



Ulysses

tragedy in five acts

after Homer

Foreword

Already Sophocles and Euripides had problems with Homer and Ulysses, and Plato suggested the exclusion of Homer's works from his ideal society. All ideal societies have perished, but Homer and Ulysses remain, we will never do without them or be rid of them no matter how much St. Augustine may have complained. Whatever you might think of Ulysses and his questionable actions, he remains the first great novel hero and must be considered as such. During the course of centuries there have been many who have attacked him, Dante placed him with Diomedes in the bottom of hell, while he nevertheless never ceased to captivate and fascinate and awaken oceans within us of deep feelings and emotions.

I have also had problems with him as long as I have lived, and this work could be regarded as an effort to solve that problem.

Leh 17.8.2004

The characters:

Penelope, faithful mother
Telemachus, her faithful son
Antinous, rude suitor
Eurymachus, better suitor
Leiocritus, worse suitor
Mentor, old friend
Aegyptius, old honourable man
Nestor, old charming gentleman
Menelaos, morose victor
Helen, eternal queen of beauty
Ulysses, stranger from the sea
Calypso, patient nymph
Nausikaa, charming princess
her two laundry maids
Alcinous, her royal father
Arete, his queen
Demodochos, blind poet
Circe, famous witch

The Ghosts:

Elpenor, careless drunk
Anticleia, Ulysses' deceased mother
Teiresias, blind but timeless soothsayer
Achilles
Aias

Priam
Agamemnon
Clytaimnestra
Orestes
Cassandra

Eurylochus, Ulysses' helmsman
Eumaius, ancient swineherd
Iros, furious beggar
Melanto, false maid
Eurycleia, old faithful servant
Melantius, just another suitor
Laertes, Ulysses' father

Suitors at Ithaca and people at the court of the Phaeacians, servants and ghosts

The action takes place by the western Greek islands and in Sparta and Pylus
ten years after the Trojan war.

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Ulysses

Act I scene 1

Penelope He will be back, Telemachus. Trust me.

Telemachus It's the uncertainty, mother, that makes life more difficult every day. Of course I trust you and believe that he will come back as long as no news has reached us of his shipwreck or departure, but we haven't even had a single sign of that he is alive!

Penelope And as long as we haven't had any sign of the contrary either, we must assume and believe that he is alive. To doubt it would be treason.

Telemachus You are right of course, mother.

Penelope I know that the suitors make our existence more intolerable every day, but we have to bear with them. Ulysses' house was always hospitable, and in his absence we must keep up the appearances.

Telemachus Can't you just dismiss them?

Penelope Could you do that, Telemachus?

Telemachus I am not even a mature man yet.

Penelope There you are. I am even less capable, since I am a woman, and not even in the name of Ulysses, since we lack his mandate for inhospitality. Go in to

them and bear with them and entertain them as usual. There is an end to all sufferings. I will myself go in to my web. (*leaves*)

Telemachus For twenty years my father has been gone, and I haven't even seen him to be able to remember him. But he is always alive to me, although he never can be as alive to me as to my mother, for natural reasons. Well, let's then confront the pack of wolves one more time. (*opens the door and enters the hall, which opens up.*)

Antinous Welcome, Telemachus! You were the only one missing! Where have you been all day?

Telemachus I have just been hanging around a little and talked with my mother, among other things.

Antinous Is she still alive? We never see her around.

Eurymachus Shut up, Antinous! Of course she is alive! Or else we wouldn't be sitting here courting and proposing to her.

Antinous How stupid of me, Eurymachus! Of course she must be alive. But tell her she must make up her mind some time, Telemachus. She can't just go on crying for her dead old man until we all grow to become old men and die like him.

Telemachus We have no evidence that he is dead, and as long as there isn't any, we must assume that he is alive.

Antinous Come on, Telemachus. Everyone is certain that he is dead except you and your obstinate mother. No one errs around on the sea for ten years without getting somewhere, unless he is dead. You must wake up to reality some time, Telemachus! Don't you want me for your father-in-law?

Telemachus That is for mother to decide and no one else.

Eurymachus Leave him alone, Antinous. After all we can't complain. Sooner or later the fruit will fall off the tree before it rots, and then we can pick it up easily. (*Enter a stranger.*)

Telemachus I espy a new guest in the house whom I must take care of.

Antinous He is no suitor. He is too old. Throw him out!

Telemachus No, my friends, no one is thrown out from this house as long as any of my father's family lives. – Welcome, stranger, and make yourself comfortable! What is your pleasure? Food or just drink?

Mentor Thank you, I need nothing, Telemachus, son of Ulysses, but I wished to speak privately with you.

Telemachus Do you have any news of my father?

Mentor No, but I am well informed of the case. Troy is fallen, and everyone has returned home from there, except Ulysses. Will you do something about it?

Telemachus You sound like an old friend of Ulysses'. Who are you?

Mentor I am Mentor, son of Ankialos, the ruler of Taphos. Your grandfather Laertes knows me well.

Telemachus Then I can trust you.

Antinous (calling) Who is he, Telemachus?

Telemachus An old friend of my father's, Mentor from Taphos. Grandfather Laertes knows more about him.

Leiocritus Does he know anything new of your father?

Telemachus No, nothing.

Eurymachus Then we can let him be. Go on reasoning with him in peace, Telemachus. (*The suitors respect Telemachus and Mentor.*)

Telemachus What can I do, good Mentor?

Mentor You should absolutely do something, for the situation here on Ithaca grows constantly more intolerable the longer your father stays away. Incertitude breeds instability.

Telemachus Again: What can I do?

Mentor You can travel around and meet those who knew him. They are all safe at home now: Menelaos in Sparta, Nestor in Pylus, Diomedes in Troezen and Orestes, Agamemnon's son, in Mycaene. Someone among them must know something. Whatever you do, never give up, for if he really was dead, it would not have passed unnoticed.

Telemachus You might be the very counsellor I need. You couldn't have appeared in a more appropriate moment than now. I thank you with all my heart. You must meet my mother.

Mentor I would rather not disturb her. I respect the faithfulness of her loneliness too much. You could mention that I had arrived here, and if she calls me I will come. But most important is your research enterprise.

Telemachus (rising) Absolutely. We must get started at once. Who do you think I should visit first?

Mentor Nestor in Pylus. He is the safest one and has always been the one with the best and most comprehensive knowledge. But first you must make your intentions public to the people of Ithaca.

Telemachus You are like a godsend counsellor, Mentor. Let's take care of the matter immediately. (*leaves with Mentor*)

Leiocritus What do you think the old man wants?

Antinous Meet Penelope like everyone else.

Leiocritus In what business? Could he be an obstacle to us?

Antinous Certainly not. (*goes on partying with the suitors*)

Cheers, my good friends, for the fall of the beautiful Penelope's innocence some time for the best of us!

(*All share the toast with joy and enthusiasm and drunkenness.*)

Leiocritus And a toast for you, Antinous, our born leader, who enthused all Hellas to gather around the lovely Penelope's feet in gay courting!

Antinous At least we are not bored.

Leiocritus In your company that's impossible, good Antinous.

Antinous Don't flatter me. I am just the chief of a bunch of incorrigible rakes.

Leiocritus And that's no small matter, for it's the best bunch of rakes in all Hellas, and all envy us who don't dare to join us from sheer cowardice, since we run a party all days from morning till night.

Antinous Yes, and belch and fart and vomit in step with the swine we are consuming.

Eurymachus Are you getting tired of the game, Antinous?

Antinous Not as long as the beautiful and generous Penelope continues to keep us all on edge. What does she really think? Is she wishing for a new husband but dare not give in as long as she is uncertain of the old one? I think she is waiting for the final liberation and release from her old bondage. She is so virtuous, that she can't consider herself divorced until she knows for sure that her fugitive husband since twenty years is dead. Like Agamemnon he probably had nothing else to do during his long absence from home than to just share himself equally between all the world's available mistresses.

Eurymachus So you mean that we can safely relish here in the affluence of the grieving Penelope with a good conscience?

Antinous Of course. We have nothing more sensible to do, and what is more sensible than to party and have fun? Here at least we run no risk of getting bored, since the tension Penelope keeps us in not just remains constant but even increases year by year. What trick will she be up to next?

Leiocritus I have strong suspicions about her web and her way of never getting it finished. I think she is trying to fool us.

Antinous I think so too. We will have to send one of her more liable servants to spy on her and see what she really is up to concerning the web. Eurymachus, seduce that fair Melanto, so that she could betray her mistress to us, if there is anything there to betray.

Eurymachus A foul measure, Antinous.

Antinous No, it's all just entertainment. We mustn't get bored. Have some more wine. There is too little belching around here.

Leiocritus We take you on your word, Antinous. We have much left to release in Ulysses' loos before they get stewed.

Antinous You are getting stewed yourself.

Leiocritus Gladly and constantly.

Antinous Yes, that's the right attitude. You have the right suiting attitude. Just carry on as long as it lasts, and then start all over again. But most important of all: never take no for an answer from a woman.

Leiocritus Of course. That's the first and last in connection with women. If they say no they mean maybe, if they say maybe they mean yes, but if they say yes you can least of all take them seriously. Then you never know what they mean.

Antinous And Penelope neither says no nor maybe. So she could only mean yes with time.

Eurymachus You could make anything suit your pleasure.

Antinous That's intended. No one can refuse an honest suitor. So we'll just carry on until she says yes.

Leiocritus Cheers, Antinous, to your clear mind and sense, which by its ingeniousness simply must clear all obstacles!

Antinous Or else I wouldn't be here poculating myself to death with you imbecile fools, who just follow the stream without bothering to see where it leads.

Leiocritus We trust you. As long as you don't give up there is no reason for anyone else to do it.

Antinous That's right. Just follow me down the abyss or up to paradise. There will be either or. Either we prevail or we fall, like the Trojans and Hellenes by Troy. We all must die in the end anyway. So you might as well go on partying until you die, so that you might be lucky enough die in the middle of the party.

Leiocritus A toast for Antinoos, the wisest of us all!

Eurymachus Our constant incorrigible party leader!

(They all share the toast for Antinous and go on just having a good time.)

Scene 2. The council.

Mentor You all know me as an honest man who has known Ulysses all his life. Now you all wonder of course why this meeting has been called for the first time since Ulysses left us commanded by King Agamemnon. It so happens that his son Telemachus has something to tell us all concerning the future of Ithaca. Please approach your father's throne, Telemachus.

Telemachus (treading forth) Friends of Ithaca, I am just a young man and far from being my father's equal in initiative and wisdom, but the situation here in my father's realm on Ithaca is so worrisome that I must address myself in public with what is on my mind. You all know how timid I am and therefore never expressed any protest against the gathering of parasitic suitors in my father's house, but I can't remain silent any more. Why can't all these suitors led by Ithaca's own Antinous, Eurymachus and Leiocritus and from Akhaia and the mainland, party at their own homes instead? Is that an unreasonable request?

Antinous It's because of your mother's incapacity to ever make up her mind. But the greatest problem is that Ulysses must be dead and that you and your mother obstinately refuse to admit it.

Telemachus Then we arrive at my second point. There is no indication of Ulysses being dead, and as long as he is not proven dead, my mother has no right to accept another husband...

Antinous He can't be anything else than dead! Such a clever man as your father does not stay away from home for twenty years without any communication unless he is dead,

Mentor Quiet, Antinous. Let Telemachus continue.

Telemachus Give me a year to investigate the matter. I will go around to visit those friends of Ulysses' that have arrived home and discuss the matter with Nestor in Pylus and Menelaos in Sparta and several others. If my father lives anywhere in the world, some news thereof must have reached some of these gentlemen, who constantly have an ear to the whole world and associate with travellers from all seas.

Antinous Very well, Telemachus, you have a year. But if you come back without a word of your father, or if you don't come back at all, your mother must make up her mind. Or else we will just carry on eating your family out of your house.

Mentor You suitors are not exactly discreet in your abuse of a defenceless grass widow's kindness and hospitality, but I believe and trust Telemachus' good chances of finding his father alive. And that, Antinous, will then be the end of your party of gathering suitors.

Antinous You will have to produce Ulysses first. No one on Ithaca can believe he is alive until we see him.

Mentor Come, Telemachus. We have an important business ahead of us, which is to make all these rude suitors come to grief, unless you still have something more to say.

Telemachus I will go as soon as possible. I ask all those people of Ithaca who still cherish the memory of my father to at least wish me luck on my journey.

Aegyptius (rising) We do that of course with all our hearts, Telemachus. Come back with Ulysses. Or else we shall never again have any decent order here on our island.

Telemachus I will do my best, Aegyptius, and everything I can.

(The council is dissolved.)

Antinous You will never come back, Telemachus. When you hear your father is dead or nothing at all about him, you will never dare to show yourself here any more.

Telemachus Shall we make a bet?

Antinous I shall be delighted. Give me Penelope if I win. Or else you and your father may keep her. Do you dare meet the challenge?

Mentor Come, Telemachus. You will never get anywhere with these suitors until Ulysses is back.

Telemachus We will continue the discussion, Antinous, when I come back.

Antinous (bowing in irony) I am at your service.

(Mentor leaves with Telemachus)

The sooner he leaves, the better, but woe to him if he comes back.

Scene 3. Pylus.

Nestor I bid you welcome, friends, whoever you are, for you have been sailing for days, which is obvious from your looks, and no one deserves a warmer and better welcome than an exhausted traveller and sailor. What can I do for you?

Telemachus Noble Nestor of Pylus, I am Telemachus from Ithaca, son of Ulysses, and this is my friend and protector Mentor from Taphos.

Nestor Then you are the more sincerely welcome. Has Ulysses at last come home?

Telemachus That's why we are here. Ithaca is worried, and we travel around all parts of the country to learn anything and everything of what anyone has heard about his return journey.

Nestor My friends, you need to rest and to have a good meal. Welcome to my wealthy home and my affluent family with many sons, although one of them fell at Troy, and I will immediately make arrangements for a sumptuous dinner for all of us, for we have much to discuss. Please make yourselves comfortable and have a seat to start with! First of all you must refresh yourselves with some good cups of wine, so that you will recover at once and immediately have your good spirits restored. *(invites them)*

Mentor What is the last thing you heard about Ulysses, wise Nestor?

Nestor My friend, we sailed together from Troy, me, Diomedes and Menelaos, while Agamemnon remained with Ulysses. Still Agamemnon arrived home far ahead of Menelaos, which was due to the fact that Menelaos' helmsman died on the journey, why Menelaos wished to stop and bury him by Cape Sounion. When he later continued he was beset by bad winds and was driven down to Egypt, where he remained with Helen for quite some time. It was only I and Diomedes that thus arrived home safely, for when Menelaos finally came home he was met with the murders of Agamemnon, his wife Clytaemnestra and her lover Aigisthos. He only came home to a house of misery, sorrow and trouble.

Telemachus So you know nothing about Ulysses, good Nestor?

Nestor Nothing at all, I am afraid.

Mentor Who could possibly know something?

Nestor You must visit Menelaos. He made a much longer home journey than I and could have heard one thing and another from wayward sailors. He has contacts with a larger part of the world than I. You could easily go to Sparta by land from here and then return. I would gladly arrange your transport.

Mentor We are very grateful for that help, Nestor.

Nestor I have every reason to help you by all means I can to learn what happened to Ulysses, for his sagacity is needed in Hellas. Everyone wants him back.

Telemachus Would a visit to Diomedes be worth while?

Nestor I hardly think so. He arrived safely home like me. He consequently would not have much more to tell.

Mentor Thanks, Nestor, for your good advice.

Nestor Let's see now about our well needed dinner. *(leaves them)*

Telemachus What do you think, Mentor?

Mentor I am afraid Menelaos is our last chance.

Telemachus Still, he is a chance.

Mentor Yes, and a good one. *(They toast each other.)*

Scene 4. Sparta.

Menelaos I bid you welcome, my honoured guests, and surely you come here for very special reasons, since your escort is Nestor himself of sandy Pylus.

Nestor I insisted myself on following them, Menelaos, since they first came to me on their remarkable tour, and as I myself suggested them to visit you with my help.

Menelaos What is it about, Nestor?

Nestor As you probably have guessed, this is Telemachus from Ithaca, Ulysses' own son.

Menelaos I thought he seemed familiar in some way.

Telemachus I come here together with Mentor, who protects me on my journey on the quest of news about my father.

Nestor You were gone for seven years, Menelaos. You if anyone should know something about Ulysses.

Menelaos Not much.

Mentor The least sign of life, great Menelaos, would be more than wonderful news to our ears.

Menelaos I haven't seen Ulysses since I left Troy. We left Troy together, Nestor, with Diomedes and were the only ones to reach home safely. All the others perished or disappeared.

Nestor Did you hear nothing about Ulysses during your seven years of your wayward journeys?

Menelaos All news that reached me were bad. Aias perished, as if it wasn't enough that the great Aias went mad and committed suicide at Troy, and my brother was murdered on his arrival home together with the innocent priestess Cassandra. Idomeneus came home to a plague epidemic at Crete, and let's not talk about all the others. The entire Troy enterprise was just one long unnecessary traumatic disaster, and it isn't over yet. No one knows anything about Ulysses.

Helen (enters) Shouldn't you mention your meeting with Proteus to our guests, Menelaos?

Nestor Lovely Helen, lovelier than ever, your excellence of beauty has always been a wonder casting a spell on all men and is still doing so. (*kisses her hand*) Only to get you back made the entire Troy expedition worth its price.

Helen I don't think Agamemnon would have agreed with you, Nestor.

Mentor You mentioned something about someone called Proteus, Menelaos.

Menelaos No, my wife did.

Helen Ulysses lives, my friends. I know it. We met Proteus in Egypt, a revolting old sea-bear, who knew everything about all seas and countries in the world. He knew that Ulysses lived captive by a nymph on her island and that she refused to release him.

Menelaos He was full of old sea yarns.

Helen Just because old sailors know the most fantastic things, they are never believed by more incredulous land-lubbers.

Mentor Your account, lady Helen, fills us with joy and new courage, since this is the first sign of life we have heard about Ulysses for ten long years.

Helen Menelaos is my witness of what Proteus actually told us, and no one can say he is a liar.

Menelaos It's easy for people to believe what can neither be proved true nor false.

Nestor You don't seem very happy, Menelaos.

Menelaos Do I have any reason to be? My brother murdered on his arrival home, Helen's sister murdered by her own son, Agamemnon's sole heir, who since then has been insane. Is that something to be happy about?

Helen What do you think yourself about Ulysses, Menelaos?

Menelaos I think he lives.

Nestor At last a sensible word from you.

Menelaos And just because I think he lives and he has been away for so incredibly long, I also believe that he could come home any time.

Nestor Better and better, Menelaos. That's the spirit. Now I am beginning to recognize you.

Menelaos We must be realistic, Nestor.

Nestor Of course.

Mentor We thank you, worthy Menelaos, for your most welcome and uplifting words, and especially you, Queen Helen, for bringing up Proteus at all.

Helen You are welcome to stay for as long as you like,

Telemachus I am afraid we must hurry back to Ithaca, my queen, considering your most remarkable words, Menelaos.

Menelaos Won't you even try to meet Orestes, Telemachus? He is of your age.

Telemachus Menelaos, I would gladly return some other time just to meet Orestes, when Ulysses my father has returned and peace and order again established its rule over Ithaca. This must be my prime concern, which you surely must understand.

Helen Promise to come back later, Telemachus, for the sake of Orestes.

Telemachus I will be glad to, queen Helen.

Menelaos (rising) Good. Then I think we should have some dinner together. We have much to discuss, Nestor, both concerning old memories and the future. And our young men here must have something substantial to eat, mustn't they, Helen?

Helen Absolutely.

Menelaos Then let's all at once get seated at dinner. (*leads the way out for the whole company.*)

Act II scene 1. A lonely beach with cliffs.
You hear the surf of the sea.

Ulysses What is there left to live for except your longing, which only gets worse with the years the more you abandon yourself to your longing, as something you live for as the truest meaning of life but which you at the same time are bitterly consumed by? (*Calypso appears.*)

Is it you, my beloved witch and prison guard?

Calypso I can't keep you any longer against your will, Ulysses, if you really want to go home.

Ulysses (surprised) Do you really mean that, Calypso?

Calypso Or else I would not say it. Your suffering is mine, Ulysses. I can no longer endure your constant languishment, your melancholy constantly delving deeper into your soul and your crying growing constantly more bitter.

Ulysses But how could you send me home? There is no ship, and this far beyond the ocean of timelessness no one will ever come sailing by. Could you create a ship for me by magic with a crew?

Calypso You can work magic with your hands, Ulysses. You can build a raft.

Ulysses It must be well equipped and safe on the sea, and I must have a tremendous good luck with the weather.

Calypso We have plenty of time, Ulysses. You have been here now for seven years, and it will not take many days for you to construct a stable raft with your expert hands. I will show you where the most suitable trees are growing, I will give you material for sails and sheets, and then you'll just have to wait for the right weather and wind. It's three weeks' passage at most to the land of the Phaeacians.

Ulysses It's like a dream and too good to be true. Why this sudden change of mind of yours, Calypso?

Calypso Don't you think I have human feelings? Don't you think I can feel your suffering? When two people become one, as we have been now for seven wonderful years, the woman at least enters the man so deeply, that she can feel all that he feels. A woman can go deeper into a man than ever a man could penetrate a woman.

Ulysses So you are letting me free just from compassion?

Calypso Still I must warn you. You have worse trials and ordeals ahead, Ulysses, than everything you already have passed through, if you leave me.

Ulysses I knew there had to be a catch.

Calypso It's no catch. I am just preparing you for your home journey, so that you in spite of all will make it.

Ulysses I know that you have second sight for which I always respected you.

Calypso No one will welcome you when you return to your home, which will be in a state of dissolution and taken over by shameless parasites.

Ulysses Do you know if my son and wife are still alive?

Calypso I have tried to penetrate the curtains of the future and found that your son and wife have been surprisingly faithful to you during all these years. That is partly the reason why I decided to let you go: my power is useless against their faithfulness. But they will not recognize you when you come, and it will take time for you to convince them of who you really are.

Ulysses It's good of you to warn me, you the wisest of witches. I actually met a number, and they were all more than humanly wise, but no one was as constructive as you. So it seems I must be careful when I get home.

Calypso Exceptionally so. You can't be careful enough, for the parasites at your home will never accept your presence, since they take it for granted that you must be dead since long.

Ulysses (rising) Let's get started then, Calypso. Show me the trees. Do you have any axe?

Calypso I concealed it for you on purpose for many years, hoping that you would get accustomed to me and voluntarily choose to remain with me. But nothing can cure your unrest. I tried for seven years but finally had to give up. You are a hopeless case, Ulysses, and I only love you the more for it.

Ulysses Thanks, fair Calypso. No nymph could be like you, but when I gave my heart to Penelope it was with the intention that she alone should keep it.

Calypso Even against your fidelity I have been powerless. I didn't want to accept it, but I have been compelled to do so.

Ulysses The power of love is more powerful than all power in the world.

Calypso So I noticed. The love that remains and prevails without getting tired could cause the collapse of any mundane power. But I hope we will continue sleeping together until you leave?

Ulysses I have no right to reject your hospitality, Calypso. Actually no man has the right to refuse any woman, for if a woman wants to make love with a man it's a much more serious matter than a man's mean and base desire for a woman.

Calypso Do you think Penelope could forgive and excuse me?

Ulysses When I lie with you, Calypso, I cannot think of anyone else than Penelope, for that is the only way for me to bring her to any life in my missing her.

Calypso You are excused. I understand you.

Ulysses Take me to the trees. Calypso. After work I can love you even better.

Calypso Thanks, Ulysses. (*shows Ulysses the way.*)

Scene 2. By a river.

maid 1 Now wash the clothes carefully. They have to be shining white.

Maid 2 We wash them and wash them again but they don't get any cleaner anyway.

1 You are just lazy. This is the purest water in Faiakia. Here if anywhere everything must get pure enough for our princess Nausikaa, if we just make an effort.

2 Nausikaa is always satisfied whatever we do.

1 But consider well her wedding! That's the reason why we must wash her clothes extra fine and pure.

2 You are just nagging.

Nausikaa Don't jabber now, girls, but make sure to get ready sometime.

2 Are you in a hurry, Princess?

Nausikaa No, but I know you well enough. You just play around in the water making yourselves wet instead of making ready.

1 We shall make ready indeed, Princess, but your clothes must first get clean and pure enough.

Nausikaa Thanks for your concern.

(Ulysses sticks his head up from a bush: a human wreck all ruined.)

2 (sees him first) Fie! A dirty old man!

1 A Peeping Tom!

2 A vagabond watching us!

1 That was the rudest thing I ever experienced! Hiding in the bushes and spying on us!

2 Run, Princess, run! (*escapes*)

Nausikaa But the clothes, girls, the clothes!

1 We will collect them later! (*runs away*)

Nausikaa (*stays on quite calm and relaxed*) Who are you, poor old man?

Ulysses Most graceful princess, I am a poor shipwrecked victim who was driven ashore here tonight by a storm. All exhausted and half unconscious I slept here until now when I was awakened by the merry laughter of your maids. I never meant to disturb you.

Nausikaa Do you have any clothes?

Ulysses That's my very dilemma. I was thrown ashore naked and could only avoid the sharp rocks with difficulty until I found this calm river.

Nausikaa What luck then that my maids left all their clothes behind. Here you can adorn yourself with shawls and dresses and all my bridal outfit.

Ulysses I thank you, princess full of grace, but where am I? What country is this?

Nausikaa You have come to the land of the Phaeacians, where my own father is king. Apparently there was some meaning with our coming here today to wash my clothes at this spot. Cover yourself now, old man, so that you could get out of the bushes. (*throws a few shawls and veils over to him. He scantily covers himself.*)

Ulysses Then I am lucky indeed. The land of the Phaeacians was my very destination, for seventeen days I had good winds and weather on my raft, but just as I caught sight of your land the tempest struck me with murderous force.

Nausikaa Where do you come from?

Ulysses Most recently from Ogygia, the island of Calypso.

Nausikaa A dangerous place. What did you do there?

Ulysses I was shipwrecked.

Nausikaa But you managed to build a raft and make your way here?

Ulysses Yes.

Nausikaa It's an awful distance.

Ulysses I am afraid I am not very representative. I believe myself to be better than I look.

Nausikaa (*laughs*) I believe so too. But you must have some story to tell. You will meet my father and tell us all about it, and he will give you more decent clothes than what I can provide. No traveller is more interesting than the one who has had bad luck on his way.

Ulysses Then I will win the prize in that category, for I had only bad luck all the way.

Nausikaa I believe you. Come with me now. No, on second thoughts, I think I had better go home first. Come after me after a while. Everybody knows where my father

lives, and you can easily distinguish the house from all the others when you enter our city.

Ulysses I promise to never compromise you, princess.

Nausikaa I was never afraid of anything, but I was never less afraid than in my meeting with you. Come home soon to our castle, you shipwrecked guest, and we will give you all rehabilitation we are capable of.

Ulysses Thank you, princess. (*Nausikaa leaves.*)

I got through. My trials are over. After ten years I am saved at last. Then only the worst thing remains, to come home. But this friendly people hosting me will probably be the greatest help on my entire journey. I just hope to be able to honour them accordingly.

(covers himself with more veils and clothes and gets going.)

Scene 3. The assembly hall of the Phaeacians.

Nausikaa Father, I have something to confess.

Alcinous What have you done now, my child?

Nausikaa I found a shipwrecked stranger on the shore, whom I have invited here.

Arete I am glad you told us, daughter, so that he doesn't turn up as a surprise. Who is he?

Nausikaa I didn't learn that yet.

Alcinous Is he white or black, Greek or a foreigner?

Nausikaa A red-haired Greek, whom I think has some royal ancestry and some story to tell.

Alcinous Better and better.

Nausikaa But he was naked.

Alcinous So you met him naked?

Nausikaa Not I, only he, and he kept at a decent distance and covered by the bushes. But I had to give away some of my newly washed clothes to him.

Alcinous So he comes here dressed up in women's clothes, like Teiresias? That is not proper. Servant, when a red-haired stranger turns up dressed like a woman at the gate, don't drive him off, but give him immediately decent clothes and show him in here. (*The servant leaves.*)

Nausikaa I was hoping father would understand.

Alcinous You have done the right thing, my child. You gave a naked man the only clothes you had. You fully proved yourself my own daughter.

Arete When will he come? We expect him with excitement.

Nausikaa He should come any moment, for I asked him to come after me rather soon.

Alcinous What did he look like? Could you distinguish his dialect?

Nausikaa I suspect that he doesn't come from very far from here, for he spoke almost in our own tongue but with a more southern accent.

Arete And he seemed to have been exposed to severe trials and hardships?

Nausikaa To the highest degree.

Arete (to Alcinous) Do you think it could be Ulysses from Ithaca?

Alcinous If he is the man, and it would be most fortunate if he was, then we must do everything for him.

Arete In that case he would be a suitable match for our daughter.

Alcinous You said it. Destiny has already brought them together.

A servant (ushers Ulysses, dressed up in normal clothes and in improved condition.)

(announces) The stranger from the sea.

Alcinous Welcome, stranger. We already know everything about you.

Ulysses You can't, so much that you have done for me without knowing anything about my background.

Alcinous Our daughter has been a good ambassador.

Arete Do you happen to be Ulysses from Ithaca?

Ulysses (surprised) How did you know?

Arete We didn't. We were just hoping.

Alcinous You have been lost for ten years, during which no one has known anything about you. What happened?

Ulysses It's a long story.

Arete Tell us. We are very curious.

Nausikaa Father and mother, you are not treating our guest well by immediately tiring him out by urging him to bother about recounting all his ordeals. Shouldn't he first of all have some rest and food?

Alcinous You are perfectly right, my daughter. Let us have a festive banquet immediately. Allow our guest to eat and drink himself full and thereby gradually grow a little merrier before we pester him with interviews. But at the same time we could also well entertain him with some divertissement. Do you think you could produce our old minstrel, *Arete*?

Arete Certainly. He is always at our service. *(whispers with a servant, who leaves.)*

Nausikaa (while a dinner is served for Ulysses) Enjoy your meal now to your heart's content, stranger, while you may listen and digest the melancholy songs of the beautiful tales of our minstrel.

(Enter a small boy leading the blind minstrel Demodochos.)

Alcinous Welcome, Demodochos, the finest minstrel in Hellas, the more prominent and distinguished by your tragic handicap! Now provide him also with an opulent dinner with fruits and cheese and wine, so that he may satisfy himself with whatever he pleases when he feels like it.

Demodochos Is there some special occasion today to celebrate since you have called for me here?

Alcinous There is indeed, Demodochos, for a veteran has arrived here from the Trojan war, who would gladly hear your songs about it.

Demodochos I know a hundred thousand songs about all the tragedies and conflicts of that war, and they all end equally badly with evil violent death. Are you quite certain your veteran would like to be reminded of such tribulations?

Alcinous Do you know any song about Ulysses, one of the few who escaped death?

Demodochos I know all the songs of Ulysses, the first who turned against the rudeness and impertinence of Achilles, the only one who dared to warn Achilles when needed and who could keep him in order. Ulysses was the only one of the Greeks whom Achilles respected. All the others he treated with rude contempt and arrogance, especially Agamemnon, the tragic leader of the whole enterprise, who from the very start to the bitter end only dug his own grave.

Ulysses Is Agamemnon dead?

Demodochos Yes, don't you know what all Hellas knows? You must be a newcomer, for I have never heard your voice before. He is dead indeed and more than dead as he suffered the most ignominious death imaginable.

Alcinous This is the very veteran from Troy.

Demodochos You were at Troy, and you don't know that Agamemnon is dead?

Ulysses Alas, I have been lost all since the fall of Troy on wayward journeys. I know nothing. How then did Agamemnon meet his end?

Demodochos Alas, my friend, that's the direst tragedy of them all. For ten years he had been away from home and in the meantime had one mistress after another in a constantly increasing number. His daughter Iphigeneia he had sacrificed at Aulis to please the gods to get a favourable wind for Troy, and that could of course his queen Clytannestra never forgive him.

Ulysses Iphigeneia was saved. It was the priest Kalkhas who demanded the sacrifice to create problems for Agamemnon and his enterprise.

Demodochos There are different opinions about that, but Clytannestra never saw her daughter again and brooded on vengeance for ten years. Of course she knew about all Agamemnon's mistresses, she kept well informed of everything that went on at Troy, so that when her husband at last came home and brought the priestess Cassandra with him on his own chariot, Clytannestra had enough. She prepared a bath for him in which she butchered him to death with an axe and with some help of Aigisthos, the son of Thyestes, who during ten years had induced her to become the instrument of his own revenge on his royal cousin.

Alcinous (to Ulysses) You are crying, my friend.

Ulysses This is too much. Who else are dead?

Demodochos Aias the great went mad and was struck with berserk rage when he felt wronged by Agamemnon and Menelaos, but in his madness he vented his rage on a flock of sheep. When he discovered he had slaughtered sheep instead of Greeks he realized his own madness and took his own life.

Ulysses And Menelaos?

Demodochos Menelaos arrived home after seven years' wayward journeys during which he went stuck for a long time in Egypt, but he is home now with Helen.

Ulysses Nestor?

Demodochos Nestor and Diomedes arrived home safely, the only ones to do so.

Ulysses And what do you know about Ulysses?

Demodochos Without him Troy would never have fallen. His trick was to construct a great wooden horse, in which he himself with Menelaos and as many as could find place in there concealed themselves while the Greek navy weighed anchor and pretended to depart while the horse was left on the shore. Some Trojans feared some wicked scheme, but most of them wanted to save it as a memory of the Greek defeat and departure and therefore tore down part of the wall to let it be dragged into the city, as Ulysses had foreseen that they probably would. During the night after much partying and when the entire city was asleep the horse was opened from the inside and let out the warriors, who opened the main gate to the city. Everything was perfectly planned and organized, and the city of Troy was taken after ten years and was left in ruins, while Agamemnon at last had his monopoly on the trade through the Dardanelles, which however he couldn't enjoy much.

Ulysses And you don't know anything about the fate of Ulysses?

Demodochos He is the greatest mystery and question mark. He disappeared with his ship and his men and was never again heard of. No one knows if he is alive or dead.

Ulysses Alas, my friend, then I can tell you, that he is buried alive, and alive against his will although he should have been dead long ago.

Demodochos So you know something about Ulysses. Who are you?

Alcinous Know, Demodochos, that it is Ulysses himself you are speaking with.

Demodochos Ulysses himself? Back after ten years? Where have you been then all this time? With the dead?

Ulysses Among other places, my friend. I know the dead better than the living and have many times survived myself against my will. I should be dead but am still alive to my own misfortune.

Demodochos Why misfortune? What is better than life? Life is love and the only positive thing in existence. Everything else is worthless.

Ulysses Alas, my friend, you should have seen how many I have seen dying with my own eyes, sacrifices on my own responsibility, both at Troy and during my journeys, and then even you would question life's meaning and worth like me and your own right of existence.

Demodochos I think you have much to teach us, Ulysses.

Alcinous Isn't it time, Ulysses, that we at last may know something about your journeys? During ten years of wayward journeys you must have collected inexhaustible experiences.

Ulysses I would gladly recount a few episodes, which are so strange, that I will never be able to understand them myself. But if I may discuss them with you maybe we could arrive at some clarity concerning their wonders.

Alcinous We are all ears and attention, Ulysses.

Demodochos Here, Ulysses, take my lyre, for now you have the word. (*yields his lyre*)

Ulysses I am no singer, my language is poor and without embellishing details and circumstances, but to me the truth is all that matters. I beg you therefore to forbear that much of what I have to tell might seem brutal.

Arete Thanks for the warning, Ulysses. Carry on.

Ulysses I would then first of all like to tell you about the witch Circe. We arrived at a flourishing and lonesome island that seemed rich of wild life and inhabited, since we saw a small string of smoke at a distance. There the beautiful witch Circe lived, sister of Aietes, who cordially received all sea-faring guests and entertained them well, until they felt so well that they were transformed into animals. We stayed long with her, since I couldn't go on until my men had become normal again, and she was a very interesting and profound woman, since she not only could rule and manipulate with all men as she pleased but also had a prophetic clairvoyance and second sight.

Circe Your trials have only just begun, Ulysses. All your worst tribulations remain ahead. If you wish to come back home to Ithaca at all you must first visit the realm of the dead to there find the prophet Teiresias to be counselled by him, the only one of the great spirits of the dead who still from the other side has perfect control of reality and who rules it better as dead than when he was alive, for he sees and knows everything.

Ulysses But how could I find the realm of the dead?

Circe You only have to trust me. Follow my instructions exactly, and nothing can go wrong.

Ulysses How could I trust you, Circe, who seduced my men and turned them into animals by drugs to keep them enslaved forever, like you also tried to capture me and make me your slave? Is this a new trick of yours to get me in your power?

Circe I didn't know who you were when you came. When you resisted me and proved to be Ulysses an old prophecy was verified, that I would once meet you, and that you were the only one that I could never get in my power and be able to manipulate as I wanted. I feared you all my life, and when you finally arrived I did not recognize you but took you for an ordinary lusty man. But you were the very essence of slyness, which went deeper than even the most accomplished women's cleverness.

Ulysses But please answer my question. How would it be possible to reach the dead?

Circe You must enter yourself so deeply that you get out of yourself. There are aids.

Ulysses More drugs? Witchcraft and magic spells?

Circe No, better than that. I can put you to sleep, but you must do everything yourself. If you are not willing yourself, I cannot help you.

Ulysses And if I am not interested? If I prefer to let the dead remain in peace and undisturbed by us?

Circe Then you will never reach home.

Ulysses You know that for sure?

Circe Teiresias is the only one who can help you.

Ulysses So the real issue is just whether I want to go home or not.

Circe Stay here, Ulysses. Stay with me and live happily with me in nature in this paradise for all your living days. That would be the best thing for you. Forget about the dead and your home. Your wife has probably long since been taken care of by others.

Ulysses No, she is fidelity itself.

Circe How can you be so sure?

Ulysses I just know it.

Circe And even if you get home with the help of Teiresias, worse trials will wait for you there than any you endured on your journeys. Stay here, Ulysses, and you won't have to suffer any more.

Ulysses No, Circe, I am the king of my island and bear responsibility for my people and for the future of the Greeks. That was the only reason why I followed Agamemnon to Troy against my will and helped him sack the city just because he as the leader of the Hellenes demanded of me to fulfill my duty. It might sound foolish and senseless to a wise woman like you, but between men of honour, standing by your word is sacred and must be strictly and consistently observed. Everyone proposed to Helen, the most beautiful woman ever born, so there were so many kings that courted her that we finally agreed to draw lots about her to evade a general civil war. We agreed to the lottery on the condition, that whoever won her, all her suitors would stand up to her and her husband's help if she ever got into trouble. Then came Paris from Troy as a guest to Menelaos and abducted Helen to Troy. Our oath gave us no choice. We all had to join up in the war against Troy no matter how reluctant we were. We had all sworn Helen and Helen's husband an oath that couldn't be broken. That was the only reason why the fall of Troy was brought on. And I have no choice, for I am still married. I swore my wife an oath of fidelity that never could be broken until one of us was dead. Therefore I have no other option than to return home whatever may expect me there. And if I have no other way to go than through the realm of death, so be it, and I'll just have to go through with it.

Circe Your fidelity is the secret behind your courage, Ulysses, and for that I must respect you. I will do what I can for you, but you must believe that I only want what's best for you. Or else I cannot help you.

Ulysses Then, Circe, I have no other choice than to put my trust in you.

Circe Come with me then, and I will show you exactly what to do.

Ulysses And she showed me the way to the realm of the dead, and it was a trip that I would never like to go through again. It was horrible.

Elpenor Have you come to let yourself be haunted by us, Ulysses?

Ulysses Elpenor! Are you dead?

Elpenor Yes, poor me, but it was my own fault. Many are the men you already lost, Ulysses, and partly because of your own foolhardiness. You never had to visit the cave of the cyclops or to go ashore at the Laistrygonians for example, but I laid myself down to sleep off my intoxication up on the roof after too much good food

and drink at Circe's, and when I woke up and had forgotten where I was, I fell down and broke my neck. It was entirely my own fault.

Ulysses I am sorry, Elpenor.

Elpenor Shit happens. We all had it too good at Circe's, and I died happy at least, but your onward journey home will be anything but happy, Ulysses.

Ulysses It's to be able to manage it at all that I have visited you to learn of the dangers expecting me. Do you happen to have Teiresias anywhere in the vicinity?

Elpenor Yes, he should be around here somewhere. He will probably turn up when he feels that you are looking for him. The dead feel the thoughts of the living better than the living do themselves.

Ulysses Thanks for your guidance, Elpenor. But who is that I see? Is it not my mother? Have you died of grief for my outrageously prolonged absence, mother?

Anticleia Yes, that's exactly what I did, my unblessed son.

Ulysses How are they at home? Is father also dead?

Anticleia No, he lives, but alone and in misery out in the country, for he couldn't endure how the mob of suitors to your wife were plundering our house and property.

Ulysses Is she badly beset? Is she faithful?

Anticleia She is faithful but badly beset, and it's getting worse every day. We were all faithful to you as long as we could, Ulysses. All who knew you will remain so until we die.

Ulysses And my son? How is he doing?

Anticleia He slowly grows up to become your equal in wisdom and ability, but he needs his father. Why did you never come home, Ulysses, while I lived?

Ulysses Alas, my beloved mother, I did indeed all I could, but there were always obstacles towering up from nowhere in my way that thwarted my journey. But I never gave up, and I do intend to come back home in the end.

Anticleia Yes, you are no loser, for you never give up. No one is ever a loser until he gives up, no matter how much he loses on the way, and you will lose everything, Ulysses. Your victory over Troy and your accountability for its ruin will cost you more than you can pay in all your life, no matter how long you will live.

Ulysses What god is persecuting me?

Anticleia Don't think it's just Poseidon. He is only playing with you and hazzling with you but just for kicks because you outwitted his abominable son the cyclops Polyphemus, and as soon as you go out at sea again he will go on forcing you out of any direction. But all that is just petty sabotage. No, your real enemy is Apollo, who can never forgive you the fall of Troy with all its unnecessary and outrageous tragedies.

Ulysses Apollo! Then I am lost!

Anticleia Never completely, my son. No god is more farsighted than Apollo, and he probably keeps harrassing you with new ways of tormenting trials without ever allowing you to die with some purpose.

Ulysses Not even my protective goddess Athena can do anything against the power of Apollo's beauty and wisdom. How long will he go on persecuting me with relentless bad luck? Ten more years? Twenty years? All the way until I die a wretched old man consumed by his overwhelming load of justified bitterness?

Anticleia I don't think so. I don't know. My only weapon and protection against him is patience. As long as you don't give in to the temptations of your abyssal despair to outbursts and breakdowns, you will remain safe under the protection of Athena. But I feel Teiresias approaching. I assume he was the one you really came here to find.

Ulysses Thanks, mother, for finding me and not even letting me down after death.

Anticleia A mother never abandons her son, Ulysses, not even after death, not even if the son abandons her.

Ulysses (sincerely, on his knees) Thank you, mother.

Teiresias (has entered) You searched for me, Ulysses. What do you want?

Ulysses You blind sooth-sayer, who has seen more than anyone else and who even after death seem to have more power of seeing than any living person, I was advised by the witch Circe to consult you to learn something of the dangers that I still must endure and go through before my eventual homecoming.

Teiresias I have no good news for you, Ulysses. Circe was right. You should almost have stayed with her.

Ulysses What is the worst you can tell me?

Teiresias That nothing will be harder and more difficult for you than the very arrival home.

Ulysses I have heard that before.

Teiresias Why do you ask me then?

Ulysses You if anyone can help me.

Teiresias How?

Ulysses Give me advice.

Teiresias Very well. You asked for advice. I will give you advice. If you ever want to come home alive and survive your homecoming, forget who you are. Assume the identity of that No One which you said your name was at that abominable villain Polyphemus' place. Assume anonymity when you come home, let no one know who you are, evaluate carefully the situation at home before you identify yourself to anyone, let your wife's suitors treat you as they please, appear as a beggar and tramp, the dirtier and more miserable, the better, sleep with the swine, crawl in the dust, and you might master the situation. That's the best advice I can give you.

Ulysses That's hard advice, Teiresias.

Teiresias You asked for it. Deep wounds need hard dressings.

Ulysses But as long as my wife remains faithful I can cope with anything.

Teiresias She will remain faithful, Ulysses, but she above all must not recognize you, for her own sake.

Ulysses I understand.

Teiresias Anything else you want to know?

Ulysses I learned from my mother that Apollo is against me. Is there nothing I can do to conciliate him?

Teiresias He has the fates in his hand, and he has set them to weave against you, and their web of the threads of destiny not even gods can ever undo. Your wife has learned to weave by them, for they encourage faithfulness, and faithfulness alone enjoys the respect of the goddesses of destiny. She promises her suitors to make up her mind for one of them when she has completed her web, she weaves the whole day every day, but when the night comes she warps and tears up the whole day's work. Thus she tries to weave her suitors out of her life by defeating them with her patience.

Ulysses (laughs) I do recognize my Penelope. That's why I love her, because we had some cunning in common.

Teiresias But sooner or later the suitors must recognize her trick, and then their impatience will impose upon her endurance. At that moment, Ulysses, you should be home at the very latest, or never.

Ulysses You don't make it easy for me.

Teiresias Don't blame me. Blame the fates and Apollo. Blame Agamemnon and his destruction of Troy. Blame Helen and her willingness to commit adultery. Blame yourself, Ulysses, who launched the brilliant idea that all Helen's suitors should swear her and her by lottery chosen husband eternal faith and support. That cost Troy its life and all its looters their happiness and bliss. Blame yourself, Ulysses, for being so romantic.

Ulysses Thanks, Teiresias. I accept and appreciate your counselling.

Teiresias More questions?

Ulysses I am too overwhelmed to dare to ask for anything more.

Teiresias You are wise in doing so, for the worst truths you can't endure hearing, and they will always remain waiting for you.

Ulysses Are there any more dead who wish to see me?

Teiresias You already gave us your little finger. Many would gladly eat your arm.

Ulysses Achilles?

Achilles Ulysses, old chap, are you still alive? We have wondered for long whatever happened to you. You never arrived here, and no one who came here had seen you any more among the living after Troy.

Ulysses As you can see, Achilles, I am still alive, to my own misfortune.

Achilles Why do you say that? Life is glorious as long as you live, as long as you have something to do, and I myself deeply regret that I never got the privilege to retire as an old man to be able to enjoy myself out in the country with binding up vines in peace and quiet to crown my life with the blissful salary of being able to enjoy some good marvellous wine of my own cultivation...

Ulysses Still you died at the top of your career, and your fame could not have grown any further. You harvested the joy of becoming immortal as a youth without bitterness and grey hairs and without the dishonour of having to end your life as an

ugly and tottering old man. You were allowed to die young and will thereby remain immortally young forever.

Achilles You just flatter me. But there are many here who wish to see you.

Ulysses But isn't that the great Aias standing over there? Is he really dead?

Aias I enjoy every day that I may go on seeing you tortured, you cheeky, insolent and reckless Ulysses, who for your own perdition has voluntarily come to even the realm of death in a mad quest for the truth. Every arrow Apollo planted in your heart, Ulysses, was justified and fair, for without you, Troy with all its inhabitants would never have been massacred and given the possibility to survive only as slaves.

Ulysses (on his knees) Spare me, Aias, if this is really you and not some phantom hallucination! Are you still angry with me because of Achilles' weapons? Are you still resentful and unreasonably implacable even unto hell?

Aias And don't I have a right and reason to be? Who was a greater warrior than I except Achilles? Who killed more Trojans openly in the streets of Troy than I in its destruction? Who caused greater damage than I except Agamemnon himself with his fatal destiny, bringing us all to perdition? Did I then not deserve any honour and thanks after the fall of Troy with all the Trojans I had honestly killed in battle? But you took Achilles' weapons away from me and claimed all the honour of the fall of Troy for yourself although we all had bled and many of us to death for that bloody cause for ten long years...

Ulysses You are just a nightmare! You can't remain angry and bitter and resentful long after death! You are a lie!

Aias No, I am the truth. And there are many here besides me who will make me right.

Priam So this is the accursed villain who caused the fall of Troy by the most insidious and blasphemous of all tricks! So we are to hold you accountable for all our murdered children and violated mothers and enslaved widows and raped priestesses, you wretched Ulysses, the most deceitful villain the world has ever known! History will never pardon you or forgive you, Ulysses, not even if you would be righteously assassinated on your homecoming! Woe betide you, Ulysses, forever for the sake of the Trojan holocaust!

Ulysses Spare me! You are just phantoms and fleeting dreams! When I wake up I can discard you all as insidious deceits and sick hallucinations made up by the dark goddesses of the night!

Agamemnon You asked for it, Ulysses. Behold, my entire family has been slaughtered! Your trickeries and my ambitions have only brought all Hellas to perdition as a righteous and natural punishment for blasphemous and inhuman presumption and recklessness! We are all condemned, Ulysses, we who went to Troy with the intention to annihilate the city and who carried through this cruellest destruction enterprise in history! We are all cursed forever, Ulysses! Behold my wife! (*Clymnaestra turns up all bloody.*) Murdered by her own son by premeditated intent! Behold my son! (*Orestes appears hopelessly insane.*) He is hopelessly insane after the

deed and can never carry on my royal line with the power and glory that still was mine.

Ulysses (covers his face with his hands) Spare me!

Cassandra (appears) It all falls on you, Ulysses, for you are the only one who still is alive among the most guilty ones. Nothing can atone for the fall of Troy, and not even if you will continue living tortured to death for all your remaining life and never will find peace for your crimes and never get a break from your misfortunes, you will never cease to be persecuted by your eternal enemies. I am the priestess of Apollo, violated by Agamemnon himself and murdered in the blood of my innocence by his own adulterous wife as a punishment for his having made me his concubine. I proclaim the eternal implacability of Apollo against you, Ulysses. Be damned forever.

Ulysses (in despair) Spare me! Spare me! You are just my constant nightmares! Don't you believe that I recognize you! You keep haunting me every night, repeatedly as if each time was the first time! But you are only dreams! You don't exist in the world of reality! In your fleeting vanity of shadows you just try to drive me out of my mind without ever understanding, that you will never succeed!

(Silence. All phantoms vanish. Gradually Ulysses wakes up, like after a long torpor of exhausting attacks of fever and illness.)

(looks around) Where am I?

Alcinous You are in good hands, Ulysses. Take it easy. You have had a long and difficult journey.

Ulysses (recovering) I met all the deceased friends, and now, good Demodochos, when you have affirmed that Agamemnon really is dead, I understand that the visions actually were all true. Aias was right. He was the truth, and I will never get rid of it.

Alcinous But how did you lose all your men?

Ulysses Do you wish me to continue my story?

Arete We have no higher wish, for you are one of those rare people who seem to know and have insight into what no one else knows anything about.

Ulysses Both Circe and Teiresias warned me especially against landing where the oxen of the sun god are grazing and thriving, the finest cattle in the world that never age, and even if we went ashore there, we had to leave the cattle in peace and never touch it on any condition. I tried to dissuade my men from anchoring there, but unfortunately they could not see the danger in doing so.

Eurylochos You are only thinking of yourself, Ulysses. We all want to get home, but here we keep sailing on the open sea day and night for weeks without end, and when at last we see land you just want to bypass it from superstitious reasons. Please try to be a little human, Ulysses.

Ulysses My dearest men and comrades, of course I only want the best for you, but here in this place the oxen of the sun god are grazing, and both Circe and Teiresias have insistently warned me against the temptation of touching any of the splendid beasts. If we go ashore there, that's the last thing we may do.

Eurylochos We do carry plenty of food and supplies given us by Circe. We have no need of slaughtering any animal ashore, do we, comrades?

The men Of course we shall leave the oxen of the sun god in peace. All we need is to recuperate for a few days.

Ulysses They got what they wanted, we went ashore, but already after the first day the weather turned nasty, and we couldn't continue. There was no danger, we did have enough food and supplies indeed, but the hard weather with storms against us held us up for an entire week. There was no possibility to resume our journey. We were caught in a bay, and the wind was straight against the bay. Another week passed with the same weather, and after the third week the supplies started to dwindle, and the men began to cast eyes on the wonderful oxen of the sun god, that just walked around there doing nothing, a challenge to us by the beauty of their powerful bodies, the daintiest meat in the world, which just shamelessly boasted its pride and excellence in front of our eyes. When a month had passed and we had nothing left to eat, and the adverse tempest winds just went on blowing against us in unnatural inhuman pertinacity, I grew really disturbed and worried and went away to pray and made a sacrifice to placate the gods. When I came back I found to my horror that my men had slaughtered two of the holy oxen.

Eurylochos They just went around there shining like the sun in their fleshy splendour. We had no food left, Ulysses, and there were any number of oxen. Would we then just walk around here starving and let the best beefs in the world just pass in front of our eyes in insolent arrogance without our doing anything about it?

Ulysses You don't know what you have done. That was the only thing you were forbidden to do! There are all kinds of other food around, berries and fruits and all kinds of things growing in the ground, but you just had to go slaughtering the most sacred cattle in the world and draw the wrath of the sun god upon you!

Eurylochos I am not so sure, Ulysses. The wind has shifted already. Perhaps the sun god presented his oxen to us on purpose just to further our voyage and wish us good luck? You can't know that.

Ulysses No, we can't know anything, but perhaps the wind shifted just because I went to offer a sacrifice and perhaps at last managed to placate the god who always was against us? We don't know that either. After all, Helios and Apollo are practically the same god.

Eurylochos However that may be, Ulysses, what is done is done and cannot be undone, and we had no choice.

Ulysses If only you had waited just for one day!

Eurylochos We only took two animals. It isn't even noticed in the herd, no one could miss them, and they are of the best possible use as slaughtered since they fill the empty stomachs of starved and stranded sailors.

Ulysses What is done is done, Eurylochos, and we can only make the best of it. But I refuse to touch the food.

Eurylochos As you wish, Ulysses, but there is much of it left. Two such stupendous specimen could keep an entire regiment alive for weeks.

Ulysses I will have nothing to do with it! I will have nothing to do with you! You all had warnings! You knew what you were doing but did it anyway!

Eurylochos Take it easy, Ulysses. It is on our responsibility.

Ulysses No, Eurylochos, you are all on my responsibility! I am responsible for getting you all home to Ithaca as well as myself! I have already lost all my ships except one, and even on the last one I have lost half of my men! I can't afford to lose one single man more! And then you go blundering carelessly to commit the most stupid act that has been committed on our entire journey, and that on purpose!

Eurylochos Go to bed, Ulysses, and forgive us.

Ulysses I am sorry, Eurylochos, but I can't take any more adversities!

– I was utterly devastated by what they had done, and they just discarded my anxiety as superstitious exaggerations. Of course they could be right, but I feared the worst. We profited by the favourable wind and started off with good speed and soon reached the sea without any land in sight. Then came the storm and the disaster, the most infernal possible tempestuous weather with thunder and hailstorms and lightnings in such an appalling frequency that heaven itself threatened to break and dissolve in exploding chaos. One lightning hit the mast and shattered the ship, so that a shipwreck out in the middle of the sea became inevitable. All my men and I were separated in the darkness, and I only heard their cries and screams of despair that were hopelessly drowned in the deafening noise of the storm and the fury of the lashing waves, in which they drowned and disappeared. I lost them all that night. When the storm finally calmed down as the dawn started to break, everything was silent, and I was alone on the ocean, where I clung to some wreckage, which I succeeded in tying together with some ropes. In my endless despair I cried myself to unconsciousness. And in the fever of my delirium I thought I still could hear the voice of Eurylochos:

Eurylochos The gods have deceived us! They fooled us into consuming their cattle just to destroy us! Damned be the gods, who instead of protecting us just have brought us to ruin and perdition and without any reason, since all we actually deserved in life was at last to get home!

(His voice drowns in the aftermath of the storm.)

Ulysses Thus I drifted ashore on the island of Ogygia, the home of the nymph Calypso, where I grieved for my comrades for seven years until she finally agreed to help me get home. She gave me means to build a raft, and even then, after seven years as shipwrecked, when for the first time I dared to go to sea again, I had after seventeen days barely regained my hope, reaching so close to my own Ithaca, when the storm seized me again and tore my raft asunder and cast me out naked ashore, where I had to hide in the bushes. In that supreme instance of awkwardness your daughter Nausikaa appeared and saved me. For that I owe you all my gratitude for the rest of my life.

Alcinous You are not home yet, Ulysses, even if we of course will do everything to help you get there, if we would have preferred though to have you stay with us to please our daughter Nausikaa, who gladly would have served you for a husband.

Ulysses Your kindness and generosity overwhelm me with emotions, for during my journeys I have constantly been served with more evil and cruelty than with anything good. One sole ray of sunlight in a massive thickness of darkness, storm and cold is however enough to rekindle the hope in the fighter against hopeless adversities and even enough to put all darkness to shame and make him forget all his injuries and heart wounds.

Alcinous How shall we bring him home, Arete?

Arete We must lend him your most royal ship, to give him a worthy homecoming.

Ulysses No, my friends, I don't wish to seem ungrateful, but only the simplest and smallest ship is enough for me, which could put me ashore secretly on Ithaca during the night, so that I then could steal unnoticed to my humblest servants to learn by them how I should proceed with the repossession of my home. I have pondered Teiresias' advice for seven years and found it my best help and guidance and the only wise thing to do. It is sad, but we must not forget, that I have been missed for twenty years and believed lost, and that much has changed for the worse on Ithaca in the meantime. I must under no circumstances take any risks at all.

Alcinous Very well, Ulysses. It will be our great pleasure to meet and grant your wishes to the smallest detail.

Ulysses And I will owe you all my thanks for that for the rest of my life.

Alcinous By helping you we might even make a historical point.

Ulysses I can promise you that much, that wherever and whenever my story will be told, your story shall be told with it.

Alcinous So your immortality will become ours. That's the greatest honour we can have.

Ulysses My life belongs to you. If there is any honour to it, it is yours.

Alcinous Enough now of flatteries and compliments. Let's at last devote ourselves to festivities and celebrate Ulysses' return to Hellas! Let the festive hecatombs fill my palace with sumptuous opulence and cheeriest moods, and may the libation sacrifices be prepared, accomplished and poured out in a flow of permanent riches, and may then the food be brought in to all our participants in this universal joy with dances and songs to the accompaniment of brilliant instruments all well tuned together! Let thus joy be triumphant after so much tribulations and nights of despair in the endlessness of desert misery for our long since missed and at last returned friend, so that light, mirth, hope and life may be proved to always triumph over all things negative. Let the party begin!

(Great comprehensive preparations and introductions to festivities with all imaginable splendour with music and dances, exquisite costumes and an absolutely irrefutable festive gaiety.)

Act III scene 1. The hut of the swine herd.

Eumaius How you keep mucking up, you dirty little pigs! But that's your job, you can't do much else, and no matter how much you roll around in your dirt rooting in your filthy shit and wallowing in your precious mud, you can never get as filthy and dirty as those swine in my lord's house, who just keep on plundering his property, so that poor lady Penelope gets burdened with such economical problems that she with time hardly will be able to stay on and keep her husband's home. Yes, that I know for sure, my precious little pigs, that men are more dirty than any swine can ever be, and that all swine in comparison are clean. For man has a soul, that is his only important heritage, and the only meaning of life is to preserve it, manage it and keep it clean and pure, which only extreme exceptions seem capable of doing, since most people from the cradle to the grave only seem intent on wasting it and corrupting it as much as possible. So I am lucky to have you for better company, my little pigs. – But here comes another.

Ulysses (unrecognizable as a beggar) God's peace in your hut.

Eumaius You seem miserable enough as a wretch indeed, and still greets me so courteously! You look as if the whole world had tortured you. What could be the business of such a wretched beggar as you with a swine herd in his dirty cabin?

Ulysses For such as I a roof over his head is difficult to find.

Eumaius Have you then been thrown out from all better houses since you come to the worst one?

Ulysses You could say so.

Eumaius Here you will at least not be thrown out without a good decent meal first. Will some pork do?

Ulysses Nothing could suit me better, since you appear to be the local swine herd and consequently must be the perfect expert on how to prepare pork.

Eumaius That may be my one and only art, but I know it well.

Ulysses How many swine are in your care?

Eumaius Three hundred and sixty, but they constantly grow less, for every day I am obliged to slaughter a number to please those swine dungs up there in the house.

Ulysses The king's house?

Eumaius Yes.

Ulysses At the king's request?

Eumaius You must be new here. The king has been lost for twenty years.

Ulysses Yes, I am really new here.

Eumaius Who are you?

Ulysses I come from Crete.

Eumaius Are you a sailor then?

Ulysses All the best sailors come from Crete, and all who come from Crete know how to sail, but I am no sailor. I am one of those many scattered bastards who have the royal house of Crete to thank for their origin.

Eumaius I see.

Ulysses But why has the king been lost for twenty years? What kind of a king is that?

Eumaius During your wanderings you must have heard of Ulysses, who took part in the siege of Troy and was helpful in the conquest of the city. That was ten years ago. Since then he has been lost. I am myself certain that he is dead.

Ulysses How can you be certain? I know that he is alive and on his way home.

Eumaius Don't inspire us to wishful thinking by false illusions of mirages of hope. He must be dead. Or else he would have made himself heard of. If he lived he would not have kept lady Penelope ignorant of his fate.

Ulysses So he has a wife who is expecting him since twenty years?

Eumaius And who is still waiting for him. There have been impostors indeed, who made up stories and filled her with false hopes just to get into her favours and sponge on her hoping to be able to live here gratis. They all proved liars and cheats. I hope you are not one of them.

Ulysses I would never dream about for example trying to pretend to be Ulysses, but I can promise you that he will be home within a month.

Eumaius A dangerous promise.

Ulysses Shall we make a bet? If I win you will give me better clothes, and if I lose it will be I who will have to invite you for dinner.

Eumaius But even if you lose, which you must, I will try to get you some better clothes, which I am sure to be able to manage. Lady Penelope and Ulysses' son Telemachus are particular about no visitor to Ithaca leaving without gifts.

Ulysses So at least she has a son and heir?

Eumaius That's the question, for he has just left for Pylus and Sparta to make enquiries about his father. He is expected back any moment, but the suitors have laid an ambush for him in the sound with a ship. They are not interested in having him back.

Ulysses And the suitors all live in the palace?

Eumaius Yes, and wallow every day in the wines and dainties of the house, while lady Penelope only suffers and tries to endure them.

Ulysses Yes, she can't say no, and therefore can't drive them out.

Eumaius Do you know her?

Ulysses Only by reputation. I know her by Ulysses, who spoke much about her.

Eumaius When and where did you meet Ulysses?

Ulysses With the Phaeacians. He was their guest and had at last reached their land after ten years of suffering wanderings at sea, during which he had lost all his men. From there he should gradually be coming here.

Eumaius So he has also been as faithful to his wife as she has been to him.

Ulysses Yes, so it seems.

Eumaius That's good news. I am sure lady Penelope would gladly like to hear them. You must meet her, so that she could have a close interview with you.

Ulysses I would be glad to, my good friend, but discreetly. We must not disturb the suitors, and what I might have to tell her about Ulysses must not reach their ears.

Eumaius Of course, if you bring good news. The suitors will only hear bad news, since they only live for their malicious pleasure.

Ulysses I believe myself to only bring good news.

Eumaius Then I will fix you a place in the house, where you can sit in peace as long as you would like to stay without anyone having any right to drive you out, even if the suitors most probably will harass you.

Ulysses I am used to that. Let them beat me. I will not even react.

Eumaius And when Telemachus arrives you will meet him as well, and even he might come home with some good news.

Ulysses Do you think he can get through the ambush?

Eumaius The suitors are all stupid, and Telemachus is not more stupid than that he can always outwit them, like lady Penelope did for years.

Ulysses How?

Eumaius She promised the suitors to settle for one of them when she had completed a web she kept weaving on for years. She was diligent at it every day, and the suitors decided to wait. But every night she tore up most of what she had completed in the daytime, so that the web was never finished. She kept on like that for three years until one of her servant girls, who had become the mistress of one of the abominable suitors, betrayed her trick.

Ulysses Was it long ago?

Eumaius No, quite recently, just before Telemachus left.

Ulysses It seems that time and sand is running out for Ulysses.

Eumaius You said it.

Ulysses Very well, my dear friend, let's now concentrate on your delicious dinner. It smells marvellous.

Eumaius It's just pork, but I know how to prepare it.

Ulysses I believe you.

(They have their dinner in friendly intimacy.)

Eumaius Here I live far away from the madding crowd in peace and loneliness with my swine, for the company of men does not please me much after having observed the development here on Ithaca, how shameless youngsters without sense or manners have taken over the king's house in sheer arrogance and insolent hubris, taking for granted that lady Penelope sooner or later must give in to anyone of them, while the people just keep their mouths shut and look the other way and let it happen without even denouncing this reckless abuse of hospitality and the whole scandal.

Ulysses Yes, it must be difficult, but people are more often than not like that all over the world. It's only the happy or unhappy few who care who do something about it, but they are always there, and therefore there is always a better future also.

Eumaius I doubt it. Can you or I do anything about it? No, for we are just dirty old men and, worst of all, even poor, and therefore we stand no chance against the corrupt world order. But I tell you, my friend, that if the finest and richest king came here and asked for shelter for the night, I would immediately turn him out, since my

castle is only intended for such wise men who see through the whole humanity like you and me, my poor beggar brother.

Ulysses I feel honoured. But – is someone coming?

Eumaius I recognize those swift light steps, and the dogs don't bark. It can only be one person.

Ulysses Me they furiously scolded at once, and that was my welcome to Ithaca.

Eumaius I am sorry, but they still did not touch you.

Ulysses But who is coming then?

Eumaius It's the king's own son Telemachus who has come back.

Ulysses Here?

Eumaius Probably to play it safe. He is as cautious as his father. He has avoided the traps of the suitors and first come to me to hear the latest news. (*enter Telemachus*)

Telemachus Eumaius! I had hoped to find you alone. Who is with you?

Eumaius An old sorely tried beggar and misanthrope like myself. He is absolutely harmless. Just come on in.

Telemachus (enters) I just learned that the suitors were laying an ambush for me in the sound. That's why I stole my way back to Ithaca the other way.

Eumaius That was wisely done. Did you learn any news on the way?

Telemachus (suspicious against Ulysses) Who is he?

Ulysses A wanderer from Crete who has known your father very well and knows that he will soon be back.

Telemachus Your notice, stranger, matches what I heard from Menelaos and Helen in Sparta. You are then privy to the situation. You are welcome to Ithaca, stranger. Have you met my mother?

Ulysses Not yet, but our friend Eumaius has promised to present me to her.

Eumaius She will be glad to see you alive, Telemachus.

Telemachus I would beg you to immediately hurry up to her and tell her about my return, so that she may learn about it as soon as possible and doesn't have to worry, so that I may talk a little with the stranger here about what we both have heard about my father. Could you do that, Eumaius?

Eumaius I will hurry there at once, for my only joy left in life is to make lady Penelope happy. Take what you want of the ready meal in the meantime, Telemachus, and enjoy it.

Telemachus Thank you, Eumaius. (*He leaves.*)

Stranger, your appearance conceals many secrets and many unknown tales. You give almost the impression of some hungry wolf who threatens to lose control any moment, not of hunger but of the urge to relieve your heart of what's on your mind. Is that correct?

Ulysses I have been to Ithaca before.

Telemachus Yes, there is something familiar about you, as if I might have known you before but early in my childhood very long ago. Have you served in my mother's house?

Ulysses Yes, I have served your mother before. But that was long ago.

Telemachus It fits. I recognize your voice. But who are you?

Ulysses Go back in time as far as you can. Who is the first person you then come to think of?

Telemachus Naturally my father immediately comes first to my mind, but only vaguely like a faint dream, for I have no clear memory of him, just a hint of a feeling of his being, like a fragment of a forgotten memory. Did you have anything to do with him?

Ulysses I was here twenty years ago, Telemachus. Not until now have I returned.

Telemachus Could you then be...

Ulysses Yes, no matter how bad it looks, I am your own father.

Telemachus Returned as a shipwrecked beggar to his own plundered house crowded by invading parasites... it is too sad but still too good to be true.

Ulysses Come in my arms, Telemachus. (*He doesn't hesitate.*) We will beat them all, Telemachus. I managed everything in the world so far – why should I then not also manage my own home? For twenty years I have only lived to dream about both of you and the day when I at last would see you again, and that exile, Telemachus, my beloved, fullgrown, manly son, has been crueller than any enforced divorce. Only hope kept me alive during all these years, the last thing to leave man in his ordeals, and after twenty years the miracle has occurred that the hope in spite of all has been realized, at least to some extent, but we have a long way still to go.

Telemachus Is that why you are dressed in this disguise of a beggar, so that no one should recognize you to enable you to contrive a secret stratagem?

Ulysses Exactly, my son, but not in secret, but in peace and calm. Everything will happen naturally in due time, nothing can damage the web of the fates, but it will just go on being created by itself by the enigmatic mechanisms of fate itself, and we are all threads in its creation that are being used and contained in the reckoning until the ball of our life has run out. But how is your mother?

Telemachus She is the bravest of all women. She never loses faith. But how did you get here? Your heart must be brimming over from the yearning of the testimony of your fate to find an expression.

Ulysses We will have to let that wait until later, Telemachus. First we must accomplish the most important work of our life. How many are the suitors?

Telemachus They are more than a hundred.

Ulysses That many?

Telemachus Most of them are from the mainland.

Ulysses The more important then that no one learns who I am, neither your mother nor my father or even our faithful swineherd. We will plan a safe strategy which must not fail in any smallest detail. – But here is now our faithful herd.

Eumaius (enters) But you haven't touched the food, Telemachus!

Telemachus We had so much to talk about. The stranger from Crete here knows a great deal about the Trojan war. What did my mother say?

Eumaius She feels relieved by your cautious return, and she is hoping to see both of you up in her rooms tomorrow.

Telemachus That should suit us well, shouldn't it, my father's oldest friend?

Ulysses I feel honoured.

Eumaius So let's just take it easy then, at last finish this frugal festive meal and then sleep well until tomorrow till the dawn breaks and we can start living again. What about that, you old man, and you, my good and gallant youth?

Ulysses My dear friend, you are wisest of all.

(They eat and drink quietly together.)

Act IV scene 1. The home of Ulysses.

(like in the later part of Act I scene 1.)

Antinous Now tell me the worst. So Telemachus slipped away without your managing to stop him?

Eurymachus He stole away in the darkness without giving us any time to mobilize any counter action, as quietly and stealthily as Ulysses himself would have done.

Antinous You incompetent imbecile worthless dullards! And then you lay an ambush to have him sunk when he got back, and he slipped through your network?

Leiocritus Someone must have warned him. He didn't return by the ordinary route but sailed on the back side of the islands.

Antinous Of course, you incompetent bastards! He probably got all the warnings in the world from both Nestor and Menelaos and maybe even from still more old ghosts on the way. He maybe even got some news of his old man, and in that case, my friends, we face a crisis.

Leiocritus Wouldn't the simplest thing to do to just liquidate Telemachus once and for all?

Antinous Leiocritus, we have discussed this before. We can't murder Telemachus just because we court his mother. You must understand that. That would turn all Hellas against us.

Leiocritus Don't we have that already?

Antinous No, we have the situation under control.

Penelope (from above) I hear you too well, you infamous abusers of our hospitality! So you wish to murder my son Telemachus just because he might bring some news home about my living husband? Would you then try to murder him as well if he came home to his own? With what right, if I may ask?

Eurymachus My lady Penelope, don't take these undisciplined rogues for serious. During the three last years they often talked about getting Telemachus out of the way, but they can never touch a hair on his head. We are after all Hellenes and respect human laws, which all people have to obey whether they like it or not.

Penelope But you would without doubt try to murder Ulysses himself if he suddenly came home. I know you well enough. I ask you, Eurymachus, to immediately send Telemachus up to me when he comes.

Eurymachus Of course, my respected lady.

Antinous Speaking about the goblins... (*Telemachus arrives with Ulysses and Eumaius.*) What on earth is that kind of shabby beggars you dare to bring in here, Telemachus?

Telemachus Good Antinous, is this not my own home? May I not bring with me anyone I please? You abuse our hospitality to absurdity and consider yourselves having the right to do so, but you will not let those who every day provide you with their swine for your food to come in your sight and even refuse a beggar to pick a breadcrumb from the floor which you sully with your drivel and those leftovers you spat out?

Eurymachus It's Telemachus, Antinous. He has the right to bring home anyone he likes. And it's just the swineherd with a beggar. Don't be more stupid and meaner than usual.

Antinous But keep them at least as far away from us as possible, so that they don't contaminate us with their stench of plague and reeking footsweat, not mentioning their disgusting vermin.

Ulysses Gentlemen, I come here in poorest humility with my beggar's bowl in a pathetic effort to maintain life for one more day, since I notice that you live in such affluence and therefore believe myself to be able to save a few breadcrumbs and scraps of flesh with your good will. Is that too pretentious?

Antinous (throws a stool at Ulysses) Shut up, you insolent parasite! If you want to stay here with your beggar's bowl, then stick to your corner and don't disturb our gay company with any abject whimpering! Keep quiet, or go to hell!

Eurymachus Calm down, Antinous.

Telemachus Antinous, you have no right to insult any guest in my father's house no matter how miserable he may seem. My servants, make sure the beggar and the swineherd immediately get a good meal, and let that be an end to this discussion.

Penelope (from above) Telemachus, come up here to me.

Telemachus Yes, mother. (*goes up to Penelope*)

Antinous I don't like that dismal beggar. Why the devil should such a bloke turn up here? What is his business here? He just ruins the atmosphere and disturbs the rhythm of our indulgences.

Eurymachus Let him be, Antinous. You will gain nothing by persecuting beggars.

Antinous He is the one who persecutes us by his mere presence here casting a wet blanket over us!

Eurymachus You are just nervous, Antinous, and totally without reason.

Antinous He gives me the creeps, and I can't get rid of the bad taste of him.

Penelope Well, Telemachus, welcome back! Did you learn anything?

Telemachus Mother, Ulysses lives. I know it for certain. And he might come home any moment.

Penelope Where did you hear this?

Telemachus From Menelaos himself, who heard it from an old man in Egypt, that father was kept prisoner by a nymph on a desert island but might get away from

there at any moment. But still more important is the information from the Cretan beggar down there, who suddenly turned up at Eumaius' place.

Penelope Yes, Eumaius told me about him, and I would like to meet him. What has he got to tell?

Telemachus He knows for certain that father could turn up any time and thereby almost serves as a harbinger for him.

Penelope Eumaius told me that he had promised that Ulysses would be home within a month at most. Is that true?

Telemachus Yes, that is correct, mother.

Penelope In that case at best we will only need to keep the suitors on edge for another month at most. Do you think we can make it without their resorting to violence?

Telemachus Mother, they have been violating our house and household for three years, and we have endured them with patience and honour. Then we could surely make it a few weeks more.

Penelope But they are impatient and getting desperate.

Telemachus Yes, mother, but Ulysses could also turn up sooner than expected.

Penelope I am curious about that beggar. Can you bring him up to me?

Telemachus Yes, mother.

Iros (has entered the hall and turns with fury on Ulysses) What kind of a gutter swine is it who has had the audacity to steal my place?

Antinous (merry) You have got competitor, Iros. He is a worse beggar than you.

Iros But that is my place, and he has no right to usurp it!

Ulysses I did not know that beggars had place reservations here in the house of Ulysses.

Iros I always had that place!

Antinous That's right, Iros! Get on to him! Put him in his place! He is still just a piece of shit and disgrace to all Ithaca but even worse as such than you!

Iros Move over, old fool, or I will teach you a lesson!

Penelope What's the quarrel down there?

Melanto It's just the beggars fighting each other.

Penelope Go down and see to it that there will be no fight again, Telemachus.

Telemachus I will do my best, mother. *(goes down)*

Iros You filthy upstart, you have no right to come here making pretensions and robbing me of my begging corner!

Ulysses If I have done anything naughty it was perfectly unintentional, my dear colleague, and the last thing I wished to do was to vex anyone.

Iros He even pretends to be innocent, the impertinent piece of shit!

Ulysses You have no right to insult me for nothing.

Iros Nothing! You stole my place, you shitbag! I am the only one here with a licence to beg!

Antinous That's right! Let him have it, Iros! *(The suitors are delighted.)*

Ulysses I didn't come here to make any trouble.

Iros Why are you making trouble then, you sweat-stinking snot-driveller?

Ulysses My good man, your merry efforts don't amuse me.

Iros They are not intended to, you bag of trash and filth!

Antinous Get settled then at last! Don't just stand there arguing!

Iros Come on, you miserable wretch, if you don't prefer to run away, you wobbly old carcass!

Ulysses I did not deserve any of your jeers, my dear colleague.

(Iros aggressively attacks him. Ulysses immediately sends him bleeding to the floor.)

Get up and get out of here and find your place outside the gate and content yourself with keeping swine and stray dogs away from your master's gate in the future!

(Iros escapes in terror. The suitors laugh their sides off.)

Eurymachus There you won an honest fight, my friend, and for that you will never lack food or a place in this house.

Telemachus What are you up to? Who dares to attack our guest from Crete?

Eurymachus It was just that beggar wretch Iros who was in a bad mood, Telemachus, nothing serious. Your beggar threw him out and has now rightly taken over Iros' place.

Telemachus My friend from Crete, my mother wishes to speak with you. Could you have a break in your fights and come upstairs?

Ulysses My master, your mother's word is my law. *(rises and goes up to Penelope with Telemachus.)*

(on his way up, to Telemachus) Remove all weapons from the house. Bring them up to the attic and seal it. If anyone asks any questions, just explain they will not be needed any more, they need to be polished and are only in the way.

Telemachus Yes, father. *(shows him in to Penelope)* Here is the beggar, mother.

Penelope Come in, my friend. You have caused much stir and raised much attention since you came here, especially as you threw out the intolerable beggar Iros, who thought he was the only beggar here and claimed some monopoly on that business. But most of all you interest us by your contact with Ulysses. Come in, and let my old servant wash your tired old feet after all their wanderings.

Ulysses I already once refused to let a younger servant girl do this for her condescending unkindness, but an old servant of yours I can't refuse anything.

Penelope Right you are, my good man. Now rest and make yourself comfortable, relax and tell me first of all who you are.

Ulysses Alas, my lady, allow me to refrain from speaking about myself, for all that is contained in me is just overwhelming sorrows and melancholy despair after all the misfortunes I have experienced.

Penelope Still you have met Ulysses and know at least something about him. They say that you have asserted that he is on his way home. What do you know about him?

(In the meantime Eurycleia has started washing Ulysses' feet and immediately discovered a scar that only could be Ulysses' own.)

Eurycleia (both aghast and upset by joy, spills the washing basin, with a low voice) My lord! You are home!

Ulysses (cautioning her with the same lowered voice) Quiet, Eurycleia! Don't give me away! We have an entire house to cleanse from lethal parasites, wherefore I must remain unknown. Do you understand?

Eurycleia (bends down) Yes, father dear. *(is overwhelmed by emotions though and hurries out)*

Penelope What was the matter with Eurycleia?

Ulysses She had finished washing.

Penelope That was fast.

Ulysses She was efficient.

Penelope But tell me now what you know about Ulysses.

Ulysses I know that he is on his way home, my lady. He spent a few days with the Phaeacians and was handsomely treated there like a prince, and they promised to help him with a ship to get home.

Penelope When will he come?

Ulysses Time will show.

Penelope Your words fill me with joy. Then perhaps I might at last see an end to my own sufferings as well as his. May your words come true and soon!

Ulysses It's only a matter of time, my lady. Have patience.

Penelope With these terrible suitors who only sully mine and my husband's house by only littering and consuming our supplies and filling it with irresponsible self-indulgent youths and their disgust? What is needed here is a thorough, efficient and bloody spring-cleaning.

Ulysses If anyone is good at cleaning up, it's Ulysses.

Penelope Yes, he should be if he came home. I owe you many thanks, my good man. You will always have a place in my heart and my home, until Ulysses arrives home, when he most probably will find a position for you for life, if you want it.

Ulysses I am more than grateful, my lady. *(retires and disappears back downstairs)*

Penelope But what was the matter with Eurycleia? She has never made such a fool of herself before. Here are some ghosts lurking behind the curtains threatening with some active interference. The suitors must be read some lecture once and for all. Now I know. *(goes down)*

Antinous (sees her coming down) Behold, Penelope! The queen herself pleases to enlighten our existence, the delightful atmosphere of which has been so nastily threatened by some pathetic old men in rags. Has she finally made up her mind at last? Will it be you or me, Eurymachus, or someone even less worthy?

Eurymachus Let's hear what she has on her mind.

Antinous Speak to us, Penelope, and lift us up to your level with the bright power of your love by your mere presence!

Penelope Gentlemen, you are right. I have made up my mind. You will pass a test, that in olden times was practised as a sport here in the house. We have eleven axes here with loops above the shaft, which when placed in a row a good shot could

send an arrow through. The one who succeeds in bending Ulysses' bow and then shoot through all the loops of the axes with just one arrow, I will accept as my new husband.

Antinous That sounds easy enough. Ulysses' bow would hardly be different or more special than others?

Eurymachus You haven't seen it.

Penelope I stand by my word, gentlemen. You may begin. (*retires, meets Eurycleia*) Now I think I at last have given them some stone to bite. No one knows how to bend Ulysses' bow except himself. They may try until they die.

(Telemachus presents the bow, an impressive specialty.)

Telemachus My mother is at your disposal if you bend and string the bow. Here it is.

Eurymachus A masterpiece. I have never seen such an impressive bow.

Melantius You try first, Antinous.

Antinous No, no, let's give all the others a chance first.

Eurymachus Let Telemachus be the first to try. If he succeeds he may keep his beloved mother for himself, and we all pack our things and leave.

Antinous A splendid idea! That's fair, isn't it, Telemachus?

Telemachus Yes, that's fair enough, but if I can't bend my own father's bow, I don't think anyone of you will stand a chance either.

Eurymachus You have the chance, Telemachus. Take it. Then it's our turn.

Telemachus Very well. (*tries really his utmost to bend the bow but has to give up*)

As I said, no one can bend that bow.

Antinous Then it's our turn! Stand by, my friends! Who is first?

Leiocritus Let me try!

Antinous Every one in his turn!

(All the suitors try in their turn, by they all must give up.)

Antinous Eurymachus, your turn.

Ulysses (to Telemachus) Make sure all the doors are closed and locked. Let no woman enter. Then be ready and armed when it's my turn to bend the bow. (*Telemachus disappears.*)

Eurymachus (has to give up) It grieves me sorely that we all are so far behind Ulysses in his power that we cannot even bend his bow. But there are other women both in the mainland and on other islands. We can't manage Penelope's test. May we then accept this and obey her and leave from here before we get too old to at all be able to propose to anyone. Here we have already wasted and lost three important years of our lives.

Antinous Do you give up so easily, Eurymachus? No, let's instead get new strength for tomorrow and then try again. Here we have all the means for refreshing ourselves, both meat and food and wine in abundance, and we have our entire future ahead of us. Give yourself a break, Eurymachus. You have a new day of your life tomorrow!

Ulysses May I also give it a try?

Antinous (disturbed) Does that beggar dare to open his mouth again?

Eumaius We all have a right to give it a try. We can't succeed anyway, we decrepit old men.

Eurymachus He is right, Antinous. Let them also have a chance to play at the game, so that we may laugh when they pathetically fail.

Antinous Where is Telemachus?

Telemachus (shows up) He is here. The swineherd is right, Antinous. My mother's offer includes all men. Let also the old men try.

Eumaius We could but fail anyway.

Antinous Very well, old fools, let us see you fail like everyone else.

(The bow passes through all hands to Ulysses. He carefully examines the bow.)

Eurymachus Look how carefully he examines the bow. It's not the first time he holds a bow in his hands.

Leiocritus No, it's not impossible that he could shoot in his youth. But it sure is pathetic to see him now in his old age handle the bow of youth with melancholy regret and incompetence.

(Eurycleia is within sight of Ulysses. He gives her a sign with a nod, and she retires upstairs. Suddenly Ulysses has strung the bow, and the suitors give a cry of surprise and terror. The lower scene is immediately closed up while the upper scene continues to be open.)

Penelope What are they doing down there, Eurycleia? How is the shooting test proceeding?

Eurycleia (throws herself down on her knees for her) My mistress, all the suitors failed in bending the bow except Antinous, who never even tried. But another one succeeded, whom I have recognized as Ulysses himself.

(The death screams of the suitors start sounding from the lower closed up part of the scene.)

Penelope I hear screams of death. What is going on?

Eurycleia The day has come of our liberation at last, Penelopeia! Ulysses has the bow and the quiver with the arrows, and also Telemachus is armed, but all the suitors are trapped with them and unarmed!

(The death screams increase and continue incessantly.)

Penelope It sounds more like a nightmare than as any reality. Has then my husband come home to make himself a mass murderer among his own?

Eurycleia Did he have any choice, my good madam? During all these three years the suitors have plotted against Telemachus' life and discussed his liquidation. You are well aware of that. For three years the suitors have abused and violated your servant girls, and twelve of them are completely corrupted. Their parasitism in your house is like a cancer that has to be operated and removed by surgery with barber-surgeon knives.

Penelope But this violence is but violence, and murder is always murder. It is unlike him to go murdering about without considering the consequences. Are you sure it is really he and not just an instrumental messenger sent by him?

Eurycleia I have recognized him myself, my beloved mistress. When I was commanded to wash his feet I immediately observed the deep scar on his leg which

he received as a young man during that terrible wild boar hunt on the Mount Parnassus.

Penelope Is that why you fumbled and spilled out all the water?

Eurycleia I was so struck by joy and terror at the same time that I completely lost control of my senses.

Penelope So it is that beggar, with whom I could have an interview with myself, who claimed to be home from Crete? And I would not have recognized my own husband?

Eurycleia It is twenty years passed, my dearest! He had to disguise himself and keep anonymous to be able to spy out the suitors and make a careful evaluation of our situation here, so that he then could proceed with proper actions.

Penelope And he proceeds with his proper action by an indiscriminate massacre?

Eurycleia Antinous is dead already. He, the worst, the leader who wanted to make himself king instead of Ulysses, was the first one to fall, and all the others fall now with him like cones with arrows through their necks and breasts or pierced by the lance of Telemachus.

Penelope So even my son takes part in the massacre.

Eurycleia To the highest degree.

Penelope I can't see how this could end happily, Eurycleia. My view is that violence can only lead to more and worse violence. Couldn't he just have driven them all out, if he really is Ulysses?

Eurycleia Eurymachus, the noblest of them, tried to plead for the others when Antinous was dead. He promised to accept the responsibility for all the suitors to leave the island and restore everything they had consumed and looted during three years' time. Ulysses responded that it was too late for repentance, that he several times as a beggar had warned them and that they still willingly had committed the mistake of staying on.

Penelope So he shot him down in cold blood?

Eurycleia Yes.

Penelope What kind of a homecoming is this? Instead of a longed for husband and warm bosom with grace and comfort and good will I have to welcome home a bloody mass murderer who maybe has made himself impossible forever here in his own home on Ithaca! All the parents of the murdered youths and nobles will never be able to forgive him!

Eurycleia My beloved mistress, he had no choice! It was their lives or his!

Penelope But the result is that he is the murderer, and they are the victims!

Telemachus (comes up, all bloody) Mother, I have the happy news to bring, that father has come home.

Penelope How dare you show yourself here in such a bloody outfit!

Telemachus It is accomplished, mother. All the suitors are gone.

Penelope No, my son, they are still here and will haunt this house as long as we live.

Telemachus No, mother, we are at last rid of them!

Penelope And you profess, that your father has cleared them all out, when the entire house including yourself is dripping with blood?

Telemachus He is now cleaning the house with sulphur.

Penelope Do you think that will help against unblest spirits, who were forced to abandon their youth before they even had had time to live?

Telemachus It was their own fault. They asked for it for three years.

Penelope I don't know, Telemachus. I don't know if your so called father has done right or wrong. For his own sake I sincerely hope it wasn't he who did it.

Telemachus He is waiting for you down there, mother. He has come home at last.

Penelope I will hardly be able to avoid the necessity of seeing him.

Telemachus Are you so cold? Is that how you receive the husband you have been sighing and grieving and longing for after twenty years?

Penelope I am afraid I will not be able to recognize him.

Telemachus You have to, mother! You can't refute him! Not after twenty years and everything he has been through!

Penelope Very well, my son, I will try him, but I will not make it easy for him.

(She rises. Telemachus leads his mother down to the hall, which is opened again displaying the scene of the massacre – everything is bloody, and the corpses lie in heaps. Ulysses and Eumaius and other simple servants keep carrying them out and trying to clean it all up.)

If you are my husband, Ulysses, you certainly have created a mess for yourself and made your homecoming the most deplorable thinkable.

Ulysses I am sorry, Penelope, but I am actually your husband.

Penelope Prove it!

Ulysses How? Who else would from love of you have made so much trouble to dispose of all these suitors, who blocked my return to you?

Penelope Don't you see what you have done? As the king of Ithaca you have slaughtered all the younger generation of the island like cattle!

Ulysses I warned them in good time. They could have gone home in time.

Penelope Are they all dead?

Ulysses No, we spared the poet and the herald, for they never suited for you and only obeyed the suitors by compulsion.

Penelope And Eurymachus, the noblest of them, who presented a decent suggestion for atonement?

Ulysses I am sorry, Penelope, but he had taken part in all the dirty tricks and actions of the suitors. When he saw there was no way out he pulled his sword and attacked us. I had to shoot him or be slaughtered myself with your son.

Telemachus It is true, mother. The suitors were armed and attacked us. We had to kill them in self defence.

Penelope And there you stand covered in blood after a completed massacre in your own house expecting me to receive you in my arms in my own bed and claim to be my husband. Eurycleia, tell the maids to remove Ulysses' bed out of my room. If he is Ulysses, he can lie outside.

Ulysses What did you let out there across the fence of your teeth? Can the bed then be carried out of our bedchamber, when the chamber was actually constructed around that bed, which I formed and sculpted myself out of a firmly rotted olive tree? Who can saw that bed out of its roots which stretch far beneath the floor?

Penelope Ulysses, you haven't forgotten anything! You know our most private secret! Then it's really you! (*rushes in his arms. He embraces her tenderly.*) It doesn't matter, Ulysses. Just sully me with your bloody clothes and arms. After twenty years of incessant grieving I can take anything. Forgive me my boundlessly cold insensitivity, but I couldn't feel certain.

Ulysses Uncertainty has been my whole life for twenty years without you, but my greatest grief is that I had to come home in this way by a total desecration of my own house, and I am afraid it is only the beginning. You have hardly managed to come through one trial when you find even worse trials towering ahead of you, like a worse towering wave behind the one which already completed your shipwreck. Yes, Penelope, you are right in everything, and I know that I have made myself impossible to all Greece; but since I have managed everything up till now, I will also manage the last ordeal, if the worst still remains.

Penelope You must speak with your father. Only he can advise you. The news is probably now spreading across all of Ithaca that you have come home and butchered all their finest youths. You don't make it easy for yourself, Ulysses.

Ulysses Take it as a challenge. But you are right. I shall visit my father.

Penelope Do it incognito. Steal out of the house and let no one see you. Remove those bloody beggar rags and dress like an ordinary shepherd. Then no one will bother about you.

Ulysses My life's greatest triumph though is that I at last succeeded in reaching home to regain the wisest woman in the world.

Penelope I don't think I have changed much, Ulysses, since you left. And in spite of everything, I don't find you much changed either. You are still the same hopelessly impossible, stubborn and foolhardy daredevil.

Ulysses Perhaps all my adversities helped in keeping me young.

Penelope The one who makes an effort can always go on, and you at least have never given up. The suitors made absolutely no effort for anything at all and have all perished. That's how the easy-going pleasure works, which only disperse like morning vapours, while only striving ahead leads anywhere and always keeps you going, and that's the secret and art of survival. You made it, Ulysses. Welcome home.

Ulysses Thank you, my love. (*They go out together.*)

Telemachus (to Eumaius and the other servants) Let's get the whole place cleaned up now. After all, it is a royal palace!

Eumaius Imagine, Telemachus, that it actually was him, and that he at last has come home!

Telemachus Yes, yes, but don't just stand there gaping! We have much to do! Let's get going!

Act V scene 1.

Laertes (pottering in his garden) It's part of youth to commit mistakes of ignorance and recklessness, for youth does not understand much of life since they are too busy just living. That's their business. Let them rave so that they can mature afterwards. Patience you can only learn the hard way, and it will take time. If you are lucky you will live long enough to be able to survive your self and outgrow your own fool's cap, but no one is a greater fool than he who believes himself mature enough to chastise youth. It's like curing ignorance by folly. (*Ulysses approaching as a common shepherd.*) There is now that knave of bad luck. How shall I now handle his obsession? – Ulysses, you incorrigible good-for-nothing, what have you done!

Ulysses I am sorry, father, but at least I have come home.

Laertes Yes, but to what? To a home or a kingdom that you yourself just by returning have completely smashed to pieces and laid in ruins! All Ithaca is now against you. What are you going to do about it?

Ulysses Get some counsel from you first of all.

Laertes And how could I counsel you, poor confused scoundrel of a senseless berserk? You alone have made yourself more abominable than all the suitors together!

Ulysses Father, the whole world is accusing me. Will not even you then defend me?

Laertes No one can defend you or what you have done, even less than anyone could defend the suitors. You have transformed a party gone wrong into a worse mess aggrandized a thousand times!

Ulysses Will you not then even greet me and wish me welcome home, father?

Laertes Of course you are welcome home, but not the problems you brought along with you.

Ulysses Do you wish me to have stayed away?

Laertes I don't, but everyone else in the family does.

Ulysses Shall I then go into exile again and never more come home? Is that your meaning? Is then my homecoming just a new expulsion of me out at sea?

Laertes Yes, Ulysses, unless you yourself can solve the conflict which now has risen between you and your subjects, and it might not be solved by anything less than you paying the price. How many have you killed? How many parents have you bereft of their best sons? Can you pay such a debt? No, Ulysses, you can't. You might have managed all your trials up till now, but now you definitely are to face your own final limitation.

Ulysses I can't abandon Penelope and Telemachus now, father, not after coming home at last after twenty years.

Laertes I am not the one to determine your destiny, Ulysses. Only you yourself can do that.

Ulysses But I see another old man approaching, an even older and wiser man than you and I.

Laertes Yes, I see him coming. He never brings good news. He probably comes to deliver your sentence.

(Enter Teiresias carrying an oar.)

Ulysses Old sooth-sayer, we meet on the strangest occasions. Have you come to deliver my sentence?

Teiresias I regret that I am obliged to look you up again, Ulysses, but your father is actually right. You must resume your journeys. That's why I have brought you this oar. The decision of the gods is as follows: you must search all lands all around the world until you find a land and people that don't know what the ocean is. The sign shall be, that a man shall ask you what kind of a particular spade you are carrying. Then you will have reached your release. You will then immediately make a sacrifice of gratitude to Poseidon and Apollo, and they will at last release you from your destiny.

Ulysses But where on earth could there be any man who doesn't know the sea? Even if mountain people and farmers never have seen it, they can't have avoided getting to learn about it, for all people dream of it, since all life has come from there and has to return there.

Teiresias Yes, Ulysses, it will be a long and tedious search and your longest journey so far. But may hope bring you to the goal, as it always did so far. And all are not always against you.

(enter Mentor)

Ulysses Mentor! My best friend since childhood!

Mentor I will follow you, Ulysses. Together we shall make the test.

Ulysses Do you really think it is possible?

Mentor Nothing is ever impossible. That if anything you ought to have learned from all your journeys.

Ulysses You are right. Alone you might well be exposed to all possible trials and ordeals of the world and get hacked against the sharpest rocks in the perpetual shipwreck all the world's incessant turbulences, but one single helping hand and soul is enough for you to be able to overcome the entire world. I have lost everything but found you again, Mentor, and that is more than everything.

Mentor A true friendship you can never lose, for even death is powerless against it.

Ulysses So let's then be off at once with the oar of Teiresias, Mentor, for we have a long journey ahead of us. Father, try to explain the matter to Penelope and Telemachus and the others. Without doubt the fathers of Hellas will be content with my exile for some unlimited time.

Laertes No one will lift the slightest stone against you or your family, Ulysses, when they learn about your self-sacrifice.

Ulysses Thank the gods, not me. Come on, Mentor, let's go. *(leaves cheerful and content with Mentor.)*

Teiresias Old Laertes, since you called me and can see me, do you think the judgement of the eternal ones was too harsh?

Laertes No, Teiresias, it was only fair, absolutely fair.

(They leave together, Teiresias supporting the old Laertes.)

The End

(Ladakh, August 2004,
translated around Pentecost 2020.)

Other dramas of Antiquity by the same author:

(only in Swedish so far)

Jason and Medea

Orpheus

Thyestes

The Trojans

The Argo Scandal

King Croesus

Atlantis (Athens and the Persian wars)

Alcibiades

Epaminondas

Alexander the Great

Lucretia

The Play of Rome (Cicero)

Cleopatra

Herod the Great

The Great Passion (Jesus)

The Great Fiasco (Nero)

The Secret of Marcus Aurelius