

THERE AND BACK AGAIN, OR, A FOREWORD BY THE SERIES EDITOR

Odysseus πολύτροπος (*polútropos*). His name gave the title to one of the foundational epics of human civilization – Homer's *Odyssey*, which entered many languages of the world as the common noun "odyssey". Its "essential meaning", to quote the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, is 'a long journey full of adventures', but also 'a series of experiences that give knowledge or understanding to someone'.¹ Both denotations are close to Odysseus' Homeric epithet, built from πολύς (*polús*; many) and τρόπος (*trópos*; turn): someone who is 'much-turned', who is 'much-wandering',² with a focus also on the versatility of mind. Odysseus the Traveller *par excellence* becomes a metaphor of the human fate. "Each of us is an Odysseus / coming back to their Ithaca", writes Leopold Staff (1878–1957) – the Polish poet nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950.³ We relate to this ancient hero, we know his myth, we admire his bright mind.⁴

Odysseus is brilliant, indeed, and his *polútropos* genius no doubt made his ever so desired return home possible – beyond the gods' playground at Troy, through all the bloody battles, and out of the terrible monsters' lairs. Yet a mind

¹ See *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. "odyssey", <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/odyssey> (this and all the subsequent websites cited in this foreword were accessed on 21 December 2021, unless stated otherwise).

² Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940, s.v. πολύτροπος (online version via the Perseus Digital Library Project: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aalphabetic+letter%3D%3Aentry+group%3D182%3Aentry%3Dpolu%2Ftropos>).

³ "Nomination Archive: Leopold Staff", The Nobel Prize, https://www.nobelprize.org/nomination/archive/show_people.php?id=8719 (accessed 25 September 2022). For the poem, see Leopold Staff, "Odys" [Odysseus], in his collection *Dziewięć Muz* [Nine Muses], Warszawa: PIW, 1958, 19, vv. 11–12: "Każdy z nas jest Odysem, / Co wraca do swej Itaki".

⁴ See also Bob Dylan's Nobel Lecture at "The Nobel Prize in Literature 2016", The Nobel Prize, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2016/dylan/lecture/>: "In a lot of ways, some of these same things have happened to you. You too have had drugs dropped into your wine. You too have shared a bed with the wrong woman. You too have been spellbound by magical voices, sweet voices with strange melodies..."

is not enough for a dream to come true. Homer makes a strong point in this respect. Or rather his Muse does – the one he asks for help in the invocation to the *Odyssey*: “Of these things, goddess, daughter of Zeus, beginning where thou wilt, tell thou even unto us”.⁵

The Muse gladly takes the liberty offered by the Poet and indeed starts where she wishes to. The first scene in which we meet Odysseus unfolds on the island Ogygia. The hero has been stuck there for seven years now, in this opulent realm of the beautiful nymph Calypso – and he is desperate, dejected, and deprived of his agency. Not what we would expect from the much-wandering and resourceful hero famous for being able to cope with the most difficult circumstances. What is more, after the part of the epic known as the *Telemachia*, the scene of Odysseus’ helplessness returns, thus making this image even stronger. When Hermes comes to his rescue, by Zeus’ and Athena’s doing, “the great-hearted Odysseus he found not within; for he sat weeping on the shore, as his wont had been, racking his soul with tears and groans and griefs, and he would look over the unresting sea, shedding tears”.⁶

That is how Homer (or his Muse) challenges the views we have acquired without even knowing when. After all, the *Odyssey* should counsel that we “keep on keepin’ on”, shouldn’t it? A seven-year lockdown hardly lines up with our stereotypes. Thus Homer takes us by surprise in this very first (preserved) literary portrayal of Odysseus. But is this surprise effect lasting in our memory? For the most part, probably not. The Classics have been accompanying us since time immemorial, including via the institution of school,⁷ and so we display an overall good knowledge of Greek myths – so good that it can even spawn the false conviction that we have mastered our lesson. However, this kind of lesson is never to be mastered. That is why it is of paramount importance to constantly come back to the Classics – our Ithaca – to let Homer and his disciples surprise us (ever again). For the reading of the masterpieces is a never-ending process,

⁵ Homer, *Odyssey* 1.11: τῶν ἀμόθεν γε, θεά, θύγατερ Διός, εἰπὲ καὶ ἡμῖν. All English quotations from Homer’s *Odyssey* are given in the translation by A.T. Murray, vol. 1, “Loeb Classical Library”, Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann, 1919, via the Perseus Digital Library Project: <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0136%3Abook%3D1%3Acard%3D1>. This is also the source of the Greek fragments. On the *Odyssey*’s particular invocation, see Victoria Pedrick, “The Muse Corrects: The Opening of the *Odyssey*”, *Yale Classical Studies* 29 (1992), 39–62.

⁶ Homer, *Odyssey* 5.81–84: οὐδ’ ἄρ’ Ὀδυσσεῖα μεγάλητορα ἔνδον ἔτετμεν, / ἄλλ’ ὃ γ’ ἐπ’ ἀκτῆς κλαῖε καθήμενος, ἔνθα πάρος περ, / δάκρυσι καὶ στοναχῇσι καὶ ἄλγεσι θυμὸν ἐρέχθων. / πόντον ἐπ’ ἀτρύγετον δερκέσκετο δάκρυα λείβων.

⁷ On this issue see below, n. 21.

as the Polish Romantic poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid (1821–1883) observed.⁸ At each encounter we may uncover something we had not noticed during our previous contact with the given work. We may also recall what we had forgotten or what we (unconsciously) dismissed as irrelevant for our earlier stage of life. The effect of surprise that occurs during this process makes us pause for reflection. Thus not without reason does the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* contain, as a full definition example, the phrase “an odyssey of self-discovery”.⁹ Indeed, the Classics (nearly all fed on the crumbs from Homer’s table¹⁰) have the paradoxical potential both for offering us a comfortingly familiar base to rely on and for surprising us with an infinite number of meanings in response to our needs at various moments in life.

So if we turn back to the *Odyssey* now and ask again what is necessary to make a dream come true, we will discover – despite all the blocking efforts by Calypso (her name originating from *καλύπτω/kalúptō*, ‘to hide’) – that the mind, albeit crucial, is not enough – not even in the case of Odysseus, one of the wisest and most clever of heroes. Let us notice that the gods were moved to help him by his tears flowing from emotions that we may easily relate to still today: longing for home, family, friends... But the issue is more complex. These emotions flow from Odysseus’ heart, so, in short, to make a dream come true the heart is needed to complement the mind.

Homer chooses a clear example in order to emphasize this point. The beautiful nymph, willing to keep Odysseus on her island, offers him immortality – and he rejects it. Above all he desires to go back home to his wife, as he says. The hero’s decision cannot be explained rationally. Odysseus, who embodies the acute intellect, does not use his mind where his fate is at stake and thus he takes by surprise even the divine Calypso. She is aware of her superiority over Penelope: “Surely not inferior to her do I declare myself to be either in form or stature, for in no wise is it seemly that mortal women should vie with immortals in form or comeliness”.¹¹ And Odysseus does not deny it: “Mighty goddess, be not wroth with me for this. I know full well of myself that wise Penelope is meaner to look upon than thou in comeliness and in stature, for she is a mortal, while thou

⁸ See Jerzy Axer, “Z Horacjusza” [From Horace], in Stanisław Makowski, *Cyprian Norwid. Interpretacje* [Cyprian Norwid: Interpretations], Warszawa: PWN, 1986, 59–70.

⁹ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, *ibidem*.

¹⁰ As the saying ascribed to Aeschylus goes (*Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, vol. 3, *Testimonia* 112a–b).

¹¹ Homer, *Odyssey* 5.211–213: οὐ μὲν θην κείνης γε χερσίων εὐχομαι εἶναι, / οὐ δέμας οὐδὲ φυῖν, ἐπεὶ οὐ πῶς οὐδὲ ἔοικεν / θνητὰς ἀθανάτησι δέμας καὶ εἶδος ἐρίζειν.

art immortal and ageless".¹² Odysseus quite simply chooses with his heart. He understands not only the irrationality of his rejection of eternal life at Calypso's side, but also the risk of a new journey at the mercy of the "wine-dark sea" and Poseidon. "But even so", he declares, "I wish and long day by day to reach my home, and to see the day of my return".¹³ Thus, he soon gets to work (building a raft) – again with his mind in the lead – in order to make use of the opportunity to leave the island.

Also in this sense is each of us an Odysseus. We travel there and back again, guided both by our heart and mind (in changing proportions), with not a few stops to weep on the shore, but also to reflect there and to gather strength for the next stages of our travel. One of the sources of this strength can be the stories from the past that teach us perseverance in pursuing dreams. Odysseus assures Calypso: "And if again some god shall smite me on the wine-dark sea, I will endure it, having in my breast a heart that endures affliction".¹⁴

The hero's journey and the life journeys of many other heroes and heroines are to be found in books – in the Grand Library of human civilization, as Joseph Campbell demonstrates.¹⁵ Also Norwid, writing about the constant coming back to the masterpieces, did not mean only the Classics, even though their frequent mythical component makes their impact particularly strong. The Grand Library contains texts from very many cultural areas and traditions. It is also clear today that we should include children's literature in this collection. In our times, books for young readers are the first to show us how to use the mind and heart in life. They encourage us to follow our dreams. And they take us by surprise, too – sometimes even in a two-fold way, that is, with the primary reading in childhood and the subsequent readings many years later, when we turn back to them from our adult perspective.

To study various aspects of these phenomena is a challenge worthy of Odysseus and it demands both an acute mind and a steadfast heart. Precisely these qualities characterize Prof. Elizabeth Hale from the University of New England

¹² Homer, *Odyssey* 5.215–218: πότνα θεά, μή μοι τόδε χῶεο: οἶδα καὶ αὐτὸς / πάντα μάλ', οὐνεκα σείο περίφρων Πηνελόπεια / εἶδος ἀκιδνοτέρη μέγεθός τ' εἰσάντα ιδέσθαι: / ἢ μὲν γὰρ βροτὸς ἔστι, σὺ δ' ἀθάνατος καὶ ἀγήρων.

¹³ Homer, *Odyssey* 5.219–220: ἀλλὰ καὶ ὥς ἐθέλω καὶ ἐέλδομαι ἥματα πάντα / οἵκαδ' ἐλθέμεναι καὶ νόστιμον ἦμαρ ιδέσθαι.

¹⁴ Homer, *Odyssey* 5.221–222: εἰ δ' αὖ τις ῥαίησι θεῶν ἐνὶ οἴνοπι πόντῳ, / τλήσομαι ἐν στήθεσσι νύκτων ταλαπενθέα θυμόν.

¹⁵ See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1949. Of course this phenomenon concerns not only books, but other texts of culture as well (a topic for another kind of research).

in Australia, who, with her colleague Dr Miriam Riverlea (PhD from Monash University), has brought this volume to fruition.

The *Alphabetical Odyssey* did not come out of the blue. It is the fruit of many years of research conducted by Prof. Hale, who honoured me with her company on our mythical journey commenced as early as 2012, owing to the Loeb Classical Library Foundation. The grant for which I had applied there in 2011 – for the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Children's Literature between East and West* (2012–2013) – permitted me to develop what later grew into the multidisciplinary and international *Our Mythical Childhood* programme. While searching for collaborators, I had come across Prof. Hale's fascinating publications on classical reception in nineteenth-century children's culture. And so I sent her an email with an invitation to the first of our mythical conferences at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw. This was a time when she conquered Charybdis – in this case, her mailbox, which had devoured my email, as it had reasonably decided that my invitation must have been spam. For how else could you explain an enthusiastic message asking you to travel 15,352 km in May 2013 to jointly discuss children's literature inspired by Greek mythology? In that Charybdis challenge again both a mind and a heart were needed and, fortunately, it was only natural to Prof. Hale to use them. She retrieved my email from her spam folder and came to Warsaw, where she shared her ideas on New Zealand children's writers influenced by classical mythology.¹⁶ Then, our journey continued thanks to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Alumni Award for Innovative Networking Initiatives for the project *Chasing Mythical Beasts... The Reception of Creatures from Graeco-Roman Mythology in Children's and Young Adults' Culture as a Transformation Marker* (2014–2017).¹⁷ In the meantime, a gap in research manifested itself – that is, the lack of a guide joining the classicists and children's literature scholars. In sum – the need for this guide lay at the origin of the idea for the *Alphabetical Odyssey*, which soon was mature enough for an opportunity to come into the world. Such

¹⁶ For the results of this project, see, e.g., Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, in Open Access at <https://brill.com/view/title/32883>.

¹⁷ See the project's website: <http://mythicalbeasts.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/> and the page of the joint (ERC and Humboldt projects) publication in Open Access: Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*, "Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur / Studies in European Children's and Young Adult Literature" 8, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2020: https://www.winter-verlag.de/en/detail/978-3-8253-7874-5/Marciniak_Ed_Chasing_Mythical_Beasts_PDF/.

opportunity was offered by the European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Grant for the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* (2016–2022), which enabled us to collaborate further.¹⁸ Prof. Hale invited as the co-author Dr Miriam Riverlea, whose work she knew from Australian conferences devoted to classical reception studies and from her doctoral thesis, *My First Book of Greek Myths: Retelling Ancient Myths to Modern Children* (2017). Together, using a method of integrating the approaches of classical reception and children's literature studies, they developed the *Alphabetical Odyssey*. Their shared enjoyment of children's literature informed their study, as did a deep respect for the authors and illustrators whose works are created with children's needs so carefully addressed.

As a result, a unique amalgam was formed. On the one hand, the *Alphabetical Odyssey* is a guide showing the breadth of the creative field of children's literature that blends the ancient and the modern for readers of all ages, thereby making it possible for them to travel beyond time, to learn about new things, but also to rediscover what may already seem familiar. Short chapters on classical and childhood-specific themes are complemented with recommendations of crossover trips and further reading suggestions, with a special focus on the English-speaking world, but with some excursions also to other parts of the globe.¹⁹ On the other hand, this volume stimulates scholarly reflection on what classical culture contributes to children's literature and, reciprocally, how children's literature enriches our reception of classical material. The alphabetical arrangement of the chapters symbolizes the journey through a sea of ideas. This structure results from the inspirations by both Homer's *Odyssey* and the popular form of a children's alphabet book. As befits a "classical" adventure story, this volume comes with a map prepared (along with a set of illustrations in the form of mythological initials) by Steve K. Simons from the University of Roehampton in London – the co-creator with Dr Sonya Nevin of amazing vase animations for the *Our Mythical Childhood* project²⁰ – who displayed for this volume his painting talent.

¹⁸ See, e.g., the project's website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/>.

¹⁹ For formal bibliographical references to these works, see the bibliography at the end of the book.

²⁰ See, e.g., the "Animating the Ancient World" section of the *Our Mythical Childhood* website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/animating-the-ancient-world>, and the Panoply Vase Animation Project website: <https://www.panoply.org.uk/>.

I wish to thank all of them warmly, as well as our mythical team members: Prof. Lisa Maurice from Bar-Ilan University in Israel, who brought to life a pioneering volume on the use of myths in education;²¹ Prof. Susan Deacy from the University of Roehampton, who never ceases to inspire us with her research on Greek mythology as a tool for inclusive education in the context of autism;²² Prof. Daniel A. Nkemleke, Prof. Divine Che Neba, and Prof. Eleanor Anneh Dasi from the University of Yaoundé 1, who engage not only in researching various mythical traditions, but also in educating future teachers for the big cities and small villages in Cameroon and nearby countries.²³ My gratitude also goes to all our wonderful friends and colleagues from the Universities all over the world who build with us Our Mythical Community – the most precious treasure from our journey. I thank the ERC Executive Agency staff and especially our project officers: Ms Sandrine Barreaux, who took great care of the project at its first stage, and Ms Katia Menegon, who piloted us amazingly through the next stages.

The ERC Grant has also brought into existence a database – *Our Mythical Childhood Survey*, with over 1,500 entries (so far) on works for children and adults inspired by Classical Antiquity.²⁴ This is a huge team effort of all the contributors from various parts of the globe. I wish to thank them for their involvement in this Herculean labour. Prof. Hale and Dr Riverlea's volume is a perfect example of how our tasks and ventures complement each other, for the readers who will be interested in specific books analysed in the *Alphabetical Odyssey*,

²¹ For details, see, e.g., the "Our Mythical Education" section of the *Our Mythical Childhood* website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/our-mythical-education>, and the volume in Open Access: Lisa Maurice, ed., *Our Mythical Education: The Reception of Classical Myth Worldwide in Formal Education, 1900–2020*, "Our Mythical Childhood", Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.31338/uw.9788323546245>.

²² For details, see, e.g., the "Autism and Mythology" section of the *Our Mythical Childhood* website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-autism>. See also Susan Deacy, *What Would Hercules Do? Lessons for Autistic Children Using Classical Myth*, ill. Steve K. Simons, "Our Mythical Childhood", Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press, forthcoming.

²³ For details, see, e.g., the "Myths from Cameroon" section of the *Our Mythical Childhood* website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myths-from-cameroon>.

²⁴ See the *Our Mythical Childhood Survey* at <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey>. This database, the joint effort of our team from the University of Warsaw (Host Institution), Bar-Ilan University, University of New England, University of Roehampton, and University of Yaoundé 1, along with our collaborators in various institutions the world over, originates from Katarzyna Marciniak, Elżbieta Olechowska, Joanna Kłos, and Michał Kucharski, eds., *Polish Literature for Children & Young Adults Inspired by Classical Antiquity: A Catalogue*, Faculty of "Artes Liberales", Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2013, available online at http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/omc_catalogue, prepared within the Loeb Classical Library Foundation Grant.

might wish to continue their journey and check on these titles in the *Survey* to get still more hints through our tags and search engines.²⁵

This volume passed through the expert hands of the reviewers – Prof. Doro-
ta Michułka from the University of Wrocław and Prof. Christine Walde from the
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Prof. Hale and Dr Riverlea finished this stage of their odyssey (I use the
term “stage” here, as I deeply believe that they will soon take us on further
travels) in the most difficult circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is still
raging around the world as I write my introductory words, exactly two years
after the discovery of the virus. During my Grant Seminar at the University
of Warsaw in the first term of the pandemic, I proposed to my students to reflect

²⁵ It is worth adding that many of the ideas discussed in the *Alphabetical Odyssey* were first
tested out through the *Antipodean Odyssey* blog established and led by Prof. Hale: <https://antipodeanodyssey.wordpress.com/>.

on the ancient sources from our times' perspective. I called this task a bit provocatively *Antyk w kryzysie* [Antiquity in Crisis] – to challenge the opinion of the decline in importance of the ancient tradition for our society and instead to show that the Classics do indeed help us in our crisis. The students responded with remarkable eagerness and we prepared together (even though online) a set of essays published on the project's website along with some questions formulated for our potential readers on the base of Greek and Roman literature.²⁶ One of the participants and now a team member in the *Our Mythical Childhood* project – Marta Pszczolińska – wrote about Circe, so another divine creature who managed to stop Odysseus, however "only" for one year, and she posed an interesting and very timely question for the readers of her essay: "Is it possible to undergo quarantine in such luxurious conditions as to forget our normal life and suspend the fulfilment of our life's dream?" Personally, I do not think so, and Odysseus' case confirms my hypothesis. But books are a tempting option. They make us, paradoxically, stop and press on at the same time – for they are both an Ithaca and a new odyssey, as this volume by Elizabeth Hale and Miriam Riverlea beautifully demonstrates.

"The Road goes ever on and on", as a great twentieth-century *aoidos* wrote,²⁷ and indeed, Odysseus also embarked on another journey not long after his return home. His mind was telling him to stay, his heart – to press on. For the point is, to quote Staff's poem again, to keep going.²⁸ We may add that the point is also to keep reading – both the Classics and children's literature, and all the high piles of books to which we are led on our journey. This is also what this volume is about – reading new things and reading old things anew, as they nourish both mind and heart – both being necessary to pursue one's dream. Thus, *Our Mythical Reader*, by opening this volume, you are embarking on a very particular odyssey, there and back again, including an odyssey of self-discovery, beginning where thou wilt.

Warsaw, December 2021

²⁶ AA.VV., *Antyk w kryzysie: Praca zbiorowa uczestniczek i uczestników seminarium „Nasze mityczne dzieciństwo” na Wydziale „Artes Liberales” UW w II semestrze r. ak. 2019/20* [Antiquity in Crisis: A Collective Work of the Participants of the "Our Mythical Childhood" Seminar at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales" UW in the Second Term of the Academic Year 2019/20], <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/assets/files/pages/5c65715bbd9b4af72cbffc3803ed03dbb716b443.pdf>.

²⁷ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2020 (ed. pr. 1956), 36.

²⁸ Staff, "Odys", vv. 5–6: "O to chodzi jedynie, / By naprzód wciąż iść śmiało".