***The Odyssey***

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**Book IX**

Odysseus replies:

There is no boon in life more sweet, I say,
than when summer joy holds all the realm,
and banqueters sit listening to a harper
in a great hall, by rows of tables heaped
with bread and roast meat, while a steward goes
to dip up wine and brim your cups again.
Here is the flower of life, it seems to me!
(Fitz. 5–11)

This passage was oft quoted by moralizers who wanted to impugn Odysseus for gluttony. But food in the epic serves not as an object of greed, but as a mode rejoining or reengaging the world after great sufferings or misfortunes have alienated someone. By sharing food, the stranger (or the estranged) is made familiar.

Now, his *kleos* ringing through the great hall from the strings of Demodocus, as if he were a great hero of a distant past, Odysseus reveals to all his name:

I am Odysseus, Laertes' son, known for my guile
to all men. My *kleos* reaches the heavens. (19–20)

Like a ghost from a past where men were stronger, and glory was a possibility to be got by excellence, Odysseus makes his epiphany. This is the only time in all of Homer that a hero refers to his *kleos* in the present tense, as something already present and accomplished. He begins to narrate his story, beginning from when he plundered the city of Troy, and moving ever homeward, for "Where can a man find sweetness to surpass his own home?" (Fitz. 38).

Odysseus' first exploit after the war is to sack the Cicones, exterminating all the men, plundering the wealth, and enslaving women and children. This is pure piracy, but piracy, it seems, was a legitimate and even honorable profession in the world of Odysseus.

Zeus rouses a storm against the ships as they round Cape Malea; a current and gale spirit them out to sea. They drift for nine days; this is their passage into surreality.

On the tenth day, they touch the coast of the Lotus-Eaters. The islanders harvested and ate an opiate plant, that drugged men into such addiction that they would refuse to leave the isle. Whoever ate the honey-sweet fruit "forgot his*nostos*." Here is an explicit link of *nostos* to memory, and the failed *nostos* to amnesia. Memory is Odysseus' only fragile link to his home, and the only material from which to rebuild old relationships, so its erasure ends his journey. Odysseus drives the men who tried the fruit of the Lotus to the ship, as they wail, and lashes them down.

The next coast they touch is the land of the Cyclopes. Of all the episodes in the*Odyssey*, Odysseus' encounter with the one-eyed giant may be the most well known. The plot of the episode is simple, its own self-contained parable: Odysseus out of curiosity wanders into the cave of a giant man, Polyphemus, bringing along several men. The giant returns, and closes the mouth of the cave with a boulder too massive for a normal man to lift. For his dinner, the giant eats two of Odysseus' men, and threatens that the rest of them shall be future dinners. Odysseus then devises a clever stratagem for their escape. He tells the giant that his name is Nobody, and shapes an olive branch into a lance. That night he gets the giant drunk on some liquor he brought along, and as Polyphemus snores, he heats up his poker in the fire. He jams the hot point into the giant's eye, blinding him, and when his fellow Cyclopes hear the screams and racket, they ask what the matter is. "Nobody did this to me!" shouts the giant in agony. "Well, if nobody did this, we'll return to bed," say his peers. To escape the cave, Odysseus and his men cling to the fleecy underbellies of Polyphemus' sheep as they go out to graze. Odysseus taunts the giant and announces his real name as they sail off. The utterance of the proper name allows Polyphemus to curse him to Poseidon.

Amidst more general thematic concerns of the *Odyssey*, we can see in this episode the ultimate perversion of *xenia*, the obligations of guest-friendship. To protect and accept strangers is a mandate enforced by Zeus himself, and all the major actors of the *Odyssey* in some way respond to this compulsion: Nestor, Menelaus, and Telemachus are exemplary, whereas the suitors ravish Odysseus' possessions uninvited, Kalypso detains her guest against his will, and the Cyclops eats his own guests. Odysseus several times comments that the Cyclopes do not till any fields, that they are lawless, each man legislating his own home, and that they do not fear the gods. Lacking these three fundaments of civilized life, they neglect the basic moral obligations that accompany them.

The episode is also a mythic and archetypal parable of *metis* defeating *bie*, or mind defeating might. All the victories of the *Odyssey* are won with mind, and even the Trojan War itself (the slaughter of the suitors, which seems to be the most Iliadic achievement of Odysseus, would not be possible without the cunning disguise and planning that precedes it). The *Odyssey* presents more generally the means of achievement in a post-heroic world, and in a world where the heroic *kleos* of the Iliadic tradition is crystallized and fixed.

*Metis* has the power to subdue brawn. Book 23 of the *Iliad* presents the funeral games for Patroclus. As Antilochus, Nestor's son, prepares for a chariot race, Nestor gives sage advice:

It's *metis*, not brawn, that makes the finest woodsman.
By *metis* too that captain holds his ship on course,
Scudding the wine-dark sea though rocked by gales.
By *metis* alone, charioteer outraces charioteer. (*Il.* 23.359–362, Fagles' translation, slightly modified)

It is by cunning intelligence, intellectual trickery, that man controls nature. It is by *metis* that one triumphs in *agon*. And it is by *metis* that Odysseus outwits and maims Polyphemus. The world of Odysseus lacks the unified purposiveness of war; circumstances are fickle, situations diverse, and Odysseus' supreme resource is his adaptability:

When the individual who is endowed with *metis*, be he god or man, is confronted with a multiple, changing reality whose limitless polymorphic powers render it almost impossible to seize, he can only dominate it— that is to say, enclose it within the limits of a single, unchangeable form within its control—if he proves himself even more multiple, more mobile, more polyvalent than his adversary.11

Odysseus is *polytropos*, of many turns. It is this versatility that can free him from any impasse, any knot, that threatens him. He will discover a *poros* to dominate any *aporia*, and his adaptablility will be his greatest resource in a world that lacks the stable identities or simple values.

It is this quality of *metis*, exemplified in the Cyclops episode, that distinguishes Odysseus from Achilles, and even allows him to overcome the dilemma of Achilles. The *kleos*, the honor, of the Iliadic warrior is constituted by those who sing it or witness it. Honor in itself is empty; it must be seen, compensated, or sung to be meaningful. Agamemnon deprives Achilles of Briseis, the outward token of his honor, and Achilles' sense of self-worth is challenged by the bereavement of the external sign. Achilles does not separate his honor from its signifier. *Metis*, on the other hand, continually effects a disjunction between outward appearance and inward truth. It is by *metis* that Odysseus disguises himself, hides himself, speaks one thing while thinking another. Achilles cannot disjoin his honor from its token; Odysseus actively creates this disjunction to achieve his ends. Achilles would challenge Polyphemus with his spear; Odysseus becomes "nobody," abandons his heroic identity, and escapes death. Achilles could not tolerate being "Nobody."

There is a beautiful pun the underlies this episode in the Greek: *Outis* means "nobody," but an alternate form of *outis* is *me tis*. When Polyphemus tells his fellow Cyclopes that "Nobody has harmed him," they reply: "Well, if *me tis* (no one) has harmed you…." *Metis* has harmed him indeed.

**Book X**

After escaping the ballistic boulders slung by Polyphemus, Odysseus' next landfall is Aeolia. The isle floats adrift on the sea. The Greek adjective "aiolos" means shifty, changeful, glimmering, and King Aiolos commands the winds. After a brief sojourn, Aiolos sends off Odysseus, containing all adverse winds in a bag. But they are destroyed by their *aphradiesin*, "mindlessness." His mutinous crew open the bag, suspecting stashed gold and silver.

Odysseus did not prevent them because he was asleep: in sight of his fatherland, Odysseus could not resist a drowse. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the hero must stay awake for seven days to achieve immortality, a trial he fails. Wakefulness is an epic test. For Odysseus, hero of *metis*, wakefulness is even more essential: it is his total awareness, his perfect presence, which permits him to achieve his victories.

When the bag is opened, the storm winds blow them violently back to Aeolia. In the storm, Odysseus imagines throwing himself into the sea, but beats back the enticing possibility of death. Touching land, Odysseus begs Aeolus to renew his help; but Aeolus refuses. It is an accursed voyage, hated by the immortals, he says.

Putting to sea again, they come next to the Laestrygonians. Like the Cyclopes, these have no farms or cultivated land. A few of Odysseus' men follow a young princess up to the palace of her father, Antiphates. On arrival some are consumed; the rest flea, pursued by savage, boulder-slinging Laestrygones, back to the ships. Odysseus quickly puts to sea again, bewailing those left behind to the cannibal feast.

Next they come to Aeaea, where the goddess Circe dwells. They lie on the beach for two days and nights, "eating their spirit in sorrowing," which is no nourishment for the belly. Odysseus goes to survey the island, and sees smoke rising from a wood hut. He debates in his heart whether to approach the hut right then, but prudently decides to return to his men. On his way he haps upon an antlered buck, which he shoots down.

Circe is the daughter of the sun, and her island is the seat of dawn's rising (12.3). Aeaea (as well as Ogygia and the home of the Cyclopes) offers crops without toil of agriculture. Yet for all its abundance, the very permanence and ease of this life give it a death-like stillness. When Odysseus unloads the buck from his shoulders, and offers it to his men, "till the setting of the sun they sit feasting on the abundant meat and sweet wine." (10.184) The word usually translated as "abundant" is *aspeta*, whose literal meaning is "unspeakable" or "unverbal." It is etymologically related to *epos*—the genre of the *Odyssey*—and the verbs *ennepe* and *espete*, both of which refer to the divinely inspired speech of epic. *Krea aspeta* is "abundant meat," but also rather meat that by its abundance refuses to be the theme of epic song. The paradise situations that Odysseus haps upon in his wanderings are conceived as obstacles because they obviate the heroic achievement that song commemorates.

After they have had their fill of venison, Odysseus speaks:

O friends! We do not know where is the gloom or the
dawn,
Nor where the sun that offers light to mortals sinks
beneath the earth,
Nor where it rises: But let's consider quick
Whether there is still left to us any *metis*. (190–193)

Odysseus is disoriented upon the sea, lost and adrift. But he opposes this disorientation by his *metis*. He is moored and directed by his mind.

He splits his men into two bands, and sends one to investigate Circe's home. The band are falsely reassured when they see Circe weaving and singing, surrounded by tame beasts. Eurylochus, however, sniffed some snare and stayed back. For the rest Circe lays out a meal, but mixes her evil drugs (*kaka pharmaka*) into the food. The effect of the drugs is that the men "utterly forget" their native land. The drugs attack the mind first, and transform them bodily afterwards. Just as the Lotus plant, the threat to their *nostos* is cognitive: amnesia will stay their homeward push. Circe's drug transforms them mentally first, then bodily. Deprived of their memory, the men become pigs. The pig is the lot of the amnesiac.

Eurylochus scampers back to Odysseus to tell him; Odysseus slings his sword over his shoulder and moves to save his men. Hermes intercepts Odysseus to offer him help: he supplies him with the *molu* plant, an antidotal charm to defeat Circe's bitter drugs. Hermes is a liminal god, a god of transitions. He is the*psychopompos*: he ushers souls into the underworld. Odysseus' purpose is also liminal: he is questing to retrieve his men from enchantment, to free their entrapped souls. There is something shamanistic about his role in this episode.

Hermes' herbal potion successfully combats Circe's drugs, and she recognizes the man prophesied long before, Odysseus. Odysseus insists that she unbind his men before he partakes in the pleasures of love or food, and she complies. Odysseus sojourns there a year in hedonism, before his men tell him to "remember" his*nostos*. He informs Circe that he intends to go, but she tells him that he must visit the underworld to consult the prophet Teiresias. This *nekyia* is the subject of the next book.

**Book XI**

Odysseus and his crew sail toward the gloom; the sun sets as they glide toward the Western eschaton. They perform the sacrifices and rituals as Circe had instructed, summoning the shades with wine, milk, and blood. Odysseus draws his sword to prevent the thirsty phantoms from tasting the blood before Teiresias.

The first shade to appear is Elpenor ("Hopeman"). Elpenor had lain apart from his companions on the roof of Circe's home, heavy with wine. In the morning, he fell off the roof and broke his neck. Now, in Hades, he implores Odysseus to return to Circe's isle and give him a proper burial. He requests that they heap up a tomb, and plant an oar atop his burial mound. The Homeric word for tomb is*sema*, whose basic meaning is "sign" or "token." The tomb signifies the achievements of living man.

The blind Theban prophet Teiresias comes next, whom Odysseus questions about his "honey-sweet *nostos*." Teiresias warns Odysseus to leave unharmed the cattle of the sun, who graze on Thrinacia, or his hardships in returning will multiply. After he has avenged the suitors, Teiresias continues, Odysseus must go inland on foot with an oar. He must carry the oar so far inland that the people eat their food unmixed with salt, and that someone mistakes the oar for a winnowing fan. Then he must plant the oar in the ground, and propitiate Poseidon with rams and bulls. Even after the satisfaction of his *nostos*, Odysseus is forced to flee home, to flee the center, to become a centrifugal hero. He is bound to continuing exile to appease Poseidon.

As in the encounter with Elpenor, the erect oar again functions as a *sema*. The oar carried and implanted inland is a monument to the weariness of rowing, to the wisdom of the sea. A possible etymology of the name Teiresias is "the weariness of rowing," an etymology found in Homer: "TEIReto d' andron thymos hyp' EIRESIES. [The spirit of the men wearied beneath the rowing.]"12 We commented above that the crossing from the womb-like comforts of Ogygia to the violent sea allows Odysseus his heroic realization. Where there is no hardship, where the meat is limitless in its abundance, where one need not toil at the oar for his conveyance, the hero's self dissolves. The trial that Tiresias inflicts upon Odysseus is the fitting consummation of his epic voyage: to import the wisdom of the sea, the pain of birth, to the innermost stronghold of land. This is the *sema*'s significance.

Then Odysseus meets his mother, Anticleia. She tells him the situation on Ithaca: Penelope is faithful, Telemachus is alive, but the reckless band of suitors consumes his livelihood. She died of loneliness for her absent son. Three times Odysseus attempts to embrace his dead mother; three times her insubstantial phantom passes untouched through his arms.

After his mother recedes, Odysseus sees and questions a long train of famous women. Odysseus lists them all in his narrative; he becomes a catalogic poet, like Book II of the *Iliad* or sections of Hesiod. The typical poetic catalogue begins with an invocation of the Muse to compensate for the insufficiency of human memory. The catalogue of ships in the *Iliad* begins with an appeal to Muses with perfect knowledge, since men have only the *kleos,* "hearsay." The poet speaks from a stance of distance, of absence, from the described event. Odysseus blurs the distinction between hero and poet: he gives a direct experience and knowledge of the heroines. He is a poet with presence, and as the Muse is a substitute for presence, he does not need her.

After the catalogue, Odysseus breaks his narration, and proposes to the enchanted Phaeacians that all retire to bed. Alcinous insists that he continue, and comments on his narrative abilities: "We do not suppose that you are a dissembler or a braggart … there is a shape to your words, and you have a good mind. You have spoken a tale knowingly, like a poet." (11.363–368) Odysseus repeatedly fabricates lies to achieve his ends. Athena, in Book XIII, praises him as a consummate dissembler. Yet Alcinous denies that Odysseus is a cunning liar because his words have a certain "shape" (*morphe*). However, it is this very ability to speak with *morphe* that makes Odysseus successful as a liar. How can we evaluate the truth of the tales that Odysseus tells? Some episodes in his wanderings are corroborated at other moments in the *Odyssey*, yet the possibility of falsehoods remains. It would be vain to claim that the whole of Odysseus' narration is artful lie; however, the *Odyssey* has "narrative techniques" that at least "make possible such an evaluation."13

Alcinous asks Odysseus if he met any of his old martial comrades from Troy in Hades. He saw several, Odysseus rejoins, the first of them being Agamemnon. Agamemnon tells Odysseus of his own inglorious death, slain like an ox at the crib by Aegisthus. Agamemnon, just like Odysseus, returns home to a perverted feast; he becomes the profane meat. Agamemnon then fumes a fierce diatribe against woman, who are faithless and deceptive. Woman's guile, he says, caused the carnage of his return and of the Trojan War itself. He cautions Odysseus to return home in disguise, and to test his wife.

Odysseus then encounters the exhausted shade of Achilles. No man, says Odysseus, was more blest by fortune than you. You were honored as a god while alive, and now you rule over the dead. Achilles responds:

Do not console me about death, brilliant Odysseus. I would rather live on the earth as a slave to another, to a landless man without livelihood, than lord over all the wasted dead. (488–491)

The lowest position on earth would be preferable to a kingship over the expired. Achilles, in the *Iliad*, chooses a short, incandescent life of glory over a long life of anonymity. There are two ways to interpret Achilles' bitter response to Odysseus:

a) Achilles is rejecting the heroic *ethos* of the *Iliad*, where life is a small price to pay for everlasting fame. Achilles, now dead, reconsiders the choice he made, and decides any life is preferable to death, no matter how glorious.

b) The numb terror, the mindless oblivion of death is the necessary background to heroic achievement. There is no beatific afterworld to look forward to longingly; death's gloom is the end. But if death were not so horrible, it would trivialize Achilles' choice, because the price of glory would not as great. "Odysseus' well-intentioned but inept attempt to console has the effect of reducing the fearful cost, and therefore the terrible splendor, of Achilles' decision."14

Achilles asks Odysseus for news of his son, Neoptolemos. Odysseus tells a proud Achilles that his son never slinks back, but fights valiantly among the first ranks, and has slain innumerable enemies. Hearing this, Achilles departs over the fields of asphodel, "rejoicing that I said his son was preeminent." Achilles' joy in hearing the prowess of his son indicates that he has not rejected the *kleos* that he died to attain, and that his words to Odysseus do not subvert his choice, but subtly confirm it (b).

Odysseus next comes across the shade of Ajax. He and Odysseus had quarreled on the beach of Troy, and now Odysseus begs Ajax to curb his wrath. Ajax turns and speechlessly walks away. The Alexandrian critic, Longinus, quotes this episode to show that silence may be more sublime than words.

Odysseus then sees the torments of Tityos, Tantalus, and Sisyphus, forerunners of the tortured denizens of Dante's *Inferno*. Finally Odysseus sees Hercules, who tells of his own compelled descent into Hades. The *nekyia*, the mortal visiting the underworld, is an epic *topos* in itself. Hercules and Orpheus are precursors in the Greek tradition, while Aeneas and Dante succeed in later epics. Odysseus' association with Hercules in his *nekyia* invites him into the number of heroes.

**Book XII**

The ships sail back to Aeaea. Odysseus finds the body of Elpenor, and burns his corpse and equipment. They heap up his *sema*, fixing an oar atop the mound. Circe finds them, and all feast on "unspeakable meat" and honeyed wine.

Circe and Odysseus lie alone together, while Odysseus tells of his subterranean wanderings "fittingly" or "in due order" (*kata moiran*). Circe alerts Odysseus to the obstacles that threaten the next leg of his voyage: First he will encounter the Sirens, whose honey-sweet singing seduces men to their own withering.

… There are bones
Of dead men rotting in a pile beside them
And flayed skins shrivel around the spot. (54–56)

The grassy isle of the Sirens is the inversion of the mythical meadow that is a common *topos* for erotic happenings in Greek poetry. Instead of ever-renewing growth, freshness, and youth, they are surrounded by putrefaction and death. The decomposition of bodies opposes itself to the nature of their song. What they will claim to offer Odysseus is a knowledge un-violated by the entropic motions of the world. The metaphoric expression of the immortality of song in Homer is*kleos aphthiton*, from the root *phthi-*, which is often applied to plants and wildlife in Homer. *Aphthiton*, then, means imperishable or unwilting; it is partially a vegetal metaphor. This scene of rot and decomposition contradicts the nature of song.

Circe then warns Odysseus of Scylla, a fearsome, many-headed monster, and Charybdis, who suck down black water, drawing men to a watery death. None has escaped the vortex of Charybdis but the Argo, "a care to all" (*pasi melousa*). The story of Jason and the Argonauts is a variant, rival epic tradition, which the*Odyssey* here tries agonistically to outdo, by Odysseus' own escape from Charybdis. Odysseus had begun his narration by claiming *he* was "a care to all" (*pasi… melo*).

Odysseus tells the crew what he has heard from Circe— with some cunning omissions. He does not forewarn that six men will be devoured raw by a savage beast. Presumably the great tactician thought it might interfere with their morale.

Odysseus and his crew set off. As they approach the island of the Sirens, Odysseus seals off the ears of all his crew with wax, and commands them to bind him tight to the mast. He alone hears their song.

The two songstresses offer their *terpsis* (joy, delight) and a greater wisdom. Odysseus violently struggles to loose his fetters, but his men bind him tighter. The Sirens beckon Odysseus to return to his Iliadic persona, and to forsake his*nostos*. But they thus beckon him to a world which is closed, immutable, and dead. Their song, which they advertise as perfect, is in fact the skeleton of epic, unfleshed, like the decomposing corpses in their audience.

The classicist Pietro Pucci, who is particularly interested in "intertextual" echoes between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, has shown that the diction of the Sirens unmistakably reproduces the diction of the *Iliad*. The passage is replete with phrases that are unique in the *Odyssey* but occur several times in the other epic.15

The Sirens allure Odysseus toward a former self, and so evoke a certain nostalgia. The concept of nostalgia is vital to the *Odyssey*. The word is built from*nostos*, return, and *algos*, suffering, so nostalgia is the suffering caused by the unfulfilled desire to return. His home, on Ithaca, is the endpoint of his voyaging, the goal that animates his epic strivings. The Sirens try to relocate the end of his*nostos* to Troy, the total inversion of his journey. This threatens the complete unraveling of his character.

The Sirens invite Odysseus to switch poems. They seduce him with the past, and toward old, Trojan War paradigms of *kleos*, which have proved insufficient to the challenges of the post-heroic world of Odysseus' wanderings. Pucci claims that the song of the Sirens refers to the "text" of the *Iliad*. Since our knowledge of how two poems of Homer interrelate, and what form they might have taken, is so fragmentary, we must take Pucci's use of "text" as metaphorical. A text is fixed, closed off, and unchanging. The Sirens beckon Odysseus to a past which has become a text, and thus to his own death.

Charles Segal describes the past that the Sirens present as "something frozen and crystallized into lifeless, static form, something dead and past," and thus the heroism is "purely retrospective."16 The total defeat of the Sirens is the moment that Odysseus strings the bow "like a musician" in Book XXII: then song is not something past and dead. Odysseus transmutes into his own living song.

Because it presents the past as something closed and dead, the song of the Sirens is the perversion of epic: "The Sirens have the *terpsis* of the epic bard, but no contact with the kleos that conquers death."17 *Kleos* demands to be relived to be meaningful. The verb of hearing, Segal points out, consistently used to describe the apprehension of the Sirens' song, is *akouein*, and not *kluein*. *Kluein*is etymologically related to *kleos*, and so the repetition of *akouein* emphasizes the literal, physical nature of the hearing, and its distance from the vital hearing of epic. Their song can be blocked by sealing the physical organ of hearing since it is but the ghostly shadow of epic. Further, the "Sirens speak the language of 'knowing' … but no word of 'memory' or 'remembering' characterizes their song."18 Memory is the true source of heroic song, not the sterile recitation or information retrieval of pure knowing. The bard recreates, resuscitates, and recalls to mind the past; memory breathes and quickens.

Sailing beyond the Sirens, Odysseus' ships enter the strait between Scylla and Charybdis. Disregarding the advice of Circe, Odysseus dons his "glorious armor" (*kluta teukhea*) and brandishes two spears to face the dread beast. Scylla, unseen by Odysseus, snatches up six of his men and eats them alive. Odysseus, motionless in his armor, displays the pathetic impotence of Iliadic modes of heroism in the face of new challenges of the sea.

Though Odysseus insists that the crew sail past Thrinacia without mooring, Eurylochus convinces him to let them harbor. After they disembark, the south wind blows unceasingly for a month, and they are becalmed without food. Odysseus wanders off to pray, but falls asleep. Eurylochus rouses the crew to mutiny, and they slay several of Helios' cattle for food. The Sun threatens Zeus that, if he does not punish their insolence, he will shine among the dead, and invert the cosmos. As the men roast meat on the spits, there are portents of ill: the hides crawl on the ground, the meat bellows as it cooks. When they put to the open sea again, Zeus wracks their ship in a fierce storm. Odysseus, drifting on flotsam, is almost swallowed by Charybdis, but he holds desperately onto a fig tree to stay above water. He escapes. Here ends his tale to the enchanted Phaeacians.

The prologue of the *Odyssey* mentions the slaughter of the sun's cattle as the act of overweening insolence for which Odysseus' crew was robbed of its *nostos*. What does this act of insolence signify? There are 350 sheep and 350 cattle grazing on Thrinacia, and their number neither multiplies nor diminishes (*pthinousi*). Aristotle states directly that the livestock of the sun represent the days and nights of the year. The cattle assume a cosmic symbolic import: they are markers of the normal passage of time. When the crew kill the cattle, they are not merely offending Helios. They are desecrating time.19

Calypso offered Odysseus timelessness, a life of light immortality with a goddess, but he chose death and *nostos*. His love, his achievement, his meaning, his heroism all depend upon his death. He could not love with the same urgency, sail home with the same determination, or war with the same sense of tragedy if human life were not so ephemeral. Immortality would trivialize his past achievement, and also his nostalgia. Timelessness—on both Ogygia and Thrinacia—is a besetting trial, because the absence of time dissolves human identity. "In its first stages, the temporal horizon is simply a manifestation of memory."20Memory is the mind's representation of time. The dissolution of time destroys memory, and forgetfulness obscures our sense of time. The slaughter of the cattle violates time; as memory is the internalization of time, temporal disorientation is a type of amnesia. Many of the trials in Odysseus' fantastical wanderings are couched in cognitive language: The lotus flower, the song of the Sirens, and the magic of Circe all threaten "forgetfulness of *nostos.*" The *nostos*is a return to the past, to a region of memory, and so the deepest threat to its completion is amnesia.