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ODYSSEY

Revealed by Homer
Editor Sebastiano Vottari

PREFACE

The Endless Journey: The Odyssey as a Mirror of the Human Soul

There are literary works that do more than simply tell a story, but establish an entire universe of meaning, indelibly shaping the collective imagination of entire civilizations. Homer's *Odyssey* is, without a doubt, the supreme archetype of this category. It is not simply an epic poem that has survived the ravages of millennia, but the very breath of the Mediterranean Sea, the primordial map of the human condition, the mirror in which Western man, for over twenty-five centuries, has continued to gaze upon himself, trying to understand who he is, where he comes from, and, above all, toward which homeland he is desperately sailing.

If the *Iliad* is the poem of strength, of burning youth, of dire rage, and of glorious death on the battlefield, the *Odyssey* is the poem of survival, of maturity, of multifaceted intelligence, and of return. It is the epic of *nostos*, nostalgia, that agonizing pain generated by the distance from one's roots, which drives a man to renounce even immortality just to see the smoke rising from the chimney of his home again.

At the center of this immense fresco stands the monumental yet profoundly fragile figure of Odysseus. Homer introduces him to us from the preface not by his name, but with an adjective that defines his essence: *polytropos*, "the man of many ways," the man of multifaceted ingenuity. Odysseus does not conquer his enemies with the brute strength of Achilles or the bulk of Ajax. Odysseus wins with his *metis*, his cunning, his tactical intelligence, his persuasive words, his calculated deception, and, when necessary, the infinite patience of one who knows how to withstand the blows of fate while waiting for the right moment. He is the first modern hero. We see him weeping desperately on the rocks of Ogygia, prisoner of the beautiful nymph Calypso; we see him lie, disguise himself, doubt even the gods; We admire

him as he is tied to the mast rather than give up the knowledge promised by the Sirens' deadly song. Odysseus is driven by an inexhaustible curiosity that pushes him beyond the confines of the known world, but this drive toward the unknown is always balanced by a visceral, desperate need to return to Ithaca.

And what does Ithaca represent if not our inner center of gravity? Odysseus's journey is a journey of self-destruction and reconstruction. Before he can return to being king, husband, and father, he must lose everything: his ships, his companions, his treasures, and even his name (becoming "Nobody" in the lair of the cruel Polyphemos). The ocean on which he sails, perpetually shaken by the wrath of the god Poseidon, is the perfect metaphor for a life dominated by chaos and unpredictability, where human beings, at the mercy of titanic forces, have as their only salvation their own intelligence and their will to never give up.

Alongside the hero, the work presents us with female figures of unparalleled power and complexity. There is the wise and faithful Penelope, Odysseus's true intellectual counterpart, who, with the deception of her web, weaves and unravels time, resisting the arrogance of the Suitors with the same cunning with which her husband resists sea monsters. There are the goddesses and sorceresses: Athena, invisible protector and spiritual guide; Circe, the fascinating yet terrifying manipulator of the human form; Calypso, she who hides and restrains, the embodiment of a suffocating love that promises eternity but robs freedom. And there is the young Nausicaa, a symbol of a purity and hospitality that save the hero at his moment of greatest abjection and nakedness, restoring his lost dignity.

The need for a new voice: the choices of this translation

Faced with a work of such monumental magnitude, every translator faces a daring challenge: how to restore to the contemporary reader the voice of a bard who sang to warrior courts three thousand years ago?

Over the centuries, literature has witnessed a flourish of excellent

translations, some of which have become classics in their own right, others more academic and philological, but often burdened by an archaic legacy, complex syntax, and metrical choices that, in their attempt to emulate the unreproducible Greek hexameter, end up burdening the reader, making it difficult for modern audiences.

The translation presented here arises from a precise and courageous need: to free the *Odyssey* from the dust of classrooms and restore it to its original nature as a *compelling tale* . Based directly on the Greek text, now in the public domain, this version deliberately distances itself from pre-existing translations, opting for continuous prose.

The continuous prose here proves to be the ideal tool for conveying the pressing pace of Homer's narrative to the modern reader, allowing the text to flow naturally, without sacrificing the solemnity and evocative power of the ancient epic. The translator has emphasized two guiding principles: fidelity to the work's profound meaning and extreme readability. The aim is not to simplify or trivialize Homer, but rather to translate him into a living, vibrant language capable of speaking directly to the heart and imagination of the twenty-first-century reader.

Yet, in this process of modernization, the poem's ancient soul has not been lost. The artist has wisely chosen to retain those elements that are the hallmark of oral epic: the **formulaic epithets** . Thus, the reader will rediscover the reassuring and magical cadence of expressions such as "bright-eyed Athena," "rosy-fingered Dawn," "wise Telemachus," or "the wine-colored sea." These formulas, far from being simple repetitions, constitute the very breath of the poem, the rhythmic pillars on which the ancient singer rested his memory and through which the text takes on its unmistakable sacredness.

Reading this new *Odyssey today* means embarking on a journey within a journey. It means sitting in King Alcinous's palace, among the Phaeacians, and listening in reverent silence to a mysterious stranger who, wiping away his tears, begins to tell tales

of lotus-eaters, Cyclopes, descents into the Underworld, and shipwrecks. It means being enraged by the Suitors' arrogance and eagerly awaiting the moment when the ragged beggar will draw his great bow, revealing his identity in a purifying bath of blood.

This work is an invitation. An invitation to set sail, to abandon the safe harbors of custom, and to let ourselves be carried by the current of the greatest adventure ever told. Because, ultimately, the Odyssey teaches us that it doesn't matter how many hostile gods we encounter, how many monsters bar our path, or how many storms shatter our ships: what matters is the stubbornness with which we continue to row toward our own personal Ithaca.

Have a good trip.

ODYSSEY

SONG I

Preamble (vv. 1–10)

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who wandered long after he had destroyed the sacred citadel of Troy. He saw the cities of many men and knew their minds. He endured many sorrows at sea, in his own heart, struggling for his life and the return of his companions. But he did not save his companions, much as he wished to. Through their own folly they perished, foolish men who devoured the oxen of the sun Hyperion, and he took away their day of home. Tell us something of it too, O goddess, daughter of Zeus, beginning where you wish.

The Council of the Gods (vv. 11–95)

Then all the others, whoever had escaped the abyss of death, were at home, safe from war and the sea. Only him, longing for home and a bride, was held in her deep caves by the mighty nymph, Calypso, renowned among the goddesses, longing for him as a husband. But when, in the course of the years, the time came when the gods had spun his way home to Ithaca, not even there was he free from trials, not even among his own. All the gods took pity on him, except Poseidon; he remained implacably angry with godlike Odysseus until he reached his homeland.

But now Poseidon had gone far away, to the Ethiopians—the Ethiopians divided in two, the last of men, some where the sun sets, the others where it rises—to receive a hecatomb of bulls and lambs. There he sat, enjoying the banquet. Meanwhile, the other gods were gathered in the palace of Olympian Zeus, and among them the father of men and gods began to speak: in his heart had come the memory of noble Aegisthus, whom Agamemnon's son slew, glorious Orestes. Thinking of him, he said to the immortals:

“ Alas, what do mortals accuse the gods of? From us, they say, come evils; yet they themselves, with their follies, bring upon themselves sorrows beyond destiny. So now Aegisthus, beyond destiny, married the lawful wife of the son of Atreus, and killed him on his return, even though he knew the abyss that awaited him. We had warned him, sending Hermes, the watchful slayer of Argos, so that he would not kill him and not ambush his wife: 'From Orestes will come the vengeance of the son of Atreus, when he is grown and longs for his homeland.' So said Hermes: but he did not bend the mind of Aegisthus, despite his good counsel. And now he has paid all at once.”

Then Athena, the goddess with the shining eyes, answered him: "Our father, son of Cronus, supreme among the mighty, he lies in a well-deserved death: so perish whoever commits such deeds. But my heart breaks for Odysseus, the wise, the wretched one, who has long been far from his family, suffering pain on a wave-girt island, where the navel of the sea is. It is a tree-covered island: a goddess dwells there, the daughter of Atlas of the deadly thoughts, of him who knows the depths of all the sea and holds alone the high pillars that separate earth and sky. Her daughter holds back the wretched man as he weeps, and always with tender and deceitful words she enchants him to forget Ithaca. But Odysseus, who longs to see even the smoke rising from his land, wishes to die. And is your heart not moved, Olympius? Was he not dear to you?" Odysseus, when he offered you sacrifices by the ships of the Argives in wide Troy? Why then do you hold him in such a grudge, Zeus?"

Zeus, who gathers the clouds, answered her: “My daughter, what word has escaped you from the fold of your teeth? How could I forget godlike Odysseus, who surpasses all mortals in wisdom, and more than all has offered sacrifices to the immortal gods, lords of the wide sky? But Poseidon, who girds the earth, is angry, stubborn, without rest, for the Cyclops whose eye he blinded: godlike Polyphemus, whose strength is greater than all the Cyclopes. The nymph Thoosa, daughter of Phorcys, lord of the tireless sea, bore him, having intercourse with Poseidon in the

deep caves. Since then, earth-shaking Poseidon does not kill Odysseus, but keeps him away from his father's land. But come, let us all here consider, upon his return, how he may return. Poseidon will lay aside his anger; he will not be able, alone, to contend with all the immortal gods. ”

Then Athena, the goddess with the bright eyes, answered him: “Our father, son of Cronus, greatest of the mighty, if this is indeed now pleasing to the blessed gods, that wise Odysseus should return to his home, let us immediately send Hermes, the messenger and slayer of Argos, to the island of Ogygia , that he may quickly announce to the beautiful-haired nymph our firm resolve: the return of patient-hearted Odysseus. Let him return! But I will go to Ithaca, to spur her son on, and put courage in his heart: having called together the long-haired Achaeans, let him speak plainly to all the suitors, who slaughter his flocks of sheep and his slow-moving, crooked-horned oxen. Then I will send him to Sparta and sandy Pylos, to inquire of his father's return, if ever he hears news of it, and that he may gain noble fame among men.”

Athena in Ithaca: the meeting with Telemachus (vv. 96–324)

So saying, she tied to her feet the beautiful, immortal, golden sandals that carried her over water and boundless land, along with the breath of the wind. She took up the sturdy spear, with its sharp bronze tip, heavy, large, and massive, with which she, daughter of her mighty father, tames the ranks of heroes when she is angered. She leaped down from the heights of Olympus and stood in the land of Ithaca, at Odysseus's gate, on the threshold of the courtyard: she clutched the bronze spear in her hand, with the appearance of a stranger, Mentès, lord of the Taphians.

There he found the proud suitors. Before the door, they were playing stone games, seated on the hides of oxen they had slain. Heralds and servants were eager, some pouring wine and water

for them in bowls, others wiping the tables with a thousand-holed sponges and setting them out, others carving abundant meats.

By far the first to see her was godlike Telemachus, sitting among the suitors, grieved at heart, and with the eyes of his soul he contemplated his valiant father: perhaps, by his return, he would scatter the suitors throughout the house, and regain his honor and dominion over his possessions. This was his thought, sitting among them, when he caught sight of Athena. He went straight to the portico, indignant in his heart that a guest should linger so long at the door. He approached her, took her right hand, removed the bronze spear, and addressed her with winged words: "Greetings, stranger! You will be welcomed by us with friendship. Then, when you have supped, you will tell us what you need."

So saying, he led the way, and Pallas Athena followed. When they were inside the lofty dwelling, he leaned his spear against a tall column, in the polished rack, where many other spears of patient Odysseus stood. He led her to a throne and had her sit there, spreading a linen cloth over it: a beautifully wrought throne, with a footstool beneath. He placed a colorful chair beside it for himself, apart from the suitors, lest the guest, annoyed by the noise, should be disgusted with the food, having been offered among arrogant men; and because he wanted to ask about his father, who was far away.

A maid brought water for their hands in a beautiful golden pitcher and poured it over a silver basin for them to wash; she spread a polished table beside it. The venerable housekeeper brought bread and set it before them, adding many dishes, generously of what she had; the carver lifted and placed before them platters of meats of every kind, and placed golden cups beside them; and a herald passed frequently, pouring wine.

The proud suitors entered and sat in rows on chairs and thrones. Heralds poured water over their hands, slaves piled bread into

baskets, young men filled bowls to the brim with drink, and they reached out to the ready-made food. Once they had banished their desire for food and drink, the suitors' hearts turned to something else: to song and dance, which are the culmination of the banquet. A herald placed the beautiful lyre in the hands of Phemius, who was forced to sing among the suitors. And he, touching the strings, began a beautiful song.

Then Telemachus spoke to bright-eyed Athena, leaning his head close so the others wouldn't hear: "Dear guest, will you be angry at what I say? These people care about these things, the lyre and the song. It's easy for someone to devour another's wealth with impunity, a man whose white bones rot in the rain, left on a beach, or rolled by the wave in the sea. If they saw him returning to Ithaca, everyone would pray for swifter feet, rather than more wealth in gold and clothing. But he died, like this, by a bad fate, and for us there is no comfort, not even if some of the men on earth say he will return: for him the day of his return is lost. But come, tell me this, and speak to me frankly: who are you? of what people? where is your city? where are your parents? On what ship did you come? How did the sailors bring you to Ithaca? Who did they boast of being? Why on foot, I really don't believe you've come this far. And tell me the truth about this too, as far as I know: is this your first time here, or are you my father's guest? Many men used to come to our house; he too frequented the people."

Then Athena, the goddess with the bright eyes, said to him: "Surely, I will tell you all this frankly. I boast that I am Mentès, son of wise Anchialus, and I reign over the oar-loving Taphians. Now I have come here with my ship and my companions, sailing on the wine-colored sea toward people of foreign speech, toward Temesa, in search of bronze: I bring shining iron. My ship is stationed there, outside the city, near the fields, in the harbor Rheithrum, beneath wooded Neium. We boast that we have been guests of each other, from father to father, forever: you can go and ask old Laertes, the hero, who they say no longer comes to the city, but far away, in the country, suffering pains with an

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old maid, who prepares food and drink for him, when weariness takes hold of his limbs as he drags himself up the hill of his vineyard. I have come because they said that he, your father, has already returned to the people: but behold, the gods bar his way.” road. For divine Odysseus has not died on earth: he is still alive, held somewhere on the vast sea, on an island surrounded by waves; cruel men hold him, savages, who hold him against his will. But now I will make you a prophecy, as the immortals put it into my mind, and as I believe it will come true, although I am no soothsayer, nor expert in the flight of birds: he will not remain far from the dear land of his fathers for long, not even if iron chains were to hold him. He will find a way to return: he is a man of a thousand resources. But come, tell me this, and speak to me frankly: as great as you are, are you really the son of Odysseus? You resemble him strikingly in your head and in your beautiful eyes. So often we were together, one with the other, before he embarked for Troy, where the others, the best of the Argives, also went in the hollow ships. Since then I have not seen Odysseus, nor him me. ”

Wise Telemachus answered her: “Stranger, I will speak to you with all frankness. My mother says I am his son, but I do not know it; no one knows his own origin. Would that I had been the son of a happy man, who reaches old age amidst his wealth! Instead of him who was the most unfortunate of mortals, they say I was born to him, since you ask me.”

Then bright-eyed Athena said to him: “No, the gods have not placed your nameless lineage in the age to come, if Penelope bore you such. But come, tell me this, and speak to me frankly: what banquet, what crowd is this? What need do you have of it? A feast, or a wedding? For this is certainly not a banquet at common expense: with what arrogance, it seems to me, they feast for the house! A man of sense would be indignant at seeing such shameless things, anyone who happened to be here.”

Wise Telemachus answered her: “Stranger, since you ask and wish to know, this house must once have been rich and honored,

while that man was still in the land. Now the gods have willed otherwise, plotting misfortune: they have made him invisible like no other among men. I would not weep so much for him, dead, if he had fallen among his comrades in the land of the Trojans, or into friendly hands, after having unraveled the thread of war: then all the Achaeans would have raised a tomb for him, and for his son too he would have won great glory. But the Harpies have carried him away, without glory: he has gone invisible, unknown, and left me tears and sorrows. And not for him alone do I groan and weep: the gods have wrought other sad sorrows for me. All the chiefs who rule the islands, in Dulichium, in Same, on wooded Zacynthus, and all those who rule over rocky Ithaca, all woo my mother and destroy the house. She does not refuse hateful wedding, nor does he know how to put an end to it: and they, by eating, destroy my house. Soon they will tear me to pieces too.”

Pallas Athena answered him indignantly: “Alas, how much you need Odysseus away, to lay hands on the shameless suitors! If only he were now back at the door of his house, with helmet and shield and two spears, just as I first saw him in our house, drinking and enjoying the feast, returning from Ephyra, from Ilus son of Mermerus—Odysseus had gone there too, in the swift ship, seeking a deadly medicine to anoint his bronze arrows; but he would not give it to him, for fear of the gods who live forever; my father gave it to him, who loved him dearly—if such an Odysseus were to fall among the suitors! All would have a swift death and a bitter marriage! But surely these matters rest on the knees of the gods: whether, returning, he will take vengeance in his own house or not. You, however, I bid you consider how to drive the suitors from the hall. Come, listen carefully and pay attention to my words. Tomorrow, having called the Achaean heroes to an assembly, speak clearly to them all, and let the gods be witnesses. Order the suitors to disperse, each to his own home. Your mother, if her heart is drawn to marriage, should return to her father's house, for he has great power. They will see to the wedding and prepare the gifts, abundant, as befits a

beloved daughter. And I will give you wise counsel, if you will listen to me. Fit out a ship with twenty oars, the finest there is, and go and inquire about your father, who has been gone for so long. Some mortal may tell you something, or you will hear a voice from Zeus, the one that brings fame to men above all others. First go to Pylos and ask glorious Nestor, from there to Sparta, to the fair-haired Menelaus: he is the last to arrive, among the bronze-armored Achaeans. If you hear that your father is alive and returning, then, though grieved, hold out another year; but if you hear that he is dead, then let him not. There is no more, then return to the dear land of your fathers, raise a tomb for him and perform the many funeral rites that are due him; and give your mother to a husband. When you have accomplished and done all this, then consider in your mind and soul how to kill the suitors in your house, by deceit or openly. You must no longer behave like a child; you are no longer of age. Do you not know what fame divine Orestes has won among men, since he killed his father's murderer, deceitful Aegisthus, who had killed his glorious father? You too, my dear—I see you are beautiful and great—be brave, so that those who come will also praise you. I now go down to the swift ship and to my companions, who certainly grow impatient waiting for me. You think of yourself, and pay attention to my words. ”

Wise Telemachus answered her: "Stronger, you speak these things with a friendly heart, like a father to his son: I will never forget them. But come, stay a little longer, even if you are in a hurry to leave: so, after your bath, refreshed in heart, you will go to the ship bearing a gift, joyful in spirit, a precious, beautiful gift, which will remain with you as a memento from me: one of those that guests give to dear guests."

Then Athena, the goddess with the bright eyes, said to him: "Do not delay me any longer; I now desire to go. The gift your heart compels me to give, you will give me on my return, to take home. Choose a very beautiful one, and a worthy one will be given to you in return."

With that, bright-eyed Athena departed, flying high like a bird. She instilled strength and courage in him, reminding him of his father even more than before. Reflecting in his heart, he was astonished: he realized that he had been a god. And immediately returned to the suitors, he, a mortal equal to the gods.

The Song of Phemius and Penelope (vv. 325–364)

The famous bard sang for them, and they sat in silence to listen: he sang of the Achaeans' fateful return, which Pallas Athena had inflicted on them from Troy. From her upper chambers, wise Penelope, daughter of Icarius, took in the inspired song, and descended the lofty stairs of her house, not alone: two handmaidens came with her. When she reached the suitors, she, bright among women, stood by the pillar of the well-built roof, holding her gleaming veil before her cheeks; on either side of her stood a faithful handmaiden. Then, weeping, she spoke to the divine bard:

“Phemius, you know many other charms for mortals, deeds of men and gods, which the singers make famous: sing one of them, sitting here beside me, while these men drink their wine in silence. But stop this song, sorrowful, which always, in my chest, tears at my heart: on me, more than on any other, a grief has fallen that cannot be forgotten. Such a person I mourn, constantly remembering that man whose fame is great in Hellas and even in the heart of Argos.”

Wise Telemachus answered her: “My mother, why do you reproach the faithful singer for delighting us as his mind moves him? It is not the singers who are to blame: it is Zeus who is to blame, who assigns to bread-eating men what he wills, to each. There is no need to be angry if he sings of the Danaans' ill fate: men praise most that song which sounds newest to the ears of those who listen. May your heart and soul bear to listen: it is not Odysseus alone who lost the day of his return at Troy: many other men have perished. Go to your rooms and think about your works, the loom and the distaff, and order your handmaids

to attend to their work. The word will belong to men, to all, and to me above all others: mine is the command in this house.”

She, astonished, returned to her chambers: her son's wise words had penetrated her soul. Going upstairs with her maids, she then wept for her dear husband Odysseus, until bright-eyed Athena poured sweet sleep over her eyelids.

Telemachus and the Suitors (vv. 365–420)

The suitors were making noise in the shadowy hall, all wishing to lie beside her, in her bed. Among them, wise Telemachus began to speak: “Suitors of my mother, you of overweening pride, let us now enjoy the banquet, and let there be no clamor: for it is beautiful to listen to a singer like this, whose voice is like the gods. But tomorrow, at dawn, let us all go and sit in assembly, so that I may declare my word to you openly: leave this house! Prepare other banquets, eating your own goods, inviting one another in turn, from house to house. But if it seems more convenient and more advantageous to you to destroy the property of a single man with impunity, devour! I will invoke the gods who live forever: may Zeus one day grant that works will be paid for; then, without vengeance, you will perish within this house.”

Thus he spoke, and they all bit their lips, amazed at Telemachus, for he spoke so boldly. Antinous, son of Eupeithes, answered him: “Telemachus, it is the gods themselves who teach you to speak so loudly and so boldly. May the son of Cronus never make you king of sea-girt Ithaca, however much you may have inherited from your father!”

Wise Telemachus answered him: “Antinous, even if you are angry at what I say, I would gladly accept this too, if Zeus would give it to me. Do you really think that this is the worst thing among men? It is not at all a bad thing to reign: the house immediately becomes rich, and the man himself more honored. But surely there are many other kings of the Achaeans in sea-girt Ithaca,

young and old: let one of them have this kingdom, since godlike Odysseus is dead. But I will be lord of our house and of the servants that godlike Odysseus won for me.”

Then Eurymachus, son of Polybus, answered him: “Telemachus, these matters rest in the lap of the gods: which of the Achaeans will reign in sea-girt Ithaca? You keep your possessions, and rule over your house yourself: may no man ever come and take your things from you by force, against your will, as long as Ithaca is inhabited. But I want to ask you, good friend, about the stranger: where does that man come from? From what land does he boast of being? Where is his ancestry and his father's lands? Does he bring news of your father's return, or has he come here for some need of his own? How suddenly he leaped away, how he disappeared! He did not wait to be known; and yet, to look at him, he seemed no small man. ”

Wise Telemachus answered him: “Eurymachus, my father's return is surely lost. I no longer believe the news, wherever it comes from, nor do I pay attention to the prophecies my mother asks of the soothsayer, after having called him home. That man is a guest of my father, and comes from Taphos : he boasts that he is Mentès, son of wise Anchialus , and that he rules the oar-loving Taphians.” Thus spoke Telemachus: but in his soul he had recognized the immortal goddess.

The Night (vv. 421–444)

They, intent on dancing and enchanting song, were amusing themselves, waiting for evening to come. And while they were amusing themselves, dark evening fell; then they went to sleep, each in his own house. Telemachus went to bed in his room, in the beautiful courtyard, built high, in a place overlooking all, there, pondering many things in his heart. With him, with lighted torches, went faithful Eurycleia , daughter of Ops , son of Peisenor . Laertes had once bought her with his wealth, when he was still in the prime of his life, and paid for her twenty oxen. In the house he honored her as a faithful wife, but he never lay with

her in bed, fearing his wife's wrath. She brought him the lighted torches, she who loved him most of all among the slaves, and who had nurtured him as a child. Telemachus opened the door of the well-built room, sat on the bed, removed his soft tunic, and tossed it into the hands of the wise old woman. She folded and tidied the tunic, hung it on the peg beside the carved bed, then left the room, pulled the silver ring to close the door, and with her belt slid the latch. There, all night, wrapped in a fleece of the finest wool, he pondered in his soul the journey Athena had indicated to him.

SONG II

The dawn and the calling of the assembly (vv. 1–14)

When he appeared...

END PREVIEW