

Odysseus in Hades
or
A Psychedelic Fantasy on Homer's Oddyssey
by Rose LaCroix

Nine days out to sea
We found the entrance to Hades.
It was on an island
Where grew a grove of tall cedars
Within lay shrine by a grotto; there it lay.
The pilgrim makes his last supplication there
His toll to Charon.

I passed an old sage on his way to pay his coin
"What brings you to these shores?" said I,
as the man lifted his weary head to me and said:
"I conceived that all things had meaning,"
"And, seeing no meaning in the tides,"
"I cast myself into them."

A man of noble build and sad, bent countenance then came.
"My Lord," I said, "who are you, and how did you come by here?"
He turned to me an eyeless visage and said "Spare a thought for me,"
"For I have squandered my life on a prophecy that I alone fulfilled."
"I lived as a king, but I died as a pauper."

Then came a champion I knew by fame,
An arrow in his heel.
He had trusted the gods to protect him
And in his piety, brave Achilles
Did nothing against his own human weakness.
Into the amphora within the shrine he dropped his coin,
And into the grotto he went, forever silent.

Then came a face whom I knew well.
A sailor, Aristomache was his name.
It was a rock, cast by the blind polyphemus,
Drawn by the sound of my taunts that laid him low.
And with his dying breath, he cursed me,
Cursed my ship and cursed my crew.
And in our guilt, whenever an ill wind blew,
We did blame Poseidon instead;
for to blame a son of Ithaca
Would never have sufficed for me.

I thought to make my supplication to him first,
That I may be spared the despair of Hades.
"Brave Aristomache, who the fearful Polyphemus slew,
Would you then lift your curses and forgive your king?"

But Aristomache turned his face from me,
And marched with head held high to Asphodel.

And this last hope exhausted,
I called forth the black ram,
Readied for the altar.
Forward, then, to Asphodel I went,
The counsel of wise Teiresias to seek.

Teiresias sat alone, among the damp and reeds,
Where waters many-colored flowed,
Where shadows of the dead flitted softly by,
Vanished into the mists and lingering near again,
Far again, changing, shifting, beneath a sun,
A pale disk among the shrouding haze.

My sandals rustled waters where, in intricate patterns,
Many colors roiled and stirred.
And when I looked upon these patterns, every one,
Was far more intricate than the last,
And as I leaned in closer, still more features could I see;
The sharpest eye could see that there was no end to them.

"That is truth," the old blind sage said.
"Infinite, ephemeral, forever unknowable yet all around us.
We know what it is, we walk in pools of it every day,
But we do not know its essence."
"Wise Teiresias," Said I, "The gods have brought me here-"
"Liar" said he. "You have brought yourself. There are no gods here!"
"No gods? Not even sorrowful Hades? Not even fearful Thanatos?" Said I,
"Then may I ask your counsel, wise one?"
Blind Teiresias rose from the reeds
and made the sign of the fig with his spindly hand.
"I have said all that I must say," said he. "Godspeed."

Away I meandered, through the ever-present gloom, consumed,
Resigned, for it seemed,
That soon, too soon, I would be here again.