

# LE CLAIRE

KUNST SEIT 1982



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JOHANN HEINRICH LIPS

1758 Kloten – Zurich 1817

*Ulysses, to the Doors of Hades, meets the Shades of Tiresias and Anticlea*

Pen and brown ink, brown and grey wash.

Signed and dated lower left: *Joh. H. Lips inv: e fec: Roma 1785.*

454 x 670 mm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, Switzerland, anonymous sale, Kunst & Spiegel AG, Zurich 26-28 October 1932, lot 933 – Private collection Italy - Paolo Antonacci, Rome – Le Claire Kunst by 2009 – Olivier Aaron, Paris – His estate sale, Auction Art, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 8 October 2019, lot 89 – Private collection, France.

LITERATURE: Paolo Antonacci, *Aspetti dell'arte neoclassica a Roma*, exhib. cat., Rome 2009, no. 3, illust.

This important drawing by Johann Heinrich Lips takes as its subject a scene in Homer's *Odyssey*, Book XI. Ulysses, accompanied by his friends Eurylochus and Perimedes, visits the Underworld to consult the ghost of the blind prophet Tiresias about his future. Tiresias crouches on the floor gorging the sacrificial blood of a black sheep that will enable him to communicate with the living. Behind him stands the ghost of Anticlea, Ulysses' mother, eager to give her son news of affairs in Ithaca. At the left, the souls of the dead are held back by a naked male figure.

Lips was a noted draughtsman and illustrator. He also trained as a reproductive engraver. He owed his fame chiefly to the numerous illustrations he executed for Johann Caspar Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy*. In 1778, Lips met the artist Henry Fuseli at Lavater's house in Zurich and became devoted to this Master. Fuseli was to have a formative influence on his work. He held Lips in high regard, calling him *The Sorcerer of Kloten*, and commissioned him to execute copies and engravings after Fuseli's own drawings.<sup>1</sup> He also etched a portrait of Johann Heinrich Füssli in 1798 [fig. 1] a result of his huge admiration of his famous Swiss fellow artist. Working for Lavater, Lips also met Goethe, whom he portrayed on several occasions. He illustrated a number of Goethe's writings. It was Goethe who later brought Lips to Weimar as a teacher of drawing at the Academy.<sup>2</sup>

The present drawing is a very fine example of Lips's neoclassical style. The emphasis is placed on the figures and their poses to heighten emotional expression, as for example in the figure of the mother lamenting her fate and that of her son. The physical strength and forcefulness conveyed by the figure of Ulysses recall the marble figure of the *Apollo Belvedere*.<sup>3</sup> The pose of the blind prophet Tiresias, depicted crouching on the ground in bestial greed, was very probably influenced by Fuseli's drawing

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<sup>1</sup> Joachim Kruse, *Johann Heinrich Lips 1758–1817. Ein Zürcher Kupferstecher zwischen Lavater und Goethe*, exhib. cat., Coburg 1989, p.107.

<sup>2</sup> Kruse, op. cit., p.145ff.

<sup>3</sup> In 1778 Lips executed an engraving of the *Apollo Belvedere* after Anton Raphael Mengs. See J. Kruse, op.cit., p.117.

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of the same subject [figs. 2 and 3].<sup>4</sup> The elaborate portrayal of the ghostly apparitions at the left may have been inspired by Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel. Records show that a copy was commissioned from Lips by the Viennese banker Graf Moritz Fries.<sup>5</sup> However, it is a motif also known in Fuseli's oeuvre.<sup>6</sup>

The Homeric theme of the work, very rare in the figurative arts and extremely picked, reflects the culture and the profound literary erudition of the present northern-German conspicuous community to Rome in the last quarter of XVIII century and included around the figures of Angelika Kauffmann, of Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, and in special way of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

The drawing was executed towards the end of Lips's first sojourn in Rome (1783-5). While in Rome, he became increasingly motivated to create a major work in its own right. The present drawing shows that he had the skills and ability to do so. It is a work of great importance and in its technical and compositional brilliance a work of extraordinary subtlety. The structure of the work reflects the influence of Fuseli. Technically, it is clearly indebted to the outline drawings of John Flaxman – drawings which had been executed only a few years earlier in Rome. At a thematic level, it also owes much to the revival of interest in classical antiquity and the Renaissance popularized by Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Anton Raphael Mengs and Angelika Kauffmann. Nonetheless, the drawing is a highly original work and occupies a unique position in Lips's oeuvre.

We would like to thank Joachim Kruse, Francesco Leone, Bernhard von Waldkirch, and David H. Weinglass (†) for their help in cataloguing this drawing.

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<sup>4</sup> Gert Schiff, *Johann Heinrich Füssli. 1741-1825*, Zurich 1973, II, no. 387, repr. p.87: *Teiresias Drinking the Sacrificial Blood, Homer, Odyssey XI, 96*, 1774-8, London, British Museum, Roman Album.

<sup>5</sup> Goethe records this in his *Italian Journey*. See Francesco Leone, *Johann Heinrich Lips, Ulisse, alle porte dell' Ade, incontra dell' indovino Tiresia e della madre Anticlea*. In: exhib. cat. *Aspetti dell' arte neoclassica a Roma*. Paolo Antonacci, Roma 2009, p.14ff.

<sup>6</sup> Schiff, op. cit., nos. 386, 798: *Teiresias Appears to Ulysses Sacrificing for the Dead. Homer, Odyssey XI, 90-8*, 1774-8, London, British Museum, Roman Album; and *Teiresias Appears to Ulysses Sacrificing for the Dead*, Albertina, Vienna.

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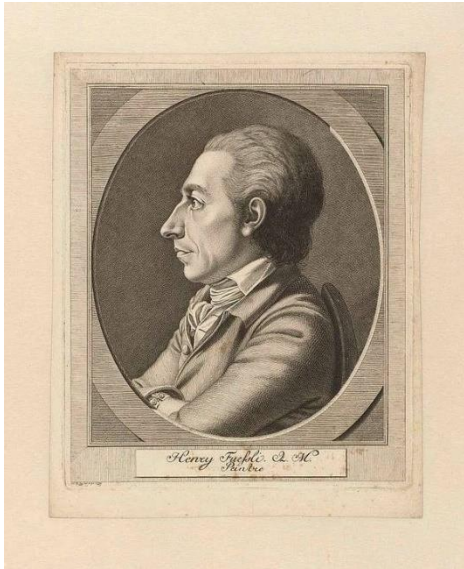


Fig.1: Johann Heinrich Füssli, 1779,  
etching and copperplate engraving.  
24.0 x 19.3 cm



Fig.2: Henry Fuseli, *Tiresias and Odysseus*, Homer's 'Odyssey', XI, from the Roman Album, 1774-78,  
Pen and brown ink, with grey wash, over graphite.  
370 x 475 mm  
British Museum, London  
Inv. no. 1885,0314.268  
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Fig.3: Henry Fuseli, *Tiresias appears to Ulysses during the sacrifice*, c.1780-85

Pen, grey and brown ink with watercolour, heightened with white, scratched out in places, over graphite  
915 x 628 mm

Albertina, Vienna

Inv. Nr. 17299