THE TELEGONY

[Proclus, *Chrestomathy*:] After the *Returns* comes the *Odyssey* of Homer, and then the *Telegony* in two books by Eugammon of Cyrene, which contains the following matters. The suitors of Penelope are buried by their kinsmen, and Odysseus, after sacrificing to the Nymphs, sails to Elis to inspect his herds. He is entertained there by Polyxenus and receives a mixing bowl as a gift; the story of Trophonius and Agamedes and Augeas then follows. He next sails back to Ithaca and performs the sacrifices ordered by Teiresias, and then goes to Thesprotis where he marries Callidice, queen of the Thesprotians. A war then breaks out between the Thesprotians, led by Odysseus, and the Brygi. Ares routs the army of Odysseus and Athena engages with Ares, until Apollo separates them. After the death of Callidice Polypoetes, the son of Odysseus, succeeds to the kingdom, while Odysseus himself returns to Ithaca. In the meantime, Telegonous, while traveling in search of his father, lands on Ithaca and ravages the island: Odysseus comes out to defend his country, but is killed by his son unwittingly. Telegonous, on learning his mistake, transports his father's body with Penelope and Telemachus to his mother's island, where Circe makes them immortal, and Telegonous marries Penelope, and Telemachus Circe.

And when the flame had come to where time and place
seemed fitting to my Guide, I heard him say
these words to it: "O you two souls who pace
together in one flame!--if my days above
won favor in your eyes, if I have earned
however much or little of your love
in writing my High Verses, do not pass by,
but let one of you be pleased to tell where he,
having disappeared from the known world, went to die."

As if it fought the wind, the greater prong
of the ancient flame began to quiver and hum;
then moving its tip as if it were the tongue
that spoke, gave out a voice above the roar.
"When I left Circe," it said, "who more than a year
detained me near Gaeta long before
Aeneas came and gave the place that name,
not fondness for my son, nor reverence
for my aged father, nor Penelope's claim
to the joys of love, could drive out of my mind
the lust to experience the far-flung world
and the failings and felicities of mankind.

I put out on the high and open sea
with a single ship and only those few souls
who stayed true when the rest deserted me.

As far as Morocco and as far as Spain
I saw both shores; and I saw Sardinia
and the other islands of the open main.

I and my men were stiff and slow with age
when we sailed at last into the narrow pass
where, warning all men back from further voyage,
Hercules' Pillars rose upon our sight.
Already I had left Ceuta on the left;
Seville now sank behind me on the right.
"Shipmates," I said, "who through a hundred thousand perils have reached the west, do not deny to the brief remaining watch our senses stand experience of the world beyond the sun. Greeks! You were not born to live like brutes, but to press on toward manhood and recognition! With this brief exhortation I made my crew so eager for the voyage I could hardly have held them back from it when I was through; and turning our stern toward morning, our bow toward night, we bore southwest out of the world of man; we made wings of our oars for our fool's flight. That night we raised the other pole ahead with all its stars, and ours had so declined it did not rise out of its ocean bed. Five times since we had dipped our bending oars beyond the world, the light beneath the moon had waxed and waned, when dead upon our course we sighted, dark in space, a peak so tall I doubted any man had seen the like. Our cheers were hardly sounded, when a squall broke hard upon our bow from the new land; three times it sucked the ship and the sea about as it pleased Another to order and command. At the fourth, the poop rose and the bow went down till the sea closed over us and the light was gone."

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel; I will drink
Life to the lees. All times I have enjoyed
Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on the shore, and when
Through scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vexed the dim sea. I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known--cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honored of them all--
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
Gleams that untraveled world whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!
As though to breathe were life! Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains; but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the scepter and the isle--
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfill
This labor, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and through soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centered in the sphere
O common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail;
There gloom the dark broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toiled, and wrought, and thought with me--
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads--you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.
Death closes all; but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Though much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are--
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 1833 (written), 1842 (published).
MENELAUS AND HELEN

I

Hot through Troy's ruin Menelaus broke
To Priam's palace, sword in hand, to sate
On that adulterous whore a ten years' hate
And a king's honour. Through red death, and smoke
And cries, and then by quieter ways he strode,
Till the still innermost chamber fronted him.
He swung his sword, and crashed into the dim
Luxurious bower, flaming like a god.

High sat white Helen, lonely and serene.
He had not remembered that she was so fair
And that her neck curved down in such a way;
And he felt tired. He flung the sword away,
And kissed her feet, and knelt before her there,
The perfect Knight before the perfect Queen.

II

So far the poet. How should he behold
That journey home, the long connubial years?
He does not tell you how white Helen bears
Child on legitimate child, becomes a scold,
Haggard with virtue. Menelaus bold
Waxed garrulous, and sacked a hundred Troys
Twixt noon and supper. And her golden voice
Got shrill as he grew deafer. And both were old.

Often he wonders why on earth he went
Troyward, or why poor Paris ever came.
Oft she weeps, gummy-eyed and impotent;
Her dry shanks twitch at Paris' mumbled name.
So Menelaus nagged; and Helen cried;
And Paris slept on by Scamander side.

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

The doors flapped open in Odysseus’ house,
The lolling latches gave to every hand,
Let traitor, babbler, tout and bargainer in.
The rooms and passages resounded
With ease and chaos of a public market,
The walls mere walls to lean on as you talked,
Spat on the floor, surveyed some newcomer
With an absent eye. There you could be yourself.
Dust in the nooks, weeds nodding in the yard,
The thick walls crumbling. Even the cattle came
About the doors with mild familiar stare
As if this were their place.
All round the island stretched the clean blue sea.

Sole at the house’s heart Penelope
Sat at her chosen task, endless undoing
Of endless doing, endless weaving, unweaving,
In the clean chamber. Still her loom ran empty
Day after day. She thought: "Here I do nothing
Or less than nothing, making an emptiness
Amid disorder, weaving, unweaving the lie
The day demands. Odysseus, this is duty,
To do and undo, to keep a vacant gate
Where order and right and hope and peace can enter.
Oh will you ever return? Or are you dead,
And this wrought emptiness my ultimate emptiness?"

She wove and unwove and wove and did not know
That even then Odysseus on the long
And winding road of the world was on his way.

Edwin Muir, 1943.
Odyssey, Book 1, lines 1-2:

Ἅνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλά πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσε.

Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.


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