and the lionisation of Mussolini's Fascist government (cf. David Moody, *Ezra Pound: Poet; A Portrait of the Man and His Work*, *Volume II: The Epic Years*).

This acknowledgement of the insufficiency of his own efforts does not, however, negate Pound's belief in *paradiso*: terms like "the beauty," "the great acorn of light," "the great ball of crystal," and even "[t]he vision of the Madonna" remain distinct and un-negated by the madness, wrecks and errors that litter the canto, as the counterpoint to its paradisal elements. Pound's conviction finds its summative formulation near the end of the canto: "i.e. it coheres all right / even if my notes do not cohere" (Canto CXVI, 817).

The *Cantos* – even (and perhaps especially) the *Pisan Cantos*, by which time Pound's hopes of an actual political paradise in Mussolini's republic have been shattered – abound in ritual enactments and celebratory epiphanies, and it would be strange to ignore the paradisal reverberations of these "magic moments," these "moment[s] of metamorphosis, bust through from the quotidian into 'divine or permanent world.' Gods, etc.," simply because *The Cantos* do not end on an unequivocal note of triumph (of course, they do not really end at all) (*SL* 210).[30] David Moody's interpretation of Pound's theory of musical harmony provides an alternative possibility, applicable to *The Cantos* as much as to Pound's musical compositions, of a *paradiso*-in-*periplum*, a cosmos of moments found in the epiphanies and rites that pervade *The Cantos* rather than in some final and comprehensive conquering of chaos, or a definitive transformation of the Oceans into a "*Mare Nostrum*":

> [W]e have to learn to think of the composing as a process and not as aspiring to a perfected final state. Its wholeness will be in its inclusiveness, in how much of the totality of the world can be brought into harmony; and harmony here is another term for the coherence of moving energies (vibrations) in their just relations. Its end, to which there is no end, is to bring the mind and the mind's little world into accord with the Cosmos and its process. (*Vol. II*, 27)

If this cannot perhaps be claimed to be the operational principle throughout in *The Cantos* (in certain periods *The Cantos* resemble little more than mere propaganda), it can certainly be said of the somewhat chastened *periplum* we find in the *Pisan Cantos*, in which Odysseus drifts through the wreckage of time and of the poet's mind, going "as the winds veer" (Canto LXXIV, 463), but nonetheless – like the magnetic urgings in the steel dust, like the sun which in its own *periplum* "brings in the stars to our shore" (Canto LXXIV, 469 and 445) –

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[30] D.S. Carne-Ross argues, for example, that *The Pisan Cantos* show that "Pound won through [over despair] because he felt himself sustained by the powers he had always believed in… The army gave him a patch of ground to lie on and he found Demeter there and celebrated the marriage of Heaven and Earth. It must be the most astounding breach of military history since Coleridge joined the 15th Dragoons" (212-13).

nonetheless shaping a coherence out of chaos, gathering into a meaningful relation the scattered fragments of a real, if broken *paradiso.*

There is an interesting moment in the conclusion of James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, when the author, having discussed at length the magic rites of a variety of cults and their deities, reflects on the science that had long since superseded them: a method that at long last constitutes, perhaps, "a clue to the labyrinth, a golden key that opens many locks in the treasury of nature" (712). Not that knowledge has now attained its acme: "[t]he advance of knowledge is an infinite progression towards a goal that for ever recedes" (713), Frazer writes, and man lives his essence only in the perpetual pursuit of this goal. "*Fatti non foste a viver come bruti,*" Frazer continues, quoting Dante's Ulysses, "*Ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza*" (713). Here again is the slight tension between the celebration of magic archaism and an embracing of the restless spirit of scientific progress: a better means by which to get through the labyrinth. It is Pound's distinction that he tried to combine such progress with a mystical closeness to the vital universe, merging the sea-quest of exploration and discovery with magic's epiphanies of the divine in the vital, vegetal world. The figure of Odysseus – the twentieth century's "symbol of the seeker," as Wallace Stevens would call him (line 2) – links these two, both the harried voyager struggling across an adversarial sea (De Villiers 507), and the ritual initiate, who might find access to the divine and to the permanent even within its chaos and flux. There is a certain hopelessness in Frazer's pursuit, because despite the promised riches the voyage holds, all the power and knowledge man might gain "can scarcely hope to stay the sweep of those great forces which seem to be making silently but relentlessly for the destruction of all this starry universe in which our earth swims as a speck or mote" (713). Pound does indeed strive and, admittedly, fail, to construct for the world a lasting *nostos* out of the wreckage of time and 'human progress', and while he does not escape shipwreck, it is hard to deny the impact and the lasting beauty of his great poetic *periplum*, which if not quite making a paradise, still "brings in the stars to our shore" (Canto LXXIV, 445).

CHAPTER 4

ODYSSEUS AND TEXT IN JAMES JOYCE'S *ULYSSES*

"Mr Joyce also preoccupied with Gibraltar and the Pillars of Hercules"

Ezra Pound, Canto LXXIV

In November 1923, "'Ulysses,' Order, and Myth" – T.S. Eliot's influential review essay on James Joyce's recently published book – was printed in the *Dial.* The year before, Ezra Pound had dismissed the mythical dimensions of *Ulysses* as mere "scaffolding" (*Literary Essays* 197), emphasizing instead its encyclopaedic[31] nature, comparing it to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, and commenting on the polyvalence of its characters and the multiplicity of its languages, styles, and dialects (*LE* 194-201). That is, Pound emphasizes the chaotic aspect of the text, and writes elsewhere of the parallels with *The Odyssey* as "mere mechanics," a "shape" for Joyce "on which to order his chaos" (*LE* 250). In response to Pound, Eliot emphasizes the importance of what he calls *Ulysses'* "mythical method," and takes it to be Joyce's principal innovation: not "an amusing dodge, or scaffolding erected by the author for the purpose of disposing his realistic tale" (165), but, in negotiating a synthesis between an anachronistic past and the present, providing "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (167). Here, too, the relation between order and chaos is present, but Eliot's emphasis, in contrast to Pound's, falls principally on the order provided by myth. While Pound acknowledges the ordering function of the Odysseus myth, he emphasizes the disorder of the text, which maintains intelligibility and communicability only through the provisional structure provided by the "scaffolding" of the Odysseus myth (*LE* 197). Thus, while Eliot sees the myth as controlling and ordering a chaotic and anarchic present, Pound lauds the text precisely for the way in which it confronts the reader with this chaos, characterising it elsewhere as a cathartic lancing of "the whole boil of the European mind" (*LE* 260). These early reviews by Eliot and Pound, in their respective characterisations of the Odysseus myth as a salvaging ordering of the present, or a means through which to undermine or destabilize a false, unsatisfactory appearance of order, have established the role of the myth as a key problematic for the discussion of Joyce's novel, and a vast bulk of

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[31] See Paul Saint-Amour's *Tense Future: Modernism*, *Total War*, *Encyclopedic Form* for an interesting discussion of the ways in which certain modernist authors use the encyclopaedic form to highlight the epistemological instabilities latent within the impulse towards a totalised body of knowledge.

material has been written in corroboration of one view or the other. Works like Stuart Gilbert's *James Joyce's* Ulysses and Richard Ellmann's Ulysses *on the Liffey* have given exhaustive treatment to the Homeric parallels in the text, and Ellmann, especially, reads Joyce's use of the myth as an affirmation, on the author's part, of the extraordinary within the ordinary. By way of contrast, a number of critics, while emphasizing the importance of the Homeric myth, view Joyce's use of it as satirical, as a critique of the small, unheroic, and frustrated people who populate Joyce's world. This is Boitani's view, in *The Shadow of Ulysses*, and even early critics like Ernst Robert Curtius saw in Joyce a "metaphysical nihilism" which made use of the systems of meaning found in myth and world literature only to nullify and refute them (469). The Italian critic Franco Moretti likewise views Joyce's use of myth as critical: he characterises Joyce as a "cultural cynic" (204), and views *Ulysses*' mythic dimension as a critique, on Joyce's part, of the capitalist bourgeois society of Dublin at the start of the 20th century. Moretti's discussion is of particular interest, however, because he argues that myth has importance for Joyce "not as a metaphoric pattern for the narration, but as its technique" (*Signs Taken for Wonders* 194). Moretti emphasizes the way in which Joyce's stylistic experimentation, in conjunction with the Odysseus myth, might be read as a critique of ideology, working against the privileging of any one system of meaning. While I do not intend to comment on Joyce's relation to ideology, nor intend to delve into the specificities of the multiple Homeric parallels in *Ulysses*, which have been thoroughly discussed since its first publication, I would like to examine more closely the tension between order and chaos, meaning and nihilism that is implicit in many of these discussions, and to explore not only how the characters in *Ulysses* themselves navigate these tensions in the world they inhabit, but also, taking my cue from Moretti, how the text itself, in its various styles and techniques, might be read as a polytropic Ulysses, navigating the destabilized world of the early 20th century.

Joyce sets *Ulysses* at the start of the 20th century, in Dublin on June 16, 1904. It is thus set within, and registers, the "accelerating tide of [technological, political, and intellectual] change which swept across Paris and other centres of the leading industrial countries during the three decades prior to World War I" (Fairhall 200).[32] James Fairhall points out the

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[32] Fairhall lists "the motor-car and the airplane" along with "the box camera, the cinematograph, the X-ray, the gramophone disc" as some of the technological changes that preceded World War I, and notes that in addition, "a wave of new ideas in the hard and social sciences also washed over the intellectual elites of Europe," with the research of Planck and Einstein "demolish[ing] the old Newtonian universe and the mechanics theory that had dominated the second half of the nineteenth century," and with Freud precipitating "a shocking re-evaluation of

significance, however, of the fact that Joyce writes in the wake of World War I, with the "apocalypse" of which writers like H.G. Wells, Nietzsche, and the French symbolists had been writing now seemingly realized (Fairhall 200). It is hardly surprising, then, that *Ulysses* is a text fraught with uncertainty. Its characters (and its readers) find themselves confronted with an almost endless proliferation of details, facts, and sensations, but for all this there is a niggling concern throughout with a void that somehow underlies this overabundance of meaning. For Leopold Bloom this uncertainty is rooted mainly in his relationship with Molly, whose infidelity undercuts the stabilizing and reassuring bond their marriage and her affections should ideally be. It is also present, to a lesser extent, in his relationship with his daughter Milly, and in the mildly estranging reality of her growing up. For Stephen Dedalus it is present in his feelings of guilt over his mother's death, in his relationship with Buck Mulligan, with the rest of his family, and in the course of action he should take in life. No character is granted firm footing. What is more, Joyce has both Stephen and Bloom reflect on the uncertainties and relativities that characterize their lives. Stephen's most sustained reflection on these concerns occurs in the third episode of *Ulysses*, aptly dubbed "Proteus," in which Stephen wrestles with questions of flux and relativity, recalling Menelaus's struggle with the metamorphosing sea-god in Book IV of *The Odyssey*. Throughout this episode, which takes place on the seashore, and which is dominated by water imagery, Stephen muses on perception and its reliability, and throughout he is concerned with the conflict between his own point of view and those of others. In the book's "Scylla and Charybdis" episode, again, he thinks of his and Buck Mulligan's conflicting intentions: "My will: his will that fronts me. Seas between" (279). Bloom, on the other hand, thinks more than once about the "stream of life" and its constant flux and change (107, 193), and ponders, albeit without understanding, the astronomer Robert Ball's explanation of "parallax" (194): a word which will recur throughout the text, hinting at the inevitable perspectivism of observer or participant in events (Kenner 73).

I have already referred to the crisis of self-reflexivity and perspectivism that culminated at the start of the 20th century, and to critics like DeKoven and Casarino's characterization of modernist texts as those which reflect this crisis, registering the simultaneous and conflicting

the human interior universe" (200). Added to these, Fairhall notes William James's writing "about the rule of chance," and Bergson and Croce about "the importance of becoming rather than being" and "the plasticity of the historical past" respectively (200).

presence of old and newly emerging thought paradigms. This is manifestly the case with *Ulysses*, in which Stephen especially is ever trying to "kill the king and the priest" in his head (273), to get rid of the insufficient but powerful paradigms he has grown up with, and which still dominate his society. Stephen's refusal, however – his "*non serviam*" – can no longer have the straightforwardness of the traditional embattled romantic hero (*Ulysses* 682), and while he has refused the old paradigms, he is at pains to determine what he can possibly affirm in their place. In contrast to Stephen, Bloom is a far more fluid character, embracing a multitude of different interests, ideas, and occupations, and adapting to the world he finds himself in. The difference between these two characters is perhaps most succinctly illustrated by their relation to water, as it is described in the Ithaca episode of the book. Bloom, is a "waterlover" (783), whose admiration of water is expounded upon by a vast catalogue enumerating the element's qualities and its various forms and places of occurrence. The list itself is a welter of details, privileging no one of its items above the other and, dispensing with full sentences, simply placing side by side descriptive phrases, bodies of water, and various watery perils, as well as technological inventions that harness water. In contrast to this welter Stephen, a "hydrophobe," is described, much more briefly, as hating bathing, disliking all aqueous substances, and "distrusting aquacities of thought and language" (785). The comparison ends with a declaration of "[t]he incompatibility of aquacity with the erratic originality of genius" (786). These are, as it were, the two poles which Bloom and Stephen respectively represent. 'Aquacities' and inexactitudes pervade Bloom's thoughts, which are muddled, indistinct, and often lackadaisical (we recurrently see Bloom abandon one train of thought for another, or lose interest in a problem that momentarily occupies him). In opposition to Bloom's casual and often banal musings, Stephen is obsessed with exactly defining and working out his theories, and the originality of his thoughts is a major concern for him (even though his theories draw heavily on other thinkers). If, as critics like Hugh Kenner and Marilyn French have pointed out, Joyce treats Stephen's torments and agonized musings on identity and originality quite harshly in *Ulysses*, Bloom fares little better, and his thoughts and words are for the most part little more than recycled banalities. Stephen's hyper-individualism is figured in an aversion to water so extreme that he refuses to bathe, as though he might accidentally dissolve. In Bloom's case, the dissolution is all but complete: he is a nonentity, possessing barely any remarkable characteristics, but mirroring the trivia and minutiae of the quotidian world he inhabits.

But while Joyce's characters attempt to navigate their world, this world, as the book *Ulysses*, is ultimately a text, which in its turn constitutes an attempt on Joyce's part to navigate or to 'read' his own world, and to strike a balance there, as suggested by Pound's and Eliot's respective review essays, in the milieu between order and chaos. A number of critics, including John Paul Riquelme, French, and Karen Lawrence, have emphasized the self-consciously semiotic nature of *Ulysses*, and have argued that Joyce, particularly in the latter half of the book, foregrounds stylistic experimentation and the text *qua* text in order to reflect upon his own hermeneutics. Lawrence argues, for example, that the "implicit assumption of the primacy of character" which characterizes the first part is ultimately disrupted by a foregrounding of the primacy of the text:

> In the first half of the book, we watch as the characters attempt to interpret their environments and their pasts; then in "Aeolus" and in later chapters, the book begins to interpret itself and inventory its own past. The book ceases to be primarily a psychological novel and becomes and encyclopedia of narrative possibilities (14)

Lawrence goes on to describe this transformation in terms of the same Shakespearian metaphor which DeKoven uses to characterize modernist literature in general. DeKoven argues that modernist literature registers the simultaneous presence of conflicting thought paradigms, and operates as the "rich and strange" locus of a "sea-change" between a dissolving past and a fluid future (3). In her own argument, Lawrence suggests that, in *Ulysses*, "elements of narration (tones and techniques) in the early chapters 'suffer a sea change' later in the book" and that Joyce "break[s] down the conventions of the novel and reconstitute[s] them in a new kind of text" (14). *Ulysses* itself enacts and contends with the interference of the old and new paradigms it has its characters contend with, and the text itself constitutes an attempt to navigate the exigencies of the time in which it was written. Foregrounding style and writing itself, Joyce magnificently fuses clichés, archaisms and literary conventions – all 'old paradigms' – and transforms or 'dissolves' them into the radical novelty of *Ulysses*, while, simultaneously, in this very act, providing a continuation of meaning, an at least partial alleviation of uncertainty and the threat of meaninglessness.

This conscious foregrounding of the text's own hermeneutic venture – a focus that makes the book itself its own eponymous navigator-hero – is perhaps Joyce's most radical (and most interesting) reconfiguration of the Odysseus myth. Before considering the text as its own Ulysses, it is however necessary to turn to its two central characters, and to examine the ways

in which they, too, constitute reworkings of the mythical navigator. While Leopold Bloom is the text's most obvious Ulysses, a number of critics, including Riquelme and John Gordon, have noted that Stephen too, at times, becomes an Odyssean figure (Riquelme 143-146; Gordon 225-227). This reconfiguration is at times Homeric, as when Stephen descends into the underworld of Nighttown and finds himself confronted by the accusing apparition of his dead mother. But there is another strand of Odysseanism that connects Stephen's restless and dissatisfied *non serviam* and his attempt at flight with the similarly rebellious flights of Milton's Icarian Satan and of Dante's Ulysses. The principal mythical figures alluded to in the character of Stephen are those of Icarus and Daedalus – an allusion highlighted by his surname – but the association between these mythical fliers and Dante's Ulysses, spreading the 'wings' of his ship in mad and ultimately doomed flight, allows the further connection between Stephen and the wilful seafarer. Milton's Satan notably embodies both Dante's Ulysses and Icarus, and in Joyce's text, Stephen clearly associates himself with this figure. His self-definitive *non serviam* itself echoes the words of the preacher in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, concerning Satan and his fall*:* "Theologians consider that it has the sin of pride, the sinful thought conceived in an instant: *non serviam: I will not serve.* That instant was his ruin" (119). Satan's punishment is also the very thing Stephen most fears: "the burning ocean of hell" which is "boundless, shoreless and bottomless" (123), afflicting the damned both from without and from within. It is in *Ulysses* that we discover Stephen to be hydrophobic, and this is important, as it is representative of the horror and anxiety evoked by the welter of life in the world in which he finds himself, and of the existential challenge it poses to him. In both *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and in *Ulysses* we find him tarrying by the sea as he wrestles with existential angst, and his troubles are repeatedly presented in oceanic terms. So, in *A Portrait*, as he struggles with and feels himself succumbing to his own passions and to the simultaneously alluring and disheartening "phenomenon of Dublin" (78), we read the following:

> How foolish his aim had been! He had tried to build a break-water of order and elegance against the sordid tide of life without him and to dam up, by rules of conduct and active interest and new filial relations, the powerful recurrence of the tides within him. Useless. From without as from within the waters had flowed over his barriers: their tides began once more to jostle fiercely over the crumbled mole. (98-99)

The mole here also brings to mind the mole on Stephen's breast, which in *Ulysses* becomes a token to him of his own identity and unique individuality. This identity is threatened by the 'tides' both within and without him, by the disconcerting irrepressibility of his animal physicality, and by the equally disconcerting and overwhelming entanglement of his life with those of other people and with the environment in which he finds himself. Maud Ellmann phrases it well when she writes that "Stephen leaks" (139).

In the *Portrait*, Stephen's solution, which he formulates by the seaside, is his art. Throughout the book, we find Stephen reciting talismanic fragments of his own or of other's writing to bear him through his struggles. In the fourth chapter of the *Portrait*, on the verge of acquiescently entering the priesthood – that is, of formally solidifying the "break-water of order and elegance" he had been at pains to build (98) – his ear catches a strain of music, which washed "in an instant, as the first bars of sudden music always did, over the fantastic fabrics of his mind, dissolving them painlessly and noiselessly as a sudden wave dissolves the sand-built turrets of children" (165). Later in the chapter, having now refused the priesthood, and walking by the sea, Stephen becomes conscious of the mythical significance of his surname:

> Now at the name of the fabulous artificer, he seemed to hear the noise of dim waves and to see a winged form flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air. What did it mean? Was it a quaint device opening a page of some medieval book of prophecies and symbols, a hawk-like man flying sunward above the sea, a prophecy of the end he had been born to serve and had been following through the mists of childhood and boyhood, a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being? (173-174)

Not that Stephen's horror at flux and chaos has been resolved: in a fascinating sentence, we are told that "his flesh dreaded the cold infrahuman odour of the sea" (172). Bearing in mind Stephen's concern with identity and individuality, the adjective "infrahuman" is interesting (172), suggesting again those (to Stephen's mind) squalid and bestial tides from without and within. The description of the entire flesh dreading an odour is also interesting, and it is worthwhile to refer here to Maud Ellmann's contention that smell is the least escapable and thus on some level the most invasive and disconcerting influx that Stephen suffers in the *Portrait* (139). In this sense, the vulnerability of the flesh to smell might thus suggest on some level the permeability of identity and individuality (Ellmann 139). Yet at this moment,

he gains confidence from the sense that he might, by his craft, 'fly above' the waves. Euphoric at this potential escape from both "the dull gross voice of the world of duties and despair" and "the inhuman voice that had called him to the pale service of the altar," rapturous at the "instant of wild flight that had delivered him" (174), Stephen ecstatically affirms, "Yes! Yes! Yes! He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul, as the great artificer whose name he bore" (175). The threat of life, figured by the sea, is transformed, in this affirmation and resolution of artistic, into a realm of possibility and promise:

> There was a lust of wandering in his feet that burned to set out for the ends of the earth. On! On! His heart seemed to cry. Evening would deepen above the sea, night fall upon the plains, dawn glimmer before the wanderer and show him strange fields and hills and faces. Where? (175)

The invasive "cold infrahuman odour" of the sea that causes him apprehension as he approaches it is now balanced by reassuring "warm isles of sand" and "grey warm air" (172, 175); much, perhaps, in the way he hopes his art will overcome the tides of life. In this moment, the reassurance is such that, no longer fearing the capacity of the sea's to drown and to engulf him, Stephen takes of his shoes and wades.

When we encounter him again in *Ulysses*, Stephen is far less self-assured. He has been re-engulfed by Dublin after the death of his mother, and the sea is no longer something to fly over, but is associated in Stephen's mind with death and with his mother. He has not bathed in months. No longer the soaring artificer, he has become, in his own thoughts, a "seabedabbled" "lapwing" (*Ulysses* 270). This is, as it were, Stephen's Icarian (and also Luciferian) fall, and the price he pays for his *non serviam* is, as was Satan's, an internalised as well as an external groundlessness, a milieu that is "boundless, shoreless and bottomless" (*A Portrait* 123). Reflecting this change, when Stephen again walks by the sea, his thoughts have moved from *A Portrait's* soaring affirmations of art and the life it feeds on and transcends to an anxious contemplation of being-in-the-world and the void that subtends it. In *The Odyssey*, Menelaus must wrestle with and pin down the elusive and constantly-metamorphosing sea-god Proteus in order to obtain from him the answer to the question he seeks to know. Similarly, in the Proteus episode of *Ulysses*, we see Stephen grappling with the flux of his world, and attempting to come to terms with his own place within such uncertainty.

The episode opens with a meditation on the relationship between the individual consciousness and the external world. To begin with, Stephen settles on the only thing he can certainly know, that is, that he is seeing: "ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes" (45). Yet he immediately tries to move away from this solipsism by adding as a counterpart to the thinking, seeing eyes, the "[s]ignatures of all things" which the "I" is there to "read" (45). He then closes his eyes and listens to the sound of his walking. When he opens his eyes again his thoughts are the opposite of the solipsistic "thought through my eyes" with which he begins: "See now. There all the time without you: and ever shall be, world without end" (46). This indifferent impersonality of the world hardly provides a reassuring alternative to solipsism, but French argues that these two poles introduce a dialectic that moves throughout the rest of the episode, without finally resolving into one or the other, or quite reaching a synthesis (although French suggests that it moves towards a synthesis Stephen ultimately reaches by the end of *Ulysses*) (75, 81-82). This relationship between self and world is especially important to Stephen, given his artistic aspirations. The impingement of the world upon him is necessary if he wishes to transform it demiurgically into art, but at the same time, he is threatened by his own involvement in it, which drags him down from any godlike transcendence or stable point of reference, and places him at the mercy of social and personal vicissitudes. Thus, when Stephen sees the two midwives walking on the strand, his mind turns to the "strandentwining cable of all flesh" that links all of humanity, and in which he himself is implicated (46). The "omphalos" of his navel is a reminder that he is not self-begotten or detached (46), but that, no Adam, his person is 'birthed' by others – by influences as well as by his physical parents – and that his art is likewise implicated. The "[s]ignatures of all things" he reads are already 'written,' as it were (45), and while he attempts to interpret them or transform them into his own art, it is inevitably a re-interpretation, and is impinged upon and threatened by these prior interpretations: "[t]hese heavy sands are language tide and wind have silted here" (55), "heavy of the past" (56). What is more, his origins make demands upon Stephen, from his motherland and mother-tongue right down to the Queen, but exemplified above all in his mother's request that he should pray for her: a request with which he refuses to comply, and a sundering for which he is wracked with guilt.

But apart from anxieties of origin and the inevitable entanglement with his world of anyone who is not, like God, self-begotten, Stephen is also concerned with destiny. In *A Portrait*, the "Where?" that follows Stephen's cry of "On! On!" suggests progress upward and onward

(175), an artistic apotheosis or transcendent flight that does not yet know its own limits. When we encounter the question again in the Proteus episode, it has become a far more disconcerting one, and the answer given intimates death: "to the evening lands" (63). The death of his mother confronts Stephen with mortality, and in the Proteus episode he is keenly attuned to the signs of death, decay and destruction that litter the shore, from the "seawrack" to the dead "dogsbody" (45, 58). In the preceding episode, Mr Deasy proclaims that "[a]ll history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God" (42). Walking by the sea, and his mind shifting to the recently drowned man in Dublin Bay, whose body has not yet been recovered, Stephen wryly posits an inverse trajectory: "God becomes man becomes fish becomes barnacle goose becomes featherbed mountain." In a sense, as French argues, the dead dogsbody becomes the manifest goal towards which all history moves (indeed in "Circe," Joyce plays on mirroring between the words "God" and "dog," and the two merge into each other in this episode) (78-79). In Proteus, birth and death, the womb and the tomb become united in the image of the sea, as they likewise do in Swinburne's "The Triumph of Time," which Stephen here recalls.

The ineluctable flux of time and of metamorphosing matter deeply disturbs Stephen, and in *Ulysses* even art and literature are subject to these tides. Yet in thinking of the "seachange" which the recently drowned man will suffer, and pondering the process of flux that sees "God become[] man become[] fish become[] barnacle goose become[] featherbed mountain" in an ever degenerative set of metamorphoses (63), Stephen acknowledges, albeit with horror, that this instability and flux connects him with the world around him, that he assimilates it in his very person: "[d]ead breaths I living breathe, tread dead dust, devour urinous offal from all dead" (63). This is a highly uncanny answer to the twin problems of solipsism and indifferent, impersonal "world without end" (46), yet French argues that it suggests the beginnings of Stephen's acceptance of the uncertainties and relativism of the world he inhabits (81-82). In the wake of this contemplation of "seachange" and intermingled death and life (63), Stephen, leaving the seashore, looks back to see "[m]oving through the air high spars of a threemaster, her sails brailed up on the crosstrees, homing, upstream, silently moving, a silent ship" (64). The combination of "moving through the air," "crosstrees" and "homing" is perhaps enough to make of this ship a tenuous portent of redemption (64), of the possibility of navigating and remaining afloat on the seas, if not perhaps of transcending them.

In the penultimate episode of *Ulysses*, Stephen sets out from Bloom's abode at 7 Eccles Street into the night, and the reader is not told where to, only that it will be neither back to the

Tower he shared with Mulligan, nor home to his family. Joyce claimed that Ithaca was written in the "form of mathematical catechism" (Ellmann; *James Joyce*, 501), and the episode operates according to a series of questions, the answers of which catalogue and file away, as it were, what Lawrence has called "the cold hard facts" (181). Yet for all the dogma in which the catechism traditionally instructs a participant, Ithaca is fraught with "the uncertainty of the void" (818), and with doubt as to whether one might get from the "known to the unknown," or from the "unknown to the known" (818). Aeons of space, micro- and macrocosms founded on the void, "our system plunging towards the constellation of Hercules" and the "parallax or parallactic drift of socalled fixed stars" are striking images to find in an episode that represents the home (819), as is its overwhelming list of the characteristics of water, encompassing for example its "violence," "imperturbability," and its "pervading penetrativeness" (784). As for exploration into either the macro- or the microcosm, we are told that "if progress were carried far enough, nought nowhere was never reached" (820). Read one way, this means that man will never find the goal he seeks in his quest for knowledge, that no final answer is ever to be had for his questions. Yet at the same time, while this is scarcely an affirmation of the stability and order of the universe, however, it is, strangely enough, a denial of total nihilism. That is, insofar as the quest or questioning continues, while nothing definitive or final will ever be reached, neither will that threatening "nought" which seems to underlie all meaning. Read in this manner, "nought nowhere was never reached" has the cadence of an affirmation of some, albeit provisional, meaning to be had, to keep man from utter nothingness (820). The final word of the episode is "Where?"(871): hardly a resolution, but suggesting, nonetheless, a continuation of the interpretive voyage. Stephen, the "centrifugal" character to Bloom's "centripetal," sets out nonetheless still believing in the possibility of "proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown" (818). Departing, Stephen's motion thus echoes that of Dante's Ulysses, who, leaving Circe, bypasses home to try the unknown.

In contrast to Stephen, Bloom is a far less agonistic figure. We are told in the Ithaca episode that he is "centripetal" and a "waterlover" (826, 783), and among the traits he admires in water, we find "[i]ts universality: its democratic equality and constancy to its nature in seeking its own level" (783). His admiration for water also encompasses, however, those characteristics that induce fear in Stephen: characteristics like its "penetrativeness" and its "metamorphoses" (784). Bloom is not unaware of uncertainty and relativism (most of the bleak, doubtful meditations on infinity and nothingness that are found in the episode are in

fact assigned to Bloom's consciousness). Nor is he stolid about these things: he is horrified by death, and his thoughts on life and decay in the Hades episode recall Stephen's own dread in the Proteus episode at the "seachange" that all things are implicated in (63). What is more, the infidelity of Molly – the text's Penelope – is real and radically destabilizing trial for Bloom. Nor is Bloom quite at home in the city he inhabits: his Jewishness earns him the mistrust of his fellow citizens, and he is something of an exile in their midst. Yet for all this, Bloom inhabits his world in a different way to Stephen, and part of this is due to one of his 'Odyssean' qualities: an everyman, Bloom is also "Noman" (858). Bloom is far less of an individual than Stephen, and is far less concerned with his own identity. If anything, he is something of a nonentity, thus causing critics some difficulty in accounting for Joyce's choice to make him the text's central character. On a Homeric level, Bloom's characterisation as a jack-of-all-trades and as an unremarkable everyman echoes Ulysses polytropic talents and the trick he plays on the Cyclops in calling himself "No-man" (*Od.* IX, 367), and it also recalls Plato's myth of Er in *The Republic*, in which Odysseus wishes to be reincarnated as a nondescript, and to live a life of peace. As many critics, including Kenner, Boitani, Michael Seidel, and Moretti have pointed out, Joyce exploits the ironic possibilities in reconfiguring Odysseus as exactly such a nondescript, and he inverts the heroism of Homer's voyager to give us the decidedly unheroic and everyday Bloom. This ironic reconfiguration is made even more apt by the mysticism and theories of reincarnation of Madame Blavatsky's school, which was scorned by Joyce, and which finds its way into *Ulysses* in Bloom's speculations on "metempsychosis." Yet as Seidel puts it, "Joyce was not so scornful as to be disinterested," and even the irony with which Bloom is treated is not a full debasement either of the character or of the mythical voyager he reconfigures (xi).

A number of critics have pointed out that Bloom exemplifies a 'new' way of being, a new type of man, or Joyce's modern type of the hero. French, for example, argues that he embodies *caritas*: a care for others that acknowledges and appreciates the interconnectedness of oneself and one's fellow man (42). Richard Ellmann, Herbert Schneidau, Boitani, and others remark on Bloom's pacifism, on his pliability and on his equanimity. Furthermore, in Bloom, Joyce presents the reader with a remarkably corporeal character. If, as Maud Ellmann argues, "Stephen leaks" (139), taking in influences from the world around him almost against his will, Bloom hardly resists such flux, and is an extraordinarily permeable character. Not only does he take an interest in a wide range of subjects, often summoning up a half-remembered word or phrase (picked up indiscriminately from a variety of sources) to apply to

his own experiences, but he is also unashamedly portrayed passing a whole range of his own bodily secretions into the external world. If Stephen is anxious about the integrity of his identity and generally repulsed by the corporeal – figured by his fear of the "tides without" and the "tides within" – Bloom is far more comfortable with influx and reflux.

It is worth noting here, however, the distinction between text and character that is subtly foregrounded in the case of Bloom. Although Bloom, as a character, is hardly as wracked by conscience and self-consciousness as Stephen, it is the text rather than the character that seems to eschew shame altogether. Bloom, as a character, is not wholly at ease with the uncertainties that come with interconnectedness and flux. Particularly in his connections with Molly, but also with his daughter Milly, who is growing up, he experiences anxiety and doubt. In the "Nausicaa" episode, he experiences shame after he masturbates while ogling Gerty MacDowell. The text, however, mercilessly exposes all Bloom's worst foibles, banalities, and ignorance, and does not shy away from portraying even his 'shameful' bodily functions. It is certainly true that Bloom is a more fluid, easygoing character than Stephen, accepting the uncontrollability and uncertainty of human relationships, and generally letting things be. Yet the text takes this fluidity and tolerant acquiescence symbolically further, representing Bloom, albeit ironically, as a sort of Messiah figure. His Jewish heritage earns him comparisons to Christ, and in the Ithaca episode, as he drifts off to sleep, he imagines – or is this too the text's doing? – that, after wandering the heavens as a comet, "beyond the fixed stars" and "passing from land to land, among peoples, amid events"

> he would somehow reappear reborn [...] and after incalculable eons of peregrination return an estranged avenger, a wreaker of justice on malefactor, a dark crusader, a sleeper awakened, with financial resources (by supposition) surpassing those of Rothschild or of the silver king. (858)

The wandering Odysseus is reborn, like the Christ-child, to right the wrongs of the world. This is all quite comic in Bloom's consciousness, and any desire on his part to wander is counteracted by thoughts of the lateness of the hour, darkness, and perilous thoroughfares (859), this along with the fact that such a cosmic return would be hampered by the "unsatisfactory equation between an exodus and return in time through reversible space and an exodus and return in space through irreversible time" (858).

Yet Seidel argues that it is exactly such a journey that Joyce makes Bloom undertake in his *Ulysses*, albeit with ironic inflections. In his *Epic Geography: James Joyce's* Ulysses, Seidel

traces Joyce's use in the structuring of *Ulysses* of Victor Bérard's seminal *Les Phéniciens et L'Odyssée*, in which the Frenchman argued for a Semitic influence on the Greek poem. As I have indicated in the preceding chapter, Bérard, whose work Joyce greatly admired, argued that while written by a Greek, the navigator-hero of poem was a Phoenician: a duality which accounts, for Bérard, for the double tendency of *The Odyssey* towards both wandering ("the Phoenicians … are at home only on the sea") and homecoming ("Greek voyagers are … inexperienced. When they are out on the seas they think of little but home") (4). Thus *The Odyssey* contains the opposing tendencies of both Semitic *periplum* and Greek *nostos*. What is more, Bérard goes on to argue that the wanderings of Odysseus are purgative, and regenerative. As Seidel writes,

> [t]en years of the Trojan War in the east are balanced by ten years of wandering over greater expanses in the west. Odysseus is his race's scapegoat. […] The *Odyssey* is not only a border epic placing its Greek hero in the uncharted seas of the *couchant* Mediterranean, but an epic eventually recivilising the very hero whose mission is it to recivilise his land. (32-33)

The directional scheme of *Ulysses*, Seidel argues, echoes the geographically purgative voyage of Odysseus in Homer's epic, moving as it does between the realm of death, as represented by the Glasnevin cemetery in the northwest, to Dublin Bay in the southeast, which is its "antithesis," representing "the place of origins" (83). Ithaca is located on the border between these two regions, and Odysseus's journey into Hades and back again serves to some extent to wrest his island kingdom back into the realm of the familiar and the cultured. As Bérard points out, "Ithaca was one of the last outposts of civilization for the Homeric Greek world … divid[ing] the civilized nations toward the dawn from the mysterious regions of the Mediterranean *couchant*" (31). Odysseus's travels beyond Ithaca and back again thus figure, for Bérard, the general Westward exploration and migration of peoples, which in familiarizing the world to the West, wrests the previous border-kingdom of Ithaca more firmly into the known, civilized world.

Seidel's argument is that Joyce's Bloom, a Jew, operates as such a redemptive Odysseus. Of course, to make him so is laughable – Bloom is an unremarkable everyman-noman, possessing no particularly heroic qualities – but Seidel holds that "what *Ulysses* will not presume on the level of naturalism, it activates on the level of symbolic renewal" (83). In the Ithaca episode, the dream-transformation of Bloom into a wandering and returning comet

operates in such a manner. Seidel notes here the influence on Joyce's by Giordano Bruno's *Spaccio*, in which the constellations become a "spatial allegory of degenerative time":

> His allegory has a familiar plot: wandering and return. The structure of *Spaccio* is similar in its import and directional significance to that of the *Odyssey* or of *Ulysses*. Bruno proposes the regeneration of a debased cosmos via a return to origins, specifically semitic origins (51).

In "Ithaca," Joyce writes in his letters, Stephen and Bloom "become heavenly bodies, wanderers like the stars at which they gaze" (160). This cosmic transformation, then, and particularly Bloom's conversion into a comet that wanders beyond the limits of the fixed stars, returning ultimately to redeem the world, represents one of the crucial ways in which Joyce reconfigures Odysseus. To quote Seidel again:

> Odysseus has his regenerative mission, Bruno has his purifying mission, and in the zodiacal projections Joyce works out a comic design that allows his wandering Jew to extend his potential range far enough to purge the home skies (59).

For Seidel, this symbolic 'purging' is Joyce's answer to the malaise of Irish society at the start of the 20th century, and Bloom, in his equanimity and non-combativeness represents the ideal antithesis to some of the more belligerent and intolerant factions around at the time, as represented in the "Lestrygonians" episode of the book. In *Ulysses*, Bloom's civilizing role remains but a symbolic one, however: while "Ithaca" sees him momentarily transformed − at least on a semiotic level − into a redemptive cosmic wanderer, his character's actual trajectory through Dublin remains small in scale and largely insignificant in its results. It is noteworthy that this reading of Bloom as a vehicle for Joyce through which to enact a symbolic purgation of his world already suggests a move away from a concern with the action of the characters and towards a foregrounding of the text itself, and suggests the possibility of reading *Ulysses* itself as an interpretive odyssey. The emphasis on the text *qua* text is already emphasized by Kenner when he writes: "On nothing is *Ulysses* more insistent than on the fact that there is no Bloom there, no Stephen there, no Molly there, no Dublin there, simply language" (156). This line of argument is shared by critics like French and Riquelme, who foreground writing or reading itself as the true theme of the text.

Having discussed some of the ways in which Stephen and Bloom might be seen as reconfigurations of Odysseus, I would like to return now to the question of the text's own navigation of order and chaos in its use of myth. In his *Signs Taken for Wonders*, Franco Moretti argues that myth operates at the centre of *Ulysses*, "not as a meta-historical image of

a fable and several typical characters, but as a relationship between subjective intellectual consciousness and intuition of objective reality; not as a metaphoric pattern for the narration, but as its technique" (194). Moretti goes on to cite Ernst Cassirer's claim that the ego, in mythic thought, "does not dispose freely over the data of intuition, in order to relate and compare them to each other, but *is captivated and enthralled by the intuition which suddenly confronts it*" (194, emphasis Moretti's). This is essentially also the claim made by Vico (whom Joyce read as early as 1905, according to Bergin and Fisch) when he writes that the first poets were "entirely immersed in the senses, buffeted by the passions, buried in the body" (118), and that the "poetic logic" of myth constitutes their attempts to navigate, by means of figures and images, circumstances that overwhelmed them. Moretti then relates this to Joyce's use of stream of consciousness in the first episodes of *Ulysses*, citing Umberto Eco's claim that in Joyce this technique results in a dissolution of identity for the characters, showing up the individual's 'permeability', as it were, to external sense data: "[i]n the flow of overlapping perceptions during Bloom's walk through Dublin, the boundaries between 'inside' and 'outside,' between how Bloom endures Dublin and how Dublin acts on him, become very indistinct" (qtd. in Moretti 194). While this is obvious in the case of Bloom, Stephen's stream of consciousness illustrates the same principle, especially in the Proteus episode, where, as the character grapples with questions of identity, perception, and external reality, the text enacts the way in which this reality impinges on him. The distinction between Bloom's and Stephen's stream of consciousness, Moretti writes, is that the latter is still "the mirror of a *conflict* between the attempt to dominate the world rationally, and the world's mute or equivocal substance" (198). Moretti's argument is essentially that stream of consciousness "indicates that the individual" in the modern world, for all his supposed rational mastery of the world and escape from the realm of myth, is nonetheless "enslaved by arcane and uncontrollable forces" in a similar way to ancient man (195), and the suggestion is that his only recourse, as in the case of his so-called 'primitive' ancestors, is to shape or to name these forces with images, metaphors and poetic fictions, thereby gaining some measure of control over them, without ever being able to transcend them.

If, as Moretti argues, stream of consciousness does indeed enact on a textual level a crisis of identity, blurring the distinctions between outside and inside, the later styles of *Ulysses* only heighten this crisis, finally dissolving the characters into the writing or language itself and, in drawing attention to the text as language, also radically destabilizing its readers. It is noteworthy that the stream of consciousness sections of *Ulysses* were not those that most

troubled early readers, and in comparison with his later styles, Joyce even refers to this "initial style" as the "Rock of Ithaca" in a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver (*Letters* 129), who had expressed her dissatisfaction with the style of the Sirens episode of the book. In a sense, while the early episodes of *Ulysses* show the reader the destabilization of its characters in the technique of stream of consciousness, the later styles end up include the reader in that destabilization, disorienting him with a welter of styles and details that cannot be clearly assigned to either author or character, and in removing such grounding authorities for its proliferating meanings, leaving the reader 'at sea.' One might think of it as a radical foregrounding of the kind of disorienting heteroglossia Bakhtin reads in Dickens's *Little Dorrit*, which, he writes, is

> [e]verywhere dotted with quotation marks that serve to separate out little islands of scattered direct speech and purely authorial speech, washed by heteroglot waves from all sides. But it would have been impossible actively to insert such quotation marks, since… one and the same word often figures both as the speech of the author and the speech of another. (*The Dialogic Imagination* 307-308)

That is, while in the initial style of *Ulysses* the reader still feels able to stably assign thoughts and utterances to specific characters or to the author, these "islands" of stability dissolve in the later styles, causing Ezra Pound to complain in a letter to Joyce of the Sirens episode, which was the first to cause this sort of concern even among Joyce's supporters: "Even I cd. do with indication of whose jag – possibly *Blooms* (?) it is" (*Pound/Joyce* 157)

It is noteworthy also that this shift occurs in the episode in which the "art or science" which it is supposed to embody (as given in the Linati schema[33]) is music – a system of meaning generally considered to be less referential than language, and which, around Joyce's time, was undergoing its own revolutions in the work of composers like Arnold Schoenberg and Georges Antheil (with whom Joyce worked on plans for an opera based on the Cyclops episode) (Martin 281). In his "Music and Language, a Fragment," Adorno remarks how Kafka "treated the meanings of spoken intentional language as if they were those of music," in rendering them as "parables broken off in mid-phrase," "energis[ing] incipient intentions" (3). Without wishing to equate Kafka with Joyce, it is certainly possible to apply these descriptions to Joyce's work, and to note the way in which certain repeated phrases and fragments that surface and resurface throughout the text, without always being attached to a

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[33] This schema, which was given by Joyce to Carlo Linati, is printed in the appendix to Richard Ellmann's *Ulysses on the Liffey*, pp. 187-188.

specific character, might be read as operating similarly to leitmotifs in musical composition. It is also worth noting the way in which Adorno compares the innovations in music and language, and the referential transformations in modern writing and musical composition: music, particularly in the works of modern composers, resembles language, Adorno writes, in that "as a medium facing shipwreck, it is sent like intentional language on an odyssey of unending mediation in order to bring the impossible back home" (*Quasi Una Fantasia* 4).

That *Ulysses* itself mediates between the complete foundering of meaning and its impossible salvation is suggested by Pound's and Eliot's concerns with order and chaos in Joyce's text, and with the degree to which it constitutes a conservation or a destruction of meaning. Eliot, with his "mythical method," sees Joyce as salvaging some lasting meaning from the "vast panorama of anarchy and futility of contemporary history" which threatens it, while for Pound, the "shape" of *Ulysses* – the arbitrary scaffolding of its parallels with Homeric myth – is but a means for Joyce through which best to present his "chaos." Or as he writes in his *Guide to Kulchur*, in *Ulysses*, "[t]he sticky, molasses-covered filth of current print, all the fuggs, all the foetors, the whole boil of the European mind, had been lanced" (96). Given this tension between order and chaos which the text registers, and considering Horkheimer and Adorno's claim that, in *The Odyssey*, "[t]he primeval world is secularized as the space [the hero] measures out […]. The adventures bestow names on each of these places, and the names give rise to a rational overview of space" (*Dialectic* 38), it becomes possible to think of the narrative itself as a Ulysses, navigating and encompassing, 'measuring out' the chaos of its own contents. The extent to which this unity is achieved is of course open to question, and part of the power of *Ulysses* lies precisely in the interaction, or mutual 'interference,' as Casarino might put it, between the ordering schemes, patterns, and parallels of the text, and the sense of chaos, meaninglessness or confusion that nonetheless still pervade it. That is, *Ulysses* magnificently and self-consciously registers both the unsettling and tumultuous world and time in which it is written, and the ordering, meaning-making interpretation that navigates it, without reducing the one to the other. Refusing both nihilism and absolutism and acknowledging that "nought never nowhere was found," *Ulysses*, which is its own true hero and mariner, keeps afloat in its acknowledgment and own enactment of the endlessly possible and necessary voyage of interpretation.

In this sense, *Ulysses* might be described, in Adorno's words, as "an odyssey of unending mediation" between final meaning and final foundering (4): an odyssey that is undertaken, what is more, in the wake of the shipwreck of old systems of meaning. Yet it is a wreck

which might still provide the means for creative survival, as Joyce brilliantly demonstrates in his radical experimentation even with the most banal forms of language, including his self-conscious reconfiguration of the Odyseus myth. In *Shipwreck with Spectator*, Hans Blumenberg describes Nietzsche's metaphor of shipwrecked man clinging to a beam as the condition in which man finds himself in the wake of "a sinking in which the artificial vehicle of self-deception and self-assurance was long since smashed to pieces" (20). It is worthwhile quoting Nietzsche at some length here, given the light that his description of shipwreck and survival can cast on a reading of *Ulysses* as an enactment of this sort of preservation. Nietzsche writes that

> [f]or the liberated intellect, that enormous timber and framework of concepts, clinging to which needy humankind saves itself for life, is only a scaffolding and a toy for his boldest works of art: and if he smashes it, mixes it up, and ironically puts it back together, pairing what is most alien and separating what is most closely related, he shows that he does not need these forms of emergency assistance (qtd. in Blumenberg 20).

Shipwreck, scaffolding, and creative survival are fused in Nietzsche's image, and perhaps it is possible to read *Ulysses*, with its reconfigurations of myth, and its own enactment of myth, along similar lines.

Seidel's study of the directional scheme of the text is one example of such creative (and ironic) reconfiguration, yet he also draws attention to the way in which Joyce makes the very activity of meaning-making a central theme in his texts. As Seidel argues, a scaffold is a dispensable structure once the building is built. But if there is no longer the possibility of any finished edifice, then meaning lies in the building process itself, and the scaffolding is of the utmost importance, and carries the entire project. In terms of Nietzsche's beam, it is the scaffolding man grasps at, plays with and constantly reconfigures, thus creatively surviving the shipwreck of any self-assured meaning. To use a different metaphor, and one the title of the book allows, even suggests, a voyager once arrived at his destination no longer has need of the ship that bore him there, but if, as proposed in the Ithaca episode: "nought nowhere [is] never reached" (820), then it remains of vital importance. Ithaca, which Joyce called the 'proper end' of the book, closes with the same "Where?" that Stephen first asks himself of his resolve to flight in the *Portrait* (175), and which he reiterates morbidly in the Proteus episode of *Ulysses.* Here, there is no answer, and the suggestion is thus of a yet uncompleted voyage, a yet missing Ithaca.

CONCLUSION

In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno construe *The Odyssey* as the first literary instantiation of man's progressive disenchantment of the world. It marks, for these authors, the beginnings of a shift away from the old, frightening world and the myths needed to survive it, towards a more stable, familiar world, demarcated by names and concepts that allow man a greater measure of control over his reality. While they oppose such rational mastery of the world to the more provisional functioning of myth, Horkheimer and Adorno also emphasise that the "arid wisdom" of enlightenment serves the same purpose as the "fantastic wisdom" of myth which it supposedly discards and overcomes (8). Odysseus, questing for the state of being-at-home in the world represented by Ithaca – the securely mastered world promised by Enlightenment – has simply enshrined, for Horkheimer and Adorno, one power as his all-encompassing myth: no longer a multitude of deities requiring rituals and repeated sacrifices, but the new deity, as it were, of human reason.

We are now in a position to recognise that Horkheimer and Adorno's reconfiguration of Odysseus is one of many that associate the hero with epistemology. For these authors, the figure is an early exemplification of the enlightenment episteme, rendering the world familiar in the wake of its illumination. I briefly explored this reading in the introduction to this thesis, and suggested, by way of contrast, that the myth is invoked by modernist authors in order to give expression to their own hermeneutic activity. Drawing on Vico and Blumenberg, I suggested that Odysseus, particularly in his role as maritime wanderer, might be invoked by authors in response to the specific perplexities and intractibilities – the logical aporias – of their different contexts. Since the focus of my project lies in interpretation and hermeneutics, I focused here on epistemological perplexities and, specifically, given the time-frame of my project, on the epistemological crisis in the 19th century which saw a heightened consciousness of perspectivism and second-order perception. If the sea voyage is a traditional image for human existence, the increasing synonymy between living and interpreting that resulted from such perspectivism meant that the sea voyage became self-consciously deployed as an image for the author's own interpretive venture. Granted all this, Odysseus, in his role as maritime wanderer, becomes an exceptionally intelligible means through which modernist writers might figure their own hermeneutics.

My second chapter comprised a historical survey of some of the major reconfigurations of Odysseus from Homer up until the start of the 20th century, including those of Dante and

Tennyson. I read these reconfigurations alongside Hans Blumenberg's historical genealogy of theoretical curiosity in his *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, to emphasise the epistemological importance of the figure, and its ineluctable association with questions of knowledge and curiosity. I noted the relation between the epistemological attitudes and the different inflections given to Odysseus that obtain at any given time, a relation which illustrates the way in which the figure of Odysseus has been historically associated with questions of knowledge and interpretation, and which situates modernist authors' self-conscious appropriation of the figure in the 20th century to articulate their own hermeneutic activity within a long history of similar epistemological associations that have coloured and distinguished various reconfigurations of the mythical hero. Commencing with Homer's hero and his struggle to regain Ithaca, I noted the arguments of critics like Ernst Bloch and Victor Bérard that here already, the figure exceeds the author's own deployment of him within the narrative trajectory of *The Odyssey*, already expressing a centrifugal tendency that would later be foregrounded by Dante. I then briefly discussed the Italian author's own reworking of the figure, which insisted on the restless wandering and inordinate curiosity of the navigator-hero. While Dante still condemns the figure's inordinate appetitiveness, censuring him with shipwreck, and contrasting him with the more prudent, God-guided figures of Elijah, and of his own pilgrimage, Blumenberg identifies this as the moment marking "the epoch's incipient doubt about the finality of its horizon and its narrowness" (qtd. in Boitani, "Shadows of Heterodoxy in Hell" 77). I then discussed the figure's association, in the wake of this Dantean reconfiguration, with Columbus, and the way in which a number of authors made use of this Ulysses-Columbus to give expression to a bourgeoning epochal optimism with regard to new 'lands' – geographical and scientific – to be discovered. Finally, I attempted to show how, when in the 19th century this optimism began to dissipate, the Dantean Ulysses espoused by earlier authors became problematized, gradually giving way to an Odysseus who is not so much a questing figure as a buoyant wanderer-survivor, remaining afloat despite the shipwreck of old thought paradigms.

My third and fourth chapters further explored this image of Odysseus as wanderer-survivor, as it emerges in Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, with specific attention to the hermeneutic associations the figure takes on in the texts of these authors. In my third chapter, I discussed Pound's use of the figure to give expression to his own hermeneutic enterprise. Pound's initial aim was the renewal of Western civilization, which he hoped to achieve in his *Cantos* through a periplean voyage through the "luminous details" of the past

(*Selected Prose* 21). Pound styled himself as an Isis re-membering Osiris from his scattered limbs, or an Odysseus piecing together and thus granting coherence to his world by 'sailing around' in it. Yet there is a sense in which Pound's paradisal aspirations were not so much projections of a future as a way of looking at the world, attentive to the 'divine' in it, even within Pound's decidedly non-paradisal present. This idea of paradise as subtending a way of looking is implicit in the pairing of "The Seafarer" and "Salve Pontifex" in Pound's *Ripostes.* Both are sea voyages, but the former is a tale of struggle and adversity, whereas the latter celebrates an epiphany of the divine. These two ways of looking at the world are again presented in Cantos I and II, respectively. Pound's use of the image of the *periplum* (as opposed to the Dantean descent and ascent) as a model for the way in which his poem operates, itself suggests the importance, for Pound, of the angle of vision from which he approaches his world: it is to be interpretive, recording the world from the vantage point of the voyage, rather from some objective final ground. *Periplum*, and the creative resources it offers the author, becomes especially important in the "Pisan Cantos," written in the wake of the shipwreck of Pound's political vision of an earthly *paradiso* in Mussolini's republic, and in the wake of his own personal imprisonment and breakdown. Here, the interpretive consciousness, figured in Odysseus, drifts through the wreckage of time and of the poet's mind, going "as the winds veer" (Canto LXXIV, 463), while still, like the sun in its own *periplum*, "bring[ing] in the stars to our shore" (Canto LXXIV, 469 and 445), and creating beautiful, if provisional meaning as it threads its way through the fragments of past paradigms and cultural creations.

In my fourth chapter, I suggested that both Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom might be read as Odyssean characters, and explored their different attitudes toward flux, particularly as figured in the sea. Taking my cue from critics like French and Riquelme, I argued that Joyce's text itself might be read as enacting an Odyssean voyage in the interplay between its structuring myth and its protean contents, thereby maintaining a creative conflict between the amorphous tendencies it at times embodies in the chaotic proliferation of its details, and the leitmotifs and recurrent images that create order within the text, without quite mastering its chaos. Drawing on Nietzsche's image of the shipwreck as providing a scaffolding upon which man might playfully and creatively build up temporary constructs of meaning, and which thereby also provides him with the means of remaining afloat in the wake of the shipwreck of any final meaning, I suggested that Joyce makes similar use of the Odysseus myth in the creation of *Ulysses.* At the same time, in so doing, the text itself enacts the sort of

polytropic survival that Odysseus comes to signify at the start of the 20th century. The multiple styles with which Joyce experiments, and which come to replace the text's characters as the principal vehicle that carries its forward, might themselves be read as the polytropic facets of the most interesting 'Ulysses' of Joyce's creation: that of the book itself.

In foregrounding the interpretive odyssey of the text, and the meaning-making potentials of language-itself, Joyce's *Ulysses* provides an important contrast to Horkheimer and Adorno's demythologising Odysseus, who reduces the world he journeys through: familiarising and circumscribing it, disabusing it of its superfluous gods and provisional figural creations. Horkheimer and Adorno's Odysseus stabilises and consolidates his world, mastering it through reason. The authors go so far as to call him a "burgher" (36): a landsman *par excellence* who, prudent and economical, maintaining careful control over himself and keeping his goal always in mind, bests the old gods and dispels the fear they personified. By way of contrast, the odyssey of Joyce's text moves from relative simplicity and stability in the opening episodes into ever stranger and more bewildering realms, and its proliferating meanings destabilise rather than consolidate its world, while nevertheless preserving its intelligibility through the text's recurrent leitmotifs and patterns. This destabilising proliferation – effected largely through Joyce's encyclopaedism, which takes on a life of its own and detaches itself from any obvious inherence the consciousness of his characters – has interesting parallels with Auerbach's reading of Homeric styles as "illuminated" and "externalised" (3-4), yet the result, in Joyce, is precisely the undoing of the sort of self-contained sufficiency that the German author saw in the Homeric text.

The figure of a world-grounding, world-stabilising Odysseus is one that recurs in a number of Odyssean reconfigurations, including that of the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot, who reads Odysseus's ruse that overcomes the threat of the siren song as leaving the world "perhaps poorer, but firmer and surer" (Blanchot 8). The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas writes, in a similar vein, that Odysseus's "adventure in the world was only a return to his native island – a complacency of the Same, an unrecognition of the Other" (*Basic Philosophical Writings* 48). Yet if this centripetal tendency is present in *The Odyssey*, and is isolated by a number of subsequent authors in their reconfigurations of the navigator-hero, it is nonetheless counteracted by centrifugal tendencies that remain latent in the figure, so that it exceeds any specific figural use to which an author might put it, subtly destabilising intended meanings through the inflections and the echoes of the multiple other, at times contradictory configurations that are lingeringly associated with the figure of Odysseus, and that not only

disrupt, but also potentially enrich any one author's use of it. If we accept Bérard's argument that *The Odyssey* is a Greek reworking of a Phoenician *periplus*, then this tension is already present in Homer's Odysseus.

Joyce's Leopold Bloom provides a good example of the protean, conflicting tendencies latent within the figure of Odysseus. In some regards, as a complacent bourgeois landowner, he is akin to Horkheimer and Adorno's "burgher," and one might read in him the very world-consolidating Odysseus who avoids extremes, does not pursue the siren song, and insists upon the return to Ithaca. Yet at the same time, Bloom is a remarkably a fluid character, a "waterlover" who is extraordinarily permeable to the influences of the world around him (*Ulysses* 783). Perhaps one might argue that the protean Bloom, for all his platitudes and nonentity, is precisely the most 'modern' of Joyce's characters and an exemplary denizen of the 20th century, his fluidity enabling him to exist within the overwhelming social and political flux and chaos that is one of modernity's radically destabilising characteristics (prompting Zygmunt Bauman to dub its late form "liquid modernity") (12). Bloom, as a burgher-Odysseus, is thus nonetheless not quite the world-consolidating voyager Horkheimer and Adorno make of the figure. In a sense, perhaps, it is now rather the author's reading and interpreting – through the figure of Odysseus – of a complex and disconcerting world which might itself be seen as the exertion of some sort of control over this world. The emphasis, however, shifts to a self-conscious hermeneutics, as interpretation itself becomes an Odyssean venture. Blumenberg argues, in his *Work on Myth*, that man creates his fictions so as not to be overwhelmed by "the absolutism of reality" (3). Vico makes a similar argument regarding primitive man and the "poetic wisdom" through which he alleviates his fear in the face of a frightening and overwhelming reality (374-384). The work of modernist authors like Pound and Joyce, in their invocation the figure of Ulysses as an image for their own hermeneutics, might perhaps be understood in similar terms: as provisional, poetic means through which to navigate the world-complexity and flux of modernity.

The question then arises as to the goal and of this interpretive venture. In their *Dialectic*, Horkheimer and Adorno cite Novalis' claim that "all philosophy is homesickness" (61). Their Odysseus chases an impossible being-at-home in the world, as represented by Ithaca. In Blanchot's discussion of Odysseus, however, it is the siren song that takes on the aspect of Horkheimer and Adorno's Ithaca: an elusive goal, a missing fullness inscribed on the horizon of the future. Indeed, in Horkheimer and Adorno's reading of *The Odyssey*, it is precisely the symbol of Ithaca that exerts the lure of siren song on the wandering hero. For these authors,

Odysseus is already alienated from his world as early as Homer's epic, and Ithaca comes to signify the "lost primal state" from which "all longing and homesickness" spring (60), and towards which he directs his voyaging. Besides the myth of the "lost primal state" (60), there is also, however, the memory of man's primal powerlessness, in which the individual was, as Horkheimer and Adorno write elsewhere, overwhelmed by the "complex concatenation of nature in contrast to its individual link" (10). For this reason, man also dreads the annihilation that might be implicit in any sort of primal unity with the world, and is careful to maintain his power over his surroundings.

In many of the reconfigurations of Odysseus leading up to the 20th century, this desired yet feared homeland is a tormenting concern. It looms large, for example, in the final sections of Baudelaire's "Le Voyage," where death itself takes on the character of the Promised Land. So, too, in *Moby-Dick*, the final meeting of Ahab and the White Whale he hunts is simultaneously the captain's own annihilation. In writing of Ahab's hunt for Moby Dick, and comparing it to Ulysses' encounter with the Sirens, Blanchot argues that there plays out

> [b]etween Ahab and the whale […] a drama that could be called metaphysical in a vague sense of the word, the same struggle that is played out between the Sirens and Ulysses. Each of these pairs wants to be everything, wants to be the absolute world, which makes coexistence with the other absolute world impossible; and yet each one has no greater desire than this very coexistence, this encounter. (8)

Blanchot, in his discussion of the siren song, thus posits Ulysses and the Sirens (or Ahab and the White Whale) as the two poles of the narrative. Both tend towards absolutism: Ulysses in asserting his mastery over nature, and the Sirens in their all-encompassing and annihilating song. If we accept that the goal – as indeed Horkheimer and Adorno argue is the case for the Enlightenment episteme – is man's being-at-home in the world, it remains elusive in the incompatible absolutisms of man and reality. The twin dangers are thus the "absolutism of reality" (*Work on Myth* 3), which first prompted man to render his world humanly intelligible through myths and figures, and the absolutism of man: the ossification of his meanings into abstracted paradigms that end up dispensing with the material world all together.

As I hope to have demonstrated in this thesis, Ezra Pound and James Joyce attempt to eschew such abstraction, and to remain immersed, in their hermeneutics, within the material world. I would like to suggest that the self-conscious hermeneutics of such authors ultimately allows them to navigate the milieu between the absolutism of the real and the absolutism of man, to

adopt a poetics of passage that remains intentionally provisional and inconclusive. To appropriate Adorno's claim regarding the "shipwreck" of straightforwardly "intentional language," such hermeneutics remain "an odyssey of unending mediation in order to bring the impossible back home" (*Quasi Una Fantasia* 4). That is, to 'survive' the shipwreck of man's faith in the synonymy between man's concepts and the realities they described, these authors salvage their hermeneutics through the provisional vessels of figural language and of literature. Thus, continuing his discussion of Ulysses and the Sirens, of Ahab and Moby Dick, Blanchot foregrounds narrative and writing itself as the means through which to mediate between these poles:

> To unite in the same space Ahab and the whale, the Sirens and Ulysses – that is the secret wish that makes Ulysses Homer, makes Ahab Melville, and the world that results from this union the greatest, most terrible, and most beautiful of possible worlds, alas a book, nothing but a book. (8)

This, then, becomes the role of man's figural creations: allowing him sufficient, albeit self-consciously artificial meaning through which to inhabit his world, and to mediate between two impossible alternatives. In this thesis, I have tried to show how Ezra Pound and James Joyce make use of the figure of Odysseus to represent this sort of self-consciously provisional hermeneutics. In his ineluctable associations with the sea and with its navigation, Odysseus becomes an extraordinarily intelligible figure for these authors through which to understand their own interpretation of the world.

I have not been able, in this thesis, to explore the practical implications of such metaphorics. Victor Bérard argues, in his discussion of Homer's supposed reading and reworking of Phoenician *periploi*, that inexactitude and error almost forcibly arises in the resultant text, according to the relative importance the author assigns different aspects of the material he is reading: different entries might be too closely linked in the author's mind, or might become too little associated, depending largely on the author's own imaginative whim. The ideological dangers implicit in adopting this immersed approach are illustrated, one might argue, by an author like Ezra Pound's lionisation of Mussolini and his Republic, due to the associations he made between *Il Duce* and figures like that of Malatesta and others: all heroes, as they appear in *The Cantos*, forging flourishing societies out of disorder and chaos. There is certainly great room for error in reading the world through such a stockpile of images, and it would be worthwhile studying, in greater depth, the ways in which such readings might

become caught up in – and do service to – the ideologies of their historical and political contexts.

In a more general vein, the way in which the figure of Odysseus is taken up by modernist authors like Pound and Joyce suggests the persistent importance of such myths in shaping man's understanding of his world. It is easy to disregard them as anachronisms, or to assign them interest only as historical curiosities, but, as I hope this study has in some way suggested, the figural past is one that interacts in important ways with the present, inhabiting it with echoes of alterity, and enriching it with the reverberations of other meanings. As such, metaphors and myths – the "poetic wisdom" that persists despite the disenchantment and pragmatism of a post-Enlightenment world – remain central to the way in which man inhabits the world, and the study of such figural language and the way in which it operates remains an important undertaking. If the cogent fictions with which we populate our lives – our myths, our poetry and rituals – are not merely gratuitous irrealities, but serve as the means through which we grant ourselves a modicum of stability and intelligibility within the enormity of a world-complexity that exceeds us, then the significance of such fictions to man's being-in-the-world remains a realm that merits continued exploration.

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