

CARLO DELLE DONNE\*

## ULYSSES PHILOSOPHUS: A PLAUSIBLE READING?

### *Ulysses Philosophus: a plausible reading?*

The purpose of this paper is to shed light on some philosophical reappraisals of Ulysses. After a brief general introduction (I), I focus on Plato's Ulysses, whom I consider as the symbol of "demotic virtue" (II). The following sections mainly deal with a passage from Cicero's *De finibus* (I discuss Antiochus' Ulysses compared to the Epicurean one: III), but they regard also the Stoic and the Neoplatonic (rather Plotinian) readings of the Homeric character (IV). I finally draw some provisional conclusions (V).

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Navigant quidam et labores peregrinationis longissimae una  
mercede perpetiuntur cognoscendi aliquid abditum  
remotumque. (Sen. *Ot.* 5)

1.

Ulysses is a multifaceted hero. Many versions of him have been elaborated throughout ages. Dante, for example, has eternized an 'intellectual' reading of this character. In the *Divina Commedia* (XXVI 55-142), Ulysses is portrayed as the hero of knowledge, who takes up a new dangerous journey only to satisfy his burning passion for knowledge (*ibid.* 97-99 «[...] l'ardore || ch'i' ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto, || e de li vizi umani e del valore»). There is nothing which can keep him from trying to widen his knowledge, and he follows this impulse regardless of any duty towards his family (*ibid.* 94-96). But to the extent that such a desire for knowledge for its own sake

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is typical of philosophers (and also of human beings in general, though less emblematically), Dante's Ulysses turns out to be the prototype of the pagan philosopher, who strives for knowledge without God's help. This is why his attempt is compared to a «crazy flight» (*ibid.* 125 «dei remi facemmo ali al folle volo»). Unlike Dante, who is led by God throughout his journey, Ulysses is predictably destined to fail (*ibid.* 142 «infin che 'l mar fu sopra noi richiuso»)<sup>1</sup>.

But what are the origins of this particular version of the Homeric character? Does it date back to the ancient world? And if so, what is its philosophical background? According to Mauro Bonazzi (the latest scholar to have elaborated on this issue), it might come as a surprise, but on the face of it, there is only one ancient text where Ulysses is said to be dominated by the desire to know – Cicero's *De finibus* (V 48-50)<sup>2</sup>. Apart from it, the most popular reading was another one, which can be found in Seneca's writings, for example, or in Xenophon's ones – namely, Ulysses taken as the symbol of ethical virtues, or virtue in general<sup>3</sup>. So, «for some reason Odysseus's intellectual curiosity, as displayed in his encounter with the Sirens, was not much emphasized in the earlier classical tradition»<sup>4</sup>. Now, since the passage from Cicero's *De finibus* derives from Antiochus<sup>5</sup>, the representation of Ulysses as the hero of intellectual curiosity<sup>6</sup> can be plausibly traced back to Antiochus himself<sup>7</sup>. But is this reading of Antiochus' Ulysses as the prototype contemplator really plausible? And if so, does it originally belong to Antiochus, or does it date back to an earlier age, perhaps even to Homer?<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Bonazzi 2020, pp. 114-131.

<sup>2</sup> Bonazzi 2019, pp. 11-12; see also Bénatouïl 2009 and Perutelli 2006, pp. 20 and 49. Both Bonazzi and Perutelli assimilate Dante's Ulysses to Antiochus' Ulysses; but as Stanford 1985<sup>2</sup>, p. 124 points out, however prudent Ulysses may appear in Cicero's passage, «yet, curiously, it failed to convince Dante that Ulysses could resist the *discendi cupiditas*».

<sup>3</sup> Bonazzi 2019, p. 6; in Xenophon there are some hints of the 'rhetorical reading' of Ulysses too: see *Mem.* IV 6 15 and *infra*.

<sup>4</sup> Stanford 1985<sup>2</sup>, p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> On this intriguing figure, see Sedley 2012.

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to observe that the only ancient romance that deals with intellectual *curiositas*, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, does not contain any reference to Ulysses' passion for knowledge; on the contrary, Lucius explicitly describes himself as a sort of «divided Ulysses» (*dimidiatus Ulixes*), with whose *sapientia* but not *prudencia* he is endowed: see *met.* IX 13 with Perutelli 2006, p. 96 and Montiglio 2007a. Apuleius' Ulysses is of Stoic ascending.

<sup>7</sup> Bénatouïl 2009, and forthcoming; Bonazzi 2019, *passim*. The origins of the metaphorical and philosophical reading of Homer's poems are hotly debated by scholars. Lamberton 1986, pp. 608 ff. ventures to say that it should be traced back to Philo of Alexandria. According to Hartog 1996, p. 44 on the other hand, this reading should be imputed to the Stoics. Last but not least, Pépin 1982, pp. 3-18 and Buffière 1956, p. 386 claim the legacy of Numenius and Cronius.

<sup>8</sup> Bonazzi 2019, p. 2 replies negatively; but see Giuliano 2004, pp. 100-102 for a different assessment of Homer's Ulysses.

2.

First of all, it is reasonable to take Plato into account. In all probability, Antiochus was among the first philosophers (along with the mysterious Eudorus) to give birth to a dogmatic reading of Plato's dialogues<sup>9</sup>. Hence, if an interesting piece of philosophy is to be found in Antiochus, the possibility that it somehow derives from the Master – Plato – should be explored. Moreover, some scholars have maintained that Plato made the prototype philosopher out of Homer's Ulysses<sup>10</sup>.

As a matter of fact, in Plato's dialogues Ulysses' character is not particularly remarkable in philosophical terms, although a generically positive evaluation, not deprived of some sympathy, is put forward in several passages<sup>11</sup>. This was quite a novelty<sup>12</sup>, in light of the widespread depreciation of the hero<sup>13</sup>. But apart from the *Hippias Minor*, where he is extensively dealt with<sup>14</sup>, Ulysses is just mentioned in other texts<sup>15</sup>. For the scope of this paper, only an extract from the *Republic* is worth discussing. In Book X, Ulysses is mentioned by Er in the context of the *post mortem* choice of lives made by the souls<sup>16</sup>. Nearly any soul makes this choice following custom – the habits of the previous life<sup>17</sup>. But this is not the case of Ulysses. Among the heroes seen by Er, Ulysses is the only one to choose his new life in order to avoid his previous suffering. Unlike nearly anyone else, Ulysses grounds his choice on his past experiences, whose lesson he has profoundly learnt<sup>18</sup>. Thus, when

<sup>9</sup> Bonazzi 2015, pp. 64-72, 83-87.

<sup>10</sup> LévyStone 2005, p. 209; Montiglio 2007 and 2011, pp. 47-52.

<sup>11</sup> See Centrone 2012, p. 198. Also Stanford 1985<sup>2</sup>, p. 117 and LévyStone 2005, p. 191 believe in some 'sympathy' felt by Plato towards Ulysses, and precisely with reference to the passage from *Resp.* X discussed above. In the *Seventh Letter* (345d8-e1), Plato (if he is the author of the letter) depicts himself as an «avatar of Odysseus the suffering wanderer», but he seems to view his wandering (and hence also that of Odysseus) in a bad light: see Montiglio 2000, p. 67.

<sup>12</sup> Another remarkable example of reappraisal of Ulysses' character comes from Antisthenes' work. There, the hero is depicted as a rhetorician with exceptional 'psychagogical' abilities. Nonetheless, the testimonies are rather controversial, and I cannot go into detail on this matter here: therefore, see Brancacci 1991, pp. 43-60; *contra*, Luzzatto 1996; *contra* Luzzatto 1996, see Brancacci 1996.

<sup>13</sup> See already Mahaffy 1874; Stanford 1985<sup>2</sup>, p. 100 identifies two causes for Ulysses' widespread depreciation: 1) a sort of moralism stemming from Pythagoras' or Xenophanes' teaching, that would lead one to consider truth as an ethically binding value; 2) the emergence of the sophistic movement, which was commonly disregarded: since Ulysses was assimilated to the sophists because of his unprejudiced use of language, he was consequently disregarded along with them.

<sup>14</sup> Centrone 2012, pp. 185-191, 197-198; Giuliano 2004, *passim*; Montiglio 2007.

<sup>15</sup> *Ion* 535b; *Resp.* 334a-b, 390a8, 390d; *Symp.* 220c; *Alc. I* 112b; *Gorg.* 526c-d.

<sup>16</sup> On this passage, see De Luise 2007. As an anonymous reviewer points out to me, Ulysses is implicitly mentioned also as a narrator (614b), where «Alcinous' tale» is said to represent a sample of 'bad' *mimesis*.

<sup>17</sup> See also *Phd.* 81e.

<sup>18</sup> Montiglio 2007, p. 43 and 2011, p. 48.

it comes to Ulysses' soul, merely automatic custom contrasts with memory, which substantiates here some form of practical knowledge about what not to do.

So far so good. But what kind of life is chosen by Ulysses? According to some scholars<sup>19</sup>, he picks out the life of the philosopher; but this is not uncontroversial<sup>20</sup> – the text is rather sketchy:

κατὰ τύχην δὲ τὴν Ὀδυσσεῶς λαχοῦσαν πασῶν ὑστάτην αἰρησομένην ἰέναι, μνήμη δὲ τῶν προτέρων πόνων φιλοτιμίας λελωφηκυῖαν ζητεῖν περιουῶσαν χρόνον πολὺν βίον ἀνδρὸς ἰδιώτου ἀπράγμονος, καὶ μόγις εὐρεῖν κείμενον που καὶ παρημελημένον ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων, καὶ εἰπεῖν ἰδοῦσαν ὅτι τὰ αὐτὰ ἂν ἔπραξεν καὶ πρώτη λαχοῦσα, καὶ ἀσμένην ἐλέσθαι. (X 620c3-d2)

And it fell out that the soul of Odysseus drew the last lot of all and came to make its choice, and, from memory of its former toils having flung away ambition, went about for a long time in quest of the life of an ordinary citizen who minded his own business, and with difficulty found it lying in some corner disregarded by the others, and upon seeing it said that it would have done the same had it drawn the first lot, and chose it gladly. (Transl. by P. Shorey)

Sure enough – as Bruno Centrone has pointed out<sup>21</sup> – Ulysses' behavior *post mortem* represents the reversal of the one typical of the τιμοκρατικός νεανίας described previously (VIII 549c ff.). But to appreciate whether the life chosen is really philosophical, it may be useful to summarize Ulysses' choice as follows: a) by chance (λαχοῦσαν), he is the last one to choose; 2) his criterion of selection is the memory of his past suffering (μνήμη δὲ τῶν προτέρων πόνων); 3) he has done without ambition (φιλοτιμίας λελωφηκυῖαν); 4) he has spent a long time «going about» (περιουῶσαν)<sup>22</sup>, while searching for his new life (*i.e.* his choice is anything but rushed); 5) the life thus picked out belongs to a private citizen (ιδιώτης), whose life is characterized by ἀπραγμοσύνη<sup>23</sup>; 6) such life is commonly neglected and it «lies in some corner» (κείμενον που); 7) Ulysses would have made the same choice even if by chance he had been the first to choose.

Between such βίος and the philosophical one, some analogies might be

<sup>19</sup> LévyStone 2005, p. 209; Montiglio 2007 and 2011, pp. 47-52.

<sup>20</sup> See Centrone 2012, p. 198 n. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Centrone 2019, p. 645 n. 772.

<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to observe that this verb is employed by Plato also in the *Apology* (31c) with regards to Socrates' everyday activity.

<sup>23</sup> But ἰδιώτου ἀπράγμονος «is virtually a single word»: Adam 2009, p. 460 n. 19. For another reference to this value in a mythical context regarding the transmigration of souls, see *Gorg.* 526c. See already Pind. *Pae.* 4, 42-48, with Untersteiner 1966, p. 322 *ad loc.*

detected. Some of them are particularly remarkable; some others are less convincing. 1) As a consequence of their highest status, the king-philosophers are the last ones to be credited with a peculiar model of life in the *Republic*<sup>24</sup>. 2) Memory (or rather recollection) is crucial in some of Plato's epistemological accounts, and it plays a pivotal role in the prospect of the achievement of a properly philosophical knowledge<sup>25</sup>. 3) Ambition is typical of those individuals whose preeminent psychic 'motivational centre' is θυμός, and not λογισμός; in particular, in the specific context of the καλλίπολις, the former (θυμός) peculiarly belongs to the soldiers, whereas the latter (λογισμός) is typical of the philosophers<sup>26</sup>. 4) Becoming a philosopher might require some time: it is a difficult and laborious process, like a long journey<sup>27</sup>. 5) The value of ἀπραγμοσύνη is typical of philosophy, as the latter requires its adherents to neglect any other occupation throughout the training process<sup>28</sup>. 6) Philosophy usually lies in public discredit, for it is misunderstood, or simply disregarded as useless<sup>29</sup>. 7) In itself, knowledge is independent from contingency: what is really good is so regardless of any particular circumstances whatsoever – actually, what is really good is not relative at all; as a consequence, the philosopher should not regret his good decisions, and he would not behave differently even if by chance he were given the opportunity to do so.

Were this reading to be correct, Plato would turn out to have created a new myth for Ulysses<sup>30</sup>. The latter would be a philosophical hero – the symbol of philosophy. But however convincing the aforementioned points might appear, (at least) some of them might be easily undermined, or even refuted<sup>31</sup>. Even though the plausibility of the comparison as a whole cannot be definitively undermined, here follows another proposal. The crucial point of Ulysses' example might be the following: those who choose their new lives under the pressure of customs or previous habits – like nearly any soul in Er's

<sup>24</sup> Vegetti 1998.

<sup>25</sup> See Centrone 2008 and 2011.

<sup>26</sup> See Calabi 1998.

<sup>27</sup> *Phaedr.* 246e5 ff.; *Ep.* VII, 344b4-c1.

<sup>28</sup> See *Ap.* 31d-32a; *Gorg.* 526c.

<sup>29</sup> *Resp.* VI 489d1 ff.

<sup>30</sup> As Montiglio 2011, p. 47 puts it.

<sup>31</sup> 1) Ulysses is the last one to choose by chance, not because of some philosophical reason; in narratological terms, Ulysses' turn might serve the purpose of implicitly highlighting the value of the choice made: even though there are a few options on the table for him, because he is the last one to choose, he makes the best possible choice as he chooses that life which is ignorantly neglected by any others. 2) Plato's recollection regards intelligible objects, not sensible ones – let alone life experiences. 3) The ability to temper ambition is not exclusively philosophical: it is a matter of virtue in general – of demotic virtue: see Petrucci 2016 and 2017. 4) Also the insistence on the long time spent by Ulysses going about might serve a merely narratological purpose: he has long strived for a life which is absolutely ordinary. 5) Actually, ἀπραγμοσύνη might result from demotic virtue too. 6) In itself, Ulysses' claim might simply refer to the deep understanding of his previous experiences.

tale – should be identified with those people who thoroughly lack virtue (see *Phd.* 81c8-82b9); whereas Ulysses, who acts in accordance with some form of empirically grounded and practical knowledge, should not be assimilated to the philosopher, but to those people who are endowed with ‘demotic virtue’<sup>32</sup>. Ulysses has learnt to be moderate (see *Phd.* 82b8, γίγνεσθαι ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀνδραζ μετρίουζ)<sup>33</sup>, because he has done without ambition along with all its suffering; he appreciates the importance of living a life deprived of troubles and demanding occupations – a virtuous life – only in light of his experiences. But not every form of virtue requires an intellectual acquaintance with the ideal dimension: along with the latter, also a non-philosophical virtue, a virtue for everyone, a ‘demotic virtue’, is contemplated in Plato’s philosophy<sup>34</sup>. Moreover, the features of this virtuous Ulysses seem to allude to Socrates<sup>35</sup>, but not to the ‘metaphysical Socrates’ (eternized by Plato), rather to a more modest one<sup>36</sup>; not by chance, also Xenophon testifies to frequent and various comparisons between Socrates and the Homeric character<sup>37</sup>.

So, when it comes to Plato’s Ulysses, there is no need to make any reference to philosophy. As a result, Ulysses the philosopher, Ulysses the hero of knowledge, cannot be traced back to Plato. More likely, in his *Republic* Plato

<sup>32</sup> Contrary to what Montiglio 2007, p. 43 n. 23 maintains. In the passage from the *Phaedo* mentioned above (81c8-82b9), three types of human beings are described: those who lack virtue, those who are endowed with «demotic and political virtue», and the philosophers. On demotic virtue, see Petrucci 2016 and 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Not by chance, in another passage from the *Republic* (390a8) Homer is criticized because he has portrayed the «wisest man» (ἀνδρα τὸν σοφώτατον) while he praises bodily pleasures. «Wise» seems to entail here nothing more than mere moderation; and moderation towards pleasures is a feature of demotic virtue: Petrucci 2016, p. 166. See also LévyStone 2005, p. 192.

<sup>34</sup> Petrucci 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Also in *Symp.* 219d Socrates is implicitly compared to Ulysses by Alcibiades; but it is his traditional virtue that is praised – nothing philosophically relevant, *pace* LévyStone 2005, p. 209. See also *Phaedr.* 259b (where the cicadas are compared to the Sirens).

<sup>36</sup> See LévyStone 2005, p. 183.

<sup>37</sup> See *Mem.* I 2, 57-59 (where Socrates is accused by Polycrates of quoting Odysseus’ words from *Il.* II 188-191 and 198-202, to defend his antidemocratic ideas), with LévyStone 2005, p. 211; I 3 6-8 (where Socrates refers to Odysseus as a model of ἐγκράτεια), with LévyStone 2005, pp. 190-191; II 6 11-12 (where the Sirens’ words to Odysseus are said to be a spell which can be appropriately applied to whoever is fond of virtue); IV 6 15 (where Socrates assimilates himself to Odysseus in as much as they are both infallible rhetoricians), with LévyStone 2005, p. 193 and Declava Caizzi 1966, pp. 106-107 and n. 12 above. Also in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (261bc) Ulysses is portrayed as a rhetorician: see *Hom. Il.* III 216-224. As is evident, either Socrates compares himself to the Homeric character, or he is assimilated to him by someone else (both positively and negatively); on this relationship, see LévyStone 2005, pp. 193-194, especially pp. 207-210: «chacun (*scil.* Plato and Xenophon) explique et comprend de manière – légèrement – différente Socrate et sa méthode dialogique, mais tous reprennent l’exemple d’Ulysse pour l’illustrer» (p. 207). See also *Xen. Cyn.* I 2; *Symp.* IV 6. Socrates and Ulysses are assimilated by Epictetus as well (I 12, 3) in relation to their personal relationship with the divine.

has just elaborated on Euripides' lost *Philoctetes*, where a «tranquil Odysseus» could be found<sup>38</sup>.

3.

Antiochus' account in Cicero's *De finibus* is particularly intriguing<sup>39</sup>. The general assumption is that the desire for knowledge is innate (*innatus in nobis cognitionis amor et scientiae*), strong (*tantus [...] ut*) and pleasant (*ut aliquid scire se gaudeant*). Knowing entails experiencing pleasure as its natural consequence. Knowledge is hence valuable in itself (*ad eas res hominum natura nullo emolumento invitata rapiatur*), unlike pleasure<sup>40</sup>. Besides, something similar had already been maintained before by the Stoic mouthpiece Cato, in relation to Stoic *oikeiosis*: we are eager to know for its own sake<sup>41</sup>.

In light of Piso's sharp criticism against pleasure as a principle, it should now be perspicuous that his dialectical<sup>42</sup> account is not directed against Stoicism – as Mauro Bonazzi has recently maintained<sup>43</sup> – but Epicureanism. And

<sup>38</sup> See Dio Chrys. *Or.* 59, 1-2 and 52, 11 with Barigazzi 1955. According to this scholar, the theme of a «tranquil Odysseus» dates back to Epicharmus and Antisthenes, whence it was extrapolated by Euripides, upon whom Plato eventually draws.

<sup>39</sup> Ulysses is mentioned by Cicero also in the following passages: *Tusc.* II 48-50, V 46; *Or.* I 196; *off.* I 113, III 97-98.

<sup>40</sup> See Tsouni 2012, p. 133. See also *fin.* V 52, *intellegi necesse est in ipsis rebus quae discutuntur et cognoscuntur invitamenta inesse, quibus ad discendum cognoscendumque moveamur*.

<sup>41</sup> III 17, *rerum autem cognitiones, quas vel comprehensiones vel perceptiones vel [...] καταλήψεις appellemus licet, eas igitur ipsas propter se adsciscendas arbitramur, quod habeant quiddam in se quasi complexum et continens veritatem. id autem in parvis intellegi potest, quos delectari videamus, etiamsi eorum nihil intersit, si quid ratione per se ipsi invenerint*. See also III 18. This makes it rather unlikely that Antiochus' account is constructed against Stoicism.

<sup>42</sup> The dialectical structure of the passage has been pointed out also by Perutelli 2006, p. 20; according to the scholar, the implicit polemical target could be represented by Laevius.

<sup>43</sup> Bonazzi 2019, p. 6; but see *ibid.* 5 («[...] ancora una volta in opposizione all'Epicureismo»). This reading derives from Bénatouïl 2007, pp. 19-21, who exploits a testimony (Plut. *Stoic. rep.* 1033c = *SVF* III 702) regarding Chrysippus: αὐτὸς γοῦν Χρῦσιππος ἐν τῷ τετάρτῳ περὶ Βίον οὐδὲν οἶται τὸν σχολαστικὸν βίον τοῦ ἡδονικοῦ διαφέρειν· αὐτὰς δὲ παραθήσομαι τὰς λέξεις· ὅσοι δ' ὑπολαμβάνουσι φιλοσόφοις ἐπιβάλλειν μάλιστα τὸν σχολαστικὸν βίον, ἀπ' ἀρχῆς τί μοι δοκοῦσι διαμαρτάνειν, ὑπονοοῦντες διαγωγῆς τιος ἔνεκεν δεῖν τοῦτο ποιεῖν ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς τοῦτω παραπλησίου καὶ τὸν ὅλον βίον οὕτω πως διελκύσαι· τοῦτο δ' ἐστίν, ἂν σαφῶς θεωρηθῆ, ἡδέως· οὐ γὰρ δεῖ λανθάνειν τὴν ὑπόνοιαν αὐτῶν, πολλῶν μὲν σαφῶς τοῦτο λεγόντων οὐκ ὀλίγων δ' ἀδηλότερον. This passage is very interesting, and it might be the case that the polemical target is represented here by Platonism and Aristotelianism, as Bénatouïl 2007, pp. 2-3 maintains. But there is not even a hint of such σχολαστικός βίος in Piso's report; there, the question at issue is whether pleasure or knowledge is primary for human beings. Besides, the Stoics themselves would credit the contemplative life with a specific status in their philosophy: see Stob. *ecl.* II 109, 10 Wachsmuth-Hense (= *SVF* III 686), with Bénatouïl 2007, pp. 7-13, who considers the contemplative life as indifferent in itself, and hence only to be 'selected' (not 'chosen') if the *logos* allows it. For a more prudent reading of Antiochus' polemics, see Bénatouïl 2009, p. 12.

what is remarkable, this very polemical target was criticized already in book III, when Cato explained the Stoic theory of *oikeiosis* (*fn.* III 17 *in principiis autem naturalibus diligendi sui plerique Stoici non putant voluptatem esse ponendam*)<sup>44</sup>.

But in book V, the reversal of the Epicurean position is obtained by means of the employment of the ‘cradle argument’<sup>45</sup>, which was an Epicurean argumentative strategy (but also a Peripatetic and Stoic one)<sup>46</sup>. Pleasure is not pursued for its own sake: knowledge is what has animated human beings since their childhood<sup>47</sup>. There follows Ulysses’ example and the episode of his encounter with the Sirens. But before I go into detail on this matter, some preliminary remarks are in order.

Given the ongoing polemics against Epicureanism, the reference to Ulysses and to his encounter with the Sirens is likely to reflect an analogous anti-Epicurean criticism. This becomes all the more likely if only one considers that Epicurean philosophers were accused to have drawn inspiration from, if not stolen, Ulysses’ words to the Phaeacians<sup>48</sup>, in order to substantiate their own account – namely that the ultimate goal (*telos*) is pleasure:

ὁ δὲ παρὰ τῷ Ὀμήρῳ Ὀδυσσεὺς ἡγεμῶν δοκεῖ<sup>49</sup> γεγενῆσθαι Ἐπικούρω  
τῆς πολυθρυλήτου ἡδονῆς, ὅσπερ φησὶν· οὐ γὰρ ἔγωγέ τι φημι τέλος<sup>50</sup>  
χαριέστερον εἶναι / ἢ ὅταν εὐφροσύνη μὲν ἔχη κατὰ δῆμον ἅπαντα, /  
δαιτυμόνες δ’ ἀνὰ δόματ’ ἀκουάζωνται ἀοιδοῦ / ἤμενοι ἐξείης, παρὰ δὲ  
πλήθωσι τράπεζαι / σίτου καὶ κρειῶν, μέθῃ δ’ ἐκ κρητῆρος ἀφύσσων /

<sup>44</sup> See also *quibus ego vehementer adsentior, ne, si voluptatem natura posuisse in iis rebus videatur, quae primae appetuntur, multa turpia sequantur*. See also Diog. Laert. VII 85-86 (‘Ὁ δὲ λέγουσὶ τινες, πρὸς ἡδονὴν γίνεσθαι τὴν πρώτην ὀρμὴν τοῖς ζώοις, ψεῦδος ἀποφαίνουσιν. ἐπιγέννημα γὰρ φασιν, εἰ ἄρα ἔστιν, ἡδονὴν εἶναι ὅταν αὐτὴ καθ’ αὐτὴν ἢ φύσις ἐπιζητήσασα τὰ ἐναρμόζοντα τῆ συστάσει ἀπολάβῃ), Sen. *ep.* 121, 7-9, with Bénatouil 2009, pp. 10-11. The Stoic theory of *oikeiosis* was constructed against Epicureanism: hence, if Antiochus relies on it, it comes as no surprise that he contrasts it with Epicurean hedonism.

<sup>45</sup> Brunschwig 1986.

<sup>46</sup> *fn.* V 55 *tamen omnes veteres philosophi, maxime nostri, ad incunabula accedunt, quod in pueritia facillime se arbitrantur naturae voluntatem posse cognoscere*. See also *fn.* III 16-22 (where the polemical target is Epicureanism), 62-68; *off.* I 13. Note that Aristotle and Plato were taken to be in profound agreement by Antiochus: see e.g. Cic. *ac.* I 17; this was the case of Stoicism too: Cic. *fn.* IV 3-14, 19. According to Antiochus, these three sects appeared as different, mainly because of the different language they would employ.

<sup>47</sup> Or, to express it with a Stoic word which is crucial also in Antiochus’ philosophy, *oikeiosis* is what children spontaneously tend to accomplish, and *oikeiosis* comprehends also the development of one’s own rational nature: see Gill 2015.

<sup>48</sup> See also the *Schol. ad Od.* IX 28 (Dindorf).

<sup>49</sup> This verb corroborates the hypothesis that the author is just relating a hostile interpretation of Epicurus’ hedonism: see Buffière 1956, p. 319 and Setaioli 2004, p. 24 for this hypothesis.

<sup>50</sup> Sure, it was the occurrence of this word that sparked the interest of the philosophical sects.

οινοχόος παρέχησι καὶ ἐγγεῖη δεπάεσσιν. / τοῦτό τί μοι κάλλιστον ἐνὶ φρεσὶν εἶδεται εἶναι<sup>51</sup>. (Ath. XII 7)

Homer's Odysseus seems to have been the Master of Epicurus with regard to his notorious pleasure; precisely that Ulysses says: "For I say that there is no more pleasant fulfilment than when joy possesses all the people, and banqueters throughout the house listen to the singer, sitting next to each other, and alongside the tables are full of bread and meat, and the wine-pourer draws drink from the mixing-bowl and brings it and pours it into cups. This seems to my mind to be most beautiful." (Transl. by E. Asmis 1995)

Nonetheless, it is unlikely that Epicurus really mentioned Homer and Ulysses as legitimizing testimonies for his own account<sup>52</sup>. Another author, Heraclitus 'the Allegorist'<sup>53</sup>, accuses him to have unwillingly<sup>54</sup> stolen from Homer; Epicurus has done nothing but express Homer's ideas with different words, although he was not aware of it. Epicurus' theory is thus a *furtum*, whose thief is such a bad thief that he doesn't even know to have stolen; hence, there is no *furtum* at all, properly speaking<sup>55</sup>:

Ὁ δὲ Φαίαξ φιλόσοφος Ἐπίκουρος, ὁ τῆς ἡδονῆς ἐν τοῖς ἰδίοις κήποις γεωργός, ὁ πᾶσαν ποιητικὴν ἄστροις σημηνάμενος οὐκ ἐξαιρέτως μόνον Ὅμηρον, ἀρ' οὐχὶ καὶ ταῦθ' ἅ μόνα τῷ βίῳ παρέδωκεν αἰσχυρῶς ἀγνοήσας παρ' Ὀμήρου κέκλοφεν; ἅ γὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς ὑποκρίσει παρ' Ἀλκίῳ μὴ φρονῶν ἐψεύσατο, ταῦθ' ὡς ἀληθεύων ἀπεφήνατο τέλη βίου [...]. Ἄλλ' ὁ γ' Ἐπίκουρος ἀμαθία τὴν Ὀδυσσεύς πρόσκαιρον ἀνάγκην βίου κατεβάλετο δόξαν, ἃ παρὰ Φαίαξιν ἐκεῖνος ἀπεφήνατο κάλλιστα, ταῦτα τοῖς σεμνοῖς κήποις ἐμφυτεύσας. (Heracl. *Quaest. Hom.* 79, 2-10)

But what about the Phaeacian philosopher Epicurus, the horticulturalist who grew pleasure in his private garden, who took a bearing on all poetry, not only Homer in particular, by relying on the stars? Did he not steal ignorantly and shamefully from Homer the only doctrines which he has passed on to man-

<sup>51</sup> See also Luc. *Par.* 10-11 (on the latter, see Gordon 2012, pp. 41-42).

<sup>52</sup> See the discussion by Setaioli 2004, pp. 20-26; see also the discussion by Gordon 2012, pp. 44-45. *Contra*, Asmis 1995, pp. 17-18. But one anonymous reviewer makes me observe: «we have clear reference to the *Odyssey* and Odysseus' rhetorical fair in one book of Philodemus' *On Rhetoric* (that contained in *PHerc.* 1004 [...]). This fact is interesting, because in the first book of this treatise Philodemus highlights his fidelity to Epicurus (and the first Epicurean masters) in believing the (epideictic) rhetoric to be an art».

<sup>53</sup> On his reading of Odysseus and his wanderings, see Buffière 1956, pp. 378-380 and Stanford 1985<sup>2</sup>, pp. 126-127.

<sup>54</sup> Asmis 1995, p. 16 misses this point.

<sup>55</sup> On other testimonies regarding Epicurus' alleged debt towards Homer, see *Schol. ad Il.* XXIV 526 (V, pp. 606-607 Erbse); *Schol. ad Od.* IX 28 (Dindorf).

kind? What Odysseus said falsely, unwisely, and hypocritically at the court of Alcinous, Epicurus proclaims as the goal of life, and claims to be speaking the truth [...]. Yet Epicurus, in his ignorance, made Odysseus's temporary necessity into a principle of living, and planted in his glorious garden the things that Odysseus told the Phaeacians were "best of all". (Transl. by Konstan-Russell)

Moreover, Epicurus' depreciation of poetry is well known<sup>56</sup>. It is hence unlikely that he could refer to the most popular poet of all times to substantiate his most allegedly peculiar and original theory. What is more plausible, in my opinion, is that some later Epicurean philosopher – maybe someone particularly fond of poetry – referred to Homer, presumably in the context of a defence of the most fundamental tenet of the school, hedonism<sup>57</sup>. All in all, the lines from the *Odyssey* quoted above could represent a sort of (popular) corroboration of the importance, if not primacy, of pleasure. Sure enough, this is not to say that such lines were taken by this Epicurean student to precisely express, or foreshadow, the ultimate goal of Epicurus' philosophy; but they could help legitimize an often misunderstood and disregarded theory, which was harshly criticized particularly in Rome. Even though this is meant to remain a mere hypothesis, Philodemus might be a promising candidate for the role just sketched<sup>58</sup>. He was an expert reader of Homer; he even dedicated a whole treatise to discuss the 'good king' according to Homer<sup>59</sup>. So he (or an Epicurean like him) might have referred to Ulysses' words just to enrich his theoretical arguments, showing a convergence with Homer; thus he would have both substantiated Epicurus' hedonism by means of a more or less authoritative quotation, and mainly defended the genuineness of such a theory. Besides, Demetrius Laco too defended Epicurus from the allegation of having stolen from Homer, presumably with regards to ethics<sup>60</sup>.

Be all that as it may, it is evident that the possibility to read Ulysses' words through the lens of the Garden was absolutely clear to Heraclitus' mind, even provided that no Epicurean student had ever read those lines that way. This is why Heraclitus, plausibly a Stoic philosopher, provides the reader

<sup>56</sup> See fr. 163 Usener. See also Plut. *Aud. poet.* 15d, with Montiglio 2006, p. 567 n. 40.

<sup>57</sup> See also Gordon 2012, p. 46.

<sup>58</sup> But see the discussion of this hypothesis by Setaioli 2004a, pp. 26-29. Nonetheless, my proposal is compatible with Philodemus' conception of the function and value of poetry: its essential purpose is to delight, but it can incidentally contain some useful pieces of information; see also Setaioli 2004a, pp. 27-28 n. 404. This could have been the case of the relationship between Epicurus' hedonism and Ulysses' words.

<sup>59</sup> On Philodemus' Homer, see Dorandi 1978.

<sup>60</sup> See *PHerc.* 1012, XLVIII 6-13 ed. Puglia 1988. According to Setaioli 2004a, p. 25, this response might regard Ulysses' words here at issue. Actually, it is possible that these words come from Epicurus himself: see Asmis 1995, p. 18 n. 18. Also Sextus Empiricus deals with the allegation of having drawn upon Homer (*Adv. Math.* I 283-285), maintaining that it is absolutely wrong.

with an explanation, or excuse, for Ulysses' Epicurean-like words – he was just pretending in order to come across as being polite to his guests. As usual, interscholastic polemics is intricate and difficult to reconstruct in detail.

Let's now go back to Antiochus. It may be the case that he referred to the Sirens because that episode had been interpreted accordingly in some Epicurean writing by some Epicurean student. This is suggested by the polemical tone of the expressions *uocum suauitate* and *novitate quadam et varietate cantandi*. According to Antiochus, it was not the pleasant voice of the Sirens<sup>61</sup>, nor the variety of their songs that would attract the sailors, but it was their wisdom (*scientiam pollicentur*) that elicited the *discendi cupiditas* of every man. Between pleasure and knowledge, it is the latter that should be credited with primacy; the former, instead, does not represent something valuable in itself, but it is only a consequence, an effect, of the former. This does not come to us as a novelty, after all; already Aristotle had made it clear that knowledge is what every human being naturally and primarily longs for<sup>62</sup>. So, Antiochus keeps Ulysses from being an Epicurean *ante litteram*, who falls for songs only because they are pleasant; rather, it is his natural impulse for knowledge that is said to be preeminent, and it matches the promise of knowledge made by the Sirens (49 *multa se scire profitebantur*)<sup>63</sup>.

That said, there are some misconceptions about Antiochus' reading of Ulysses that need to be pointed out and refuted. First of all, in Piso's account Ulysses is not the symbol of philosophy, he is not devoted to a contemplative life, he does not take up his journeys only because he is a philosopher *sapientiae cupidus*<sup>64</sup>. Only the episode of the Sirens is read by Antiochus in an intellectually qualified way. But there is not even a hint of philosophy, or pure contemplation, in the construction of the character. The fact that Ulysses disregards his homeland (49 *scientiam [...] quam non erat mirum sapientiae cupido patria esse cariorem*)<sup>65</sup> as a result of his being *sapientiae cupidus*, does

<sup>61</sup> Actually, also the Stoics used to consider the Sirens as the symbol of pleasure, corruption and vice, thus judging them negatively: Sen. *ep.* 31, 2; 56, 14; 123, 8-12; Epict. *diatr.* II 23, 36-39, with Bonazzi 2019, p. 6.

<sup>62</sup> *Met.* A 1, 980a1; but see also Cic. *fin.* IV 4 (*habere etiam insitam quandam vel potius innatam cupiditatem scientiae*); *ibid.* 18 (*erat insitus menti cognitionis amor, e quo etiam rationis explicandae disserendique cupiditas consequatur*).

<sup>63</sup> Tsouni 2012, p. 134.

<sup>64</sup> See Tsouni 2012, p. 134: «[...] the desire for theoretical knowledge is represented by the long travels of Ulysses, who appears not to be forced to endure many adventures before arriving back in Ithaca but to be travelling for the sake of the spectacle itself. In this way the hero is vindicated as an example of a wise man who devoted himself to the theoretical life and embarked upon journeys led by a desire for knowledge (*sapientiae cupido*)». See also Bonazzi 2019, p. 6, who refers the expression *maiorum rerum* to the Sirens, whereas Antiochus/Piso assigns it to the contemplation of the *maiores viri*. See *infra*.

<sup>65</sup> Differently, Seneca's Ulysses (a Stoic Ulysses) is eager to come back home: *Ep.* 66, 26 *Ulixes*

not mean that he represents the metaphorization of philosophy, or of the contemplative life; it is just an extreme example of the axiological primacy of the desire to know over any other kind of impulse or value (family and home included)<sup>66</sup>. Ulysses is a fully developed human being, who follows his absolutely natural inquisitiveness, whatever it takes.

The real ‘contemplators’ – so to speak – are introduced by Antiochus later in the text, where Piso maintains that *duci vero*<sup>67</sup> *maiorum rerum contemplatione ad cupiditatem scientiae summorum virorum est putandum*. Figures like Ulysses are more of curious than theoretical people: *omnia quidem scire, cuiuscumque modi sint, cupere curiosorum*. The expression *omnia [...] cuiuscumque modi sint* is likely to allude to the kind of notions transmitted by the Sirens: they promise to teach [...] *grave certamen belli clademque [...]*, || *Graecia quam Troiae divino numine vexit*, || *omniaque e latis rerum vestigia terris*. The content of their teaching was likely to seem to Ulysses to be something like his own present. In any case, we are left with no clues as to which kind of connection (if there is one) links the widespread and common desire for knowledge and that particular form of *cupiditas* which is orientated towards *maiores res* and which is typical of special people like Plato, Democritus or Pythagoras. It may be the case that between these two forms of desire there is something like a natural *continuum*, without any hiatus or fracture<sup>68</sup>; but it is not possible to state it with absolute certainty. Antiochus’ celebration of human inquisitiveness, which he shares with the New Academy<sup>69</sup>, does not involve Ulysses as such.

*ad Ithacae suae saxa sic properat, quemadmodum Agamemnon ad Mycenarum nobiles muros: nemo enim patriam quia magna est amat, sed quia sua*. See also *Const.* 2, 1.

<sup>66</sup> In relation to the semantic field of desires, which is quite abundantly present in this passage, Bonazzi 2019, p. 7 has put forward the following hypothesis: the insistence on impulses and desires, which are strongly felt by Antiochus’ Ulysses, would be symptomatic of an implicit polemic against Stoicism, because of their refusal to credit the sage with desires (see Epict. *Diatr.* III 24, 13-31). Now, the insistence is real, and it is likely to allude to an Aristotelian (but see Natali’s correct objections in Bonazzi 2019, p. 7 n. 22) or a Platonizing psychic model, as Bonazzi 2019, p. 7 believes; but since the hypothesis according to which the polemical target of the previous lines is Stoicism has been refuted, there is no need to detect this anti-Stoic overtone when it comes to Antiochus’ psychology. In my opinion, the Platonic, or Platonizing psychic model underlying the chapter is perfectly suited to insist on the very general point that Antiochus has already repeatedly made: the discriminating aspect is *what* you essentially desire, *what* you spontaneously long for, provided that you have natural impulses and desires; according to the Epicureans, it is pleasure, whereas according to Antiochus, it is knowledge, although the quality of this knowledge and of its objects varies. See *infra*.

<sup>67</sup> The adversative value of the adverb marks a fresh start compared to what has been stated before.

<sup>68</sup> See Tsouni 2012, p. 133: «The development of scientific and generally intellectual enquiry directed at “higher” objects of study seems to be a natural development arising from this commonly shared inquisitiveness».

<sup>69</sup> See Cic. *Luc.* 127, with Bénatouïl 2007, pp. 14-19, where the searching moment is predictably

Besides, also the series of examples of *summi viri* casts doubts over the real value of Ulysses' character in Antiochus' account. According to Tsouni,

The Odyssean model of the wanderer who embarks on the acquisition of knowledge, as exemplified in his encounter with the Sirens, serves in *fin.* 5 as a mythical archetype. It initiates the examples of old authorities and famous people of the past who devoted themselves to the theoretical life and could thus serve as role models. The Antiochean protreptic at *fin.* V 50 represents a tradition which clearly depicts ancient authority as detached from the political sphere and devoted solely to theoretical activity. Thus Pythagoras, Plato and Democritus are depicted as examples of wandering philosophers who travelled the world to acquire wisdom motivated by a desire for learning<sup>70</sup>.

As a matter of fact, after the distinction between *curiosi* and *summi viri*, several figures are mentioned. The first one is Archimedes, who is described while concentrating on his geometrical demonstrations, and he does not even realize that his homeland has been destroyed. This episode is mentioned also by Plutarch, who sets out a thorough Platonization of the figure, in order to prove the Epicurean Colotes wrong<sup>71</sup>. Along with other pieces of evidence<sup>72</sup>, this element too strengthens the hypothesis that Antiochus' ongoing polemic is directed against Epicureanism. But also the second figure quoted in the passage, Aristoxenus, is present in Plutarch's *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum* (e.g. 1093d): he is the symbol of the devotion to music. Unlike the previous and the following ones, the third author mentioned by Antiochus, Aristophanes, is not explicitly present in Plutarch's anti-Epicurean writings; nonetheless, Plutarch repeatedly refers to philological disputes in his intellectual fight against Colotes (*Non posse*, 1095c). Last but not least, in Piso's account there come the three philosophers already mentioned above – Plato, Pythagoras, Democritus. As a matter of fact, these are the only ones *a quibus propter discendi cupiditatem videmus ultimas terras esse peragratas*. And all of them are quoted also by Plutarch to prove the primacy of intellectual pleas-

emphasized. Note that the other school which is there credited with such contemplative interests is Stoicism: *quaeret igitur haec et vester sapiens et hic noster. Sed vester ut adsentiat credat adfirmet.*

<sup>70</sup> Tsouni 2012, pp. 134-135.

<sup>71</sup> *Non posse*, 1094c with Parente 1992.

<sup>72</sup> See the expression *qui propter animi voluptates coli dicunt ea studia quae dixi* (50: note the preciseness of the *iunctura animi voluptas*, which correctly encapsulates the Epicurean difference between psychic and bodily pleasures). They do not realize that there is no need to introduce utility to make the *studia* at issue *expetenda*: they are desirable *propter se*, and those who pursue wisdom and knowledge experience pleasures that derive from *ipsa scientia*, regardless of its potential advantages or disadvantages. Sure enough, the anti-Epicurean overtone of this passage is particularly vivid in the polemical mention of *utilitas* (see *Ratae sententiae* 10-12); see also 51, *nec vero sum nescius esse utilitatem in historia, non modo voluptatem*.

ures over the bodily ones<sup>73</sup>. Another important analogy between Plutarch's Platonizing anti-Epicurean polemics and Antiochus' account is the defence of *praxis*<sup>74</sup>, which is dealt with at V 57-58 (58 *nos ad agendum esse natos*)<sup>75</sup>. Now, were Tsouni's aforementioned words to be right, Plato, Pythagoras and Democritus would represent the historical incarnation of the mythical and metaphorical example offered by Ulysses – namely, the philosopher devoted to contemplation, who takes up difficult (and metaphorical) journeys in search of the truth, whatever it takes. Unfortunately, if Ulysses is really said to be animated by a *sapientiae cupiditas* (more precisely, he is *sapientiae cupidus*), nevertheless Piso does not ever say that all of his journeys depend on such desire; actually, he does not deliberately set off on any journey: he just faces what destiny or the gods want him to face. Antiochus limits himself to the claim that *sapientiae cupiditas* only explains the way Ulysses behaves with the Sirens. The scope of Antiochus' defence is narrow and limited to one episode<sup>76</sup>.

Now, the very problem regards the sources of Antiochus. According to Georgia Tsouni, behind Antiochus' allegorical reading of the Sirens some Peripatetic source is likely to lie<sup>77</sup>. The survey of the pertinent sources offered by the scholar is convincing: it is absolutely plausible that Antiochus drew upon such material. After all, biographical interests were widespread in Aristotle's school. Moreover, this piece of evidence is thoroughly unproblematic even in relation to Antiochus' philosophical allegiance: as I have already said above, he would deem Peripatetic sources and also Aristotle's writings as profoundly

<sup>73</sup> E.g. Plato: *Non posse*, 1094cd; Democritus: *Adv. Col.* 1108e ff.; Pythagoras: *Non posse*, 1105e. Historians too are mentioned by Plutarch as allies against Colotes (*Non posse*, 1093b); and also Piso mentions history as something valuable in itself in the next paragraph (51, *ipsi enim quaeramus a nobis [...] quid historia delectet, quam solemus persequi usque ad extremum, <cum> praetermissa repetimus, inchoata persequimur*). Even fictions (52, *fictas fabulas*) are taken by Piso as examples of our innate desire to know; Plutarch too mentions them in his *Non posse* (1092f). See already Aristotle (*Met.* A 2, 982b18).

<sup>74</sup> On the different forms of *praxis* contemplated by Antiochus, see Bénatouil 2009, p. 16; on Plutarch's philosophy of *praxis*, see Bonazzi 2012.

<sup>75</sup> 57 *itaque ut quisque optime natus institutusque est, esse omnino nolit in vita, si gerendis negotiis orbatus possit paratissimis vesci voluptatibus. [...] qua in vita (scil. the one devoted to studying) tantum abest ut voluptates consectentur, etiam curas, sollicitudines, vigiliis perferunt optimaque parte hominis, quae in nobis divina ducenda est, ingenii et mentis acie fruuntur nec voluptatem requirentes nec fugientes laborem. [...] tantaque est vis talibus in studiis, ut eos etiam, qui sibi alios proposuerunt fines bonorum, quos utilitate aut voluptate dirigunt, tamen in rebus quaerendis explicandisque naturis aetates conterere videamus*. The last point sounds like a charge of inconsistency on the part of the Epicureans: they claim the primacy of pleasure over anything else; still, they spend their whole life studying. The general perspective of this criticism is clearly Platonic, or Platonizing: the reference to the «divine» intellect, which is like a daemon within us, and the expression *ingenii ac mentis acies* are quite typical of Plato's philosophy.

<sup>76</sup> Cicero too seems to implicitly defend Ulysses in *Tusc.* I 98; see Perutelli 2006, p. 24.

<sup>77</sup> Tsouni 2012, p. 134 and *passim*.

compatible with Plato's ones – they all stem from one source<sup>78</sup>. It suffices to think of the insistence on the naturalness of the human desire for knowledge, which is notoriously put forward in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. But as the parallels with Plutarch's writings pointed out above show, Antiochus is likely to have considered also an anti-Epicurean source (maybe the same as Plutarch's), which was probably Platonic. This hypothesis is further strengthened by the positive evaluation of the Sirens which can also be found in some Pythagorizing and Platonizing texts (e.g. again Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* IX 4, 745e-f)<sup>79</sup>:

αἱ γὰρ μὲν δὴ Ὀμήρου Σειρήνες οὐ κατὰ λόγον ἡμᾶς τῷ μύθῳ φοβοῦσιν, ἀλλὰ κάκεινος ὀρθῶς ἠνίξατο τὴν τῆς μουσικῆς αὐτῶν δύναμιν οὐκ ἀπάνθρωπον οὐδ' ὀλέθριον οὔσαν ἀλλὰ ταῖς ἐντεῦθεν ἀπιούσαις ἐκεῖ ψυχαῖς, ὡς ἔοικε, καὶ πλανωμέναις μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν ἔρωτα πρὸς τὰ οὐράνια καὶ θεῖα λήθην δὲ τῶν θνητῶν ἐμποιοῦσαν κατέχειν καὶ κατὰδειν θελγομένας, αἱ δ' ὑπὸ χαρᾶς ἔπονται καὶ συμπεριπολοῦσιν. ἐνταῦθα δὲ πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἀμυδρὰ τις οἶον ἠχῶ τῆς μουσικῆς ἐκείνης ἐξικνουμένη διὰ λόγων ἐκκαλεῖται καὶ ἀναμνησκει τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν τότε· <τὰ δ' ᾄτα τῶν> μὲν πλείστων περιαλήλιπται καὶ καταπέλασται σαρκίνοις ἐμφράγμασι καὶ πάθεσιν, οὐ κηρίνοις· ἦ δὲ <δι'> εὐφυῖαν αἰσθάνεται καὶ μνημονεύει, καὶ τῶν ἐμμανεστάτων ἐρώτων οὐδὲν ἀποδεῖ τὸ πάθος αὐτῆς, γλιχομένης καὶ ποθούσης λῦσαι τε μὴ δυναμένης ἑαυτὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος.

And Homer's Sirens give us no just reason to be afraid; for he in that fable rightly intimates the power of their music not to be hurtful to man, but delightfully charming, and detaining the souls which pass from hence thither and wander after death; working in them a love for divine and heavenly things, and a forgetfulness of every thing on earth; and they extremely pleased follow and attend them. And from thence some imperfect sound, and as it were echo of that music, coming to us by the means of reason and good precepts, rouseth our souls, and restores the notice of those things to our minds, the greatest part of which lie encumbered with and entangled in disturbances of the flesh and distracting passions. But the generous soul hears and remembers, and her affection for those pleasures riseth up to the most ardent passion, whilst she eagerly desires but is not able to free herself from the body. (Transl. by W.W. Goodwin)

<sup>78</sup> Cic. *fin.* IV 3-14, 19; see also Bonazzi 2019, p. 10 n. 29 on the problem of the sources.

<sup>79</sup> There are some differences, though. Antiochus' Sirens are more Homeric, so to speak; they promise knowledge, but they have nothing to do with the celestial music which in Plutarch enables the hearers to return to the intelligible: see Opsomer 1998, pp. 199-200, Bonazzi 2019, p. 9. According to Pépin 1982, p. 4, this reading of the Sirens is not Platonic, although the speaker is Plutarch's master, Ammonius, but Pythagorean; moreover, in Pépin's view, Neoplatonists are likely to depend on this philosophical tradition, which was metaphysical unlike the Stoic and the Cynic one. But the allusion to recollection (διὰ λόγων [...] ἀναμνησκει [...] τῶν τότε) is clearly Platonic. As for Ulysses, if he were really taken to be a philosopher by Ammonius, he would be a philosopher unable to take advantage, philosophically speaking, of the Sirens' music.

## 4.

So far so good. But what is the origin of the reading of Ulysses as the prototype philosopher? To the best of my knowledge, the only sect to have explicitly identified his model of sage with Ulysses is Stoicism. But before I go into detail on this, there is a passage from Seneca's *Epistles* (88, 5) which needs to be previously dealt with; for it seems to refute my hypothesis:

Nisi forte tibi Homerum philosophum fuisse persuadent, cum his ipsis, quibus colligunt, negent. Nam modo Stoicum illum faciunt, virtutem solam probantem et voluptates refugientem et ab honesto ne immortalitatis quidem pretio recedentem<sup>80</sup>, modo Epicureum, laudantem statum quietae civitatis et inter convivia cantusque vitam exigentis, modo Peripateticum, tria bonorum genera inducentem, modo Academicum, omnia incerta dicentem. Adparet nihil horum esse in illo, quia omnia sunt. Ista enim inter se dissident. Demus illis Homerum philosophum fuisse; nempe sapiens factus est, antequam carmina ulla cognosceret. Ergo illa discamus, quae Homerum fecere sapientem.

It may be, perhaps, that they make you believe that Homer was a philosopher, although they disprove this by the very arguments through which they seek to prove it. For sometimes they make of him a Stoic, who approves nothing but virtue, avoids pleasures, and refuses to relinquish honour even at the price of immortality; sometimes they make him an Epicurean, praising the condition of a state in repose, which passes its days in feasting and song; sometimes a Peripatetic, classifying goodness in three ways; sometimes an Academic, holding that all things are uncertain. It is clear, however, that no one of these doctrines is to be fathered upon Homer, just because they are all there; for they are irreconcilable with one another. We may admit to these men, indeed, that Homer was a philosopher yet surely he became a wise man before he had any knowledge of poetry. So let us learn what were the particular things that made Homer wise. (Transl. by R.M. Gummere)

According to some scholars, Seneca would testify to the existence of an Epicurean reading of Homer (*i.e.* from this perspective Homer should be an Epicurean *ante litteram*)<sup>81</sup> – along with a Stoic, a Peripatetic and an Academic one. But why should the passage above be of some interest for the scope of this paper? Because at least two of these interpretations (the Stoic and the Epicurean ones)<sup>82</sup> depend on words spoken by Ulysses, or on episodes regard-

<sup>80</sup> See also Cic. *de orat.* I 196.

<sup>81</sup> Bignone 1936, I, p. 291; Giancotti 1978<sup>2</sup>, pp. 495-498; Ronconi 1972, p. 70; Dorandi 1982, p. 17.

<sup>82</sup> As for the Epicurean reading, see *Od.* IX 5-11; as for the Stoic one, see *Od.* I 55 ff.; V 151 ff.; IX 25 ff.; as for the Academic interpretation, see *Schol. ad Il.* XX 249 (V, p. 43 Erbse); as for the

ing him in the poems. He is hence considered as Homer's mouthpiece. As a consequence, were this to be the case, Ulysses would not be the prototype of just one sect (Stoicism, as I have just claimed above), but he would turn out to have been employed to symbolize the perfect Epicurean philosopher too. Unfortunately, this overall interpretation does not live up to an accurate analysis. For the subject of all the verbs in Seneca's passage is always the same – namely, the *professores* quoted at 88, 2, the professors of liberal arts<sup>83</sup>. As I read the passage, these *docentes* are such bad masters that they interpret the same author in radically different manners; some of them turn Homer also into an Epicurean *ante litteram*. But this does not entail that any Epicurean student has actually read Homer that way<sup>84</sup>. It may be the case that some later Epicurean student referred to Homer's Ulysses in the context of a theoretical discussion (see *supra*), but such a quotation would not amount to a metaphorical and philosophical allegory. The same discourse should apply to the Peripatetics and the Academics as well<sup>85</sup>.

Let's now go back to Stoicism. The evidence that the Stoic sect would read Ulysses in philosophical terms is unobjectionable<sup>86</sup>:

Pro ipso quidem Catone securum te esse iussi; nullam enim sapientem nec iniuriam accipere nec contumeliam posse, Catonem autem certius exemplar sapientis viri nobis deos immortalis dedisse quam Ulixen et Herculem prioribus saeculis. Hos enim Stoici nostri sapientes pronuntiaverunt, invictos laboribus et contemptores voluptatis et victores omnium terrorum. (Sen. *Const.* II 2, 1)<sup>87</sup>

Peripatetic one, see [Plut.] *Hom.* II 137-142; *Schol. ad Il.* XXIV 376 and XVII 238 (V, pp. 586-587 Erbse; IV, p. 376 Erbse).

<sup>83</sup> Gordon 2012, p. 50 misses this point. See also Sextus, *Adv. Math.* I 273.

<sup>84</sup> Setaioli 2004a, p. 20: «Seneca per la verità non afferma che siano stati gli Epicurei a fare di Omero (o di Ulisse tra i Feaci) uno di loro, come peraltro non lo dice per nessuno degli indirizzi filosofici coi quali in quel passo il poeta viene posto in relazione. In base al testo senecano non può essere escluso che siano stati altri a vedere in quei versi una consonanza con la dottrina epicurea».

<sup>85</sup> Seneca sharply criticizes the *grammatici* and their pointless and erudite interest in the details of Ulysses' story (see also *Brev.* 13, 2); rather, one should correctly universalize his suffering and ask oneself how not to yield to the *naufragia et tot varietates malorum* of the soul (*Ep.* 88, 7; see also *ibid.* 31, 2; 123, 12; *const.* 2, 1): see Setaioli 2004, p. 353 nn. 121, 122; Perutelli 2006, pp. 85-86. Also Diogenes of Sinope is credited with an analogous criticism against grammarians: Diog. Laert. VI 27.

<sup>86</sup> See Setaioli 2004, p. 354. As for the ancient Stoa, only one testimony is remarkable (*SVF*, I 526). It concerns Cleanthes and his reading of the *moly*, which is etymologically connected to the verb *μολύω*. Actually, this piece of exegesis presumably reflects a broader philosophical reading of the whole episode of Ulysses' encounter with Circe: Setaioli 2004a, pp. 7-8. In any case, Ulysses behaves like a philosopher. The Stoic interpretation of Circe as the metaphor of corruption is followed also by Horace (*Ep.* I 2, 25 *sub domina meretrice*) and Servius (*ad Aen.* VII 19). As for the universalizing reading of the poets, see *SVF*, II 100, where Chrysippus is credited with this kind of interpretation; a similar approach towards exegesis is likely to have been defended by Zeno too: see *SVF* I 274, where he is quoted along with Antisthenes.

<sup>87</sup> On the importance of the introduction of a historical sage like Cato, see Torre 2016, pp. 710-

I said, too, that in Cato the immortal gods had given to us a truer exemplar of the wise man than earlier ages had in Ulysses and Hercules. For we Stoics have declared that these were wise men, because they were unconquered by struggles, were despisers of pleasure, and victors over all terrors. (Transl. by J.W. Basore)

The main sources are Seneca, Horace<sup>88</sup> and Epictetus, but some other authors and passages can be appropriately quoted with reference to this issue<sup>89</sup>. According to all of these testimonies, Ulysses symbolizes the Stoic sage, who always shows *καρτερία* and *ἐγκράτεια*<sup>90</sup>. Horace's *Epistle* (I 2, 17-26) is particularly interesting from this perspective:

Rursus, quid virtus et quid sapientia possit,  
 utile proposuit nobis exemplar Ulixen,  
 qui domitor Troiae multorum providus urbes  
 et mores hominum inspexit, latumque per aequor, 20  
 dum sibi, dum sociis reditum parat, aspera multa  
 pertulit, adversis rerum immersabilis undis.  
 Sirenum voces et Circae pocula nosti;  
 quae si cum sociis stultus cupidusque bibisset,  
 sub domina meretrice fuisset turpis et excors, 25  
 vixisset canis immundus vel amica luto sus.

Again, of the power of worth and wisdom he has set before us an instructive pattern in Ulysses, that tamer of Troy, who looked with discerning eyes upon the cities and manners of many men, and while for self and comrades he strove for a return across the broad seas, many hardships he endured, but could never be o'erwhelmed in the waves of adversity. You know the Sirens' songs and

711. Cato serves the purpose of demonstrating the real existence of the Stoic *sapiens*, contrary to what the detractors of Stoicism would claim; but at the same time, he is somehow mythologized by means of the very comparison with Homeric heroes.

<sup>88</sup> See Stanford 1985<sup>2</sup>, pp. 122-123 and Montiglio 2006, p. 558 n. 16 for Horace's Stoic allegiance in this *Epistle*; but see Perutelli 2006, pp. 43-51 for a broader and more problematic picture of Horace's reading of Ulysses. According to the latter scholar, «Orazio giudica il protagonista dell'*Odisea* a seconda dell'occasione, senza un impegno serio a farlo corrispondere a una qualche ideologia». For another interpretation of Horace's *Epistle*, see Gigante 1984, pp. 296-298, who makes it depend on Philodemus' *De bono rege*; but see the objections put forward by Setaioli 2004, pp. 252-253.

<sup>89</sup> Cic. *off.* I 110-113 (where the source is the Stoic Panaetius), with Perutelli 2006, pp. 28-29; Heracl. *Quaest. Hom.* 78, 3, 79, 2-11; Eustath. 1707-1709 (on the latter, see Buffière 1956, pp. 380-386).

<sup>90</sup> His behavior towards the Sirens, for example, is often mentioned by Seneca to refer to the sage's attitude towards any potentially disturbing and corrupting factor: *Ep.* 31, 2; 56, 15; 123, 12 with Perutelli 2006, p. 84: «Il paragone [...] sembra essere il più efficace per conferire la concretezza di un'immagine nota a un atteggiamento a cui Seneca aspirava spesso, l'astrarsi del saggio dalle voci e dai richiami di un ambiente corrotto».

Circe's cups; if, along with his comrades, he had drunk of these in folly and greed, he would have become the shapeless and witless vassal of a harlot mistress – would have lived as an unclean dog or a sow that loves the mire. (Transl. by H.R. Fairclough)

His reading of Homer is ethically orientated, like that of Seneca in *ep.* 88, 7-8: on the basis of Homer's poems, Horace believes it possible to work it out (I 3) [...] *quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non*. This is a sort of universalizing reading of the poems<sup>91</sup>. Actually, Homer is better than Chrysippus and Crantor as a Master of ethics (4 *planius ac melius Chrysiippo et Crantore dicit*). More precisely, by means of Ulysses, who is proposed by Homer as a «model» (18 *utile proposuit nobis exemplar Ulixem*), Horace can clarify (17) *quid virtus et quid sapientia possit*. Here «virtue» and «wisdom» simply amount to the ability to endure suffering and not to indulge on passions<sup>92</sup>. But it is maybe remarkable that also Dante's Ulysses reminds his friends of their being naturally meant to follow «[...] virtute e canoscenza» (*Inf.* XXVI 120) – he employs exactly the same wording as Horace. The point is, Ulysses' companions are not *bruti* (*ibid.* 119 «fatti non foste a viver come bruti»). Hence, the polarization is between human beings and beasts, in Dante's lines; just as it happens in Horace's *Epistle*, where Ulysses has managed not to become a pig, by means of not yielding to Circe (25-26 *vixisset canis immundus vel amica luto sus*)<sup>93</sup>. In any case, according to Horace, Ulysses has proven himself (22) *adversis rerum immersabilis undis*: he both (21-22) [...] *aspera multa || pertulit*, and (19-20) [...] *multorum providus urbes || et mores hominum inspexit latumque per aequor*<sup>94</sup>... So, Ulysses is credited with intellectual qualities too: he is smart and expert<sup>95</sup>. This side of the character has no parallels in Stoic literature<sup>96</sup>, apart from Epictetus' *Diatribes* (see *infra*). But Ulysses is not *cupidus* (unlike Antiochus' Ulysses, who is certainly *cupidus*, though in a different sense)<sup>97</sup>; therefore, he managed not to be en-

<sup>91</sup> See Torre 2016, pp. 707-709, who elaborates on Setaioli's 1988, p. 196 suggestion that Aristotle's *Poetics* might be in the background here.

<sup>92</sup> Mayer 1994, p. 114, n. *ad l.*: «*possit* [...] points to practical use, not a theoretical definition of terms».

<sup>93</sup> The only major difference regards the impulse, or ardor, which leads Dante's Ulysses: such desire is not mentioned by Horace.

<sup>94</sup> In the lines quoted, there are two verbs (*noti*, I 2, 23, is referred to Lollius, but it equally applies to Ulysses) and an adjective that belong to the semantic field of knowledge; this is symptomatic of some importance of this side of Ulysses' character. In particular, on the value of *inspexit*, see Montiglio 2006, p. 558 n. 16: «[...] conveys Odysseus' intellectual activity more strongly than its Greek equivalent *iden*». See also Montiglio 2000, p. 101 n. 85.

<sup>95</sup> Montiglio 2000, p. 101, *Id.* 2006, p. 558; Torre 2016, p. 710 n. 36.

<sup>96</sup> It is absolutely absent from Seneca, for example.

<sup>97</sup> Antiochus' Ulysses is *cupidus* in the sense that he is intellectually curious: see *supra*.

tangled in Circe's magic. Here, Circe too is interpreted in ethical terms: she is explicitly described as a *meretrix*. As a result, Ulysses is portrayed as endowing καρτερία, for he is *immersabilis*; ἐγκράτεια, since he is a *contemptor voluptatis* – just as he is depicted also by Cicero<sup>98</sup>; but he is also *providus*, because he knows many things and peoples. The potential of Homer's character seems to have been entirely unleashed by Horace, or by his source: Homer repeatedly depicts Ulysses as endowed with outstanding intellectual skills, along with the typically heroic virtues<sup>99</sup>.

But Stoic authors provide Ulysses with some other features too. Along with the other typically Stoic characteristics<sup>100</sup>, Epictetus (*Diatr.* III 24, 12-13) is the first to explicitly make Ulysses' wanderings thoroughly depend on his purpose to contemplate for its own sake (αὐτῆς τῆς θεάς ἔνεκα)<sup>101</sup>; it is a Cynicizing passage<sup>102</sup>:

ὁ δ' ἄνθρωπος πρὸς τῷ φύσει μεγαλόφρων εἶναι καὶ πάντων τῶν ἀπροαιρέτων καταφρονητικὸς ἔτι κάκεῖνο ἔσχηκε τὸ μὴ ἐρριζῶσθαι μηδὲ προσπεφυκέναι τῇ γῆ, ἀλλὰ ἄλλοτ' ἐπ' ἄλλους ἴεσθαι τόπους ποτὲ μὲν χρειῶν τινῶν ἐπειγουσῶν, ποτὲ δὲ καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς θεάς ἔνεκα. καὶ τῷ Ὀδυσσεῖ τὸ συμβᾶν τοιοῦτόν τι ἦν· “πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἶδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω”.

And man, in addition to being by nature high-minded and capable of despising all the things that are outside the sphere of his moral purpose, possesses also this further quality, that, namely, of not being rooted nor growing in the earth, but of moving now to one place and now to another, at one time under the pressure of certain needs, and at another merely for the sake of the spectacle. Now it was something of this sort which fell to the lot of Odysseus: “Many the men whose towns he beheld, and he learned of their temper.” (Transl. by W.A. Oldfather)

<sup>98</sup> See *off.* III 97.

<sup>99</sup> See Giuliano 2004, pp. 100-102.

<sup>100</sup> *E.g.* endurance in poverty (Epict. fr. 11, 10 ff. Schenkl: εἶτα χείρων Πόλου ὁ γενναῖος ἀνὴρ φανεῖται, ὡς μὴ πᾶν τὸ περιτεθὲν ἐκ τοῦ δαιμονίου πρόσωπον ὑποκρίνασθαι καλῶς; οὐδὲ τὸν Ὀδυσσεῖα μιμήσεται, ὅς καὶ ἐν τοῖς ῥάκεσιν οὐδὲν μείον διέπρεπεν ἢ ἐν τῇ οὐλῇ χλαίνῃ τῇ πορφυρᾷ;); see Stanford 1985<sup>2</sup>, p. 121. Moreover, like Ulysses the Stoic sage will learn to prioritize his family, his home, over travelling: he will have a «centripetal determination», as Montiglio 2006, p. 563 puts it; see also Cic. *de orat.* I 196 and Sen. *ep.* 123, 12.

<sup>101</sup> There is an interesting similarity with Herodotus' Solon and with other wandering saviors: see Montiglio 2000; on Stoic contemplation and on its differences from the Platonic one, see Bénatouil 2009a.

<sup>102</sup> Montiglio 2000, pp. 100-101.

Thus, we have eventually come across the combination of the purpose to the spectacle for its own sake<sup>103</sup> and the virtuous practical attitude towards evil and pleasures. Of such a combination there is just a hint in Epictetus. There is not any wider and deeper examination into this ‘contemplative’ aspect of Ulysses’ character. Nonetheless, it is absolutely remarkable that a Stoic author highlights this side of the Homeric figure: unlike Seneca, Epictetus takes into account all of the features with which Ulysses is credited by Homer – namely, his being both *πολύτλας* and *πολύτροπος*. The two Stoics are remarkably distant on this point:

Seneca’s Odysseus is one-sided: he submits to destiny but does not possess any *curiosum ingenium*. Seneca does not even offer Odysseus as a model of behavior because he listened to the voice of the Sirens and ye sailed forth. [...] Seneca does not see any cognitive content in the Sirens’ song and has no word of praise for Odysseus because he listened to it<sup>104</sup>.

Last but not least<sup>105</sup>, a strongly philosophical reappraisal of Ulysses is to be found in Plotinus’ *Enneads* (1, 6[1]; 8, 16-26)<sup>106</sup>. There, a fully allegorical interpretation of the hero is accomplished; his journeys and his choices are read as essentially philosophical moments, which enable him to get away with matter and the bodily dimension, and thus return to our real homeland – the intelligible, metaphysically speaking<sup>107</sup>. Hence, Ulysses’ *nostos* is profoundly allegorized: it turns into the *nostos* that could lead only a few of us back to the One<sup>108</sup>:

<Φεύγωμεν> δὴ <φίλην ἐς πατρίδα>, ἀληθέστερον ἂν τις παρακελεύοιτο. Τίς οὖν ἢ φυγὴ καὶ πῶς; Ἀναξόμεθα οἷον ἀπὸ μάγου Κίρκης φησὶν ἢ Καλυψοῦς Ὀδυσσεὺς αἰνιττόμενος, δοκεῖ μοι, μεῖναι οὐκ ἄρεσθεις, καίτοι ἔχων ἡδονὰς δι’ ὀμμάτων καὶ κάλλει πολλῶ αἰσθητῶ συνών. Πατρὶς δὴ ἡμῖν, ὅθεν παρήλθομεν, καὶ πατὴρ ἐκεῖ. Τίς οὖν ὁ στόλος καὶ ἡ φυγὴ; Οὐ ποσὶ δεῖ διανύσαι· πανταχοῦ γὰρ φέρουσι πόδες ἐπὶ γῆν ἄλλην ἀπ’ ἄλλης·

<sup>103</sup> See Montiglio 2006, p. 558; I hence disagree with Bonazzi 2019, p. 2, who maintains that the roots of the transformation of Ulysses into a traveler utterly determined to know are to be traced back to Platonism alone. See also Hartog 1996, p. 44, whose interpretation is nonetheless excessively clear-cut.

<sup>104</sup> Montiglio 2006, p. 558.

<sup>105</sup> Actually, also Clement of Alexandria (*Protr.* XII 118, 4) reads Ulysses’ encounter with the Sirens metaphorically: in his view, Ulysses would symbolize Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross (I owe this piece of information to an anonymous reviewer).

<sup>106</sup> According to Buffière 1956, pp. 393-395, the allegorical interpretation of Homer has its roots in Middle Platonism, and particularly in Plutarch and Numenius (who handed it down to Cronius); see *supra* n. 7.

<sup>107</sup> Bonazzi 2019, p. 2.

<sup>108</sup> Actually, ‘father’ may allude to the Intellect as well: Gerson 2018, p. 101 n. 59.

οὐδέ σε δεῖ ἵππων ὄχημα ἢ τι θαλάττιον παρασκευάσαι, ἀλλὰ ταῦτα πάντα ἀφεῖναι δεῖ καὶ μὴ βλέπειν, ἀλλ' οἷον μύσαντα ὄψιν ἄλλην ἀλλάξασθαι καὶ ἀνεγεῖραι, ἦν ἔχει μὲν πᾶς, χρῶνται δὲ ὀλίγοι.

Someone would be better advised to say: 'let us flee to our beloved fatherland'. But what is this flight, and how is it accomplished? Let us set sail in the way Homer, in an allegorical way, I think, tells us that Odysseus fled from the sorceress Circe or from Calypso. Odysseus was not satisfied to remain there, even though he had visual pleasures and passed his time with sensual beauty. Our fatherland, from where we have actually come, and our father are both in the intelligible world. What is our course and what is our means of flight? We should not rely on our feet to get us there, for our feet just take us everywhere on earth, one place after another. Nor should you saddle up a horse or prepare some sea-going vessel. You should put aside all such things and stop looking; just shut your eyes, and change your way of looking, and wake up. Everyone has this ability, but few use it. (Transl. by L.P. Gerson)

## 5.

It is now time to draw some conclusions. Ulysses is really multifaceted, in light of the examination conducted so far. His intellectual curiosity, his ardor in pursuing his impulse for knowledge, are particularly highlighted by Antiochus/Piso in Cicero's *De finibus*. But these features of Ulysses' character only serve the purpose of interpreting his encounter with the Sirens as an intellectually qualified interaction, and not as one characterized by the pursuit of mere pleasure. Moreover, he is never said to willingly take up his journeys, in order to satisfy his desire for contemplation. Sure enough, Antiochus' picture bears some resemblance with Dante's Ulysses, who is animated by a burning *ardor* in his attempt to go beyond the Pillars of Hercules; but if the semantic of desire alludes to Antiochus' account, the idea that a new journey is taken up by Ulysses only to widen his own knowledge, αὐτῆς τῆς θεας ἔνεκα, seems to date back to a (peculiar) piece of Stoic philosophy.

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