

ODYSSEY (Part 1)

Introduction

I am not so interested in what sort of neurosis prompted Homer to write the Odyssey, nor in what is expressed in that epic, as I am in what happens between the reader and the work of art itself. What was the relation between the bard and his hearers? Something goes on between them. If this were not true people wouldn't listen. What is this inner process? It can't have been for entertainment only (once for curiosity maybe). If it has been read over a period of 2 or 3,000 years it must have some vitamin content. Something goes on between the artist and his audience - else why do we read? Why do we listen?

Tell a child of a fairytale and he is influenced^d by the whole story. He responds emotionally to the tone of the story. If it is gloomy, he is gloomy, etc. But often even at the early age of 3, he begins to identify himself with a character or perhaps a tree, an animal or an engine. Then he identifies himself with one part of the play. Even when adults go to the theatre, they identify themselves with the actors - man with man and woman with woman. This is wrong as it shows immaturity and is the result of our individualistic civilization which we are outgrowing. The truly mature person must be able to identify himself with the whole play, with the heroes, the villains, and beggars - even the corresponding caste of feminine characters. So with the help of his anima image, man can understand what happens to the heroine by identification. Thus only is he able to judge with justice.

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This poetic justice has always been the highest goal of poetry and art, having been early achieved on the primitive stage. Perhaps the best example of early double identification is found in Homer's Iliad where even the Greek Gods treated the Trojans as equals.

Now let us apply this poetic justice to the Odyssey, where Homer writes fairly of both the migrant hero Ulysses and his various hostesses. This point of view leads not only to poetic justice but to artistic maturity. Also it presupposes that we can do this too, by learning from inside the view of both sexes. Today we are in the stage of individualism. If we would discover what lies in the future beyond individualism, it is well to study what preceded this period (for the pendulum swings inexorably, etc.)

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First half.

We must assume that Ulysses when he left Ithaca was an immature boy, whatever age. He was still a boy when he conquered Troy. The process of maturing begins on the battlefield, but it is not consummated there. What happens there, however, is a dynamic experience which time alone can digest. Life is like this! -- Experiences, through a sort of delayed action, may be shelved many years before they can be assimilated.

Modern writers will later describe the inner happenings of the current war actually, but the ancients described events in terms of outer

processes, for they had no other way to express inner happenings. Hence the second half, less active than the first, is more difficult to understand. But it can be done.

VI - At Court of Alcineus in Phaeacia

Ulysses tells his story in retrospect. (One must reestablish the chronological sequence): They had won the war but not the peace. The inner thing of winning the peace is experienced by Ulysses in outer symbolic way via his adventures. He cannot find his way home except by numerous detours. After escaping from the land of the Lotus-eaters he meets his first very tangible adventure in the land of the one-eyed giants, the Cyclopes.

The great poet dreams for a nation. If a poet is great it is never of one person that he dreams; he dreams for us - and slowly we are learning to interpret them in the same way as we interpret our own. And so we say that Polyphemus is the negative father-image or tyrant. He is the Shadow or un-lived life of Ulysses, the giant who pursues and judges. He symbolizes negative patriarchal authority from which every boy must free himself in order to become mature. Every boy growing up has to integrate the power of the mature man. Sometimes he "slugs it out" with the old man"; sometimes he fights it out inside, but sooner or later, when they come to grips, a symbolic thing happens. Father says, "Be home at ten or don't come home at all." The boy must somehow force the father to let him come home when he wants to. If the father gives in the son has won and receives from him the key, symbolic of power. (Maybe then when free and having the key, he comes home at nine!) This first step is very decisive and means initiation into manhood.

Ulysses' experience with P. is symbolic of this sort of initiation. P, ~~Ulysses~~ Black Giant, forces him to fight. He, like all of us, would escape but

he cannot. Nor can he kill him for if he did he would remain trapped in the cave. So he blinds him and escapes. The courageous, intelligent hero has overcome the negative father-image, and in so doing, absorbed his strength. Now Ulysses faces the world freely. He is greatly strengthened but not yet mature (because he has integrated the negative power of the giant). Negative images are always primitive and cannot be argued with, but what to do with them? If we kill them we are trapped in the cave with the corpse. Blinding them, we remove the all-seeing eye under which one cannot mature as an individual.

Late in the story we find Ulysses confronted with Circe, the sorceress, who turned men into swine. Why does womanhood appear on this primitive level and in such a queer negative form? It looks as though he were too good and she too bad. Every man meets in life what he deserves. If he is turned into swine by a woman, he deserves his fate. But Minerva, Ulysses' Madonna-guardian is always there to save him - this same image which we meet in Faust Das Ewigweiblich, eternal woman who lifts man up to a higher level. Apparently this anima image is present in each man, coming to his aid in tight spots and saving him by the protection of intuition and instinct from the wiles of the enchantress, who dulls men's intellects so they function as beasts. This Madonna-image did this to the Crusaders of the Middle Ages. Even Parsifal was so protected. This suggests a religious aspect. Yes, but the psychological level is more interesting and more real.

Thus femininity is accessible to man. Even if he'd never seen a woman he'd still know what she should be like. He would know what he is hungry for. This idea is like a compass to Ulysses, showing him the way through Intuition and Instinct--the things which save the innocent boy from bad women and the girl from the evil man. Minerva is this Intuitive Power. (Is this the Logos aspect of Animus in Woman?) Ulysses only deserves to hear her warning.

"Beward Circe", because he has first conquered the father-image. Through Minerva Ulysses is able to use the powerful herb Moly to resist the sorcery which has turned his companions into swine. The herb symbolizes courage; with it he is able to bring her to her knees in fear of his sword. This is unheard of! Circe, in all her deviated power, is amazed and defeated for the first time. Failing in her feminine tactics, she breaks down, becomes small and begs pardon - a powerless little girl. If she can't get him by superiority, then with inferiority. But the clear image of feminine purity (Minerva) says "No! I won't be cheated - while my friends are swine." Circe is forced to withdraw her spell seeing she is completely foiled. She offers her love to Ulysses and her help; then they feast and make love. Apparently there was no moral prejudice in ancient culture. In spite of her dangerous intentions to destroy him, still he doesn't mind. Now she is really under his power and they have a good time. It is difficult to understand this morally and aesthetically. Maybe our own development goes in a different direction. At any rate, our whole problem of monogamy is different with us.

Land of the Dead (Book 11)

Now Ulysses is more mature. He has learned not to give in too easily. Then Circe sends him on his way into the country of the dead, warning him of Sirens on the way. A strange mission he has.

No good epic can be written apparently, without Aechea. Why is the journey into this land an integral part of human development? In the New Testament, twice the Aechea, the journey into Hell, is found. Matthew, Mark and John don't say so, but Luke hints that He is going through Hell in order to redeem the damned--in this Country of Darkness. In Matthew, Jesus says that only those who can live without security can follow him. (Foxes have holes, etc.) Storms befell Jesus on the lake; storms befell Ulysses. Jesus came to a strange country where he encountered two madmen. The devil

jumped into the swine and the swine into the lake. This is a sort of Country of the Dead, a Hades, a nightmare exactly like the one in Ulysses Aechea. We all go into this country. Write down your nightmares and you will see. Read Matthew VIII in the light of early epics.

In Hades, Ulysses conjures up one after another, among them his mother's shadow. If you read this with vivid imagination, it may save you a nightmare. If you don't work it out.

Here are the Shadows of the Past--not only our own individual mothers (she may be in Bel-Air)--but Womanhood in the Past. Weird and powerful images are these and we must face them. Ulysses had to face Circe, now his mother, both weird but different. To face ones Shadow-Mother is either to die or to mature. Ulysses matures and is given added strength. Then he meets a prophet who tells his future and gains from him new wisdom and strength. When Ulysses has learned to face these weird things in consciousness, then he sees the Seer who conveys new wisdom. This pattern repeats itself again and again in literature.

With Circes' helpful warnings, Ulysses is then able to meet his next danger - the lure of the Sirens, these cruel half-girl and half-bird creatures who typify a kind of prostitution. Then on, past Scylla and Carybdis, the two terres, a sneaky monster and a frightful chasm. ^hWhichever way Ulysses had turned would have spelled destruction. The only solution was to go head-on through them. This he could do with the help of wisdom, craftiness and even lies (no moral prejudice).

Arriving at the island of Aeolis, Ulysses finds his White Giant who almost spoils him by giving him fair winds, and in a bag the bad winds, not to be opened. This didn't work. The seaman's curiosity released the evil winds and they were obliged to use their own ears to avoid destruction in the

storm. To be faced with a Black Giant is bad, but it often helps us. The White Giant is worse.

Conquering another storm, Ulysses arrives at the isle of Calypso, the goddess, "nymph of the well-braided hair", "The veiled one", from whose hearth the fragrance of cedar logs and incense trees perfumed the air, and who sang as she wove at her loom with a golden shuttle. Here, fed with ambrosia and ruddy nectar on soft "lawns starred with parsley and violets", and given the gift of immortality, Ulysses remains for nine years. But Minerva reminds him of Penelope and of what real womanhood is and when the time comes, Calypso sends him on his way with her love and blessing and equipment for the journey.

This figure of Calypso (the veiled one) suggests what we call in psychology the Priestess, who initiates youth into love, giving him lessons in unselfishness which he cannot learn from a sweetheart of his own age. It is bad for a college boy to learn love from a college girl. This Priestess is too young to be his mother and too old to be his sweetheart, so he outgrows her and is then mature enough to woo one of his own age, with whom he can be a man - not a student. He needs ten casualties in order to learn.

The tragedy is often the elder women's, since, as in the case of Calypso, she may really love him, or else she could not sacrifice herself in order to bring him up and then lose him. One might say she gave birth to him as a mature man. This theme often occurs in great stories. Siegfried was brought up in the arms of B, then marries Kriemhilde after he has gone through the baptism of fire. Tanhauser was kept by Venus in the mountains. In the language of mythology, this is initiation. When he is ready and mature, then comes the voice of the Madonna, telling him, "Not B. - not Calypso - but Penelope - the symbol of real womanhood, his real mate." Calypso herself is

mature now. She not only helped Ulysses to grow up, but gave him to the ~~whole~~ world as a mother does.

Now Ulysses is mature, having been initiated by Circe, by the Shadow of his mother, and then by Calypso. He is ready to meet Nausicaa, the first pure clean woman, and see how he behaves! He almost worships her (pg. 88, Shaw) and never thinks of making love to her. (This is as unusual for a Greek hero as a Hollywood one!) He knows the secrets of womanhood and that her purity is a real value. He has learned to look through the ruses of Mother Eve. He has lost his fear of inferiority and is now objective enough to see real love -- and to meet Penelope.

This seems to be the story of Man -- but woman must also identify with the whole story, learning something of her own animus within, while perhaps drawing distressing conclusions about her own husband.

Gestalt View of Odyssey

The Germans have originated a word, Gestalt, which is difficult to define. It is the figure of the whole where all parts are in relation to each other. If a man has a good Gestalt, physically speaking, his feet and hands and head balance. Let us look at literature, at this poem in this light. We see that his attitude and hers balance; each conditions the other as two figures in a painting. So when Ulysses is a wild man he meets Circe and learns how to deal with her. Thinking there is no good woman, he is gloomy and in this mood meets his mother. Then, in Calypso, "The veiled one", he meets the everlasting enigma of Woman. Then when he is mature, he meets a perfect woman, Nausicaa, at whom he can look objectively and appreciate unselfishly, seeing her for her sake alone.

If a woman would think of the different encounters she has had

with men she would recognize these stages. Or she can study the different stages in the one man she has known for many years. Was she A-ish with A and C-ish with C? Mutual conditioning within the whole (Gestalt) would be possible between couples. If you as woman felt like Circe, surely a Ulysses was not far away.

Ner should woman say, "I never became Penelope because Ulysses failed me." Also she failed him. This is what Gestalt really means: each part is responsible for the whole. The responsibility is 200 percent. This is the secret of organisms - where organs live ~~the~~ together.