

THE ODYSSEY

A Modern Sequel by
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Translated into English Verse,
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This translation is for
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BOOK V

The sun turned toward his mother, and his mother, frightened, rushed to light all her ovens at the sky's foundations and cast in forty loaves of bread to feed him well. When the crew saw the sun dip down, they lit a fire hard by the coastal rocks, then broiled a spitted kid found wedged between a rocky cleft and swiftly roped. The half-baked piper sat cross-legged on stones and turned the spit, and as his cross-eyes blinked with smoke, he laughed, nibbled with secret glee, and licked the luscious meat. All watched the reddening kid on the hot coals and yearned to eat at last, for hunger threshed their entrails cruelly until for solace they, too, nibbled and sipped wine. Thorn-bearded Captain Clam, nostalgic for the sea, sighed heavily and began to sing a plaintive ditty: "Ah, Mistress Captain Sea, with all your teeming ships, you swish and sway and saunter on the rosy sands, you swagger on the beach and fill young men with longing. The wretched mothers in their rooms, the wretched sisters, the wretched sweethearts by their looms all raise their hands: 'May you be cursed, O bitter sea! You drive men daft! You strut upon the sands and your white ankles laugh, your eyes and your teeth laugh, and all your beaches laugh, till young men laugh and sigh and come down to your sands: 'Hi, Mistress Captain Sea, what wages will you give me?' "The four winds for a blanket and the waves for pillow, and a small seagull that will bring the sad news quickly

to mother and to sister and to coddled sweetheart." "

Thus Captain Clam with his hoarse voice sang bitterly while the spit swiftly turned and broiled the fragrant roast. Hardihood then spoke roughly and spread his grasping hands: "Well spoken, Captain Clam, well said, but I'm still starved!"

Bush-bearded Captain Clam laughed loud and stuffed his mouth: "Let that cantankerous song go bawl and babble! Oho! If you're in love, give bones and body to the crows! Lads, I'm a toady toad-fish and a perching perch-fish!"

The wine-companions laughed, cut up the kid in shares, and fell upon it greedily, gleaming tooth and nail; only the munching of their sturdy jaws was heard and clean-picked kid-bones falling on the pebbly beach and tipped-up wine-gourds gurgling on their greasy lips. When they had eaten well and washed their hands in sea, the comrades broke their silence and began to talk: "If only our fierce captain were to loom up now, bearing in his embrace the lady of arched eyebrows!"

These words of hope still hung upon the piper's lips when hawk-eyed Granite leapt and thundered through the hush: "Fellows, is that his seacap gleaming not far off?"

The crew leapt to their feet, made out a chariot's shape, picked out their captain's cap, and saw a pure-white dove that flew as harbinger ahead and showed the way. The five brave gallants dashed like savage lion-cubs who spy their father with wild game between his teeth. They raised huge dust clouds, and the piper, panting, last, ran stumbling on his pigeon-toes, stuttering with yells: "Fellows, I see two white wings in the chariot there!

THE ODYSSEY

Ahoy! We'll sleep tonight beside man-loving Helen!" Then Captain Clam ran forward and held the foaming steeds; with shouts and laughter the smith seized in brawny arms the world-famed woman, gently put her down to earth, then turned his fevered face toward hers as though just then he'd carried to his forge and on his anvil placed bronze metal white-hot from the fire for murderous swords. "Quick, fellows, rig the sails, and off! Our task is done!" Their Captain roared, and all, wing-footed, rushed down toward the beach.

Evening had not yet faded, as on mountain slopes night stepped with crimson feet like a wild partridge, slowly. The tranquil evening veiled the world with sweet delight, each heart in the breast's branches perched like a calm bird and sang night-long all it had feared to sing by day. A girl sighed in her loneliness, and all leaves swayed, a widow sent her longings out to browse at night, and old king Menelaus fell on his terraced roof and slowly shook his head like an exhausted hare. He turned his crown in his pale hands and played with it for many speechless hours while his mind raced far on desolate shores, on steeds, on laughter, on white roads. His motionless dry eyes looked southward steadily as though they followed an unceasing falling star. At that same hour the comrades leapt into their ship and placed star-breasted Helen gently by the prow. "Welcome, foam-born, our vessel's gorgon figurehead with your fate-written crystal on your warring breasts!"

Thus spoke the enduring archer, and his heart rejoiced
because the unknown far future always stormed and tossed him;
he never wanted earth to lose her virtue, raped by mind.
The sails and rigging creaked, the painted prow's eyes glared,
till like a swimming steed the vessel plunged in foam
and reared with upright haunches in the streaming sea.
Astride the bowsprit, the light-headed piper yelled:
"Hey, fellows, may this holy voyage never end!
Ho, for a slender ship, for Helen at your side,
to sail the seas without a country endlessly!"
But Helen watched in silence the sea's emerald wash,
the curly momentary foam, and joyed to feel
the seawind thrusting at her breasts like a man's hands
and cool her deep down to her foam-smooth rosy heels,
nor turned her head at the port's mouth to see that isle ⁹⁷
which sweetly spread its shade and flowering grass for her
when once she twined limbs lovingly with handsome Paris
and shamed her household gods in an erotic swoon.
As the world-wanderer held the tiller, he recalled
far-distant shores, and wondered where to set his course.
Then as the warm stars glowed and thickened round the masts,
the men pressed close about the narrow deck to eat,
and the brave crew had never tasted bread more sweet
nor had a cooler mistral ever flicked their brows.
Man-loving Helen sighed with joy, for once again
men's heavy odors rose, great cities shook once more,
and freedom's wind blew once again about her brow.
She had not tasted such sweet bread for many years,
for many years no wind so sweet had touched her brow.

THE ODYSSEY

Strengthened with food, the gallants sat astride the thwarts
and all life in their entrails laughed like cooling wells
till in their minds fate blossomed like a crimson rose
and they, like scarabs, plundered all its golden honey.
These were not waves, nor this a scudding ship they rowed,
but they were wandering leaf by leaf a fragrant rose
till all their thighs and bellies filled with pollened gold.
Their minds shook in their haughty heads, the wide world shook,
though life was not a cooling waterdrop, nor fate a rose,
but they breathed Helen's misty breath, and their minds shook.
Then Kentaur stroked his beard, opened his he-goat lips,
and with a wily voice spun truths and shameless lies
in a close web of slaves, rich wine, and golden castles,
and as he talked life turned to legend in his mind:
how slaves caressed him as he sprawled amid the wine-jugs,
how from the tower's roof their master's laughter plunged
and ate the strong foundations like a river's rush,
then how he swooped on Helen with his eagle claws.
The horses scattered in the fields, doves in the courts,
until his comrades' skulls struck sparks, echoed like stones,
so much had their blood-brother swept them with his guile.
But Rocky stood apart, leaning above the gunwale,
admiring flocks of black-white sheep, the goats that ran,
and other curly herds that pushed behind: a sea
packed full of sheep, the penfold of a Shepherd King.
Meanwhile their skipper spun strange cities in his mind;
he thought of sailing through waste seas of the far North
and like the male worm hang his beard with crystal ice;
of turning his prow boldly toward the distant South,

toward that dark land of savage beasts and crinkly men
for which the Cretan bard once opened the iron doors.
He longed for the black, aromatic shores of Africa,
land where the sun bakes bread and the full moon is milked.
"Welcome and hail, black brothers! I did not want to fall
and vanish beyond the waves before I bade goodbye.
I've heard that earth hangs down your neck like a huge drum;
now raise your hands, my brothers, beat it until it bursts!"
Thus murmured the deceiving mind of the world-roamer;
all things seemed beautiful, earth spread before his eyes,
a hand with five roads, luring onward toward the waves.
He bent above the black eyes of the swan-born mutely
to see where fate would moor them, but the godly one,
leaning upon her crystal arms, was idly dreaming:
a vine of thick grape-clusters grew above her head,
a cool and gentle wind through azure shadows blew,
and she, stark-naked on a black bull, ambled by ...
As the all-knowing man hung on her bosom's cliff,
his great mind dimmed, his castle-skull began to shake,
and he yearned suddenly to cast his friends mid-sea
like dolphins, and to sail alone with Helen there;
meanwhile his masts would sprout with clusters of crisp grapes
and he would lie on vine leaves, fondle her with pride,
and in her womb entrust a son that one day would surpass him.

But as the archer horsewhipped man's unruly passions,
Captain Clam climbed the mast to spy with careful watch
on wind and weather both amid the starry dark,
till on the deck abruptly his wild cry rang out:

THE ODYSSEY

"Fellows, take in the sails! A fierce North Wind comes plunging!"
The archer raised his eyes and like a dragon scanned
the lowering, wrathful clouds that on the billows cast
their savage claws and blindly dragged the heaving waves.
The hollow sound of thunder broke, and earth and sea
was zoned with lightning as though God flashed wrathful eyes
with fiery strokes for fear the new ship might escape,
that now sighed, bitter and profound, like man's own heart.
Then the quick-tempered skipper bit his lips and yelled:
"You murderer, you! How long will you breathe down my back
or cleave my skull with your sharp ax of lightning bolts?
For shame! Go hide your head! Have you no honor, God,
to take it out on man's small nutshell of a ship?
I hoped you wouldn't come just now because I feared
this flowering body that sails beside me here would drown;
you know I don't care for myself or my harsh hounds,
but since you've deigned to come, hail then a thousand times!"
This sharp arraignment hung still on his bitter lips
when an enormous wave crashed on his battered head
till all his body, fingers, lips, and nostrils stung
as though unnumbered fiery sparks flared up and died.
Odysseus bit his flaming mustache hard, and mocked:
"That violent squall came close enough to prick me then!"
Poor Rocky tripped and staggered, grabbed at the rail with fear
as his proud body buckled, for these storm-tossed fields
made his young shinbones stagger till with shame he thrust
his face within his arms that smelled of savory still.
Waves kicked and struck the piper by the mizzenmast
and when salt blood ran from his gap-toothed mouth, he shrieked:

"Oho! I'm for the fishes now and a watery grave!

Spread out your hands, dear God, and save your silly songster;
I'll bring you first-grade oil in monstrous buffalo skins!"

The coward vowed and whined, then plunged into the hold.

Waves rose like cutting scythes, swooped down and threshed the
hull

until it buckled at the knees, reared high, plunged down,
sighed deeply, and like light foam danced on thundering foam.

The winds threshed at the sleepless crew all night till God
at daybreak hurled the dark sun like an iron quoit,

but still strong-souled Odysseus scoffed and gripped the tiller:

"Blow, foam-brained blabber-lips, choke in your own rage,

but get this through your head: you won't eat our poor plank—
it grips its soul between its teeth and won't give way!"

Two days and nights they fought with death, lunged down in
waves

and then shot hurtling upward, and again crashed down.

On the third day the solid waves smashed the frail rudder

and all the dread gods of the sea with snarling roared

and shared with howls and laughter the still-living craft.

The South Wind claimed the archer, the Northeaster Helen,

and scornful Captain North Wind mocked at Captain Clam:

"What a fine curly beard! I'll thrust it full of weeds

that eels and gudgeons may skid through and squirt their milt.

You've got my dander up, and I'm out for vengeance now!"

But Captain Clam flung back the words in North Wind's teeth:

"You dolt! I've yet to eat much bread and gulp much wine

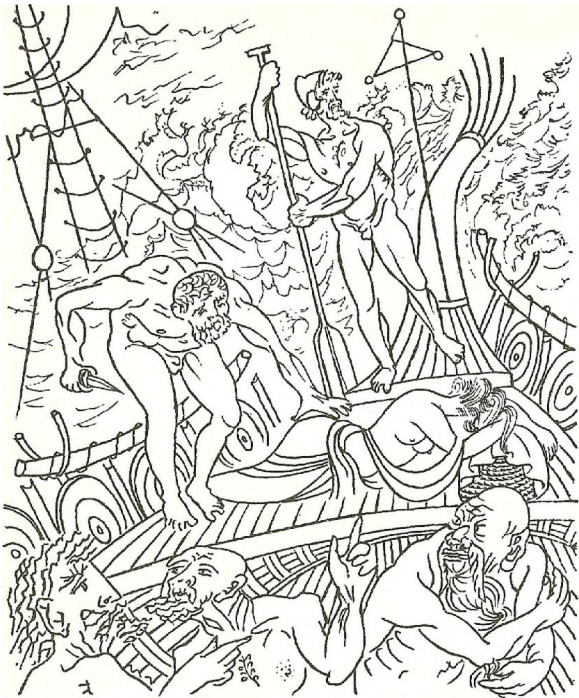
before my bones fall to your claws to be licked clean.

Come butt our hull in vain and break your puny horns!"

But Kentaur felt already through his hairy thighs
the stinging jellyfish and the black scuttling crabs.
Flat on his back in the drenched hold, he growled like a bull:
"Damned if I let you gulp me down without a fight!
When my time comes to croak, it'll be on good firm earth!
Ah for a fresh green branch to whittle a small switch;
you'd see then, Master Charon, how I'd lay about you!"
Granite and the slim shepherd, that landlubbery pair,
grabbed at each other, bit their lips, and then fell flat
lest fear—what shame!—should slip and pass their quaking
throats.

On the third day a pointed head poked through the wineskins
like a whipped short-winded dog and whined in a shrill voice:
"Brothers, not one soul shall escape from pitch-black death;
our crime hangs heavily like a millstone round our necks.
God roars with thunderbolts and flashes through my head:
'Give the waves sacrifice to expiate your crime!' "
The shrill voice finished and the pointed head at once
plunged in the hold and left a drenched and shaken crew;
all glared in silence toward the savage, tossing stern
where godly Helen lay amid the ropes entangled,
and Helen felt their furtive looks and shook with dread,
but scorned in her great pride to wail or weep or plead
or lean her breasts as suppliant on the men's hard knees.
She had surpassed the common lot of women, and felt ashamed.
Hardihood rose in silence and his red stain swelled
and thrashed his savage face like a live octopus.
He strode across the thwarts toward the all-holy form
and for a flash the weather cleared and North Wind paused.

The great-graced lady thrust her face between her hands
and all life passed before her like an oar-winged dream,
a gold bird flown, a dulcet dizziness that vanished.
But as the bronzesmith lunged to seize those famous locks,
he suddenly clenched his fists and slowly turned away
and bit his red mustache with an ill-tempered shame.
Swift-eyed Odysseus, who ruled fate with sleepless eyes
and weighed the souls of his ship's crew, yelled out with joy:
"Your health, O Hardihood, for in this difficult hour
you rose up proudly like a king and flouted Death!
Now, by the brand-new God I bear, I swear this oath:
on the first land where we shall moor, I'll crown you king!"



But the boar-bristled boatman laughed with bitterness:
"Man, don't you fret! We'll never see dry land again!
But, even so, your words have wreathed my carrot-top
with a gold crown, and I shall drown like a true upright king!"

But then, as Granite seized the prow, flat on his face,
he spied an azure peak amid the spuming waves
tossing and gleaming on the heaving sea's horizon.
"Ho! Land ahead!" he yelled, and all eyes pierced the spume.
Captain Clam tried for a long time to see earth's face,
and the world-wanderer questioned in his laughing heart
where of all places the four winds had slung him now.
All strands seemed equally good to him to test man's soul.
Then with great joy the old salt-tar yelled out: "It's Crete!"
All hearts leapt up and tossed toward the all-holy mother,
and the sagacious man laughed low and said to his god:
"I begged for one breadloaf: you cast me ovens full;
one sip of wine: you gave me casks big as my body;
I begged for a small belt of land, a branch to grasp:
and lo, from waves you hand me Crete on a gold platter!
Thanks for the bite, it just exactly suits my hunger!"
Meanwhile the weather slowly cleared, the squalls calmed down,
and the storm-battered vessel raised its prow and sailed.
They tied their long oars to the rowlocks, the tholes creaked,
and keeping the isle in sight, plunged toward it, oar and sail.
Helen smiled thinly through her tears like the pale dawn;
the black locks round her temples tossed in the land breeze
as with drenched hair she gently touched the archer's knees:
"I have some words to say, my dear, but my voice chokes."
Yet as the sweet-voiced lady rose and saw his eyes,
she paled with fear and leant her head on his soaked chest.
Deep in his bottomless eyes she saw Crete rise and fall
and break between his eyebrows like a foundering ship.

THE ODYSSEY

The leader of souls then stroked his beard in silent thought
and his sharp smile rose in a curve to his thick ears,
for, many-breasted, shameless, nude, Crete's body spread
her practiced thighs amid the waves, swarming with merchants.
He'd often met their wealthy barques on distant shores
and marveled as they sauntered on the quays adorned
like birds with peacock plumes and bracelets of pure gold.
These acrid captains ate and drank till their guts burst,
they'd seen all, kissed and drained their bodies dry with lust,
till drenched in fine perfumes, fluttering their feathery fans,
they swooned now in the firm embrace of their black slaves.
Their fingers were all rotted, but their rings remained,
their empty loins were withered, but their thin skulls shone
with wide-eyed sophistry and brimmed with mocking smiles.
In their plush homes, the gods, demeaned to bric-a-brac,
cooped up like parrots in their cages of gold bars,
were hung in windows where with human voice they squawked
and cackled back those words which they were taught to say.
The archer nailed his eyes on the great, regal island,
and saw Crete stormed and tossed amid the heavy waves
like a rich galley overstuffed with precious wares.
They skimmed close till the peaks of Ida flashed serene
and towns shone white like dragon-eggs wedged in the clefts.
When Rocky smelled the earth, his soul filled up with loam;
he saw far off, high in the sun, the verdant fields
and longed to clamber up and hear the jangling goat-bells,
until his wedge-shaped beard perked up like a he-goat's.
The two landlubbers broke in song, like partridges,
like cool cascading waters in a wooded gorge:

"God, to climb hills again, to clear our heads with air,
where blooms the haughty asphodel, where pine trees drip
with resin, where the dappled partridge spreads its wing!
Ah, that the girl I love might hear and bolt her door
with a thick spray of basil, fresh mint on her breast
for lookout, and the curled carnation for her sentry."
Thus did the mountain lads pour out their hearts in song,
and rocks grew huge and savage, seashores opened wide
their arms like a crab's claw until the battered prow
plunged groaning, like a bolting colt, in the port's mouth.
All Crete jounced over them and swayed with upright teats,
till Helen suddenly shuddered and grew pale as wax,
for as she watched the famous island gleam on the waves
there rose high in her memory ancient dragon tales
that her old nurse had crooned to make her fall asleep:
"Far, in the far strands of Crete—may she be cursed!—
a horned dragon roars and feeds on mortal men.
Crete like a lamia sits on the all-sucking waves,
laughs lightly, braids her hair, then sinks all passing ships.
Ah, may your foam-feet, Helen, never tread on Crete."
Now she was rushing headlong—who could stay his fate?—
in the man-eating mouth of the bull-snouted god.
But you, O Captain Clam, pulled on your oars like wings,
nor were you seized with fear, nor with old midwives' tales,
and if fate doomed your salt-caked flesh to be devoured
by this world-famous island where you plunge full sail,
you neither broke in sweat, nor gave a salt-tar's damn!
You pulled the toughest oar, your lips gave you no rest,
until you decked the sea's Dame with a thousand gems:

THE ODYSSEY

"The sea is a huge loom where Crete sits down and weaves;
lucky those eyes who've seen her shuttling on the waves.
If you're sick, you sprout wings, if sluggish, you grow wild,
and if cares crush you, your dazed mind glows like the moon,
and you forget black pain and raise your arms on high
and bless your happy parents who once gave you birth."
Odysseus opened his brains wide, his eyes and ears,
till odors, Crete, and castles plunged in his deep wells.
A sentry from the headland yelled: "A ship, ahoy!"
A sentry from the seashore yelled: "It's made the harbor!"
The archer leapt on shore and cried: "Well met, O longed-for
Crete!"

Upon the summit of great joy Dread holds his throne,
and comrades, masts and oars, women, and high waves,
unshaven lips and laughing eyes and gaudy wings
pass by as though they swam through harsh nightmarish dreams.
A stout coastguard approached to ask about their tribe,
and his mouth gurgled in the sun like a tipped jug;
he held a wax plaque and bronze style to etch their words,
but the bold archer laughed and stroked his curly beard:
"Let us alone to sleep a while, and when our souls
distill once more, we'll tell you from what land we come;
now set us down as tattered sails and seals of the sea."
He spoke, and all slid through a shadowy cool arcade,
fell on the tiles as dead, while from the fragrant earth
sleep rose like moss and covered up their curly brows.
Night fell, and the green bellies of the glowworms shone,
the high stars leapt, the breasts of Helen swayed and burned
within the lustrous night like two matched crystal pears,

and sleep crouched like a fisherman on the crew's eyes,
patched up their tattered nets, stitched all their fishing hooks,
and calked again the battered planking of their bodies.
But that beast, Hunger, conquered sleep at drop of noon,
and first to raise his eyes and cluck his tongue was glutton:
"I'm starved! O for a bite of meat, a hunk of bread!"
And then the whistling voice of cricket-face piped up:
"Glutton, rise up and shine with health! You'll eat, don't fear!
Friends, are my eyes flickering, or do I see, even now,
the crown of Crete shine on the locks of our brave smith?
Rise up, great King, command us women, food, and wine!"
Then Granite stretched his haughty body above the ground:
"By God, my soul has longed to stroll on this good earth
more than it longed for women, bread, or finest wine!"
Then Rocky lightly leapt and stood by his friend's side,
but the archer's mind had gone to work before the dawn:
"It's only just to care for our bruised bodies first.
Let's go! The hunter Mind has flushed a hare in harbor."
When the three vanished in the harbor's jostling crowd,
fair Helen from her bosom's secret cleft brought up
the prophesying globe to see her soul's new road.
She bent above the god's eye, but saw nothing more
than all her hairy comrades round her like adornments;
with their crude hanging beards they seemed sea-battered seals
cast by the raging sea on some far-distant strand,
and in the seals' nest she discerned a pure-white swan.
Stooped low in silence thus, the sun-born sniffed her fate
and strove in foggy inner woods to see her way.
But the clear crystal suddenly dimmed, its riches vanished,

THE ODYSSEY

until a peaked cap rose and covered all its globe,
and Helen, trembling, thrust the eye back in her breast.
Their leader's voice was heard then, full of cheer and joy:
"Come, dear blood brothers, stuff your bodies, eat and drink!"
He spoke, then broke a basket open and filled their hands.
All fell to eating headlong, and their dreadful jaws
ground round like millstones till the archway shook and swayed:
when they grabbed bread, their fists were filled with plunging
swords,
when they drank wine, it thunderously plunged at once
like armored mail and wrapped them round with brazen shields;
wine turned to crimson blood, meat turned to sturdy flesh,
and when they'd eaten, the port stopped swaying, earth grew firm.
The piper then, wine-dreg of God, laughed loud and long:
"O God," he roared, "patron of friends, bread, wine, and meat,
how you've declined and poked yourself in our wide guts!"
The heaven-baiter laughed and thrust his hardened hands
to cool them in the wine-flasks and the luscious fruit.
"Brothers, I've roamed the world, my eyes have joyed in much,
yet never have I seen bazaars where gods are sold;
but it was foreordained that I should gape at gods
spitted like crabs on reeds and sold in clustered groups.
Here mortals may choose gods for every single need:
gods of the sea, gods of the earth, gods of good health,
one to cure goiters, belly-aches, or falling-sickness,
another to cure jaundice, sore throat, fever, dropsy.
Here gods are sold in rows, nostrums of every kind.
I dragged my god there by his feet, a votive beast:
'Merchants, your health! I bring this miracle-working god,

defender of fine friendship with his bolts and lightnings.'
An old man turned and whistled through his hairless lips:
'How nice of him to come, too. Drag him out, let's see him.'
He rubbed him with a touchstone, weighed him well on scales:
'Great is his grace, by God! He's true, pure, solid gold!'
He yelled, and from great joy his ears broke in a sweat;
then we began to bargain, and closed the deal with skill.
Now, lads, your brains shall grow huge, for you've eaten God,
but still be patient, for the wonders have not ceased."
Then sly Odysseus turned and winked his eye at Granite,
and he with chuckles overturned a monstrous tub
from which at once poured sheepskins, sandals, vests and belts
which the great captain portioned out in equal shares:
"God has arranged for everything, for he's all-knowing;
let's dress like native Cretans; I'd be filled with shame
to face great King Idomeneus clad in rags;
and fellows, look, I've bought the starry sky for Helen."
He then unfolded in the light a woman's robe
that shone with rich adornments and with sparkling gems,
and she, who was love's face, rejoiced and spread her arms:
"O skilled in many crafts, you rule the heart of woman
as if it, too, were but a heavy storm-tossed sea,
for headcoins, feathers, silver chains and frills delight
the godly, gaudy bird caged in a woman's skull."
She spoke, then gathering her brocaded armor, vanished.
The men then quickly armed themselves in their brave robes:
"Ahoy, we too shall walk tight-assed and scissor-stepped!"
they shouted gaily, and their mocking laughter rang.
But when they saw the lean-branched lady turn a corner,

THE ODYSSEY

they cupped their hands against their eyes to bear the dazzle:
her firm voluptuous breasts shone naked in the dark,
high sandy rose-red hills in the world's desolation,
and her dress flowered like the wealthy frills of spring.
Their leader's eyes flashed fire, his gray hair stood on end:
"Fellows, I once saw fierce War firmly plant his feet
on two high peaks, then stoop and drink the rolling river,
and the deep water boiled with rage and turned to blood,
yet I feared not, as now I fear the sight of Helen!"
And Granite suddenly shuddered and recalled his brother:
"I've often thought, O Captain, to my heart's great shame,
that you and I, body and soul, like black lambs follow
the woman warrior with her nude milk-laden breasts."
Then the great-masted mind fell silent and refused
to show his most precipitous hope, his deepest grief,
but gathered his old friends and told them what to do:
"Scatter throughout this famous port, poke everywhere
and open your eyes wide, your nostrils, ears, your hearts,
because this earth, though beautiful, does not last long,
and then let's meet for council when the twilight falls."
He spoke, and each one scattered where his own heart wished.
Hardihood went alone and poked about the workshops.
Broad-shouldered Kentaur grabbed the piper by the nape
and climbed the crooked alleys of the harbor town
in search of good red wine and good full-bodied maids.
The mountain pair strolled arm in arm about the wharfs
where heavily-scented harbor girls winked playfully
with hanging hair and tinkling gods between their breasts;
but they, in the sweet snare of friendship soon forgot

to care for food and drink or even a girl's kiss.
And knotty Captain Clam, like a ship's dog let loose,
leapt every anchored prow to nose out his old friends;
his salt seafaring mind rejoiced to stroke the ships
with their swift-voyaged demons painted on the prows,
but all at once a shrill voice seized and cast him ashore:
"Aye, Captain Clam, your eyes are welcome as snow in heat!"
He turned and saw an old friend, a thin-haired shipmaster
with narrow skull and white hair flowing down his back,
and the old friends fell moaning in each other's arms.
They talked for hours of the sea, that wild horse-maid,
and like two oysters closed and opened their old entrails
while all the raging sea broke over them and dragged them down.

Meanwhile Odysseus and arch-eyebrowed Helen gaped
at the great wealth unstacked and heaped upon the piers
from the long-voyaged, many-oared, far foreign ships.
Crete in the harbor tower sat on her high throne
and from the far ends of the earth her four wind-lovers
brought her sea-caravans brimmed with many precious gifts.
First always came the harsh North Wind with his blond beard
and at the briny wheat-brown feet of his beloved
he spread the hides of wild beasts, wools, and fertile slaves,
and on her hot stones cast his honey-colored amber.
Then blowing from the shady side, the West Wind came
with his upturned mustache, his anklets of fine bronze,
and brought her gifts of tin and silver huge as loaves.
Then from the sunny side there came the withered, sly,
and winking lover of the sweet-breasted ancient East

THE ODYSSEY

with his bright silver rings and painted pouting lips,
and in her open hands and garnished lap heaped high
most precious spices, golden birds, and magic balms.
And Lord South Wind, that famous lover with moist locks,
brought her close-woven colored baskets, ivory gifts,
miracle-working letters, demons, monkeys, charms,
and Crete sat on her lofty throne, with naked breasts,
and held the scales above her seas and weighed each kiss.
Helen, unspeaking, felt the four winds blow about her
with hot erotic breath, whistling between her thighs,
and wished she were that robust isle in the sea's midst
hard-beaten by her lovers, the four Captain Winds.
But woman's flesh is an unable, transient thing,
and then lip-closing Charon grabs it by both braids
before it can rejoice an hour in man's embrace.
The multicolored, raucous, crowded harbor swayed,
and in the woman's towering, full, and famished throat
the suffocating wild dove secretly complained.
Then a slim peddler, smelling of rank musk and goat,
slid near the arch-eyed lady, and slowly in the sun
unwrapped in waves a rich-embroidered magic robe.
Black, white, and crimson horses dashed about its field,
and kings astride them bent their bows with golden darts
and shot slim green-blue beasts amid wild cypress groves,
and all around its hem rolled cool cascading waves.
Helen was dazzled like a quail, and shut her eyes,
but the old corsair bowed and said with lilting voice:
"I've traveled round the tree of earth, and yet I swear
I've never seen such beauty in a mortal maid.

Oho, who lies beside you longs for sleep in vain!"
He spoke with lowered head, but glanced with snaky eyes
and measured well the stanch man by the rose-drenched maid.
Odysseus laughed and seized the peddler's hairy arms:
"By God, if she were all alone on distant shores
we'd fling her on our backs and make for our swift ship!"
The peddler's thick lips cackled and his small eyes flashed:
"By God, if only all you say were true, my friend!
But God has sent her near me in a jostling port
and placed a true man by her side, a rampant lion.
You must have come as pilgrims for this holy feast day."
His tongue began to wag around his lilting mouth
about the island's withered souls, its barren maids,
its animals diseased and sterile, its drowned fleet.
"And all this, sire, because old age has crushed our king;
his strength has drained away, his rotted loins have shrunk,
and Crete, his flesh and blood, grows old as he grows old.
Today he climbs to God to snatch at youth renewed,
that strength might once more crackle in his empty bones
and he descend at dawn with strong loins and new laws.
But if our Bull-God scorns to fill that putrid flesh,
our foul-lunged king will vanish in the cave and never
from out that labyrinthine darkness find the light.
The simple-hearted people fall on palace tiles
and all night long with holy water and love-making
try to assist our shrunk king to regain his strength."
The shoulders then of sun-born Helen began to shake
until the old oriental codger stooped and smiled:
"Don't let your lips, those red carnations, tremble, lady;

THE ODYSSEY

the Bull-God gulped our kings only in ancient times,
for now they've learned to be on good terms with the gods
and climb unruffled toward them, bearing golden towers,
for learn, the gods are merchants now and strike hard bargains."
He spoke, then from his bosom dragged an ivory god
with seven towering heads piled on each other, worn
by myriads of caressing hands and pilgrim lips.
Odysseus grabbed at the ivory wonder eagerly;
the seven heads all swayed, and seven-colored flames
rose in his mind as with his finger tips he stroked
and gently licked with slow caresses each strange head.



Time shut its wings for a brief moment and stood still
so that the lone mind could have ample time to climb
with skillful fingers all the rungs of mortal virtues.
Below, the most coarse head, a brutal base of flesh,

THE ODYSSEY

swelled like a bloated beast bristling with large boar-tusks,
and it was fortified with veins as thick as horns.
Above it, like a warrior's crest, the second head
clenched its sharp teeth and frowned with hesitating brows
like one who scans his danger, quakes before death's door,
but in his haughty pride still feels ashamed to flee.
The third head gleamed like honey with voluptuous eyes,
its pale cheeks hallowed by the flesh's candied kisses,
and a dark lovebite scarred its he-goat lips with blood.
The fourth head lightly rose, its mouth a whetted blade,
its neck grew slender and its brow rose tall as though
its roots had turned to flower, its meat to purest mind.
The fifth head's towering brow was crushed with bitter grief,
deep trenches grooved it, and its flaming cheeks were gripped
with torturous arms as by a savage octopus;
it bit its thin lips hopelessly to keep from howling.
Above it shone serenely the last head but one,
and steadfast weighed all things, beyond all joy or grief,
like an all-holy, peaceful, full-fed, buoyant spirit.
It gazed on Tartarus and the sky, a slight smile bloomed
like the sun's subtle afterglow on faded lips;
it sauntered on the highest creviced peaks of air
where all things seem but passing dream and dappled mist;
and from its balding crown, that shone like a smooth stone
battered by many flooding seas and licked by cares,
there leapt up like unmoving flame the final head,
as if it were a crimson thread that strung the heads
like amber beads in rows and hung them high in air.
The final head shone, crystal-clear, translucent, light,

and had no ears or eyes, no nostrils, mouth, or brow,
for all its flesh had turned to soul, and soul to air!
Odysseus fondled all the demon's seven souls
as he had never fondled woman, son, or native land.
"Ah, my dear God, if only my dark soul could mount
the seven stories step by step and fade in flame,
but I'm devoured by beasts and filled with mud and brain!"
The wily peddler smiled in secret satisfaction,
feeling his dangling hooks had caught the octopus,
and then Odysseus filled the peddler's hands with gold:
"O cunning fisherman, you snare the mind with skill;
here, fill your itching palms with gold, heal my desire,
give me that seven-headed demon, that bright robe."
The greedy palms sprang open and devoured the gold,
and then the roguish stranger caught the crystal hand
of the world-famous lady, stooped, and scanned her palm:
"My grandsire, a great sorcerer, could read the fates;
they say his hollow shoulders held two monstrous heads;
the one, with eyes wide open, could expound the past,
the other, blind, could scrutinize the foggy future,
and his great power still reigns within his grandson, Lady."
He studied then her rosy palm and spoke with awe:
"O godly woman, stars and swords flash in your hands!
I see a mountain-heap of bodies and red streams
amid deep gardens of thick smoke and blind canaries."
He spoke, then vanished like a snake in the town's streets.
The archer covered Helen's quivering shoulders gently
with the resplendent gold-stitched robe so that it gleamed
on her seductive back with waters, steeds, and kings;

THE ODYSSEY

and as the proud stag leaps with lighting on the doe
so did the impetuous archer seize her by the waist:
"You hold the scales of Fate deep in your bosom's cleft,
and if it's true that you're ordained to burn the palace,
I ask this boon: grant me for wage and recompense
a small, small pointed ship on which to flee one dawn."
Then hurriedly he unclasped that man-bewitching waist
and his slight smile's reflection vanished from his brow:
"Lady, it's time we climbed to the bull-fighting castle;
our words were playthings of the brain and the wind's whistle."
The comrades from their rambles had returned replete,
and when the archer marshaled them, he gave commands:
"Helen and I today shall mount to the king's court;
he's an old comrade, strong in war, and when he sees
and touches Helen, his thin backbone will rejoice.
But you must calk our battered ship with skill and strength,
arm it with sails and rigging, spread it with thick grease,
for when God comes to snatch our tiller, he swoops swiftly.
Kentaur, take care, don't fall to wine and kisses now,
for lads, at any moment we may need our souls,
so keep them far from wine and women, safe and sober.
I speak to all, and not to Kentaur only, friends,
so hang my words like earrings from attentive ears.
But Hardihood, you'll come with me; who knows what work
a bronzesmith's sooty hands may find in palace walls?
My breast's a buzzing beehive of unruly bees,
and I don't know as yet just when the bees will swarm;
all have unsheathed their sting, but hold their honey still.
Nor enmity nor friendship pulls me toward the castle;

my vacillating spirit is armed to right and left
for a sweet friendly feast or the red sword of war.
Whatever that holy pair begets—fate and man's mind—
is welcome! We'll unswaddle it with ready hands!
Bronzesmith, push on, the anvil yearns for the hammer's stroke!"
Rocky grew sullen then and flung out, bold and rash:
"We, too, have souls and strength—not that you seem to care!"
He spoke, then suddenly felt ashamed and dropped his eyes.
The archer sank his hands in his friend's curly locks:
"Don't rush yourself, green lad! I won't forget! I know
quite well your soul's prepared and chafes to take its turn."
But as he spoke and stroked with love the warm gnarled head,
a dark thought struck him: the black earth—may it be cursed!—
would one day gape and swallow whole this brawny man!
He felt like shrieking out a great blaspheming curse
but held his blind wish back and swallowed his wild wrath:
"Rocky, don't hold a grudge against me, don't be vexed,
I swear to throw your way one day the heaviest mortal duty."

Thus the three friends of fate, their destiny unknown,
on a huge heavy ox-cart climbed the palace road
and the day gleamed and glittered like a bright bronze cow.
A sweet breeze rose to cool the earth at afterglow,
olive trees swelled with wind, and the admired light
rose stone by stone on the green mountain slopes, and faded.
A girl stood in the vineyards all alone and sighed
as all the vine-leaves round her withered with her pain
till the compassionate man felt deeply the girl's ache:
"Helen, earth sighs, it seems to me, and my heart breaks."

THE ODYSSEY

But Helen smiled at man's fantastic lunacies:

"Ah, lover of the bow, don't grieve; it was not earth
but some green girl who smelled man pass, and her loins flamed."

The knowing man laughed wryly but did not reply;
there was but one short phallic bridge between the sexes,
and then deep Chaos where even a bird's wing might not pass,
for man's soul perched, an eagle's nest, high in the head,
and woman's soul lay brooding deep between two breasts.
The silent archer tasted thus dusk's bitterness
while all of Mother Earth's serene, sad tenderness,
the mountains round, vineyards and trees, were drowned in light,
as though Odysseus gazed on ruins in deep water,
a swordfish sailing in the sea's dark azure depths.

A swarming crowd climbed slowly the white palace road,
all who had vowed this pilgrimage, and tightly clutched
clay miniatures of poppies, pigeons, calves and hearts,
their humble gifts to the dread Mother of men and beasts;
and the sea-chested pilgrim climbed with the great crowd
to proffer Helen to the myriad-breasted goddess.

He listened to his sparse-haired cunning wagoner
who, starved for talk, unfolded to the smith the shames
of their old king, the secrets of their holy rites:

"He shall return renewed today from the high mountains,
and next day bulls shall dance within the ritual ring
like wedding guests who bring the bridegroom to the bride."

Then the ox-driver laughed and winked his eyes with craft:

"In the ring stands the bride, a hollow cow of bronze,
on which the Bull-King swoops until both merge in lust.
Don't let them fool you, friend, for here's the mystic secret:

in the bronze belly of the cow a real girl lies!"

The driver's flickering tongue wagged on, and his eyes sparkled:

"And yet, my friend, take lightly what I'll tell you now:
our doomed king lusts to take for bride his virgin daughter!
In all the caves he's set loose bands of wild-game hunters,
for Krino, still unmounted, hates all mortal men.

Alas, though born of dragon seed, she'll not escape."

The beardless driver laughed and goaded his dull oxen,
but the hunched, silent bronzesmith felt his heart leap up
like a dark beast who hears a rustling in the leaves.

The dark blue twilight spread on the respiring soil,
fuzz-breasted insects fell embraced on lily leaves,
and when a shepherd rose and leant on his lean stick,
the mountain slopes swayed with the sound of silver bells.

Then the arch-eyebrowed lady longed for cooling water.

Within a garden of plump water-nourished leaves
a blond-haired gardener turned his chain-pump like a horse
until the buckets overbrimmed with gurgling sound;
there tall sunflowers shone like princes by stone walls
and marigold and balsam filled the dusk with scent.

When the cart stopped, Odysseus gave his sharp command,
and the tall gardener seized a bowl, brimmed it with water,
and proffered it on muddy knees to the arch-eyed lady.

Her rose-red palms refreshed, her godly throat grew cool,
her veins swelled and rejoiced as though a man passed through
them

till the sun-bearded gardener steamed with joy to gaze
on the tall-throated beauty sipping like a bird,
and her alluring glances struck him like the sun's rays.

THE ODYSSEY

The archer glowered to see how her nostalgic eyes,
smothered with passion, loitered on the young man's chest,
and he was suddenly seized with wrath and clenched his fists:
"Drive on! Night falls, and little time hangs in the scales!"
They moved on, but her soul still lingered on the road.
Just as an eagle hunts the misty fields for hare,
the castle-wrecker's mind gazed on his muddy entrails:
"You driveler, when will you stop groaning, muddy guts?
And you, wolf-dancing heart, when will you ever find rest?"
The fertile-minded man thus scolded his dark roots.
A bull growled deep in earth, and the ox-driver stopped:
"O master, raise your hands on high, open your eyes,
for the great palace soon will suddenly come to view."
Then the world-rambler deeply felt his chest swell up:
"Life is a hunt, we dash with arrows at early dawn,
and God, how many pheasants and slim deer to kill,
how many trysting-places on the crinkly grass!
O keep your gut-string taut, dear bow, do not snap now!"
He turned and reared his neck high like a greedy snake,
then opened his eyes wide to catch the lightning flash.
His temples creaked, rejoiced, and all the city spilled
like gurgling wine and cooled him to his thirsty guts:
bronze columns, towers, gardens, gods, men, terraces
enriched his white-haired mind, till like a partridge cloth
the wealthy, gaudy town swayed in the darkling air
until his deep unsated brain with satiation smiled.

A high joy seized their minds, their bones felt light as air,
and as they slowly climbed the palace's long stairs

they felt their shoulders sprout with downy, curly wings.
The lone man turned to admire the famed decoy of men
as step by step she breached the palace like a flame.
It was just such an hour as this when the bright star
of the nude wagtail goddess laughed, shadows embraced,
as by Troy's battlements he'd placed the pregnant mare;
the azure darkness dimly shone like this when once
he stood, new-washed and mute on his ancestral threshold,
and held the wages of just slaughter in firm hands.
Odysseus moved his lips and hailed the coming night:
"O dark-eyed lady, this is a pure and lucky hour."
In dusk the crowd shone faintly in the central court,
and from the terrace of the women's quarter stooped
bare-breasted, golden-feathered ladies, budded flowers,
and laughed with wonder at earth's multicolored ants.
The Serpent Sisters, consecrated maids who served
the many-dugged old dame of earth, in joy adorned
the squat round columns with white lilies and green palms,
and decked the king's courts to receive the miracle.
But suddenly as the inner gate swung wide, there loomed
three monstrous-bodied Negroes with thick brazen spears;
between their savage thighs two slender leopards slunk.
Then a wasp-waisted Cretan sniggered to the bronzesmith:
"All joy to these black lovers of lush Diktena!
Evil tongues say that our good-natured princess now
cries out in bed with these three blacks the whole night through."
He was still speaking when the gold jambs shone like stars;
Diktena's soft and tender body stood revealed
and her breasts swayed like two newborn and curly beasts.

THE ODYSSEY

She slowly lifted heavy-lidded, painted eyes,
harrowed the courtyards, the men's bodies, festive dames,
then smiled and slowly vanished in the night once more.
Arch-eyebrowed Helen sank her face in her cupped hands:
"My eyes are tired of gazing and my ears of hearing.
Ah God, to lie down in a nook till the world cools!"
The archer's heart then ached for that celestial body:
"Helen, I'll tell the guards of our renowned descent;
the gates shall open then, you'll lie on golden beds,
for our renown has surely reached these distant shores."
He spoke, pushed through the milling crowd, and vanished soon.
Hardihood, meanwhile, gaped with silent envious awe
on adamant embellished armor highly wrought
with rampant rushing lions, lilies in full bloom,
and girls that played and tumbled with ferocious bulls:
you'd think that each sword cried with its own special pain.
The Evening Star had vanished in the sea like flame,
and honeysuckle, tangled in the hair of night,
burst, till the curled locks in the courtyards smelled of musk.
And Helen, leaning on a sea-blue column, watched
the pert court ladies with their flouncing furbelows
who bent and wriggled their wide loins with swaggering sways
and kept the double treasure of their bosoms open.
Deep in her mind, the crystal-breasted woman scolded:
"It's best that women keep their breasts well hidden, clothed,
to veil them like wild flames and so preserve their strength;
that which you wish to give, keep hidden and unspent."
Then as all-knowing Helen appraised the women's armor,
and saw with sidelong glance the blond-haired gardener come

and stand beside her like a chaste and guileless bull,
naked, with but a sheepskin round his sunburnt loins,
she looked on his strong sturdy knees with stooped submission.
The snow-white swan-god suddenly passed through her dazed
mind,

he who had swooped and cast her mother supine on grass,
and now, dear God, he'd come again to seek her out
with wine-drenched beard, mud-splattered feet, and heavy flesh!
Thus, stooped, she felt his panting stallion breath above her
entering her brimming neck and coursing down to her loins
until she felt the old sweet dread that seized her mother.
He reached his calloused hand in silence, filled her palm
with a grape-cluster, his first fruit, huge as an infant,
and then the swan-born heard his steps withdraw, and sighed
with soft desire as she watched his firm calves vanish.
She raised her head and ate with greed the luscious grapes;
three-headed time was conquered: in one lightning flash
loam, grapes, and wine had merged, intoxication spread
like a tall vine and twined about her famous thighs.
And thus the lone man found her, sunk in hidden thought,
the bittersweet grape-cluster in her rose palms still.
He saw her eyes brim sweetly with a blond-haired man
and mocked her gently as he spoke with slant allusion:
"Lady, good weather at your prow, wind in your sails!
You're scudding swiftly on deep seas to distant shores!"
He laughed without much heart, then with great anger said:
"Tonight we three must lie here in a courtyard nook
and sleep with the remaining pilgrims till day dawns,
but when the king finds out tomorrow who we are

we'll enter his great palace as befits our rank."

The bulldog bronzesmith then appeared with sullen glance and all three lay amid the columns on myrtle boughs.

The people swarmed about them, and the stars dripped dew, the women tucked their rich-embroidered wings like birds, girls giggled in the shade, the young men strolled and swaggered, all waited for the holy moon to rise and light the world. Fires in every town and hamlet were put out, and flame still lingered only on the Bull-God's steaming wicks; all looked toward dawn when the new fire would light their hearths.

A golden lamp within the courtyard's smoking shrine shone softly flickering and caressed the fertile Mother who held her swelling breasts as votive offering high, while the male double-ax hung over her, and swung. Then white-winged Helen reposed at last like soil on earth, and shut her gracious eyes, but in her mind still saw the fat, rotund great goddess with her spreading flanks; her eyes dimmed and her mind spun till there rose from earth the holy fruitful tree of the dark goddess—sleep. Gold votive offerings hung like apples from its boughs, and with a mother's sleep-alluring languid lullaby the votive tree kept rustling till the seductress slept; but then with a light twist of her unguarded mind the full tree vanished, and above her bosom hung a cluster of firm grapes, a bloodstained double-ax. She laughed and raised both breasts on high as votive gifts. Thus did the famous beauty dream on palace tiles, but at her side the sleepless archer fought his heart

and gripped it like a snapping bitch to choke its yelping.
The door guard had not quaked to hear his dreaded name
' but spurned him with no fear or reverence, barred the door,
so that his savage flame-filled heart had rushed at once
to fall on that pigheaded guard, break down the doors,
and, by a hair, had almost dragged the body with it.
Now sleepless and distressed, he took his heart to task:
"Bitch, will you still resist and bite your chains with rage?
You're not the master at my castle's brazen doors,
nor can you shut out or invite all those you please!
And when the sentry thwacked us with his heavy spear,
didn't you hear me cry to swallow your tongue, you bitch?
But you howled on nor stopped until I called you thrice.
Don't hurry, you poor wretch. Be patient, our time will come."
Thus did the great heart-battler argue all night long;
he clenched and then unclenched his fists to grip his thoughts
as though composed of bodies, spears, or kindling wood.
The air blew like a sweet and cooling summer breeze,
lilies and myrtles swayed, and in the lofty cornice
the royal banners flapped, the double-axes gleamed,
till suddenly in the frenzied mind of the sea-battler
the night-drenched palace rose like a great-masted ship.
Oho! See how it proudly scuds with open sails
loaded with all the riches of earth, sea and mind;
but all the foaming waves are full of reefs, the pilot drunk,
and God sits in the laden hold and rips the heavy planking!

Then the light sleeper rose and cocked his subtle ears,
for far in the high mountains, in God's twisting gullet

THE ODYSSEY

the king groped toward the cavern to regain his youth.
The Serpent Sisters slowly in the waning moon
began to sway with naked feet on the courtyard tiles
that their shrill cries and dancing might sustain their king
who walked the perilous verge now of the Bull-God's path.
They leapt like slender tiger-cubs in the moon's light,
and their unmounted bodies were coiled tight with power;
looped thrice about their arms, or hissing from their hair,
the sacred snakes of ritual slid in smooth contortions.
Raising their hands toward the high hills, the maidens cried:
"O Mother, Mother, mistress of mountains, sea, and air,
whose gorged breasts burst with anguish of redundant milk,
Crete weeps and starves! Come to her shores now, give her suck!
Ah, Mother, may the exhausted earth revive once more
that our great seed may sprout, our trees bear flower and fruit,
our headlong herds increase, our green ravines and vales
wabble with newborn lambs of white wool, black, and gray;
and may our ships sail always with fair winds once more
while you, a gorgon at their prow with savage eyes,
cut new roads in the waves for Crete to spread her claws.
Strengthen the loins of our pale men, pity our maids
and give them swelling breasts that flow with milk and honey!
Crete calls with all her loam! Dear Mother, fill her womb!
Crete calls with all her horses, Mother, her sheep and ox,
Crete calls with all her men, her women beg and wail,
come spread your holy hands above our old king, Mother!"
Thus did the Serpent Sisters cry in whirling dance,
swaying on high their snake-kissed arms in the moon's light
till the crowd surged and men and maids struck up a dance

then raised their hands on high and shouted toward the hills:
"O Mother-Mistress, Huntress, Priestess, Captain, come,
come to this court, come down and take the lead, come kick
this earth and whirl it like a spinning top anew!"

The people shouted till their temples creaked like gates,
their brains spilled from their skulls and boiled like seething must,
their minds grew savage as all former boundaries broke,
and when a shadow suddenly leapt on tiles, they gasped—
wild hair, bow stained with blood, shrill twang of speeding arrow!
It leapt high, seized the lead and swirled the dancers round;
the bridegroom lost his bride, the young girl her betrothed,
the dancers wept and whined and howled for their return,
but Death, their Leader, raged and threshed them like a whirlpool
till all, with throats caught in the lime-nets of the moon,
burst out in joyous and bold song like nightingales
who vanish, lovesick, carefree, lost in flowering shrubs.
But all at once the swift dance broke and all sides scattered;
a vulture's shrill cry sounded from the palace stairs
and all with terror hid themselves near the squat columns.
The women screamed, and pressed their hands against their ears:
"It's Phida, shrill-voiced, first-born daughter of our king!
God's heavy hand has felled her once again, she's moonstruck!"
Leaning against the sacred double-axes by the stairhead,
a young ecstatic girl with red rags round her waist
flung her pale hands on high with rage and beat her breasts:
"Great God, for years I've torn my heart out calling you!
Rise from the earth, you slayer, gird on your iron armor,
spew fire and burn our ships to coal, scorch Crete to ash!"
She screamed, foamed at the mouth until her pale throat choked,

THE ODYSSEY

and then she tumbled headlong down the darkened stairs.
In terror of the moonstruck girl the people fled,
but through the scattering crowd the archer strode and knelt
above the shriveled form convulsed in the sallow moon.
A dread bloodthirsty god sucked at the young girl's brains
and she like a hooked fish thrashed wildly to cast off
the curved iron hook that jabbed deep in her choking throat.
Then the much-suffering archer gently raised her head
so that she might not break her skull on the hard stones,
and watched in silent fear the whites of her wild eyes
turned upward, glazed, or rolling round in bloodstained sockets.
But as he reached to wipe the sweat from her damp lobes,
the gates were suddenly flung wide, bald eunuchs dashed,
stooped down, then from the earth scooped up the girl like rags,
and vanished, fleeing down the palace corridors.
Odysseus, deeply wounded, stretched on myrtle boughs
and brooded on the weak and pallid soul of man:
a small sail on a small boat by all four winds thrashed.
He leant his harsh head gently by a column's base
till the flesh-healing god of sleep leant mutely down
and all night stitched with care the cracked seams of his skull.

Thus did the spacious courtyards shrill in the sick moon,
but pairs of dancers in four rounds rose quickly again
as all strained to enkindle and sustain their king.
Meanwhile, Idomeneus crawled on craggy cliffs
and wanly smiled with hairless lips as his flat pate
shone dimly in the silver moon like a bleached skull.
At length he crawled close to God's mouth, a deep dark pit,

and stood near, panting, gasping long to get his breath.
A cool wind gently blew, and all the stars marked out
with mystic characters what fate had foreordained.
He cackled dryly with his withered, toothless gums:
"My wretched forebears scanned the stars at night with fear
and yearned for a good sign before they dared to thrust
their noses in God's cave to see the Holy Mother;
but now I bring them gold—that is, both sky and stars!"
He spoke, then boldly thrust himself through the low entrance
and squirmed upon the cavern's glooming slippery stones.
The cavern's arches spread until God's monstrous mouth
gaped open slowly, high and wide, and darkly gleamed.
Long rows of hanging stalactites dripped in the gloom
and rose like thick round phalli twined with maidenhair
and red rags tied by women in their votive rites.
The winding pathways broadened in wide whorls and twists
until the thick black gore distilled in murky pits
as the king slipped and slithered in God's bloody entrails.
Huge startled bats sped by his ears without a sound,
and suddenly torches blazed, shrieks rang, and maidens masked
like cows, bare-bosomed and one-breasted, sprang from clefts,
bellowed with rage and butted their old king to leave.
A woman's cry in birthpang suddenly split the air
and all the women rushed about a rutting bull
poured of pure bronze that in the savage torchlight flashed;
a tall black double-ax gleamed on its golden horns.
Then slowly from its loins a dragon-woman rose
holding in both her hands her two milk-laden dugs.
The king fell on the earth face down and shouted, "Mother!

THE ODYSSEY

Help me, thrice-Mother, who begets gods, men, and beasts!
All think I'm a great monarch, for one night you placed
your hands on my bald pate till God's soul boiled and rose,
and from your tenfold fingers strength poured through my heart.
That sacred sperm you planted in my split head, Mother,
has sprouted and borne fruit: ships, laws, and famous wars;
but Mother, it's all withered now and casts no sprouts.
I've squandered all that spirit, my loins are drained dry.
Look, I've brought back my body. Fill it with God again!"
The Mother-Dragon mutely weighed the old man well
then slowly her loud cavern-roar rang mockingly:
"Old king, I don't think you can bear the Bull-God now!
If I should place my dreadful hands on you, old man,
you'd burst in fragments like a sheepskin filled with flames."
She roared, then gave commands for all her maids to leave,
and the young cows scattered in rings and hid in rocks.
No sooner were the two alone than their eyes met
and merged with laughter like two wily beasts in darkness.
Slowly the Mother spread her plump and painted hands
and in one palm the king heaped high thick towering pearls
and in the other poured, with sweet seduction, gold and gems.
When the she-dragon cast these gifts in the Bull's belly,
she reached out both her hands with ravening greed once more.
"I give you also, unslaked Mother, three large towns:
one in the fields for grain and all your flaxen robes,
one in the harbor to enjoy the sea's great wealth,
the third and best is planted on a high plateau
where your bull-calves may browse and your male children breed."
The Mother laughed, full-satisfied, then crossed her hands,

uttered shrill cries of joy until the young cows dashed
 and carried in their hands the sacred, regal dress:
 tall peacock feathers, three-peaked golden-lilied crown,
 an ivory tray with mystic, thousand-spiraled signs
 where in the center God's great eye turned savagely
 as round it hearts and human heads danced arm in arm
 in a wide belt adorned with women, beasts, and snakes,
 and on the disk's rim, tall and straight, nine galleys sailed,
 all mystic signs that etched upon the precious ivory
 the great commands and cares of their most dreaded God.
 The cunning king stooped low and then the Mother placed
 her hands on his bald shining pate and shrilled aloud:
 "I've watched and weighed you like a hawk, then swooped and
 seized you!
 I'll raise my double-ax now high and split your brains!
 Descend from horns, O Strength, and make his weak mind firm!
 Ascend from the new phallus, Strength, and rouse his loins!
 Rise up, O Mystic Snake, and nine times zone him round,
 God fills his heart now with nine winter-summer seasons."
 She spoke, then from the cavern mouth a flame leapt out,
 tall as two men, and heralded the newborn news.
 The flame then leapt with joy on high Mount Dikte's peaks, ¹¹⁰⁵
 dashed downward like a flashing star to Mount Selena
 and rooted in its craggy rocks where round it leapt
 goatherds and shepherds in a savage Cretan dance.
 High above Knossos the tall peak of Grouhla flamed,
 and shepherds beat bronze pans, cast trees into the hearth,
 till like an eagle beating his red blazing wings
 the flame leapt on the palace roof, fluttered, and lit

THE ODYSSEY

all upper windows swiftly with its burning beak.
Then it fell lightly to the royal courts, sped toward the town,
leapt in and huddled swiftly in the nameless hearths
and hatched a burning coal for egg wherever it stayed.
The king passed through the fields, his nuptial chariot drawn
by four pure snowy bulls with horns of gleaming gold.
The largest stars still wanly burned high in the heavens,
and all the nearby villagers dashed out with palms
and bowed with reverence low before their potent king.
Young women spread the ground with their embroidered dowries,
for the king now so brimmed with God that his new strength
would pass through chariot, bulls, and wheels, spill on the ground,
where scooped by garments, it would pass to hopeful bodies.
Clutching his seed, the king rode all day long in state
while the three comrades sauntered through the lower town.
Taverns at every corner opened, doors were decked,
sills flashed with new-washed garments, and young maidens
drenched
with water their slim lilies, basil, and green mint.
They turned their festive faces suddenly toward the East:
was it a golden cloud that rose on mountain passes
or did a thunderbolt split the exhausted fields,
or could it be the king who dashed down from the mountain
slopes?

Drums beat at sunset in the spacious palace courtyards;
and all at once the whole town thundered, palm leaves swayed,
and black eyes filled the air to gaze on the healed king,
but he fled down the labyrinthine halls in rage,

for all his hunters had failed to seize his daughter-bride
and had returned with empty hands and empty nets.
In frenzied wrath he ordered the three hunter-chiefs
first slain with double axes and then meshed in nets
which they had long borne on their shoulders all in vain.
All shook to see the godly strength that filled their king,
untamed as yet by mankind's gentleness and patience.
Odysseus waited for the monarch's wrath to cool
and then sent word that he'd been waiting by the gate
with world-famed, wondrous-eyebrowed Helen at his side.
For hours they waited by the gate for the king's word
until the archer's head boiled like a seething caldron
fed by the bronzesmith's spiteful words as by hot flame:
"I can't believe my eyes, nor get it through my head
that the great archer stands and begs at the king's door!"
But though the rash man's blood now boiled, he bit his fist:
"O heart, keep vengeance deep, caress her secretly,
for there's no bride with greater dowry in all this world;
she carries ashes in her chests, blood in her jugs,
and brings a long black-hilted sword as the groom's gift!" 1158
A warm and heavy South Wind rose, the far seas rippled,
and like white, silent, sailing ghosts, with shrouds for sail,
fishing-boats, triremes, galleys, slowly, slowly sailed
into the ponderous azure dreams of slumbering Crete.
Crete slept on like a silent sea-beast that once rose
from time's deep pitch-black mire to get a little air;
for a short while, then, plants and beasts and men had time
to stretch their carefree legs and raise a bit of crust
until on her thick hide she felt with mild annoyance

THE ODYSSEY

the myriad lice-race softly crawl and saunter by;
but when she scratched herself, all fell in tangled heaps,
and when she yawned, swift earthquakes gulped the towns
till she could get some air and sink in seas again.
But just before she sank in waves or plunged in mire
the archer grasped one of her columns tight, and roared:
"Dame Crete, don't sink again before my mind's revenged!"
The slayer was growling still when footsteps sounded near
as the gate suddenly opened and two gold-plumed lords,
as squat as jars, spoke greetings in a shrilling voice:
"The true son of the Bull-God, the sea's unconquered king,
has with great royal kindness deigned to let you see him!"
With golden staffs, they showed the way through the dark halls;
long rows of empty cellars, old worm-eaten stairs,
moss-covered gaping towers, and balconies half-fallen—
as though the palace once had been a dragon's armor
where now his thin debilitated grandson sailed.
In the black wall a secret door gaped suddenly
and a great golden room spread to their startled eyes.
Between tall double-axes on a high throne, the prow
of a great sea-battling ship, the monarch proudly sat
like a majestic sea-god carved from a huge pearl
and leant upon a coral tree that rose to his right.
On low thrones round him, old sea-skippers sat and stank
like withered apples with their hairless senile flesh;
behind them sat plump eunuchs, guards of God and maids,
sly dream-interpreters, and bath-attending lords.
Naked young pages, all adorned with peacock plumes,
some holding incense-burners, others long-stemmed lilies,

bedecked the throne like rich festoons and shone like snakes.
Idomeneus placed then in a goldsmith's hand



a ball of solid gold, large as an infant's head,
to carve God's blessing richly on a holy rhyton.

THE ODYSSEY

He ordered the skilled goldsmith to remember all:
"God stood on high and I stood straight on earth before him,
the great sun hung low to my right, the full moon left,
so that their double beams met in my dazzled eyes.
God spread his hands and gave into my trust the firm
round disk of earth with all its souls and mighty laws.
I did not move, and held the whole world in my palms;
God questioned, and I stared straight in his eyes and answered.
I questioned too, and he replied like a true friend.
Gather your wits, O goldsmith, teach your crafty hands
how to immortalize this meeting in pure gold.
Make infinite what lasted but a lightning flash on earth!"

He spoke, dismissed the goldsmith with a regal gesture,
then turning slowly with his half-shut snaky eyes,
suddenly hissed, and hailed the royal pair before him:
"Great is the Bull-God's joy this holy night to take
and taste in his wide mouth sun-lovely radiant Helen;
even though Chance is blind, God leads her by the hand.
Welcome, tall lily of the air, immaculate flower,
that you may also hang from the god's golden horns."
His mocking eyes gazed downward on the cunning man
but his soul trembled, for his mind divined some evil:
"Quite well do I recall your slanting sea-capped head;
somewhere on neighboring beaches once we met by fate—
you were a common shepherd, then, in a poor farm;
yet got to be the frequent comrade of great kings
because your crafty brains gave birth to wiles and tricks."
But the quick-tempered man reined in his heart and brain

and soothed his mind, recalling how in the dread cave
he stood erect before the one-eyed monster, Cyclops,
and in clay basins poured out wine for that tricked brute.
"Hold tight your miseries, O my heart, and lick your leash,
put on a pleasing face, smile now and pour with skill
the new bright wine you bear here: Helen's wanton eyes."
The nimble-fingered weaver chose what woof to weave
and signaled with his eyes to her for whom Troy fell,
and she with fear ascended the throne's golden steps,
and with her rose and flickered that great lady, Fire.
Then the decrepit king sank his exhausted hands
in her bright hair till its perfumes unhinged his brain:
"Warm is the earth, the hills are fragrant, and horns sway.
O heifer Helen, the Bull-God roars deep in my loins!"
The eunuchs smiled with pallid lips and swung their necks
so that their golden earrings tinkled jauntily.
The king spread out his hands, his wily eyes grew glazed:
"Dear Bull-God, large-eyed father, when on the great waves
you saw this new bride coming with her naked breasts,
you bellowed as you licked your lustful, lustrous thighs.
Your grace is double, double your mind, and your horns double!
I know now why in my thick nets you would not snare
my virgin daughter whom nine hunted night and day.
Let heralds with their conches blare in towns and hills
that God has found his bride, let Krino and her troop
dance with no fear now on the sacred threshing floor."
Thus spoke the senile king and shook with smothered passion
as the sly weaver watched the old man swirl in rings
and vanish in the whirlpools of his spinning mind.

THE ODYSSEY

Though frightened Helen signaled with her eyes for help,
feeling the beast's deep breath already on her back,
bespurred Odysseus saw her quake, and was not moved:
"Many think she's a goddess and bow to her great power,
others embrace her as a woman and lose their wits,
for me she's but a singing decoy-bird in my god's hands."
He brooded in his brain, then set the king a snare:
"With hand on heart, I bow low and salute the Bull!
He stood a fisher on Crete's shores, and pulled me in
with all my ships, deep in his bloody nets of love;
we sail now in his holy mouth—his will be done!
Helen, how fortunate! You'll lie in the bronze cow,
for God is good and loves the fragrant smell of man."
But bitter gall rose in the king's suspicious eyes:
"O treacherous man, even as you spoke, I knew quite well
what crafty trap you leant against my castle walls.
I loathe that man with blinders on who his life long
turns like a beast the slippery well-pump of his brain
and, like a sterile mule, breaks no untrodden road.
And now you place the same snare by my castle walls:
a bronze cow with a white flame in its womb—fair Helen!
But my ax-bearing heavy God can smash all wills,
and you've come vainly to my house with torch in hand;
O crafty fox, you're caught now in my own god's snare!"
Odysseus cast his piercing glances round him then
and reckoned that their skulls encased but thinner brains
and that God never thrusts his strength in double-axes
but in the muscular strong hands that hold them tight.
Idomeneus watched the archer's glances thrust

like swelling firebrands amid his myriad wealth
and said, as though his crooked brain decided then:
"I hold earth on my back, life is my heavy duty,
it's only just that with my heels I crush this flame
that rears its tongue, or it will swell and burn me down,
because, O evil-footed man, in every home you've stepped ¹²⁹²
you came with torch to set a conflagration blazing."
Then the flame-sower felt deep fear, yet held his dread:
"There is a god of friendship who defends pure love.
I came like an old friend to knock on your bronze gate,
and hold no blazing torch but only friendship's apple."
The king then turned to his plump eunuchs mockingly:
"This man who passed and stole his trusting best friend's wife
dares talk of friendship! Why has the earth not swallowed him?"
"A God commanded! I swear I wept till my heart broke!"
"And God was wise to thrust you deep in the Bull's belly.
Try to escape now from his twisting, torturous guts!"
He spoke, and all the eunuchs laughed, till once again
their golden earrings tinkled in their downy ears.
Helen then placed her suppliant hands on the king's knees,
and round her neck a vixen's blazing colors flashed:
"I swear I left my happy hearth of my free will.
A great god seized me and I followed joyously;
he came to play with me on grass like a white bull,
then suddenly bellowed, shook himself, plunged in the waves
and placed me at your golden feet, still drenched with foam.
Now I rejoice to know you are the Bull-God truly."
The king closed both his eyes, her voice seemed honey-sweet,
and she rejoiced, whose speech was cool as fragrant flowers,

THE ODYSSEY

and her much-kissed and ruby mouth sang out once more:
"I ask one favor only for my wedding gift:
dear bridegroom, do not touch my sorrow-laden friend."
Her body's crackling warmth rose in the old king's brain:
"For your dear sake, my bride, I shall protect his head
though God within me shouts it's high time, Helen, now,
that his sly brains and eyes should vanish from the earth."
He turned then to the archons of the women's quarters:
"Go tell my Serpent Sisters to lave Helen's body
with thick balms and aromas, and to teach her how,
in seven days and nights, to mingle with God sweetly.
Let her lie on my daughter Diktena's divan
but let not my cursed daughter Phida touch her ever.
Her friends shall be our guests in the rich archons' room,
to eat and sleep as it befits a monarch's wealth;
their hated heads are guarded by the hand of Helen.
But never let them once take wing to flee the palace,
but keep them locked like eagles in a golden cage
so they won't fly in light or their souls slip my claws.
Let the page boys remain; it's time I bathed my body
to give my flesh new strength and grace, to cool my mind,
for all night long I've battled with my heavy God."
He spoke, the drowsy noblemen and eunuchs rose,
slaves ran from everywhere with torches, some bent low
and raised the heavy-laden, gold-decked king on high.
The naked page boys, shaking golden perfume flasks
ran on ahead, sprinkling the way with flower-water,
and last of all the castle-wrecker strode: his soul
flashed fire from his twenty finger tips and toes,

and his gaunt head, all seven stories high, swayed in the air.