

Goran Stefanovski

ODYSSEUS

(a play for the theatre)

2012

Translated from the Croatian by
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CHARACTERS

(with possible duplication of roles)

ODYSSEUS

ATHENE

PENELOPE (MOTHER, SIREN)

TELEMACHUS

MAID (HELEN, SIREN, NAUSICAA, CIRCE)

CALYPSO (SIREN, HECUBA, DOG)

ZEUS (MENELAUS, FIRST SOLDIER)

POSEIDON (NESTOR, SECOND SOLDIER)

BARD (TIRESIAS)

CYCLOPS (SUITOR, REFUGEE, ASTYANAX)

Fragments from Robert Fagles', William Cowper's, Alexander Pope's and E.V.Rieu's translations of Homer's *Odyssey* and from Philip Vellacott's translation of Euripides' *Trojan Women* are used in the play.

The play was commissioned by the Ulysses Theatre of Zagreb and first performed on 20th July, 2012.

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PROLOGUE

Enter the Bard with a group of actors.

BARD (*Singing*)

Home is where
I spend the night,
Home is where
I feel all right.

I can never go back home
For now I've lost my way,
I can never leave my home
No, never go away.

Home is where
they know my name,
Home is where
I lay my claim.

I can never go back home
For now I've lost my way,
I can never leave my home
No, never go away.

Home is where
My love is strong,
Home is where
My pain is long.

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I can never go back home
For now I've lost my way,
I can never leave my home
No, never go away.

The actors disperse. Pause.

BARD

Sing to me of Odysseus, Muse, the man of twists and turns, the cunning destroyer of the sacred city of Troy. *(Pause)* No, wait a minute. Start again. Sing to me, Muse, *a version of the story* of Odysseus, the man of twists and turns . . . *(Pause)* Once there was a great civilisation, whose capital was called Troy. It so happened that Troy was attacked by various factions who smelt blood. The mighty invisible forces of the gods helped the league of local human interests. The war lasted ten long years. The alliance was victorious. Troy was razed to the ground and no longer exists. Everyone agrees it was the most brutal war in history. Blood flooded the earth and screams the sky, as is the way with wars. The cunning of the Greeks put an end to it, entering Troy in a wooden horse and slaughtering its remaining defenders. Twenty years have passed since the beginning of the war – a short time in history, but a long time for us ordinary mortals. The world has changed. In the place of great kings, whose word was respected, there are now petty tribal chiefs of dubious honour. The war veterans have taken over the old states. Now they squander Trojan capital. They live in arrogance and debauchery. The gods who conspired to make all this happen have withdrawn, leaving the world in chaos. Of the surviving victors of Troy only one hasn't returned home. The gods have sentenced him to endless exile and eternal yearning. The gods have sentenced him to nostalgia.

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SCENE 1: ASSEMBLY OF THE GODS

Olympus. Athene and Zeus.

ATHENE

Father Zeus, King of Kings! My heart aches whenever I remember brave Odysseus, the cleverest of all men. There he is, he's been suffering for years, far away from his loved ones, forgotten on the island of the nymph Calypso. His heart is torn apart by the desire to see his native Ithaca just one more time.

ZEUS

My child, he was sentenced to life.

ATHENE

Why are you so angry with him, Father?

ZEUS

You know very well. He thought he was greater than us, the gods. After victory at Troy he had the cheek to raise his head towards the sky and shout: "I won without your help, gods! My power is equal to yours, if not stronger!" Do you really think, daughter, that we should have overlooked that? How could Poseidon have ignored those words from a mortal? You know yourself how vain Poseidon is.

ATHENE

Odysseus has served seven years.

ZEUS

The case is closed. Ad acta.

ATHENE

You've destroyed his house. His son's lost and insecure. His wife's worn down and almost ready to give in to one of that rabble of merciless suitors. Isn't that enough punishment for him? Odysseus always sacrificed to you on the field of Troy.

ZEUS

And what's it to you?

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ATHENE

There aren't any heroes left down there. Just thugs and swindlers. Odysseus is the nearest thing to a hero. He should be supported.

ZEUS

Why?

ATHENE

Because without heroes there're no gods. Without them, there's no us. And when there's no us, the sky's empty, and then there's nothing. Please, Dad, release godlike Odysseus!

ZEUS

“Godlike”? You're not in love, are you?

ATHENE

Let's send the nymph news of your decision to have him return!

ZEUS

So you are. You're in love.

ATHENE

So much, Dad, that I can't even breathe.

ZEUS

This is a bit sudden, isn't it?

ATHENE

Ten years I panted under the walls of Troy with him in battle. I smelt his armpits while he slept.

ZEUS

I thought you were all mind, but now I see you're body, too. With all these gods, giants and titans who want you, you've decided to fall in love with a mere mortal. It's not on. Human love is like a hole in water. If the others hear about it, you'll be the laughing stock of Olympus. Does he know?

ATHENE

He hasn't got a clue. For him I'm just a friend, counsellor, helper.

ZEUS

So why don't you just take him?

ATHENE

Is that what you think love is? That's rape. I want him to fall in love with me himself.

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ZEUS

Well, good luck to you, then.

ATHENE

Thank you, my good, great father! I'll go straight to Ithaca. His son must be encouraged to go and look for his father! He must set out immediately!

Athene flies off like the wind and comes down on the threshold of Odysseus's palace.

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SCENE 2. TELEMACHUS PREPARES FOR A JOURNEY

Penelope and Telemachus. Telemachus is looking at the fire. Penelope is sitting beside him, her head on his chest.

PENELOPE

Your father'll come back and everything'll be as it used to be. I saw him again last night proudly walking through those doors. He was wearing a helmet, and carrying a shield and a spear. But when I ran to put my arms around him – nothing there.

TELEMACHUS

(Revealing his right arm, on which the name Odysseus is tattooed) What was he like?

PENELOPE

You already know. I've told you so many times.

TELEMACHUS

Tell me again.

PENELOPE

He had strong hands. He mastered many a beast with them. His voice was deep and dark. Resolute, manly. Everyone adored him and followed in his footsteps wherever he went. Our house was always echoing to sounds of joy and merry-making. And he loved joking and laughing. And he loved me. He loved me in silk gowns and without them. He knew the soul of the winds and how to tame them. He made a bed of olive wood the like of which no mortal had ever seen. We shared secrets which were ours alone, signs which no one else knew.

Enter a Suitor. He puts a gift down before Penelope. Enter the Maid, the Bard and other suitors.

[Type text]

SUITOR

I'm losing patience. I've brought a gift, because that's the done thing, but I'm feeling less and less like giving you anything. It's high time, Penelope, that you gave *me* something! Or one of us, if I'm not to your taste. Time's working against you, Queen. Have you had a look in the mirror lately? Your face isn't much to look at anymore. Hide that wrinkled neck of yours, cover those rough hands. You've become dull, washed out. How else can I put it and make it sound less hurtful? You're old. But I'd marry you anyway because the kingdom can't be without a leader any longer. Somebody's got to sit on that too long empty throne. So, here I am, I'm putting myself forward.

TELEMACHUS

Get out of this house! Out, all of you!

SUITOR

Whose is that little voice I hear? Is it a boy's or a girl's? You don't give orders round here! The king's heir can only take power when his right is recognised by the nobles of the previous king. And, as you should have realised by now, we don't recognise anything! Go and suck your thumb somewhere else, because if you stay here someone might rip it off and throw it to the dogs!

PENELOPE

Please, don't quarrel. Let's get some wine and meat, and have dinner in peace. Melantho, come, serve us! Bard, sing something. (*The Bard starts singing.*) Sing something else.

BARD

This one was requested. I sing by request.

PENELOPE

And I'm requesting another song!

BARD

One about Odysseus, the hero you loved?

SUITOR

Anything but that! You can't sing about someone who's not here. There are other heroes now and they're here. Sing about us and for us! (*The suitors applaud.*) Friends, isn't it time we razed this palace to the ground?

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PENELOPE

Don't! Please, give me a little more time! I promise I'll choose one of you as the new king! I just have to finish Odysseus's father's shroud so the wool doesn't go to waste.

SUITOR

Finish it then! And after that I expect you to wash my feet and kiss them! Understand?

The Maid throws herself on the ground and kisses his feet. Telemachus pulls her up.

SUITOR

The shroud, the famous shroud! She weaves it by day and unpicks it by night! She keeps making promises, and for years the country's without a king! Anarchy, chaos, nobody afraid of anything. You can't tell the difference between men and murderers. Our fathers are dead, obeying Odysseus's commands at Troy. Now it's only right we should get power in return. *(To Telemachus)* It's a simple matter: your father's dead and you can't marry your own mother. Or perhaps you'd like to?

TELEMACHUS

It's easy for you to shout now when he's not here. If he were, you wouldn't be able to get away fast enough, not a peep out of you! Pigs.

SUITOR

But he's not here. And one of the pigs'll be king. Of all, you included.

The Maid brings food and wine. The suitors go out to music. Enter Athene in disguise. She approaches Telemachus.

TELEMACHUS

Who are you, stranger?

ATHENE

I'm Mentos, King of the Taphians. Friend to Odysseus.

TELEMACHUS

That's becoming a rare thing around here. Welcome. I don't know if you've heard, but my father's bones are rotting away somewhere, or have been swept up by the waves of the sea.

[Type text]

ATHENE

And you believe that? The son of such a hero falling for the lowest kind of gossip? Have you looked for him anywhere so you can say for sure he's gone? Have you sailed the seas, roamed through cities? No, you haven't. And why haven't you? You're young and strong – don't give credit to their lies. I'm no prophet, but I tell you: Odysseus is alive and won't be away much longer, even if they shackle him in irons!

TELEMACHUS

So where is this father of mine, then, who I've never seen? Does he exist at all?

ATHENE

You must set out immediately! Prepare the best ship with twenty oarsmen and head for Pylos, go to Sparta. Don't stop till you find him.

TELEMACHUS

How can I leave my mother to these vultures who are eating us out of house and home?

ATHENE

I'll protect her and Odysseus's palace for thirty days. But I can't do any more than that. You'll have to come back with Odysseus by then and liberate the kingdom together.

TELEMACHUS

Stranger, let me reward you for this.

ATHENE

Don't delay any longer. Do as I told you.

Athene flies off like a bird. Telemachus looks after her in amazement. He begins to make preparations.

PENELOPE

You're talking to yourself. You're going out of your mind, my poor boy.

TELEMACHUS

I'm going to find my father.

PENELOPE

Where?

TELEMACHUS

Pylos, Sparta, the ends of the earth if need be, till I find him.

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PENELOPE

Pylos and Sparta are far away, my only son.

TELEMACHUS

Fear not, mother, this isn't without the will of the gods.

Exit Penelope. Enter the Maid.

MAID

Beautiful evening. The moon's full.

TELEMACHUS

Has my mother sent you to initiate me into the secrets of manhood?

The Maid says nothing. She and Telemachus make love.

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SCENE 3: STORIES ABOUT THE FATHER

Enter the Bard.

BARD

I sing to you, Muse, the next instalment of this story, tale and legend. Young Telemachus set off into the big wide world. The first people he came across were the famous general Nestor, Commander Menelaus and his beautiful wife, Helen of Troy.

Exit. Enter Helen, heavily made-up, the insane general Nestor in uniform with war medals, and the commander Menelaus. Enter Telemachus. He goes up to them.

HELEN

Oh, you do look like Odysseus! Tall and upright, those regular features, blue eyes.

MENELAUS

Rubbish. Odysseus wasn't in the least bit tall. On the contrary. He was titchy and hunchbacked with a crooked nose.

NESTOR

His eyes weren't blue. They were red and staring. Like a wolf's.

TELEMACHUS

You knew my father? Is he still alive?

MENELAUS

Well, I hope he isn't! That fraud! That piece of shit who took the credit for victory over Troy. My name has been wiped from history! Just Odysseus this, Odysseus that! And who started that war? I did. Me, Menelaus!!!

HELEN

Didn't I have anything to do with it?

MENELAUS

And you, my love, of course, you too. *(They kiss.)* This lady set Europe against Asia! Credit where credit's due! She never found it hard to sleep with whoever she had to or didn't have to. But Paris kidnapping her – that was my idea! We had to make up a cause for war. Agamemnon, Palamedes and I formed the alliance and set off for Troy.

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All right, it's true I didn't really plan for her to stay in bed with Paris for ten years. I decided I'd never ever forgive her and I'd cut off her head. But when I laid eyes on her again my old love worked its magic. Here, take a look at her yourself, and you'll understand.

Telemachus looks at Helen.

HELEN

Once he came to ask for my hand, that father of yours. Empty-handed. Of course I refused him. And then he married that duck you call your mother. Never had any taste, you see.

NESTOR

Enough of that deserter! When Menelaus, Agamemnon and Palamedes went to call him to war, he pretended to be crazy to shirk his responsibilities. He harnessed a donkey and an ox to the plough and sowed the soil with salt.

MENELAUS

He acted as if he didn't recognise us. And I said to myself, so you're crazy, are you, coward, let's see just how crazy you are. You were just a baby, so I threw you in front of the plough, to crush you if he was really mad. (*He laughs.*) He remembered us straightaway and got his wits back!

HELEN

Then he set out to seduce women wherever he could. Without any consideration or moderation. Vulgar, really.

NESTOR

And then there was Philoctetes. Out of pure jealousy he threw the most renowned archer of our time onto a desert island and left him there to croak from hunger. And he slaughtered all the Trojans one by one, although we'd agreed to spare the ones who didn't offer any resistance. He butchered women, children, old men.

MENELAUS

And, my friends, what he did to Palamedes!

TELEMACHUS

But didn't Odysseus build the Trojan horse? And wasn't that the turning-point in winning the war?

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NESTOR

There you are, there's your war propaganda. It turns out that those who've never seen Troy even in a picture book know all about it, while we, who left our youth there, we don't know anything.

MENELAUS

The Trojan horse was my idea. Odysseus had nothing to do with it.

HELEN

But he certainly had something to do with raping the Trojan women. And he left you as soon as you were born. Your father was a mole. An informer. Our man in Troy. He wormed his way into the city itself as a beggar and deceived everyone. I was the only one who recognised him. I massaged him with oil and he told me everything. He killed a lot of Trojans and went back to the Greeks with all the information.

MENELAUS

Did he try it on with you? Of course he did. Did you let him? Of course you did.

HELEN

Not in front of the children.

MENELAUS

What children? He's old enough to try it on with you himself.

HELEN

And, goodness me, to have his way as well. He's so sweet, he's blushing. (*Telemachus turns to leave.*) Where are you going now?

TELEMACHUS

To find my father. Suitors have taken over Ithaca, my mother and our home.

NESTOR

Listen, if you need weapons you're in the right place. We'll make a good deal. Bows which bend themselves, swords and knives of all sizes, spears, shields, clubs. Or this new product. The T10 mace. T for Troy. 10 for ten years of war. And we can negotiate an army. Day hire. Two units'll sort out the suitors in an afternoon. Transport, food and incidental expenses included. Listen to me, I know. (*Showing his medals*) Services to the nation, labour award, national hero, army general, liberator. (*Something falls out of the sky onto his head.*) Eagle droppings! That's a good sign! (*To Telemachus*) The gods are with you, dear boy. You can't breathe for the gods.

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They ramp up taxes, take commission and there's nothing left for us honest businessmen.

He takes out some powder. They all take a sniff.

TELEMACHUS

What kind of world have I been thrown into?

HELEN

What's wrong with the world?

TELEMACHUS

A couple of feathers, to fly.

Exit Telemachus.

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SCENE 4: CALYPSO RELEASES ODYSSEUS

The island of Ogygia. Odysseus is sitting on the beach. His eyes are closed. He is dozing. There are wine and salted fish on a table in front of him. He suddenly cries out and opens his eyes. As if he's been wakened from some kind of nightmare.

ODYSSEUS

(Looking at a tooth which has fallen out) This tooth tore off bread and meat under the walls of Troy, cracked walnuts and hazelnuts, bit the nipples of lovers, caressed Penelope's tongue, helped me whisper and shout. And now it's decided it doesn't need me anymore and it's abandoned me. *(He puts it back in his mouth. It falls out into his hand again.)* Should I swallow it? It's mine, I'm not letting go of it. Or should I throw it to the fish in the sea? Or sow it in the earth as seed for some monstrous plant? Or throw it in the air for a bird flying past to grab and take to Olympus so the gods can see what flimsy stuff they made us of. Disgraceful. How can I laugh now with a hole in my teeth? How can I speak without making that whistling noise? How can I chew? What kind of hero is toothless? Not to mention the constant heartburn. And the creaking knees.

Enter Athene, invisible.

ATHENE

Poor Odysseus!

ODYSSEUS

Athene. You're here.

ATHENE

When you see me and when you don't.

ODYSSEUS

Goddess, you've been keeping me here like a dog on a chain for years. For years I've been dreaming of revenge and trying to find peace. My soul has been stretched across the four corners of the Earth. I beg you on my knees and bang my head on the

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ground. Either kill me or let me go home. Does Ithaca still exist? Is anything left of my homeland?

ATHENE

Ithaca exists. But it's never been worse there. You can go home. Zeus has released you.

Odysseus slashes through trees and plants with a sword. Enter Calypso from the other end. Athene goes up to her, disguised as Hermes.

CALYPSO

What are you doing here, messenger? You don't come often.

ATHENE

I bring bad news. Zeus commands you to despatch Odysseus from here post-haste.

CALYPSO

Come again?

ATHENE

You heard me. He came here to do hard labour not to have a good time. This is prison, not a weekend cottage. He was supposed to be knocking rocks, not *you!* The prison warden fell in love with the prisoner!

CALYPSO

You gods are so callous. You're envious if a goddess loves someone in public and takes him for a husband.

ATHENE

It was male gods who punished you. They can go with mortal women but you're not allowed mortal men.

CALYPSO

Someone else thought this up.

ATHENE

Who?

CALYPSO

(Very softly) Athene.

ATHENE

Why d'you suspect her?

[Type text]

CALYPSO

Because she's jealous. A shrivelled virgin. Stupid cow. If she's female at all.

ATHENE

I've got to go. Don't worry. I won't tell Athene.

CALYPSO

No. Do. Please tell her everything I said. Word for word.

Exit Athene. Calypso goes to Odysseus.

CALYPSO

Lunch.

ODYSSEUS

Not hungry.

CALYPSO

I'm just saying it's on the table. What's up? What's happened?

They look at each other. Pause.

ODYSSEUS

Calypso. The one who hides things.

CALYPSO

I've never been able to hide anything from you.

ODYSSEUS

You've hidden me away from the whole world. For many years, as well.

CALYPSO

But I haven't managed to make you forget Ithaca. The gods know how hard I've tried. Stay here with me. You'll be immortal and forever young.

ODYSSEUS

Calypso, I don't want your eternal youth, I want my old age. I'm going home.

CALYPSO

What d'you mean, home? What's home? This is your home.

[Type text]

ODYSSEUS

My home is Ithaca! That's where rivers of milk and honey flow. The grapes come three times a year and the corn five times. The sun shines from three sides and the moon from four. There's hardly any sickness, old age or death. Peace and eternal love rule. And everyone sings: "Let others be wherever they like, just so long as we're here, home."

CALYPSO

Go then. You're free, old man. I'm serious. Go! I'm fed up with you. You've been screwing me here for seven years every night till dawn. Then you go and sit on the beach and drown in self-pity, wanking over Penelope. Go, and have a nice trip. *(Pause)* What're you waiting for? Me to change my mind?

ODYSSEUS

I'm waiting for a fair wind. *(Pause)* Aren't we going to say goodbye?

Calypso undoes her dress and stands naked. Calypso and Odysseus kiss. Athene looks on invisible from the sidelines.

ODYSSEUS

You'll kill me with love.

CALYPSO

Better to die of love than hired assassins. You've got no idea what awaits you on your journey.

ODYSSEUS

Who d'you work for?

CALYPSO

You should go if you can't tell friends from enemies.

ODYSSEUS

I'm an eel of a man. Even my shadow can't follow me.

CALYPSO

If you think you're still as good as you used to be, you're wrong. You're not.

[Type text]

SCENE 5: A QUARREL ON THE HIGH SEAS

Enter the Bard.

BARD

I sing, Muse, of further permutations and variations on a theme.

Exit.

Odysseus is sailing a boat. Night. He is looking at the sky and stars. Enter Poseidon.

POSEIDON

Where d'you think you're going?

ODYSSEUS

Home.

POSEIDON

Have you asked anyone? Who gave you permission? What d'you mean, home?

ODYSSEUS

Home is where everyone's always known me and I've always known everyone. The place where everything is *mine*. The sun which comes up at dawn and the shadows which fall at twilight. I sit at my table a happy man, and the guests listen to me talking and ask me where I've been and how I became famous. The tables heaped with bread and meats, and, drawing wine from a mixing-bowl, the steward makes his rounds and keeps the winecups flowing. People coming together, singing songs. I embrace my wife, Penelope. And feel proud of my son, who's growing up to be my worthy heir.

POSEIDON

Ooh, you gave me goosebumps. Nothing's the same there any more. Everything's upside down.

ODYSSEUS

I'm going to make it right again.

[Type text]

POSEIDON

Everything that was sacred is now silly.

ODYSSEUS

I'm going to take revenge on the reptiles who think they've taken my place. The rats who lead the dance in my house. They don't even mention my name anymore, as if I never existed. They've buried me and erased me. And, as time goes by, I've started behaving as if I don't exist. I miss myself. But that's enough of that. I won't allow it anymore. It's mine! I'm going to reclaim what's mine!

POSEIDON

What the eye don't see, the heart don't grieve over! Why d'you think you're better than them?

ODYSSEUS

I don't. I know it in my heart. I feel it in my blood! (*Looking at the sky*) I'm coming, home, you poison, you bone in my throat, you thorn in my soul! I greet you, sister stars! And you, mother, cosmic winds!

POSEIDON

You're not going anywhere. You're just drifting.

ODYSSEUS

Why have you so taken against me?

POSEIDON

You know all our codes. How could we have let a mortal like you make up our codes, manage our accounting and HR policy? Negotiate in our name. You got a taste for it. You gained power. You thought you were one of us. The man who knew too much. You want to betray us. Go there and look important, as if you know everything, tell them how it is and why it all happened.

ODYSSEUS

I wouldn't dare do that.

POSEIDON

And why should I worry about whether you will or you won't? Instead of just nicely getting rid of you.

Poseidon raises his hand to kill Odysseus. Enter Athene.

[Type text]

ATHENE

No. My father promised me he'd stay alive.

POSEIDON

If you want a toy, Daddy can buy you a hamster. Or a dog.

Poseidon whips up a storm.

ODYSSEUS

Oh, ye gods! Where do I stand? Am I in favour or out? Punish me or spare me, but at least come to some agreement! Alas, unhappy me! My Athene, my shadow, my sadness, my only true comrade. I kiss your honeyed lips.

ATHENE

What colour lipstick do you like?

ODYSSEUS

Sorry?

ATHENE

I could put some on.

ODYSSEUS

It doesn't suit you. Forget that now and give me a hand!

Athene gives Odysseus a veil which covered her breasts. Odysseus looks away.

ATHENE

Gird yourself with this immortal veil. Swim with all your might!

Odysseus struggles with the storm. The boat falls apart. Odysseus swims. He reaches land. He falls into mud and loses consciousness. Pause. Enter the Bard.

BARD

I sing to you, Muse, the continuation of this fable, with further convolutions. Animals wander, people wander, entire nations wander, gods wander and history wanders. We're suspicious of wanderers. As we are of refugees. Why aren't they at home? What was it that ousted them and exiled them? If home is Eden, why did they go east of Eden? Why did they rebel? Wandering can be physical or metaphysical, deliberate or

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forced, it can be adventurous or bewildering, pleasure or pain, a game or an identity crisis, it can be fun or fatal. On the one hand, we envy wanderers their freedom, on the other we pity them for that same freedom.

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SCENE 6: NAUSICAA

Enter Nausicaa with a bundle of clothes to wash. She doesn't see Odysseus who is sleeping behind some bushes. She soaks her washing and tramples it with her feet. She puts it out to dry in the sun. Odysseus cries out suddenly and opens his eyes. As if he's been wakened from some kind of nightmare. He stands up naked and muddy behind a bush.

NAUSICAA

Oh my!

ODYSSEUS

Who're you? Where am I?

NAUSICAA

Oh my, oh my!

Odysseus breaks off a branch and covers himself with it.

ODYSSEUS

Don't be frightened, girl.

NAUSICAA

I'm Nausicaa. This is the land of the Phaeacians. I'm washing clothes. I'm going to be married soon. I have to wear the prettiest dress because that's how you get a good name among the people. I won't be a virgin for much longer.

ODYSSEUS

I have never laid eyes on anyone such as you, neither man nor woman. I marvel at you, my lady: rapt, enthralled, too struck with awe to grasp you by the knees.

NAUSICAA

Stranger, now you have come to our lands you shall want for nothing.

ODYSSEUS

Maiden, stand apart, that I may cleanse my shoulders from the briny surf.

[Type text]

NAUSICAA

(Turning her back) This man hasn't come without the will of Olympus. Oh, if only destiny intended such a husband for me. *(To Odysseus)* How did you swim here and save yourself from the terrible sea?

ODYSSEUS

I don't know myself.

NAUSICAA

(Sidling up to him) Oh my. Oh my, oh my! *(She tries to kiss him.)* Why don't you want to?

ODYSSEUS

I can't just do it like that.

NAUSICAA

Like what? It's my first time.

ODYSSEUS

I'd like to, but I'm afraid.

NAUSICAA

You don't like me.

ODYSSEUS

I'm old.

NAUSICAA

You're not old. What d'you mean, old? I really like it that you're old.

ODYSSEUS

I don't know who you are. Who's behind you?

NAUSICAA

I'm on my own.

ODYSSEUS

Nobody's on their own.

NAUSICAA

I hate you. I'll kill myself. I'll tell my Dad you raped me. He's the king.

ODYSSEUS

Help me. The whole world's after me. I must get home to Ithaca.

NAUSICAA

Kiss me.

[Type text]

ODYSSEUS

Who are you? Who d'you work for? Did Poseidon send you after me? I wasn't born yesterday. Those tears aren't real. Admit everything.

They kiss. Pause.

NAUSICAA

You see I was a virgin.

ODYSSEUS

I've become a beast.

NAUSICAA

Oh my, yes.

ODYSSEUS

My wine has turned to vinegar.

NAUSICAA

Quiet. I'll never forget you. Just so long as nobody sees me. I couldn't stand the gossip. People here don't like strangers.

ODYSSEUS

So what about me? Where shall I go?

NAUSICAA

Go back into the sea, where you came from. I love you.

[Type text]

SCENE 7: TELEMACHUS, THE BARD AND THE REFUGEE

An inn. The Bard, who is now blind, is playing and singing to the Refugee, who is drunk. Enter Telemachus.

TELEMACHUS

Good evening.

BARD

Welcome, stranger, to this great casino.

TELEMACHUS

Casino?

BARD

Phaeacia is now one big casino. Caviar, sparkling wine, flashy suits, plenty of bling, make-up, glamour, vanity fair.

The Bard sings. The tone is ironic and facetious.

Who's that man?

Who's that eel man?

Who's that eel man, faster than his shadow?

Who's that, faster than his shadow and more cunning than Fate?

Who's that, more cunning than Fate, bright as the sun and fickle as the moon?

Who's that, bright as the sun and fickle as the moon, who storms the heavens?

Who's that who storms the heavens, lover of nymphs and goddesses?

Who's that lover of nymphs and goddesses, the mortal who outwitted the gods?

Who's that mortal who outwitted the gods, jumped over time and cheated death?

It's him,

It's him, hey,

[Type text]

It's him, hey, Odysseus!

The Refugee laughs. Telemachus takes the Bard aside.

TELEMACHUS

I know you from before. You used to sing at our house on Ithaca. You're weren't blind then.

BARD

Sometimes I am, sometimes I'm not. Depending on where I'm performing.

TELEMACHUS

You sing that song as if you're mocking him. What, if anything, d'you know about Odysseus?

BARD

I travel around. From island to island. You hear one thing here, another there. People say all sorts of things.

TELEMACHUS

What do people know? Odysseus was a hero, not a crook!

BARD

I sing what the audience likes. Once there was a fashion for songs about how the Trojan veterans were heroes. Now it's the opposite. Now it's democracy. Freedom. Earlier it was just the gods and the muses who sang, and now everyone tweets away. Universal din and competition. Calypso's a goddess for some, for others a high-class whore. It's all spin. I've got a repertoire of templates, phrases, rhythms, tempos, hexameters, a pack of characters. Action, schemes, wars, floods, adventures on land, sea and air, family feuds, births, marriages and funerals.

TELEMACHUS

Sing differently or I'll break your neck!

BARD

How shall I sing?

TELEMACHUS

Seriously. Movingly. Odysseus had strong hands. He mastered many a beast with them. His voice was deep and dark. Resolute, manly. Everyone adored him and followed in his footsteps wherever he went. He knew the soul of the winds and how to tame them. I'm his son.

[Type text]

REFUGEE

Whose son are you?

TELEMACHUS

Odysseus's.

REFUGEE

Odysseus's? D'you want me to tell you a story about Odysseus? D'you know where the city of Ismara is? I'm from Ismara. We had a nice peaceful life there. That is until one day at the break of dawn your father turned up with six ships and three hundred soldiers. They set fire to our houses, raped our mothers and sisters, slaughtered our brothers and fathers. Just a few of us escaped and now roam from place to place. Here, have a look what Odysseus did to me. (*He pulls out his trousers so Telemachus can see inside.*) There, that was your father. (*Pause*) Sing, bard!

Telemachus vomits.

BARD

Who's that mortal who jumped over time and cheated death, swallowed his own head and was born again from himself?

It's him,

It's him, hey,

It's him, hey, Odysseus!

[Type text]

SCENE 8: THE ARMY

Odysseus is travelling, searching for his home. He passes Telemachus who is travelling and searching for his father.

BARD

People wander in search of their identity, the story of who they are and what they are. They invent various tricks while they're doing that. They present being lost as being found. They think up new maps and pretend they're exactly where they should be. They look for an alibi for their actions, think up excuses for their mistakes, try to give sense to their lives at any cost. So it comes about that adventuring is presented as principled travel, selfishness as aspiration towards higher goals, robbery as a fight for freedom, attack as self-defence, genocide as a sacred quest.

Enter Odysseus. Enter First Soldier and Second Soldier, covered in blood.

FIRST SOLDIER

Odysseus! Worthy commander!

SECOND SOLDIER

Master, leader, what're you doing here?

ODYSSEUS

My soldiers. What're *you* doing here?

FIRST SOLDIER

Just a bit of looting.

ODYSSEUS

Who else is here?

SECOND SOLDIER

There're more than a hundred of us.

ODYSSEUS

Didn't you go home after Troy?

[Type text]

FIRST SOLDIER

We did, but then we left again. Some of us, our neighbours had taken our land, some our wives, some went mad, and some of us found it boring without a war on.

SECOND SOLDIER

Some of us wondered why we'd bothered to come back at all. Only fools go back to sweat away ploughing the soil and shearing the sheep.

FIRST SOLDIER

It's boring respecting the law. Some of us said: our Odysseus did the clever thing not coming back at all.

SECOND SOLDIER

So we got together again and set off. There's always work for a good army.

The soldiers eat lotus.

FIRST SOLDIER

Have some. Lotus fruit.

SECOND SOLDIER

Makes you forget.

FIRST SOLDIER

We all followed your example, Master. I never did care much for tilling the soil and running a household. I only really liked ships, oars, battles, sharp spears and death-dealing arrows. What others found terrible and repulsive, I was rather fond of.

SECOND SOLDIER

And this is where the winds have thrown us up. And we've taken the city and massacred the people. Just like you taught us.

FIRST SOLDIER

Blood flowing down the streets. Houses burning, smoke and weeping to high heaven. And me with five of them in front of me. I ordered them to strip and squat, one above the other. And then one by one, from bottom to top, from top to bottom. Some old man appeared from somewhere and tried to protect them, so he got my sword in his balls.

SECOND SOLDIER

Happy days.

[Type text]

FIRST SOLDIER

And it was pure chance that we came here.

SECOND SOLDIER

The wind blew us out here.

FIRST SOLDIER

Fate!

SECOND SOLDIER

Free will and choice don't exist.

FIRST SOLDIER

Let the currents take you.

SECOND SOLDIER

You don't know the circumstances.

FIRST SOLDIER

You don't know the motive.

SECOND SOLDIER

You can't know the consequences.

FIRST SOLDIER

What you see, that's it.

SECOND SOLDIER

There's nothing else.

FIRST SOLDIER

The important thing is to survive.

SECOND SOLDIER

At any price.

FIRST SOLDIER

One man's loss . . .

SECOND SOLDIER

Is another man's gain.

FIRST SOLDIER

May it always be the other guy's loss . . .

SECOND SOLDIER

And our gain!

[Type text]

ODYSSEUS

(Going for them) Who d'you work for? I'll rip your heads off, you rabble, sorry excuse for soldiers!

FIRST SOLDIER

We're not soldiers any more. We were soldiers at Troy!

ODYSSEUS

So what are you now?

SECOND SOLDIER

We don't know any more. We've forgotten.

The First Soldier and Second Soldier laugh hysterically.

ODYSSEUS

From now on you're under my command again! My word is final! We're going back to our old homeland, to build a new world!

[Type text]

SCENE 9 : PENELOPE AND THE MAID

Penelope is asleep. Enter Athene. She goes up to her.

ATHENE

What does he see in you that he doesn't see in me? What do you have that I don't? Your marriage bed is still here where it was. The bed posts of thick green olivewood, inlaid with gold, silver and ivory, with purple straps of stretched oxhide. Some deity has disturbed your sleep for it seemed as if Odysseus was lying beside you and your heart rejoiced and thought it was no dream but reality. Do you dream of him as I do? Dreams are pure absurdity. Two are the portals through which those fleeting visions come: of horn is one, the other of ivory. Pure illusion are those that reach us through the finely wrought ivory, never to come true, but dreams that enter through the portal of polished horn foretell real events, sure to come to pass. You'll be famous because you waited for him. But who will ever know that I waited for him too?

Penelope wakes up. Athene disappears. Enter the Maid.

MAID

I've brought you figs, honey and sweet wine.

PENELOPE

Thank you. I'm most interested in the wine.

The Maid pours some wine for Penelope and for herself.

MAID

Your health.

PENELOPE

And yours.

MAID

(Giving Penelope a little box) From last night.

[Type text]

PENELOPE

(Opening the box and taking out gold jewellery) Who were you with?

MAID

Antinous.

PENELOPE

Again.

MAID

He asked me to.

PENELOPE

And? On your face?

MAID

On my body. On my neck. He said: "Eh, if I could only do the same thing to your mistress."

PENELOPE

Right, to work.

MAID

Yes, Mistress. They expect me to whisper your messages in their ear.

PENELOPE

"Dear . . ." – here put in the appropriate name. "Last night I went to bed with you in my thoughts."

MAID

Hot.

PENELOPE

Hot and wet. Add something along those lines.

MAID

You must put the price up. There's great demand. We can't meet it. There are only so many of us maids.

PENELOPE

Oh, if that was all I had to think about . . . I bear the whole kingdom on my shoulders. I carry out domestic and foreign policy, diplomacy, put up smoke screens, discharge black ink like squid. I take heed that the right hand doesn't know what the left is doing. I carefully organise confusion. I sustain a situation so that it is unsustainable. Controlled chaos. I take care of fishermen, peasants, shepherds, swineherds. Of you slaves. That Odysseus might deign to come back and do a bit himself.

[Type text]

MAID

Did you love him a lot?

PENELOPE

I was a girl. He was already thirty. Arranged marriage. Love? Yes. And no. And maybe. I didn't have time to decide before he went off to war.

MAID

How can you stand all this?

PENELOPE

I'm the daughter of a Naiad, a water goddess. My mother gave me just one piece of advice: "Act like water!" And Odysseus gave me another: "When everyone thinks you're here, you be there." You can't escape your fate, but make it hard for it to follow you. Wriggle out of it.

[Type text]

SCENE 10 : THE CYCLOPS

(A cave. The one-eyed cyclops is finishing his dinner. He's eaten a few soldiers. Odysseus is watching him.)

CYCLOPS

That's eight of your soldiers I've eaten.

ODYSSEUS

Nine.

CYCLOPS

You'll make a nice round ten.

ODYSSEUS

With whom do I have the pleasure . . . ?

CYCLOPS

I'm the cyclops Polyphemus.

ODYSSEUS

And I'm . . .

CYCLOPS

(Interrupting him) You're No One! You're dinner. *(Pause)* What do you think of me at first sight? Am I repulsive? Silence – that means I am. My brothers and I make weapons. Not the kind of toys you have. These are weapons for the gods. Thunderbolts for Zeus. When a volcano erupts, that's us letting off steam from our furnaces. I'm a grumpy old sod, I hate myself in the morning and the whole world in the afternoon. I say *Yes* when everyone else says *No* and *Well, I'm going to* when everyone else says *Don't*. I'm the master of spite, the eternal nay-sayer, cutting off my nose to spite my face. I've got one eye and I see everything from only one point of view. I'm a brainfucker, I drive people insane. Anyway, let's just devour you now.

ODYSSEUS

Wait a minute. We were having such a nice chat.

[Type text]

CYCLOPS

What's there to wait for?

ODYSSEUS

I look at you and think what a pity it is.

CYCLOPS

What's a pity?

ODYSSEUS

The fact that you're genetically a cyclops, but you don't try to avoid the clichés and the stereotypes. You have your own life and your cyclopean habits, of course, but why shouldn't you be able to be, say, a poet as well?

CYCLOPS

What's that?

ODYSSEUS

Someone who expresses their feelings. Have you ever tried to do that? Has love ever touched your heart? Silence – that means it has. Who was she?

CYCLOPS

Her name was Galatea. But she didn't fancy me. She found some stupid Sicilian, a mortal. I killed him with a rock.

ODYSSEUS

Unrequited love. What a theme! And all you asked for was a little human warmth. Why is love impossible in the political world?

CYCLOPS

My Dad Poseidon'd kill me if I started writing poetry.

ODYSSEUS

Well, write and then eat what you've written, so he doesn't see. And in the end if you're not a lyric poet by vocation, you can always write about manly epic themes. You can be a war poet. Your task would be to use poetry to stir things up, arouse passions, call up the ghosts of the past. There's no war without its poet.

CYCLOPS

How do you write?

ODYSSEUS

Oh, my dear sir, what an infinitely complex topic that is! First we need a pen. Allow me to sharpen that olive twig. (*Taking the twig and beginning to sharpen it*) Next we

[Type text]

need a little inspiration. You ask how to begin? What to write about? Well, the best thing is to start from yourself. This cave of yours, for instance, is not just a cave, it's your home as well. It's a house. A little house. Little house, little cave. My little house, my little cave, my little freedom.

CYCLOPS

My little bedroom.

ODYSSEUS

That's it. Brilliant!

CYCLOPS

My little threshold, my little roof, my little chimney.

ODYSSEUS

Excellent. You're a born poet.

CYCLOPS

I dig my little garden.

ODYSSEUS

You see, you can do it!

CYCLOPS

I plant my little fruits, look after my little chickens and little goats. My little milk, my little cheese. My little field, my little grass. My little sun and my little moon in my little sky. My little willy, my little thumb and my little finger.

ODYSSEUS

My little chest and my little heart. That is, *your* little chest and your little heart.

CYCLOPS

My little chest and my little heart.

ODYSSEUS

On which is engraved: My little house, my little cave, and so on. You see. Then it'll all go round in a circle and repeat itself. Well done! Your first poem and you hit the bullseye!

CYCLOPS

Is that all?

ODYSSEUS

That's just a working version, it's not ready yet. (*He stabs the cyclops in the eye with the pen. The cyclops cries out, bleeding.*) It all begins with poetry and ends in blood!

[Type text]

CYCLOPS

My eye! My eye! (*He tries to catch Odysseus.*)

ODYSSEUS

Cyclops, you monster! If any man should ask who blinded you, say Odysseus, raider of cities, *he* gouged out your eye, he who makes his home in Ithaca. (*Exit.*)

CYCLOPS

Listen and take this to heart. Of all the creatures that breathe and creep about on Mother Earth there is none so helpless as man.

[Type text]

SCENE 11 : CIRCE

Enter the Bard.

BARD

Outraged at the treatment of his son, Poseidon thought up a new scheme. The Lestrygonians, savage cannibals, stacked the sailors up on spikes like fish, preparing a horrific feast for themselves. The ships sank, all except Odysseus's, which somehow managed to escape. Five hundred and fifty men lost their lives in that place. They fought for ten years at Troy to finish up as food for cannibals. One of the survivors tells Odysseus: "Poseidon is after you, but he kills us." And Odysseus replies:

ODYSSEUS

A great misfortune has befallen me. I no longer know which way is west, which east, nor where the sun sets, nor where it rises. Here I am, Poseidon! Drag me to the bottom of the ocean and bury me a hundred feet deep in the mud. And let me find peace.

BARD

Fate threw Odysseus onto the island of Aeaëa, where the enchantress Circe lived.

Island of Aeaëa. Enter Circe the Witch, singing. She looks like the Madam of an S&M salon. Enter Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS

Who are you?

CIRCE

I'm Circe. And you're a pig. (*She blows in his face. Odysseus goes weak and falls to his knees.*) Now you're my willing slave. (*Exerting himself to the extreme, Odysseus draws his sword.*) Who are you? Why haven't you succumbed to my magic breath? You must be Odysseus whom the prophecy told me of. Sheathe your sword and come to my bed so we can be reconciled in love and make friends. (*Circe helps Odysseus up.*) Come, eat and drink wine, and you'll feel strength in your breast again. (*She pours wine for him into a golden cup.*)

[Type text]

ODYSSEUS

A weariness has taken over my limbs, sapping my soul away.

Circe kisses him.

CIRCE

Tell me. How you kill.

ODYSSEUS

I shoot an arrow, straight at the nose, penetrating white teeth, cutting through the tongue to the root. The copper tip flies through the lower jaw and the man collapses. Then I thrust a spear into his chest. And his blood spurts out on all sides.

CIRCE

That's it. Talk to me. Don't stop.

They kiss.

ODYSSEUS

Winter's passed, Circe, and spring's come. I'm not well. My sight's going. Everything's blurred. I've lost my sense of time. How long have you kept me here?

CIRCE

You're alert and bristling like a lone wolf. You're attracted to danger like a child to a rattle.

ODYSSEUS

The war haunts me.

CIRCE

It doesn't haunt you, but you haunt it. You miss it. You don't know what to do with yourself when you're not warmongering.

ODYSSEUS

I'm a hero, a star, a superman. I want fame and applause. Achilles died in the arena before the eyes of the world. What about me? Who's watching me? No one. Except you.

CIRCE

Isn't that enough? I'm your death. Your first true love. Penelope's nothing. She's a housewife.

[Type text]

ODYSSEUS

Penelope is my one true love. She takes care of my house and my son. And prays every day for my soul's salvation with the whole nation. They all stand to attention three times a day and look towards the sea with tears in their eyes, waiting to see my ship's mast on the horizon.

CIRCE

They all think you're dead. And nobody even mentions your name any more.

ODYSSEUS

Who d'you work for?

CIRCE

For myself. I'll drink your brain through a straw. I'll tear your cock off with my teeth.

They kiss.

ODYSSEUS

Summer's here. I want to go home, sorceress! What spells have you put on me? My mind's like a flock of birds scattering. My heart's pounding. I have no will of my own. Tell me, is there a way back? Show me the way out of this magic circle!

CIRCE

You want to find a way. There isn't one.

ODYSSEUS

There must be.

CIRCE

The only way is no way. How much are you willing to pay to find a way?

ODYSSEUS

What's the price?

CIRCE

The price is your life. You have to die to be born again. Go against your very self. Swallow your own head, go through your own entrails, and reinvent yourself.

ODYSSEUS

What does that mean?

CIRCE

You must descend into Hades and ask Tiresias the Theban, the blind prophet.

[Type text]

ODYSSEUS

Well, I've come to hate my life. How can I get there?

CIRCE

Raise the mast, unfurl a white sail, and the north wind will take you to the ends of the Ocean, to the mouth of the Acheron, which flows from the Styx.

[Type text]

SCENE 12 : HADES

The ends of the deep Ocean. A land veiled in fog and clouds. Enter Tiresias. Enter Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS

Tiresias!

TIRESIAS

Wretched man, you'll die twice for entering Hades alive. You long to return to your home but Poseidon won't make it easy for you. To be honest, I've got no idea how you can get home. In my time I prophesied according to the laws of probability. You have a look at the case, make some sensible points, job done. Now it's all gone to the dogs. Now the uncertainty principle rules. But who knows what that's good for? *(Pause)* Say hello to Athene for me. I saw her naked while she was bathing. She blinded me, but, hand on heart, she gave me second sight. Which has also more or less gone now.

Exit Tiresias. Enter Hecuba.

ODYSSEUS

Hecuba!

HECUBA

You slaughtered me.

ODYSSEUS

I had no choice.

HECUBA

You slit my throat just so you wouldn't look like a coward in front of your soldiers. The whole world can go hang just so long as your name isn't soiled, your heroism denied.

ODYSSEUS

What could I do?

[Type text]

HECUBA

I mourn for my dead world, my burning town, my sons, my husband, gone, all gone!
What pride of race, what strength once swelled our royal sails! Now shrunk to
nothing, sunk in mean oblivion! Dust mingled with smoke spreads wings to the sky,
I can see nothing, the world is blotted out! Earth and her name are nothing;
all has vanished, and Troy is nothing!

Exit Hecuba. Enter Astyanax.

ODYSSEUS

Astyanax?

ASTYANAX

Why did you throw me from the walls?

ODYSSEUS

You're Hector's son, Prince of Troy.

ASTYANAX

Why did you throw me from the walls?

ODYSSEUS

We couldn't allow you to live as the heir to Troy.

ASTYANAX

Why did you throw me from the walls?

ODYSSEUS

It was war.

ASTYANAX

Why did you throw me from the walls?

Exit Astyanax. Enter Odysseus's mother.

MOTHER

Oh my son – what brings you down to the world of death and darkness? You are still
alive!

ODYSSEUS

Oh, mother, misfortune has brought me to Hades.

[Type text]

MOTHER

Not yet returned to Ithaca?

ODYSSEUS

I have never once set foot on native ground. What form of death overcame you?

MOTHER

I simply died. No sickness conquered me. No, it was my longing for *you*, my shining Odysseus, that tore away my life that had been sweet.

ODYSSEUS

Mother!

MOTHER

I know, son. You yearn to kill yourself, to end the tension, the constant vigilance, suspicion, the weariness of the body, the exhaustion of the soul. You've been coming back from the war for ten years now. A new generation has grown up who don't remember the war and only know peace. You'll soon have no one to talk to about the war. Everything calls you towards the past, to your old glory. You'd like to surrender to that temptation.

Odysseus tries to embrace her.

ODYSSEUS

Let me embrace you.

MOTHER

You can't. There are terrible waters between us which no one may cross. My dear son, this is just the way of mortals when we die. Sinews no longer bind the flesh and bones together – the fire in all its fury burns the body down to ashes. You see that Hades is no kind of solution. Rather hasten back swiftly to the light!

Exit Odysseus.

[Type text]

SCENE 13 : THE SIRENS

The ship is sailing by the island of the Sirens. They sit with piles of skeletons and rotting corpses around them.

SIRENS

Oh stay, O pride of Greece! Odysseus, stay!
Oh cease thy course, and listen to our lay!
We know whate'er the kings of mighty name
Achieved at Ilion in the field of fame;
Whate'er beneath the sun's bright journey lies.
Oh stay, and learn new wisdom from the wise!

Odysseus puts wax in his ears. The Sirens sing. Odysseus takes the wax out of his ears to hear their song. He listens. He weeps. He puts the wax back in his ears. He takes it out again and listens to the Sirens' song. He weeps and wails. He throws himself in the sea.

SCENE 14 : QUARREL AMONG THE GODS

Zeus, Athene and Poseidon.

POSEIDON

But, Zeus, nobody will respect me any more. We worked together on making the Greeks suffer on their journey home. And you, Athene, suddenly start helping Odysseus. Why? How come you changed sides like that? I'd understand if you were in love. But you just look at him from the sidelines like an old maid.

ATHENE

What d'you know about love?

POSEIDON

Oooh!

[Type text]

ZEUS

Aaah!

ATHENE

You've shagged on a grand scale and you've shagged far and wide. Disguised as swans, bulls, snakes, faithful husbands of faithful wives. Disguised as fire and air. You've raped your own mother. You've shagged half the universe. Begotten a horde of children. But you know nothing of love.

POSEIDON

Sweet little Athene.

ATHENE

Is that what you called me when I was a child? When you came to take care of me?

POSEIDON

What? What's that?

ATHENE

What did you do to me then?

POSEIDON

What're you talking about?

ATHENE

I have some hazy memories, Uncle Poseidon!

ZEUS

Family love has a magic power. Let's look for a moment now into the cold abyss of the truth.

Poseidon grabs Odysseus, who is drowning in the sea.

POSEIDON

Why d'you think you're better than me? And if you are, have you ever asked yourself why? Who made you like that? Me. I did. One afternoon, when I had nothing better to do and I happened to come across your Mama. She immediately married the first man who walked by after that. All right then, you're free. Go back to Ithaca and flail around like a scarecrow in the wind. Go and try to work out who's who there, who's what, and who's with whom. And who on earth *you* are.

[Type text]

SCENE 15 : ITHACA

Odysseus is asleep on the beach. Enter Athene. She looks at him. She kisses his armpit.

ATHENE

I spent many happy years as the goddess of wisdom. I was quite content and confident. But one day I met my evil fate and my ruin. I was walking with Hera and Aphrodite when we ran into the goddess Eris. I knew nothing good would come of it. That Eris is the goddess of envy and discord. She threw a golden apple at us and said: "This apple is for the most beautiful among you." How could I have fallen for that? Taken over by vanity, blinded by jealousy? Why did it suddenly matter to me to be beautiful? We couldn't decide who the apple belonged to. And who did we choose to be the jury? Handsome young Paris. Hera offered him a kingdom as a bribe, but he refused because he wasn't interested. And what did I offer him? Listen, I ask you – strategic superiority in military matters. Who was I offering this to? A young man who thinks only with his cock. Aphrodite cleverly offered him Helen. And that's how she got the apple, Paris got Helen, and we all got the Trojan War. I realised I was stupid in matters of the heart, that I didn't feel anything. Everyone talked about coming, and I didn't know what it meant. I desperately wanted to find out. And from you, first among men, who I had always loved. It's not enough for me to be a wise and clever virgin. I want you to see me as a woman. I want to have you for a husband. I've followed your loves and infidelities for years. (*Whispering*) I dream of being in your arms. And of new grass springing from the sacred ground beneath us. Dewy lotus, saffron and fragrant hyacinth shooting up from it. Us covered by a golden cloud with sparkling drops of dew. (*Pause*) Odysseus, you've reached home on Ithaca. Ithaca, Odysseus.

Odysseus suddenly cries out and opens his eyes. As if he's been wakened from some kind of nightmare.

[Type text]

ODYSSEUS

Goddess, tell me, am I really in my homeland?

ATHENE

Unbeliever. Here it is – Ithaca!

Athene clears the mist. Odysseus falls on his knees. He kisses the earth.

ODYSSEUS

Ithaca, my dear land, I never dreamed I would see you again . . . Now rejoice in my loving prayers. (*Pause. He looks around.*) This doesn't look like Ithaca to me.

ATHENE

You don't look like Odysseus either.

ODYSSEUS

Where's that Ithaca of mine?

ATHENE

Gone with that Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS

I thought . . . it'd be the same.

ATHENE

You're not the same either.

ODYSSEUS

What about Penelope? Is she the same?

ATHENE

You mean faithful? Let's have a look at your side of the story. You had three children with Circe – Telegonos, Agrios and Latinos. With Calypso you had Nausithous and Nausinous. And one child each with Callidice, Euipe and Thoas.

ODYSSEUS

Nobody knows that. Nobody saw that.

ATHENE

Except me.

ODYSSEUS

Let's keep it that way. What about Penelope? What's her story?

[Type text]

ATHENE

Nobody saw that either. (*Pause*) Except me.

Pause. They look at each other.

ODYSSEUS

I'm nervous. My knees are shaking. Give me courage.

ATHENE

I'll be on your side.

ODYSSEUS

First I've got to kill the suitors. How am I going to do that? And Penelope? Will I be able to, you know, when I see her again?

ATHENE

There's nothing I can do about that.

ODYSSEUS

What kind of goddess are you?

ATHENE

Let me make it so no one'll be able to recognise you! I'll turn you into a doddering old beggar!

ODYSSEUS

You always want to have your way. Where's my freedom in this?

ATHENE

What d'you know about freedom? You're mortal.

ODYSSEUS

What d'you know about freedom? You're immortal.

Athene touches Odysseus with her staff. He is turned into a beggar.

[Type text]

SCENE 16 : THE DOG

Odysseus goes up to the Dog.

ODYSSEUS

You're still alive. My faithful dog. Guarding my threshold. How many times did we go hunting together? D'you know who's come?

DOG

My master Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS

It's me.

DOG

I can hardly see you. Hardly hear you. I waited for you.

ODYSSEUS

How are you?

DOG

You can see for yourself.

ODYSSEUS

You've often been in my thoughts.

DOG

And you in mine.

ODYSSEUS

It's been twenty years. They told me you were with the shepherds. That you fearlessly protected the flock from wolves.

DOG

The shepherds loved us, shared their life with us, we ate and slept together. I was the chief dog. Others chased the wolves and tired them, and then I was the one who ripped their throats out at the end. They put the best food aside for me and the best place by the fire. I was famous. But years went by, I grew old, I lost my sight and sense of smell, I started to limp. And the day came when the shepherds decided we must part. They left me my last meal and moved the flock on. I watched them go, but there was no help for it, life goes on. I was left alone. And then the wolves appeared.

[Type text]

They remembered me well, had known me for years. They surrounded me and I was helpless. I waited for them to kill me. That would have meant my salvation and a heroic death. But no. They had other ideas. They left me alive. And started to screw me. One by one, all of them. Several times.

ODYSSEUS

Oh, heavens!

DOG

An old dog, sport for the wolves. There. That's what I wanted to tell you. Now leave me to die.

ODYSSEUS

No.

DOG

Yes.

[Type text]

SCENE 17 : FATHER AND SON

Telemachus and Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS

Is this where the swineherd Eumaeus lives?

TELEMACHUS

Eumaeus is dead.

ODYSSEUS

We were friends long ago. I've come from faraway to ask for shelter.

TELEMACHUS

Strangers, travellers and beggars are sent by Zeus.

ODYSSEUS

How many suitors does Penelope have?

TELEMACHUS

First there are fifty-two choice young men from Dulichium, and six servants with them. From Cephalonia there are twenty-four, twenty from Zakynthos, and from Ithaca twelve.

ODYSSEUS

I met Odysseus on Crete.

TELEMACHUS

Any tramp passing through Ithaca comes and pretends to my mistress that he's seen Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS

He'll come home. His ship's already put to sea to bring him back to his dear homeland. What would you do if Odysseus suddenly appeared here right now?

TELEMACHUS

I'd hold him to my breast and weep.

ODYSSEUS

And he'd weep.

[Type text]

TELEMACHUS

Then we'd both weep.

ODYSSEUS

I'm Odysseus.

TELEMACHUS

He'll never come.

ODYSSEUS

I'm your father.

TELEMACHUS

I really wanted to find you, but as time went by I became more and more ashamed of you.

ODYSSEUS

How are you? What's it like for you here?

TELEMACHUS

Ithaca's a windblown place. There's nothing here. Actually, it's not that there's nothing here. Here there *is* nothing!

ODYSSEUS

I didn't want to go to war. You were a baby. I'd bought you a dog. I was happy. I wanted to watch you grow up, be a father to you. But they came for me, mobilisation. I sacrificed myself for you. Everybody in the war swore by a god, but I swore by my son Telemachus.

TELEMACHUS

I know you gave me life, but I don't feel anything for you. Mother tried to praise you, say how good and famous you were in the past. But the more she praised you, the more ashamed I was of your name. I wanted to ask her where you'd been when my first tooth came through. But that wouldn't have changed anything.

ODYSSEUS

I'm a veteran. I've been there.

TELEMACHUS

Where is there?

ODYSSEUS

There is Troy.

TELEMACHUS

What is this Troy? For years it's been a bloated corpse dragged around by hyenas.

[Type text]

ODYSSEUS

Troy is my whole life!

TELEMACHUS

Everyone says that when they get old. They were all at Troy, they were all heroes. Ah, if you'd seen me then! Ah, how it was in my time!

ODYSSEUS

But I was there! Ten years I lived with death, slept with it, ate with it.

TELEMACHUS

Are you sure you've been anywhere at all? Where's this island of Ogygia? It's not on any maps. How come you're the only one left alive?

Odysseus hits Telemachus.

TELEMACHUS

We bow down before you, great commander, destroyer of cities, you who made rape and looting into an honourable profession, our father! We bow down before your image. We're in exile here at home. Not every house is a home. Grant us a new world, law and order. Show us where we are, where we come from and where we're going.

ODYSSEUS

You're not my son!

TELEMACHUS

Daddy came home from the war a psychopath.

ODYSSEUS

(Raising his hand)

TELEMACHUS

You touch me again and I'll kill you!

Exit Odysseus. Telemachus tries to scratch the tattooed name of his father off his arm with his nails.

[Type text]

SCENE 18 : HUSBAND AND WIFE

Penelope's chamber. Odysseus and Penelope.

ODYSSEUS

Madam, you sent for me.

PENELOPE

Stranger, who are you, where are you from and who are your parents?

ODYSSEUS

Lady, your fame reaches the heavens. Ask me something else, just not about my origins and homeland. I saw Odysseus on Crete and showed him hospitality.

PENELOPE

Come, tell me what sort of clothing he wore.

ODYSSEUS

A tunic bright as the sun, as thin as dry garlic skin.

PENELOPE

I gave him that garment from the storeroom. I folded it neatly, fastened the golden brooch to adorn my husband.

ODYSSEUS

He's close, close at hand.

PENELOPE

Stranger, this house no longer has a master. Tomorrow will cut me off from Odysseus's house. I mean to announce a contest, a trial for my suitors. The winner is the man I follow, yes, forsaking this house.

Pause. They look at each other.

ODYSSEUS

You recognised me.

PENELOPE

Yes.

ODYSSEUS

When?

[Type text]

PENELOPE

As soon as I saw you.

ODYSSEUS

Why didn't you tell me?

PENELOPE

I was embarrassed.

ODYSSEUS

You were embarrassed?

PENELOPE

Why all the acting?

ODYSSEUS

Athene disguised me.

PENELOPE

Why?

ODYSSEUS

How should I know?

PENELOPE

Didn't you ask her?

ODYSSEUS

You go and ask her.

PENELOPE

No need to get angry.

ODYSSEUS

Is that all you've got to say to me? That the costume's not very good?

PENELOPE

I've been waiting for this moment for twenty years.

ODYSSEUS

What about me?

PENELOPE

I didn't expect you to turn up as a fake beggar.

ODYSSEUS

Do you want me to come back in again? Stage the meeting again?

PENELOPE

This is unpleasant.

[Type text]

ODYSSEUS

You've taken the words right out of my mouth.

Pause.

ODYSSEUS

Why don't you hug me?

PENELOPE

And you me?

Pause.

ODYSSEUS

Come on. What're you waiting for?

PENELOPE

You come on.

They stand and don't move. Odysseus glares at Penelope. Pause.

ODYSSEUS

What's the matter now?

PENELOPE

I'm looking at you.

ODYSSEUS

Why? (*Pause*) You're looking at me as if I were a stranger! You don't recognise me anymore! Did you wait for me? Home is where they wait for you. Where's this I've come to? D'you know who I am? D'you know my name? D'you want me to tell you my name?

Penelope quickly turns and makes for the exit.

ODYSSEUS

Come back here! D'you hear me? Cheeky bitch! Did you take Antinous of Dulichium as your lover?

[Type text]

PENELOPE

I beg your pardon?

ODYSSEUS

I'm just asking.

PENELOPE

Yes, I did.

ODYSSEUS

And is it true you made love with all one hundred and eight suitors? And that you had a son, Pan, with them? The ugliest of creatures, lover of Bacchantes and Maenads. Is it the truth?

PENELOPE

Yes, it is. (*Pause*) So? What do you want now? What do you want? You want me to swear I was faithful? Beg mercy from you? Why should my chastity be taken for granted? Have you ever asked yourself what twenty years of chastity means? And what you've done to deserve them? If you're really free, why do you keep comparing yourself with us? You measure your victories against our defeats, your freedom against our slavery, your merry madness against our boring normality. You want to keep changing, and us to stay the same and immobile, like an anchor, like the North Star in the heavens, as a measure of your distance from us. We're not your point of arrival, but the transit station for your departures. Ithaca is a place to avoid! Ah, your painful return to your homeland and your wife! How many other people's homelands have you destroyed, how many other men's wives have you fucked? Your son's caught your disease. He'll get married, too, and go off to some bloody Troy of his own, leave his wife and children and come back to them a stranger. Your mother died of loneliness. And me? Every day I long to get the hell out of here. What do you think, the fishermen and peasants have nothing better to do than sit and sigh and worship you? "Ah, where's our free Odysseus now?" They have their own work and worries, trying to make ends meet. They're not even aware of your exploits, nor do they give a damn about them. You've managed to escape from everything, including yourself. There, that's the price of your freedom! So do the sums. How many Ithacas for one man's freedom?

[Type text]

SCENE 19 : DEUS EX MACHINA

Athene suddenly appears.

ODYSSEUS

Is this really happening to me or I just think it is?

ATHENE

It comes down to the same thing. I've worked hard to get you home. Put an end to your yearning. Bring you to your wife, son and people, spend enough time with them to get bored, really fed up, disillusioned, and then long to set out again. And finally realise that it's actually me you've always wanted. I wanted to live with you. Make you immortal. I made an agreement with the gods. They all signed. Even Poseidon. "Athene is permitted to marry Odysseus and live with him forever and make him immortal".

ODYSSEUS

And?

ATHENE

I was over the moon with happiness. And then I discovered a secret annexe to the agreement. Which says that Odysseus can be immortal, but not forever young. They want you to turn into a decrepit old man who throws up, pisses and shits in his pants. And for me to spend the rest of time with a corpse in my bed of love.

ODYSSEUS

So you have fate too. You don't have the last word.

ATHENE

Fuck life and the gods. It's terrible how people get old. It's not slow or gradual. It happens all of a sudden, one afternoon, overnight, from Tuesday to Wednesday. I can't watch you get old. Am I a stupid cow?

ODYSSEUS

No, you're not.

ATHENE

I've spent eternity like a strict school mistress. I've educated the universe. Given morals, warnings, doled out slaps. But love, love I haven't known. May I kiss you?

[Type text]

(Athene kisses Odysseus on the forehead. Pause.) Do you love me just a bit? You were my Ithaca. Ithaca is where you set out from but can't go back to. It's time to part.

ODYSSEUS

Are you playing with me?

ATHENE

I pictured it differently. But even I can be wrong.

ODYSSEUS

Who do you work for? Pallas Athene, I'll kill you! I'll kill you all! Odysseus has come for his own! Odysseus is back! Odysseus has come home!

Enter the Suitor.

SUITOR

Save us, dear gods! Master Odysseus, I can explain everything. It's not at all what you think. We thought you were dead.

ODYSSEUS

Did you think I'd never return from Troy, you dogs? Is that what you thought?!

Enter Zeus and Poseidon.

ATHENE

Listen to me, people of Ithaca. It's your fault all this has happened. Now you're going to stop killing each other with hatred, you're going to be reconciled with love. Zeus will make you forget your distress altogether and love each other as before.

ZEUS

Ladies and gentlemen, comrades, friends. My dear people, that is, dear mortals. Respected colleague gods. So the hour has come . . . Allow me to say a few words on the occasion of . . . regarding . . . It's a great honour and special pleasure that the task has fallen to me to declare peace. What is peace? Peace is thus . . . not war. Peace is youth, making jokes and making merry. It's peaceful cooperation between mortals and gods in all fields for a better life for future generations. And therefore long live peace! There, that's all I have to say. More or less. Thank you. *(Applause. Zeus addresses the Bard.)* Come now, sing of this, may it be heard by mortals far and wide. Tell them everything.

[Type text]

BARD

Everything?

ZEUS

The whole story.

BARD

There isn't a whole story.

ZEUS

What d'you mean, there isn't?

BARD

There're just parts. Versions.

ZEUS

Mind how you tell it then.

BARD

You mind how I tell it then.

ZEUS

I beg your pardon?

BARD

It's not easy for us bards. It all needs summarising. Make it consistent in places, sound nicer in others, add something here, cut something there. Telling stories is waging war by other means.

Pause. Odysseus looks around him.

ODYSSEUS

Now I see what you're playing at. War and hatred cut short. Brushed under the carpet. Replaced by peace and unity. And that lasts a few years. Then peace and unity cut short. And war and hatred again. Well done. How come you don't get fed up with it all? You've ruined Ithaca! You've destroyed my homeland! No trace left of empire or great rulers. Only a handful of upstarts left who call themselves kings, each in his own dark hole. You've spat on the vows that were made. You've put up monuments to foreign gods. You've burnt the flags, banned the songs, changed the locks on the doors. What kind of people are you? I thought you'd wait for me, but you haven't even waited for yourselves. You've turned my home into a wasteland. You've plucked the heart out of Ithaca's breast and put a stone in its place. For ten years the gods

[Type text]

wouldn't let me have my revenge. D'you know what revenge looks like when it's been brewing for ten years? Like this!

Odysseus frenziedly swings his sword around in thin air for a long time. They all look at him. Pause. Odysseus stabs the sword into the ground, out of breath. Pause.

ODYSSEUS

Help me to take out the dead. Bring sulphur to clean the chamber. Home is where it hurts! *(Long pause)* Let's move on!

The group of actors start singing.

ALL

Home is where
I spend the night,
Home is where
I feel all right.

I can never go back home
For now I've lost my way,
I can never leave my home
No, never go away.

Home is where
they know my name,
Home is where
I lay my claim.

I can never go back home
For now I've lost my way,
I can never leave my home
No, never go away.

[Type text]

Home is where
My love is strong,
Home is where
My pain is long.

I can never go back home
For now I've lost my way,
I can never leave my home
No, never go away.

They exit singing into the darkness. Their shadows find it hard to follow them too.

CURTAIN