

Martin Robertson

Odysseus

He had reached the ends of the earth,
done all in order as the witch had said,
and now, sitting over the blood-filled trench,
the hero peered into the opening shadows
and held his sword against the shades crowding
to the blood.

When he had let Tiresias drink
the old ambivalent spirit spoke:

“You shall win home
and find your wife waiting for you, your son
a man now and a friend, a few old friends.
Between you you shall clear your house and your kingdom
of the parasitic clutter. But do not think
to live in peace. The angry sea-god
is not assuaged.

This you shall do.
Take ship again. Yes, take ship again
and sail distance and days,
beach on an unknown shore.
Then take an oar, turn your back to the sea
and walk inland with the oar on your shoulder.

You will meet with men from time to time,
and after you do not know how many miles
and after you have forgotten how many days
you will meet a man
who says “That’s a funny kind of winnowing-fan.”
Plant the oar in the ground,
mark out a temenos, build an altar, sacrifice
there to Him of the sea.
He will accept it,
forget his anger.

And much good may it do you.
I don’t think you’ll get home a second time.”