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Itinerary of Endless Stories: the Odyssey of Living and Dying in Theodoros Angelopoulos' *Eternity and a Day*

Itinerário de Histórias sem fim: a Odisseia de viver e morrer em *A Eternidade e um dia* de Theodoros Angelopoulos

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Abstract: This article examines Theodoros Angelopoulos' *Eternity and a Day* (1998) in contrast to the Homeric *Odyssey* (8thBCE) to discuss how he reappreciates in his film an aspect of this poem often overlooked by most critics: its *open-endedness*. My central argument is that, although the *Odyssey* is normally considered a homecoming story, Odysseus' journey does not end with his arrival back home, but with a journey away from home, a detail that the filmmaker masterfully explores anew in his narrative through the main character's personal and circumstantial motivations towards life as a dying man.

Keywords: Homer; Theodoros Angelopoulos; nostos; homecoming; life and death; human rights.

Introduction

In 1964, Jorge Luis Borges wrote the following sonnet inspired by some of the final events in the Homeric *Odyssey* (8thBCE):

Odisea, Libro Vigésimo Tercero

Ya la espada de hierro ha ejecutado
la debida labor de la venganza;
ya los ásperos dardos y la lanza
la sangre del perverso han prodigado.

A despecho de un dios y de sus mares
a su reino y su reina ha vuelto Ulises,
a despecho de un dios y de los grises
vientos y del estrépito de Ares.

Ya en el amor del compartido lecho
duerme la clara reina sobre el pecho
de su rey, pero ¿dónde está aquel hombre

que en los días y noches del destierro
erraba por el mundo como un perro
y decía que Nadie era su nombre?

(BORGES (1974) 897)

The Odyssey, Book Twenty-Three

Already has the iron sword executed
the due labour of vengeance;
already have the coarse arrows and the spear
shed the blood of the wicked.

In spite of a god and his seas, back
to his kingdom and queen has come Ulysses,
in spite of a god and of the grey
winds and of Ares' loud roaring.

Already in the love of the shared bed
sleeps the fair queen on her king's chest;
but — where is that man, who,

in the days and nights away from home,
wandered the world as a dog and
said that Nobody was his name?

(BORGES (1974) 897; my translation)

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As we can see, this sonnet, conveniently titled "Odisea, Libro Vigésimo Tercero" — or "The Odyssey, Book Twenty-Three", in reference to the poem's penultimate chapter—, synthesises some of the events that followed Odysseus' arrival back in Ithaca and which eventually led to one of the most important sequences in the entire poem: Odysseus' reunion with Penelope, particularly their sexual reunion, as husband and wife, as king and queen, on their marital bed. However, in a broader context of literary studies on the *Odyssey*, the convenience of this title is not restricted to the fact that it literally explains which myths in the poem it is making reference to. More importantly, it also insinuates that Book 23, the penultimate chapter, can be read, or perhaps should be read, as that one chapter in the *Odyssey* in which the whole Odysseus myth comes to some effective sense of an ending.

We can verify this objectively in the sonnet's language: for instance, in its recurrent use of the adverb *ya* (already), the prepositional locution *a despecho de* (in spite of), and the past perfect compound *haber* + *participio* (*ha ejecutado* (has executed), *han prodigado* (have shed), *ha vuelto* (has come back)), it makes clear that the focus of its analysis is the conclusion of a narrative, that its object of interest is the end or the approaching end of a cycle. This sense of an ending can also be recognised in the contrast, in the penultimate stanza, between the simple present that describes the current situation of the couple (*duerme la clara reina* (sleeps the fair queen), *dónde está aquel hombre* (where is that man)) and the past imperfect that describes the recent experiences of Odysseus alone (*erraba* (wandered)), a contrast that emphasises a sentiment of relief in Odysseus' safe return home from the sea and joyful reunion with Penelope.

Together, these linguistic constructions provide us a sense of an ending about the poem in that they describe the accomplishment of all that Odysseus had to accomplish in order to achieve his *nostos*, that is, in order to achieve his 'safe return home' from the dangers of the sea: by the end of Book 23, Odysseus has already overcome all of his challenges in spite of the many forces that systematically acted against him, so, at this point, he is once again free to live in peace with Penelope in their palace in Ithaca. In fact, this sonnet is also an important case study for us here because it works both as a metaphor and as a metonymy for a chronic and still dominant tendency in literary

studies today: the tendency to examine the *Odyssey* as a perfectly completed *nostos*, that is, as a 'safe *return* home' that comes to an *end* with the hero's 'safe *arrival* in his home'.

This is, for instance, the dominant perspective in Erich Auerbach's "Odysseus' Scar" (1946) and Italo Calvino's "The Odysseys within *The Odyssey*" (1991). In his essay, Auerbach suggests that Odysseus' safe return home reaches a true narrative climax in Book 19, when Eurycleia's recognition of an old wound on her master's leg activates a sudden coalescence between past and present. (AUERBACH (2003) 3) In his essay, in turn, Calvino suggests that Odysseus' safe return home —the journey, in this case— consists of a chain of mythological references woven together so as to structure the narrative of a hero whose greatest challenge is, in the end, to safely reach home changed but unbroken by the hardships of the sea. (CALVINO (1999) 13) We can also find in *Ágora: Estudos Clássicos em Debate* some examples of this logic, such as Ana Paula Pinto's "Poetizing the Borders: Homer" and Begoña Ortega Villaro's "The Impossible Return of the Exiled: Ulysses in Alberto Manguel's Work". In her article, Pinto suggests that Odysseus' wanderings are not just a journey whose objective is to reach home, but a progressive transgression of borders, not simply from one community to another, but from barbarism to civilisation, particularly to the civilisation that Ithaca ultimately embodies. (PINTO (2020) 13-19) Adopting a more political tone, Villaro examines Manguel's reinterpretation of the Odysseus myth to emphasise how it is impossible for the world today to be a place for heroes, particularly returning heroes, because of a geopolitical reality that stimulates the existence of social categories such as exiles and refugees. (VILLARO (2019) 353-71).

In the *Odyssey*, however, Odysseus' journey does not come to an *end* with his *arrival* back in Ithaca; in fact, in this poem, his journey does not *end* at all. As we will see, in Book 11, the clairvoyant Tiresias explains that Odysseus' journey must in fact *continue* after his *arrival* back in his palace, after his reunion with his land, subjects, and family, a new cycle of explorations that is bound to take place not across the sea, but throughout Greece's backlands.

Clearly, I am not suggesting that this peculiarity is completely strange to or ignored by literary critics today. Gregory Nagy, for instance, discusses it at length in Hours 9 and 10 of his massive *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours*

(NAGY (2013) 213-49)—two chapters that I will, indeed, discuss in more details in the next section. However, even Nagy's masterful philological analyses do not give the proper attention as to *why* it is so important for Odysseus and the Odyssean myth as whole that Odysseus' *nostos* remain *open-ended*, that is, that his journey do not come to an *end* with his *arrival* back in Ithaca.

In this article, then, I will revisit Tiresias' presage in the *Odyssey* with two goals in mind: first, following a reinterpretive strategy based on Nagy's observations, I will explain *why* it is so important for the *Odyssey*, for Odysseus' *nostos*, that he do not *end* his journey with his *arrival* back in Ithaca; then, based on the findings of this preliminary discussion, I will examine Theodoros Angelopoulos' Palm d'Or winner *Eternity and a Day* (1998) to explain how, I believe, he takes this *open-endedness* in Odysseus' *nostos* as a creative inspiration for the development of the main character's dramatic potency, particularly his personal and circumstantial motivations towards life as a dying man.

Odysseus: a Journey in Dying

Like the Homeric *Iliad* (8thBCE), the Homeric *Odyssey* is a *kléos*, it is a 'song' of a hero's 'undying glory'; but it is a *kléos* of a rather special kind: while Achilles achieves his *kléos* through *battle*, Odysseus achieves his *kléos* through *nostos*, that is, through his 'safe return home' from the dangers of the sea. As Gregory Nagy points out, the word *nostos*, which can be simply understood as 'safe return home', is etymologically connected to another very recurrent word in the *Odyssey*, the word *noos*, which can be simply translated as 'mind' or 'thinking'. (NAGY (2013) 232-33) These two words, *nostos* and *noos*, he explains, are etymologically connected to the Indo-European root -**nes*, whose original semantics is related to the ideas of 'dawn', 'daybreak', or 'rise of the morning star', but whose basic meaning can be determined, more concisely, as 'return to light and life'. (NAGY (2013) 234) We can actually find traces of this etymological connection in the names of two characters in the *Odyssey*: *Alkinoos* 'he who brings back light and life' and *Antinoos* 'he who opposes the return of light and life'. Alkinoos, king of the Phaeacians, is, in fact, the wise character who helps Odysseus get back on his course to Ithaca by encouraging him and by providing him the material resources to do so. Antinoos, son of Eupeithes and

possible future ruler of Ithaca, is, in turn, the vile conspirator who constantly harasses Penelope into marrying him so that he can actually usurp Odysseus' place as king. (NAGY (2013) 235) From a narratological perspective based on this basic philology of the Ancient Greek, we can then read the *Odyssey* as a song that perpetuates the story of a hero whose greatest achievement in life was to safely return home after surviving the dangers of the sea, finally coming back, changed but unbroken by his new experiences, to the light and life —to the ideal of civilisation— that his home perfectly embodies. The *Odyssey*, then, is not just a song about a hero's *journey*; it is, above all, a song about a hero's *journey back home*, back to the place where rests the light and life of his origins, but where, at the same time, rests a misery whose rebirth into light and life depends on his very return to these origins.

However, contrary to this dominant perspective about the *Odyssey* as a perfectly completed *nostos*, as a 'safe *return* home' that comes to an *end* with the hero's 'safe *arrival* in his home', Odysseus does not *conclude* his journey with his *arrival* in Ithaca. In Book 11, the chapter in which we follow Odysseus' *katabasis* 'descent' into Hades' underworld and the *nekyia ritual* that he performs to summon the souls of his late friends and relatives, we learn from the spectre of the blind clairvoyant Tiresias that, although Odysseus is, indeed, fated to reach Ithaca, he is also fated to continue his journey far beyond it, far away from it, for Ithaca is not the place —or the way or the moment— where he is fated to die.

Tiresias explains:

> *You must carry on with your journey, taking with you a well-crafted oar,*
> *until you find this place where nobody will know the sea,*
> *where they will not even eat their food with salt taken from these waters,*
> *where they will not know anything about the purple colour of the ships,*
> *nor about well-crafted oars, these wings for the ships.*
> *And I will give you this very clear indication, about which you shall never forget:*
> *when a passer-by on your journey meet you*
> *and say that it is a shovel that you carry on your strong shoulder,*
> *right there and then you must stick this well-crafted oar on the ground*
> *and offer noble sacrifices to Poseidon. [...]*
> *As you do this, death shall come from the sea to greet you,*
> *a death as soothing as it can be, and it will embrace you.*
> *You will eventually fall weak, there, in your meritable old age. [...]*
> (*Od*.11.121-36; my translation)

As we can see from Tiresias' presage, then, the reason why Odysseus must continue on a new journey after safely arriving in Ithaca is that he is fated to die in Greece's backlands, as an old man and by the hands of Poseidon himself. Considering how the *Odyssey* registers Odysseus' arduous return home from the dangers of the sea, this new journey brings us to a troubling but very plausible question: why is it so important that Odysseus' *nostos* do not come to an *end* in Ithaca?

When discussing some of the anthropological aspects of the *epic heroes*, Nagy explains that they normally share three fundamental characteristics: they are *unseasonal*; they are *extreme*; and they are *antagonistic* towards the *god* who is most *like* them. (NAGY (2005) 87; NAGY (2013) 37) Odysseus, of course, is a good example of how these characteristics play out in practice: Odysseus' *antagonistic god* is Poseidon, the god of the seas and, by extension, the god of seafaring, crossings, and wanderings. The fact that Odysseus' problems begin right after his departure from Ilion invites us to consider the possibility that his conflict with Poseidon might be connected to this city's downfall, but we cannot be sure of this based on the narrative alone. Whatever the case, we do know from the *Odyssey* that Odysseus' fight with Poseidon's son Polyphemus on his journey back to Ithaca does make his relationship with the god even more bitter and destructive. (*Od.*9.110-550) Odysseus' *extreme* nature can, in turn, be recognised in his cunning strategies to overcome his challenges: we can see it, for example, in his idea to blind Polyphemus and identify himself to him as *Outis* 'Nobody' in order to escape his attacks (*Od.*9.450-465), in his idea to have himself tied up to his ship's mast in order to be able to appreciate the sirens' song (*Od.*12.170-205), or in his idea to disguise himself as a beggar in order to trap Penelope's suitors and slay them in his own house (*Od.*22.1-126). Now, while these two characteristics are considerably easy to understand, the first one, the epic heroes' *unseasonality*, requires a much more complex analysis—or at least this is what I would like to suggest.

In his works, Nagy explains that the epic heroes' *unseasonality* refers to the fact that they constantly find themselves "out of their time" (NAGY (2005) 87; NAGY (2013) 38-39), an ambiguous idea that, in practice, refers to the fact that, in their narratives, in their *kléa*, these heroes constantly find themselves misplaced in a world out of order. This is clearly Odysseus' case: Poseidon is

the otherworldly force that keeps pushing him off his earthly course in his attempt to return to a kingdom that is certainly suffering with his absence. In his works, however, Nagy also explains that, despite the epic heroes' unseasonality, there is one moment in their lives, and one moment only, when they find place and order in the world: the moment of their *deaths*. (NAGY (2005) 84-85; NAGY (2013) 30) Nagy's contention is a curious one, because, if it proceeds, then it entails that the very existence of poems like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is of a much more complex nature than it seems —a nature truly based on an *open-endedness*: although these poems are cases of *kléos*, although they are 'songs' of heroes' 'undying glories', they never narrate these heroes' *deaths*, that is, those singular moments in their lives when they find their places in the world and when this world is finally re-established, for them, as a world of order. The myth of Achilles' death is a bit obscure, but we do know from different sources (NAGY (1979); BURGESS (2009); HORN (2020)) —including Hector's prediction in his dying breath (*Il.*22 355-60)— that Paris and Apollo finally kill him by shooting an arrow through his heel. Tiresias' presage of Odysseus' death is not exactly clear, either, but we do know from his predictions that this hero is fated to die by the hands of Poseidon in a distant land and in a distant future. (*Od.*11.121-36).

But, again, why is it so important that these *kléa* remain *open-ended*, why is it so important that the epic heroes' *deaths* take place *beyond* the main narratives of their glorious deeds?

In his fictional dialogue *On Heroes* (3rdAD), Flavius Philostratus, through a conversation between his two main characters —a Vineyard Keeper and a Phoenician Traveller—, explains that ordinary people like these two men can bring themselves closer to heroes like Achilles and Odysseus in two ways: by having a singer sing about their glories, which is the case when a singer performs the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* to an audience, and by worshipping them, by paying libations to them at sacred places, a practice that might even invite a hero to objectively interact with his worshippers —through their dreams, for example. (*OH.*7.2-3) In the first case, these heroes are *epic heroes*, that is, they are heroes kept alive only and specifically through the narrative medium of the songs that perpetuate their glorious deeds. In the second case, these heroes are *cult heroes*, that is, they are heroes who have met their deaths

in their earthly existences but whose spectres still linger on a transcendental plane, from which they can be summoned only and specifically through the medium of worshipping. This distinction is crucial because, we finally realise, *epic heroes* can only be talked *about* —and through the narrative mediation of a singer's performance—, whereas *cult heroes* can actually be talked *with*—what virtually any person can do if she properly worships these heroes at their sacred shrines. (*OH*.6.7-7.6; NAGY (2013) 322) If this distinction proceeds, then a possible reason why a hero's *death* is not objectively depicted in his *kléos*, in his narrative of eternal glory, is that, if it were, this would lead to an ontological conflict: *epic heroes* are necessarily *alive*, they live through the activation of the medium of narrative, whereas *cult heroes* are necessarily *dead*, even if they still spectrally exist on an otherworldly plane from which they can be summoned through worshipping. In fact, to *sing* about a hero's glorious deeds is not to *worship* him, just as much as to *worship* a hero is not to *sing* about his glorious deeds: to *sing* about a hero's glorious deeds is to invite a singer to perform the narrative of the earthly existence by which the hero won his glory of being eternally sung about; to *worship* a hero is to pay libations to him in order to establish a dialogue with his otherworldly existence, a dialogue by which one can gain advice from him on things of this world. In this sense, to *sing* about a hero's glorious deeds is to bring the past into the present, specifically through the medium of narrative, whereas to *worship* a hero is to push the present into the future, specifically through the medium of worshipping. In this context, Odysseus' case becomes particularly interesting, because the *ontological open-endedness* of his story —the fact that his *death* cannot be part of his *kléos*— conflates with the *narratological open-endedness* of his journey —the fact that his *death* cannot take part in his *nostos*—, a conflation that ultimately improves the beauty of the Odyssean myth as a whole: after all, it is clear that Odysseus is by his own nature a *wandering hero*, a hero whose life, whose *raison d'être*, is to always be in motion —just as his animosity with Poseidon, his antagonist god, persistently demonstrates.

Safely arriving home from the dangers of the sea was, for Odysseus, a successful comeback insofar as this allowed him to retrieve the light and life of his origins; but, now that these have been retrieved, now that they have been

re-established as Ithaca's orderly reality, it is up to him to carry on, to keep on going, to continuously look for different places and fresh experiences from which renewed senses of novelty may emerge, until death finally comes. In fact, although it may seem strange that Odysseus' final resting place be somewhere in Greece's backlands, this conclusion to his earthly existence could not be more perfect: although Poseidon and the sea are Odysseus' nemeses, they are also his reason to live, for they are the challenges that he must overcome in order to reach Ithaca, in order to achieve his *nostos*, his *noos*, and his *kléos*. The sea is the place of his living, not of his dying, the place of his narrative's progression, not of its conclusion. Its conclusion must be in his country's backlands, a place that embodies both the completion of his crossing and the continuation of his life beyond it —in fact, we can assume from Tiresias' presage, a place fated to become a material memory of Odysseus' dying: a place where his narrative is fated to end and the worshipping of men is set to begin; a place, in other words, fated to become the place of Odysseus' passing from his condition of *epic hero* to his condition of *cult hero*.

In the next pages, I will discuss this idea of *open-endedness* in further details, but not anymore as it is manifested in the *Odyssey*; redirecting my attention to Theodoros Angelopoulos' *Eternity and a Day*, I will discuss how in this film he seems to take this *open-endedness* as creative inspiration for the development of the main character's dramatic potency, particularly his personal and circumstantial motivations towards life as a dying man.

Alexandros: a Journey in Living

Theodoros Angelopoulos' proficiency in the *Odyssey* is already evident in *Voyage to Cythera* (1984) and *Ulysses' Gaze* (1998), two films that clearly suggest contemporary versions of the Odyssean myth: the first one, an *anti-nostos*, *anti-noos*, and *anti-kléos*, is focused on the tragic case of a partisan's return home from exile in the aftermath of the Greek Junta (1967-74); the second one, a journey into the chaotic past of the Balkans, is focused on a philosophical transgression of the borders —geographical, social, cultural, linguistic— that fragmented Eastern Europe into different countries in the early years of the 20th century and throughout the Cold War (1947-91). However, we can also find this proficiency attested in several of his interviews; for instance, when talking to Geoff Andrew

about his ideas for *Ulysses' Gaze* and to Michel Grodent about the characters in *Voyage to Cythera*, he explains:

> *I wanted to make a film somehow related to The Odyssey, and when I visited my co-writer, Tonino Guerra, who I'd already worked with on four films, we talked over what sort of journey it might be. Then we began to discuss the ethnic conflict in the Balkans, and as we spoke, a young woman arrived, sent by the daughter of the Italian sculptor Giacomo Manzu, with a present for Tonino. And there was a letter from Manzu's daughter saying how he used to have an idée fixe about the gaze of Ulysses, who in his travels had seen the entire human adventure. And that's how we came to the title of our film.* (ANDREW (2001) 90-91).

> *The triangle Ulysses-Penelope-Telemachus represents in this context the end of a journey. If one considers the last forty years in Greece as another War of Troy, the return of Ulysses is the obvious conclusion. [...] The leading figure of previous conflicts, the revolutionary, comes back to a country that rejects revolution and has no use for him. Old Ulysses refuses to accept any compromises; therefore, he does not fit in anymore; there is no role for him to play.* (GRODENT (2001) 46).

But, of course, Angelopoulos' proficiency in the *Odyssey* is not restricted to his familiarity with the poem's core narrative and leading characters; when talking to Dan Fainaru about *Ulysses' Gaze* and to Andrew Horton about *Voyage to Cythera*, he also makes clear that he is aware of the possibility of reading the *Odyssey* and the Odyssean myth as *open-ended* narratives:

> *As I said, my point of departure was the Odyssey. I am referring to the myth, not to Homer's text. It is the same myth I used before in Voyage to Cythera. According to the myth, Ulysses comes back to Ithaca but does not stay there. After a while he leaves again on another journey. The film itself is the personal journey of a man, a filmmaker we know as "A," seeking a way out of a crisis that is not only his own, but that of an entire generation.* (FAINARU (2001) 94).

> *In Voyage to Cythera the voyage is really a reworking of the myth of the Return of Odysseus according to a myth which preceded Homer. Similar to Dante's version, there is a pre-Homeric version that Odysseus set sail again after reaching Ithaca (of course, Nikos Kazantzakis also chose this myth to represent in his The Odyssey: A Modem Sequel). So the film becomes more a leaving than a homecoming. You see, I have a soft spot for the ancient writings.* (HORTON (2001) 88).

In his interviews, however, Angelopoulos is never invited to make a clear connection between the *Odyssey* and *Eternity and a Day*, a film that, I believe, masterfully explores this less known facet of the poem as an *open-ended* story. In the next pages, then, I will examine the sense of *open-endedness* in this

film in contrast to the sense of *open-endedness* in that poem in order to suggest a new perspective on the tragic journey of Alexandros, the film's main character: while Odysseus spends his final moments in Ithaca tying loose ends and paying farewell to his family so that, with this sense of closure, he can leave on a new journey during which he is fated to meet a soothing death in a distant land, Alexander spends his final moments in Thessalonica completely failing to tie loose ends and to pay farewell to his family, a lack of closure —or a grim sense of open-endedness— that makes it even harder for him to go on a new journey during which he is likely to meet a bitter death in a cold hospital; however, while Odysseus is fated to be successful in leaving Ithaca, for only in this way he will be able to fulfil his destiny of dying in a distant land, Alexander also fails to leave Thessalonica, a failure that, in the end, proves to be his own way of successfully challenging his destiny of dying in a cold hospital.

Although Book 23 provides us a sense of an ending to Odysseus' *nostos*, centred on the aftermath of his killing of Penelope's suitors and on his erotic reunion with her, in Book 24 we learn that he extends his homecoming process to his father Laertes' orchard in Ithaca's inner lands. This new journey has two main objectives —a clearer one and a subtler one: the clearer one is to allow Odysseus to buy some time so that he can find a way to come to terms— peacefully or not —with the families of the men he just killed; the subtler one is to allow him to pay one last visit to his father before he, Odysseus, leaves on a journey from which he is not coming back. It is true, Book 24 eventually closes with Athena's *deus ex machina* intervention, which brings to an end both Odysseus' conflict with the suitors' families and the heartfelt circumstances of his encounter with Laertes; but, even if this is the case, it is clear that Book 24 both closes one narrative and opens up a new one: it closes the narrative of Odysseus' safe arrival in Ithaca, the light and life of civilization, and it opens up the narrative of his new journey away from Ithaca, a long journey at the end of which he is fated to meet a soothing death from the sea.

In *Eternity and a Day*, Angelopoulos presents us the reverse of this logic:

This film is a bittersweet tragedy centred on Alexandros (Bruno Ganz), a sickly poet who, after some resistance, decides to follow his physician's orientations and commit himself to a hospital so that he can be treated for the pains that are likely to precede his nearing death. Resigned with the fact that

he is going to die in this process, he embarks on a journey of closures: he says goodbye to his housekeeper, looks for a new owner for his dog, and pays one last visit to his daughter, who knows nothing about his disease. However, he progressively fails to give closure to these situations, to tie these loose ends in his life: heartbroken and indignant, his housekeeper leaves him without a proper goodbye; he realises that no one wants to take care of his dog; and, not only does he fail to tell his daughter about his disease, he also learns from her that she has decided to put his house for sale, what, for him, feels as the shattering of what was left of his memories. But, as if these unclosed narratives were not troubling enough, he also finds himself opening up a new one when he impulsively decides to help a young refugee (Achilleas Skevis, then a real Albanian refugee) escape first the police and then a vile band of kidnappers. In the context of Alexandros' journey throughout this last day in the real world, a world in which he is bitterly unable to give closure to anything, he finds in this vulnerable child a chance of redemption: saving him by finding a better place for him becomes his final challenge before the day ends and he retires to the hospital.

As we can see, then, much of Alexandros' dramatic potency is built on a narrative that both subverts and reconstructs the final events of Odysseus' narrative: in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus leaves his palace in Ithaca to close at least two open narratives —to find a solution for the conflict with the suitors' families and to reunite and then say goodbye to his father— before he goes on a new journey that is fated to end with his soothing death in Greece's warm backlands; in *Eternity and a Day*, Alexandros leaves his house in Thessalonica to close a series of open narratives—saying goodbye to his housekeeper, finding a new owner to his dog, saying goodbye to his daughter—before he goes on a new journey that is bound to end with his painful death in a cold hospital. The difference, of course, is that, while Odysseus succeeds in closing his narratives, what reassures him that what he is leaving behind is a stability through which Ithaca is likely to prosper, Alexandros fails to close his narratives, what forces him to leave behind an instability that epitomises his life's decadence in the also decadent city of Thessalonica.

This narrative logic is not, however, the only connection that we can find between the film and the poem.

When Alexandros tries to take the boy back to a relative in Albania, the boy explains to him that he had first crossed the border into Greece with the help of an older refugee boy named Selim. Further in the film, the boy is informed by other refugees that Selim, of all people, had died in an accident resulted from the poor working conditions he was working in; sympathising with the children's cause, Alexandros helps them retrieve Selim's clothes from the morgue, so that they can perform their own nekyia. In Book 11, we can see that Odysseus' nekyia is a necromancy similar to the worshipping of cult heroes: through the holocaust of his best animals, he is able to summon Tiresias' spectre from the depths of the Hades so that he, Tiresias, can counsel him, Odysseus, on the matters of his future. The nekyia that we find in Angelopoulos' film, however, also works in an inverted logic: through the burning of Selim's clothes, the young refugees offer him a sort of elegy that is also an elegy to themselves, a prayer whose words are their own pessimistic perspectives about a future that, they know, they will hardly escape.

Image 01: *Eternity and a Day* (1998) © Greek Centre of Cinematography
In this sequence, Angelopoulos edits the refugees voices over the film's images, giving them an opportunity to objectively denounce their situation.

Touched by the refugees' nekyia, by this close encounter with death, Alexandros, much like Odysseus in the end of Book 24, decides to pay one last visit to his mother in a nursing home. Like Laertes, Alexandros' mother

does not immediately recognise him, and, like Odysseus, Alexandros is also forced to engage in a nostalgic conversation with her so that she can. Unlike Odysseus, however, Alexandros does not pay this last visit to his mother so that he can go on a journey at the end of which he is going to welcome a soothing death; he pays her this last visit so that he can go on a journey at the end of which he is going to succumb to what is likely to be a painful death. But, compared to Odysseus' farewell to his father, Alexandros' farewell to his mother is not exactly a closure, either: while Laertes eventually comes back to his senses, recognises Odysseus, and even helps him confront the suitors' families in order to bring peace to Ithaca and protect the honour of their family, Alexandros' mother eventually falls back into confusion and sickness, leaving him to mull over his existential problems through what becomes a monologue in face of a shadow of regrets.

Image 02: *Eternity and a Day* (1998) © Greek Centre of Cinematography

The *Odyssey* is not, however, the only literary reference that Angelopoulos took as creative inspiration for the web of open-ended narratives that structure his *Eternity and a Day*. Halfway through the film, Alexandros, explainning to the boy some of the ways of poetry, reveals to him that one of his greatest projects as a poet was to try and complete "The Free Besieged" (1828-51), an epic-lyric poem left unfinished by Dionýsios Solomós (1798-1857) (Fabrizio Bentivoglio), Greece's most influential romantic poet. According to Alexandros —following a legend in part involuntarily created by Angelopoulos himself

(FAINARU (2001), 107-08)—, Solomós was a rather rich poet who, after many years in Italy, felt inspired to go back to his mother's native Zakynthos to write the glories of the Greek people, then uprising against the Ottoman Empire. However, the legend goes, when Solomós arrived in Greece, he realised that he was not really familiar with the Demotic Greek, the language of the people; so, in order to properly write these glories, he then decided to pay for the people of Zakynthos for every new word they taught him, words he eventually used to write patriotic poems like "The Free Besieged". As Alexandros explains to the boy, Solomós ultimately failed to finish this poem; so he, Alexandros, had set as his life goal to complete it —an ambitious project that, we know, eventually became another of the many loose ends that he was forced to leave behind with his final journey to the hospital.

Image 03: *Eternity and a Day* (1998) © Greek Centre of Cinematography
In this sequence, Angelopoulos coalesces Alexandros and the boy's present in Thessalonica with Solomós' past in Zakynthos, breaking the narrative's natural order. This coalescence is beautifully similar to the one Auerbach examines in "Ulysses' Scar", centred on Eurycleia's recognition scene.

From Books 11 and 24, we learn that Odysseus, after arriving back in Ithaca, is fated to continue his journey to Greece's dry backlands, a long journey in distance and time fated to come to an actual end with his death, a soothing death sent by Poseidon from the sea. From a comparative reading of these Books, then, we can infer that, even though Odysseus spends his first days back in Ithaca looking for different forms of closure —re-establishing order in his palace, looking for a way to come to terms with the suitors' families, saying good-

bye to his elderly father—, he does this precisely to make sure that his own narrative remains open-ended, so that he can bring it to an end by continuing on a long new journey away from Ithaca, a journey fated to effectively come to an end with his own death—a soothing death sent by Poseidon from the sea. In one of the final sequences of *Eternity and a Day*, we learn that Alexandros, after finding a more promising destiny for the boy, decides not to commit himself to the hospital, avoiding a short journey in distance and time fated to end with his death, a painful death bound to come to him as his body slowly succumbs to it on a hospital's bed. From the dramatic arc completed by this sequence, then, we can infer that, even though Alexandros spends his last moments in Thessalonica looking for different forms of closure —finding a new owner for his dog, saying goodbye to his housekeeper and to his daughter— so that he can die with no burdens on his shoulders, he eventually gives up his treatment in the hospital to make sure that his life remains open-ended—that is to say, so that he can decide for himself his own way of dying, his own way of living until death finally comes. In the film, this is a contingency in destiny suggestively representted in Alexandros' peaceful, even joyful, final contemplation of the sea: an Odyssean metaphor for a soothing death that finally establishes a reconciliation between him and a world now back into order.

Image 04: *Eternity and a Day* (1998) © Greek Centre of Cinematography
Alexandros' closing scene seems to echo the circumstances of Odysseus' death as predicted by Tiresias.

Conclusion

My main objective with this article was to emphasise the *Odyssey* as an *open-ended* narrative in order to explain how Theodoros Angelopoulos reinterprets this characteristic to create the narrative of *Eternity and a Day*, particularly the dramatic potency of the film's leading character. As we have seen, Book 23 synthesises many of the key moments of Odysseus' *nostos*, *noos*, and *kléos*: we finally find Ithaca free from the insidious presence of Penelope's suitors, finally witness Penelope's long-waited reunion with her husband, and, like Jorge Luis Borges in his sonnet, finally follow these two characters to their marital bed, where, under Athena's zeal and blessing, they once again consummate their unshakeable love for each other. However, as I have suggested, Odysseus journey does not really end with arrival back in Ithaca; in fact, based on what Tiresias foretells in Book 11, Odysseus' arrival back in Ithaca is the conclusion of one cycle—his coming back from Ilion and the dangers of the sea —and the beginning of a new one— his new journey towards Greece's backlands, where he is fated to die as an old man and by the hands of his antagonist god Poseidon. This conclusion is, of course, already evident in Book 23, in Odysseus' killing of Penelope's suitors and his erotic reunion with her, but it is also evident in Book 24, in the final visit that he pays to Laertes and in the final reconciliation between him and the suitors' families. Clearly, these events do bring the *Odyssey* to some sense of closure, for they indeed bring order back to Ithaca, to Ithaca as a world; however, as we can infer from Tiresias' predictions in Book 11, these events do not bring an ultimate order to Odysseus' own world as an epic hero: this order is fated to be re-established with his death as an old man in Greece's backlands, a soothing death sent by Poseidon from the sea —par excellence, the place where Odysseus' narrative is fated to unfold, not where it is fated to come to an end.

As we have seen, then, even though this *open-endedness* might be a less discussed aspect of the *Odyssey*, Angelopoulos' proficiency in this poem allowed him to explore such peculiarity as a creative inspiration for *Eternity and a Day*, particularly for the development of the leading character's personal odyssey towards death. Reflecting Odysseus' actions in Ithaca in Book 24, Alexandros, in order to leave on a journey at the end of which he is certain to die, spends his last day in Thessalonica trying to tie a web of loose ends

—something he progressively fails at: he says goodbye to his dear housekeeper, but is not corresponded; he looks for a new owner for his dog, but cannot seem to find one (even though, after some insistence, his housekeeper finally accepts to take care of him); he tries to say goodbye to his daughter, but, not only is he not corresponded, he also bitterly learns that she is getting rid of his old house, the embodiment of his memories. But, as if all these unclosed narratives were not troubling enough, he opens up a new one when he impulsively decides to help a young refugee escape the law and the lawlessness of Thessalonica: having in his hands a vulnerable child who seems to systematically find himself trapped in other people's violent actions, Alexandros finds in this child a chance of redemption: to find a safe place for him becomes his final challenge, his final chance of closure, before his last day in Thessalonica finally comes to an end. As we know, Alexandros eventually seems to find a more promising future for the young boy, a future embodied in the ship that, in the final sequences, takes this boy to the West—clearly, Angelopoulos' own way of criticising the fact that, for people like Alexandros and the boy, more promising futures tend to lie in the very people responsible for the misery of their own people. Whatever the case, Alexandros does find redemption, and, with it, completes both his dramatic arc and his journey through the day: he begins his day as a sombre and frustrated man resigned with the fact that he will have to live one last day of closures in order to be able to properly retire to a hospital where he is certain to die; however, he ends this same day as an enlightened and reinvigorated man open to whatever life brings to him until death, a joyfully uncertain death, finally comes.

To conclude, it should be noted that *open-endedness* is a fundamental characteristic not only for Odysseus' journey away from Ithaca and Alexandros' journey away from Thessalonica, but also for the young boy's journey away from Eastern Europe and the many forms of violence that this place embodies for him. Until about halfway into the film, what we can see about the boy is that he is systematically subjected to other people's narratives: we find out that he had escaped to Greece in order to flee the misery in which he lived in Albania; we see how he is forced to struggle for money and live a miserable life in the streets of Thessalonica; we witness a strange situation in which he is kidnapped by a street gang whose project is to literally sell young children to

the city's rich families; we finally watch him follow Alexandros to the strangest places in the city because, as awkward as it may be, this subordination to the old man is still the best of his options. In other words, until about halfway into the film, what we see is the boy's complete inability to narrate his own story—that is, the fact that, where ever he goes, whatever he tries to do, his life narrative ultimately remains closed to him, it eventually proves to be another tragic dead end. With *Eternity and a Day*, then, Angelopoulos does invite us to reconsider the relevance of Odysseus' and Alexandros' *open-ended* journey, but, more importantly, it invites us to consider the idea that one's dignity, one's accomplishment and happiness in life, objectively depends on one's freedom to narrate their own story —in fact, as far as we can tell, exactly the kind of freedom that the boy spiritually reanimates in Alexandros and which Alexandros materially provides to boy in the end of the film.

Images

All film screenshots (Images 01, 02, 03 and 04), used in this article for scientific and educational purposes only, legally comply with the law decree n.º 63/85 issued by the Ministry of Culture of Portugal and published on the Diary of the Republic (n.º 61/1985, Series I of 1985.03.14).

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Resumo: Este artigo examina *A eternidade e um dia* (1998), de Theodoros Angelopoulos, em contraste com a *Odisseia* de Homero (VIII a.C.) para discutir como ele reavalia no seu filme um aspeto desse poema muitas vezes ignorado pela maioria dos críticos: a sua *abertura*. O meu argumento central é que, embora a *Odisseia* seja normalmente considerada uma história do *regresso ao lar*, a viagem de Ulisses não termina com a sua *chegada a casa*, mas com uma viagem *longe de casa*, um pormenor que o cineasta explora magistralmente de nova maneira na sua narrativa através das motivações pessoais e circunstanciais da personagem principal para a vida como um moribundo.

Palavras-chave: Homero; Theodoros Angelopoulos; *nostos*; regresso a casa; vida e morte; direitos humanos.

Resumen: Este artículo examina La *eternidad y un día* (1998), de Theodoros Angelopoulos, en contraste con la *Odisea* de Homero (VIII a.C.) para discutir cómo el cineasta griego reevalúa en su película un aspecto del citado poema a menudo pasado por alto por la mayoría de los críticos: su apertura. Mi argumento central es que, aunque la *Odisea* se suele considerar una historia de regreso a hogar, el viaje de Ulises no termina con su *llegada a casa*, sino con un viaje *lejos de casa*, un detalle que el cineasta explota magistralmente con un nuevo enfoque en su narración a través de las motivaciones personales y circunstanciales del personaje principal para vivir como moribundo.

Palabras clave: Homero; Theodoros Angelopoulos; *nostos*; regreso a hogar; vida y muerte; derechos humanos.

Résumé : Cet article examine *L'éternité et un jour* (1998) de Theodoros Angelopoulos en contraste avec l'Odyssée d'Homère (VIII av. J-C) pour discuter comment il réévalue dans son film un aspect de ce poème souvent ignoré par la plupart des critiques : *son ouverture*. Mon principal argument se base sur le fait que, bien que l'*Odyssée* soit normalement considérée comme une histoire *retour chez soi*, le voyage d'Ulysse ne se termine pas avec son *arrivée chez lui*, mais avec un voyage *loin de chez lui*, un détail que le cinéaste explore magistralement d'une nouvelle manière dans son récit, à travers les motivations personnelles et circonstancielles du personnage principal pour sa vie en tant qu'homme mourant.

Mots-clés : Homère ; Theodoros Angelopoulos ; *nostos* ; retour à la maison ; vie et mort ; droits humains.