

# Intellectual and Emotional Types of Homecoming

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## Summary

In this article my aim is to outline a map of typologies of representations of home, seeking to illuminate the nature of the different issues contained therein, as well as the underlying feelings and mental mechanisms. I therefore try to draw a kind of categorical map of the diverse perspectives implied in the representation of home, or homecoming, or the quest for a home. I distinguish five levels as central categories of the homecoming: the mythical, the ontological-religious, the anthropological, the political, the psychic and pathological.

## Opsomming

My doel met hierdie artikel is om 'n tipologiese kaart van uitbeeldings van die huis te skets, waarin sowel die aard van die verskillende kwessies wat daarin vervat is as die onderliggende gevoelens en geestesmeganismes belig word. Ek probeer dus om 'n kategoriese kaart te teken van die uiteenlopende perspektiewe wat in die uitbeelding van die huis, of tuiskoms, of die soeke na 'n huis veronderstel word. Ek onderskei vyf vlakke as sentrale kategorieë van die tuiskoms: die mitiese, die ontologies-godsdiensige, die antropologiese, die politieke, die psigiese en patologiese.

## Introduction

Whether as a refuge from a labyrinthine and hostile city, a resting place for the worn body and tired soul, or as a memory of the place of original and rooted belonging, which we always carry with us and to which we have an indestructible bond; or whether as a quest and hope that tears the present and projects itself into an imagined future, the representation of the home not only stirs powerful affections and emotions, but also draws out several levels of understanding reality. From the beginnings of thought to contemporary social and political upheavals, through the poetic word, the construction of utopias, the expression of religious anxieties, the universe of ideas, convictions, symbols and feelings contained in the representation of home are so vast and complex that it would be impossible to present a complete overview of the

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immense kaleidoscope of themes and concerns included in this representation. And yet, for those who want to see it more clearly, it seems to me indispensable to try to distinguish the various models for representing home; whether in the form of a homecoming, or a quest for a home or a homeland. In this article, my aim is to outline a map of typologies – naturally incomplete – of representations of home; seeking to illuminate the nature of the different issues contained therein, as well as the underlying mental mechanisms. It is a matter of distinguishing the resonances that inhabit the theme. I will therefore try to draw a kind of categorical map of the diverse perspectives implied in the representation of home, or homecoming, or the quest for a home. I will distinguish the mythical, the ontological-religious, the anthropological, the political, the psychic and pathological. They correspond, I believe, to distinct beatings of the same heart, the same theme.

### **Mythical Thought or the Guarantee of Always Being at Home**

Mythical thought does not directly approach the question of representing home or homecoming, but in its way of understanding reality and in the underlying mental processes, there is a quite obvious intention to exclude all forms of exile and withdrawal from the mundane principles of reality, principles which take the form of exemplary narratives, of myths. The density and centrality bestowed by myth on the behaviour – ritual – of men ensured the fullness of their existence, avoiding all the painful separations; as if man lived always in the Absolute, his unique and original home, which he never left. The intellectual process by which this rootedness is understood and legitimised in this species of full or Absolute totality did not disappear with the emergence of great historical cultures, nor with philosophy, but has remained throughout the ages dressed in other garments, which is yet another reason to understand it.

What is at the basis of this continuous anchoring in the Absolute is a circular conception of time, as Mircea Eliade (1969 a) or G. Gusdorf (1953) have demonstrated so well, whose main consequence is the radiance of the perception of time as a chronology, as a succession of times, a before and after. The absence of a linear conception of time implies an abolition, an impossibility of history, preventing distinction between past, present, and future, and nullifying the multiple relationships that can be established between these three moments. In the mythical mentality, the myth narrates the primordial, exemplary events, those that happened in the mythical past, at the moment of creation, at the moment the world was ordered and that ritual behaviour imitates and updates. The antecedence of the facts narrated in the myth is not a chronological precedence, that is to say, situated in the temporal succession. It is a qualitative, *mythical* precedence, because it describes the events that occurred at the origin, at the beginning of the world, when it

changed from formless chaos to ordered cosmos. Outside the myth nothing exists, nothing has body or meaning; it is purely and simply non-existence. The rite – and outside the rite nothing is conceivable in the life of the group – imitates these gestures of primordial heroes and gods and coincides with them, continually reintroducing the original, creative and unique moment. Man lives thus securely and always in the bosom of the Absolute, of the full order. The intelligibility of the myth precedes and determines the understanding of the empirical phenomena that occur.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, there is no place for novelty, for the unforeseen, or the anxieties that a time opened *ad infinitum* raises. Man is unaware of history and inhabits the unchanging heart of reality. His home is that kind of absolute from which he has never been separated or exiled.

The mythical understanding of space is consistent with the conception of referred time. In the mythical mentality, the inhabited space is identified with the space of ordering or creation, coinciding with it in an indistinguishable way. The inhabited space imitates and updates the first and original space within which man and his actions are rooted. Here again, man does not know, nor can he know – because his mental categories do not allow him – the pains of separation, distance, exile and alienation.

I would thus conclude that this conception of mythical space, combined with the mythical circular conception of time, based on a liturgy of repetition, makes the world a home of full acceptance and also makes every ritual gesture a sacred, eternal and immutable celebration.<sup>2</sup>

## Philosophy as Exile and the Nostalgia of the Absolute

Philosophy is, par excellence, the site of an insurmountable fracture, of radical exile. Born of amazement, nourished by interrogation, philosophy reveals the feeling and perception of an ontological amputation, of an absence that has never truly been filled. The breath that gives it life is revealed in the Greek etymology of the word *philo-sophia* (the love of knowing), indicating an unresolved tension, a desire that is never entirely satisfied, which is both its strength and its weakness. The quest for the Absolute, for a fullness that puts

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1. As Gusdorf (1953: 33) clearly explains: “La vérité intrinsèque de la réalité mythique est donnée dans la mentalité avant l’ affirmation historique de l’ événement.”
  2. Cf. Eliade (1969a: 33): “Par le paradoxe du rite, tout espace consacré coïncide avec le Centre du Monde, tout comme le temps d’ un rituel quelconque coïncide avec le temps mythique du « commencement ». Par la répétition de l’ acte cosmogonique, le temps concret, dans lequel s’ effectue la construction, est projeté dans le temps mythique, *in illo tempore* où la fondation du monde a eu lieu.” See also Eliade (1969 b).

an end to the inconsolable awareness of a fragmented, mutilated existence, has been part of philosophical reflection from its earliest days; the search for the remedy for this “existential indisposition”<sup>3</sup> – philosophers are sick men – has taken on multiple forms of expression, leaving in them, however, the mark of this desire, of this ontological aspiration.

The Platonic theory of *anamnesis* is a good example, and I do not think it is wrong to say that it is the philosophical formulation of a circular thought structure, analogous to that which we have just characterised in the primitive mentality. In Plato’s narrative, as it appears in the *Meno* (81 a-e), a narrative wrapped in still mythical robes, the immortal soul has already contemplated the Ideas in a previous moment, but due to a crime, to a lack, the soul fell into the prison of the senses, from which the only way to free itself is to remember the Ideas, through the use of a qualitative memory that allows it to return to the contemplation of these principles. This ascendant memory, the “*anamnesis*”, is the path that enables us to *return* to the “beginning”, to first principles, giving us access to contemplation/ communion with the Ideas again.<sup>4</sup> The circular structure is maintained, allowing an intermediate fault to be overcome. It could be said that this “story” is a fairly popular way of establishing the need to admit a “previous” instance of experience as the basis of its own possibility of knowledge. Otherwise, we would remain in the paradox of never being able to know what we do not; because if we do not know what it is, we cannot look for it. One could also ask what triggers this process of reminiscence – the desire to know, *eros*, the will? – and whether this process is mediate (discursive, based on *ratio*) or immediate (based on an intellectual intuition). It is not, however, the gnosiological question that interests us here. What is important is to underline this longing to return to an earlier, though now lost, fullness, a process that can be understood as the return to our true home.

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3. As Álvaro de Campos, one of Fernando Pessoa’s heteronyms, said: “metaphysics is a consequence of feeling out of sorts.” Cf. *Tabacaria*: “I light a cigarette as I think of writing them / And I savour in the cigarette liberation from all thought. / I follow the smoke like a route of my own, / And enjoy, for a sensitive and competent moment, / Liberation from all speculations / And awareness that metaphysics is a consequence of feeling out of sorts” (Pessoa 1982).
  4. Cf. Plato, *Meno*, 81 d (translation Lamb): “Seeing then that the soul is immortal and has been born many times, and has beheld all things both in this world and in the nether realms, she has acquired knowledge of all and everything; so that it is no wonder that she should be able to recollect all that she knew before about virtue and other things. For as all nature is akin, and the soul has learned all things, there is no reason why we should not, by remembering but one single thing – an act which men call learning – discover everything else, if we have courage and faint not in the search; since, it would seem, research and learning are wholly recollection (*anamnesis*).”

In Christianity, the idea of a return to one's origins has often taken the form of a literal return to the Paradise lost when we were expelled due to original sin. I am not only referring to the psychological dimension that tends to see the past nostalgically, imagining it as a golden age that has withered and been lost in time. On the religious rather than the psychological plane, it is the existential situation of man and his redemption; in other words, his estrangement from God by virtue of Adam's sin and the return to God is, above all, a question of overcoming the alienation into which sin has thrown us and fulfilling the vocation given to men by God. Through grace, faith and deeds, man shall return home, to his house, the home of the Father.

This theological view, however, in imagining the final moment, the *eschaton*, coinciding with the initial moment, betrays the sense of history and the idea of man's spiritual growth throughout life. One of the main legacies of Judeo-Christianity is precisely the idea of history: the conception of a time that is projected in the future and which, understood as theophany, is the setting for the revelation of God's plan to save Man, which transforms all history into the History of Salvation. The Word of God is manifested in the temporality of a single and irreversible time, fertilising the ephemeral becoming of events with the revelation of He who is neither subject to time nor history: God. Conceived in this way, history, always dealing with the horizontality of passing time, is crossed by epiphanies (by revelations) of the Timeless God who commands, guides and gives meaning to history (the most important obviously being that of the incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of Christ). For this reason, history, in essence, is always the History of Salvation because it is the fulfilment of God's plan to save men. The ultimate meaning of this history is the culminating moment in which, as St. Paul says: "God will be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15: 28). In this eschatology, the final moment, itself set beyond History, represents the paradise to be found, the last dwelling that is actually reserved for us, home to joyful delights of complete and absolute communion with God. In this case, Paradise is not identified with any previous situation; it is a Paradise still to be found, the true home to live in at the end of the pilgrimage undertaken here and now, in our life. This desire, not of returning home, but of finding a home, arouses a nostalgia not of the past, but of what awaits us, a kind of restlessness looking to the future, a burning desire to be welcomed by the Father. St. Augustine expressed this in exemplary fashion: "But still, since he is a part of your creation, he wishes to praise you. The thought of you stirs him so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you." (*Confessions*, I, 1, 1, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin)<sup>5</sup>

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5. According to James J. O'Donnell's (1992) version: "et tamen laudare te vult homo, aliqua portio creaturae tuae. tu excitas, ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te."

Portuguese thought and culture have a very particular way of expressing this “nostalgia” through the term “saudade” that some claim to be untranslatable, revealing a special trait of Portuguese identity.<sup>6</sup> I do not want to dwell on this issue, nor on how “saudade” appeared and has developed in Portuguese history. It is enough, for purposes of this essay, to discuss the feelings and meanings that the word conjures up. “Saudade” is a word of debatable etymology.<sup>7</sup> It is, however, related to the Latin *solus* and its derivatives *solitudo* and *solita*, coming from the same semantic area as the idea of being alone – the Portuguese words “soidão” and “solidão” derive precisely from *solitudo*. Starting from *solitatem*, and using only the usual phonetic phenomena in the passage from Latin to Portuguese, we can see the formation of the words “soedade” and “soidade”, as well as “suidão” and “suidade”: terms that are in the origin of “saudade”. Respecting this etymological trail, we see that the spark that fires these terms is the idea of separation, of solitary distance, understood as geographical and spatial distance, in a wild and isolated place, or as a temporal and psychic distance, a seed of feelings of abandonment and helplessness, of melancholy sadness and nostalgia since although this distancing may be “mild and delightful”, it is mostly sad and painful. Others believe they see the influence of the Arab *saudá* and *suidá* in “saudade”, expressions that have the normal sense of bitter sadness – literally, “a dark blood burst within the heart”, which would not take us out of the same semantic field. This psychological resonance, having unthinkingly forgotten what is no longer there, cannot blind us to the glow of another departure, another exile, no longer psychological but ontological, of which, at least for some, “saudade” will be a voice of an awakened messenger. How do we characterise a “saudade” consciousness and how does this ontological dimension arise? The path that allows us to reach the deep beating of “saudade” was mapped out by Duarte Nunes de Leão (1983: 304) when, in the early 17th century, he said that “saudade” is a memory of something along with the desiring of it.<sup>8</sup> According to this, at the core of “saudade” is the acceptance of a distance, a distance never completely overcome; as well as the perception of deprivation, both felt and thought, and never entirely fulfilled. In the “saudade”, the consciousness is in tension, divided between the situation in which it is and this other revisited situation, remembered,

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6. About this subject see José Pedro Serra, A saudade: memória e desejo na modulação da alma, *Isleña* 44, 2009, pp. 25-33.
  7. About the etymology of the word see Vasconcelos (1922); Costa & Gomes (1976); Botelho & Teixeira (1986).
  8. We could compare the meaning of the Portuguese word “saudade” with the Catalan “anyoransa”, the German “sehnsucht” or the Romanian “doru” or even with the Danish “svan”, the Swedish “saknad” and the Icelandic “saknaor”. However, this would be the subject for another essay.

desired and loved. In its first appearances, whose echoes are already felt in Galician-Portuguese poetry, “saudade” refers precisely to that sorrowful feeling caused by being apart from the loved one; the pain that memory, according to its possessions, consoles and sweetens. There is no surprise in the double valuing, the ambivalence with which one assesses the experience of this absent presence. Still in the 17th century, Francisco Manuel de Melo (1975) said that “it is an evil that you like, and a blessing from which you suffer”.<sup>9</sup> In a strict sense, therefore, immediately perceptible, and in accordance with the personal bond it bursts out of, the “saudade” consciousness is *in-tense*, in the sense that it implies a *self-absorption*, a concentration in itself. At the same time, it is a *retro-tense* consciousness; in other words, a consciousness that is directed towards a past to which it is linked by memory. If we remain, however, in this plane, our understanding of “saudade” would be incomplete, perhaps even mutilated. The word contains, perhaps more veiled but no less present, a forward-looking intention, a sign of the *pro-tense* dimension in which that *in-tensity* and *retro-tenseness* come together.<sup>10</sup> And it is here, it seems to me, that we stand at the dawn of another meaning. “Saudade” is not only the evocation of a lost past that time has turned into ashen traces. This connection to the past is so vivid and powerful, it is so firmly established in it that, in the “saudade”, the past, that gloomy presence in the light of projected absence, is rescued by memory, metamorphosing into a promise of meeting at a future time. In other words, “saudade” is more than nostalgia, it is nostalgia redeemed. Therefore, with the diverse times brought together by the “saudade” consciousness overcome, “saudade” is revealed to be not so much of the past, but of the future. Or, if we prefer, in the elliptical formulation of Teixeira de Pascoaes, “‘saudade’ is the hope of the future”. This transfiguration of temporality, however, becomes clearer if we immediately ask: and what “saudade” does “saudade” have? What does memory remember so lovingly? According to what has been said, initially, the object of this memory is the past happiness that time has spoiled, the sweet idyll now vanished from the present. Underlying this psychological shudder, taking it as a mask of something deeper, there is, however, the appeal, no longer psychological but ontological, to the Absolute, to the fullness of being, that the loving quest is a symbol and, perhaps, messenger. Behind the scattered and fragmented romantic adventures, like an igneous fire granting them the energy that moves them, is the inconsolable longing for Being, whole and full, an aspiration that is based on the wound of our human ontological mutilation. In the heart of nostalgia, piercing the concrete garments that envelop it, is the loving desire to inhabit the Absolute whose absence is very much present.

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9. The Portuguese reads: “é um mal de que se gosta e um bem, que se padece”.

10. On the characterisation of the *times* of wistful awareness, see Carvalho (1987).

Just to finish this already long item, I want to mention an important aspect of this desire to return to the Absolute: the relation between the One and the multiple to borrow, gratefully, from the Greeks. Indeed, in Greece we find multiple expressions of the incomplete and fragmented return of the individual to the primordial One. The reflection on Anaximander's *apeiron* (the indeterminate) in terms of asking about the first principle, could well serve as first reference (Diels & Kranz 1956, fr. 12 B 1). More important than this, however, is the Dionysian religion and its expression in the Theban ritual (the Theban Trieterides) performed at night on Mount Citeron. In opposition to the official ritual of the *polis*, Apollonian in nature, Dionysus proposed to his followers (a feminine cult) grouped together – the *tiaso* – the experience of a delirious communion, where nature, man and god are fused in a kind of primordial unity. I say delirious, in the etymological sense of the term: *delirium*, which comes from the verb *delirare* – the *lira* was a kind of plough that furrowed the earth. It means to jump from the track, from the traced groove and, by implication, to jump from reason, from the track outlined by reason, or to become “delirious”. That is why Dionysus is the god of frenzy, of the tempestuous orgy. The internal logic of the Dionysian religion was based on the attempt to overcome individuality, in frantic and dissolute communion: where everything dissolves, from man into nature, into God, touching the immortal principle of life that is manifested in all individuals.<sup>11</sup> This fusion with the storm of life is also a form of redemption, of salvation, as if God said: “free yourself from yourself, free yourself from your particularities and you will be saved.” It is not by chance that these rituals took place at night, lit by torches and with frenzied dance. The night draws the most distant things closer and blends them in the same breath; in the same ripple the most different beings and things find those illusory identities

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11. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche strongly characterised the Dionysian spirit: “In the same place Schopenhauer also described for us the monstrous horror which seizes a man when he suddenly doubts his ways of comprehending illusion, when the sense of a foundation, in any one of its forms, appears to suffer a breakdown. If we add to this horror the ecstatic rapture, which rises up out of the same collapse of the principium individuationis from the innermost depths of human beings, yes, from the innermost depths of nature, then we have a glimpse into the essence of the Dionysian, which is presented to us most closely through the analogy to intoxication. [...] The strange mixture and ambiguity in the emotions of the Dionysian celebrant remind him, as healing potions remind him of deadly poison, of that sense that pain awakens joy, that the jubilation in his chest rips out cries of agony. From the most sublime joy echoes the cry of horror or the longingly plaintive lament over an irreparable loss. In those Greek festivals it was as if a sentimental feature of nature is breaking out, as if nature has to sigh over her dismemberment into separate individuals” (trans. by Ian C. Johnston).  
Available at <http://www.russoeconomics.altervista.org/Nietzsche.pdf>.  
About this subject see Dodds (2004).



bestowed by the deceiving light of the Sun erased. The night is mystical, with a luminosity that the dull sunlight, the principle of distinction and individuality, will never achieve.

It is of no surprise that the romantics (the hymns to the night)<sup>12</sup> and some later poets were interested in this immersion in the Absolute, the mystic fusion in the One, the idea of death redeemed by the Whole. Focusing only on the inexhaustible theme of the relationship between *eros* and *thanatos*, between passion and death, here are Isolde's words preceding her death in Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*:

“Friends! Look!  
Do you not feel and see it?  
Do I alone hear  
this melody  
so wondrously  
and gently  
sounding from within him, in bliss lamenting,  
all-expressing,  
gently reconciling,  
piercing me,  
soaring aloft,  
its sweet echoes  
resounding about me?  
Are they gentle  
aerial waves  
ringing out clearly,  
surging around me?  
Are they billows  
of blissful fragrance?  
As they seethe  
and roar about me,  
shall I breathe,  
shall I give ear?  
Shall I drink of them,  
plunge beneath them?  
Breathe my life away  
in sweet scents?  
In the heaving swell,

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12. In addition to Novalis' famous evening hymns, one could quote Álvaro de Campos' *Ode to the Night*: “Come, selfsame and ageless Night, / Queen of Night, born dethroned / Night matching innermost silence, Night / Spangled with fast flying stars / In your dress fringed by Infinitude. / Come drifting, / Come lightly, / come in solemn, alone, hands fallen/At your sides / come Bearing the distant hills down to the foot of the trees nearby / Fusing all fields I see into your one field / Turn the mountain into a single block of your body, / Expunge from it each bit of difference I see from afar. (trans. by Edwin Honig and Susan M. Brown)

in the resounding echoes,  
in the universal stream  
of the world-breath –  
to drown,  
to founder –  
unconscious –  
utmost rapture!<sup>13</sup>

### **The Anthropological Viewpoint: Homecoming or the Discovery of the Human**

It was also the Greeks, at the very beginning of their literature, who consecrated the genre that can be broadly termed “travel literature”. *The Odyssey* tells the story of Ulysses’ adventures on his return to Ithaca from the Trojan War, a homecoming that takes ten years. The son of Laertes, the man of a thousand artifices and who suffered a great deal, is often pointed out as an example of the traveller who approaches strange lands and customs. What is important to understand, however, is the meaning of this voyage, of this wandering in the sea of dangers and storms that make you more experienced and wiser. If we look at the beings that Ulysses encounters along the way, we will find that they are either monsters or divine beings, set in planes that are either inhuman or superhuman. The exception are the Phaeacians, the people of the lovely Nausicaa, the only one Ulysses will fondly remember in Ithaca (Od. 8, 461-468),<sup>14</sup> and who plays a decisive role in his successful homecoming. The Lotus Eaters, the Cyclops and Lestrygonians, Scylla and Charybdis are monsters that represent terrible dangers, and threaten his life, but Ulysses wins by his cleverness. (The Cyclops represents the negation of community life without assemblies and without fear of the gods – unthinkable for a Greek).

Circe, the Sirens and Calypso are superhumans, although they represent even greater dangers for Ulysses’ humanity. The transformation of Ulysses’ companions into pigs at Circe’s hands shows the risk of a degrading metamorphosis and the terror of a fall into bestiality. Now is not the time to enquire into the reasons for that metamorphosis – perhaps linked to a failure of *eros* – but there is no doubt that it represents a degradation of the human, a

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13. *Tristan and Isolde, libretto* by Richard Wagner. Available at <http://www.impresario.ch/libretto/libwagtrie.htm>.

14. “Farewell, stranger, and hereafter even in thy own native land mayest thou remember me, for to me first thou owest the price of life.” Then Odysseus of many wiles answered her: “Nausicaa, daughter of great-hearted Alcinous, so may Zeus grant, the loud-thundering lord of Here, that I may reach my home and see the day of my returning. Then will I even there pray to thee as to a god all my days, for thou, maiden, hast given me life.” (trans. by A.T. Murray)

descent from the human to the most brutish animality. Calypso represents the contrasting danger. An immortal goddess, more beautiful than any woman, her offer of immortality intended to seduce Ulysses, keeping him on the beautiful Island of Ogygia, represents to the hero the death of his humanity, buried in the ashes of his memory, forgotten by his wife Penelope, his son Telemachus, “his high-ceilinged home in Ithaca visible in the distance”. The erasing of his memory means the ruin of his own person, the loss of his identity. The immortality offered to Ulysses is not compatible with his deepest human identity, made of his history and memory and, so he cannot, therefore, accept it. But the risk of oblivion is certainly the most difficult and tempting risk the hero goes through. To all these dangers, we should add the visit to Hades where he will consult Tiresias on how to return. If Ulysses is known for being the hero of limits, one who always seems to wander about extreme possibilities, this episode contributes decisively to that fame. Very rare things – if there are any – are as uneven as being among the living and the dead. To the dead belongs the kingdom of Hades, the recondite kingdom of the shadows; to the living the light of the Sun, for as long as the great sleep of bronze does not descend upon mortals. To confuse the two planes is to disorganise the real, dangerously disturbing its order. From what we have been able to present synthetically on the journey of Achilles, we realise that the journey of Ulysses is far from being on an ethnographic or customary plane. His risky journey, always carried out at extreme limits, whether geographical, political or moral, represents the trip of those who look for the humanity that characterises them. In the dialogue with the monsters and the divine beings it is the contours of the human that gain importance. Basically, the *Odyssey* is an analogous way of trying to answer the question of the Sphinx: “What (Who) is man?” That is why I am setting this argument on the anthropological level.

Over time, and through the numerous readings that have been made of *The Odyssey*, this search for what is human in man has been blurred, leaving only the idea of travel. One of the readings that best characterises the latent despair in contemporary times and the absurdity that has invaded life, largely the result of the major news story from the 19th century – the death of God – (if we remember fragment 125 from *The Gay Science*, or Ivan Karamazov's statement that “if God is dead, everything is allowed”) is that presented by C. P. Cavafy in his famous poem, “Ithaca”.<sup>15</sup> Here, with the port of arrival lost;

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15. “As you set out for Ithaka / hope your road is a long one, / full of adventure, full of discovery. / Laistrygonians, Cyclops, / angry Poseidon – don't be afraid of them: / you'll never find things like that on your way / as long as you keep your thoughts raised high, as long as a rare excitement / stirs your spirit and your body. / Laistrygonians, Cyclops, / wild Poseidon – you won't encounter them / unless you bring them along inside your soul, / unless your soul sets them up in front of you. / Hope your road is a long one. / May there be many summer mornings when, with what pleasure, what joy, / you enter harbors

lost, too, the reference that guided the arrival and gave it meaning, the only things of importance are the journey, experience and wisdom that can be extracted from it. This is the meaning Cavafy found for the mythical Ithaca: the generous gift of the journey, the interlaced adventure of dreams and experiences: although the island remains, that island, where we effectively cure the evils of our finitude, is reduced to the truth of illusion that can still stir the soul. If in Homer it is the memory of Penelope's living hand that guides Ulysses; here, on this journey, it is the fleshless hand of Penelope that steers the ship. The anthropological quest has become a kind of disenchanting party along the way.

### **The Political Exile and the Transformation of Emigrants into Vagabonds on Earth**

We also find in the myth the significant model of abandonment and exile, of that cruel indifference that turns the other into something indifferent in the course of our actions. Left alone on a desert island, suffering from a wound in the foot whose stench becomes unbearable for his companions, Philoctetes is left to his fate by the indifference of the Greek army on its way to Troy. It is only their need of Philoctetes' bow for the conquest of Troy that makes the Greeks, led by Ulysses, return to this deserted island with the intention of carrying it off. Sophocles portrays this episode, in which the cynicism and perverse rhetoric of Ulysses contrasts with the unguarded and innocent youth of Neoptolomus. At the heart of this tragedy is the notion of *paideia*, the education of the young at the heart of the polis and, of course, the place of the other in the collective construction of the city, where noble feelings are mixed with political interests and manipulation.

The idea of exile as a political measure is very old not only in myth, but also in concrete political order, and we find it in Ancient Greece, even as a prudent decision to ward off tyrannical impulses. Ostracism, the name derived from *ostraka*, the stone upon which someone's exile was voted, was a prophylactic

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you're seeing for the first time; / may you stop at Phoenician trading stations / to buy fine things, / mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony, / sensual perfume of every kind – as many sensual perfumes as you can; / and may you visit many Egyptian cities / to learn and go on learning from their scholars. / Keep Ithaca always in your mind. / Arriving there is what you're destined for. / But don't hurry the journey at all. / Better if it lasts for years, / so you're old by the time you reach the island, / wealthy with all you've gained on the way, / not expecting Ithaca to make you rich. / Ithaca gave you the marvelous journey. / Without her you wouldn't have set out. / She has nothing left to give you now. / And if you find her poor, Ithaca won't have fooled you. / Wise as you will have become, so full of experience, / you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean." (trans. by Edmund Keeley / Philip Sherrard)

measure that sought to prevent an individual from becoming too important by disturbing the democratic order of the *polis*. In many cases, these exiles were quite mild and comfortable. There were also other far rougher and more famous examples, as in the case of Ovid. The 21st century, however, presents us, above all in Europe, with a radically different and very serious situation. In the aftermath of prolonged periods of war, of intense destruction, wars that the West has often imprudently helped to foment, we are witnessing a desperate migration of people from the peripheries, searching for a home in Europe, where they may be allowed to live. These migrants, however, sometimes face insurmountable difficulties, which have turned the Mediterranean into a sad tomb of voices calling for help. Emigration raises complex problems as it involves economic, linguistic, behavioural and customs issues. Besides these, there are also the decisive psychological and social questions present in the perception of the other, of the different, where this difference can represent a danger to one's own. And here many fears arise and insinuate the movements that create scapegoats. What I designate from a political perspective is very broad and cannot be developed now. I shall confine myself to a brief commentary on a work by Elfriede Jelinek, *The Supplicants*, published in 2013, in which the author portrays the immeasurable suffering of refugees of all times and of how they are perceived, including by the media today. The text refers once again to the Greeks, to the tragedians and, in particular, to Aeschylus. It turns out, however, that the text of Aeschylus' *Supplicants* has an ambiguity about the appeal and welcome of the interesting and complex refugee. Let us look at the situation. Coming from the Nile delta, the daughters of Danaus, the Danaides, appear in Argos as supplicants, fleeing the sons of Egypt that violently persecute them, forcing them to marry against their will. Pelasgus, king of Argos, finds himself in a dreadful dilemma: either he shelters the Danaides, respecting Zeus, protector of the Supplicants, and sets off a war against the Egyptians, or he spares his city the privations of conflict, but disrespects the law of the gods. At first, the daughters of Danaus seem like weak doves persecuted by violent hawks. The situation, however, soon becomes more complex. In addition to the suspicion of misandry which falls upon the maidens, who would refuse not only the Egyptians, but all men – hence their outward resemblance to the Amazons – the Danaides behave brutally and violently in threatening to hang themselves from the statues of the gods, a particularly wicked act that would cause a *miasma*, a stain of pollution upon Argos and its inhabitants. What I find interesting is the idea of assigning, correctly or falsely, blame on the supplicants that removes their veil of innocence, making it difficult to receive them and grant them an effective home. The lesson of Aeschylus allows us to look more closely at the situation of those who, today, fleeing from a war that victimises them, are held in suspicion, due to the supposed connection with terrorism that threatens the West in its fundamental principles and values. And

for them, to be accepted in a homeland becomes even more difficult, and the dreamed home becomes a walking asylum in man's land.

### **The Psychological and Psycho-Pathological Perspective**

I would like to add just a few words on the psychological and psycho-pathological perspective. Although indirectly, I have already referred to the awareness of life's ephemeral nature, to the feeling of loss linked to a past that does not return, to the voracity of a time that kills dreams and borders everything with the shadow of death. Returning to the home of our youth, to the dewy dawns of happy days, has been an inexhaustible source of lyricism. It seems useless to reinforce it.

More curious, because less evident, is the pathological tonality that this connection to the past can have, physically and emotionally debilitating the man who suffers it. It was, however, in pathology that the word "nostalgia" was born. Coined by Jean Hofer in the late 17th century (Bolzinger 2007), it appears in the title of a dissertation, *Dissertatio de Nostalgia*, as part of his doctoral thesis. In this text, the term "nostalgia" designates the pathology of those who, when removed from home, became ill, became lethargic, became listless and apathetic. Only by returning home did he manage to cure this illness. In addition to the specific cases pointed out by Hofer, there are the famous examples of Swiss soldiers, fighting far from home, over whom death hovered, brought on by nostalgia. Disengaged from a creative capacity, wrapped in robes of extreme emotion, nostalgia for home can become depressing and petrifying, leading to an incapacity, a paralysis which, to some degree, is analogous to oblomovism, Oblomov's disease, the eponymous hero of the famous novel by Ivan Goncharov. This may also be a path worth exploring.

### **Conclusion**

In this reflection, I have tried to outline some perspectives, as well as categories, implicit in representations of home, whether it is the homecoming, or the quest for a home. I am not saying, of course, that they are exclusive, since they may well be joined by others. Each of the *items* presented allows for a vastly expanded development, an inexhaustible extension. My goal was to show the complex network implied in the representation of home and the various subtle threads, some bright, others sombre, that involve our sense of dwelling as well as the feeling of exile.

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