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WHAT DAEDALUS TOLD ARIADNE, OR, HOW TO ESCAPE THE LABYRINTH: THE MINOTAUR

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WHAT DAEDALUS TOLD ARIADNE, OR, HOW TO ESCAPE THE LABYRINTH

THE MINOTAUR

Within the labyrinth of wit
I hide the minotaur
Of self; and then, a Minos, sit
And watch the Icarian shore
Of that Aegean wave
That is my daedal grave.

My spider-daughter spins the web
That helps dumb Logos find
And slay the self; the dead sea's ebb
Drowns the daedal mind:
Whom Theseus did not tarry
A god chose to marry.

My father trained me for the law;
To judge became my fate.
Why did my taurine son-in-law
Not check his daedal mate?
Now I must justify
The verdict that is I.

John Crossett

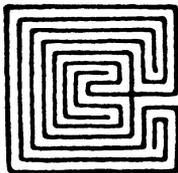


Figure A

1. *The Symbol of the Labyrinth and a Modern Version of the Story of Theseus Slayer of the Minotaur*

The myth of Theseus in Crete and the symbol of the Labyrinth are much used today. There is also much literature about Theseus and the Labyrinth. Yet the literature is very disappointing, and I believe for an obvious reason. Investigators have stressed the background in Egypt and have been motivated to uncover the original meaning in the ultimate origin. But it is impossible to consult an ancient Cretan about the connection of the myth and the symbol with the Minotaur. Interesting as that would be, why ignore an equally interesting question? Why do men persist in using such an old myth and symbol in spite of revolutionary changes in thought? To a possible answer to this question I address a brief essay. The stress is not on the origin of the myth and the symbol but on the persistence and function in communication today.

For this reason I should like to retell the story from a very popular contemporary version, that of Edith Hamilton:¹

When Aegeus was King of Athens, he welcomed as a guest Androgeus, the only son of Minos, King of Crete. Androgeus, although a guest, was sent on an expedition of peril, to kill a dangerous bull. When Minos' son was killed by the bull, Minos invaded the country and captured Athens. Under threat the Athenians agreed to send every nine years a tribute of seven maidens and seven youths. When they reached Crete they were given to the Minotaur.

This monster, half bull, half man, was the offspring of Minos' wife Pasiphaë and a bull which had been given by Poseidon to Minos, for sacrifice. Minos failed to sacrifice the bull because of its beauty, and Poseidon caused Pasiphaë to fall in love with it. Thus the queen bore the monster, a Minotaur.

Minos had Daedalus, a great architect, construct a labyrinth of twisting paths, so complex that escape was impossible for the un instructed. Here dwelt the Minotaur. Into the maze the young

¹ Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* (New York, New American Library, 1953), pp. 150-152. (Hard cover edition; Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Co., 1940, 1942.) I have followed Miss Hamilton's version because contemporary students innocent of Greek and history enjoy her retelling. If one wishes to read translations of ancient authors, to see what Miss Hamilton has used and what she has not used, the most convenient source is Robert Graves, *Theseus in Crete*, Vol. I of *The Greek Myths* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1955), pp. 336-345.

Athenians were cast, and from the monster no youth or maiden had ever escaped.

When the time of tribute came, Theseus, son of Aegeus, offered himself as one of the victims. Only to his father did the noble youth reveal his plan to kill the Minotaur. If he succeeded, he promised to change the black sail (the sign of grief always used on the victims' ship) to a white one. Then the father would know upon sighting the vessel whether or not his son was safe.

The seven youths and seven maidens were paraded upon their arrival in Crete. Among the spectators of the victims was Minos' daughter Ariadne. She fell in love with Theseus. She asked Daedalus for the secret of escape from the Labyrinth, and told Theseus she would bring about his escape if he would take her back to Athens and marry her.

Ariadne provided Theseus with a ball of thread which he was to fasten to the inside of the door and to unwind as he went on. Thus knowing he could retrace his steps, he went in boldly seeking the Minotaur. Theseus came upon him asleep and after a fight, slew the monster.

Then Theseus led the other Athenian youths from the Labyrinth and with Ariadne, they took to their ship and set sail for Athens. When Ariadne was seasick, Theseus set her ashore on Naxos. While she was resting Theseus returned to repair the ship. A violent wind carried the Athenians out to sea, and when at long last they were able to return, Ariadne had died.

The ship approached Athens, but perhaps in grief for Ariadne or perhaps in the joy over the success of the voyage, no one thought to replace the black sail with the white. King Aegeus, watching the sea, caught sight of the black sail and threw himself from a rocky cliff into the sea. Hence the sea is to this day called the Aegean.

Theseus became King of Athens, but rather than rule over his people, he shared his power with them, retaining only the military power as commander-in-chief. Athens thus became a commonwealth with a council in which all citizens could participate.

2. The Meaning of the Myth: The Myth Retold Connecting Symbol and Myth with Ritual

If we have avoided the first trap, that of a vain search for meaning in origin, can we avoid the second trap? For many interpreters still the primary question seems to be: What does the myth mean? Perhaps the proper ironic answer is to tell the story again, as

one of the responses to 'What does the music mean?' is to play the piece again. This we shall do, not once but twice.

'What does the myth mean?' is a condescending question, as though those who tell the story have something to say but don't know how to say it. Must we translate narrative into propositions factual and analytic? Must there be a translation to indicate whether the statements are true or false? This procedure is too much like trying to substitute *Tales from Shakespeare* for the plays themselves. The plays themselves are rich and various as the mythical stories, like this story of Theseus.

Better than the question 'What does the myth mean?' is to consider 'Why do we enjoy rehearing the story?' Not surely to gain information, or alleged information. We all know by now that Theseus will not be killed by the Minotaur, that Ariadne succeeds in rescuing Theseus, yet by a cruel fate she does not marry Theseus in Athens. Each version accounts differently for the desertion by Theseus and the death of Ariadne. And why does the young prince not change the sail? Has not the old king suffered enough wondering what has happened to his son, and the other youths and maidens? The story is full of pathos. Is there more for us to understand?

There are probably as many interpretations of the story as there are great schools of mythological theory. Did Max Müller find an Aryan version that connected the characters to the life-giving sun? Is the thread of Ariadne the bright ray piercing the deadly darkness of the cave? Did some Freudian tell us that the myth of escaping the labyrinth is one of birth from the womb and that the thread must then be the umbilical cord? Did some Euhemerus point out the historic fact that at some point a rational Athenian defied human sacrifice, and the monster obviously is human superstition, which degrades man to the level of the beast? Did some Plato make of the story an allegory? We find ourselves before the world as a maze which we cannot understand. Ariadne is the mind which brings us into contact with the architect of the world. When we know the plan, then we understand and it is no more a maze. Yet when we use reason to control the world, pure reason dies of practicality. Each of these interpretations would lead us to tell the story in a different way. Rather than merely mock the narrowness of the theoreticians, each zealous to find the same theme in every story, or to support a single definition by the collective evidence

of all such stories, let us examine a retelling of the myth of Theseus and Ariadne from the now dominant myth and ritual school.²

One clue to the meaning is in the dance associated with the story, for the dance was part of the ritual of the slaying of the bull. The death of the bull was also the death of the king, and the meaning is that periodically life must be renewed. The religious ritual was aimed "at securing the well-being of the community by the due performance of ritual actions."³

The story thus told has an interest of its own:

Since dancing played such an important part in the Labyrinth, we shall not be surprised to find that the connection was preserved in Crete. There, we find the Labyrinth associated with the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. According to this ancient Greek myth, King Minos of Crete had laid upon the Athenians an annual or triennial tribute of twelve youths and maidens. [footnote: "Tribute was paid to Minos at the end of the octennial cycle, when it was necessary for the king to renew his life. He retired to the oracular cave

² The three best sources for comparing theories of myth are Thomas A. Sebeok, *Myth: A Symposium* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1958), which was originally an issue of *American Folklore Society*, Vol. 5, 1958; *Myth and Mythmaking*, Vol. 88, No. 2, of *Daedalus* (Spring, 1959), also in hardcover; T. J. J. Altizer, W. A. Beardslee, J. H. Young, *Truth, Myth and Symbol* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962). The analyst Michael Josef Eisler uses a dream of escape through a narrow passageway to interpret "the meaning attaching to the Labyrinth of Greek mythology." This is the theme of the birth of the hero, who, upon entrance into the world is confronted with hostile forces. "The labyrinth from which he saves himself with the aid of the 'thread of Ariadne,' after slaying the Minotaur, represents that mysterious and secret place from which all life emerges. It tends to corroborate such a supposition that Theseus, after his rescue, faithlessly abandons Ariadne (the mother). It is possible that the author (or authors) of this legend were actuated by the same infantile sexual fantasy as finds expression in the dream reported above." In Robert Fliess (ed.), *The Psychoanalytic Reader* (New York: International Universities Press, 1948), p. 382; other references are in *The Index of Psychoanalytic Writings*, 1958.

One should not ignore the Jungian interpretations: Gerhard Adler, *The Living Symbol: A Case Study in the Process of Individuation* (Bollingen Series LXIII, Pantheon Books, 1961), p. 292. Also dependent in its stress on the Labyrinth upon John Layard's *Stone Men of Malekula* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1942), is the very rich and suggestive *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*, by Joseph Campbell (New York: The Viking Press, 1959).

³ S. H. Hooke, *The Labyrinth: Further Studies in the Relation between Myth and Ritual in the Ancient World* (London: SPCK, 1935), p. v.

on Mount Ida, to commune with his father.”⁴ These [youths and maidens] were destined to be sacrificed to the Minotaur, in the Labyrinth, the cult centre of the king-god. The legend of the slaying of the Minotaur by Theseus relates how the royal youth joined the band of victims destined for the Minotaur. On arriving at Crete he met Ariadne, the daughter of the king-god by the priestess Pasiphaë. Ariadne fell in love with Theseus and gave him the sword with which he slew the Minotaur, and the clue by means of which he escaped with her, together with the twelve youths and maidens, from the Labyrinth. They all sailed to Delos, where Theseus sacrificed to the god and dedicated an image of Aphrodite which he had received from Ariadne. In honour of Aphrodite, he and his companions wove a *circling* dance, in which Daedalus had instructed him, and which depicted his wanderings in the Labyrinth. This dance was preserved by the Delians. Lucian mentions certain dance-themes, among which are “The Labyrinth,” “Ariadne,” and “Daedalus.”⁵

The story we retold earlier neglected to tell us what men skilled in archeology and anthropology provide. The ritual was led by the

king-god . . . in conjunction with the goddess as his consort, and their daughter, who would occupy an important position as priestess. Foreign youths and maidens were offered to the god, possibly sacrificed. The divine bull was slain. There was a ritual dance.

The circular dance was in honor of the Egyptian mother-goddess, Isis. Aphrodite and Pasiphaë were local forms dominating the cult. In Crete the king was “her high-priest, probably united to her in sacred marriage, and with her the life-giver of the people.” Since “the king and the bull were one,” and the union of the goddess and the king-priest must be fruitful, we can understand what was meant by the Minotaur.⁶

Our first version is probably best called artistic. If we enjoy the story, Miss Hamilton is not troubling us by asking about the meaning. Nor does she affirm or deny the truth of the myth. The question does not arise in the artistic context. The religious context of the

⁴ C. N. Deedes, *The Labyrinth*, quoting Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 1-vol. edition, pp. 279-280.

⁵ S. H. Hooke, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27; C. N. Deedes, *The Labyrinth*.

⁶ S. H. Hooke, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

second version does raise the question of truth as well as meaning. Let us examine what S. H. Hooke and members of his school mean by the 'truth' of the myth of Theseus in Crete.

3. *The Truth of the Myth: Is the Ritual the only 'Essential Truth'?*

The generalized view from *Myth and Ritual* is that myth is true, not as

the record of a single event which took place at a particular date in a definite locality but it possesses a truth which is both wider and deeper than the narrow truth of history. An historical event can only take place once. . . . But the essential truth of the myth lies in the fact that it embodies a situation of profound emotional significance, a situation, moreover, which is in its nature recurrent, and which calls for the repetition of the ritual which deals with the situation and satisfies the need evoked by it.⁷

Yet the meaning of the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur as a ritual is lost, concludes the interpreter. "Now, the life-giving magic of the Labyrinth is lost, and however many clues we may yet discover, it is doubtful whether we shall ever know its mystery."⁸ But is it true that the survival of the myth is only "as art-motives in decoration"? The author mentions the survival of the Labyrinth in a few Christian churches of the Middle Ages. Perhaps the survival is not merely the failure to eradicate the tradition but putting the symbol to work as part of a new ritual. Allan Temko, for example, suggests that the maze in the pavement of cathedrals in France, called the *Maison de Dalus*, was the "twisting route of stone . . . on which the devout crawled to a figurative Jerusalem."⁹

The ritual interpretation of the truth of the myth of Theseus is peculiar. Although the 'meaning' is said to be lost, yet there is said to be in it an "essential truth" presumably conveyed by retelling the story in the context of a ritual by which life was renewed. But does this magic work? And second, members of the ritual school of myth condemn not only the artistic version but also the

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. ix-x.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁹ Allan Temko, *Notre-Dame of Paris* (New York: The Viking Press, Compass Book Ed., 1959), p. 104.

philosophic myth or myth whose meaning is allegorical. Plato's myths, for example, are said not to be the product "of action in response to a concrete situation," which is the mark of a true myth. If reflection enters into the construction of a myth, does this new way of thinking render the story a mere 'pseudo-myth'?

On the contrary, it is the philosopher and the reflective man generally who is aware of the myth as metaphor and the myth as allegory. It is the philosophic myth as well as the ritual myth that stresses "the essential truth of the myth [that] lies in the fact of profound emotional significance, a situation, moreover, which is in its nature recurrent. . . ." ¹⁰ Any reflective man is daily confronted by a concrete situation that calls for myth, even the myth of Theseus.

The fact that gives veracity to the myth of Theseus and the Labyrinth is that man is confronted by what is chaotic and therefore unintelligible. The challenge is to find an order in the apparently disorderly and so render the unintelligible intelligible. The myth of Theseus and the Minotaur is a myth of chaos and order. The problem of confronting the maze is ever-recurrent, and who does not, in the powerful metaphor of the myth and the symbol, stand in need of Ariadne's thread? The detective, the artist, and the scientist need a thread to guide them through their at first meaningless and disconnected data. The statesman, the businessman, the builder, the artist also, confront puzzles to be turned into orderly and manageable situations.

But is the story so allegorized a 'profound' truth? Perhaps it seems shallow to one concerned with the myth of the periodic renewal of the life of a community. Discovery and creation are crucial for communities of learning and making things.

The myth and ritual school lives in an atmosphere of pathos. As though man in becoming literate, philosophical, scientific, has lost his intimacy with the tribe, with nature, with the tribal and natural gods, but gained nothing. Man in this revolution has also gained control over his beliefs, ability to reason from principles and to create new societies with specific purposes. Modern man as well as primitive man is also involved in transforming chaos into cosmos.

¹⁰ S. H. Hooke, *op. cit.*, p. x.

So the story of the old Labyrinth of Crete was meaningful and true to Virgil, and is meaningful and true for us:

As when in lofty Crete (so fame reports),
The Labyrinth of old, in winding walls
A mazy way enclosed, a thousand paths
Ambiguous and perplexed, by which the steps
Should by an error intricate, untraced
Be still deluded.¹¹

DÆDALUS

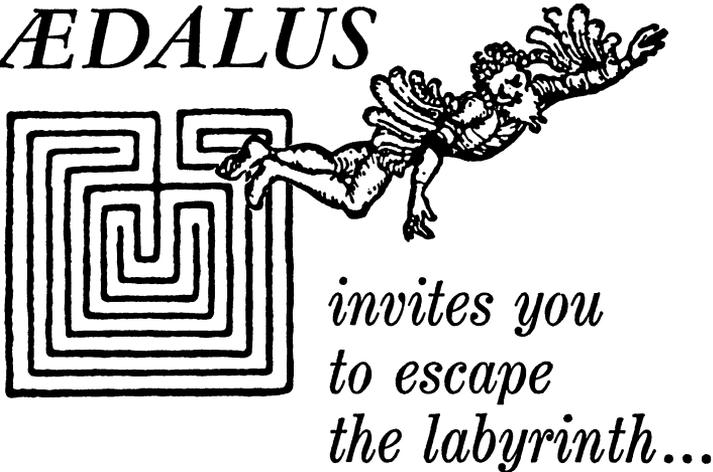


Figure B

4. *The Ambiguous Symbol: "A Mighty Maze but not Without a Plan": The Labyrinth a Symbol both of Chaos and of Order: Relevance to the World and to Our Age.*

The journal *Daedalus*, each issue adorned by the famous design from a coin of ancient Knossos, uses the maze with a figure of winged Icarus. "Daedalus invites you to escape the labyrinth." Daedalus had built the Labyrinth with the aim of foiling escape, but he also provided the ball of thread.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35; Trapp's translation, 1718. I am happy to see that Robert W. Hall also raises a question about the distinction between 'myth' and 'pseudomyth' in "Myth-making Attitudes," a critique of William Sacksteder's "The Making of Myths," *Thesis and Counterthesis* (University of Pacific Forum), Vol. 4, No. 1, Sept., 1965.

The same square Labyrinth also adorns the jacket and the cover of Paul Weiss' *Philosophy in Process*. A quick glance, which is all that most people give the pattern, conveys the impression of impenetrable complexity and hence conveys the emotion of intellectual despair. A poor symbol indeed, one might think, to proclaim dialogue between men learned in the arts, the sciences, and in philosophy. Yet study the pattern by tracing a path from the entrance, and with one slightest exception, there is no alternative path, no losing of the way. There is only one path, ending in the center. The return requires no thread of Ariadne but only an about-face. This maze is, as Pope characterized the world, "not without a plan," and it is therefore a good symbol for the transition from chaos to order, from confusion to the triumph of understanding. The Labyrinth is an excellent symbol because it conveys concretely an opportunity to experience the transition from fear of the unknown to mastery of the pattern. Although the symbol of a maze seemed at first to impress one with forbidding complexity, in the end it is complexity unraveled by following a principle.

Ours is not the first age in which the Labyrinth has been felt a significant characterization of the human situation. Writing during the Thirty Years War, the great Czech educator Jan Komensky wrote his celebrated allegory, *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*.¹² Yet the Labyrinth need not be contrasted to Paradise, for the Labyrinth itself loses its terror and becomes a delight when it is understood. Then it can be used. Another way to put it is this: Am I Theseus entering the Labyrinth confident and with Ariadne's thread or am I Theseus entering in despair without a thread?

Clearly the use in our age is of both the despairing and the confident ways. W. H. Auden best conveys the ambiguity:

The labyrinth is safe but endless, and broken
Is Ariadne's thread.¹³

Franz Kafka, like Komensky, views man expelled from Paradise and forced to burrow. The Labyrinth is the allegory of man with a

¹² John Amos Comenius, *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*, trans. Matthew Spinka (Chicago, Ill.: The National Union of Czechoslovak Protestants of America, 1942).

¹³ W. H. Auden, "Casino," *Collected Poetry* (New York: Random House, 1945).

goal but without a way: "What we call way is only wavering."¹⁴

I venture the surmise that the use of the symbol and the myth is more prominent now than ever before. James Joyce chose as his *persona* Stephen Dedalus. He made him a Labyrinth of cognition and traced and retraced the paths of the eye and the inner ear.¹⁵

The symbol of the Labyrinth and the myth of Theseus seem central in other works, beyond those of Auden, Kafka and Joyce. Without extended survey, I can mention Greene, Gide, Renault, Paz, Borges, and Steinberg.¹⁶

The Labyrinth is not only significantly ambiguous, and capable of various interpretations, concrete yet applicable to different organs of man, society, intellectual tangles, the world, the search for God; the Labyrinth is also capable of rich humor, of ironic self-mockery. Saul Steinberg, for example begins with two points, A and B. He could go simply from A and B by a straight line, by an arc, by a helix. But no, he wanders, as though to show how many ways there are to start from A and to get finally to B by traversing the area back and forth, around and around. What Rube Goldberg is to the world of engineering, Saul Steinberg is to the world of symbols.^{16A}

¹⁴ Walter A. Strauss, "Franz Kafka: Between the Paradise and the Labyrinth," *Centennial Review*, 5 (1961), pp. 206-222.

¹⁵ H. M. McLuhan, "Joyce, Aquinas, and the Poetic Process," in Thomas F. Connolly (ed.), *Joyce's Portrait: Criticism and Critiques* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962), pp. 258-259.

¹⁶ Graham Greene, *The Labyrinthine Ways* (New York: The Viking Press, 1940).

André Gide, *Oedipus and Theseus*, trans. John Russell (London: Secker and Warburg, 1950); Mary Renault, *The King Must Die* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958); [Saul Steinberg, *The Labyrinth* (New York: Harper, 1960)]; Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*, trans. Lysanter Kemp (New York: Grove Press, 1961); Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Inby (New York: New Directions, 1962).

^{16A} Another view is expressed by Saul Steinberg in a letter to the author which is reproduced herewith with Mr. Steinberg's kind permission:

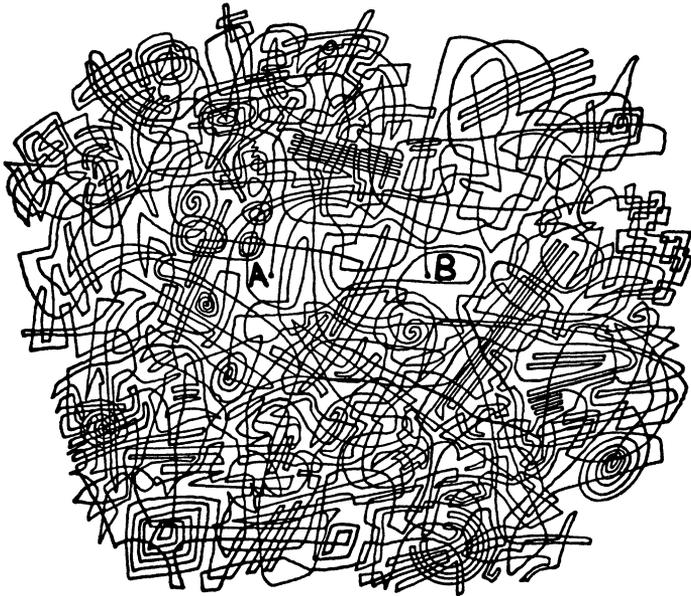
"Dear Mr. Kuntz:

Notes on my Labyrinth.

The maze has "rich humour or ironic self-mockery" only in the prejudice caused by the context (humor book etc.). The phantasy of line causes pleasure that is often confusing to the scholar—Your comparison with R. G. is wrong—My drawing is not a satire on anything but only an indispensable way of showing a poetic invention.

Notice the drawing—the maze on your cover—A and B are the eyes of the

STEINBERG



THE LABYRINTH

Figure C

It is to be doubted that Kafka made the Labyrinth a symbol of chaos only, but the order is more difficult to discern. Such literature of defeat as Kafka's, Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus* and other examples of *littérature noire* are healthy correctives of an over-optimistic tradition based on divine providence, that is on identification of the natural and the moral orders. When the correction has been made and men freely recognize this disharmony as well as the harmony, then the symbol of the Labyrinth will be, I venture to predict, even more significant than it is today.

In the world of scholarship we face a Labyrinth and candidates for the Ph. D. do well to fear that within the tortuous chambers of libraries there is a beast who will destroy them. Recently a systematic bibliography was advertised as "a practical guide in the labyrinth of publications concerning this author for the last eighty years." Cassirer sought a "clue of Ariadne to guide us through the complicated and baffling labyrinth of human speech. . . ." ¹⁷

The myth of Ariadne's thread is one of those myths by which Theseus lived, and we must live also. Certainly we have now conceptualized the orders we discover in nature, the orders we create in history, the ideal orders we regard as transcendent. But does this break with the primitive unity of the cosmos not make the myth the more necessary for us? ¹⁸

This old myth, though encrusted in magic, did manage, in Suzanne Langer's words, "to symbolize great conceptions." ¹⁹ If it is

minotaur. The maze is made of all possible lines—crooked, ugly, elegant, caligraphic, orderly and parallel, etc.—Some are traced with a ruling pen, others with a compass meaning that a labyrinth contains order (prejudice, bureaucracy) and disorder or poetry of any sort, good and bad—both indispensable.

Sincerely,
Saul Steinberg
c/o The New Yorker
25 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y."

¹⁷ Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1953), p. 165.

¹⁸ John Wild, *Human Freedom and Social Order* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1959), retells the famous "Myth of the Cave," pp. 60-70. My retelling the myth of Theseus is partly Wild's inspiration, but not without certain disagreement with his doctrine of sharp break between stages: "Mythical, Cosmic, and Personal Order," *Review of Metaphysics*, 16, No. 4 (June 1963), pp. 718-748.

¹⁹ Suzanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: Penguin Books, 1948), p. 39.

in the conceptual world that we are “bewildered in [our] effort to find the centre or make [our] exit,” then we should not degrade philosophic myths.²⁰ The positive note of Cassirer is struck by his rendering a Stoic idea: “Man is no mere spectator; he is, according to his measure, the creator of the world order.”²¹

5. *The Intellectual and Moral Importance of the Symbol of the Labyrinth and of the Myth of Theseus*

About symbols and myths in general what I have to say can be said only indirectly as I conclude my reflection on the Labyrinth and the myth of Theseus.

This myth is one of many that appeal to contemporary writers and the reader may well not prefer this myth, as I do, to that of Prometheus, of Oedipus, of Ulysses or of Sisyphus. The comparative question of the Labyrinth is itself labyrinthine: if none of the myths is factually true or false, and someone is deeply moved by each to read man's place in the world as promethean, oedipean, ulysean, sisyphian, why not say the preference for the thesean view is a curious expression of taste and feeling but no more? Or put another way, isn't the myth a way of making an emotion peculiarly viable in human communication? To rouse men to defy Zeus (that is, the Establishment), tell the story of Prometheus. To tell of a man caught by fate, tell of Oedipus. To tell of a long voyage by a man cunning and persistent, tell of Ulysses. And to tell of courage to face the unknown with intelligence, tell of Theseus. If all fails and we feel our relation to the world absurd, then tell finally of the stoic resignation of Sisyphus at the foot of the hill, ready to roll the stone once again.

There is an emotional aspect of all of these myths as they are revived by modern man, but are they merely emotive? Not if they give a reliable picture of the world, and not if they help shape responses to the world that are appropriate. I venture to claim, what

²⁰ “Labyrinth,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, XVI (11th ed., 1911), p. 11. The article considers only the subterranean buildings discovered in Egypt, Crete and Italy and the later garden hedges, and intricate pathways of box and privet. The analogical meaning is for us far more important than the literal univocal reference to mazes.

²¹ Cassirer, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

I cannot here demonstrate, that subjected to the sort of analysis that debunked Albert Camus' *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, almost any modern philosophic myth of Theseus would come off better than did that of Sisyphus.²²

T. S. Eliot in his famous essay "Ulysses, Order and Myth" celebrated Joyce's *Ulysses*. The myth "is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, or of giving shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."²³

The myth of Theseus, Ariadne, and the Minotaur seems to me likewise of intellectual and moral significance. To show this I would like to conclude by retelling the story of the Labyrinth. The author has enjoyed the recent versions of Gide and Renault, and although as a philosopher he is not at home in romance, the story suggests an adventure of ideas relevant to life and love:

Every ninth year seven youths and seven maidens had to be sent to Crete, from Athens. The people of Athens held Minos in great fear: he was a priest with uncanny powers, and dancing with the mask of a bull, struck awe in all who witnessed the sacred dance of the Labyrinth.

But Theseus, the young prince, had faced bulls. He knew that in Crete there were acrobats who grasped bulls by the horns and swung themselves onto the backs of the animals, stiffened themselves upright and allowed themselves to be carried. . . . He wanted to see how young Cretans might triumph over bulls.

²² A. J. Ayer, "Albert Camus," in the series "Novelist-Philosophers," *Horizon*, 13, No. 74 (March 1946), 155-168.

²³ T. S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," *Dial*, 75 (November 1923), 480-483. On the notion of the moral truth of religion and of philosophy I am indebted to George Santayana's *Reason in Religion, The Life of Reason*, Vol. 3 and "Dramatic Truth," *The Realm of Truth, Realm of Being*, Chap. 7. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (New York: Bollingen Series XVII, Pantheon Books, 1949), pp. 23-25, has made much of the symbolic importance of Daedalus, the single-minded scientist, and the skein of linen thread, symbol of imagination and husbandry. Campbell tells his beautiful allegory with an emphasis on the creative scientist, Daedalus. In rejecting the sharp dualism between poetry and philosophy, between imagination and criticism, there is also Suzanne Langer, "The Growing Center of Knowledge," *Philosophical Sketches* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962). A living myth is one "invested with a modern significance, whether personal or social, and the dead ones are plaster reproductions of the antique," concludes Douglas Bush's *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry*, quoted by Richard Chase, *Quest for Myth* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1949), p. 112.

The women wailed and their husbands were silent: the children would be sent into the unknown never to return. The underground prison was a place of despair: there lived the Minotaur, it was said, sired in the body of a cow constructed by Daedalus, and the monster fed upon human flesh.

Theseus had once laughed at the idea of a Minotaur. What a woman to fall in love with a bull, and how did they do it? And even more ridiculous is a flesh-eating bull. People in anguish could not reason, Theseus had discovered, so he laughed to himself this day of deep grief.

Theseus had always liked problems, the more impossible they seemed, the more challenging to him. So he went to his father the King and offered to go to Crete and kill the Minotaur, if there was a Minotaur. He put it gaily: to kill the fear of the Minotaur.

The old King had failed to be independent of Crete. He was angered by his subservience to Minos. Why, he asked, does not Minos have to send me every ninth year seven Cretan youths and seven Cretan maidens? He would not sacrifice them in a Labyrinth. He would allow the seven maidens, curly-haired and bare-breasted in flouncy skirts, to add beauty to the human scene, and surely those Cretans, so strong and handsome, would add skills to the multifarious activities of Athens. The father wondered: must I risk the prince to do what I could not do? If he succeeds, I shall give him the kingship, and retire. If he fails, I shall spend my old age without a son and in grief.

In this dire choice, the old man had to yield for a political reason. The people murmured that their children were lost, when the prince was safe. If it was not the King's fault, it was at least his duty to free Athens from fear and humiliation and grief.

Theseus pondered how to solve the problem of the Labyrinth. How broad and high were the passageways? How many turns, and in which directions? How many alternatives at the crossings? How large an area? How long are the passages? Why can no one find the center and retrace his steps? It all seemed ridiculous to keep a bull-man or a man-bull in an underground cavern. What trouble carrying hay and grain and cleaning an underground stable.

While the other youths on the Crete-bound ship were in despair or quietly resigned to inevitable death, or listening to the girls singing songs of mourning, Theseus was exercising his wits and his body. Upon arrival in Crete he looked his finest. The young prince looked as no youth from Athens had ever looked before.

Young Ariadne saw him from the palace and thought what a

shame to destroy such a young man! She was high-spirited and outspoken against many of the stupid rituals of her father. And so with this one of human sacrifice. She would not stand by, or participate in killing bulls or killing Athenian youth. She knew she got nowhere at all talking with her father. Her mother, too, was caught in the old ways. So she turned to the clever builder Daedalus.

To him she said, I don't want the young prince to be sacrificed, or any of the youth of Athens. Daedalus was shrewd and asked whether she would like Theseus as a husband. Cretan girls were straightforward, and she admitted it. Very well, said Daedalus, I will tell you about the Labyrinth. There is no Minotaur.

And furthermore, said Daedalus, I have constructed the tunnels with perfect regularity. True, they turn so that in following them you are going now in one direction, now in another, and there is a succession of turns, right, left, left, right, and you will feel you are getting nowhere. But there is never a choice between left and right, nor between north and south. There is only one next step to get to the end.

Then there's no problem about escaping?

None whatsoever, said Daedalus. But if you wish to give your young friend a ball of twine, he will roll up exactly what he had unrolled.

Ariadne took the thread and, making a secret rendezvous with Theseus, told him the secret.

The secret of the labyrinth is that an order may look confusing because people have never thought about its pattern. All patterns are intelligible, and everything has a pattern. Overcome the fear, find the method, the problem gets solved.

The myth of Ariadne, Theseus, Daedalus, and the Minotaur is a philosophic myth because it deals with man whose understanding leads him from what he feared was chaotic to what he knows to be orderly. It is the myth of all discovery—the guiding image of the courage of reason to overcome fear, ignorance, and superstition.

“What is your aim in philosophy?” asked Wittgenstein, and he answered, “To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.” Why wouldn't it be a better metaphor to say “To find the pattern of the Labyrinth, to end the fear of the Minotaur, to free people from the ritual of human sacrifice”?

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