



UNIVERSITY OF LISBON
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES
ON SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT AND SEAS



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A Literary and Philosophical Approach

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After all, who is Ulysses?

Ulysses:

- is a latin variant of the greek word Odysséus (Ὀδυσσεύς);
- is a legendary Greek king of Ithaka and the hero of Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, who took a twenty-year expedition to return to his homeland Ithaka.

The Odyssey:

- is about nostos (νόστος), homecoming, a common theme in Ancient Greek Literature;
- is also about cunning. It focuses on a “man of twists and turns”.



The Odyssey – Plot Overview

The inciting action

Begins with the arrival of Athena in Ithaka. Disguised as a sailor, tells Telemachus that his father is still alive and he should set out on a journey to find out what happened to him after the Trojan Wars.

The rising action

Concerns Ulysses, who, after being freed from Calypso's island by Athena, sets out for home, but is shipwrecked by Poseidon, still angry that Odysseus blinded his son, Polyphemus.

The climax

Happens after Ulysses has left Phaeacia and at last returns to Ithaka, where his story merges with Telemachus's and father and son are reunited to face one final obstacle.



What's the meaning of Odissey? Who's then Ulysses?

- *The Odyssey* is the ultimate endorsement of homecoming, the idea that a heroic warrior's greatest triumph comes when he returns from war to his own home and family;
- But *The Odyssey* may offer a profound insight about life in all its complexity, with both the disappointments and the pleasant recollections that become inescapable;
- *The Odyssey* can mean a journey of life, our journey, the journey that one takes through life. And then Ulysses can be any of us in our own's journey.



The journey as chance for Ulysses to find himself

- Ulysses exists unprotected in an environment that leaves him necessarily exposed to fortune, to chance, to adversity in general;
- The journey is the chance of an opening made, according to Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, for wisdom;
- Wisdom as an acute awareness of oneself and the situations in which we find ourselves each time can detect the possibilities of its outcome



- This job is carried out by Ulysses;
- This is the job to be carried out from within the human being;
- The human being is set for happiness, motivated for it;
- Happiness as the real motivation for Ulysses to return to Ithaca.



A drive towards excellence (ἀρετή – aretê)

- Happiness is the end , télos (τέλος) .The human exists to be fulfilled while not happy;
- Happiness is *a certain activity of the human soul according to excellence* (Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle);
- Happiness results from the effort of human action, from acting according to a guiding sense. A kind of contemplative look that opens to an intuitive understanding of the meaning of life.



Ulysses' journey may be the possibility of him to discover the means that will allow him to be truly happy, through wisdom. At stake it is:

- A drive towards excellence;
- A fulfillment of himself;
- The chance of acting with wisdom.



Ithaca and its meaning

- Ithaca is the end and the end, following this philosophical approach, is happiness;
- The end is not the last thing to happen. It means that which is perfect, that to which nothing speaks to be;
- In Ithaca, Ulysses fulfilled himself. Ithaca is the encounter, it is a place where one can be, a place of oneself.
- The question that arises now is the follow:

Is one fulfilled on the arrival at the destination, just like Ulysses, or on the journey guided by Ithaca as a personification of happiness?



Ithaka by Constantine Cavafy

- Poem *Ithaka* written by the greek poet Constantine Cavafy, first published in 1911;
- Based around the great epic *The Odyssey*;
- From the analysis of *The Odyssey* it seems clear that Ulysse's fulfillment takes place on the arrival at the destination. However, by Cavafy's poem it is by no means clear that this is so.





<https://youtu.be/sl3uKXU6VLI>



*“Hope your road is a long one,
Full of adventure, full of discovery.”*





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