The Search for Odysseus

By
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The Search for Odysseus was originally produced by Wales Stage Company, UK, in 1993

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**Characters:**

- Telemachus
- Athene
- Penelope
- Eurymachus
- Odysseus
- Eurycleia
- Alcinous
- Laodomus
- Cyclops
- Achilles
- Calypso
- Arete
- Nausicaa
- Messenger
- Cast/Chorus/Calypso’s Helpers

*The play can be performed by six actors doubling.*
ACT ONE

Music. ATHENE, Daughter of Zeus, enters dressed as a beggar.

ATHENE Once upon a time in the land of Greece,
On an island called Ithaca
there lived a man named ...

CAST Odysseus.

Enter ODYSSEUS.

ATHENE Odysseus was the King of Ithaca, a brave man, a good man and
when his country called him to war he put on his bronze armor
picked up his sharpened spear and led his men down to the long
black ships which lay in wait on the cold tide and his wife wept to
see him go.

A light rises on PENELPOE who hold a baby in her arms.

PENELPOE My husband.

ODYSSEUS Penelope.

PENELPOE Please do not go.

ODYSSEUS I have no choice.

PENELPOE Your son, your son.

ODYSSEUS I'll be home before he's a year old, I promise.

PENELPOE You promise?

Silence

ODYSSEUS If I don't come back by the time my son has grown his first beard
then consider me as dead and marry again, if you wish, with a
younger man.
The cast representing soldiers and people of Ithaca, laugh at this last remark.

PENELOPE You are my husband. How can you joke at a moment like this?

ODYSSEUS Because it won't happen. I'll come home to you and to my beloved Ithaca. I shall see the smoke rising from the chimney and my son will run down to the harbor to greet me.

PENELOPE Not if he's only a year old my husband.

ODYSSEUS (He smiles) Within a year the bell will ring out with news of our victory.

A WOMAN Look - Odysseus.

Music. Then as if in the sky above the harbor, a small sparrow is chased and crushed in the talons of an eagle. This may be represented through percussive sound.

A SOLDIER What does it mean Odysseus?

ODYSSEUS It's a good omen my friends. The sparrow represents our enemy, the Trojans. We the Greeks are the eagle. We will crush the enemy in our mighty talons, win the war and be home for supper.

ALL Odysseus!

ODYSSEUS kisses PENELOPE with love and passion and then he holds up his baby son.

ODYSSEUS My son, listen for the bell, then I will come home with my arms full of gold, treasures, beyond your wildest dreams - and all for you.

ATHENE And with these words, brave Odysseus, good Odysseus, set sail for a distant land far across the wine dark sea.

CAST Odysseus - Odysseus.

Exit ODYSSEUS. PENELOPE stands looking out to sea.
ATHENE And his son saw him go but did not understand the meaning of the horizon.

PENELOPE Hush, hush little one, your father will be home soon, home soon, home soon.

The music continues low and foreboding containing a sense of the war far away.

ATHENE But the war did not last a year or even two, or three, or four, or five, or six or seven or eight or nine and all the long years Penelope waited. And her son grew tall, and his name was, Telemachus.

CAST Telemachus.

Enter TELEMACHUS as a ten-year-old boy. He comes on brandishing a sword, fighting an invisible enemy. EURYMACHUS, his mother’s suitor, watches him from the shadows.

TELEMACHUS Odysseus the hero and his friend the angry Achilles are in a tight spot. Back to back they face one hundred Trojans. The Trojans charge. The swords of the heroes never cease - blood and limbs fill the air - the Trojans die horrible deaths. (This he acts out) At last there are only two men left standing, Odysseus and Achilles - but then an arrow flies. (He falls.) 'My heel my heel' the hero cries, and as he dies he calls out. 'Farewell Odysseus, farewell - my friend'. (As Achilles, he dies.)

EURYMACHUS applauds.

TELEMACHUS What do you want?

EURYMACHUS The other lads are playing in the courtyard, why don't you join them? (He picks up TELEMACHUS' sword which is wooden.)

TELEMACHUS Give my sword back.

EURYMACHUS A fine sword.

TELEMACHUS Give it back.

EURYMACHUS I came to talk to you - about your mother.
TELEMACHUS  One day, my father will come home and cut your head off.
EURYMACHUS  Here, let’s play together, you and I. *(He offers TELEMACHUS his sword back.)*

TELEMACHUS  I don't want to play with you.
EURYMACHUS  Don't be rude, Telemachus.
TELEMACHUS  It's my house, I'll be rude if I want.
EURYMACHUS  Come let's spar together like Father and Son. *(He throws down the sword which TELEMACHUS picks up.)* Come attack me. *(He walks towards TELEMACHUS who is very scared.)* We're only playing aren't we? *(TELEMACHUS drops his sword. EURYMACHUS then puts his own sword against his throat.)* Understand this Telemachus. I wouldn't let a man live who spoke to me as you have spoken to me. But you are not a man –

TELEMACHUS  My father... .
EURYMACHUS  Your father is dead.
TELEMACHUS  NO - no.
EURYMACHUS  And I will marry your mother.
TELEMACHUS  NO! *(EURYMACHUS removes the sword.)* My father is alive. He will come home and sweep you from the house like so many dead leaves.
EURYMACHUS  Perhaps it would be better for your mother if he were dead. Have you thought of that? Or are you too young to understand? Love can grow cold you know.

A bell rings.

TELEMACHUS  The bell. There must be some mistake. *(pause)* It still rings.

*PENELlope enters.*
PENELOPE  Telemachus. The war. The war is over. (She embraces her son.)

TELEMACHUS  (turns to EURYMACMUS) NOW, now we shall see. My father will have your head.

Enter EURYCLEIA.

EURYCLEIA  My lady. A messenger is at the gate.

PENELOPE  Let him in, let him in - no wait. Give him food and drink. We must not forget ourselves.

EURYCLEIA  Yes my lady.

PENELOPE  It doesn't seem possible and yet the bell still rings. Is it really true do you think?

TELEMACHUS  I t must be. It has to be. (They embrace again.)

Enter EURYCLEIA.

EURYCLEIA  The poor man will not eat. He will not drink but begs to see you now.

PENELOPE  Then let him in, no wait - let him bathe and give him clean clothes..

TELEMACHUS  Mother.

PENELOPE  Yes - let him in - let him in.

EURYCLEIA exits momentarily and she and the MESSENGER enter.

MESSENGER  My lady, I see by your smile the news has younger legs than me.

PENELOPE  It's true then.

MESSENGER  As true as I stand here. The war with Troy is over!

PENELOPE  Good. And - did we win?
MESSENGER (Laughs) Aye. Troy is no more than dust. Its men are dead, the women and children sold into slavery.

PENELLOPE nods, unsure how to react.

TELEMACHUS My father?

MESSENGER Your father is safe and well. I saw him set sail for home in his own ship with twenty trusted men.

TELEMACHUS (Punching the air) Yes! Yes!

MESSENGER Brave Odysseus. We all rejoice to speak his name. Not a single Greek would be home yet but for him. Your husband's wits have saved us all.

TELEMACHUS How? Tell me everything in every detail. Mother?

PENELLOPE Yes - go on.

MESSENGER Odysseus of the nimble wits is what we call him now for he devised a plan so clever, so full of cunning. Under his orders we made it seem as if the war had broken all our hearts. For ten years we had camped outside the city walls of Troy and won nothing but wounds and grey hairs. Great warriors like Achilles had been killed, so our giving up was not hard for the Trojans to believe. One morning as they awoke they found the field of battle empty, our camp fires out, our ships gone. They cried out in joy, 'The Greeks have fled, we have defeated them!', not knowing that all our soldiers armed and ready to kill were hiding on an island just a few miles away. The Trojans came out of the city and danced in and out of our empty tents. 'Here camped the merciless Achilles, there the clever Odysseus'. Now gone it seemed, all gone except an offering that we had made to the Gods and left behind.

TELEMACHUS What kind of offering?
MESSENGER A horse. A huge wooden horse. It was made from sawn firewood, and its belly was a cavernous womb large enough to hold twenty soldiers armed to the teeth. Your father was among them.

TELEMACHUS Inside the belly of the wooden horse.

MESSENGER The Trojans in their joy pushed the horse through the gates of their mighty city and for the first time in ten years, after all the wasted blood of the battlefield, by one trick we too were inside. All night the Trojans drank and danced and when at last they fell asleep your father, your husband, glad to be free, led out his men with stealth. He slew the sentry with one silent blow.

TELEMACHUS Yes!

MESSENGER Opened the gates of Troy from the inside and the whole of our army, bristling with knives and swords poured in under cover of darkness.

TELEMACHUS And then... ?

MESSENGER (Pause) And then the moon hid her eyes. No tongue can describe the terrible slaughter of that night.

TELEMACHUS How many did my father kill?

PENELLOPE Telemachus!

TELEMACHUS My father is a soldier, and a hero amongst men. They should call him a God.

MESSENGER Aye many of the common soldiers do for he has brought us home and we are glad.

PENELLOPE Messenger. Thank you. Where is the fleet that brings my husband home?

MESSENGER There was a storm just a few miles from the coast of Troy which scattered the fleet, so each ship will make its way alone. Your husband’s ship was among the fastest. The first mast on the horizon should belong to him and you.
PENELOPE          Eurycleia, bring the Messenger some food now. He will stay with us tonight.

MESSENGER         My lady, I will resist. I have a son who was just a few days old when the war began. I haven't seen him for ten years, and I've another day's walk to my farm, before I do.

PENELOPE          May the Gods bless you.

MESSENGER         And your house.

Exit MESSENGER.

PENELOPE          Ten years? Why not ten months, ten days, ten minutes? . . .

EURYMACHUS goes to comfort her.

TELEMACHUS        Leave her alone.

PENELOPE          Telemachus, go and prepare to meet your father. Go on.

Exit TELEMACHUS.

EURYMACHUS        I'm glad the war's over Penelope.

PENELOPE          Yes. Perhaps you should leave before my husband comes home.

EURYMACHUS        Are you ashamed?

PENELOPE          No.

EURYMACHUS        Then I'll stay and greet him.

Music. A fanfare. TELEMACHUS enters wearing a fine robe. EURYCLEIA enters and gives PENEOLE a fine robe also.

TELEMACHUS        Mother! There are ships on the horizon. Can you see them?

PENELOPE          (Gently) Yes, I see them.
ATHENE One by one the ships sailed home from war returning swiftly on the welcoming tide. Husbands and wives, fathers and sons were reunited. Each day another boat came home.

TELEMACHUS Sailor, have you seen my father’s ship?

SAILOR No master, but he should be close behind.

TELEMACHUS He will come home now won’t he mother? Now the war’s over.

ATHENE Each day mother and son gazed out to sea until all those who had escaped sheer destruction, either by land or sea came home, all but one man alone.

TELEMACHUS Father! Father! Where is he? What could keep him?

PENELOPE The sea.

TELEMACHUS No! (He calls out again.) Father!

Silence. Exit TELEMACHUS, PENELOPE goes to a large spinning wheel. She begins to spin and to sing.

PENELOPE Many years I have waited
On this cold, lonely shore
Many tears I have wasted
for a man and his war.
Now my eye has forgotten
the shape of his face
The sea has devoured him
and left me no trace.

She continues to spin indicating that she has become withdrawn and introspective.
EURYMACHUS watches her.

ATHENE Again the years passed by, and at fourteen years old, Telemachus showed the first signs of his first beard.

TELEMACHUS enters, once again he fights invisible enemies. EURYMACHUS enters.
EURYMACHUS  Come on Telemachus - we're only playing aren't we?  
*(TELEMACHUS drops his sword and EURYMACHUS smiles.*) It's past your bedtime - Telemachus. Go on. *(TELEMACHUS picks up his sword and goes to his bed. He plays with a wooden horse from which soldiers descend.)*

EURYMACHUS  *(goes to PENELope)* Penelope? *(silence)* Penelope.

PENELope  Yes?

EURYMACHUS  Have you spoken to your son yet?

PENELope  What about?

EURYMACHUS  About the matter we discussed.

PENELope  I've been busy.

EURYMACHUS  So I see. *(pause)* What are you making?

PENELope  I'm not sure. It will turn into something eventually.

EURYMACHUS  Why don't you speak to him tonight? *(silence)* Penelope?

PENELope  Mmm?

EURYMACHUS  We must move forward, with our lives together. If we wait any longer I fear...

PENELope  *(sharply)* For what? For whom?

EURYMACHUS  For you. Every day you sit and spin not knowing what you make. Each day your mind travels to some dreamland where I cannot follow. *(pause)* Penelope, do not waste your life. The time has come for you and your son to accept that Odysseus is dead. Drowned at sea.

PENELope  I have not heard that.