

PERUSAL SCRIPT

The Odyssey

*Adapted by
Eric Samuelsen*



Newport, Maine

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THE ODYSSEY

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Cast of Characters: 22m, 11female, 2 either +maids, crew, suitors,

Odysseus

Homer (sometimes speaks as a narrator for the story; sometimes speaks as Odysseus while the action is carried on around him.)

Zeus

Athena

Company (as many other actors as needed; will all play multiple parts, 19male+suitors and crew, 10female+ maids, + Servant, Singer, Crew(either gender))

Telemachus

Penelope(F)

Antinous (becomes suitor)

Erymachus (becomes a suitor)

Nurse Eurycleia(F)

Hermes

Calypso(F)

Lusty Young Man

Servant(either)

Poseidon

Nausicaa(F)

King Alcinous

The Queen(F)

Maids(F)

Queen Arete(F)

Singer (either)

Crewman

Cyclops

Other Cyclops(F)

Eurylochus

Circe(F)

Pig-Men/Crew

Elpenor

Tiresias

Agamemnon

Odysseus's Mother(F)

Helios

Eumaeus

Herald

Suitors

Arnaeus (suitor)

Woman(F)

Amphinomus (suitor)

Leodes (suitor)

The use of **PROJECTIONS** and Sound Effects (**SFX**) is highly encouraged, even beyond the few instances mentioned in the script. The could begin each BOOK and then morph through the action, even punctuating the scene.

THE ODYSSEY Adapted by Eric Samuelsen. 22m, 11female, 2 either +maids, crew, suitors. (Doubling recommended) Fluid multi-scene setting that can use projections. Costumes of Greek or modern era. 80-90 minutes. A faithful, action oriented adaptation of the bloody tale of Odysseus returning from the Trojan Wars. As told by Homer, Odysseus, Athena and Zeus, himself, the consequences of Odysseus' and others' disobedience to the Gods, the tale of enduring what is coming at us until the restoration of life to its fullest, fills the narrative structure of THE ODYSSEY. Premiered at Brigham Young University. **ORDER #3290**

Eric Samuelsen taught at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio before joining the faculty at Brigham Young University in 1992. He became head of the Playwriting program at BYU in 1999. He has also taught as an adjunct faculty member in the Religion department. He retired from BYU in 2012.

As a playwright, Samuelsen has had twenty-seven plays professionally produced in Utah, Indiana, Louisiana, New York, and California. Some of his plays include *Gadanton*, which has seen three professional productions across the country, *A Love Affair with Electrons*, *Family*, *The Plan*, and *The Way We're Wired*. He is resident playwright at Plan-B Theatre Company in Salt Lake City, who designated their 2013-14 season a 'Season of Eric, including productions of six of his plays.

He is a member of the Playwrights' Circle, and the Dramatists Guild. He is three-time winner of the Annual Award in Playwriting offered by the Association for Mormon Letters (AML) and he became president of AML in 2007. In 2013 the organization awarded him the Smith Pettit Award for his lifetime work as a playwright.

He has been a staff writer for the on-line satirical magazine The Sugarbeet. He was also featured in the book *Conversations with Mormon Authors*, edited by Chris Bigelow. He is a noted Ibsen translator, and has also published scholarly articles on 19th and 20th century Scandanavian Theatre, and more recently, on LDS drama and film. He blogged at Mormoniconoclast.com. Eric died in September of 2019 after a long battle with polymyositis. This has left a huge hole in the Theatre Community within, and outside of, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

THE ODYSSEY

ACT I

PROLOGUE

ODYSSEUS: Dear Woman, I doubt that every Achaean under arms will make it home from Troy, all safe and sound. The Trojans, they say, are fine soldiers too, hurling javelins, shooting flights of arrows, charioteers who can turn the tide – like that! – when the great leveler War, brings on some deadlock. So I cannot tell if the gods will sail me home again or I’ll go down out there, on the fields of Troy, but all things here must rest in your control. Watch over my father and mother in the palace, just as now, or perhaps a little more, when I am far from home. But once you see the beard on the boy’s cheek, you wed the man you like, and leave your house behind.

BOOK 1: ATHENA INSPIRES THE PRINCE

HOMER: Sing to me of the man, muse, the man of twists and turns driven time and again off course, once he had plundered the hollowed heights of Troy. Many cities of men he saw and learned their minds, many pains he suffered, heart-sick on the open sea, fighting to save his life and bring his comrades home. But he could not save them from disaster, hard as he strove—the recklessness of their own ways destroyed them all, the blind fools; they devoured the cattle of the sun and the sun god blotted out the day of their return. Launch out on his story, muse, daughter of Zeus, start from where you will—sing for our time, too. By now, all of the survivors, all who avoided headlong death were safe at home. But one man alone ... his heart set on his wife and his return—Calypso, the bewitching nymph, the lustrous goddess, held him back, deep in her arching caverns, craving him for a husband. But then, when the wheeling seasons brought the year around, that year spun out by the gods when he should reach his home, Ithaca—then every god took pity, all except Poseidon. He raged on, seething against the great Odysseus ‘til he reached his native land. But now Poseidon had gone to visit the Ethiopians, worlds away; the other gods, at home in Olympian Zeus’s halls, met for full assembly there, and among them now the father of men and gods was first to speak.

(Exits)

ZEUS: Ah, how shameless—the way these mortals blame the gods. From us alone, they say, come all their miseries, yes, but they themselves, with their own reckless ways, compound their pains beyond their proper share. Look at Aegisthus now ... above and beyond his share he stole Atrides’s wife, he murdered the war lord coming home from Troy, though he knew it meant his own total ruin. Far in advance we told him, “Don’t murder the man,” but would Aegisthus’s hardened heart give way? Now he pays the price—all at a single stroke.

ATHENA: Father, son of Cronus, our high and mighty king, surely he goes down to a death he earned in full! Let them all die who do such things. But my heart breaks for Odysseus, that seasoned veteran cursed by fate so long—far from his loved ones still, he suffers torment, left to pine on an island, racked with grief in the nymph Calypso's house. She holds him there by force! He has no way to voyage home to his own native land. Odysseus longs to die ... Olympian Zeus, have you no care for him in your lofty heart? Did he never win your favor with sacrifices burned beside the ships on the broad plain of Troy? Why Zeus, why so dead set against Odysseus?

ZEUS: My child, what nonsense you let slip through your teeth. Now, how on earth could I forget Odysseus? Great Odysseus who excels all men in wisdom, and offerings. No, it's the earth-shaker, Poseidon unappeased, forever fuming against him. And now though he won't quite kill Odysseus—drives him far off course from native land. But come, all of us here put heads together now, work out his journey home so Odysseus can return. Lord Poseidon, I trust, will let his anger go. How can he stand his ground against the will of all gods at one—one god alone?

ATHENA: Father, son of Cronus, our high and mighty king! If now it really pleases the blissful gods that wise Odysseus shall return—home at last—let us dispatch the guide Hermes down to Ogygia Island, down to announce at once to the nymph with lovely braids our fixed decree: Odysseus journeys home—the exile must return! While I myself go down to Ithaca to rouse his son to a braver pitch. (Exits)

HOMER: And down she swept from Olympus' craggy peaks and lit on Ithaca, standing tall at Odysseus' gates. Gripping her bronze spear, she looked for all the world like a stranger now, like Mentos, lord of the Taphians.

TELEMACHUS: Greetings, stranger! Here in our house, you'll find a royal welcome. Have supper first, then tell us what you need. Look at them over there. Not a care in the world, just lyres and tunes! It is easy for them, all right, they feed on another's goods and go scot-free—but that man—if they caught sight of Odysseus' home in Ithaca, they'd all pray to be faster on their feet than richer in bars of gold ... but now, no use, he's died a wretched death. The day of his return will never dawn. Enough. Tell me about yourself now, clearly, point by point. Who are you? Is this your first time here? Are you a friend of father's, a guest from the old days?

ATHENA: My name is Mentos, lord of the Taphian men who love their oars. As for your father, we've been friends forever, I'm proud to say, and now I've come—and why? I heard that he was back ... your father, that is. But no, the gods thwart his passage, yet I tell you great Odysseus is not dead. He's still alive, somewhere in this wide world, held captive, out at sea on a wave-washed island, and hard men, savages, somehow hold him back against his will. He won't be gone long from the native land he loves, not even if iron shackles bind your father down. He's plotting a way to journey home at last; he's never at a loss. But come ... you're truly Odysseus' son? You've sprung up so. Uncanny resemblance ...

TELEMACHUS: Mother has always told me I'm his son, it's true, but I'm not so certain. Who has ever really known who gave him life? Would to the gods I'd been the son of a happy man, whom old age overtook in the midst of his possessions! Now, think of the most unlucky mortal ever known—since you asked me, yes, they say I am his son.

ATHENA: Still, trust me, the gods have not marked out your house for such an unsung fortune, not if Penelope has borne a son like you. But tell me about all this and spare me nothing. What's this banqueting, this crowd carousing here? Hardly a pot-luck supper.

TELEMACHUS: Well, my friend, all the nobles who rule the islands round about, and all who lord it in rocky Ithaca as well—down to the last man they court my mother; they lay waste to my house! And mother ... she neither rejects a marriage she despises, nor can she bear to bring the courting to an end ... while they continue to bleed my household white. Soon—you wait—they'll grind me down as well.

ATHENA: Shameful, but you, I urge you, think how to drive these suitors from your halls, come now, listen closely. Take my words to heart. At daybreak summon the island's lords to full assemble, give your orders to all, and call the gods to witness: tell the suitors to scatter, each to his own place. Sail in quest of news of your long-lost father. Someone may tell you something or you may catch a rumor straight from Zeus. First go down to Pylos—question old king Nestor, then cross over to Sparta to red-haired Menelaus. Now, if you hear your father is alive, and heading home, hard-pressed as you are—brave out one more year. If you hear his is dead, no longer among the living, then back you come to the native land you love, raise his grave mound, build his honors high with the full funeral rights that he deserves ... and give your mother to another husband. Then, one you've sealed those matters, seen them through ... think hard, reach down deep in your heart and soul for a way to kill these suitors in your house, by stealth or open combat. You must not cling to your boyhood any longer—it's time you were a man.

HOMER: : Amidst them still the famous bard sang on, and they sat in silence, listening as he performed the Achaeans' journey home from Troy—all the blows Athena doomed them to endure.

PENELOPE: Phemius! Break off the song—the unendurable song that always rends the heart inside me. How I long for my husband—alive in memory, always.

TELEMACHUS: Courage, Mother! Bards are not to blame; Zeus is to blame. Harden your heart, and listen. Odysseus was scarcely the only one, you know, whose journey home was blotted out at Troy. So, Mother, go back to your quarters, tend to your own tasks, the distaff and the loom. As for giving orders, I hold the reins of power in this house. *(To Athena)* Oh, Stranger. You've counseled me like a father to a son. I won't forget.

BOOK 2: TELEMACHUS SETS SAIL

PROJECTIONS: Ancient sails and a fair sky

HOMER: When young Dawn with her rose-red fingers shone once more the true son of Odysseus ordered heralds to cry out loud and clear and summon the Achaeans.

TELEMACHUS: Trouble has struck my house a double blow. First, I have lost my noble father. But, now

this, a worse disaster. Suitors plague my mother—against her will. They infest our palace day and night, they butcher our cattle, our sheep, our fat goats, feasting themselves sick, swilling our gloving wine as if there's no tomorrow—all of it, squandered. By Zeus, it's intolerable, what they do—my house a shambles!

ANTINOUS: So high and might, Telemachus—such unbridled rage! Well now, fling your accusations at us? Think to pin the blame on us? You think again. It's not the suitors here who deserve the blame, it's your own dear mother, the matchless queen of cunning. Look here: for three years now, getting on to four, she's played it fast and loose with all our hearts, building each man's hope—dangling promises, dropping hints to each—but all the while with something else in mind. This was her latest masterpiece of guile: she sets up a great loom in the royal halls and she began to weave ... and the weaving fine-spun, the yarns endless, and she would lead us on

PENELOPE: My suitors, now that King Odysseus is no more, go slowly, keen as you are to marry me, until I can finish off this web ... so my weaving won't all fray and come to nothing. This shroud is for old lord Laertes, when the deadly fate that lays us out at last will take him down. I dread the shame if a man of such wealth should lie in state without a shroud for cover.

ANTINOUS: Despite our pride and passion we believed her. So by day she'd weave at her great and growing web—by night, by the light of torches set beside her, she would unravel all she'd done! Three whole years she deceived us blind, seduced us with this scheme ... Then, when the wheeling seasons brought the fourth year on, one of her women, in on the queen's secret, told the truth and we caught her in the act—unweaving her gorgeous web. So she finished it off. Against her will. We forced her. Now Telemachus, here is how the suitors answer your—your burn it in your mind. Direct her to marry whomever pleases her. So long as she persists in tormenting us, quick to exploit the gifts Athene gave her—we will devour your worldly goods and wealth as long as she holds out. We'll not go back to our old estates or leave for other parts, not 'til she weds the Argive man she fancies.

TELEMACHUS: I WILL NEVER ISSUE THAT ULTIMATUM TO MY MOTHER. And you, if you have any shame in your own hearts, you must leave my palace! See to your feasting elsewhere. But, if you decide the fare is better, richer here, destroying one man's goods and going scot-free, then carve away! But I'll cry out to the everlasting gods in hopes that Zeus will pay you back with a vengeance—all of you destroyed in my house while I go scot-free myself!

HOMER: And to seal his prayer, farseeing Zeus sent down a sign. He launched two eagles soaring high from a mountain ridge, a glaring, fatal sign ... talons slashing each other, tearing cheeks and throats they swooped away on the right, through homes and city.

ERYMACHUS: Stop, old man! Go home and babble your omens to your children—save them. Odysseus? He's dead now, far from home—would to Zeus that you'd died with him too. We'd have escaped your droning prophecies.

ANTINOUS: Here's my prophecy, you old codger. Incite the boy to riot—he'll be the first to suffer. And you, old man, we'll crush your spirit!

TELEMACHUS: Antinous ... the rest of you ... I am done with appeals to you about these matters. I'll say no more. All I ask is a good swift ship and a crew of twenty men to speed me through my passage out and back. I'm sailing off for news of my long-lost father's journey home.

HOMER: This broke up the assembly. The people scattered quickly, while the suitors strolled back to King Odysseus' palace.

TELEMACHUS: Come, Nurse, draw me off some wine in small traveling jars. I'm sailing off to Sparta, for news of my dear father's journey home.

(Enter Nurse EURYCLEIA)

EURYCLEIA: Why, dear child, what craziness got into your head? Why bent on rambling over the face of the earth?

TELEMACHUS: Perhaps I'll catch some rumor.

EURYCLEIA: A darling only son! Your father's worlds away, and these brutes here, just wait, the moment you're gone they'll all be scheming against you ... Kill you by guile, they will, and carve your birthrights up in pieces.

TELEMACHUS: Courage, old woman, there's a god who made this plan.

EURYCLEIA: No ... sit tight here ... don't go roving over the barren salt sea.

TELEMACHUS: Swear you won't say anything to my mother. Not 'til ten or a dozen days have passed, or she misses me herself and learns I'm gone. She mustn't mar her lovely face with tears.

HOMER: The old one swore a solemn oath to the gods. Then bright-eyed Pallas, disguised as a prince, roamed through town, pausing beside each likely crewman, giving orders ...

ATHENA: Gather beside our ship at nightfall—be there.

HOMER: She asked Noemon, Phronius' generous son, to lend her a swift ship. He gladly volunteered.

ATHENA: Telemachus, your comrades-at-arms are ready at the oars, waiting for your command to launch. So come, on with our voyage now, we're wasting time.

TELEMACHUS: All, lay hands to tackle!

BOOK 3: ODYSSEUS AND CALYPSO

(ZEUS enters. HERMES lounging)

ZEUS: You are our messenger, Hermes. . . Announce to the nymph with lovely braids our fixed decree: Odysseus journeys home—the exile must return. So his destiny ordains. He shall see his love ones at

last.

HOMER: So Hermes skimmed the crests on the endless waves and strode on till he reached the spacious cave where the nymph made her home, and he found her there inside.

(Calypso sings, weaving at her loom)

SFX: birds, owl, hawks, ravens of the sea, four springs bubbling

PROJECTION: *Odysseus sits on a headland, weeping, gazing out over the barren sea (Hermes stops, amazed at what he sees and hears—it's beautiful—then briskly looks for Odysseus)*

But as for great Odysseus—Hermes could not find him within the cave.

(CALYPSO seats HERMES)

CALYPSO: Why have you come, honored friend? It's been so long, your visits much too rare. Tell me what's on your mind. I'm eager to do whatever I can ... —Ambrosia?

HERMES: As one god to another, it was -Zeus who made me come—no choice of mine. Zeus claims you keep beside you a most unlucky man. Zeus commands you to send him off. It is not his fate to die here, far from his own people.

CALYPSO: Hard-hearted you are! You unrivaled lords of jealousy—scandalized when goddesses sleep with mortals. So now at last, you gods, you turn your spite on *me* for keeping a mortal man beside me. The man I saved, and I welcomed warmly, cherished and even vowed to make immortalBut since there is no way for another god to thwart the will of storming Zeus, let the man go—if the Almighty insists.

HERMES: Release him at once. Steer clear of the rage of Zeus! Down the years he'll make your life a hell.

(HERMES speeds away. CALYPSO climbs to find Odysseus.)

HOMER: The queenly nymph sought out the great Odysseus and found him there on the headland, sitting, still weeping for his foiled journey home. In the nights, true, he'd sleep with her in the arching cave—he had no choice—unwilling lover alongside lover all too willing But all his days he'd sit on the rocks and beaches, gazing out over the barren sea through blinding tears.

CALYPSO: No need, my unlucky one, to grieve here any longer. Now I am willing, heart and soul, to send you off at last.

ODYSSEUS: Passage home? Never. Surely you're plotting something else, goddess.

CALYPSO: Come, cut timbers, make them into a raft to sweep you free and clear on the misty seas. And I myself with stock her with food and water, give you clothing, send you a stiff following wind so you can reach your native country all unharmed.

ODYSSEUS: I won't set foot on a raft until you show good faith. Swear a binding oath, goddess, you'll never plot some new intrigue to harm me!

(CALYPSO smiles and strokes him with her hand)

CALYPSO: Ah, what a wicked man you are. What a thing to say! I swear by the greatest, grimmest oath that binds the happy gods: I will never plot some new intrigue to harm you. Never.

(She climbs down, leads him back to the cave)

Trust me. I am all compassion ... Ambrosia? Still eager to leave? Much as you long to see your wife, the one you fine for all your days ... I just might claim to be nothing less than she, neither in face nor figure. Hardly right, is it, for mortal woman to rival immortal goddess?

ODYSSEUS: Ah, great goddess, don't be angry with me. All that you say is true, how well I know. Look at my wise Penelope. She falls far short of you—your beauty, stature. She is mortal after all. Nevertheless, I long—I pine, all my days—to travel home.

CALYPSO: If you only knew what pains are fated to fill your cup before you reach that shore, you'd stay right here, preside in our house with me, and be immortal.

ODYSSEUS: And if a god will wreck me yet again, I can bear that too. Bring the trial on!

(CALYPSO and ODYSSEUS exit in each other's arms.)

HOMER: And now, withdrawing into the cavern's deep recesses, long in each other's arms they lost themselves in love.

BOOK 4: THE DEBATE IN ITHACA

PROJECTIONS: *Ancient Games*

HOMER: But all the while the suitors, before Odysseus's palace, amused themselves with the discus and long throwing spars, out on the leveled grounds, free and easy as always, full of swagger.

NOEMON: Antinous, have we any notion of not when Telemachus will return? He sailed a ship of mine and now I need her back.

ANTINOUS: Tell me the truth! Where did he go? Tell me this—be clear—I've got to know; did he commandeer your ship against your own will or did you volunteer it once he'd won you over?

NOEMON: I volunteered it, or course. What else could anyone do, a prince weight down with troubles asked a favor? Hard to deny him anything.

ANTINOUS: What a piece of work! In spit of us all, he slops away. And this is just the start of the trouble he can make. Quick, fetch me a swift ship and twenty men—I'll waylay him from ambush, board him coming back in the straits between Ithaca and rocky Sarne. This gallant voyage to find his father will find *him* wrecked at last!

HOMER: But not for long was Penelope unaware of the grim plots her suitors planned in secret.

PENELOPE: Why has my child gone and left me? Does he want his very name wiped off the earth? Zeus has given me torment. My lionhearted husband, lost, long years ago. And now my son, my darling. Oh, if only I had learned he was planning such a journey, he would have stayed, by the gods—keen as he was to sail—or left me dead right here within our palace. Hear me, daughter of Zeus, whose shield is thunder—tireless one, Athena! If ever, here in his halls, resourceful King Odysseus burned rich things in your honor, oh remember it now for *my* sake. Save my darling son, defend him from these outrageous, overbearing suitors.

HOMER: The goddess heard her prayer as the suitors burst in.

LUSTY YOUNG MAN: Listen, our long-courted queen is preparing us all a marriage—with no glimmer at all how the murder of her son has been decreed.

ANTINOUS: Stupid fools! Muzzle your bragging before someone reports us. Now, drive home our plan.

HOMER: With that, he picked out twenty first-rate men, and down they went to the swift ship at the sea's edge. But there in her upper room she lay, Penelope, lost in thought, shunning food and drink, brooding now. Her mind in torment, like some lion at bay, dreading gangs of hunters closing their cunning ring around him for the finish.

ATHENA: Penelope, your heart so wrung with sorrow? The gods can't bear to let you weep and rack your spirit. Your son will still come home; it is decreed.

PENELOPE: Why have you come, my sister? You tell me to lay to rest the grief and tears that overwhelm me now. And now my darling boy, he's off and gone! Just a youngster, still untrained for war. Him I mourn even more than I do my husband—I quake in terror for all that he might encounter. Hordes of enemies scheme against him now, keen to kill him off before he can reach his native land again.

ATHENA: Courage! Don't be overwhelmed by all your direst fears. He travels with such an escort, one that others would pray to stand beside them. Pallas Athena pities you in your tears.

PENELOPE: If you are a god and have heard a god's own voice, come, tell me about Odysseus. Is he still alive? Does he see the light of day? Or is he dead already, lost in the House of Death?

ATHENA: About that man, I cannot tell you the story, start to finish, whether he's dead or alive. It's wrong to lead you on with idle words.

HOMER: At that she glided, gone on a lifting breeze.

BOOK 5: MENELAUS AND HELEN

HOMER: After visiting sandy Pylos, at last they gained, they gained the ravines of Lacedaemon ringed by hill and drove up to the halls of Menelaus.

MENELAUS: Help yourselves to food, and welcome!

HELEN: Do we know, my Lord Menelaus, who our visitors claim to be, our welcome new arrivals?

MENELAUS: Once you've dined, we'll ask you who you are.

HELEN: My heart tells me to come right out and say I've never seen such a likeness. I'm amazed at the sight. To the life, he's like the son of great Odysseus, surely he's Telemachus! The boy that hero left a babe in arms at home when all you Achaeans fought at Troy, launching your headlong battles just for my sake, shameless whore that I was.

MENELAUS: My dear, my dear, now that you mention it, I see the likeness too ... Wonderful! The son of my dearest friend, here in my own house! Nothing could have parted us, bound by love fore each other, till death's dark cloud came shrouding round us both. But the gods themselves, no doubt; robbed that unlucky man, him and him alone, of the day of his return.

(Enter SERVANT)

HOMER: So Menelaus mused and stirred in them all a deep desire to grieve. Helen though of something else. Into the mixing-bowl from which they drank their wine she slipped a drug, heart's-ease, dissolving anger—magic to make us all forget our pains. No one who drank it deeply, could let a tear roll down his cheeks that day, not even if his mother should die, his father die, not even if right before his eyes some enemy brought down a brother or darling son with a sharp bronze blade.

(SERVANT leaves and returns with a chair)

HELEN: Come, let's sit back in the palace now, dine and warm our hearts with the old stories. I will tell something perfect for the occasion. Surely, I can't describe or even list them all, the exploits crowding fearless Odysseus' record, but what a feat that hero dared and carried off in the land of Troy. He slipped into the enemy's city, roamed its streets all disguised, a totally different man, a beggar. I spotted him for the man he was, kept questioning him—the crafty one kept dodging. And once he'd cut a troop of Trojans down with his long bronze sword, back he went to his comrades, filled with information.

MENELAUS: There was a tale, my lady. So well-told. What a piece of work the hero dared and carried off in the wooden horse where all our best encamped, our champions armed with bloody death for Troy ... when along you came, Helen. Three times you sauntered round our hollow ambush, feeling, stroking its flanks, challenging all our fighters, calling each by name—yours was the voice of all our long-lost wives! And Diomedea and I, crouched tight in the midst with great Odysseus, hearing you singing out, were both keen to spring up and sally forth or give you a sudden answer from inside, but Odysseus clamped his great hands on the man's mouth and shut it—brutally, yes—he saved us all, holding on grim-set till Pallas Athena lured your off at last.

TELEMACHUS: I came in hope that you can tell me now some news about my father. My house is being devoured, my rich farms destroyed, my palace crammed with enemies.

MENELAUS: How shameful! That's the bed of a brave man of war they'd like to crawl inside, those

spineless, craven cowards.

TELEMACHUS: Perhaps you saw him die with your own eyes or heard the wanderer's end from someone else. Don't soften a thing from pity, respect for me—tell me clearly, all your eyes have witnessed.

MENELAUS: Proteus the Old Man of the Sea, the prophet who never lies, said—and his story crushed my heart—“Odysseus who makes his home in Ithaca ... I saw him once on an island, weeping live warm tears in the nymph Calypso's house—she holds him there by force. He has no way to voyage home to his own native land, no trim ships in reach, no crew to ply the oars, and send him scudding over the sea's broad back.” But come, my boy, stay on in my palace now with me, at least till ten or a dozen days have passed.

TELEMACHUS: Please, Menelaus, don't keep me quite so long.

BOOK 6: STORM AT SEA

HOMER: When young Dawn with her rose-red fingers shone, the lovely goddess launched him from her island. The wind lifting his spirits high, royal Odysseus spread sail. (*Seagull and ocean waves sounds*) Seventeen days he sailed, making headway well. But now Poseidon, just returning home from his Ethiopian friends, spied Odysseus.

POSEIDON: Outrageous! Look how the gods have changed their minds about Odysseus—while I was off with my Ethiopians. Just look at him there, nearing Phaeacia's shores where he's fated to escape his nose of pain. Still my hopes right high—I'll give that man his swamping fill of trouble!

HOMER: With that he rammed the clouds together—both hands clutching his trident—churned the waves into chaos, whipping all the gales from every quarter; East and South winds clashed, raging West and North, the earth and sea at once.

SXF: *Storm*

PROJECTION: *Storm*

ODYSSEUS: Wretched man—what becomes of me now, at last?

SFX & LIGHTING: *STORM GALORE*

What a wretched death I'm doomed to die!

(*ATHENA enters*)

ATHENA: Ah, poor man, just do as I say. Strip off those clothes and leave your craft. Swim for it now. Here, take this scarf, tie it around your waist—it is immortal. But once you grasp the mainland, untie it quickly; throw it into the sea.

SFX: *STORM STORM STORM, RAFT TOTALED, ETC.*

(*Odysseus ties the scarf around his waist*)

HOMER: He dove headfirst in the sea, stretched his arms and stroked for life itself.

POSEIDON: Go, Go, after all you've suffered—roved your miles of sea—till you fall in the arms of people loved by Zeus. Even so, I can hardly think you'll find your punishments too light.

(ATHENA calms the wind, waves, sea, etc.)

ODYSSEUS: Hear me lord, whoever you are, I've come to you—the answer to all my prayers—rescue me from the sea, the Sea-lord's curse!

HOMER: So the man prayed and the god stemmed his current, held his surge at once and smoothing out the swells before Odysseus now, drew him safe to shore at the river's mouth. Struggling up from the banks, he flung himself in the deep reeds, he kissed the good green earth, and so great Odysseus buried himself in leaves. Athena showered sleep upon his eyes and ...

BOOK 7: THE PRINCESS AND THE STRANGER

HOMER: ... traveled through the countryside. She made her way to the gaily painted room where a young girl lay asleep, Nausicaa, the daughter of generous King Alcinous.

ATHENA: Nausicaa, you careless girl! Look at your fine clothes, lying here neglected. Come, let's go wash these clothes at the break of day.

NAUSICAA: Daddy dear, I wonder, won't you have them harness a wagon for me so I can take our clothes to the river for a washing? Lovely things, but lying before me all soiled. And you, yourself, sitting among the princes, debating points at your council, you really should be wearing spotless linen.

KING ALCINOUS: My darling girl, off you go, and the men will harness a wagon.

(The QUEEN packs her a hamper of food, pours wine in a skin, for NAUSICAA and her MAIDS.)

HOMER: Once they reached the banks of the river flowing strong, they lifted clothes by the armload, plunged them into the dark pools and stamped them down until they'd scoured and rinsed off all the grime.

(The MAIDS hang the clothes to dry in the hot noon sun, then they play ball. One MAID tosses the ball, it misses another MAID, splashes in the river, and wakes ODYSSEUS.)

ODYSSEUS: Man of misery, whose land have I lit on now? What *are* they here—violent, savage, lawless? Listen: shouting, echoing round me—women? Girls?

HOMER: Muttering so, great Odysseus crept out, stripping off with his massive hand a leafy branch from the tangles olive growth to shield his body—hide his private parts. And out he stalked as a mountain lion exultant in his power about to mingle with all those lovely girls.

(The MAIDS scatter in panic, except NAUSICAA, who ATHENA gives courage and dissolves her fears.)

ODYSSEUS: Here I am at your mercy, princess—are you a goddess or a mortal? I look at you and a sense of wonder takes me. Only yesterday did I escape the sea. Some power has tossed me here.

NAUSICAA: Stranger, friend, it's Zeus himself who hands our fortunes out. He gave you pain, it seems. You simply have to bear it.

ODYSSEUS: Compassion—princess, please! Show me the way to town; give me a rag for cover, just some cloth.

NAUSICAA: But now, seeing you've reached our city, you'll never lack for clothing. I am the daughter of generous King Alcinous.

ODYSSEUS: And may the good gods give you a husband, a house, and lasting harmony too. No finer, greater gift in the world than that when man and woman possess their home, two minds, two hearts that work as one.

NAUSICAA: *(To MAIDS)* Stop, my friends! Why run when you see a man? Surely you don't think *him* an enemy, do you? Every stranger and beggar comes from Zeus, and whatever scrap we give him he'll be glad to get. So quick, my girls, give our newfound friend some food and drink.

ODYSSEUS: Stand where you are, dear girls, a good way off, so I can rinse the brine from my shoulders now. But I won't bathe in front of you. I would be embarrassed—stark naked before young girls with lovely braids.

(Athena lavishes splendor on his head and shoulders so he is glistening in glory.)

NAUSICAA: Listen, my white-armed girls, at first he seemed appalling, I must say—now he seems like a god. Ah, if only a man like *that* were called my husband.

(To Odysseus)

Up with you now, my friend, and off to town we go. Wait, let's do it this way. While we're passing along the fields and plowlands, you follow with my maids. But once we reach our city, some old salt might mock us behind our back—we have our share of insolent types in town and one of the coarser sort, spying us, might say, "Now, who's that tall, handsome stranger Nausicaa has in tow? Where'd she light on *him*? Her husband-to-be, just wait! But who? Some shipwrecked stray she's taken up with, some alien from abroad? Countless Phaeacians round about who court her, nothing but our best." So they'll scoff ... just think of the scandal that would face me then. *I'd* find fault with a girl who carried on that way, consorting with men before she'd tied the knot in public. Now, you'll find a splendid grove along the road—take a seat there, wait for a while, and give us time to make it into town and reach my father's house. Then, when you think we're home, walk on yourself, ask the way to my father's palace. You cannot miss it. Go quickly across the hall until you reach my mother. Grasp her knees. If the queen will take you to her heart, then there's hope that you will see your love ones.

(NAUSICAA leaves with the MAIDS.)

ODYSSEUS: Hear me, daughter of Zeus whose shield is thunder—tireless one, Athena! Now hear my prayer at last. Grant that here among the Phaeacian people I may find some mercy and some love!

BOOK 8: PHAEACIA'S HALLS AND GARDENS

HOMER: Odysseus set off toward the city. Pallas Athena, drifted a heavy mist around him, shielding him from any swaggering islander who'd search out who he was. As he was about to enter the welcome city, the bright-eyed goddess herself came up to greet him there, for all the world like a young girl.

ODYSSEUS: Little girl, now wouldn't you be my guide to the palace of the one they call Alcinous?

ATHENA: Good old stranger, here, here is the very palace that you're after—I've guided you all the way. You go on inside. The queen is the first you'll light on in the halls.

HOMER: And there Odysseus stood, gazing at all this bounty, a man who'd borne so much ... Once he'd had his fill of marveling at it all, he crossed the threshold quickly, strode inside the palace.

ODYSSEUS: Queen Arete, daughter of godlike King Rhexenor!

(Bows low)

Here after many trials, I come to beg for mercy, your husbands, yours, and all these feasters' here. May the gods endow them with fortune all their lives, may each hand down to his sons the riches in his house and the pride of place the realm has granted him. But as for myself, grant me a rapid convoy home to my own native land. How far away I've been from all my loved ones—how long I have suffered!

(ARETE takes Odysseus by the hand, raises him up, and escorts him to a chair)

ARETE: Come! Let's pour out our cups to Zeus who loves the lightening, champion of suppliants—suppliants' rights are sacred.

(A MAID brings water to wash his hands. A housekeeper brings food and wine. As ODYSSEUS eats and drinks, the KING rises and addresses his people.)

KING ALCINOUS: Hear me, lords of Phaeacia, hear what the heart inside me has to say. Now, our fest finished, home you go to sleep. But at dawn we call the elders in to full assembly, host our guest in the palace, sacrifice to the gods and then we turn our minds to his passage home, so under our convoy our new friend can travel back to his own land.

HOMER: So there, after many trials Odysseus lay at rest on a corded bed inside the echoing colonnade. Alcinous slept in chambers deep in his lofty house where the queen his wife arranged and shared their bed.

BOOK 8: A DAY FOR SONGS AND CONTESTS

HOMER: When young Dawn with her rose-red fingers shone once more, royal Alcinous, hallowed island kind, rose from bed. Great Odysseus, raider of cities, rose too, and they spent the day in feasts and games and Odysseus excelled them all.

(SINGER does song about Troy)

KING ALCINOUS: But come my friend, tell us your own story now, and tell it truly. Where have your roving forced you? What lands of men have you seen, what sturdy towns, what men themselves? Who were wild, savage, lawless? Who were friendly to strangers, god-fearing men? Tell me.

HOMER: Odysseus, the great teller of tales, launched out on his story:

BOOK 9: IN THE ONE-EYED GIANT'S CAVE

ODYSSEUS: Alcinous, majesty, I am Odysseus, son of Laertes. Sunny Ithaca is my home. And I know no sweeter sight on earth than a man's own native country. No more. Come, let me tell you about the voyage fraught with hardship Zeus inflicted on me, homeward bound from Troy

(Homer continues the story as Odysseus and his men provide the action)

HOMER: Now Zeus, who masses the storm clouds hit the fleet with the North Wind—a howling, demonic gale, shrouding over in thunderheads the earth and sea at once—and night swept down from the sky. The ships went plunging headlong on, our sails slashed to rags by the hurricane's blast! We struck them; cringing at death we rowed our ships to the nearest shoreline, pulling with all our power. There, for two nights, two days, we lay by, with no letup, eating our hearts out, bent with pain and bone-tired. Nine whole days I was borne along by rough, deadly winds on the fish-infested sea. Then on the tenth our squadron reached the land of the Lotus-eaters, mellow fruit and flower. Lotus-eaters who had no notion of killing my companions, not at all, they simply gave them the lotus to taste instead ... Any crewman who ate the lotus, the honey-sweet fruit, lost all desire to send a message back, much less return home, their only wish to linger there with the Lotus-eaters, grazing on lotus, all memory of the journey home dissolved forever. But I brought them back, back to the hollow ships, and streaming tears—I forced them, hauled them under the rowing benches, lashed them fast and shouted out commands:

ODYSSEUS: Quick, no time to lose, embark in the racing ships!

HOMER: From there we sailed on, our spirits now at a low ebb, and reached the land of the high and mighty Cyclops, lawless brutes.

ODYSSEUS: The rest of you stay here, my friends-in-arms. I'll go across with my own ship and crew and probe the natives living over there. Are they violent, savage, lawless? Or friendly to strangers, god-fearing men?

HOMER: I told most of my good trusty crew to wait, to sit tight by the ship and guard her well while I picked out my dozen finest fighters and off I went. But I took a skin of wine along, the ruddy, irresistible wine that Maron gave me once, a priest of Apollo, because we'd rescued him, his wife, and children. Our party quickly made its way to his cave, but we failed to find our host himself inside; he was off in his pasture, ranging his sleek flocks.

CREWMAN: Let's make way with the cheeses, then come back—hurry, drive the lambs and kids from the pens to our swift ship and put out to sea at once!

ODYSSEUS: But I would not give way—and how much better it would have been ...

HOMER: WE built a fire, set our hands on the cheeses, offered some to the gods and ate the bulk ourselves. Back he came from pasture, late in the day, herding his flocks home, and lugging a huge load of good dry logs to fuel his fire at supper. Then to close his door he hoisted overhead a tremendous, massive slab. I tell you, such an immense stone the monster wedged to block his cave!

CYCLOPS: Strangers! Now who are you? Pirates, who risk their lives to plunder other men?

HOMER: The hearts inside us shook, terrified.

ODYSSEUS: Men of Achaea we are, and bound now from Troy! Driven far off course by the warring winds.

CYCLOPS: Stranger, you must be a fool, where did you moor your ship when you arrived? I'd just like to know.

ODYSSEUS: My ship? Poseidon, god of the earthquake, smashed my ship, I and the men you see escaped a sudden death.

HOMER: The ruthless brute. Lurching up, he lunged out with his hands toward my men, and snatching two at once, rapping them on the ground he knocked them dead like pups—their brains gushed out all over, soaking the floor—and ripping them limb from limb to fix his meal he bolted them down like a mountain lion, left no scrap, devoured entrails, flesh and bones, marrow and all! One the Cyclops had stuffed his enormous gut, he slept in his cave. I thought at first to steal up to him, draw the sharp sword at my hip and stab his chest, but a fresh though held me back. There at a stroke we'd finish off ourselves as well—how could we with our bare hands heave back that slab? When young Dawn with her rose-red fingers shone once more the monster relit his fire and milked his handsome ewes; he snatched up two more men and fixed his meal. Well-red, he drove his fat sheep from the cave, lightly shifting the huge door slab up and away, then slipping it back into place, he left me there, the heart inside me brooding on revenge:

ODYSSEUS: How could I pay him back? The Cyclops's great club:

HOMER: I chopped off a fathom's length ...

ODYSSEUS: Planed it down, making the club smooth ...

HOMER: I bent and shaved the tip to a stabbing point. I turned it over the blazing fire to char it good and hard, then hid it well, buried deep under the dung that littered the cavern's floor in thick wet clumps. ...

ODYSSEUS: Who'd brave it out with me to hoist our stake and grind it into his eye when sleep overcomes him?

HOMER: Nightfall brought him back, herding his woolly sheep and he quickly drove the sleek flock into the vaulted cavern, then he hoisted the huge slab to block the door and squatted to milk his sheep and bleating goats, he snatched up two more men and fixed his meal. But this time I lifted a craved wooden bowl, brimful of my ruddy wine, and went right up to the Cyclops, enticing:

ODYSSEUS: Here, Cyclops, try this wine—to top off the banquet of human flesh you've bolted down!

CYCLOPS: More, a hearty helping! And tell me your name now, quickly, so I can hand my guest a gift to warm his heart. Our soil yields powerful, full-bodied wine. But this, this is nectar, ambrosia!

ODYSSEUS: So, you ask me the name I'm known by, Cyclops? I will tell you. But you must give me a guest-gift as you've promised. Nobody—that's my name. Nobody—so my mother and father call me, all my friends.

CYCLOPS: Nobody? I'll eat Nobody last of all his friends—I'll eat the others first. That's my gift to you!

HOMER: With that, he toppled over.

ODYSSEUS: Courage—no panic, no one hang back now!

PROJECTION: Splatters of blood

HOMER: Blood came boiling up around that smoking shaft and the hot blast singed his brow and eyelids round the core and the broiling eyeball burst—it's crackling roots blazed and hissed.

(CYCLOPS bellows and roars in pain)

OTHER CYCLOPS: *(From offstage)* Polyphemus, what in the world's the trouble? Roaring in the night, robbing us of our sleep. Surely no one's rustling your flocks against your will—surely no one's trying to kill you now by fraud or force!

CYCLOPS: Nobody, friends—Nobody's killing me now by fraud and not by force!

OTHER CYCLOPS: If nobody's trying to overpower you, it must be a plague sent here by Zeus. You'd better pray to your father, Lord Poseidon.

ODYSSEUS: Laughter filled my heart to think how Nobody's name had duped them. I was already plotting ... what was the best way out? That flock, their splendid thick fleece ...

CYCLOPS: Dear old ram, why last of the flock to quit the cave? In the good old days you'd never lag behind the rest, but now you're last of all. And why? Sick at heart for your master's eye that coward gouged out, that ... that ... Nobody ... who's not escaped his death, I swear, not yet.

HOMER: But soon as we'd got one foot past the cave, straight to the ship! But once offshore as far as a man's shout can carry, I called back to the Cyclops:

ODYSSEUS: So, Cyclops, no weak coward it was whose crew you bent to devour, you shameless cannibal, daring to eat your guests in your own house.

HOMER: That made the rage of the monster boil over. Ripping off the peak of a towering crag, he heaved it so hard the boulder landed just in front of our dark prow. The sudden backwash drove us landward again.

ODYSSEUS: I began to taunt the Cyclops.

MEN: Why rile the beast again?

That rock he flung—we thought we'd die on the spot!

Good Zeus, the brute can throw?

ODYSSEUS: Cyclops—if any man on the face of the earth should ask you who blinded you—say Odysseus, raider of cities, he gouged out your eye—Laertes' son who make him home Ithaca!

CYCLOPS: Hear me—Poseidon! If I rally am your son and you claim to be my father—come, grant that Odysseus never reaches home. Or if he's fated to see his people again, let him come home late and come a broken man, and let him find a world of pain at home!

HOMER: So he prayed and Poseidon heard his prayer. The monster suddenly hoisted a boulder—far larger—wheeled and heaved it, and the boulder crashed close, landing just in the wake of our dark stern. A huge swell reared up as the rock went plunging under, and from there we sailed on, glad to escape our death.

ODYSSEUS: Yet sick at heart for the comrades we had lost.

BOOK 10: THE BEWITCHING QUEEN OF AEAEA

HOMER: Six whole days we rowed, six nights, nonstop. We reached the Aegean island next, the home of Circe.

(ODYSSEUS scales a commanding crag and scans hard.)

ODYSSEUS: *(To his comrades)* Smoke from Circe's halls! Listen to me, my comrades, brothers in hardship. We must think of a plan at once. I did see smoke drifting up. Brave Eurylochus, move off with two-and-twenty comrades.

(EURYLOCHUS and men search, find Circe's palace. CIRCE is deep inside, singing in her enchanting voice, gliding back and forth at her great immortal loom.)

EURYLOCHUS: Friends, there's someone inside, plying a great loom. Goddess or woman, let's call her

out now!

CIRCE: (*Opens doors, beckons*) All in.

HOMER: So she urged, and the men called out and hailed her. She opened her gleaming doors at once and stepped forth, inviting them all in, and in they went, all innocence. Only Eurylochus stayed behind—he sensed a trap. . . She ushered them in; she mixed them a potion. Into the brew she stirred her wicked drugs to wipe from their memories any thought of home. Once they'd drained the bowls she filled, suddenly she struck with her wand, drove them into her pigsties, all of them bristling into swine—with grunts, snouts—even their bodies, yes, and only the men's minds stayed steadfast as before. So off they went to their pens, sobbing, squealing as Circe flung them acorns, corn[el] nuts and mast, common fodder for hogs that root and roll in mud.

CIRCE: Acorns? Corn[el] nuts?

HOMER: Back Eurylochus ran to our swift black ship to tell the disaster our poor friends had faced.

EURYLOCHUS: ... through the brush ... Circe's palace ... a great loom ... her gleaming doors ... inviting us all in ... But *I* stayed behind ... blotted out ... not one face showed again ...

ODYSSEUS: Lead me back by the same way that you came.

EURYLOCHUS: (*Throws his arms around Odysseus' knees*) Don't force me back there, captain, king—leave me here on the spot. You will never return yourself, I swear, you'll never bring back a single man alive. Quick, cut and run with the rest of us here-----we can still escape the fatal day!

ODYSSEUS: Eurylochus, stay right here, safe by the ship.

HOMER: As I was nearing the halls of Circe skilled in spells, approaching her palace, Hermes, god of the golden wand crossed my path.

(Odysseus heads inland, Hermes crosses his path.)

HERMES: Where are you going now, my unlucky friend—trekking over the hills alone in unfamiliar country? And your men are all there, in Circe's palace, cooped like swine. Well, I warn you, you'll stay right there, trapped with all the rest. But wait! I can save you. Look, here's a potent drug. Its power alone will shield you. Here's your plan of action, step by step. The moment Circe strikes with her long thin wand ...

CIRCE: In.

(She mixes the potion; Ulysses drinks it. She strikes with her wand)

Now off to your sty, you swine, and wallow with your friends!

HERMES: You draw your sharp sword sheathed at your hip and rush her fast as if to run her through! She'll cower in fear and coax you to her bed ...

(Odysseus draws his sword and rushes her, she screams, falls to the floor and hugs his knees.)

But don't refuse the goddess' bed, no then, not if she's to release your friends and treat you well

yourself. But have her swear the finding oath of the blessed gods she'll never plot some new intrigue to harm you, once you lie there naked.

CIRCE: Who are you? You drank my drugs and you're not bewitched! Never has any other man withstood my potion, never! You must be Odysseus, man of twists and turns. Hermes always said you'd come. Come, sheath your sword, let us go to bed together; mount my bed and mix in the magic work of love—we'll breed deep trust between us.

ODYSSEUS: Circe, Circe, how dare you tell me to treat you with any warmth? You, who turned my men to swine in your own house and now you hold me here as well. Teeming with treachery you lure me to your room to mount your bed, so once I like there naked you'll unman me, strip away my courage! Mount your bed? Not for all the world. Not until you consent to swear, goddess, a binding oath you'll never plot some new intrigue to harm me!

HOMER: Straightaway she began to swear the oath that I required—never, she'd never do me harm—and when she'd finished, then at last, I mounted Circe's gorgeous bed ...

(CIRCE leads him off.)

CIRCE: Odysseus, why just sit there, struck dumb, eating your heart out, not touching food. Suspect me of still more treachery? Haven't I just sworn my solemn, binding oath?

ODYSSEUS: Circe, how could any man in his right mind endure the taste of food before he'd freed his comrades-in-arms and looked them in the eyes? If you, you really want me to eat, set them free ... all my beloved comrades.

HOMER: So I demanded. Circe strode on through the halls and out, her wand held high in hand, and, flinging open the pens, drove fourth my men, who looked like full-grown swine. As she went along the ranks, anointing them one by one with some new magic oil—the bristles grown by the first wicked drug slipped away, and they turned men again.

(CIRCE flings open the pens, anoints each PIG-MAN with magic oil, and they turn into MEN again.)

ODYSSEUS: And there we sat at ease, day in, day out, till a year had run its course. But then when the year was through, my loyal comrades took me aside.

COMRADE: Captain, this is madness! High time you thought of your own home at last.

ODYSSEUS: Circe, now make good a promise you gave me once—it's time to help me home.

CIRCE: Odysseus, old campaigner, stay on no more against your will. But first, another journal calls. You must travel down to the House of Death, there to consult the ghost of Tiresias, seer of Thebes.

ODYSSEUS: Circe, who can pilot us on the journey? Who has ever reached the House of Death in a black ship?

CIRCE: Odysseus, born for exploits, let no lack of a pilot at the helm concern you, no, just sit back and the

North Winds will speed you on your way. Once there, go forward, hero. Soon the great seer will appear before you. He will tell you the way to go, the stages of your voyage, and how you can cross the swarming sea and reach home at last.

ODYSSEUS: Up now!

(ODYSSEUS stirs his MEN)

No more lazing away in sleep, we must set sail—Queen Circe has shown the way!

HOMER: Elpenor, the youngest in our ranks, none too brave in battle, none too sound in mind—he'd bedded down on Circe's roofs. Roused by the shouts, he leapt up with a start, but forgot to climb back down again by the long ladder—headfirst from the roof he plunged.

(ELPENOR screams, falls from the roof.)

PROJECTION: *ELPENOR's soul flies up then down to Death.*

ODYSSEUS: You think we are headed home, our own dear land? Well, Circe sets us a rather different course ... down to the House of Death, there to consult the ghost of Tiresias, seer of Thebes.

BOOK 11: THE KINGDOM OF THE DEAD

HOMER: Circe the awesome nymph with lovely braids sent us a fresh following wind. The sail stretched taut as our ship cut the sea all day. And she made the outer limits, the ocean River's bounds. There, we beached our craft by the ocean's banks until we gained the place the Circe made our goal. And once my vows and prayers had invoked the nations of the dead, I took the victims—over the trench I cut their throats and the dark blood flowed in—and up out they came, the drifting, listless spirits of the dead and gone ... But I never let the ghost of the shambling, shiftless dead come near that blood till I had questioned Tiresias myself. ...

ODYSSEUS: But first the ghost of Elpenor, my companion came toward me.

(Speaks to him)

Elpenor, how did you travel down to the world of darkness? Faster on foot, I see, than I in my black ship.

ELPENOR: Odysseus, the doom of an angry god, and god know how much wine—they were my ruin, captain . . . headfirst from Circe's roof I plunged, my neck snapped from the backbone, my soul flew down to death. My lord remember me, I beg you! Don't sail off and desert me, left behind unwept, unburied—don't! Perform my rites, and plant on my tomb that oar I swung with mates when I rowed amount the living.

ODYSSEUS: All this, my unlucky friend, I will do for you. I won't forget a thing.

TIRESIAS: Royal son of Laertes, Odysseus, master of exploits, man of pain, what brings you here, forsaking the light of day to see this joyless kingdom of the dead? Stand back from the trench ... put up

your sharp sword so I can drink from the blood and tell you all the truth. A sweet smooth journey home, renowned Odysseus, that is what you seek, but Poseidon will make it hard for you. Even so, you and your crew may still reach home, suffering all the way, if you only have the power to curb their wild desire and curb your own. At Thrinacia Island, you will find them grazing, the cattle of Helios, god of the sun who sees all, hears all things. Leave the beasts unharmed, your mind set on home, and you all may still reach Ithaca—bent with hardship, true—but harm destroyed, your men destroyed as well. And even if you escape, you'll come home late and come a broken man—all shipmates lost, alone in a stranger's ship—and you will find a world of pain at home. All that I have told you will come true.

ODYSSEUS: Oh Tiresias, surely the gods have spun this out as fate, the gods themselves. But tell me one thing more, and tell me clearly. I see the ghost of Agamemnon here before me. Dead, crouching close to the blood in silence, he cannot bear to look me in the eyes or speak a word to me. How, lord, can I make him know me?

TIRESIAS: One rule there is and simple for me to say and you to learn. Any one of the ghosts you let approach the blood will speak the truth to you. Anyone you refuse will turn and fade away.

(AGAMEMNON drinks)

HOMER: He knew me at once, as soon as he drank the blood, and wailed out, shrilly; tears sprang to his eyes, he thrust his arms toward me, keen to embrace me there—no use ... the great force was gone, the strength lost forever. I wept at the sight; my heart went out to the man.

ODYSSEUS: What fatal stroke of destiny brought you down?

AGAMEMNON: Aegisthus hatched my doom and my destruction, he killed me, he with my own accursed wife ... and around me all my comrades killed, no mercy, one after another ... the whole floor awash with blood. But the death-cry of Cassandra—the most pitiful thing I heard! My treacherous queen, Clytemnestra, killed her over my body, yes, and I, lifting my fists, beat them down on the ground, dying, dying, writhing around the sword. But she, that whore, she turned her back on me, well on my way to Death ... she even lacked the heart to seal my eyes with her hand or close my jaws. So I died—a wretched, ignominious death.

ODYSSEUS: How terrible! Clytemnestra schemed your death while you were worlds away!

AGAMEMNON: What a monstrous thing she plotted, slaughtered her own lawful husband! Why, I expected at least some welcome home from my children, but she—the queen hell-bent on outrage—bathes in shame not only herself but the whole breed of womankind, even the honest ones forever down the years!

ODYSSEUS: Zeus from the very start has hated the race of Atreus with a vengeance—his trustiest weapon: women's twisted wiles. What armies of us died for the sake of Helen ...

AGAMEMNON: True, true, so even your own wife—never indulge her too far. Never reveal the whole truth, whatever you may know. Not that you, Odysseus, will be murdered by your wife! She's much too steady, her feelings run too deep. Penelope, that wise woman, I well remember ... we left her behind

when we went off to war, with an infant boy she nestled at her breast. But my wife—she never even let me feast my eyes on my own son; she killed me first, his father! I tell you this—when you reach your homeland, steer your ship into port in secret, --the time for trusting women is gone forever! Enough. Come, tell me this, and be precise: Have you news of my son?

ODYSSEUS: Why ask me that? I know nothing, whether he's dead or alive.

HOMER: So they stood there, trading heartsick stories, deep in grief, as the tears streamed down their faces.

ODYSSEUS: But look, the ghost of my mother comes! Whom I had left alive when I sailed for sacred Troy.

ODYSSEUS'S MOTHER: Oh my son—what brings you down to the world of death and darkness? You are still alive! Have you just come from Troy? Not yet returned to Ithaca? You've still not seen your wife inside your halls?

ODYSSEUS: Mother, never yet have I neared Achaëa. But tell me about yourself and spare me nothing. What form of death overcame you, what laid you low, tell of the son I left behind; please, tell me about my wife ... still standing fast beside our son, still guarding our great estates, secure as ever now? Or has she wed some other countryman at last, the finest prince among them.

ODYSSEUS'S MOTHER: Surely, surely, she's still waiting there in your halls, poor woman, suffering so, her life an endless hardship like your own ... wasting away the nights, weeping away the day. No one has taken over your royal rights, not yet. Telemachus still holds your great estates in peace. And I with grief, died and me my fate. It was my longing for you, my shining Odysseus—you and your quickness, you and your gentle ways—that tore away my life that had been sweet.

HOMER: And I, my mind in turmoil, how I longed to embrace my mother's spirit, dead as she was! She fluttered, sifting away like a shadow, dissolving like a dream. I cried out to her, words winging into the darkness:

ODYSSEUS: Mother—why not wait for me? How I long to hold you!—We can fling our loving arms around each other, take some joy in the tears that numb the heart.

ODYSSEUS'S MOTHER: My son, my son, the unluckiest man alive! This is just the way of mortals when we die. But you must long for the daylight. Go, quickly. Remember all these things so one day you can tell them to your wife.

HOMER: I rushed back to my ship, commanded all hands to take to the decks and cast of cable quickly. They swung aboard at once, they sat to the oars in ranks and a strong tide of the Ocean River swept her on downstream, sped by our rowing first, then by a fair fresh wind.

BOOK 12: THE CATTLE OF THE SUN

HOMER: As soon as Dawn with her rose-red fingers shone again, I dispatched some men to Circe's halls to bring the dead Elpenor's body. We held his funeral rites in sorrow, streaming tears. Once we'd burned the dean man and the dead man's armor, heaping his grave-mound, hauling a stone that coped it well, we planed his balanced oar aloft to crown his tomb.

CIRCE: Ah, my darling, reckless friends! You who ventured down to the House of Death alive, doomed to die twice over—others die just one. Come, food, drink, Ambrosia? Rest here the livelong day and I will set you a course and chart each seamark, so neither on sea nor land will some new trap ensnare you in trouble, make you suffer more. First you will raise the island of the Sirens, those creatures who spellbind any man alive, whoever comes their way. Whoever draws too close, off guard, and catches the Sirens' voices in the air—no sailing home for him, no wife rising to meet him, no happy children beaming up at their father's face. The high, thrilling song of the Sirens will transfix him, lolling there in their meadow, round them heaps of corpses rotting away, rags of skin shriveling on their bone ... ace straight past that coast! Soften some beeswax and stop your shipmates' ears so none can hear, none of the crew, but if you are ben on hearing , have the tie you hand and foot in the swift ship, erect at the mast-block, lashed by ropes to the mast so you can hear the sirens' song to your heart's content, But, if you plead, commanding your men to set you free, then they must lash you faster, rope on rope. But once your crew has rowed you past the Sirens, there Scylla lurks, a grisly monster, I assure you! She has six long swaying necks, a hideous head on each, each head barbed with a triple row of fangs, thickset, packed tight—and armed to the hilt with black death! She shoots out her heads, out of that terrifying pit, widely sweeping the reefs. No mariners yet can boast they've raced their ship past Scylla's lair without some mortal blows—with each of her six heads she snatches up a man from the dark-prowed craft and whisks him off. Beneath the lower crags, awesome Charybdis gulps the dark water down. Three times a day she vomits it up, three times she gulps it down, that terror! Don't be there when the whirlpool swallows down—not ever the earthquake god could save you from disaster. Sail on past her—top speed! Better by far to lose six men and keep your ship than lose your entire crew.

ODYSSEUS: Can't I possibly fight Scylla off when Scylla strikes my men?

CIRCE: So stubborn! Scylla's no mortal, she's an immortal devastation, just flee the creature, that's the only way!

(Pause for action)

Then you will make the island of Thrinacia ... where herds of the Sun-god's cattle graze. Harm them in any way, and I can see it now; your ship destroyed, your men destroyed as well! And even if you escape, you'll come home late, all shipmates lost, and come a broken man.

ODYSSEUS: Listen to me, my comrades, brothers in hardship; let me tell you the dire prophecies of Tiresias. He told me to shun this island of the Sun, the joy of man. Here, they warned, the worst disaster awaits us. Row straight past these shores—race our black ship on.

EURYLOCHUS: *(complaining)* You're a hard man, Odysseus. Your fighting spirit's stronger than ours, your stamina never fails. You must be made of iron head to foot. Look, your crew's half-dead with labor,

starved for sleep, and you forbid us to set foot on land, this land here, washed by the waves, where we might catch a decent meal again. Drained as we are, night falling fast, you'd have us desert this haven and blunder off, into the mist-bound seas? No, let's give way to the dark night and set out our supper here.

ODYSSEUS: Eurylochus, I'm one against all—the upper hand is yours. But swear me a binding oath, all here, that if we come on a herd of cattle or find flock of sheep, not one man among us—blind in his reckless ways—will slaughter an ox or ram. Just eat in peace, content with the food immortal Circe gave us.

HOMER: They quickly swore the oath that I required and once they had vowed they'd never harm the herds, adeptly set about the evening meal. A welcome sleep cam on them in their tears. But for one whole month the south wind blew nonstop, not other wind came up, none but the South, Southeast. As long as our food and ruddy wine held out, the crew, eager to save their lives, kept hands off the herds. But then, when supplies aboard had all run dry ...

EURYLOCHUS: Listen to me, my comrades, brothers in hardship. All ways of dying are hateful to us poor mortals, true, but to starve to death—that's worst of all. So up with you now, let's drive off the pick of Helios' sleek herds, slaughter them to their gods who rule the skies up there. If we ever make it home to Ithaca, erect at once a glorious temple to the Sun-god. But if the Sun, inflamed for his longhorn cattle, means to wreck our ship—I'd rather die at sea, with one deep gulp of death, than die by inches on this desolate island here!

HOMER: That moment soothing slumber fell from my eyes

ODYSSEUS: Father Zeus! You with your fatal sleep, you lulled me into disaster. Left on their own, look what a monstrous thing my crew concocted!

HELIOS: Father Zeus! Punish them all, that crew of Laertes' son Odysseus—what an outrage! The, they killed my cattle, the great joy of my heart ... unless they pay me back in blood for the butchery of my hers, down I go to the House of Death and blaze among the dead!

ZEUS: Helios, you keep shining among the deathless gods and mortal men across the good green earth. And as for the guilty ones, why, soon enough on the wine-dark sea I'll hit their racing ship with a white-hot bolt; I'll tear it into splinters.

HOMER: The cattle were dead already ... and the gods soon showed us all some fateful sings—the hides began to crawl, the meat, both raw and roasted, bellowed out on the spits, and we heard a noise like the moan of lowing oxen. Then Zeus the son of Cronus mounted a thunderhead above our hollow ship and the deep sea went black beneath it. All of a sudden killer-squalls attacked us, screaming out of the west, a murderous blast shearing the two forestays off so the mast topples backward, its running tackle spilling into the bilge. The mast itself went crashing into the stern—it struck the helmsman's head and crushed his skull to pulp, and down from his deck the man flipped like a diver—his hardy life spirit left his bones behind. Then, Then in the same breath Zeus hit the craft with a lightening-bolt and thunder, and the god cut short their journey home forever. But I lashed the mast and keel together, made them one,

riding my makeshift raft as the wretched gale-winds bore me on and on, making me double back my route toward cruel Charybdis, where the dreadful whirlpool gulped the salt sea down. But, heaving myself aloft to clutch at the fig-tree's height, like a bat I clung to its trunk for dear life. I held on, dead set ... waiting for her to vomit my mast and keel back up again—Oh, how I ached for both!—and back they came, late but at last. I let go—I plunged with my hands and feet flailing, crashing into the waves beside those great beams and scrambling aboard them, I rowed hard with my hands right through the stars ... And the father of men and gods did not let Scylla see me, else I'd have died on the spot. I drifted along nine days. On the tenth, at night, the gods cast me up on Ogygia, Calypso's island, home of the dangerous nymph with glossy braids who speaks with human voice, and ...

ODYSSEUS: ... she took me in, she loved me ... Why cover the same ground again? Just yesterday, here at hall, I told you all the rest—you and your gracious wife. It goes against my grain to repeat a tale told once, and told so clearly.

BOOK 13: ITHACA AT LAST

KING ALCINOUS: Odysseus, now that you have come to my house, I know you won't be driven off your course, nothing can hold you back—however much you've suffered, you'll sail home.

ODYSSEUS: Alcinous, launch me safely on my way—to one and all, farewell! *(All burst into applause)*

HOMER: When they reached the ship at the water's edge, Odysseus climbed aboard and they slipped the cable free.

ODYSSEUS: Your health, my queen, through all your days to come—until old age and death, that visit all mankind, pay you a visit too. Now I am on my way, but you ... may you take joy in this house of yours, in your children, your people, in Alcinous the king!

HOMER: On she ran, cutting the swells at top speed, bearing a man endowed with the gods' own wisdom, one who had suffered twenty years of torment, sick at heart, cleaving his way through wars of men and pounding waves at sea, but now he slept in peace, the memory of his struggles laid to rest.

(CREW lifts ODYSSEUS—asleep—off the ship and lays him on the sand. We see TELEMACHUS and PENELOPE)

HOMER: And then, that hour the star rose up, the clearest, brightest star, that always heralds the newborn light of day ... the deep-sea-going ship made landfall on the island ... Ithaca, at last.

(END ACT ONE)

18 additional pages in ACT II