

## 1 REBELS AGAINST THE GODS: PROMETHEUS, ODYSSEUS, JOB

The Prometheus myth lays the groundplan of what is most central in all subsequent Western history and literature. Prometheus himself subsumes God and Lucifer, Adam and Christ. In some versions of the myth, Prometheus (whose name means 'foresight'), a Titan, son of Earth herself, makes the first men. In others, men spring spontaneously from the earth, but Prometheus is the first and only god to make common cause with them, to assume responsibility for them (since they are utterly helpless), to take sides with them against a tyrannical god, to commit the first crimes on their behalf, and voluntarily to suffer the extreme of physical and mental torment in order to guarantee their survival and progress. The myth tells us nothing of his motives. He is unique among Greek gods in that he seems to have no *raison d'être* beyond his partnership with man. Most of his fellow Titans had been defeated by Zeus and the Olympian gods and subjected to terrible punishments. Prometheus' foresight had enabled him to predict the outcome and take sides with Zeus. He is equally able to see the even more terrible consequences for himself of his later single-handed rebellion against Zeus on behalf of man, yet accepts them, as if he had no choice. He seems to represent that which is indestructible in the human spirit - man's aspiration to raise himself above the condition of the brutes and become independent of both nature and the gods. If that spirit is an absolute, then it is also, for the Greeks, a *theos*, a god. Equally, he can be seen as an eternal image of the imperfection of man's nature, his greed, pride, violence, materialism, his blinkered intelligence. To try to put it more neutrally, as the myth does, he embodies man's inability to submit to the given conditions of his being, which always seem to man to constitute, in themselves, an injustice against him.

Ovid elaborates on Hesiod's account of Prometheus as creator of man:

Though all the beasts  
Hang their heads from horizontal backbones  
And study the earth  
Beneath their feet, Prometheus  
Upended man into the vertical –  
So to comprehend balance.  
Then tipped up his chin  
So to widen his outlook on heaven.

[*Tales from Ovid*, 8]

Not only does this free man's hands to become tool-maker, weapon-maker and technician, it also makes man the 'godlike novelty' of all creation, the only creature capable, for good or ill, of looking beyond the earth and of aspiring to a condition of superiority to its conditions and processes. Thus Prometheus planted in man the seeds of rebellion against the given conditions, nature's laws.

Prometheus' next significant act in relation to man was to slay an ox. According to Pliny he was the first ever to do so. His purpose, presumably, was to provide man with meat. Knowing that such a sacrilegious act would anger Zeus, he instituted sacrifice, whereby man might provide himself with meat and placate the gods simultaneously. Thus sacrifice was invented as a cover-up for sacrilege. So one-sided were Prometheus' sympathies, so irresistible his trickster nature, that he could not resist attempting to trick Zeus himself by hiding all the good meat in the stomach-sac, covering the bones with luscious fat, and then inviting Zeus to choose. Did he really expect all-seeing Zeus to be taken in? Zeus saw through the deception, but deliberately chose the bones in order to give himself an excuse to condemn man to misery or extinction by withholding fire, without which man's condition would be wretched, bestial and hopeless.

Prometheus had another trick up his sleeve. He stole a spark of fire from the gods concealed in a hollow fennel stalk, and gave it to man. The possession of the divine spark bestows on man his essential subsequent condition, combining the mortality of the beasts with the power of the gods. Zeus had withheld fire expressly so that man should die out. Therefore, Prometheus' theft is an act of salvation, and a protest against injustice. Man needed fire to keep himself warm, to cook his meat, to smelt iron to make utensils. A surviving fragment of Aeschylus' *Prometheus the Fire Kindler* is part of a lesson in smelting. But Prometheus foresaw that eventually the gift would enable man to do much more than this, to stand spiritually erect, to become independent and civilized. He taught man all his own skills: architecture, astronomy, mathematics, navigation, medicine, metallurgy, and other useful arts. As Aeschylus writes in *Prometheus Bound*:

And fire has proved  
For men a teacher in every art, their grand resource.

The myth foretells man's appropriation of nature, of life itself, his creator, to his own purposes. The myth itself does not prejudge the issues. It neither validates nor condemns Prometheus. It is open to whatever

interpretation writers who draw upon it choose to give it. The Promethean fire has been for some writers (Shelley, for example) man's glory, his unbreakable revolutionary spirit. Prometheus is the hero who lifted man out of the mud and gave him his humanity with its limitless potential. He bared his own breast to draw the wrath of Zeus upon himself, suffering pain and humiliation incalculable that man might be free, confident of ultimate victory. Not only Zeus, but all the other gods would die. The savage god's days are numbered unless he can arrive at some accommodation with man. Only Prometheus would live on, in man, to witness man's apotheosis.

Such an interpretation has become more difficult for us, witnesses as we are of the culmination. We are more likely to see the gift of fire as just as deceptive as Zeus' gift to men through Prometheus' brother Epimetheus of Pandora, described by Hesiod as 'an evil thing in which they may all be glad of heart while they embrace their own destruction'. Perhaps Zeus in his wisdom had better motives for withholding fire, and Prometheus worse motives for stealing it. Fire is the divine creative and destructive energy of the universe. The gift of fire puts into man's hands power which he is quite incapable of handling safely. It will not be long before he is forging weapons. The logical conclusion of the gift of fire, its contemporary equivalent, is nuclear power. Roszak reports that

J. Robert Oppenheimer, witnessing the first test of a nuclear weapon, confessed to tasting sin. But he and all his colleagues knew from the beginning what lay waiting at the end of the project. And which was the stronger flavor, the sin, or the satisfaction of having stolen fire from the gods? [195]

Therefore, from another perspective, Prometheus, like all tricksters, gets it wrong. In trying to remedy what he takes to be God's mistakes, he makes things even worse. He commits, on man's behalf, the original sin, a theft of forbidden knowledge, the purpose of which and the punishment for which is to separate man from nature and from divinity, to encourage man to indulge in *hubris*, that Faustian pride which prompts him to become his own god, or to remake the gods in his own image. In *Frankenstein* Shelley's wife saw this as *hubris* taken to the point of suicidal insanity.

In teaching man sacrifice and the use of fire, Prometheus taught him to destroy both Fauna and Flora, in Kerenyi's words to 'strike wounds in the divine environment' [*Prometheus*, 53]. In this he is the exact opposite of Osiris:

Osiris became the first king of Egypt and the creator of civilization, teaching his people the art of cultivation and the honouring of the gods, 'establishing justice throughout both banks of the Nile'. He taught the Egyptians how to plant wheat and barley, how to gather the fruit from the trees and to cultivate the vine, and before their time the races of the world had been but savages. When he travelled to teach other nations, Isis ruled vigilantly and peacefully in his absence. [Baring 228]

Mythically, it was Prometheus who determined that the Neolithic Golden Age should be violently replaced by the terrible Age of Bronze:

Earth's natural plenty no longer sufficed.  
Man tore open the earth, and rummaged in her bowels.  
Precious ores the Creator had concealed  
As close to hell as possible  
Were dug up – a new drug  
For the criminal. So now iron comes  
With its cruel ideas. And gold  
With crueller. Combined they bring war –  
War, insatiable for the one,  
With bloody hands employing the other.  
Now man lives only by plunder. [Tales from Ovid 12]

Prometheus continues throughout his agony, crucified upon a crag, his liver pecked out daily by Zeus' vulture, to rail at Zeus. Zeus is identified with things as they are, eternity. Zeus fears change and is angered by any attempt to bring it about. Prometheus, for all his foresight, knows and foresees less than Zeus. He is distinguished from Zeus and almost all the other gods by his inability to accept things as they are, his assumption that permanent change - evolution, 'progress' - must be preferable. He is motivated partly by compassion for man, but also by Faustian pride, which blinds him to the long-term consequences. The would-be redeemer is himself in need of redemption, and that can be bought only by suffering:

I must be bowed by age-long pain and grief.  
So only will my bonds be loosed. [Prometheus Unbound]

Prometheus must undergo an ego-death. He must accept suffering as a necessary and permanent part of the human condition. Kerenyi interprets the wreath with which the delivered Prometheus is crowned as a

sign and token of release and redemption, of repentance and reconciliation with Zeus, the symbol of a bond with the hard laws of a luminous, rigidly established heaven consciously accepted by an eternally restless being, a victim of injustice, a sufferer from his own darkness, exposed to unendurable torments. [127]

Given that only fragments survive of the first and third parts of Aeschylus' trilogy, such interpretations must remain speculative, but they are in accord with the most recent recycling of the myth in Ted Hughes' *Prometheus on his Crag*. Hughes' version also testifies to the validity of Nietzsche's account of the permanent relevance of the Prometheus myth:

The presupposition of the Prometheus myth is primitive man's belief in the supreme value of fire as the true palladium of every rising civilization. But for man to dispose of fire freely, and not receive it as a gift from heaven in the kindling thunderbolt and the warming sunlight, seemed a crime to thoughtful primitive man, a despoiling of divine nature. Thus the original philosophical problem poses at once an insoluble conflict between men and the gods, which lies like a huge boulder at the gateway to every culture. [The Birth of Tragedy, 63]

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The original palladium was a protective statue of Pallas Athene (given to Troy by Zeus himself) which Odysseus stole. Odysseus, like Prometheus, was a clever trickster, and a robber and enemy of the gods. However, he differs from Prometheus in several important respects: first, he is entirely human and mortal; second, his actions are purely selfish; third, he is successful, winning, at last, (in Homer's telling), the admiration of Athene and the respect of men and gods.

In *Occidental Mythology* Joseph Campbell gives a lengthy interpretation of *The Odyssey* in terms of a spiritual quest and initiation in which Odysseus overcomes the psychically disabling divisions between male and female, life and death, culminating 'in a realization of an identity *in esse* of the individual (microcosm) and the universe (macrocosm)' [164]. That the adventure begins

with a crime, the sacking of Ismarus, a particularly bloody crime with women as booty (which is all in a day's work for Odysseus), is not in dispute. Zeus responds to this with a tempest, which drives Odysseus' ships 'beyond the bounds of the known world'. But once Odysseus has entered the mythic realm, according to Campbell he can do no wrong. Campbell can describe the encounter with the Cyclops as 'self-divestiture' only by ignoring completely the last two and a half pages of the 'Cyclops' chapter, where Odysseus rashly reinvests himself with the full string of his names and titles and ensures the enmity of Poseidon himself. Odysseus is occasionally humiliated, but never humble. He is downcast, but shows no sign of the self-questioning which characterizes the Dark Night of the Soul (which Campbell would have us believe he enters). His encounters with Circe, Calypso, and Nausicaa represent, we are told, 'psychological adventures in the mythic realm of the archetypes of the soul, where the male must *experience* the import of the female before he can meet her perfectly in life' [164]. The most important of these females is Circe: 'The goddess who in her terrible aspect is the cannibal ogress of the Underworld was in her benign aspect the guide and guardian to that realm and, as such, the giver of immortal life' [171]. Campbell ends by contrasting Greece with India and the Judaic world. In the bible the dialogue between patriarchal and matriarchal thought is 'deliberately suppressed in favour exclusively of the male'. In India

the principle of masculine ego initiative was suppressed, even to the point of dissolving the will to individual life; whereas in Greece the masculine will and ego not only held their own, but prospered in a manner that at that time was unique in the world: not in the way of the compulsive 'I want' of childhood (which is the manner and concept of the ego normal to the Orient), but in the way of a self-responsible intelligence, released from both 'I want' and 'thou shalt', rationally regarding and responsibly judging the world of empirical facts, with the final aim not of serving gods but of developing and maturing man. For, as Karl Kerényi has well put it: 'The Greek world is chiefly one of sunlight, though not the sun, but man, stands at its centre'. [173-4]

It is strange that Campbell should here allow himself to be so carried away by the attractions of the emerging anthropocentric vision, for in his opening chapter he had expressed deep reservations about 'the warrior principle of the great deed of the individual who matters', 'the freely willing, historically effective hero':

And yet, one cannot help feeling that there is something forced and finally unconvincing about all the manly moral attitudes of the shining righteous deedsmen, whether of the biblical or of the Greco-Roman schools; for, in revenge or compensation, the ultimate life, and therewith spiritual depth and interest, of the myths in which they figure continues to rest with the dark presences of the cursed yet gravid earth, which, though defeated and subdued, are with their powers never totally absorbed. A residue of mystery remains to them; and this, throughout the history of the West, has ever lurked within, and emanated from, the archaic symbols of the later, 'higher' systems - as though speaking silently, to say, 'But do you not hear the deeper song?' [24-5]

Perhaps that deeper song is the song of the sirens, daughters of Earth, to which Odysseus must make himself deaf if he is to survive as hero.

All Campbell says about *The Odyssey* is, it seems to me, perfectly accurate, except the suggestion that Homer is wholly to be identified with his hero. As I read *The Odyssey* I can respond to Odysseus only as a parody of the quest hero, who undergoes all the archetypal initiations and psychic adventures only to emerge completely unchanged. He does not meet Penelope 'perfectly' on his return. He is still far from being in a mature and responsible frame of mind in relation to women or life in general. His ego remains, throughout, unquestioned, and very much a matter of 'I want'. His main concern is not that man should stand at the centre of the world, but that Odysseus should. He wins acknowledgement from the gods in the end not because he has found the right relationship between man and the universe, but because he is the first man to stand up to the gods and survive to tell the tale. That is an achievement, which commands some admiration, but not quite in Campbell's terms. And Homer's admiration is severely qualified. His Odysseus is both hero and anti-hero.

Far from becoming a self-responsible adult, Odysseus is locked into a permanently childish state. According to Philip Slater it is a type fostered not only by such heroic myths as *The Iliad*, but also by the pattern of Greek family life. When Slater writes 'He will feel that if he is not a great hero he is nothing, and pride and prestige become more important than love' [33], he is not speaking of Odysseus, but of the typical Athenian boy. When Slater describes what Freud calls the 'narcissistic type', he comes even closer to a description of Homer's Odysseus:

The fatal charm of such persons lies in the illusion of independence they maintain - if others help them they perceive themselves not as receiving but as taking, by virtue of their cleverness at manipulating people. They do not in fact 'need' specific others, since they are concerned only with their personal survival and self-aggrandizement. Nor does conscience ever make cowards of them, for they have none. This emotional obliviousness to others, this seeming independence and self-love, endows them with considerable *mana* as leaders. [151]

This passage could equally be about Peer Gynt, who is also locked into lifelong childlike egotism, who abandons a faithful loving wife for decades without giving her a thought in favour of the attractions of loot, self-aggrandizement and erotic adventures, who seeks adventures mainly for the subsequent pleasure of being the centre of attention when he relates them to easily-impressed audiences, who prides himself on an achieved selfhood which is mere solipsism, who has no inner life and is therefore incapable of suffering (except physically) or growth. As Peer is a button without a loop, so Odysseus is incapable of relating to the not-self. As the Troll King testifies at the end that Peer is the equivalent of a Troll, so Athena testifies that Odysseus is the equivalent of a god - i.e. inhuman. Ibsen wrote, with reference to *Peer Gynt*, 'To write is to sit in judgement on oneself'.

Homer begins the story near the end so that most of it can be told by Odysseus himself. Odysseus tells the tale compulsively. He is single minded in his pursuit of name and fame. He begins his tale to Lord Alcinous: 'I am Odysseus, Laertes' son. The whole world talks of my stratagems, and my fame has reached the heavens'. He cannot bear the thought of his tale coming to an end. There must always be a yet unwritten sequel. His fame is only as bright as his last adventure. The happy homecoming is an ending to be deferred as long as possible, until that too becomes a violent adventure. There is heavy irony in Odysseus' frequent complaints that a harsh fate has kept him from his hearth so long. He voluntarily stays a year with Circe and eight with Calypso. He offers to stay a year with the Phaeacians. When he does finally reach home, we know that he will not stay there long.

The purpose of all the adventures is to tell others about them afterwards. His must be the story not of one hero among many, but of a hero to end all heroes. Unlike the other heroes of the Trojan War, he has no military exploits to boast of. He expects to be admired not for noble deeds, but for deceit and the sacking of many cities. And his enemies are not Trojans but monsters and gods. The childish formula is to accept a dare (usually of his own devising), to



tell his story (how I won through; how much I suffered in the process, but how much more suffering I brought to others), to show his scar, to receive praise. He requires nothing more from life than its endless repetition.

One difficulty, which prevents some readers from recognizing the persistent irony of *The Odyssey*, is that they carry over to it the values of *The Iliad*. But even if Homer did write both epics, *The Odyssey* may well be twenty or thirty years later than *The Iliad*, and constitute an ironic commentary on the values of the earlier book. Those values are summed up by George Steiner:

War and morality cry havoc, yet the centre holds. That centre is the affirmation that action of body and heroic spirit are in themselves a thing of beauty, that renown shall outweigh the passing terrors of death, and that no catastrophe, not even the fall of Troy, is final. [9]

The mature Homer may well have looked back on that youthful vision with a wry smile. It is the vision with which Odysseus attempts to console the shade of Achilles in the underworld, but Achilles gives him short shrift: 'My lord Odysseus, spare me your praise of Death. Put me on earth again, and I would rather be a serf in the house of some landless man, with little enough for himself to live on, than king of all these dead men that have done with life' [184].

Odysseus had been named by his grandfather Autolycus, whose own name meant Lone Wolf. Autolycus, proud of his pre-eminence as 'the most accomplished thief and liar of his day', hoped his grandson might inherit these qualities. The Rieu translation reads: 'In the course of my lifetime I have made enemies of many a man and woman up and down the wide world. So let this child be called Odysseus, "the victim of enmity"' [298]. This clearly makes no sense, and Dimock has demonstrated that it is a mistranslation. Autolycus uses the verb *odyssasthai*. What he is, in effect, saying, according to Dimock, is: 'I have odysseused many in my time, up and down the wide world, men and women both; therefore let his name be Odysseus' [Steiner 106]. It is clear that Odysseus is to be the perpetrator, not the victim. Dimock calls him Trouble-Bringer. The fictitious name he later invents for himself, Eperitus, means Quarrelman. He brings trouble to all he meets, not least to those closest to him.

Autolycus is an unscrupulous and ruthless self-made man. His morality is wholly that of success and the outward signs of success - the loot, the scars, the tall tales. The means are of no moral interest to him. His wish that Odysseus should follow in his footsteps is amply fulfilled. On his return to Ithaca Odysseus (disguised) says of himself:

Indeed Odysseus would have been here long ago, had he not thought it the more profitable course to travel about in the pursuit of wealth - which shows that in business enterprise he is unsurpassed. [295]

He proposes to make good 'the ravages that gang of profligates have made among my flocks' by ravaging himself.

Odysseus' name is inseparable from his scar, which he also owes to his grandfather, who introduced him to boarhunting. That first adventure had all the characteristics of the later ones. The young Odysseus goes looking for trouble. He pits himself against nature at its most dangerous and inhuman, a mighty boar. Later, loaded with gifts and displaying his scar, he returns home to tell the tale to his dotting parents: 'They asked him about all his adventures, in particular how he had come by his scar, and Odysseus told them how in the course of the chase he had been gashed by a boar's tusk on the expedition to Parnassus with Autolycus' sons' [300].

Odysseus has two other tokens, a brooch, which depicts a dog throttling a fawn, and a soft gleaming shirt, which is attractive to women. He is the ruthless male predator, not least sexually. Women are like any other plunder. He begins his story to King Alcinous with a casual reference to the sacking of Ismarus: 'I sacked this place and destroyed the men who held it. Their wives and the rich plunder that we took from the town we divided' [140]. This is a striking instance of the black comedy of *The Odyssey*. For only four pages earlier Homer had used the sack of another city, Troy, to provide a bitterly ironic, ludicrously inappropriate simile (a device frequently employed) for Odysseus' womanish weeping:

He wept as a woman weeps when she throws her arms round the body of her beloved husband, fallen in battle before his city and his comrades, fighting to save his home-town and his children from disaster. She has found him gasping in the throes of death; she clings to him and lifts her voice in lamentation. but the enemy come up and belabour her back and shoulders with spears, as they lead her off into slavery and a life of miserable toil, with her cheeks wasted by her pitiful grief. Equally pitiful were the tears that now welled up in Odysseus' eyes. [136]

Here again *The Iliad* is stripped of all its glamour. The irony is in the distance between the moral sensibility of the narrator and that of his hero.

An equally striking example of the ironically inappropriate simile occurs when Odysseus is pondering what to do with the suitors' mistresses:

Should he dash after them and put them all to death; or should he let them spend one last night in the arms of their profligate lovers? The thought made him snarl with repressed fury, like a bitch that snarls and shows fight as she takes her stand above her helpless puppies when a stranger comes by. So did Odysseus growl to himself in sheer revolt at these licentious ways. [304]

This absurd casting of Odysseus as female protector of the helpless throws into harsh relief his actual savagery, and the unnaturalness of his uncontrollable murderous revulsion against female sexuality.

It is appropriate that the story should begin with Calypso, whose name means 'engulfed'. To languish on an island in the middle of nowhere in absolute security, with a beautiful goddess who offers not only love but immortality would be for many an earthly paradise. For Odysseus it is misery. It denies him the possibility of that 'recognition' which is his *raison d'être*. The Lotus eaters (who have no names) are for him images of oblivion. And the Phaeacians are not much better, though their society corresponds to many a subsequent utopia. Their lives are trouble-free, being under the protection of Poseidon. They are at one with their environment. Women dominate in a peaceful, life-loving society. Such fame as they have is for sports and dancing. They try to evict Odysseus, but he represents the selfish element in human (or perhaps only male) nature, which sooner or later undermines all utopias. As a result of harbouring him, they are cut off from the sea on which their lives depend.

The sea is that which by its sheer size and unknowability threatens to overwhelm Odysseus. His greatest fear is death by drowning, a 'villainous death', which is to him what the casting ladle is to Peer Gynt, an obliteration of the ego. He would rather have died where the spears were flying at Troy 'and the Achaeans would have spread my fame abroad'. He is skilled in shipbuilding and seamanship. After centuries of hugging the coast, he is the first man to head for the horizon to confront and, if possible, master the unknown and the great powers of the natural world which pay no heed to human name and fame.

Polyphemus means 'much fame' and the mutilation of him, the son of Poseidon, promises that. Antiphates, on the other hand, means 'against renown', for in the encounter with him, Odysseus sends his men into danger while he sits safely on his ship. He regains his name when Circe recognizes him as Odysseus

'the man whom nothing defeats. ... Royal son of Laertes, Odysseus of the nimble wits' [168].

It is similarly by refusing to accept a position of dependence, even upon those gods who seek to help him, that Odysseus wins their respect. He does not tell the truth to Athene: 'It had been on the tip of his tongue, but loyal as ever to his own crafty nature he contrived to keep it back'. It is Athene who must first abandon her reserve:

'What a cunning knave it would take,' she said, 'to beat you at your tricks! Even a god would be hard put to it. And so my stubborn friend, Odysseus the arch-deceiver, with his craving for intrigue, does not propose even in his own country to drop his sharp practice and the lying tales that he loves from the bottom of his heart. But no more of this: we are both adepts in chicanery. For in the world of men you have no rival as a statesman and orator, while I am pre-eminent among the gods for invention and resource.' ... 'How like you to be so wary!' said Athene. 'And that is why I cannot desert you in your misfortunes: you are so civilized, so intelligent, so self-possessed.'

[209-11]

Athene's admiration should not surprise us. She had invented the bridle and the chariot, built the first ship, and helped Odysseus build the wooden horse. It does not follow that Homer shares Athene's admiration. There is bitter irony once more in that a god should sanction Odysseus' behaviour as 'civilized'.

The climax of *The Odyssey* is Odysseus' massacre (with a little help from his son Telemachus) of the suitors for Penelope, who for many years have been unwanted guests wasting his estate. In the massacre and its aftermath we are presented with atrocities all too similar to those which have characterized the flowering of 'civilization' in our own day. Odysseus finds out from his informers which of the suitors have behaved decently, then kills them with the rest. The twelve women who had fraternized with the suitors are rounded up:

Wailing bitterly, with the tears streaming down their cheeks, the women all arrived together. Their first task was to remove the bodies of the slain, which they laid under the portico of the walled courtyard, propping them one against the other. Odysseus himself took charge and hounded them on till they had finished their unwilling work. Next they washed down the tables and the beautiful chairs with sponges and water, after which Telemachus and the two herdsmen scraped the floor of the great hall with spades, while the maids removed the scrapings and got rid of them

outside. Finally, when the whole house had been set in order, they took the women out of the building, and herded them between the round-house and the great courtyard wall in a narrow space from which there was no escape. Then Telemachus spoke. 'I swear I will not give a decent death,' he said, 'to women who have heaped dishonour on my head and on my mother's, and slept with members of this gang.' With that he took a hawser which had seen service on a blue-bowed ship, made one end fast to a high column in the portico, threw the other over the round-house, and pulled it taut at such a level as would keep their feet from touching earth. And then, like doves or long-winged thrushes caught in a net across the thicket where they came to roost, and meeting death where they had only looked for sleep, the women held their heads out in a row, and a noose was cast round each one's neck to dispatch them in the most miserable way. For a little while their feet kicked out, but not for long. Next Malanthius was dragged out across the court and through the gate. There with a sharp knife they sliced his nose and ears off; they ripped away his privy parts as raw meat for the dogs, and in their fury they lopped off his hands and feet. Then, after washing their own hands and feet, they went back indoors to Odysseus and the business was finished. [339-40]

The appallingly matter-of-fact tone and attention to detail only accentuates the outrage. And we leave Odysseus a few lines later 'overwhelmed by tender feelings' as the other women of the household shower him with affectionate kisses. All this was accomplished with the blessing and active help of Athene, the goddess of war, arts, crafts and intelligence, (in other words, of civilization), who had sprung from the head of Zeus, and who became the arch-enemy of the older nature-god Poseidon.

*The Odyssey* ends with Odysseus launching himself into another massacre, of his own rebellious subjects, before the gods themselves are forced to say 'enough is enough'.

Odysseus learns to survive in a world where mere prudence is useless, since the whims of the gods make life a lottery. Craft, opportunism, self-reliance, the calculated risk, ruthlessness, are the means. Never lower your guard or turn your back. Push your luck as far as it will go. Never give except in the expectation of getting back more. Write off the past immediately. Let others look after themselves. Odysseus demanding and getting his royal titles from the gods has come a long way from the miserable victimized wretches Prometheus undertook to champion, but at a price. Individuation taken to these lengths is surely monstrous. The ego isolates itself behind its weapons and goes

insane. He will ensure that his sons and grandsons, in Auden's words, have never heard

Of any world where promised were kept  
Or one could weep because another wept. ['The Shield of Achilles']

And Odysseus is setting the pattern of heroic manhood which persists to this day.

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The intelligent, self-reliant, violent man who thinks he can live without reference to the gods, dictating the terms of his own life, is the typical protagonist of Greek tragedy. And this form of pride, *hubris*, is the typical tragic flaw. The type was not limited to the Greek world. In Judaic myth the ancient heroes, the 'mighty men which were of old, men of renown' [*Genesis* 6:4], who filled the earth with violence, are the very men who cause God to regret having created man at all and to resolve to flush the earth clean of such men. But human pride cannot be so easily extinguished.

At the beginning of the Book of Job, Satan assumes (correctly) that, like himself, no man subjected to the tyranny of God will not rebel against it. Job is the opposite of Prometheus in the quiet and modest humility of his rebellion, and of Odysseus in that he responds to the amorality of God not by miming divine ruthlessness but by affirming a purely human morality of justice. No man could be further than Job from the egotism and freebooting pride of the heroes. Nor is he so foolish as to curse God to his face. But his very integrity demands that he should maintain his own ways before God. His pride is a pride in humanity itself, its understanding and morality, its righteousness. Job is as aware of the irresistible power of God as his comforters, but, unlike them, refuses to be entirely cowed by it. The comforters argue that man is a mere worm, but Job assigns him a lordly status: 'He hath stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head' [19:9].

The comforters insist on a strict correlation between purity and prosperity. They insist that God never betrays the heart that loves him, that any evil which befalls man must be God's 'correction' of some fault, whether that fault is evident or not. But Job knows that his punishment is 'without cause'. His comforters deny him the right to plead 'not guilty'. Job can see that to plead 'not guilty' is equivalent to charging God with injustice (or at least with neglecting to consult his own omniscience), of claiming to be more righteous

than God. He is fully aware of the enormity of that; yet he cannot avoid the conclusion that 'He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked', that there is no correlation whatever between the ways of God and man's standards of morality and justice. The question he must ask of God is 'seest thou as man seeth?'. And even if God does *not* see as man sees, Job will still maintain his own ways before him. To submit in silence would be spiritual death: 'for now, if I hold my tongue, I shall give up the ghost'.

The pattern Job seeks to impose on God is (as in *The Oresteia*) that of the court of law: 'O that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbour!' [16:21]; 'Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgement' [19:7]. He wishes that heaven itself were a court of law, with God as both prosecutor and judge:

Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his  
seat!  
I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.  
I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand  
what he would say unto me.  
Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put  
strength in me.  
There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for  
Ever from my judge. [23:3-7]

But since no redeemer yet stands on the earth, Job will have to conduct his own defence, and fears that God will answer him, if at all, in a voice of thunder, and 'the thunder of his power who can understand' [26:14].

These fears seem amply justified when God at last speaks. Far from answering Job he batters him with a series of rhetorical questions, mocking man's pretensions to understanding. The chief of the ways of this God is behemoth; and leviathan is 'king over all the children of pride' [41:34]. God seems not to know that the time will come when, acting in the spirit of Prometheus and Odysseus and the Ode to Man in *Antigone*, the children of pride will indeed fill the skin of leviathan with barbed irons [41:7].

Yet with a sudden unexplained volte-face, God turns in anger on the comforters, and praises Job for having 'spoken of me the thing that is right' [42:8]. The rebel, it seems, in spite of all God's bluster, has, simply by standing by his lights, triumphed: 'the Lord also accepted Job' [42:9]. He is rewarded with much wealth and length of days. According to Jung's *Answer to Job*, this is the moment when God realizes that man has developed a higher

consciousness than his own, and first conceives the ambition to become man. It is the first stage in the process by which the God of creation becomes the God of sin and redemption and the divine sanction for humanistic moral values. Man's intellectual and moral development had brought him to a point where the old Nature god or gods no longer fulfilled the role he required of the godhead, which was now to validate the aspirations of men in an increasingly male-dominated and civilized society.

Robert Graves comments:

The result of envisaging this god of pure meditation, the Universal Mind still premised by the most reputable modern philosophers, and enthroning him above Nature as essential Truth and Goodness was not an altogether happy one. . . . The new God claimed to be dominant as Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, pure Holiness, pure Good, pure Logic, able to exist without the aid of woman; but it was natural to identify him with one of the original rivals of the Theme and to ally the woman and the other rival [the devil] permanently against him. The outcome was philosophical dualism with all the tragi-comic woes attendant on spiritual dichotomy. If the True God, the God of the Logos, was pure thought, pure good, whence came evil and error? Two separate creations had to be assumed: the true spiritual Creation and the false material Creation. [*The White Goddess*, 465]

This is very close to Jung's conclusion that when God becomes a god of goodness, love and light only, the dark side of god, which won't go away, becomes a terrible burden of sin and guilt, a terrible impulse to hatred and violence, in the human unconscious.

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