

SCENES FROM THE LATER WANDERINGS OF ODYSSEUS

That the most poetic of all the Greek philosophers should also be the severest judge of the poets was a perpetual embarrassment to his disciples and an invitation to enemies who could never have found their way into the difficulties of his thought. At the hands of Colotes, an early Epicurean, Plato became the butt of his own asperities;¹ the allegorist Heraclitus, showing equal contempt for Plato and for 'the Phaeacian Epicurus',² found that philosophy lent itself to vices for which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* had no name. Proclus, in his *Commentary on the Republic*, has the task of reconciling Homer with Plato,³ and of showing that the mythopoeic faculty is an instrument of the profoundest thought in both.

The discovery of Plato as an allegorist could also excite the creative powers of those who had to defend him. Porphyry, for example, was one of the first apologists for his myths;⁴ he was also one of the most ingenious critics of Homer. The object of this paper is to show how the marriage of one Platonic metaphor with a group of Homeric episodes could inspire all forms of literature in the school which flowered for the first time in the works of an author greater than either Porphyry or Proclus, and one who had extolled his most famous pupil as a combination of exegete, critic and poet.⁵

I

'Let us fly to our own dear country'⁶ exclaims Plotinus in the earliest of the *Enneads*; not his own words, but how should a Greek embark upon an arduous course of philosophy if not with a line from Homer? Plotinus makes his intentions plain by likening Homer's Odysseus to the human mind which forsakes the delusive pleasures of the senses for higher joys and an everlasting home:

εἰ γὰρ τις ἐπιδράμοι λαβεῖν βουλόμενος ὡς ἀληθινοῦ, οἷα εἰδῶλου καλοῦ ἐφ' ὕδατος ὀχουμένου, οὐ λαβεῖν βουλευθείς, ὥς πού τις μῦθος, δοκεῖ μοι, αἰνίττεται, δὺς εἰς τὸ κάτω τοῦ ρεύματος ἀφανὴς ἐγένετο, τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον ὁ ἐχόμενος τῶν καλῶν σωμάτων καὶ μὴ ἀφίεις οὐ τῷ σώματι, τῇ δὲ ψυχῇ καταδύσεται εἰς σκοτεινὰ καὶ ἀτερπῆ τῷ νῷ βάθη, ἔνθα τυφλὸς [καὶ] ἐν ἄδου μένων καὶ ἐν ταῦθα κακῇ σκιάῃ συνέσται. φεύγωμεν δὴ φίλην ἐς πατρίδα, ἀληθέστερον ἢ τις παρακελεύοιτο. τίς οὖν ἡ φυγή; καὶ πῶς ἀναξόμεθα; οἷον ἀπὸ μάγου Κίρκης φησὶν ἡ Καλυψοῦς Ὀδυσσεὺς αἰνιττόμενος, δοκεῖ μοι, μέναι οὐκ ἀρεσθείς, καίτοι ἔχων ἡδονὰς δι' ὀμμάτων καὶ κάλλει πολλῶ αἰσθητῶ συνών.

(*Enneads* 1.6.8.10)

The purposes of the philosopher make him careless of confusions which would

¹ See Macrobius, *Comm. in Somm. Scip.* 1.9.9. and Proclus, *Comm. in Rem Pub.* ii.105ff. (Kroll).

² *Homeric Allegories* 77.5 and 79.2.

³ *Comm. in Rem Pub.* i.69–205.

⁴ Proclus, *Comm. in Rem Pub.* ii.106ff. and A. J. Festugière, *Proclus, Commentaire sur la République*, iii (Paris, 1970), pp. 47–52.

⁵ Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 15.

⁶ The closest resemblance in Homer is *Il.* 2.140; however, it is clear that Plotinus is thinking rather of *Od.* 5.37 and 5.204, which contain the formula *φίλην εἰς πατρίδα* but not the verb *φύγωμεν*. This is a sovereign instance of a principle which will be used in other parts of this paper, that the citation of a phrase in a certain context may involve a further allusion to other contexts in which this phrase occurs.

Here, as elsewhere, I underline all words and images that will be treated or referred to in this paper.

have puzzled the rigorous allegorist. He has no use for stopping-places on the journey: he does not make any difference between a goddess and a witch, and he does not observe that Odysseus came to Calypso as a refugee from the troubles and indiscretions that had previously driven him to Aeaea. These intermediate stages provide no opportunity for the cultivation of wisdom, as they do in Heraclitus (*Hom. All.* 70–3) nor for the proof of his practical virtues, as in one of Horace's better-known epistles (1.2.17ff.). Plotinus expects his mariner to plot a direct course.

The end of such a course is to be the exchange of present illusions for the intelligible realities. This is, indeed, the task for every Platonist, and is represented, as everyone knew, in Plato's little myth of the philosopher's emergence from the Cave. Nourished by Homer and Plato, the fancy of Plotinus guides the labouring soul from Hades to the upper world,⁷ from *εἰκασία*,⁸ the mere guessing among the *σκιαῖς* or *σκοτεινά*, to an eternal realm of light. When he draws expressly on Plato's fable, it is turned against the 'Gnostics', who are prisoners to the charms of *καλῶν σωμάτων* (*Enneads* 2.9.17.27), believe that the world was created by the soul through its own *εἶδωλον*,⁹ and yet are bold enough to taunt Plato as one who has failed to fathom the *βάθος* of the intellectual world:¹⁰

ὡς γὰρ τῆς ἀρχαίας Ἑλληνικῆς οὐχ ἀπτόμενοι ταῦτα σκευωροῦνται εἰδόντων σαφῶς τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ ἀτύφως λεγόντων ἀναβάσεις ἐκ τοῦ σπηλαίου καὶ κατὰ βραχὺ εἰς θεῶν ἀληθεστέραν μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον προιούσας. (*Enneads* 2.9.6.9ff.)

The quarrel of Plotinus with the 'Gnostics' was a long one, and was doubtless marked by the frequent exchange of such traditional commonplaces. It is a charge made more than once in the course of *Enneads* 2.9 that the Gnostics have appropriated the imagery and language of Plato's dialogues for an illegitimate use.¹¹ Contemporaries who were acquainted both with the lectures of Plotinus and with the occasions of their delivery would therefore have had little problem in detecting the voice of Plato behind his philosophical rendering of Homer in *Enneads* 1.6. The journeys of Odysseus become one journey, and this in turn is conflated with the ascent of the philosopher from the Cave.

The school of Plotinus produced at least two other works in which passages from the same poem are found in collusion with the same thoughts of the same philosopher. Both the long treatise of Porphyry and the verses of an ingenious admirer show that the methods of Plotinus were considered inexhaustible even where they were most sedulously applied.

II

In Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* the philosopher is honoured with a versified encomium, which, in spite of its prolixity and its meticulous imitation of human models, is imputed to the Oracle at Delphi.¹² The following lines are marked by a use of Homer

⁷ Cf. in *Enneads* 1.1.12.32ff. the symbolic use of Heracles, who is divided between Hades and Olympus. The figure of Heracles briefly advances in the *Oracle of Apollo* (see next section), when the author praises Plotinus for his *ἀριθμὸς ἀέθλων* (*VP* 22.59).

⁸ *Republic* 7.534a. Cf. *Republic* 7.515a.

⁹ *Enneads* 2.9.10.19ff. In the passage quoted, Plotinus makes the lover of mortal beauty repeat the primal sin of soul or *Σοφία* who either enters or illuminates the underlying darkness, leaving behind an *εἶδωλον* *εἰδῶλον*. ¹⁰ *Vita Plotini* 16.9.

¹¹ Plotinus goes on to charge the Gnostics with plagiarism from Plato's images of the afterlife, and in *Enneads* 2.9.4.1 alleges that they misuse the term *πτερορρηγῆσα* from the *Phaedrus*.

¹² On this *Oracle* see: J. Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre* (Ghent, 1913), pp. 122–6; R. Goulet in L. Brisson (ed.), *Porphyre: Vie de Plotin* (Paris, 1982), esp. p. 395 for Odyssean references; J. Igal in *Emerita* 52 (1984), 83–115: 'El enigma del oraculo de Apolo sobre Plotino'.

which, if it is not the densest in the poem,¹³ has been commonly agreed to be the most striking:

ῥεθέων δὲ πολυφλοίσβοιο κυδοιμοῦ
 ῥωσάμενος πραπίδεςσιν ἐς ἥδονα νηχύτου ἀκτῆς
 νήχε' ἐπειγόμενος δῆμου ἀπο νόσφιν ἀλιτρῶν
 στηρίξει καθαρῆς ψυχῆς εὐκαμπέα οἴμην,
 ἦχι θεοῖο σέλας περιλάμπεται, ἦχι θέμιστες
 ἐν καθαρῷ ἀπάτερθεν ἀλιτροσύνης ἀθεμίστου.
 καὶ τότε μὲν σκαίροντι πικρὸν κύμ' ἐξυπαλύξαι
 αἰμοβότου βιότοιο καὶ ἀσηρῶν ἰλίγγων
 ἐν μεσάτοισι κλύδωνος ἀνώιστου τε κυδοιμοῦ
 πολλάκις ἐκ μακάρων φάνθη σκοπὸς ἐγγύθι ναίων.
 πολλάκι σείο νόοιο βολὰς λοξῇσιν ἀταρποῖς
 ἰεμένας φορέεσθαι ἐρωήσιν σφετέρησιν
 ὀρθοπόρους ἀνὰ κύκλα καὶ ἄμβροτον οἶμον αἶεραν
 ἀθάνατοι θαμινὴν φάεων ἀκτῖνα πορόντες
 ὅσσοισιν δέρκεσθαι ἀπὸ σκοτῆς λυγαίης.
 οὐδέ σε παμπήδην βλεφάρων ἔχε νηδυμνος ὕπνος·
 ἀλλ' ἄρ' ἀπὸ βλεφάρων πετάσας κληῖδα βαρεῖαν
 ἀχλύος ἐν δίνησι φορεῦμενος ἔδρακες ὅσσοις
 πολλά τε καὶ χαρίεντα, τὰ κεν ρέα οὔτις ἴδοιτο
 ἀνθρώπων, ὅσσοι σοφίης μαιήτορες ἔπλεον.

(Vita Plotini 22.25–44)

Annotators have never failed to compare this with the coming of Odysseus to Phaeacia;¹⁴ the resemblance is a profound one, and is signalled by the most obvious of the verbal repetitions. For Homer too can tell us of a hero who has heard the many voices of the deep, and now strikes out with zeal for the headlands:

νήχε δ' ἐπειγόμενος ποσὶν ἠπείρου ἐπιβῆναι...
 ἠϊόνας τε παραπλήγας λιμένας τε θαλάσσης

(Od. 5.399 and 440)

Father Igal extended this line of argument when he cited the brief remarks which had been made upon the Homeric scene by Maximus of Tyre. His observations are rather enhanced than diminished when we perceive that there is as much play in this *Oracle* with the thirteenth book of the *Odyssey* as with the fifth, and that if we read it according to Porphyry's own interpretation of the later book, we shall detect a subtler purpose than the single-stranded allegory of Maximus would have prescribed.

Although the wisdom and fortitude of Odysseus could not but endear him to philosophers, it was well known that the man of many devices was also a man of many crimes. These could be rehearsed by any reader who had admired the strength of Ajax, the wit of Palamedes or the tender innocence of Priam's daughter. In the fifth book of the *Odyssey*, it is only with the appearance of Leucothea that he becomes a proper subject for his admirers: before that he is propelled he knows not whither, giving vent to the most unmanly lamentations, and under the ban of one of the greatest powers on Olympus. It is therefore not unnatural that Maximus should represent his labours as those of a fallen spirit, doomed to wander without a destination, and discharging its burden of miseries only when reason bears it to the shore:

Καταπεσοῦσα γὰρ ἡ ψυχὴ εἰς τουτονὶ τὸν θόρυβον, καὶ δοῦσα ἑαυτὴν ἐπ' ἀμηχάνου φορεῖσθαι

¹³ For the greatest density see *VP* 22.48–54, cited below.

¹⁴ Bidez, op. cit., p. 123; Igal, art. cit., *passim*. See also R. Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian* (University of California, 1986), p. 133; Brehier's edition (Budé), i.25; Armstrong's edition (Loeb), i.66.

κύματος, νήχεται δυσέκνευστον πέλαγος· ἐστ' ἂν αὐτὴ φιλοσοφία ὑποδέξῃται ὑπολαβοῦσα τοὺς ἑαυτῆς λογισμούς, ὥσπερ τὸ κρήδεμνον τῷ Ὀδυσσεὶ ἡ Λευκοθέα.

(Discourses 11.10h Hobein)

Maximus does not dwell on the subsequent hardships which are narrated in the *Odyssey*: what can there be to harm us when philosophy has released us from the *δυσέκνευστον πέλαγος* of human appetite? The veil is a means of egress from the sea, rather than a defence which allows the hero to swim unharmed.

Porphyrus's *Cave of the Nymphs* would appear both inconsistent and obscure to one who read in the expectation that Odysseus would appear everywhere as a paragon of philosophical virtue. Such a reader should note that when Odysseus arrives in Ithaca he has not yet secured the possession of his kingdom, let alone such peace as the philosopher could liken to that of his own everlasting home. The sage is but at the beginning of his most important labours, so long as he is hampered by the shadows of the world. Of these the cave is a symbol, and a pleasant one at that, since it partakes of eternal beauty; but to embrace it would be to fall for the mortal likeness of immortality, and the mind that penetrates its dark recesses will be repaid with neither instruction nor delight:

ὄθεν οἰκειῶς ἐπ' αὐτοῦ ἂν ῥηθείη ἄντρον ἐπήρατον μὲν τῷ εὐθὺς ἐντυγχάνοντι διὰ τὴν τῶν εἰδῶν μέθεξιν, ἡρωεῖδές δὲ σκοποῦντι τὴν ὑποβάθραν αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὴν εἰσιόντι τῷ νῷ.

(Nauck, *Porphyrii Opuscula*, p. 59.21ff.)¹⁵

In Porphyry, as in Plato, the beginning of contemplation is a deliverance from illusion: as in the passage quoted above from the *Enneads*, mere perception is contrasted with intellectual contemplation, eternal forms with the perishable beauty of the Cave.¹⁶

The egress from the *Cave of the Nymphs* would perhaps have been impossible without some token of divine concern:

διοικεῖται δὲ καὶ ὁ κόσμος ὑπὸ νοεράς φύσεως φρονήσει αἰδῶ καὶ ἀειθαλεῖ ἀγόμενος, ἀφ' ἧς καὶ τὰ νικητήρια τοῖς ἀθληταῖς τοῦ βίου δίδοται καὶ τῶν πολλῶν πόνων τὸ ἄκος.

(p. 78.12ff.)

The olive is the emblem of Athena and the earnest of her protection (p. 79.5): it is also the tree whose boughs are plucked by the suppliant in the hope that its brilliant wardrobe will befriend his prayers for light:

καὶ ἐν ταῖς λιτανείαις καὶ ἱκετηρίαις τὰς τῆς ἐλαίας θαλείας προτείνουσιν, εἰς τὸ λευκὸν αὐτοῖς τὸ σκοτεινὸν τῶν κινδύνων μεταβάλλειν ὀττεύμενοι.

(p. 79.1–3).

The olive, as the light of divine intelligence, leads the contemplative out of his cell in the steps of Plato and Plotinus:

παραπεφύτευται τῇ εἰκόνι τοῦ κόσμου τῷ ἄντρῳ σύμβολον φρονήσεως θεοῦ ἡ ἐλαία.

(p. 79.7ff.)

But Porphyry uses its other properties, going beyond his master's commentary, when he makes Odysseus the picture of a soul not merely rescued, but redeemed. When the hero sits beneath the olive he gives notice that he is now prepared for philosophy (p. 80.9–10), and, as suppliant, he receives the answering promise that he is now free of his sins:

¹⁵ Compare *υποβάθραν*...τῷ νῷ with τῷ νῷ βάθῃ in *Enneads* 1.6.8, cited above.

¹⁶ For allusion to Plato see p. 61.17.

διὰ τοῦτο, οἶμαι, καὶ τοῦ Φόρκυνος ἐπωνόμασεν τὸν λιμένα·

Φόρκυνος δὲ τίς ἐστι λιμὴν, ἀλίοιο γέροντος,

οὗ δὲ καὶ θυγατέρα ἐν ἀρχῇ τῆς Ὀδυσσεΐας τὴν Θώσαν ἐγενεαλόγησεν, ἀφ' ἧς ὁ Κύκλωψ, οὗ ὀφθαλμὸν Ὀδυσσεὺς ἀλάωσεν, ἵνα καὶ ἄχρι τῆς πατρίδος ὑπῇ τι τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων μνημόσυνον. ἐνθεν αὐτῷ καὶ ἡ ὑπὸ τῇ ἐλαίᾳ καθέδρα οἰκεία ὡς ἰκέτῃ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ὑπὸ τὴν ἰκετηρίαν ἀπομειλισσομένῳ τὸν γενέθλιον δαίμονα.

(p. 80.2ff.)

Through his previous tribulations Odysseus has appeased the wrath of 'marine and material deities': he is now to achieve his victory, and to consummate it by a final journey, which is barely hinted at in Homer's poem:

ἵνα γυμνωθεὶς τῶν ῥακέων καθέλῃ πάντα καὶ οὐδ' οὕτως ἀπαλλαγῇ τῶν πόνων, ἀλλ' ὅταν παντελῶς ἐξαλὸς γένῃται καὶ ἀπειρος θαλασσίων καὶ ἐνύλων ἐργων, ὡς πτόον ἡγείσθαι εἶναι τὴν κώπην διὰ τὴν τῶν ἐναλίων ὀργάνων.

(p. 80.21ff.)

Porphry is therefore at one with Maximus in his opinion that it was only the end of his voyage that made Odysseus a pattern for the philosopher. In this distinction they cannot have been alone, since the word *πλανή*, which combines the notions of wandering and of error, appears to have been employed with a tacit allusion to Odysseus in the *Seventh Epistle* of Plato,¹⁷ and even Heraclitus makes an instructive, though inaccurate, connexion between the apparition of Hermes and the emergence of the hero from the waves:¹⁸ Ἀμέλει τὸ πρῶτον ἐκ τῆς νεῶς ἀνίοντι καὶ πλησίον ὄντι τοῖς προθύροις Ἑρμῆς ἐφίσταται, τουτέστιν ὁ ἔμφρων λόγος.

(Hom. All. 72.4)

Odysseus was, of course, a different man to his admirers and his detractors, but there were two descriptions under which he would be recognised by all. He was the man who had been tossed long and ineffectually on the billows of misfortune; he was the man who owed his rescue to the gracious intervention of the gods. In Porphyry, as in Maximus, the erstwhile sinner acquires the perfect attributes of the sage.

Had our *Oracle* merely turned Odysseus into Plotinus or Plotinus into a hero, it would have been an indifferent allegory: what it rather implies, however, as we can now show, is that even the highest fancies of the poet are unworthy of one who can rest his eyes on eternity amid the storms of life.

We have already seen that Plotinus does not escape the sufferings of Odysseus near Phaeacia: he does, however, escape the helpless agonies of the unenlightened soul. Even when he passes Charybdis (ἀσηρῶν ἰλίγγων) he is threatened but not diverted, and his insight (πραπίδεσσι) makes him proof against the turmoil which is the nature of the element, not the outcome of his sins. With adverbs such as *παμπήδην* and *πολλάκις* the poet shows that the journey is to encompass a whole life pursued ἀπονόσφιν ἀλιτρῶν, and light and darkness are set before Odysseus throughout the poem, as Porphyry and Plotinus set them before the Ithacan hero. Here, as in the *Enneads*, the voyage itself is the ascent from Plato's Cave. As Plotinus strives like the shipwrecked swimmer in the fifth book of the *Odyssey*, his eyes retain a shrewdness which is denied to the fortunate sailor of the thirteenth:

καὶ τῷ νήδυμος ὕπνος ἐπὶ βλεφάροισιν ἐπιπτε.

(Od. 13.79)¹⁹

¹⁷ *Epistle* 7. 350d, with note in the Budé edition of Souilhé. On the voyage of Plato see further n. 35. ¹⁸ This is not the first occasion of his leaving the ship in Aeaea: see *Od.* 10.146ff.

¹⁹ *Od.* 13.79. Henry and Schwyzler, *Index Fontium* to Oxford text, iii.466, cite *Il.* 2.2, where the formula νήδυμος ὕπνος has the same metrical position as in *VP* 22.40, but the word βλεφάρων does not appear.

This striking reminiscence is not observed by the annotators of Porphyry, though Homer's line was alluded to in oratory, and must therefore have been sufficiently well-known.²⁰ Porphyry would have found it easy enough to make sense of the echo: Odysseus when ferried to Ithaca was still sleeping, still a novice in contemplation; Plotinus, the true philosopher, was self-sufficient even in the waves.

Perhaps we should rather say that the sufficiency of heaven is never withheld. We are reminded, not of anything in Maximus or in the kingdom of Alcinous, but of the thirteenth book of the epic and of Porphyry its interpreter when we hear that the philosopher is piloted by a divine mark which is at once the goal of a journey, a source of illumination and a beacon to all who wish to fix their eyes on a point above the flux of life. Plotinus is his own olive-bough when he dissipates the σκοτίης λυγαίης; continually enlightened by the σκοπός, he need not wait, like Odysseus, for the guidance of a single, elusive power.

For Odysseus, even in Ithaca, is in danger of losing his senses to the world. It is Homer who tells us how the sleeper failed to recognise his own kingdom, and did not discover the truth until Athena drew the veil as a triumphant peroration to her description of the Cave:

ἀγχόθι δ' αὐτῆς ἄντρον ἐπήρατον ἡρωειδές,
 ἱρὸν νυμφάων αἰ νηιάδες καλέονται...
 Ὡς εἰπούσα θεὰ σκέδασ' ἥερα, εἶσατο δὲ χθών.

(*Od.* 13.347–8 and 352)

The sequence ἡρωειδές... ἥερα might be taken to imply what Porphyry holds, that the Cave itself is a source of blindness. Maximus also is critical of Odysseus, since, having come to shore in Phaeacia, he took the banquets of Alcinous for the food of immortality.²¹ The dangers of preferring sense to intellect are expressed in a simile drawn from navigation by the second-century Platonist Numenius, who is known to have used Odysseus as a symbol of philosophical endeavour:²²

Just as if a man sitting on a vantage-point were to glimpse a small seaborne vessel... alone in the midst of the waves, so it should be if a man would approach the Good... But if anyone, taking pleasure in things of sense... should flatter himself that he has come upon the Good, he is completely in error.

Odysseus throughout the *Odyssey* is the man who is not what he seems, a roving illusion. In Phaeacia it is his patroness Athena who conceals him in an artificial cloud:

εἷα εὐπλόκαμος, δεινὴ θεός, ἥ ρά οἱ ἀχλὺν
 θεσπεσίην κατέχευε φίλα φρονέουσ' ἐνὶ θυμῷ

(*Od.* 7.41–2)

Neither the hints of the poet nor those of Porphyry are forgotten in the *Oracle*, which gives Plotinus a penetrating vision such as neither mists nor darkness could impair.²³ At 1.43, the words πολλὰ τε καὶ χαρίεντα describe the objects of

²⁰ Xen. *Anabasis* 5.1.2. The point holds whether the speech is real or fictitious.

²¹ *Discourses* 22.1a–2a. Cf. 10.7b and 12.6c.

²² Numenius, Fr. 2 (Des Places). For Numenius on the *Odyssey* see Frs. 30–3 and remarks in Lamberton, op. cit., pp. 318–24. Fr. 2 may have inspired the imagery of the *Oracle*, but Fr. 33 does not suggest that Numenius would have interpreted the earlier adventures of Odysseus as examples of human infirmity rather than virtue. We cannot, however, exclude the possibility that second-century authors anticipated the exegesis of Porphyry, since Maximus does not regard all the actions of Odysseus as equally worthy of praise.

²³ If we read, with Wolkmann, σκεδάσας κηλῖδα βαρεῖαν, the allusion to Homer is all the more striking, as the above citations show.

philosophical contemplation, which are more beautiful and more lasting than those that present themselves to the senses. The multitudinous contents of the intellect, and the beauty that it discloses to contemplation, are frequent and important themes in the *Enneads*: the *Oracle* seems to intimate that loveliness such as that of the Cave, which deceives us with its counterfeits of the Forms, will be as nothing to the philosopher, who beholds the Forms themselves.

The Cave is the world, to which most of us cannot but be subject while we remain in the body. For Porphyry Odysseus achieves his last goal only when he is *γυμνωθείς τῶν ῥακέων*, delivered from the bondage of the flesh. Plotinus, however, as the same author records (*VP* 8.40ff.), was set apart from others because he retained the tranquil vision of Reality amid all the many burdens and activities of life.

Plotinus, who is destined for Elysium,²⁴ completes the journey which is only foreseen by Homer. As he repeats the toils of Odysseus without his peregrinations, he answers the two conventional descriptions noted above, but in a way that makes him the equal of Odysseus in perseverance and his superior in moral worth:

1. The billows of misfortune. Odysseus made two memorable landfalls, as swimmer and as passenger: each could be said to usher him from ignorance to a wisdom only later made secure. Plotinus had no Phaeacian bark to carry him, and throughout his life was menaced by the storms of sense and change; philosopher as he was, however, his progress always resembled that of the homecoming Odysseus, being certain, uninterrupted, and at least inwardly serene. His course combines the images of two Homeric journeys, and (to take up the hints of Porphyry) he completes both journeys waking and without sin: *νήχε' ἐπειγόμενος δήμου ἀπονόσφιν ἀλιτρῶν*.

2. Divine intervention. Guided throughout his whole life by a harmony of Immortals, Plotinus shows a wisdom and intrepidity far surpassing that of Homer's mariner, and his Athena is a constant illumination of the intellect, not a late or occasional friend. Obscurity surrounds but does not engulf him; the olive is always visible from the Cave: *οὐδέ σε παμπήδην βλεφάρων ἔχε νήδυμος ὕπνος*.

Might it be objected that it is fanciful to apply the methods of Porphyry to a poem which is not of his own composition? If he is not the author of the *Oracle* – and surely we are entitled to suspect a perverse humility in the ascription to Apollo – then it was evidently the work of one who was closely related in intellectual sympathies. If the author was Amelius he could easily have perused his colleague's treatise before embarking on these verses;²⁵ and a disciple of Plotinus would think nothing of

²⁴ *VP* 22.48ff.:

ἐνθ' ἐνὶ μὲν φιλότης, ἐνὶ δ' ἡμέρος ἀβρὸς ιδέσθαι,
 εὐφροσύνης πλείων καθαρῆς, πληρούμενος αἰὲν
 ἀμβροσίων ὀχετῶν θεόθεν, ὅθεν ἐστὶν ἐρώτων
 πείσματα, καὶ γλυκερὴ πνοιή καὶ νήνεμος αἰθήρ·
χρυσεῖς γενεῆς μεγάλου Διὸς ἤχι νέμονται
Μίνως καὶ Παδάμανθος ἀδελφεοί, ἤχι δίκαιος
Αἰακός, ἤχι Πλάτων, ἱερὴ ἴς.

Numerous echoes, cited by Henry and Schwyzler, are here underlined. *VP* 22.53 offers little resemblance to *Il.* 14.322, and might rather put one in mind of the Minos of *Od.* 11.568–9, the *Διὸς ἀγαλὸν υἱόν* with his *σκῆπτρον χρυσεῖον*. Thus we find the image of Hades taken up into that of Elysium: Plotinus sees the other world as Odysseus does, but not in its terrible aspect.

²⁵ On dating of the *Cave of the Nymphs* see now the commentary of L. Simonini (Milan, 1986), pp. 30–1. Nothing suggests that the treatise is a late one; nothing shows that it was written before Porphyry's studies under Plotinus. If we find similar features in *Enneads* 1.6, either author could be indebted to the other, or to a common source, or to none.

turning the vagaries of Odysseus into a single, linear progress from the flux of sense to the undebated ground above the Cave.

We know at least that the man who wrote the treatise *On the Cave* was also the man to whom this poem owes its preservation. It is natural to suppose that he would understand it according to his own principles, and that what he intended the lines to convey to readers of his biography is what careful and imaginative study of their Homeric antecedents conveyed to him.

III

Neither Plotinus nor his encomiast has any reason to occupy himself with the sins of Odysseus: Porphyry, however, had special lessons to draw from his frailties, for it seemed to him that Odysseus, like himself, had once conceived a design against his own life.²⁶ An incident rarely quoted against Odysseus by the allegorists is nonetheless the source of his misfortunes, and the *Cave of the Nymphs* presents it as a sinful anticipation of the conquests which are reserved for virtue alone:

ἀφ' ἧς ὁ Κύκλωψ, οὗ ὀφθαλμὸν Ὀδυσσεὺς ἀλάωσεν, ἵνα καὶ ἄχρι τῆς πατρίδος ὑπὴ τι τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων μνημόσυνον. ἔνθεν αὐτῷ καὶ ἡ ὑπὸ τῇ ἐλαίᾳ καθέδρα οἰκεία ὡς ἰκέτη τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ὑπὸ τὴν ἰκετηρίαν ἀπομειλισσομένῳ τὸν γενέθλιον δαίμονα. οὐ γὰρ ἦν ἀπλῶς τῆς αἰσθητικῆς ταύτης ἀπαλλαγῆναι ζωῆς τυφλώσαντα αὐτὴν καὶ καταργῆσαι συντόμως σπουδάσαντα, ἀλλ' εἶπετο τῷ ταῦτα τολμήσαντι μῆνις ἄλιων καὶ ὕλικῶν θεῶν, οὓς χρὴ πρότερον ἀπομειλίξασθαι.

(p. 80.6–15)

The man who inflicts this injury is, of course, no mean exponent of practical virtue; but, as Plotinus would have told him, it is not this that delivers us from the blindness of our own eyes.²⁷ Only light can overcome darkness, and the gods are the only source of it; if a man tries to forestall them they exact a just revenge.

The story of Porphyry's folly and redemption is briskly told in the *Life of Plotinus* (11.14ff.). Observing that his pupil has fallen prey to evil broodings, Plotinus bids him retire to the more wholesome air of Sicily, where he remains for a number of years, learning of his master's death some time before the end of his convalescence.

More prolix and more improbable²⁸ is the version in Eunapius, which we should be glad to neglect with all the discourtesies due to the sophist,²⁹ were it not for the intrusion of an older tale, an intelligible narrative, though a concealed one, which it seems that a reader of Porphyry might be the best equipped to construe.³⁰

Igal, pp. 113–15, argues that Amelius must be the author, but relies on our ability to distinguish the erudition of Amelius from that of any other member of this very gifted school. The strongest argument for ascribing the *Oracle* to Amelius is the statement at the beginning of *VP* 22 that he received this utterance from Delphi.

²⁶ See Lamberton, p. 131. For a favourable interpretation of this episode see Maximus, *Discourses* 26.9h on Polyphemus. ²⁷ Note use of τυφλός in *Enneads* 1.6.8, cited above.

²⁸ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.19.6, speaks of Porphyry as having settled in Sicily, thus requiring us to postulate either a second journey or a single, longer residence of the kind implied in *VP*. It is possible that *VP* is disingenuous: on the need to explain one's absence from the deathbed of one's master see G. E. L. Owen, 'Philosophical Invective' in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* i (1983), p. 12. It remains, however, unlikely that Plotinus would have undertaken such a voyage in pursuit of Porphyry in his debilitated state.

²⁹ So Wright in his Loeb edition discounts the passage as an incompetent recollection of the *VP*.

³⁰ Best consulted in Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre*, Appendix p. 48. Other references to Eunapius are to Boissonade's pages.

Ἀκορέστως δὲ τῆς παιδείας ἐμφορούμενος καὶ τῶν πηγαίων ἐκείνων καὶ τεθειασμένων λόγων, χρόνον μὲν τινα εἰς τὴν ἀκρόασιν ἤρκεσεν, ὥς αὐτὸς φησιν, εἴτα ὑπὸ τοῦ μεγέθους τῶν λόγων νικώμενος, τό τε σῶμα καὶ τὸ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ἐμίσησε, καὶ διαπλεύσας εἰς Σικελίαν τὸν πορθμὸν καὶ τὴν Χάρυβδιν, ἥπερ Ὀδυσσεὺς ἀναπλεύσαι λέγεται, πόλιν μὲν οὔτε ἰδεῖν ὑπέμεινεν, οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἀκούσαι φωνῆς (οὕτω τὸ λυπούμενον αὐτῷ καὶ ἡβόμενον ἀπέθετο), συντείνας δὲ ἐπὶ Λιλύβαιον ἑαυτὸν (τὸ δὲ ἐστὶ τῶν τριῶν ἀκρωτηρίων τῆς Σικελίας τὸ πρὸς Λιβύην ἀνατεῖνον καὶ ὀρών), ἔκειτο καταστένων καὶ ἀποκαρτερῶν, τροφὴν τε οὐ προσιέμενος, καὶ ἀνθρώπων ἀλεείνων πάτον. Οὐδ' ἀλαοσκοπὴν ὁ μέγας εἶχε Πλωτῖνος ἐπὶ τούτοις, ἀλλὰ κατὰ πόδας ἐπόμενος, ἢ τὸν καταπεφευγότα νεανίσκον ἀναζητῶν, ἐπιτυγχάνει κειμένῳ, καὶ λόγων τε πρὸς αὐτὸν ὑπόρρησε τὴν ψυχὴν ἀνακαλουμένων ἄρτι διῆπτασθαι τοῦ σώματος μέλλουσαν, καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἔρρωσεν ἐς κατοχὴν τῆς ψυχῆς. Καὶ ὁ μὲν ἔμπνους τε ἦν καὶ διανίστατο, ὁ δὲ τοὺς ῥηθέντας λόγους εἰς βιβλίον κατέθετο τῶν γεγραμμένων. Τῶν δὲ φιλοσόφων τὰ ἀπόρρητα καλυπτόντων ἀσαφεία, καθάπερ τῶν ποιητῶν τοῖς μύθοις, ὁ Πορφύριος τὸ φάρμακον τῆς σαφηνείας ἐπαίνεισας καὶ διαπείρας γευσσάμενος, ὑπόμνημα γράφας εἰς φῶς ἤγαγεν.

That he means to carry the Odyssean imagery beyond the name of Charybdis Eunapius testifies by his neat reversal of Homer's poem:

πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἵδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω

(Od. 1.3)

and the striking juxtaposition of the two formulae ἀνθρώπων ἀλεείνων πάτον and οὐδ' ἀλαοσκοπὴν gives this passage the allusive density of a roman à clef. The first occurs only once in either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*:

ὃν θυμὸν κατέδωκ, πάτον ἀνθρώπων ἀλεείνων

(Il. 6.202)

and is then applied to Bellerophon, a man of heroic stature, but one whose presumption was punished by separation from god and man. Porphyry, we may say, has exchanged Odysseus for Bellerophon, but he has the luck of the former at this point in his tribulations, since the phrase οὐδ' ἀλαοσκοπὴν is never completed in the Homeric poems except by the name and epithet of a god.³¹ These five words thus comprise a familiar history in miniature: a mortal is condemned for his overweening, roams in solitude and affliction, and is plucked from peril at last by divine intervention. This interpretation we can derive by putting Eunapius beside Homer without guidance from the conceits which other Platonists had foisted upon Odysseus; nevertheless, the comparison with Plotinus, Porphyry, Maximus and the *Oracle of Apollo* all but forces itself upon us when we notice that Porphyry's tasting of the φάρμακον τῆς σαφηνείας produces a transition from light to darkness after the pattern of the Platonic ascent from the Cave.³²

The Platonist also knew what to make of a reference to Charybdis. No more than the straits of Messina, said the geographers,³³ but Diogenes had employed the name as a metaphor for the profligate human belly,³⁴ and the *Seventh Epistle* tells us how the crossing of Charybdis (345e) deposited Plato in a country where 'people fill themselves twice a day' (326).³⁵ Charybdis, daily disgorging what it has swallowed, is the vortex of human passion, the voyage of Plato an instance of an indiscretion

³¹ Il. 10.515; 13.10; Od. 8.285.

³² Note many words denoting clarity or dullness of perception: ἰδεῖν, ἀκούσαι, ἀλαοσκοπὴν, ἀσαφεία, σαφηνείας and εἰς φῶς.

³³ See Strabo 1.2.16. On the wanderings of Odysseus in Sicily see Apollodorus, *Epitome* 7.1; Polybius 34.3; and the criticisms of Strabo 1.2.1–18.

³⁴ Diogenes Laertius 6.51.

³⁵ For disparagement of this voyage, imparting symbolic associations, see Heraclitus, *Homeric Allegories* 76.6. Has Plato anticipated Polybius 34.3.11–12 in the emendation of τρίς to δὶς in Od. 12.105?

typical in philosophers, who were all too apt to return from their meditations to the unedifying thoughts of the common man.

Odysseus is thus drifting upon his own sea: the allegorists have led us to expect that the touch of land will be his salvation, when he receives the veil of Leucothea, the seat beneath the olive or the *φάρμακον* which Hermes delivers to him in Aeaëa:

Ὡς ἄρα φωνήσας πόρε *φάρμακον* ἀργειφόντης.

(*Od.* 10.302)

The longest thoughts on the *φάρμακον* are to be found in Heraclitus,³⁶ not the Platonists, but the presence of so many reminiscences of Homer may incline us to the suspicion that the word was felt by Eunapius to derive a special fitness in this context from its poetic associations. If the *φάρμακον τῆς σαφηνείας* is the antidote to the philosophical charlatanry, the *μεγέθος τῶν λόγων*, that had led Porphyry into temptation, it would be easy enough for the allegorist to cast the godlike Plotinus in the character of Hermes, and to liken his arguments to the mythical herb.

The poetic tags in Eunapius are therefore no mere flourishes: they desiderate a reading of the *Odyssey* which had been familiar to Platonists since Maximus of Tyre. This it has proved possible to demonstrate without borrowing from Porphyry, but it is interesting that reference to his extant works will turn these faint impressions of allegory into clear and distinct ideas.

There is no doubt that Plotinus bears the same character in Eunapius which is ascribed to him in the *Oracle of Apollo*: he is the man of eternal vigilance and one who merits the epithets of a god. There is equally little difficulty in comparing the truant Odysseus of the *Cave of the Nymphs* with Bellerophon: both men slay their monster, both suffer the persecution of those above. To Charybdis Porphyry could have given a variety of meanings. In the *Oracle of Apollo* it is one of many traps that Plotinus avoided, but for his disciple this symbol of human passion could have been made to represent at least three dangers: the fierce and encroaching appetites, from which death seemed the only deliverance; the revenge of those deities *ἀλίων καὶ ὑλίκων* who are not subdued, but roused to effectual wrath, by the act of suicide; even the sins inherent in self-destruction, which, as Plotinus observed, cannot be accomplished by any but an excessively passionate man.³⁷

Porphyry's sin, translated into the images of the *Odyssey*, was to afflict his own sense with blindness, and for this he was pursued by the gods of the sea. The words *ὁ μέγας Πλωτῖνος* in Eunapius succeed the Homeric phrase according to the form of one hexameter in particular:

οὐδ' ἀλαοσκοπῖν εἶχε κρείων ἐνοσίχθων.

(*Il.* 13.10)

Even though this line is not from the *Odyssey*, it would be difficult to recall it without recalling the ten-year vigil which was kept up against Odysseus by the potentate of the waves. Pursuit by a watchful deity can be understood in two senses, and any Porphyrian reading would have profited by an analysis of the word *ἀλαοσκοπῖν*. Whether we imagine the philosopher applying the word to Poseidon or to some more

³⁶ *Homeric Allegories* 73.10–13. For a short allegorization of the moly see Olympiodorus, *Comm. in Phaedonem* p. 34.17 (Norvin).

³⁷ *Enneads* 1.9.1.9. This, since it was written before Plotinus made the acquaintance of his biographer, cannot be the treatise mentioned by Eunapius, unless the latter has made an error. The fragment printed in Henry and Schwyzler's text, i.143, seems to allude to Porphyry's misguided self-denial, and rebukes those who imagine that their actions are concealed from the light of the sun.

benevolent deity, we find sight compared with blindness, the fault that provokes the wandering contrasted with the faculty that both convicts the transgression and provides the means of return.

Since the word *ἄκος* is used in the *Cave of the Nymphs* (p. 79.7ff.) to denote the medicinal power of reason in Odysseus, Porphyry lends some authority to our interpretation of the *φάρμακον τῆς σαφηνείας*. Stobaeus preserves an extract from another book, where a discussion of the right mode of quitting the body is succeeded by a passage describing the donor of the *φάρμακον* as one whose illumination protects the soul against Circe's charms:

δεῖ μάλιστα περὶ τὸν θάνατον ὥσπερ ἐν τελετῇ καθαρεύοντα παντὸς ἀπέχειν πάθους... καὶ φθόνους καὶ δυσμενείας καὶ ὀργὰς ἀπωτάτω τιθέμενον τοῦ φρονούντος ἐκβαίνειν τοῦ σώματος. οὗτος ὁ χρυσόρραπις Ἑρμῆς... δεικνυὼν ἐναργῶς τὸ καλὸν... ἀπέχει τοῦ κυκεῶνος...

(*Eclogae* 1.41.60)

Porphyry thus teaches us what was once his own hard lesson. The sequence 'passion, projected departure, Hermaic illumination' so resembles that in Eunapius that one wonders whether this might not be a fragment of his source.

All such speculations, however ingenious and however well-documented, will do nothing to restore the sense behind the Homeric phrases in Eunapius unless we can show that Porphyry is likely to have dictated, not only the matter of this biography, but the style. Such influence, which in any case we could never preclude with certainty, we have in fact some reasons to surmise:

1. Eunapius would not have cited Porphyry in the first sentence unless he had wished us to hold him responsible for the sequel, yet nothing except the retirement to Lilybaeum seems consistent with the account in the *Life of Plotinus*. We cannot suppose that the *Life* is the source of this narrative in Eunapius without forming an unconscionably low estimate of his probity or his intelligence.

Although we should have preferred him to say so, we may legitimately assume that the biographer intends us to look for his source in the *ὑπόμνημα* which he admires for the lucidity of its style. Its lucidity offers no antidote to the tumid affectation of Eunapius, but his praise is applied specifically to the arguments, which may not have been all that the work contained. A *ὑπόμνημα* ought perhaps to include a narrative, and if Porphyry had introduced the philosophical portion with a rehearsal of his own conduct and its motives, he might have thought it appropriate to embellish this with the inflated style, the *μεγέθος τῶν λόγων*, of his earlier cogitations. Such a style might easily have provided his biographer with that surfeit of Homeric diction and imagery which his skeleton of a tale in the *Life of Plotinus* would be inadequate to explain.³⁸

2. Imitation of his models was both a pleasure and a duty for Eunapius, and is manifest in the first paragraph of his *Lives of the Philosophers*:

Ξενοφῶν ὁ φιλόσοφος, ἀνὴρ μόνος ἐξ ἀπάντων φιλοσόφων ἐν λόγοις τε καὶ ἔργοις φιλοσοφίαν κοσμήσας (τὰ μὲν, ἐν λόγοις, ἔστι τε καὶ ἐν γράμμασι, τὴν ἠθικὴν ἀρετὴν γράφει, τὰ δέ, ἐν πράξεσι τε ἦν ἀριστος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐγέννα στρατηγούς τοῖς ὑποδείγμασιν· ὁ γοῦν μέγας Ἀλέξανδρος οὐκ ἂν ἐγένετο μέγας, εἰ μὴ Ξενοφῶν), καὶ τὰ πάρεργά φησι δεῖν

³⁸ On p. 453.19 the *ὑπόμνημα* is introduced as a source of biographical information. For further discussion of the word see R. Goulet, 'Variations Romanesques sur la Mélancolie de Porphyre', *Hermes* 110 (1982), 454. Goulet's theory that the *ὑπόμνημα* was nothing more than *VP* 11 does not account for the magnitude of the discrepancy in this case, or for the critical comments with which Eunapius introduces his use of the word.

τῶν σπουδαίων ἀνδρῶν ἀναγράφειν. Ἐμοὶ δὲ οὐκ εἰς τὰ πάρεργα τῶν σπουδαίων ὁ λόγος φέρει τὴν γραφήν, ἀλλ' εἰς τὰ ἔργα. Εἰ γὰρ τὸ παίγνιον τῆς ἀρετῆς ἄξιον λόγου, ἀσεβοῖτο ἂν πάντως τὸ σπουδαζόμενον σιωπώμενον.

(p. 453 Boissonade)

With this we should compare Xenophon's:

Ἄλλ' ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ τῶν καλῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν ἔργα οὐ μόνον τὰ μετὰ σπουδῆς πραττόμενα ἀξιομνημόνευτα εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐν ταῖς παιδιαῖς.

(*Symposium* 1.1)

Here παίγνιον matches ἐν ταῖς παιδιαῖς and σπουδαίων matches μετὰ σπουδῆς: Eunapius is too proud to steal, but paronomasia exercises his powers and secures the thought to its source.

We might expect that even greater artifice would be expended on Porphyry, who had provided his biographer with a literary model, yet had left so few memorials that his own biography had to be pieced together from his works.³⁹

3. The imitation of Homer is exemplified in the opening of the life of Prohaeresius (p. 485): the sophist is ἀγήρων τινὰ καὶ ἀθάνατον, his attributes μεγάλα καὶ οὐρανομήκη.⁴⁰ He thus attains the immortality denied to Sarpedon and Glaucus, and proves himself a hero of the intellect who is worthy of Homer's lines.

But in the life of Porphyry the Homeric reminiscences are not in the usual manner, or applied to the usual ends. The likening of Porphyry to a named character from epic, and the choice of reminiscences that attach themselves to a common interpretation of that character, have no parallel in these *Lives*; and the author, in relating facts which cannot but discredit both Porphyry and Odysseus, departs from what is his own and the general custom of reserving Homeric phrases for the passages of eulogy which they naturally magnify and sustain. It is much more likely that Porphyry, deploring his own aberration, set the precedent for this humbling of Odysseus than that Eunapius should have conceived of it for himself.

In this ὑπόμνημα we might have found: (1) An extinction of the senses (Porphyry, unlike Odysseus, cannot look upon men or cities); (2) Isolation from god and man (Bellerophon); (3) Divine wrath (Charybdis and Poseidon), and (4) the intervention of Plotinus in the character of Hermes bearing the φάρμακον.

If this reconstruction is plausible it may even be possible for us to explain how Porphyry's history could be so sadly misrepresented in a biography that names him as the only source. If Porphyry's book had used Sicilian features, such as the Cyclops and Charybdis, as landmarks in an intellectual journey, while the *Life of Plotinus* described the author's arrival in the flesh at Lilybaeum, it would be possible for an inattentive reader to take the figurative itinerary for a real one, and so to transplant the philosopher prematurely from Italy to the place of his convalescence. Eunapius thus appears in his usual character as an incompetent biographer, but we have reason both to thank and to admire him for his sensitive imitation of the language of his source.

IV

In the *Cave of the Nymphs* Porphyry distinguishes three chapters in the history of Odysseus: his expiatory wanderings as a sinner, his illumination in Ithaca and his journey, under the discipline of reason, to his last home. As his main study he takes Odysseus at the moment of enlightenment, the moment when he turns his eyes to his tutelary deity and away from the treacherous cave. Plotinus also takes this Platonic

³⁹ See p. 454 and Bidez, Appendix p. 47.13ff.

⁴⁰ See *Il.* 12.323 and *Od.* 5.239.

symbol as a commentary on the *Odyssey*: by a characteristic instinct he effaces all recollection of earlier wanderings and transgressions, and hurries the philosopher straight to his goal. The author of the *Oracle on Plotinus* also makes one journey of at least two Homeric scenes, but with such a host of particular allusions, both to Homer and to his exegetes, as to point a conscious moral: the godlike sage surpasses even the heroes of romance in the integrity of his career. By contrast the behaviour of his disciple provokes an elaborate comparison with the Sicilian phase of the epic, and with the tribulation imposed upon Odysseus by one divinity and relieved by the grace of another. Porphyry is delivered by the advent of Plotinus, in whom Poseidon and Athene are combined.

Reflection upon the *Odyssey* in the school of Plotinus thus engendered at least four different treatments of the hero, each uniting private associations with a stock of common images, and each of them developed in accordance with the best traits of a philosophy which was inventive, profoundly felt, and intellectually severe.⁴¹

Corpus Christi College, Oxford

M. J. EDWARDS

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