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The Return of
ODYSSEUS

The Return of
O D Y S S E U S

A Poetic Drama
in Four Acts

By
Percy Stickney Grant



1912
B R E N T A N O ' S
N E W Y O R K

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Percy Stickney Grant



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To
A. M. F.

I passed an island in a wintry sea.
Upon its barren, yellow sides I saw
No form of man, or beast,—'twas void of life.
But some one told me: "This is Ithaca,—
This was Odysseus' home. Hence sailed he forth.
His eyes saw what you see. Here found he gods
Who led him through a world of chance to fame.
That crag was watch-tower for Penelope.
That beach felt his boat's keel and his glad feet."
Then swarmed for me the sea, earth, sky, with life.
A world of gods and heroes, rose to view,—
A world of deathless deeds.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

ODYSSEUS, *King of Ithaca.*

TELEMACHUS, *his Son.*

KING EURYTOS.

A PRIEST.

EURYMACHUS,

PEISANDER,

POLYBUS,

CTESSIPUS,

AGELAÛS,

LEIOCRITUS,

A THRACIAN PRINCE,)

*Grecian Kings and
Princes; Suitors
of Queen Penelope.*

FIRST FISHERMAN.

SECOND FISHERMAN.

A BOY.

AN OLD HUNTSMAN.

PENELOPE, *Wife of Odysseus.*

DORIS, *Daughter of King Eurytos.*

MAID SERVANT TO PENELOPE.

FIRST FISHERWOMAN.

SECOND FISHERWOMAN.

THIRD FISHERWOMAN.

PRIESTESSES.

A SIREN.

PSYCHE.

Suitors, herdsmen, servants, fisher-folk, dancers, etc.

The Return of
ODYSSEUS

Акт I

ACT I

The Island of Ithaca. A fishing village on the east coast. Early morning; later, sunrise over ~~Adriatic~~ ^{Dorian} Sea. Beach in the middle. Cliffs to left. Small temple with altar in front, to right. Fishermen are seen about boats on the shore. Faint singing is heard in the distance off the left.

FIRST FISHERMAN (*indifferently*)

'Tis early yet, to think they will arrive.

SECOND FISHERMAN

I tell you no, the wind and tide both serve.

FIRST FISHERMAN

The dawn, scarcely as yet, ripples the waves.

SECOND FISHERMAN

What think you, fool, that lovers wait for light
To set about a journey gives them joy?
No fog, last night, drifted about our doors.
The moonlight every hour spangled the sea.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

I warrant you they started while the moon
Still lit the heavens, or while the day star glowed.

(The singing grows a little louder)

FIRST FISHERMAN

Then they must row, not sail, and so be slow;
For hardly yet the winds have waked from sleep.

SECOND FISHERMAN

The stoutest arms propel Telemachus,
And loyal hearts that faint not at fatigue.
Our Ithacans row hard to reach their goal.

FIRST FISHERMAN

Well, I will go and see my boat is bailed,
Nor spend my time spying 'neath empty palms.

SECOND FISHERMAN

You can do little, ere they will appear,
And at first sight our signals must wave forth.

FIRST FISHERMAN

I've fish to catch that lovers do not lure,
But lovers eat. Love gives them appetite.

*(They go off along the beach—right.
Wives of Fishermen enter, one by one)*

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

FIRST FISHERWOMAN

The Queen will soon come down to greet her son.

SECOND FISHERWOMAN

Sad lady! That to-day will give her joy.

FIRST FISHERWOMAN

Let's clear these nets; for here she must await.

SECOND FISHERWOMAN

The Princess, too, will give her company;
Less lonely will the hours be if she stays.

*(They begin to gather up the nets that the men
had spread on the beach to dry)*

FIRST FISHERWOMAN

Years of neglect no woman ought endure;
A son cannot make up for all she lacks.

THIRD FISHERWOMAN

Why should she stay alone when many sue?
Is she a priestess vowed to singleness?

SECOND FISHERWOMAN

They say Odysseus is her only thought;
Her only guile, poor plots to hold men off,
Who tell her that the King is long since dead.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

THIRD FISHERWOMAN

And they are right. Why should she still hold out?
Odysseus has been gone these twenty years,
And twenty more will not see him return.

SECOND FISHERWOMAN

Hush, hush, be still! What if the Queen should hear?

FIRST FISHERWOMAN (*who is rolling up the nets*)

The Queen could better use your hands than tongues.

THIRD FISHERWOMAN

Well, had our King more lives than other men?
A little water drowns the lustiest.
A fall, a spear, a vapor or a god
Can kill a king. Have I not seen men die?

FIRST FISHERWOMAN

O stop your bitter tongue. Do you alone
Of all this isle make offerings for the dead?
No year revolves that does not feed the sea
With those we wed or those our bodies bear.

*(Enter Eurymachus and Peisander over rocks
from the left, they cross over, see the women,
then speak to them)*

EURYMACHUS

Have you heard ought of young Telemachus?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

WOMEN

We wait for him; he surely must come soon.

(They have now got all the baskets, creels and nets ready to carry off)

EURYMACHUS *(to women)*

Be off and bring us news of what you learn.

(They gradually go off to right. Once more singing is heard in distance, off the left)

(To Peisander)

That streak of blood across the eastern sky,
Forbodes our fortunate deed. We shall succeed,
And stain the sand with King Odysseus' blood,
Drawn from the only fountain where it flows—
Telemachus, his son. See, all the waves
Respond with mirrored red, to urge our hands.

PEISANDER *(crossing to steps of temple sits on stone coping—right)*

The dawn is not the hour for youth to die.
Wait for to-night; the death of day is the time.

EURYMACHUS *(follows him, right center)*

What ails you? Sunlight purges fear away,
Not courage, which is stronger with the sun.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PEISANDER

Darkness gives crimes a courage light destroys.
Odysseus must be dead, I grant you that,
And I have urged my suit, as have the rest,
Upon Penelope, and racked her house.
But you well know Odysseus saved my life,
And gave me harbor and his royal help,
When a base brother drove me from my throne.

EURYMACHUS

Well, he is dead who proved so much your friend.
What now you want, his son's life militates.
(Sits on opposite coping stone, down right)

PEISANDER

Telemachus would let his mother wed.

EURYMACHUS

Yes, let his mother wed and go away,
So leaving him possessed of all the realm
His father left. Would you consent to that?

PEISANDER

No, Ithaca must be her dowery.
Whichever of us wins her must be lord
Of her and of Odysseus' kingdom, too.

EURYMACHUS

Now when he brings a powerful ally,
 We'll strike both down before they grip the land.
 Why should we wait for all their tedious plans?
 Or yield him joyance of a wedding day,
 Who stands between us and our own desires?
 For should the priest persuade him there's a plot
 Against his life, as he has tried to do,
 Telemachus might flee and call to arms
 His father's friends, the kings who conquered Troy.

PEISANDER

To kill a boy we've known so long is base.
 The lad has talked to us with manly words,
 And bade us pay our suit but spare the land.

EURYMACHUS (*rising angrily*)

"Base! Base!" Your brother's base. My plans are base.
 What are your plans and you? You vacillate
 'Twixt bad and worse. You balk my way
 To ease your conscience of some old offence.
 Where is Polybus? Look! The hour grows late.
 He and his spearmen should have come ere this.

PEISANDER (*rises*)

I urged you not to trust him with our men.
 His mind is able and his courage good,
 But Bacchus is his god. He drinks or sleeps.
 What can we do if we are left alone?

(*Goes to Eurymachus*)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

EURYMACHUS (*close to Peisander*)

Wait for a chance to find the Prince off guard,
And separate from the sailors and armed men.
Our greeting might turn out the time to strike.

PEISANDER

To gain by smiles an entrance for a sword
Is not my way.

*(They separate. Peisander goes back to steps.
Eurymachus to right center)*

I do not like the work.

(Re-enter Fisherwomen from along the beach)

FIRST FISHERWOMAN

We searched the shore, but no Telemachus.
Our men say it is early for him yet;
You'll hear their "hullo," when they sight his boat.

EURYMACHUS (*to women*)

We wish to bid him welcome with the rest.

(To Peisander)

In this sea air to sit is to be chilled;
Let's stroll along the beach and stir our blood.

(They go off to the right)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

FIRST FISHERWOMAN (*going to left, but looking back at Peisander and Eurymachus. The other women are on higher rocks*)

Black welcome will the Prince receive from them.

(*Nearer music*)

SECOND FISHERWOMAN

Hark! Hark! Hear you not flutes? (*runs to back of stage*)
Here comes the Queen with priestly offerings
For the salt altar of the sailors' god.

(*The women gather together on beach. Other fisher-folk and children ascend rocks. Queen Penelope enters from left, preceded by flute-players, girls with garlands, and white-haired priest*)

PENELOPE

The sea I scanned from every vantage ground,
Descending from the palace to the shore.
Each hillock was a tower with seaward eyes,
But naught revealed. So now my son is gone
Into the dark of distance, which still holds
His father voicelessly, and a new fear
Of silence that may spread from day to day,
From year to year, torments me.
Yet the high gods that love the altar flames,
And savor of burnt offerings, still may hear
May pity, may relent.

(*Crosses to altar, right center*)

First I will lay
 Upon Poseidon's altar richest gifts,
 And pray propitious airs may breathe
 Around my voyagers on their different seas,
 Breezes that blow homeward, with homeward thoughts.

*(Advances to altar and places garlands and
 other offerings, which she receives from an
 attendant)*

SECOND FISHERWOMAN *(to her companions)*

Her very sighs would waft an argosy;
 Her prayers turn feet she loved from any fate.

PENELOPE *(to a boy)*

Run lad to the cliff and see if now they come.

(Exit boy up rocks to left)

*(She goes up steps of temple and looks out
 over the sea)*

I wait and always wait. The waters bring
 The fisher-fleet and merchants with their goods,
 And even loathsome lovers, time and time again;
 But him who sailed in radiant strength to war,
 And conquered men, as he had won my soul,
 Ocean refuses to return.

(She sits gazing at sea)

*(The boy reappears on the cliff and keeps look-
 out facing towards the right, watching the
 beach and the sea)*

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

SECOND FISHERMAN (*returned from his boat*)

Odysseus was a god in worldly might,
His shining armor shielded a firm heart,
While his wise thought could battle with the gods,
To win his way in spite of their ill-will.

PENELOPE

If he were dead, then I could do the rites
And comfort me by those sad services
We render them that sleep, thinking we serve
Them still, by solemn acts. Or, I could have
Sweet talk of him with those who knew him well,
Then glad as I to tell of some high deed
That showed him first of men.

SECOND FISHERWOMAN

Unless a woman saw her husband dead,
The fallen chin firmly held by linen bands;
Or she is told by one who saw him die,
Then let her hope.

*(Priest kindles fire upon the altar. While he
is officiating at altar Priestesses sing)*

FIRST CHORUS

No man can overthrow Death,
He strews the strong with the weak.
Warriors he spurns like his breath,
He herds the proud with the meek.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Death, where he walks is high Lord,
Breaker of life and of limb.
Death has no ears and our word
Heedlessly falls upon him.

Death has no eyes, and our tears
Stream down our cheeks unseen.
Death has no heart and our fears
Shake us, but change not his mien.

SECOND CHORUS

All things are different from Death—
Sleep with its waking again,
Ruddy of mouth, deep of breath,
Rouses from where it has lain.

Partings are but for a time;
Hearths that await a return
From a far distant clime,
Greeting their lord soon shall burn.

But the dead do not awake,
And the dead do not return.
No, though our hearts may break,
Sealed is the funeral urn.

BOY (*from cliff, pointing down shore—right*)

They come, they come, I see their flashing oars,
Which wrestle with the current at the cape.
The tide has swept them to the lower bay;

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

They've missed our channel, or seek nearer land.
Some help they'll need safely to beach their ship;
The breakers there roll frothily and fierce.

*(Fishermen and boys hurry off along the shore
—right. The women and children gather
on the rocks and beach. During the general
movement Peisander and Eurymachus come
and conceal themselves in the crowd)*

PENELOPE

Boy, can you see the Prince Telemachus?

BOY *(from cliff)*

Two forms stand at the prow spattered with foam,
A youth and maid supported by the mast,
Holding each other on the uneven deck.
He points her out the places on the shore.

PENELOPE *(to Priest, as she looks toward cliff)*

A scattered heritage on this sad isle,
Is all he can display; perhaps, regained
From ruthless hands, if he can mount the throne—
Left empty by his father all these years—
And wedded, wield in show his father's power,
Letting the name of king piece out his youth.
So far I see my way—
But to no man's embrace will I consent,
Who once found home in great Odysseus' arms.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PRIEST

You are beset by a foul, carnal pack,
Pretenders to your hand, who waste your lands,
Invade your home, debauch your maids,
And make their days an endless revelry,—
Yours, hideous forebodings, hourly dread.
Did monkeys mate with wolves, and from these spring
A monstrous race, ruttish and ravenous,
They could not match these beasts in human form.

PENELOPE (*who has been looking out to sea, startled*)

I see Peisander and Eurymachus!
There, there, behind the rocks—muffled and close!
What brings them here? No good to me or mine.

PRIEST

At worst they only spy upon the Prince.
They are too few to do him any harm.

PENELOPE (*straining her eyes seaward*)

The distance or my tears hide him from view.
Oh! Do you think that this will ever end?

(*Penelope comes to steps of temple*)

PRIEST (*goes to the steps of the temple close
to Penelope. The sacred altar is rekindled
and kept burning. The crowd in distance
is heard*)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Telemachus once wed, enthroned and crowned,
Much may we hope—in spite of new-born fears
Lest at his throne they aim some fatal blow.
This hope and fear, this prayer and awful risk
Must rend your mother-mind until the event.

PENELOPE

And am I doomed to pass my life in fears?

PRIEST

Beseech the gods that his young arms be strong.

*(Noise of approaching crowd grows louder—
right)*

But see! At last our wanderer returns.

*(Enter Telemachus, Doris and King Eurytos.
Behind them Odysseus, disguised as an old
man, a beggar. He goes down left. Eury-
tos and Doris left center. Telemachus runs
to his mother and prostrates himself at her
feet)*

PENELOPE

Arise dear child; force me not thus to lean.
I would look up to you and feel you close,
Sure that my arms contain what I so love.

TELEMACHUS

The gods be thanked, I find you as you were
When I set forth—but lovelier, dearer grown.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PENELOPE (*goes to center with Telemachus*)

A brighter brow you bring from your sojourn
Than home and this sad isle equipped you.
And so my thanks will lend my welcome warmth
To those whose care has proved such medicine.
Eurytos, welcome.

(*Eurytos comes to center, kneels and kisses her
hand. Telemachus crosses to Doris, left
center*)

How I wish this land
Could give you more than half a welcome, and
Its King receive you as befits a king!

KING EURYTOS

Fairer than my deserts would welcome be
That coupled with your kindness his who won
The greatest fame at Troy, where all were great,
And taught our Grecian lords, so long encamped,
Around the stubborn town whence Helen fled,
To conquer it and raze it to the ground.

PENELOPE

Had you been there, you would have won renown.

KING EURYTOS

Too young was I to be of that famed fleet.
My crown I'd give to have borne Odysseus' spears.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

But now I bring my daughter, dearer far
Than throne or fame, to wise Odysseus' son.

PENELOPE (*holding out her hands to Doris*)

Princess, I welcome you—

(*Doris runs into Penelope's arms*)

Yes, with a heart
Full of fond hopes of sweet companionship,
Well purged of all a mother's foolish fears
And jealousies that she may lose her son
In seeming so to gain.

DORIS

That my own mother died when I was born
And that I love your son, describes, perhaps,
Dear Queen, the heart I bring to you,—

(*falling to her knees*)

Worshipped among these isles where'er a girl
Bends dreaming o'er her work and as she plies,
Comforts her tremors at the great god Love,
By singing songs of your deep loyalty,
And that which gave it root.

PENELOPE (*lifting Doris up tenderly*)

Your double need, shall have my double love.
Your confidant and mother I shall be.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

TELEMACHUS

Now these good words are said, that warm our hearts,
Let's hasten on where fire and food await;
For Doris is as wet as any fish,
And I am empty as these idle boats.

DORIS

And who will see that our old friend is warmed
And fed and speeded on his way?

(All look at Odysseus who is on the left)

TELEMACHUS *(to Penelope)*

A venerable man of many wars,
And wanderings, seeking his distant home,
With empty purse, begged of us passage here,
And Doris' pleading won him his request.
He paid us well in tales that calmed our haste.

PENELOPE

All shall be as you wish. *(To Priest)* Befriend his need.
The stranger in this isle, whate'er his plight,
Must have the care we pray our King may find
In his dark wanderings—though he is strong,
Attended, nor can lack great wealth of spoil.

(Procession of flute-players, girls, etc. Penelope offering her hand to King Eurytos, all pass out to left. Telemachus kisses his mother again, then gazes after her as she passes up the path. Doris, leaving Telemachus, goes back to Odysseus)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

DORIS (*to Odysseus who comes to the left center*)

Here is a ring—a girl's ring is not rich—
Say in your home, a princess gave it you,
Who mad with love Odysseus' son bestowed,
Wished all the world to drink love's overflow,
And something of her joy to flood all hearts.

ODYSSEUS

Daughter, for age if honorably worn
May thus address even a princess,
The gods were in good mood when you were born,
And may they always bless your prince and you.

*(Doris and Telemachus go out at the left;
fisher-folk scatter to their homes, boats,
work. Odysseus and Priest follow a few
paces then stand watching Telemachus and
Doris)*

(Re-enter Eurymachus and Peisander from beach)

EURYMACHUS (*to Peisander*)

Lost, lost is now our better chance to strike.
Curse on Polybus,—his befuddled plans!
Come, let us follow! We may meet our force.

*(Exeunt Eurymachus and Peisander after the
crowd, off the left. Odysseus, interested, has
singled them out and watches them off. He
pauses as if not sure which way he should
proceed)*

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PRIEST (*looking intently at Odysseus*)

Your age and mine cannot be far apart.

ODYSSEUS

I'm bleached by time but hardship's blight as well.

PRIEST

An early snow has beaten on my head
While waiting for our King Odysseus' face.

ODYSSEUS

Were you his friend?

PRIEST

Since boyhood—and till death.

ODYSSEUS (*still looking after Peisander and Eury-
machus*)

They say he'll need a friend when he returns.
His palace swarms with foes, who woo his wife;
Waste his won wealth; make hiccough mock of war
And him, over their wine; and flout the gods.
But this is rumor; this cannot be truth.

PRIEST

The truth is worse; for after all their waste
And insolence, their riot and their lust,
The Queen's great terror of their ruffian hands,
They plot now to destroy Telemachus.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS (*turns sharply and listens*)

Murder—the boy who went with that sweet girl,—
As dainty as the double of a birch
Mirrored in mountain pools!

PRIEST

Their wedding is the signal for his death.

ODYSSEUS (*covering his eyes with his hand*)

And can no hand prevent this cruel fate?

PRIEST (*looking at Odysseus in amazement*)

None—save the hand that hides your weeping eyes,

(Seizes his hand and examines scar)

Once wounded by the anger of a friend,
When we were boys. I see that scar
And know I guess aright. Odysseus lives!

*(After the recognition a pause. Priest leads
Odysseus to a seat by the altar)*

ODYSSEUS

And was I hid until I raised my hand?
Shall I be known by others easily?

PRIEST

None; not Penelope would dream 'twas you.
Too young are they to picture all life's scenes.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

We recognize a road we've traveled on,
And I have gone your way and know the signs.

ODYSSEUS

What unexpected consummation crowns my fame!
I sailed from home and battled many years
To win again King Menelaus' wife,
Helen, whom Paris stole away from Greece,
Bearing to Troas woes for all his blood.
There with the Grecian kings I bore my part,
And in the event none more than I achieved.
Helen to Menelaus I returned.
At length I come to Ithaca, my home,
And see my wife pass by, but cannot speak
Or touch her hand and have her turn to me.
My boy in kindness grants me beggar's boon,
While insolent princes fatten on my flocks.

(The altar fire is just dying out)

Helpless I stand who saved the Argive kings;
Spurned by the living who once dared the dead.
What mystery's here?

*(The altar fire spurts up in a last flame. A
pause)*

What? Can your altars tell?

PRIEST

The wise are they to whom the dead have talked.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS (*rises and speaks with suppressed agitation*)

While Menelaus' wife I gave him back,
I hide my face from sad Penelope.
With haughty crest I warred on Priam's land;
Alone, in rags, I come back to my own.
Ten years false Helen's lord has had her cheer;
But twenty years, like largest pearls in a chain
That holds too few and smallest at the ends,
Are lost to me of my true Queen's true love.

(*The altar fire revives as the priest tends it*)

What say the gods who guard the hearth and home,
Who, built by me, another's crumbling house,
And, I away, let mine become a sty?

(*They both stand by the altar*)

PRIEST (*peering into the fire*)

They say that what Odysseus wrought at Troy
Against high walls and heroes of renown,
He'll do again against a coward pack,—
Unfortified, unguarded, unprepared,—
Who deem him now a shade in Acheron.
Soon, soon Odysseus you can claim your own.

ODYSSEUS

Craft, first must find a way, when force is weak.
So I will quell the longings of my heart;
Hold the hot hatred I would hurl at once,
Until I gauge the weakness and the strength

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Of this mad, far-famed crew that lord it here.
Ah! Ah! I babble like a boy just home
From his first visit, full of his affairs;
Who talks his fill, but will not hear a word.
What has been done to rid you of this pest?

PRIEST (*coming to him in front of temple*)

What could a woman do but shun the worst
By every dexterous play of mind and speech?
Putting her suitors off with patient words,
She wove with cunning fingers a great web
Wherein she stitched the story of your wars.

(*Odysseus is intensely affected*)

Thus could her mind brood always upon you;
Thus could she point your son to what you were;
And thus for coming years preserve your fame.
She prayed, with woman's fondness for the past,
That her tormentors would extend the time,
That she might honor more her absent lord,
Lost though he were 'twixt home and victory,
Sewing a shroud against his father's death—
Aged Laërtes, tottering to the tomb—
And this accomplished, she would quickly wed.

ODYSSEUS (*hotly*)

Has she so promised? Has her choice been made?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PRIEST

Her story's never done; new scenes appear,
As travelers come, or minstrels, with fresh songs
Of what Odysseus wrought on the plains of Troy.
Then when she seems likely to end, at night,
Her women say, she leaves her bed and flits
Like a ghost to her task, as though in dreams
To labor on; but deftly ravel out
The patient woven toil of all the day.
Thus she postpones the fatal, deathlike choice.

(Odysseus, overcome, falls upon Priest's breast)

ODYSSEUS *(after a pause)*

What labors have I left to woman's hands!
But my own blood, Telemachus! What of him?
Could he not find some way to rout his foes?

PRIEST

You truly say that he is your own blood.
But he has just returned from fruitless search
In many land for you, seeking the kings
Of the Greek states, who were with you at Troy.
Now, mourning you as dead, he plans to reign,
Young King Eurytos promising support,
Whose only daughter Doris he soon weds.

(Odysseus sits on steps of temple)

The King and Princess have just come to us

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

To note the mind and temper of our guests,
When they surmise our plans.

ODYSSEUS

But you declared his marriage sealed his doom.
Does he know this?

PRIEST

He will not think their venom is so ripe.
Long years have passed, nor have they hurt a hair.
They jest with him and treat him like a boy.
I see their mood is changed with change in him
To man's estate, but he does not see this.
Then, too, I hear their threats.

ODYSSEUS

How has Penelope endured all this?

PRIEST

A veil of tears long dried conceals her soul,
Through which the gods alone can peer.
While you were taking Troy, though long delayed,
She bore a proud and happy countenance,
Though sometimes fear would bring her helpless hand
To her breast for breath; still she was bright and brave.

*(Odysseus rises and looks lovingly up the path
taken by Penelope)*

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

But when the rest of the great names returned,
Resuming the old life among their kin,
And you were still away, I saw her pine.
The gods have vexed her with a daily woe.

ODYSSEUS

No, not the gods, but I have tortured her.

PRIEST

Nor would her suitors suffer her to hope,
Or to have faith. What she has, heaven has saved.
You stayed (they laughed) where other loves allured.
You'd caught at Troy a soldier's fickleness.
Some goddess captive to your godlike deeds,
Had begged high Zeus for your companionship,
And you had gone to join the Olympian group,
Never again to see poor Ithaca.

ODYSSEUS

What damnèd torture to her gentle soul!
O cursèd crew! Accursèd, cursèd crew!
*(He crosses to the path to the palace, left center,
and walks about in an agitated mood)*
Before the sun sets you shall pay your score,
Nor keep a penny for death's ferryman.

PRIEST

Let me be close to you in what you plan.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS (*going up and down beach on the left*)

I must devise how best to sample them—
A sailor from Odysseus' ship might do,
Escaped from perils that engulfed the rest.
'Twould quake their coward hearts to know he lives.
Their sudden pallor would be good to see.
Yes, I can steer them from surmise of truth,
And gain their ear and their close company.

PRIEST

That will be easy, for they live to play
And welcome a diversion as a gift.

ODYSSEUS

I'll spit my hate at him for this long voyage—
A lifetime from my house and friends and fields—
Which I now feel more than the meanest slave
That followed me to Troy, in homesick dreams.
Their hopes that they are left alone, I'll puff
And prove Odysseus never can return.
Thus I can win my way. When I have learned
Their habits and their strength—then I can strike.

(Takes him in his arms)

But tell me more about Telemachus.
A babe held high up in its mother's arms,
Was the last thing I saw with dimming eyes
When I gazed backward from my Troy-bound ship.
Is he as manly as he looks to be?
And worthy of the Princess for his bride?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PRIEST

Yes! manly, worthy. He is all the son
Of wise Odysseus and Penelope should be.
But woman's happiness rests not on these.
He loves adventure and to see strange lands.
The man in him is strong, the lover weak.

ODYSSEUS

Yet men were not begot to mind the fire.
Their voyages from the hearth have won all wealth;
Subdued the brute and brute-like savages;
Plucked knowledge from the stars, power from the sea;
Honor from war, wisdom from wandering;
And like great Hercules, on labors thrived,
Which sent them to the corners of the earth.

PRIEST

I see that woman never can be satisfied—
Having her joy in man as is her fate—
For were she queen, high arbiter of life
And death for millions of her race; and though
Thousands of soldiers' lives sustained her throne,
But were without a child hugged to her breast,
She would be still unsatisfied.
Since, then, weak, changeful man can never match
Her dream of what he is, or through her might become,
What joy can husbands give, e'en giving sons?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

One sorrow hoists new hopes for deeper fall.
Her god hurled down, can she a better make?

(Voices heard without, off left)

Her son becomes another woman's woe,
If not her own shame, her death dealing fate.
She must sit tearful, pale and comfortless,
The tragedy of our so smiling world.
But this is an old priest's talk, not a king's.

ODYSSEUS *(listening to loud voices drawing nearer)*

'Twere best be hid from those who so contend.

*(They conceal themselves in doorway of temple.
Enter Polybus, an old huntsman and armed
men, drunken and noisy)*

ODYSSEUS *(pointing at old huntsman)*

See how the poor clod's eyes and ears stand out;
His puzzled head leans to the drunkard's lips,
Who never listened in his sober sense
To ought that gave such labor to his wits.

(Polybus falls down)

PRIEST *(looking at Polybus)*

I mark some men can only see the sky
When on their backs, in a ditch with croaking frogs,
And farthest from the splendor they behold.

(Polybus is dragged to his feet)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

POLYBUS (*leaning upon an old huntsman, both intoxicated*)

More truths I'll tell you that you never knew.
I am a prince and you are but a slave,
Yet all my wealth, and lands and palaces
Are not myself. My soul is different far
From what I own or what surrounds my life.
High as Olympus soars above the plain
Is the soul of a man, above, above. . . .

(*Falls down again*)

HUNTSMAN

You tell us marvels, master. Speak again.

POLYBUS (*incoherent, gesticulating, rises to feet*)

PRIEST (*to Polybus*)

An earlier hour sees you than your wont.
The morning air is better for young men
Than midnight feasts and unmixed wine and maids.

POLYBUS

To-night (or is't to-day?) I have had both—
I've played the night long and come out at dawn—
And early rising is not good, say I,
When you've not closed your eyes from dusk to dawn.

PRIEST

When night has added fever to the day,
The fresh, cool air, perhaps, will cure your heat.

POLYBUS

From you, old man, I have not asked advice.
 I promised 'Rymachus to meet him here.
 He cannot breakfast, if he has not killed
 Some creature wakened from the dewy brake.
 Let them all sleep, say I, hunter and game.
 'Twere better so, all sleep and do no wrong.
 The world is vile except the hours it sleeps.

ODYSSEUS (*humorously*)

When weak and wanton dreams befool the good,
 And drunkards know not even that they dream.

POLYBUS

Hail, old Silenus! Wine has worn you bare.
 Nor wars, nor work can make so big a hole
 In tailor's toil as wine can wear;—
 And you are full of holes. Come, you're our man.

*(Snatches wreath from the altar and throws it
 over Odysseus' head; then seizes him in at-
 titude of Bacchus and Silenus)*

I'll be your Bacchus—yes, the god of wine—
 And you the fellow and the fruit of drink.
 Come Bacchanals, come back, let's find us drink,
 While old Silenus chatters of his youth,
 And like all beggars, boasts how great his toils.

(All go out noisily, in mimic Bacchic procession)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS (*freeing himself from the embrace of
Polybus and returning to Priest*)

In this poor world where most of mankind sleep,
And in their dreams fight hard against the truth,
'Tis double waste that men whose brains can think
And lead their times, should drink their wits away.
Yet Bacchus here has tangled murderous schemes,
And given me time to save my princely child.
Come, faithful friend, I know a short, steep path.

(*Waving his hand to the sea as if in farewell*)

My feet must crush the fragrance of the hills.

END OF ACT I

АСТ II

ACT II

(Odysseus' Palace. South terrace. Entrance to Palace on the left. On the right an alley. Along the back from alley to Palace, a vinery. In center a garden with fountain)

Time: forenoon of same day

DORIS

Do I do right to tell you of my love?

TELEMACHUS *(teasingly)*

What could you talk about, if not of love?

DORIS

Many things, new things, if there were need.

TELEMACHUS

You could not please my ears or heart so well.

DORIS

But am I right to say and say again
That I can find no fleck or flaw in you?

[41]

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

TELEMACHUS (*very seriously*)

Right as the sun that feeds that which it warms;
Though all your praise send me to countless prayers.

DORIS

The sun grows fierce at last, burns and destroys.

TELEMACHUS

Death from your love would be the flower of life.

DORIS

Yes, I have felt that too—death is not hard
When love has found the limit of its joy.
Death seems but birth into an ampler love.
But if I bare my heart, perhaps, you'll tire.

TELEMACHUS

Tire of the best that I have ever known?
Achilles in such love had found fresh strength.

DORIS

Nurse says that men care but for what they lack,
While certainty breaks off the edge of zest.

TELEMACHUS (*rises*)

Don't listen to that foolish body's talk.
Assurance is the door to fullest joy;
Beyond the mark of union lies our bliss,
For happiness can only grow with trust.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

DORIS

If I am good to you as I am now,
Will you then love me always—me alone?

TELEMACHUS

Your goodness and your love o'erpower me,
Till grateful wonder burdens me with pain,
That I so poor return can offer you,
For heaven's revealed gift to my ignorant heart.

DORIS

A god alive you give me—who wants more?
And I could kneel in worship endlessly.
O, how I long to help you in your life!
Can I not help when we at last are wed?

TELEMACHUS

You help me now, more than my words can tell.

DORIS

How does it seem to have a girl your slave?

TELEMACHUS

No, not a slave,—my goddess, soon my queen.

DORIS (*rises with pretended petulance*)

You love another more than you love me.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

TELEMACHUS

A woman more than you! She does not live.

DORIS (*laughing she comes behind him and throws her arms around him. He is seated*)

No, no! I see you love your mother more,
And I must be first in your every thought.

TELEMACHUS

Heaven gave to mothers for their sons one prayer.
So on their knees they beg their love may live,
And that their sons may not be left alone,
When they who gave them life and love are gone.
That which you ask, answers a mother's prayer;
You only ask to give perpetual love.

DORIS

Yes, I would bring you all her prayers can plead.
But when your father comes, he will be first
In all your thoughts and acts.—Will he be first?
No, no! You will not leave me, following him.
(Sits by him again)

TELEMACHUS

I will not leave you till death severs us.
You bring such brightness into troubled days

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

I sometimes think that you but masquerade
And are not Doris of Dylechion,
That wooded isle, sweeter to me than home;
But a bright star dropped down to comfort me
And guide my steps in pity of my plight,
As the moon came to sad Endymion.

DORIS

Ah, woe! A goddess will make love to you,
Then what can Doris do? Has any yet?

(Puts herself in his embrace)

But promise me you'll never listen, dear.
I—I must have you, and but I alone.

TELEMACHUS

And so must I have you and you alone.

(Kisses her—pause)

Come let me show you round your future home,
(They rise)

Where I was born; where I have spent my days.

DORIS

How wonderful to see where you were born.
O happy spot to own Telemachus!

*(Doris and Telemachus pass out, from the right
up the alley and off up the left)*

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS (*entering from the right, watches them and comes down alley to the right*)

(*To a maid servant who is coming from palace, the left*)

How fares it with your mistress in the house?

MAID SERVANT

No better and no worse than when she is out.

ODYSSEUS

A lonely woman is more safe at home.

MAID SERVANT

How can a house be safe that has no head?

ODYSSEUS

What do you mean?—A house that has no head?

MAID SERVANT

Are you a fool, old man, and do not know
Odysseus has been gone these twenty years,
And all goes ill with us in Ithaca?

ODYSSEUS

Yes, I have heard that he strives with the gods
Who bar his way and hold him from his home.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

MAID SERVANT

The gods, indeed! I've heard another tale.
But I will think no harm of him who loved
Me when a child and tossed me in his arms
When I could barely talk. Would he were here!

ODYSSEUS

And has it been so bad with him away?

MAID SERVANT

Can you look straight at me and ask? "So bad!"
Where there's no master, there can be no maid.
A pack of idle drunkards rule this place—
If riot can be rule—and work their will.

ODYSSEUS (*greatly moved*)

O what a grief! A child the King caressed,
Come to her bloom, is ravished by his foes—
And in his house—and undisturbed—Ah! woe!

MAID SERVANT

Worse yet, old man—if man can understand,
How devilish is motherhood with hate.

ODYSSEUS

Ah, had your master known, he had not stayed;
But hastened home to right such awful wrongs.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

MAID SERVANT

I'm past the help of man—were he a king.

ODYSSEUS

Nor man, nor king, nor gods? Is there no help?

MAID SERVANT

Nor man, nor king—nor gods—no, none can help.

What child can come out of this monstrous act?

Its father I know not, but I curse all

The drunken beasts who dragged me to their beds.

What monster shall I bear, myself a beast,

Mere flesh for their vile spawn?

ODYSSEUS

The best of them shall wed you for his wife.

MAID SERVANT

Farewell! The Queen has given holiday

To all the house in honor of her son.

The maids have gone along the sandy beach

And many of our high guests stray that way,

Or to the groves. The Queen will be alone.

(Maid lifts basket to her head and passes out)

ODYSSEUS

If cause I had not to revenge my wrongs

And had my house suffered no whit from these;

Yet would thy hurt so foul, irreparable,

Consume my mind till it had wrought thy will,

Thy deadly will upon them.

(Odysseus seeing Telemachus and Doris coming withdraws into the arbor along the back terrace. Re-enter Telemachus and Doris)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

DORIS

I saw a bird once flutter from a tree,
Which held the blooms of spring, and as it flew,
Around her and her song, there dropped and sailed
A fleet of guardian, sweet and rosy petals,
Which her spread wings had loosened from the boughs,
Glad of this flight with her that made them free,
With her that voiced the beauty that they felt.
I come to you so, guarded by sweet thoughts,
While lovely hopes, loosed from my girlhood days,
Hem me around, to hold off any hurt
In this my daring flight.

TELEMACHUS

Into my arms you may securely fly.

(She does so)

DORIS *(after a pause)*

When do you think we shall at last be wed?

(Odysseus goes up the alley to the right)

TELEMACHUS

When we have put to test my mother's friends
Who will, I know, in all haste leave our land,
If once convinced I take my father's place,
And have an ally near and strong in arms.

(Enter Penelope from the palace)

DORIS (*going to her*)

Dear mother, will your son weary of love,
Which I can never weary showing him?

PENELOPE (*fondling her*)

A woman's life is like a woodland bird,
It utters but one cry, to all appeals one note,
And that is love.

(*Crosses to Telemachus*)

To man's rough force, raw fame, his fickleness,
His sex's mastery, his wealth, his power,
She answers but by love—her one song—love.

(*She joins their hands*)

In other varied voice she cannot call,
Or give him fame for fame, battle for battle.
Woe, if her answer weary him and seem
Sign of inferior wit, and lower mould,
A poor exchange for all his gifts, puny
Or limited, monotonous, or dumb;
There is no cure.
The bird, her one note stopped, must pine.
But let her language fall on ears that hear,
It tells a gift man's genius cannot win.
Beyond his varied deeds and wealth and fame,
Lies an immortal boon, which is her love:
Not to be won by force, or splendid crown;
Or battled for, like an indifferent prize;

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Or tricked by sleight to proffer or to stay;
But gained, a heavenly gift, by man's unworthiness.
Son, now you hold what life cannot surpass.

TELEMACHUS

Where are there two such women in the world?
With you for wings I scarce can keep to earth.
But I must see what our rough fields produce.
The land has suffered, while I dreamed of love.
See, too, this litter heaped where none should be,
Around our door. My father's chariot
Hides here against the wall, fearing the feet
Of thieves and cowards where his sandals trod,
Or spiteful harm to his bronze throne of war.

(To Doris)

What say you, dear, have farmers time for love?

DORIS

I'll be the farmer's dog and follow you.
To pat a dog is not neglect of work.

TELEMACHUS (*patting Doris*)

No, you stay here and I will soon return.

(Telemachus kisses his mother. She blesses him. He goes up alley and off into fields, right)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PENELOPE

Doris,

(Doris runs and sits by Penelope)

I think men cannot be as we—
As women are—or as I am myself.
They, with the best intent, waver in love,
Are unreliable and weak of will:
With one love in their heart, can hold and press
Another to their breast, not in their hearts,
Or deeply in their lives. Their flesh is weak,
Not nice, in that it acts without the soul
And has a life apart, too lightly stirred.

DORIS

I'd stake my life Telemachus is true.

PENELOPE *(smiling and patting Doris)*

The gods be thanked who made in womankind
These two gifts one. Spirit must prompt our flesh.
Where love is not, there then can be no lust,—
No touch, no kiss, no motion of the flesh;
But all is cold and calm, of feeling negligent.
If pressed upon to yield, still lacking love,
To give love tokens, which are the soul's speech,
Our mind revolts, disgust and loathing rush
Like guardians armed to stop such infamy,
Such desecration of that earthly heaven,
Each in her heart may have if she be true.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

DORIS

But O Penelope, the years have passed
With youth and strength and quick and ardent moods.
How have you borne his absence all these years?

PENELOPE

Yes, every bright day has cried out for him,
And every night some fear has forced me gasp
“Where is Odysseus who should be my stay?
Where is the god whose place is by my side,—
The only man whose name can thrill my flesh?”
My mirror tells me that much time has passed,
For weeping wears the neck and arms and limbs
From the fresh fullness that the bride brought forth,
A waste unharvested.

DORIS

I grieve for girls
Who pass their prime unmated and forlorn.

PENELOPE

Worse than an unwed maid, is married barrenness.
A wife whose fruit must wither on the tree,
Is in a bitterer case than she who sits
Unwed and sees her blossoms bear no fruit.

DORIS

I could not let Telemachus go forth
Knowing not where he fared, or if he lived;

Or if some woman touched him, kissed him. No!
 Life is too short for such harsh pupilage.
 Why I should die if he were gone a day;
 While if another robbed me of his love,
 I'd pray the Fates to punish both with death.

PENELOPE

Yes, so you think, and such was once my mood.
 But I have learned we must not strive with men;
 For woman's love is all man knows of heaven.
 If he can understand this, and though false
 And wandering far, lured by the moment's joy,
 Can hold within his breast her certain love,

(*Rises*)

Profaned, forgot, neglected, tortured, mad,
 And at the last return, confess his debt,
 And claim the heaven of peace lies in her heart,
 Then she has lived a handmaid of the gods,
 Doing for man their high eternal will.

DORIS (*restlessly*)

Can many women be as strong as that?
 But I must go and find Telemachus.

PENELOPE

Yes, go and find our boy and fetch him here,
 To show his mother what a lifetime lies
 Between her and her children whom she tires.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

DORIS (*throwing her arms around Penelope and kissing her*)

O no, no, no! But I will search for him.

(*Doris goes out up alley to right, looking backward and waving to Penelope*)

PENELOPE (*advancing to an altar*)

O ye great gods relieve my pain of heart,
Grievous, unbearable. Behold me now
Bereaved, yet not bereaved. Waiting for what?
Ah, what indeed! Is it for news of death?
Is it for love again, when it may come too late?
My breast will suffocate with suppressed fears;
Lonely, yet courted by officious loves.

(*King Eurytos enters, unobserved*)

No, not my flesh, but my unhappy soul
It is that suffers. To be given much love,
That wakes not love but pity, terror, wrath,
Leaves the soul empty, tired with bootless broods,
And shameful, if it give e'en pity play.

KING EURYTOS

Pity is never shameful; no, nor pity's touch.

PENELOPE (*startled*)

I'm glad it was no other heard my words.
Body pain can be borne; that's not the worst.
Sharp is its sting and sharply to be fought.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Yes, borne with bliss for some great end in view;
A child like one you love; or death for him;
Or, gulped as medicine to a far cure;
Or, a physician's hurt that looks toward help.
But my pain is the plague of heart and mind.
I live in dreams of what was once my joy;
I grasp at hopes that these may still be real;
'Twi'x dreams and hopes I live a daily death,
With ebbing strength and clouded, stricken hours.

KING EURYTOS

You are more beautiful than when a girl.
You have not suffered loss. You need not mourn.

PENELOPE

What is so cheap as beauty! Then why mourn
When beauty passes as all beauty must.
Yes, every hour beauty dies unblessed
Which harvested would deck a paradise;
Or seen by eyes swift to acquaint the heart
Would fire new Parises to dare the world,
And call new Agamemnons to new wars.
Proud women at whose smile a king could kneel,
And lift as offering a whole people's toil;
Charmed voices that have wakened sleeping souls,
Till song seemed, sword-like, to cleave open heaven.

EURYTOS

Sad Orpheus' harp once opened Hades' gates
And offered life to dead Eurydice.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PENELOPE

Now while we talk think how much beauty dies!
The shadows on the mountains steal away;
Winds ruffle lakes, lapped in the glittering sun,
And blot the images of heaven-high peaks,
Of rugged pine trees or the slim, white birch.
The flowers in a million gardens fall,
Like maiden hopes that leave sweet faces bare.
Yes, every hour, faces turn to stone
At news that kills the love that gave them grace;
And wistful wakings of the slumbering soul,
In youth as light as wind-anemone,
Are blasted ere the soul can say it lives.
So moonlight lifts the common shroud of night,
That lovers may behold the death-like sleep
Of all things beautiful, and feel the pain
Of pleasure passing while they dream their dreams.

KING EURYTOS

You still are young and joy will come again.

PENELOPE

You see me, friend, as I was when a girl,
And you a younger boy, but I have changed.
I sometimes wonder at the waste of love,
The wealth love scatters on its royal way;
For love when poor in purse is always crowned,
And gives with open hand, like unto kings.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

What, pray, becomes of all the gifts of love—
Its looks, its words, its kisses, its caress,
Its dreams, its fears, and its humility,—
Life's richest moments, when it coins the heart?

KING EURYTOS

These are not lost, I think.
The lover's glance that feeds upon a face
Till he forgets tasks, duties, laws, the world,
With all the common look of life's habitual round,
And comes to earth again, as to some country
Strange, peopled by curious folk;
The song sung of a summer night, love's voice,
Poured out like perfume from the helpless rose;
The fillet-fingers binding a blessed head;
The cheeks that touch in tenderness and part;—
All these rich gifts, moments of quick delight
Have immortality.

PENELOPE

What meanest thou?

KING EURYTOS

I mean they do not die. Love always lives.

PENELOPE

But how can such slight, transient things endure?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

KING EURYTOS

There are fair islands, far in western seas—
The sailors call them Islands of the Blest—
Whose seasons are the waftings of our souls;
Whose summer tides obey our full orbèd love;
Whose winters are the periods of our wars.
Yet winter is not like the frost with us
That kills and blasts the soil to barrenness;
But like the pauses in a summer day.
There where all life is daily at its prime,
And love is satisfied, our words of love
Like wingèd seeds descend, take root and grow,
Building bright bowers of eternal bliss.

PENELOPE

Not ours, my Lord. We speak no words of love.

KING EURYTOS

Mine, if not yours, dear lady, yet I know
Your impulse is so kind, that you too have
Fair offspring in those Islands of the Blest.

PENELOPE (*absently*)

Offspring, my Lord? Telemachus is here.

KING EURYTOS

No flowers bloom there that are not seeded here,
In the infinitude of lovers' ways,—
So they be kind and true. No faintest sigh

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Breathed to the moon, but there shows as a bud.
And lovers' vows, e'en vows that break, are there
A beautiful but barren plant; while vows
That last without deceit, perfect in faith,
Are there unfading trees with blossoms sweet.

PENELOPE

I would I knew that land, those blessèd isles.

KING EURYTOS

Penelope, cannot our children's love
Find counterpart in us? I am all yours;
And that which you since childhood have known well,
Can show so little chance of variance,
No risk would skulk behind our blended days.

PENELOPE

Be all I have I can depend upon,
Except my son; but ask no more.

MAID SERVANT (*enters from house, bowing toward
some one following her*)

The Prince Eurymachus would see the Queen.
(*Maid Servant looks sullenly at the Prince as she
retires*)

(*Enter Eurymachus*)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

EURYMACHUS

I wish the Queen what is already hers:
A good "good morning."

PENELOPE (*startled*)

Have you two famous hunters met?

KING EURYTOS AND EURYMACHUS

We have.

PENELOPE

Then may your pleasures keep you in accord.

KING EURYTOS

I hope some morning soon to hunt with you.

EURYMACHUS

There is not much here for the keenest sport.
A boar, a stag occasionally we find,
But glad we are of noble company.

(*King Eurytos bows and goes into the palace*)

EURYMACHUS (*turning to Penelope*)

Our Queen feels safer with her son at home.
I saw your early start to welcome him,

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

And your return. But he is not enough.
These long-time guests of yours will not give way
Before a boy. You need, fair Queen a man
Who knows men's hearts and heads—a mighty man.
Give me your hand and gain a swift defense.
Of all these high contestants I am first
In feats of strength and games of hardihood.
None can protect you or your realm as I.

PENELOPE

A man's strength can be shown in many ways
And I need help that does not cost so much.

EURYMACHUS

A man's help to a woman looks for pay.
Where do you see help proffered otherwise?

PENELOPE

Have men so changed from those I used to know?

EURYMACHUS

You were a girl and did not understand.
Besides, what's past is past; but men are men.

PENELOPE

Does that mean they are beasts? It cannot be.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

EURYMACHUS

Your beauty makes them beasts and your repulse
Of what they offer you—all they can give—
As safety, peace of mind, a quiet home
And pleasures that are every woman's due,
But do not fit the faded, withered, bent.

*(Odysseus enters from the right, without being
observed and conceals himself in vinery at
the rear)*

PENELOPE

My only pleasure and my chiefest prayer
Is joyance of Odysseus safe at home.

EURYMACHUS

If he's not dead why clings he far from home?
All his compeers were back ten years ago.
He loves or wars; he dallies or he fights.
In either case he does what pleases him,
While you and Ithaca are clean forgot.
Up, match his heedlessness and please yourself!
Should he return, he'd bring old bones and ills
For medicine and nursing, not for love.
A forced home-coming, pushed by weariness,
A woman should resent and not await.

(Odysseus acts as if he cannot believe his ears)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PENELOPE

He went a god and such he will return.
But were he brought to me feeble and old,
Sore needing me to tend him like a babe,
I'd praise the gods for that high privilege.

*(Odysseus kneels down and bows his head in
his hand)*

EURYMACHUS

Odysseus was a trickster, not a god,
Who used his wits where brave men use their swords.
Were he beside you now, I should be safe.

(Odysseus leaps up in fury)

What did he ever do but darkly plot
While braver men than he exposed their skins.
Good when the battle must be fought with tongues—
In female warfare he was always first—
Or to persuade against good eyes and ears,
Or blind his women-folk to his defects.

(Odysseus strides toward Eurymachus)

He dared not go to Troy until compelled
By very shame—and lied to stay at home.
Instead of waiting for that fox' return,
Go offer sacrifice that you are free,
And pour libations for a braver bed.

*(Odysseus makes as if he would rend him in
pieces)*

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PENELOPE

I daily pour libations for his weal.

*(Footsteps are heard. Odysseus withholds
his hands and withdraws behind chariot)*

EURYMACHUS

Await your gray-beard babe and stir the pap.
Ha! here comes cob-web brain and I must go.

(Exit Eurymachus)

(Ctessipus enters)

CTESSIPUS *(pats Penelope upon the arm. She draws
back)*

This gown becomes you, wear it oft for me.
Then I shall know you have me in your mind.
For I can see you have to make pretense
And cannot bare your heart before these brutes.
You love me more than any, do you not?
Would rather be with me than anyone?
I understand and do not ask for words,
That can be said and easily denied,
Or spoke with look and voice that hide the sense.

*(Draws near and smooths Penelope's dress.
Odysseus shows amazement and disgust)*

Our love is deeper than the breath of lips:
Sweet, secret symbols satisfy our souls
That seem to others dumb. Yes, yes, we know!

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PENELOPE (*moving away*)

Talk if you must, but do not come so near.

(*Odysseus smiles and places his hands on his ears*)

CTESSIPUS (*looking about uneasily*)

Is some one coming? I can see no one.
Your hair is wonderful! How long is it?
Not even faded gold. When it is loose
Some day, do let me see how low it falls.
I'm glad one woman does not talk of fat,
And wear her life out copying boys' hips.
Your hands! I love a woman with small hands.

(*Tries to take her hands*)

But that ring I have never seen before.

PENELOPE

'Twas one, when I was young, that brought me luck.

CTESSIPUS

Who would suppose you had a son so old.
Your figure is as shapely as a girl's.

PENELOPE

I ceased long since to care for flattery.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

CTESSIPUS

No woman who deserves it, but still cares,
And those who least deserve it love it most.
But I'll not flatter you. I'm a blunt man
And tell you to your face, you are a fool.

PENELOPE

That does not hurt. I often think I am.

CTESSIPUS

You are a fool to love with no response.
Love is a thing to spend a lifetime with.
If I can pass the time as pleasantly,
And do not need to be each day with you,
Call me a brother, cousin—what you will,
But lover, husband, no! Ha, ha, not that!
Were you my wife, think you I'd stay from home?

PENELOPE (*smiling*)

Were you my husband I should pray you would.

*(Odysseus who is in the alley on the right smiles
and makes mock threatening gestures at
Ctessipus)*

CTESSIPUS

Ah, witty too! You captivate my mind,—
You are too rare to waste upon a man
Who loves his armor better than your arms,

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Whose mind is dull to all a woman craves
With the rough work of killing other men;
Wasting his days in camp or on the sea,
And causing you more pain than time can cure.

PENELOPE

Women love men for being men, and bear
All pains brave men require willingly.

CTESSIPUS (*smirks and smiles*)

Ah, how you understand me! What great love!
(*Messenger enters hastily from left and whispers
to Ctessipus. Leiocritus enters with mes-
senger*)

I'm sent for. May I go? Farewell for now.

PENELOPE (*laughing*)

Thank your dear friends for serving me so well.
Stay out the council, give them due advice.

CTESSIPUS

They say they need my help. The matter's deep.
(*Exit Ctessipus and messenger into palace.*)

LEIOCRITUS

Lady, you'll live, I vow, a thousand years.

PENELOPE (*still laughing from Ctessipus' leave-
taking, sits on a stone seat—right center*)

Am I so old you think I'll never die?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

LEIOCRITUS

You live as though you thought a thousand yours,
Or countless lives like saints in India.

PENELOPE

Less than my mother's days will be my span.
One lifetime furnishes too many years.

LEIOCRITUS

Too many to waste, too few to be enjoyed.

PENELOPE (*rising*)

Your scheme of things and mine do not agree.

LEIOCRITUS

Life's not a scheme or a philosophy:
But heartbeats, tears or laughter, pain or bliss;
Wealth, poverty, distinction or disgrace;
The pinch of frost, the pleasant glow of fire;
A bed a maid has tucked or the bare ground;
The clasp of lovers or a lonely couch.
That man is wisest who is most alive
To feelings that befit the prime of strength,
And witness to the moment's mastery.

PENELOPE

To thrill each moment must be tiresome.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

LEIOCRITUS

To thrill at all is rare accomplishment.
Your garden does not bloom unvisited.
You do not plant upon a mountain top
You never climb, but where you often walk.
You smooth and smell the petals of the rose,
You carry in your hand, cut from its stalk.
A life whose pleasures are unplucked is mad,
And throws away the little life affords.

(Tries to seize Penelope)

Let me, then, give you pleasure, for I can.

*(Odysseus is about to leap upon Leiocritus.
Agelaiüs enters from house. He hurls back
Leiocritus. They fight. Leiocritus is wounded
and crawls away behind house)*

AGELAÜS *(to Penelope, dazed)*

Come to your senses, Queen Penelope.
Stay on the earth. Stop living in the clouds.

PENELOPE *(sinking into seat up left)*

If clouds could hide me from your eyes I'd stay
The queen of cloudland, lady of the mists.

AGELAÜS

Not when I tell you what I've heard to-day.

PENELOPE

What have you heard?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

AGELAÛS

That your Odysseus is not coming home,
But lives in Circe's isle, content with her.

PENELOPE

You heard that? How?

AGELAÛS

A sailor from the crew, escaped, is here,
Old and infirm from following your lord
In his hot, break-neck speed in hastening home.
Ha! ha! ten years is not enough for him,
When ten weeks would be long for fishermen
Slowly to sail from Troy to Ithaca.
And any sailor's wife would spurn her man,
Were he upon that easy voyage a year.

PENELOPE

O then Odysseus lives. The gods be praised!
Bring here his man.—My husband is alive!

AGELAÛS

O no! no! no! I hastened when I heard
Lest others should persuade you, now bereft.
(Seeing strange look in Penelope's face)
But I am slow, I've caught Odysseus' trick
And searching you I'm late. My chance is lost?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PENELOPE

Were there no other man under the sun
And I in terror of the forest beasts,
You never could persuade me.

(Penelope turns to flee. Agelaüs stands in her way)

Let me go.

AGELAÜS

I have a right to speak and you to hear.

PENELOPE

What right, forsooth, is common to us both?

AGELAÜS

The right of mutual lust. I know your need.

(Seizes her)

(Penelope in tearing herself away from Agelaüs is hurt and lies unconscious by house on the left. Odysseus rushes from his hiding place in the alley on the right, clutches Agelaüs by throat and mouth, bends head back, breaks neck, picks him up and hurls him into a cistern off the right, beside the alley; then quickly re-enters and goes to Penelope, who is prostrate on steps of house, on the left. He supports her and gets water from the fountain up left center)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS (*bending over Penelope takes water from a vessel and sprinkles it on Penelope's face*)

This unimagined horror, daily death,
Has this, dear wife, been what I left you to?
O woeful, wandering gods, who led me on,
How can your eyes bear unearned misery?

(*Odysseus hearing voices and footsteps withdraws*)

(*Polybus and Peisander pass across back of stage, in the vinery, talking. Peisander goes out, but Polybus leaves him and comes quickly down alley on the right, goes into the garden and sees Penelope unconscious on steps. He hastens to her*)

POLYBUS

Help! Ho! Help! The Queen is hurt!

(*As he hears hurrying footsteps*)

Hasten! Help!

(*Maid-servant, old herdsman and a boy come running from the palace and stand staring in terror at the Queen and Polybus*)

END OF ACT II

АСТ III

ACT III

Women's room in palace. At the rear is seen vaguely the tapestry Penelope had been weaving. Distaffs, spinning wheels and stools on left around great fireplace. Couch on right. Penelope lying upon the couch. Polybus standing at the side. Maid-servant, old herdsman and boy behind.

Time: afternoon of same day.

(Polybus whispers to maid-servant, old man and boy, who quietly leave the room,—right)

POLYBUS (*to Penelope*)

I sent your people to find out your Prince.
Telemachus and Doris soon will come.

PENELOPE

Too little of friends, too much of foes, I've seen.

POLYBUS

Madam, what happened? Were you ill or harmed?
I found you fallen, and almost thought you dead.

PENELOPE

I fell and fear I fainted. A misstep.
That's all. 'Twas nothing. No, no, nothing more.
Your coming was well timed. How chanced you there?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

POLYBUS

I'm hunting the old man who came to-day
With Prince Telemachus. He proves to be
A sailor from Odysseus' crew, escaped
Alone from an island, where a queen resides
Of more than mortal blood and mortal power,
Who all his fellows, even the captain, holds
In strong enchantment, she is mistress of.

PENELOPE (*lifting herself up; she speaks vaguely, as
if trying to recollect something*)

A sailor of Odysseus here with us!
At last the gods commiserate my pain.

POLYBUS

He saw his ship-mates changed by her to swine.
But not Odysseus. He is held by bars
Invisible, like hands in horrid dreams
That hem him in and will not let him pass.

PENELOPE (*falling back on couch in a daze*)

Am I alone, and evermore alone?
What! Can he never break this spell and flee?
My love—is it less powerful than her will?
Zeus, help him burst these bars invisible.

POLYBUS

Ugh, don't say that! My knees are weak. Ho! Ho!
The very news Odysseus lives and breathes

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Put out the fires in your ardent friends,
Till, shivering, some made speedy exit home.

PENELOPE

The fires cowards feel are quickly cooled.

POLYBUS

They have believed him dead, burned and entombed.

PENELOPE

While I have always known he was alive.

POLYBUS

Were he Prometheus, bound by iron chains
To rocky cliffs, these fools would quake and run.
Dead he must be, before they live at ease;
Although I tell them he is good as dead
In an enchantress' spell, no man can break.

PENELOPE

Less than a man is one who is so held.
Odysseus is a god, and wills his way.

POLYBUS

Zeus help her looks! O keep her true of heart
And hold Odysseus steadfast to her charms!

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PENELOPE (*wearily*)

Polybus, I am hardened to your jests.
Tell me the old man's story! Why delay?

POLYBUS

It is a story strange and full of marvels.
A tale for all who stay at home to hear.

PENELOPE

And will he tell it me? Pray, bring him here.

POLYBUS

We've fixed a time and place for him to speak,
That the whole house may know what he has seen.
To make all real, as it in fact befell,
So that the eye may help the duller ear,
We forced the sailor act Odysseus' part,
While we his followers pretend to be.
The Princess Doris will sit Circe's throne.

*(Peisander enters up the left, but seeing and
hearing Polybus conceals himself)*

Songs of enchantment, dances we have planned.
O you must come! I cannot tell you all.

PENELOPE

I cannot see Odysseus' counterfeit.
Excuse me from your games and merriment;
But bring me word of all the sailor says.
Make careful note. Bring me his very words.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

POLYBUS

I'll do my best with a bad memory,
But if, by chance, you change your mind, join us.
'Tis never hard to find us. We are heard.
Songs of enchantment! Dances!

(Imitates Greek dances grotesquely)

Ha! ha! ha!

(Exit Polybus, left)

PENELOPE

Songs of enchantment! Dances! Yes for fools—
Dances of death, and madbrained fantasies—
Who do not trust love's wings to cross great seas.

(Peisander glides into view from behind tapestry)

PENELOPE *(leaping up off the couch in fear)*

Oh! Oh!

PEISANDER

Why should you fear me, high-born Queen?

PENELOPE

Speak not to me, least trusted of all men,
But leave me, stealthy creeper, as you came.
You whom Odysseus saved, driven from your throne,
Received, protected, honored as a friend;
Now you who owe your life and wealth to us,

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Consume our wealth and plot our one child's death.
How came the gods to fit you with such guile?
Disloyalty and treachery feast on you,
Nor find one spot of love to break their teeth.

PEISANDER

Madam, you know full well my love for you.

PENELOPE

Speak not of love to me. To-day, at dawn,
I saw you close behind the rocks on shore,
Watching Telemachus—not for his good.
O by those oaths that still may bind your acts,
Unless you're weanèd from the fear of heaven,
I pray you spare my son; seek not his death.

PEISANDER

You wrong me, I shall prove it; you must hear.
I went to warn him of his enemies' plots,
But failed to see him, so have come to you.

(Doris enters at left, pale, distracted, her clothing torn. She leans against pillar by fire-place)

Send her away, for I must speak to you.

(Penelope hesitates between anxiety to hear Peisander and alarm at Doris' appearance, then hastens to Doris. Peisander follows her and whispers)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Protect Telemachus. Warn him to-night.
His foes sum all their plots to take his life.

(Peisander glides behind tapestry, then out in plain view on right)

PENELOPE *(takes Doris to a seat by fireplace, left center, and gasps)*

What ails you child? Where is Telemachus?

DORIS

I do not know. 'Tis well he is not here.

PENELOPE *(in terror)*

“'Tis well he is not here?” Well, well—you say?
(recovering herself)

Sweet Doris, Princess, speak. Has he been rough,
Or rude or cold? What is it, dear?
Forgive my son if he has wounded you.
Our guests have not been proper pedagogues.
The boy, perhaps, has caught their ruffian ways.

DORIS

Telemachus could never be like them—
But he will hate me—I have lost his love.

PENELOPE

Ah! now I see. A cloud has crossed the sky
That dawned so clear and promising for you.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

But lovers' quarrels do not spoil the crops.
The clouds will pass.

DORIS

A cloud envelopes me I cannot pierce.

PENELOPE

Come child, be plain. Speak not in mysteries.
But quickly tell me all.

DORIS

One of those frightful men made love to me.

PENELOPE (*laughing hysterically*)

So now I have a rival. Zeus be praised!

DORIS

How can you laugh? He took me in his arms.

PENELOPE

I'm glad Telemachus did not see that.

DORIS

Yes, he would hate me.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PENELOPE

No! No fear of that.

I only dread lest he had killed the fool,
And thus embroiled himself with all the crew;
Though little loyalty or love they show,
Except for crimes that need a virtue first.

DORIS

But could he not be killed and they not know?
I have not told you all, and cannot tell.

PENELOPE (*in alarm*)

Open your soul to me, or I shall die.

DORIS

He asked me things that I cannot repeat,
Yes, held me till I ripped myself away,
And as I fled, he kissed me on the neck.
I am defiled and never can get clean.
What shall I do, dear mother, you must know?

(*Buries her face in Penelope's arms*)

PENELOPE (*kissing her*)

I know too well their taint and sacrilege.
But human bodies though they be most fair
Are but the scabbards for the sheathèd soul.
All's well if that be bright;
Or like a traveling coat the mud may splash,

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

If we keep clean within.
Come let me drench the spot with this perfume.
But tell me, how did all this come to pass?

DORIS

These men have planned some sort of minstrelsy.
The old man we brought hither proves a bard,
Who promises them stories not yet heard
About Odysseus, whom he says he served.
He did not tell us that in the boat. How strange!

PENELOPE

I hear they crown you Circe in their sport.
But does your father know?

DORIS

They asked him for my help, the one he knew,
And, though Telemachus was far from pleased,
They thought they'd best agree—I asked it, too.

PENELOPE

What, you so brave?

DORIS

Yes, for I thought that if they could perceive
My actions and my will towards them were kind,
'Twould help Telemachus.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PENELOPE

And for your sweetness, foulness was their pay.
But why did no one save you from this beast?

DORIS

My father and Telemachus were called
To quell a quarrel in the stable-yard,
Between your servants and the Thracian prince,
Who killed, this morning, the best horse you had,
In a rough, wagered race.
Then, while I stood alone, the creature turned,
Hairy and huge—the one my father knew.

PENELOPE

I know him. I have had my turn. But you—
What did you say?

DORIS

I talked as I would talk to any man,
Until he scared me grinning through his beard;
Called me a child who needed a strong man,
Like him, to save me from the rest of the horde.

PENELOPE

To laugh and cry I am at once inclined.
By Hercules, a dull fool and a rogue
To make his strength so thinly clothe his lust.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

DORIS (*holding her wrists to Penelope*)

Bathe perfume on this place—and here—and here.
How can I clasp Telemachus again?

(*Enter Maid Servant*)

MAID SERVANT

Madam, our visitors again want wine.
They soon make merry in some impish play,
And say that Circe's palace serves good wine.

PENELOPE

These do not need to drink to turn to swine,
Nor Circe to transform them. Beasts they are
And wine will but increase their beastliness.
I'll see what there is left. But you stay here
And save our Princess if again they prowl.

(*Penelope goes out on the left*)

MAID SERVANT

Have they insulted you? Is not one left
Who has not felt the furnace of their breath?
But thank the gods that you escaped their arms,
And were not hurt like me irreparably,
To mother devils for earth's future bane.

DORIS

We all will help you every way we can.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

MAID SERVANT (*excitedly and strangely*)

I see a face in hell on which tears rain,
And where they fall they hiss on the moist skin,
And blacken the burned spots that twitch with pain.
Tears from a mother's eyes prayers cannot quench;
Tears from young girls deceived and cast away;
Tears from poor babes unfathered save in hell;
Tears from a wife stabbed by inconstancy.

DORIS

O stop! you frighten me! What mean your words?

MAID SERVANT

What words? Did I speak? I only saw a face
Now living, that seemed dead. A face. That's all.

DORIS

Whose face?

MAID SERVANT

One that I hope you never see.

DORIS (*thoughtfully*)

Who pours the wine?—the wine the men will drink.

MAID SERVANT

I pour it and some other girls with me.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

DORIS

You saw a face now living that seemed dead?

MAID SERVANT

Yes.

DORIS

I saw one living that I wish were dead.

MAID SERVANT

My vision then, perhaps, was prophecy.

DORIS

But prophecy to happen must have hands.

MAID SERVANT

Well here are two, and yours are two again.

While one will do. Oh! oh! the face!

(Starts back)

DORIS

Fear not; I'm here and there is none besides.

MAID SERVANT

Why should I fear to whom the worst has come?
Nor am I one to drive out fears with fears,—
Which were small gain. I guess your hidden wish.
I'll do it though I die. Bring me a drug.
To topple from a throne while the world laughs,
Would fitly shame these drunken ravishers.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

DORIS

The while we pay them for their insolence,
Which has defied all laws of gods and men,
We clear the way for Prince Telemachus
To rule his father's land—once more at peace.

MAID SERVANT

To rid this land so many years abused
Appears incredible; for all my life
This plague has wasted us. I cannot wait
For long-delayed revenge and our release.

DORIS

No word of this to any one. Your pledge.

MAID SERVANT

No word, indeed; now only acts can count.

DORIS

And if we suffer, it is willingly.

MAID SERVANT

I pray to live to see you wed and crowned.

DORIS

Let us go find the Queen. Where can she be?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

MAID SERVANT

Trouble finds trouble in this headless house.
The Queen can take no step, but she's beset
By some complaint or problem, some bad news,
Or sight of squandered goods, quarrels or worse.
To sit and weave is all the peace she has.
Her loom and distaff are her comforters.
But I hear voices—let us not be seen.

*(Doris and Maid Servant go out same exit on
the left as Penelope)*

(Enter Odysseus and Priest, right)

ODYSSEUS *(looks fondly at the objects in the room, then
turns and sees tapestry)*

Sweet Queen, your body-toil cheated the years;
Each stitch gained one day more for my return.

PRIEST

This is a picture of heroic deeds,
Double victorious as great deeds are,
Conquering here while you fought far away.
Mere images of strong and glorious things,
Though framed by gentle hands, wield victors' swords.

ODYSSEUS

The Queen, you think, will not surprise us here?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PRIEST

No, I just left her seeking her own room.

ODYSSEUS

You saw Penelope, and she was well?
I had to leave her sighing, 'twixt death and life.

PRIEST

Yes, sire, the Queen is quite restored again.
'Tis not the first time she has been so felled.

ODYSSEUS

Ah, woe, and woe, I ever left her side
To punish Paris! His crime's white to mine.

PRIEST

Since you could not invite toward you their rage,
When you were in the garden near the Queen,
By several slaughter as the beasts pranced by,
And risk the whole pack, summoned by their cries,
Why did you not depart such torture?

ODYSSEUS

Some ease it was to drink my cup of shame,
And share with her the sorrows I begot.
These rascals know me, as I know myself,
Nay, taught me some things that I never dreamed;
But paint with no excusing kindliness,
Such as we use when we describe ourselves.
Penelope must have been moved by them.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PRIEST

Her hurt humiliates, but never sways
A heart composed to know no love but yours.

ODYSSEUS

They diagramed and named my several faults,
What enemies see and friends, sometimes, will gloss,
They revel to reveal with eloquence,
That only hate can teach. I doubt myself.
Were I a judge and heard so fair a case,
So full of damning accusations unassailed,
My verdict would be given for their side.
How can Penelope withstand such pleas?
Did her scales never tip weighed with my blame?

PRIEST

No, nor the scales fall ever from her eyes,
That made you seem a god.

ODYSSEUS

Can any man be worth such loyalty?

PRIEST

The wives that have their husbands every day
Have torments similar. The world is full
Of men and women of such viperish tongues,
They tell poor wives all they surmise or see,
And turn the luckless husbands inside out.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

If, after twenty years, a woman loves
The man she wed, 'tis not in ignorance
Of all his faults, his weakness or his bounds;
But by some gift the gods in mercy send.
This sport they plan, which may hide murderous aims,
You think will give fair opening for our swords.

ODYSSEUS

It cannot fail; for they will be relaxed
And foolish, occupied in following
Odysseus' fortune in a far-off land.
They'll see him there, not sitting at their side.
The story with the music and the maze
Of dancing feet will dull occasional fears,
Till wine, at last, completes their helplessness.

PRIEST

The dread of you, when you declare yourself,
Will hurl upon them chariots and horse.

ODYSSEUS

These "would have gones," who never saw Troy-town,
Shall have their turn and face a soldier's rage.
You saw Penelope. What did she say?

PRIEST

The Queen is in close conference with her son.
Her tender arms enfold him from his fate,
As sad Andromache held Hector back.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS

Brave Hector left his queen for her defense,
While I—no more!
What was my Queen and Prince's conference?

PRIEST

Pacing the hall, where your throne lies defiled,
'Twas pitiful to hear the broken Queen
After Peisander warned her of the plot
To kill the Prince to-night, amid their play,
Her panic prove. "What hope is there?" she cried.
"Whom have we to oppose to all their band
In number, or in note or loyalty?
Our armed attendants,—few to those they've brought—
Are watched by them so close they dare not stir,
Unless to quit the island or their arms."

ODYSSEUS

Besiegèd soul, your terrors soon shall end!

PRIEST

Against a prince she threw a goat-herd's name.
Against a king a churl, clutching a scythe.
Her votive child full in their midst she saw,
As helpless as a victim priests can slay.

ODYSSEUS

Him she shall see with homage of a king.
Could they invent no plan to thwart these plots?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PRIEST

Telemachus impatiently made sport
Of her sweet fears and showed a manly front.—
Too strange for you to dream was her advice.

ODYSSEUS

And did his mother show the boy a way?

PRIEST

She clung to him as sailors to a spar,
And prayed him: "Son, stay not amid your foes.
Wait not so willingly the suitors' blows,
To-night while mimicing Queen Circe's court.
Seek the old sailor. If his tale seem true,
Launch out at once for this Queen Circe's isle—
With him as guide you cannot lose your way—
And break the spell that keeps your father there.
Alone I will hold out till your return.
Else—I myself will sail to front her charms.

ODYSSEUS

Could courage further go! O royal heart!
She saves him so. Yet madness sounds like that!

PRIEST

Could I have whispered—"Hush! the king is here,"
Which you forbade, her enemies from her mind
Had scattered like the troubles of a dream,
Or like the cattle that mad Ajax charged.

(The daylight is fading)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS

Your silence was more kind than confidence.
After a score of years a day to wait,
Even filled with cruelty, is but a day.
To know me would distract her with new fears,
And I must be a conqueror again
Before her faithful arms clasp round my neck.
How many do you reckon on our side?

PRIEST

All told we're six.
Yourself, Telemachus, Eurytos, I,
And two old herdsmen, not denied the house.

ODYSSEUS

How many are they; the number we must fight?

PRIEST

They're thrice, at least, in numbers all we have.

ODYSSEUS

Courage will always dare ten times its strength.
To ask less were disgrace. Tell the rest that.
Our signal is, when I beg for the bow.

PRIEST

They will be weak from laughter if you ask,
You, an old man, to bend Odysseus' bow,
Which they in boastful mood have striven to pull,
But could not stir the string.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS

Tell each our force whatever he should know,
Beyond what I have planned for each to do,
When summoned by my signal to the test.
I'll wait, remember, until wine has flowed;
Then when they are most rapt in revelry,
I'll pray them I may try Odysseus' bow.
At that same moment Doris must withdraw,
Which she can do when Bacchus strikes them blind.
(The daylight is growing dimmer)

PRIEST

They so regard their pleasures and this play,
They will do nothing to disturb the sport
Until your story's done. Time favors us.
(Hearing quick steps, he looks away from Odysseus)
Here runs the Prince to get you for his guide.
(Telemachus enters hurriedly. He is greatly excited. Seizes Odysseus)

TELEMACHUS

Old man, I brought you to these shores, my home,
Where once Odysseus reigned, wisest of kings,
Whom we have watched for and whom I have sought,
Yes, far and wide, but yet have heard no word.
You, now I hear, you coming thus to me,
Were with Odysseus, saw him, followed him.
Now by high Zeus, why have you been so dumb,

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

That neither in my ship that brought you here,
Nor on this soil that mourns your master's feet,
You said one word of this to me, his son?
O tell me news to ease my mother's heart,
And guide me; for I live and always have,
Like one in the dark, in the black Stygian lands.
Be thou forerunner of a sunny day
That bids begone the horrors of our night.

ODYSSEUS

Telemachus, nobly you've borne your lot,
Without your father's help—among base men
Escaping baseness, and by careful words
Have steered between the violence of your foes.
Truly I see you are Odysseus' son.

TELEMACHUS

Where did you leave him? Why? And how was he?

ODYSSEUS

To tell you all, would be no easy task,
And I have questions, too, I fain would ask.

TELEMACHUS

Ask what you will. Fear not ingratitude.

ODYSSEUS

Nor fear your anger, if my words are blunt?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

TELEMACHUS

No, hasten, hasten on! Your story! Quick!

ODYSSEUS

You have survived the daily dangers here,
And now are strong and soon to take a bride.
A man, a prince, may well desire to rule,
And I would know in what way I must speak,
Lest, bringing news unwelcome to your ears,
I suffer for my error, though I'm old.

TELEMACHUS

Speak to a boy whose heart would burst his breast
To feel the soldier clasp of our lost king.
Speak to a son who'd give his life to see
His father's face, for never have these eyes,
Since first they wobbled in a baby's head,
Unseeing though they saw, his face beheld.

ODYSSEUS

If King Odysseus stood where now I stand,
Would you speak so, or do you lead me on
To still your fears by telling of his death?

TELEMACHUS

Old man, strain not the vow I made to you,
Nor mix me with these suitors whom you see,
That vulture-like seek food among the dead.
Tell me you left my father living, well?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS

As living and as well as I am now.

TELEMACHUS

If you could so return, what held him back?

*(Wind blows through hall shaking the tapestry
and starting up fire on hearth)*

ODYSSEUS

Nothing has held him back, for I am he.

*(Transformation of beggar to King Odysseus
in sight of Telemachus and Priest)*

PRIEST

The gods disclose your father and my king;

But I, too, know 'tis he by human marks.

*(Telemachus throws himself prostrate before
Odysseus)*

END OF ACT III

АСТ IV

ACT IV

The Great Hall of Odysseus' Palace

Doris is seated upon Odysseus' throne, impersonating Circe. Suitors upon high and imposing seats. Polybus, as master of ceremonies, stands by Doris. Odysseus with minstrel's lyre, upon low seat (right and front), Priest behind him, Telemachus (opposite)

Time: evening of same day.

POLYBUS (*to Doris*)

These, Goddess, are Odysseus and his men—
If you would know the names of those you see—
Cast by the sea upon your sacred shore,
After long years of wandering after war.
Cannot your magic find amusement fit
To cheer them to oblivion of their woes?

DORIS

There is no magic like a beating heart,
Nor long forgetfulness except in love,—
And these await Odysseus on this isle.
First, let a dance divert him from his pain,
And weave a spell to hide this happy place
From all the world, its torments and its tears.

(Waves waud, dancers appear)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS

This dance, Queen Circe, what's its story?

DORIS (*after consulting Polybus*)

Polyxena, a princess, outside Troy,
Is captured by Achilles for his wife;
Her nurse is beaten down and killed;
Her guard destroyed. The Grecian demi-god,
Upon his shoulders, bears her to his tent.

ODYSSEUS

No nobler booty did he ever win,
Who was of all the Greeks at Troy the best—
As brave as beautiful.

(*Greek dances*)

EURYMACHUS

Our Goddess, now, must speak some word to us.

DORIS

I cannot speak to match so strange a scene.

PEISANDER

Then sing some song a minstrel has devised.

DORIS

I'll sing you one, but cannot hope to please.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

ALL

Hush! hush! The Princess sings.

DORIS (*cantilating*)

When the first soul, from earth, reached the immortals,
Tearfully torn from the arms that embraced her,
Led by blind death to a world unimagined,
Fear overcame her.

Fear bowed her body, reluctant, unwilling.
Fear sank her feet in the asphodel meadows.
Fear tore death's hand to untwine his cold fingers,
All unavailing.

She had known life where the sun and the moon shone.
She had known love and had suckled her children.
She had known sleep in the arms of her husband,
And these sufficed her.

None in the halls of death bade her sweet welcome.
None kissed her lips or enfolded her man-wise,
And her cold breasts missed the cheek of her children,
There where the gods sat.

There where the gods sat grave and exalted,
On the high thrones that beheld all and ruled all,
In the gold light that diffused from their faces,
Gods who were angry.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Having sent death lest mankind be immortal,
Might laughing live, loving their busier country,
Drinking the wind and the sunlight like nectar,
Happy, undying:

Now that death brought the sad soul to her makers,
What should they do, lest she still be immortal,
Living like gods, with the gods in their dwelling?
Death now dismayed them:

Coming so blindly within their bright presence,
Standing so grimly before their gay scepters,
Dumb till the gods should decree his doings,
Death, awful servant.

Holding the soul though it trembled and shuddered,
Holding it hard when it wept and pulled backward:
Silently waiting the will of the great gods,
Plagued by creation.

Zeus at last thundered, settling their difference.
Hermes he bade quickly bring him a balance,
Golden, the work of the cripple Hephaestus,
Golden and even.

Then every god longed to hold the fair balance,
Gleaming, well finished, uninjured by usage,
Arbiter be for the soul's unplanned future,
Weighing and judging.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

First Aphroditè begged Zeus she might hold it,
Then would the scales mark the soul's earthly beauty.
Tempting she stood, for she knew that no creature
Matched her perfection.

But the great father shook his curled temples,
Laughed back at sweet Aphroditè, the wave-born.
"Beauty on earth is not weighed in the balance
Of heavenly beauty."

Then bright Apollo, god of all gifts of mind,
Who gives the Muses divine inspiration,
Whose fiery car the full-limbed Hours follow,
Reached for the balance.

But Zeus forbade, he had heard the shell's music
Played by Apollo and knew that no mortal
Dreamed of the harmonies of the high heavens,
Apollo's vision.

Then Rhadamanthus, stern keeper of records,
Measurer he by the rod and the letter,
Darkly demanded the scales mete his judgments,
That he might punish.

But Zeus turned from him, cold, inattentive,
Looking for one who sat near Aphroditè:
Eros, her offspring, or Love as some call him,
Humble but mighty.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Bade Hermes place in his hands the gold balance:
Bade Eros stand by the soul to discover
How much of love it had wrought and had lived by,
What for love suffered.

Then the boy Eros, smiled up at his mother,
Sweet Aphroditè, daintily took the scales
From the shrewd Hermes, stood before Zeus while he
Beckoned the spirit.

Then death relaxed his cold clutch on her fingers,
And the glad soul quickly ran to the love-god.
Naked she stood by him and the gold balance,
God of her worship.

Then the scales made by the cripple Hephaestus,
Gleaming, well finished, uninjured by usage,
Tipped till the arms of the balance stood upright,
Heavy with love pangs.

And all the gods in amazement and wonder
Looked at the life newly born to their number;
Looked at young Eros, holding the balance,
Clasping the mortal.

And through the air came a song new in heaven,
So sweet, Apollo listened, attentive,
While all the Muses sought to remember—
Songs as of children.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

And on the soul there appeared such a beauty
That Aphroditè turned her head, grew paler,
And Rhadamanthus snapped his rough measure.
Fear overcame them.

POLYBUS

A curious song: it smacks too much of death.
A song should make us feel we never die.
A drinking song for me!

DORIS

My maidens, now, shall sing you songs of love.

SUITORS

Yes, songs of love. We live for love. Ha! ha!

*(Doris waves wand: bands of singing and
dancing girls dressed as Sirens appear)*

One cantilates while others beckon

Haste not, Odysseus, through the sea,
None fairer in any land awaits thee.
Did not the waves give Aphroditè birth,
Without whom life were as death?
Stay, then, with us, her children.

Waked by the waves to life for love,
We for comfort are of thy courageous soul.
Love us, but roam when you will.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Prisoners we seek not, but gods.
No change from age bring the years to us;
Complaint, or reviling, we speak not;
Nor of sickness, nor sadness;
Only sweet singing.

Come and enjoy. Go when you will.
What you now see, is yours,—enjoy.
Love and forget love, we ask no more.
Embrace us to-day; whom you will to-morrow,—
If for you there be a to-morrow,
Bewildered mortal.

LEIOCRITUS

Were there more women talked like that to men,
The world would be a better place to live,
And more men would be saints.

SUITORS

Ha! ha! Yes we should all be saints. Ha! ha!

A girl dressed as Psyche, bearing in her hand a Greek lamp, which she holds above her head as if searching for something, runs across the hall singing

Love set aflame by a word,
Love that is quenched by a kiss,
Love whose approach is not heard,
Goes, and no farewells are his.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

How shall we find him, Love's lord;
How shall we bind him to stay?
Him whom a look or a word
Drives without turning away.

(Enter Penelope, hastily and wildly, while dancers and instrumental music continue)

PENELOPE

Let music cease, ye gods, if you would stay concealed;
For silence is the veil that hides you!
Dense flesh and form are gossamer thin to sound;
Behind them flash the motion of immortals.
The movement of your limbs, your laughter, yes,
Your tears and all the impotence of gods,
O'erwhelm me like a fragrant dream,
That flits through open windows of a summer night.
I cannot bear the maddening approach
To all thy gay-stepped mystery of life.
Let music cease, before thy veil be rent!

SUITORS *(in astonishment)*

The Queen raves! Woe! Penelope is mad!

TELEMACHUS *(springing toward her)*

Mother, you walk and speak as in a dream.
Return to your bed; our play will soon be done.

(He tries to lead her out of the Hall)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PENELOPE (*disengaging herself from Telemachus*)

If my poor wits are still my own and sane,
And not Cassandra-like, broke by my woes,
If I'm not mad, the gods alone be thanked.
Why does my mind not crash and see your deeds,
Set topsy-turvy in so opposite light,
Are nobly gracious and of good intent?
Lest breaking I should live in awful truth,
And see you undisguised the beasts you are;—
Eurymachus run a tiger of bloody maw;
Peisander a clinging viper dealing death;

(Laughs hysterically)

You all a jungle herd fatal, faithless,—
Still trampling down your lairs to hold your prey.

EURYMACHUS

We are your lovers, not your murderers.
Your loneliness is preying on your mind.
Only be kind, select whom you will have;
The rest will make short shift to get away.

PENELOPE

If I choose not to choose, you slay my son,
Punish my older love with fresher mourning.
Is loyalty to husbands purchased so?
If dazed I would still dream of my lost god,
I lose again the god that god bestowed,—
Telemachus: his blood must buoy my hope.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

No, no! I choose. Give me but one day more.
'Then of you all, one for Odysseus' place
I'll name,—I'll name.

TELEMACHUS

Mother, you put too great shame on our guests.
They're men; they want no futile, boyish blood;
But waiting years, in face of what seems death
And mocking echoes to all calls and prayers,
They, too, desire a queen upon their throne,
And seek one who has learned, indeed, her part.

PENELOPE

But they have not yet learned the part of king,
Else why from out their midst does not one stand
And say, "I see, poor Queen, your woeful plight,
A woman matched against a horde of men.
Her husband captive to the furious gods,
On an enchantress' isle in unknown seas,
Watched by the warder waves, can give no help.
Her son ingenuous and himself soon wed,
Sees all life as a golden, rosy dawn
And cannot help. So I her champion am.
Give her all time, be it a thousand years,
No hand shall force her to a loathsome couch."

(Penelope pauses and looks from one to another)

If not one, will not two or three so stand
With me whom every day you say you love?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PEISANDER

I play a high part basely, but I stand.

POLYBUS

A drunkard's a poor staff, but it is yours.

CTESSIPUS

Teach us our part; for you have well learned yours.

PENELOPE

A traitor, drunkard, fool, is that my guard?

TELEMACHUS

If you are right in thinking I am doomed,
These three show courage that should blot their faults.

PRIEST (*aside to Odysseus*)

With these three less to fight, and on our side,
We shall most surely win. O glorious Queen!
Some god within her whispers her release.

TELEMACHUS (*giving up attempt to lead Penelope
away*)

Come, mother, listen to the old man's tale;
He may say something that will comfort you.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

PENELOPE

Then must the gods speak through this wanderer's mouth,
And tell me that Odysseus nears his home.

*(Telemachus places Penelope behind him, on
right of hall, opposite Odysseus. Peisander
and Ctessipus take position near her)*

EURYTOS (*to Odysseus*)

Old man, give us no mumbled, maundering talk.
Forget your age, forget your strength's decay,
Forget your beggary—you play the king:
One who among great leaders was the best;
Who wore Achilles' armor when he died;
Advised the course that, in the end, won Troy;
And had such strength of arm that none can stir
The bow-string on the bow that was his sport.
Waiting for him it hangs upon the wall.
Well may you look at it. No harp-string that
A minstrel's hands could wake; its song is death.

ODYSSEUS (*feigning tears*)

I did not ask to do what now I do.
I had much rather be at home at rest,
And have my dear wife's welcome than be here.

POLYBUS

No tears, old stranger! Tut! Now to your tale.
Forget your name, your rags and where you are;
But be Odysseus in Queen Circe's hall.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

DORIS

Tell me your wanderings and what brought you here.
Islands more strange to guests than cities are,
Their guardian waters are not passed afoot;
We see, for years, no faces but our own.
Great fear or pride has driven you this way;
You flew from perils or would face the gods.

ODYSSEUS

The gods mislead me, and the bidden winds
Blow contrary to my goal, which is my home.
To tell you all my wanderings would tire
One in whose mind the magic power dwells,
To see whate'er befalls on land and sea.
Sorrows and wanderings have been my lot
Since first I started for the plains of Troy.
Ocean in tumult thwarts my homeward helm.

PENELOPE

How could the master-mind, that conquered Troy,
Lose his way home? A hero, for himself
Should do as well, as for another's need.

ODYSSEUS

Lo, I who fought with princes and have won,
Now strive against the anger of a god,
And, at the barriers that guard the earth,
Meet all things that hate man, or that can blind

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

His mind to what is wise. My reason reels,
And I am dragged back from the human race
To brutal forms of monsters, mixed of men.

DORIS

We often lay upon the gods a blame
That our own choice deserves. Storms have not racked
Year after year, incessantly the seas.
When waves were smooth and sunny, where were you?
Did pains and perils never lead to joy?

THRACIAN PRINCE

I want to hear about the wooden horse.

TELEMACHUS (*good naturedly*)

You soon yourself will need a wooden horse,
If you kill all of ours in your mad rides.

PENELOPE (*addressing Odysseus*)

Have these ten years since you left smouldering Troy
Shown only tears and storms,—no hours of joy?

ODYSSEUS (*to Penelope*)

Men out of perils find new patience born
To grapple with the world, which is man's joy.
Brief is the season rest can make him glad,
Or pleasure hold him from his life of war,
And restless roamings where great deeds are done.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

To push far back the walls of wondrous things,
Spreading the place where human feet can walk,
And where the mind can see substantial ground
Is work for man.

DORIS

Has man no need of woman to achieve?
The heart, must it be still, when work's to be done?

ODYSSEUS

Often she helps man best whose lips say "go,—"
Like waves that push our oars and stay behind.

PENELOPE

But is not love a haven all men seek,
In which their thoughts find firmest anchorage;
Where body and soul united are at peace?

ODYSSEUS

Man's haven is not rest, nor thought his goal.
The deeds called thought are faulty and half done:
Truth's tested by the act and finds its goal
Through maze-like wanderings at the hands of men
Who mould it by their warfare and their work.
No! truth is not begot beside the fire,—
The truth for men to find—it lurks abroad,
And must be hunted like the forest beast,
Besieged and taken like an enemy's town;

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

So sought and dared and delved, where ease is not,
Nor sweet companionship of woman's love,
Save that bestowed in passing as reward,
Or mutual comfort as he comes and goes.

DORIS

Must woman's solace be to wait and wait
For those brief seasons rest can make man glad?

ODYSSEUS (*disregarding Doris' question*)

The shepherd piping to his gentle sheep;
The maid, a-spinning and a-dreaming, ask
When will Odysseus come again to us?
Why is he gone a lifetime from his home?
Forgetting stubborn foes to be o'ercome,
And contrary winds, and envious, hostile gods:
Forgetting that frail hands must win a way;
That every deed is builded by a hand,
Weak to lift off the chaos of the old.

CTESSIPUS

A tedious tale! This beggar's mad. Bring wine.

PENELOPE (*repeating Doris' question*)

Must woman's place be all alone to wait,
For the brief seasons rest can make man glad.

(*The Queen stands up in excitement, then sinks
back again into her seat*)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

LEIOCRITUS

Wine tells us stories better than this fool's.
Bring wine.

ODYSSEUS

Silence, vile drunkard, when Odysseus speaks.

ALL (*laughingly applaud*)

Yes, silence drunkards, when Odysseus speaks.

ODYSSEUS

Queen Circe, it is not woman alone who waits,
Though there is one I hope who waits for me.
An island queen is she, like to yourself;
But in her looks a mortal not a god.
Yet mortal as she is and doomed to fade,
I'd rather see her than your changeless brow.
For from the time I sailed from Ithaca,
Though facing foes and leaving home behind,
I said, each day, I'm sailing toward my home,
Since one day's gone, and by so much I near
Penelope.

PENELOPE

And did you hear the King say that to her?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS

Aye, that and more, until he made her weep,
That she half goddess, could not have such love,
As women who die receive from erring men.

EURYMACHUS (*to Penelope*)

The beggar knows his trade. He likes your food,
Your fire and roof. He will not budge, I swear
Until a spear pries out his lazy bulk.

(*Raises his spear*)

POLYBUS (*putting his sword against Eurymachus' spear*)

He's my Silenus, you shall not hurt him.

(*to Doris*)

Come, Queen, 'tis time we drank. Come ho! Some wine!

DORIS (*motioning Maid Servant*)

Then drink your fill of this my goodliest wine.
See unaccustomed sights and singular forms
Of lions, wolves, of swine and lower beasts,
As they may fit the souls within your breast.

(*Maid Servant and other women offer wine to suitors,—first to Eurymachus, who holds his goblet while others drink. Polybus falls in paroxysms of pain, from poison. He rolls convulsively upon the floor*)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

CTESSIPUS (*to Polybus*)

Well done, you do your part the best of all.

(*Ctessipus falls in like manner. Suitors laugh*)

SUITORS

Ha, ha, ha, ha! We should have had this first.

(*Polybus and Ctessipus on the floor stiffen out dead. Others leap from their places to see*)

EURYMACHUS (*throws down goblet; draws sword*)

The wine is poisoned. Fools, our friends are slain.

These women are the Prince's cowardly hands.

Strike them and him. Telemachus must die.

(*Eurymachus stabs Maid Servant; rushes to Doris, stabs her and attacks Telemachus*)

PEISANDER (*guarding Telemachus*)

My hand shall save Telemachus from you,

And ward extinction from Odysseus' line.

EURYMACHUS (*spearing Peisander*)

Then you shall die.

TELEMACHUS (*cutting down Eurymachus*)

But you shall follow him.

(*Uproar. Eurytos and others fight with suitors. Odysseus' rags and signs of age fall from him*)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

SUITORS

It is Odysseus. Woe, we are undone!

(Priest snatches Odysseus' bow from the wall and hands it to him. Odysseus bends it easily and shoots arrows at suitors. In the conflict torches are knocked down and trampled out. As the doors and curtains are torn open by escaping suitors, the near hills and the ocean further off are disclosed by moonlight.)

Odysseus stands in door shooting at suitors who can be seen fleeing over hills. Queen, transfixed in her place, watches Odysseus.)

ODYSSEUS

A quiver, quick! My arrows are all shot.
Why are there so few here? Quick! Quick! I say.

(Penelope snatches quiver from wall, rushes to Odysseus, and kneeling by his side holds up the arrows. Odysseus takes them one by one without turning)

PRIEST

There runs Leiocritus, there Kleon. Look!

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS

They must not miss their fate—nor shall they.
Their path is crooked, but my arrow is straight.

*(Odysseus, Penelope and Priest go outside and
are lost to view. Two herdsmen stand guard
at door)*

EURYMACHUS (*on floor*)

The boy at last has cut my sinews through.
Fools, fools, cajoled and poisoned by a girl!
Killed by a coward coming in disguise,
Odysseus, still the curse of braver men!

(Eurymachus dies)

PEISANDER (*wounded in guarding Telemachus*)

Telemachus, let the Queen know it was I
Who saved you from Eurymachus. Farewell!

(Peisander dies)

TELEMACHUS (*kneeling by Doris—left*)

O fatal day! This day of glad return!
A father you bestow, but snatch a bride.
My heart is opened with excess of joy,
Then shut all tomblike with a weight of woe.
High Zeus! has not our suffering been enough?
That I without a father lived till now;
That my dear mother grieved her years away,
Her house become more common than an inn;

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

That our great wealth was wasted at the will
Of arrogant suitors for my father's place;
That now, the noblest girl among the Greeks,
In wooded islands or across tilled fields,
Who meet at water-springs, bearing tall jars,
Or weave in princess' chambers with white hands,
More precious than all flocks and herds of men,
Is slain upon the altar of our house,—
Her blood flows on our luckless floor? Ah woe!

(Telemachus throws himself upon Doris)

DORIS *(regaining consciousness)*

Telemachus! Your enemies I slew
And with their blood have purified my flesh.
'Tis yours again, washed clean.

TELEMACHUS

What is their carrion to your sacred flesh!
Oh! oh! that heaven can so let hell prevail!

DORIS

I slew not all, alas! one has slain me.
My heart that bounded at your name in pride
And wild delight, choking me for new ways
To tell you wealth of love that found no words,
Now finds a way, and finally breaks down
All body barriers and pours its life
Before your eyes to see, and spells it love.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

EURYTOS (*supporting Doris' head*)

Would you had never left Dylechion,
My wounded sea-bird with your plaintive cry.
The waves that kissed your bare feet on the sand
Will mourn you, as they break, with noisy grief,
And I must hear their melancholy wail.

(*Re-enter Odysseus, Penelope, Priest. Penelope runs to Doris and kneels down over her*)

ODYSSEUS (*to Priest hastily*)

Good friend, stay here and with these guard the doors.
Now few are left alive of that foul pack
And they the cowards, fleetest, too, of foot,
Whose fears will drive them farther than our arms.
They will not stop until they launch their boats.
Heaven still is kind to them and gives them light.
You soon will hear their row-locks throb in flight.

PRIEST

Happy am I to guard this purgèd place
And see you enter undisputed king.

(*Priest posts one herdsman at door; with the other he watches outside the house. Odysseus goes to Doris*)

ODYSSEUS (*to Eurytos*)

Dear Prince Eurytos, is she badly hurt?

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

EURYTOS

A sword has pierced a breast a word could hurt.
A woman's body was not made for war.

ODYSSEUS

Could I have guessed my coming would do this,
I would have stayed a slave to Polypheme,
Or fought with monsters at the ends of the world.

EURYTOS

'Twas that you did not come, that has done this.

PENELOPE (*rising and throwing her arms around
Odysseus, as if in defense.*)

Unfathomable are the gods to man.
The fleet for Troy was halted till a maid
Iphigeneia, Agamemnon's child,
Was offered on an altar to a god.

DORIS (*opening her eyes*)

I'm glad my eyes have seen Odysseus' face,
Long-watched of those who love him as a god,
Yet seen so soon by me who feared his power.
I feared you'd take Telemachus away.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Now it is I who go and you who stay,
Thou father of him I love. His father, his,
Whom I bequeath, alas! no child of mine.

ODYSSEUS (*kneeling by Doris—right*)

Sweet Princess, do not talk, it weakens you.

DORIS

I go to long repose and I must speak.
Farewell, great King, forgive a blinded girl—
Blinded by love, more dazzling king than you—
Who ran athwart your chariot's advance,
Dreaming to save your son. She did not see
Your godlike head or guess you sped with help,
Disclosed to her too late.

ODYSSEUS

You are as dear as my own child to me;
Though I have known you, Doris, but a day.

DORIS

Telemachus!
My breasts will never swell with mother's milk,
Or be searched out by kissing baby lips.
I leave you—and so feel a double-death,
At thought of what must come to you so left,—

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

A prince and young—of other women's love.
I cannot bear in you that death of love.
O tell me, tell me, not to fear to go.

TELEMACHUS

Such love as ours, Zeus knows, befalls but once.

(Bends his face toward her lips)

DORIS *(lifting herself up and seizing his face in her hands)*

No, do not kiss me, let me see your face,
For one long look that I must carry far
And treasure mid the dead whom Hades rules,
My only gladness, cherished till you come.
As trees in northern mountains turn more bright
When frost checks their warm sap—so you see me,
Flaming with love, when chill death halts my blood.

TELEMACHUS

Hold tight my hand, for I would follow you!

DORIS *(slowly)*

Sweeten with your lips the rim of the cup of death.
Press in your hands the consecrated bowl.
Pour to the gods libations from my heart.

(As Telemachus clasps Doris and kisses her, she falls back dead)

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

TELEMACHUS

The loveliest thing in all the world lies dead.
Let me die, too!

(Tries to stab himself)

ODYSSEUS *(striking the sword out of Telemachus' hand)*

No! No! Telemachus.
Add not another to this fatal list.

PENELOPE *(dazed)*

See child! Your father lives. He has returned.

THE END

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