

PROTEUS

The fourth play of the tetralogy:
The Oresteia's missing satyr play



The final play of Aeschylus' Oresteia tetralogy has vanished without trace. We know the title – no more. No quotations, no references in other ancient authors, nothing.

I've dared to assume that Menelaus was the main character – his fate is undisclosed in Agamemnon. The title character was known as Pharaoh of Egypt, The Old Man of the Sea, and the Lord of the Seals. Helen must have featured.

Aeschylus was famed for his satyr plays – why do none survive? Perhaps they were actually not very good. If so, my version may have a chance!

ORESTEIA

THE ORESTES TETRALOGY

PART 4

PROTEUS

The missing satyr-play

Lost original by AESCHYLUS

Imagined by ANDREW WILSON

Only its title Proteus is known. Nor a single word survives nor is there a single ancient reference to the Oresteia's satyr-play. I've assumed it was inspired by Odysseus 4 (as Euripides' Cyclops was by Odysseus 6). I also assume that Euripides' Helen could not have been written without knowledge of this play.

PROTEUS

Characters

Menelaus, a hero

Papa Silenus, father of the Satyrs.

Chorus of Satyrs

Eidothea, Proteus' daughter.

Proteus, king of Egypt, son of Poseidon, aka "the Old Man of the Sea", "Lord of the Seals"

Helen, of Sparta (never of Troy)

Scene

Egypt - a deserted beach

Enter Menelaus, from the sea, his modesty preserved by no more than a damp strand of kelp

MENELAUS

My curses on this place, this barren waste!
My curse on all you gods who dumped me here,
My curse on you for coolly offering
My wife as tempting bait in one of their
Ridiculous disputes, a Miss
Olympus contest of some kind.
My curse on Priam's son who took your bribe
And stole my wife, and dragged us all to war.
My curse on you for sending me and all
The Greeks to bloody Troy. For what?
The Trojans told us straight away that she,
The wife I'd lost, was not in Troy.¹ We Greeks
Assumed that they were lying: 'course we did.
We did not believe them, so we went to war.
Ten effing years to find they told the truth:
Helen of Sparta never got to Troy!
At least we sacked the place and burnt it down,
We slaughtered all the men – those that were left --
And lined the women up to share them out.
Of course, no Helen, and the Trojan girls
All jeered and said "We told you so!"
They chose a woman – all except for me;

¹ Herodotus, Histories 2.112 ff

My brother Agamemnon took the best,
As you'd expect, Cassandra, the princess.
For sure he's having fun with her right now,
As I stand naked on this beach, alone.

We left the smoking rubble and set sail –
The rest for home, but I still desperate to
Be reunited with my wife, direct
My ship towards the land of Egypt, where,
The Trojans said she'd been for these ten years.²³
Those cursed gods had not yet ceased their sport:
The grandmother of storms attacked my boat,
It smashed the mast, tore off the sails, and washed
My loyal crewmen off the deck. Just I,
Their wretched captain still remained on board,
Alone, battered and bruised but still alive,
For days I drifted out of sight of land,
No food, no water, lashed by icy gales
Until a second storm worse than the first
Erupted. Pounding waves splintered the hulk
Such as was left and dumped me on the beach.
So here I am, a hero once, but now
Barely a man, cowering with shivering limbs
Upon the shore, hoping for speedy death.

SILENUS [emerging from the sea – also covered in sea-weed. His flippers, tiny ears and blubber identify him as a large SEAL]. He is joined by a herd of smaller seals, the transmogrified SATYRS.

Oh, the waves of the sea, how they roll and they reel,

But life in the ocean's no fun for this seal

I'm Silenus, the seal who'd much rather be

² Herodotus ib.

³ Apollodorus Epitome 6.30

Swigging wine from a jar, not surfing the sea.

CHORUS

Alas, poor Silenus, he won't like this song
For the drunkard, the lecher, just everything's wrong
The sandy beach and the ocean blue
Are no fun with no drink and no nymphs to pursue.
(Repeat after each verse)

SILENUS

These flippers are fine, for swimming they're neat
Yet I'd trade them in gladly for me old plates of meat
Too much crab, too much squid - they make me feel sick
And under this blubber I can't find my dick.

Oh, for a thumb, and a pinkie too,
What I would give to put on a shoe!
And here's another imperfection:
Silenus seen with no erection!

If only I'd hands, not these flippers of mine,
To grab me a cup full of Thasian vine;
But though Drinking's essential, it cannot surpass
The pleasure of clasping a pretty nymph's arse.

Onk! Bloody Onk!

He barks. A sound of pain and abject misery. He doesn't notice Menelaus
My curses on this dismal place! You do
Not recognise me – do you? Though I am
In every Satyr play there's ever been.
I'm usually the principal, the most
Obvious butt of all the jokes. But not

Today. There's nothing funny in the sight
Of Papa Silenus dressed as a Seal. [only there is]
You see these whiskers – where's my beard?
My ruddy cheeks are grey. My hands, you see,
Designed to clutch an overflowing cup
Of finest wine, are empty. That's because
They're flippers now. How can I hold a drink?
Not that there is a drop of proper booze
In this benighted realm. What happened was:
We came with Bacchus, on his global tour⁴
To introduce the vine to every land. Well, vines
Don't grow in desert sand, so he and I
Planned exiting as quickly as we'd come.
Sorry, you folks who're native to this land
Can just make do with beer. Hard cheese!
But what we didn't know was this: the king
Of this unfriendly state is wholly weird.
He claims to be the most hospitable,
Most welcoming of any man on earth.
But he goes mad if someone comes and won't
Abase themselves and act the cringing guest,
With all the ritual nonsense that entails.
Well Dionysus never said hello.
He didn't waste his time when it was clear
No vines would ever grow here: off he fucked!
Gods can do that; they wish themselves elsewhere,
And poof! they've gone. I am an oldish bloke,
A goodly, corpulent old man, it's said,
So Proteus – that's the king, unleashed his rage
On me, and on my boys, those innocent

⁴ Apollodorus. 3. 5

Young satyrs. Turned his magic powers on us –
And changed our shape as you can see into
These hideous stinking mammals of the sea,
And made us join his royal herd of seals.
“Lord of the Seals” I’ve heard him called. He loves
To act just like a seal and frolic with
The others in the surf. And dive for fish!
No decent god, or human, lives lived on fish!
Can you imagine Agamemnon or
Achilles grilling sardines on a spit?
So that’s my story – left behind and forced
To pay for Dionysus’ rudeness to
The Insane monster who’s this country’s king.
Much loud and confused honking of seals.
These are my sons, fresh from their swim. I know,
You’ll listen kindly to their cries of woe.

CHORUS

Onk! Onk! Onk! Onk!

Can you imagine how I feel
To be a slimy smelly seal?
With tiny holes instead of ears
And extra blubber on our rears!

The thing I miss the most is feet
A pair of tootsies can’t be beat.
So ask me how I get around?
I shuffle, belly on the ground.

Feet, feet, wonderful feet

Complete with their toes, there's nothing so neat,
Without them you can't walk or run;
That's why we're missing all the fun.

With these appendages I'm slow,
Pursue a nymph? Well that's a no!
If there were wine to have a sup (A SATYR: There isn't!)
I couldn't even hold a cup.

I hate to lose my bearded chin.
My horse's tail's become a fin!
But what I really cannot bear
Is soggy fur just everywhere.

And then the smell of this wet coat
I rather liked our reek of goat,
But now I stink, against my wish
Of seaweed and of rotting fish.

Cos fish is all we get to eat
Pilchards and sprats instead of meat.
What's there to drink? No wine, od cock.
We slurp from puddles in the rock

Satyrs were famed for drink and sex.
No drink these days goes down our necks.
As for the other, as is clear
Our pride and joy's no longer here!

Dionysus, lend an ear!
We are jolly when you're near

Why've you left us in this plight?
Do something now to put it right!

Bacchus, who was once our mate
Left us to this fishy fate
You can't imagine how it feels
Flumping here as honking seals!

They flump, slump, flap, flip and flop in in sad attempt at a choral dance

SILENUS

Look Something's washed up on the sand.

Quick! Shuffle over! Lend a hand!

A couple of seals move towards the object.

SATYR 1 [dragging himself with difficulty]

I'll lend a flipper. Maybe it's some booze!

Shit! It's a body. Wonder whose?

SATYR 2

A corpse is what it seems to be.

A dead one, too, if you ask me.

SILENUS

Yes it's a carcase, some decaying beast...

O no! Look out! it twitched, it's not deceased!

If it be human, there's no need to fuss.

But if a god, might be some use to us.

The bundle stirs, and stands up. A strand of seaweed preserves its minimal modesty.

MENELAUS

I'm not a god; alas. I am a man.

The most unlucky mortal of all time.

I've lost my ship, my clothes, my mates,

My wife, my money and my dignity.

My life is all I have and if someone

Deprived me of it I would not complain.

But who are you, what animals are these?

Dolphins or porpoises or what on earth?

SILENUS

I wish we were on earth! Alas, we're forced

To make the sea our home, since recently

We were transformed and lost our rightful shape.

I am Silenus, once a jolly chap

With rosy cheeks, a beard, and feet.

These satyrs are my sons, embodying

In better times, a life devoted to

Debauchery, to drunkenness, and pledged

To decadence, to women, wine and song.

Now we go "onk" and dive for fish; we've been

Transmogrified from gods, (though minor ones)

To seals that bark and flop upon the sand -

Thanks to the beastly king who rules this land.

But tell me truly, stranger; have you come

Here just to mock our bitter plight? Or do

You have a tale to entertain us with?

MENELAUS

Nothing to laugh at here at all.

I'm Menelaus, perhaps you've heard of me?

Before, I was the happiest of men.

I was a king and had a brother king,

Called Agamemnon: Argos was our land.

I had a charming, lovely wife, to boot.

One day a handsome guest arrived to stay,
From windy Troy across the sea he came.
We gave him every thing a guest could want,
A banquet, entertainment, and a girl
To warm his bed at night. But this was not
Enough for Paris – that's the bastard's name –
One night when I could not be home, he had
His men take all the gold and treasure I'd
Got in my store and pile it on his ship;
And then – to make things ten times worse – burst in
To where my wife was sleeping, trussed her up,
And smuggled her on board as well! My wife!
Helen of Sparta who was Zeus's child,
More beautiful than any girl alive
Who chose me out of all the men in Greece
To be her husband. I was quite surprised,
But proud to have this treasure in my bed.
Her suitors would have killed each other in
Their lusty eagerness to marry her,
So all agreed to let her choose her man;
And she chose me – I don't know why; but all
Swore to assist if any harm should come
To her – or me. That had a consequence.
SILENUS [quickly, to cut this story short]
You mustered all the kings of Greece, and launched
A thousand ships to punish Troy, bring home
Your precious wife the Trojans stole from you.
What happened then? How come you've washed up here?

MENELAUS

We got to Troy to find the Trojan king
And Paris his despicable young son

Laughing at us, and mocking our attack.
“Come all this way to get your Helen back?
What utter fools! Deluded idiots!
She isn’t here! She never got to Troy!
The gods wrecked Paris’ plans - and ship - not long
After he’d sailed away from Argos with
His bride-to-be and all your cash.⁵ They dashed
His ship aground in Egypt, where the king,
An evil monster, ruled a blighted land.
And stole his woman and his treasure too.
By luck alone he managed to get free,
With nothing, not a thing, just with his life,
And made his way back to his family here.
So Helen never got as far as Troy. Bad luck!”
There was no way we would believe this tosh,
And settled in to fight as long as it
Might take. Ten years of camping there at Troy,
Come rain or shine, losing both hope and friends,
Killed by disease more often than the foe.
At last – why did it take so long? – he built –
Odysseus did – his wooden horse. Those fools,
The Trojans, dragged it into Troy,
And when night fell we, those of us still fit,
Leapt from its hollow belly and began
To slaughter left and right the enemy
Who’d taunted us, and made us waste our lives.
We killed the males – regardless of their age –
And lined the women up, for me
To find my Helen, and the rest to pick
Their favoured concubine. I hurried up

⁵ Menelaus’ treasure: Iliad 3. 70, 72, 91, 255, 282. Herodotus ib.

And down the rows, expecting Helen to
Cry out and run to me. But they all stood
There sullenly, hoping they'd not be picked
By Ajax, or Achilles' psycho son.
One of the oldest, Priam's wife maybe,
Croaked out "We told you so!" Another cried,
"You fought like fools to bring a phantom home.
Helen was never here: so now you know."
So I left Troy, and steered my ship due south,
Making for Egypt, if that tale were true,⁶
Still hoping I might find my wife alive.
But storms and hurricanes sent by
The gods have blown me off my course not once
But countless times. I aimed for Egypt, but
I've ended up on this depressing coast.
What is this dreary god-forsaken place?

SILENUS

Egypt! You've made it, though I'd say
Your trouble's only just begun. The king,
Old Proteus, Master of the Seals, is not
An easy one to deal with – look at us!
We asked for help politely, "Couldst
Thou let us have a ship to get back home
To Greece?" We only asked and he went mad,
Became a raging animal, a vicious beast,
Abused us, using words that even we
Had never heard, and had us turned
From merry satyrs into barking seals.
Good luck with Proteus, let us hope that he
Has kept your wife and treasure still intact.

⁶ Herodotus 2.116

My knowledge of him would suggest
This is unlikely. But hope for the best!

CHORUS

Welcome to Egypt, you sad man!
Its king's a brutal ruffian
You must not stay here, get away
Before old Proteus makes you pay.

When we were slaves in Sicily
We thought it would end horribly
Imprisoned in the Cyclops' cave.
But we had hope which made us brave,

He didn't eat us, which was great -
We fooled him and escaped our fate
Thanks to a most terrific wheeze,
And made off home with all his cheese.

In Egypt there's no wine, no booze
But drink's not the worst thing to lose
Without our hands or feet, you'll trust
There is no way to cool our lust.

Bacchus, Bacchus where've you flown?
Having orgies on your own?
Still partying and having fun?
While we are stuck here having none?

But now It's time for this poor seal
To go to sea to catch his meal.

You cannot know how much I wish,
I never see another fish!

The Chorus, led by Silenus, retreat into the waves. As Menelaus stares after them a beautiful woman appears from the opposite direction, and approaches him tentatively

MENELAUS

I see a woman coming ...is it true?

EIDOTHEA

Menelaus can it be really you?

MENELAUS

Helen, my darling, here I am at last!

EIDOTHEA

Let go of me, how dare you grab my arse!

MENELAUS

You are my wife. Therefore as such ...

EIDOTHEA

I am a priestess, whom no man may touch.

MENELAUS

The evil king has put a spell on you -

This is some cruel trick of Proteus!

EIDOTHEA

Why cruel to live in service to a god?

MENELAUS

His plan's to keep you sacred - to himself!

EIDOTHEA

Of course! My father is a god, and king.

MENELAUS

Yes, you are Zeus' daughter, that makes sense -

So Zeus is ruler of this land, good news.

EIDOTHEA

In Egypt we don't reckon much to Zeus,

MENELAUS [aghast at the blasphemy]

But you're the daughter of the king of gods!

EIDOTHEA

Don't dare insult my ancestry, old man.

My father's Proteus, ruler of this land!

And I am Eidothea, daughter, devotee

The virgin priestess of my father's cult!

A prophetess that knows whatever was.

Is now and what's to come.

MENELAUS

Pardon! . Your loveliness led me astray.

So father is the vile Egyptian king?

His daughter! [Aside] You're so like my darling wife!

EIDOTHEA

Maybe once long ago she looked like me!

MENELAUS

What do you mean? You must explain.

EIDOTHEA

It's ten years since she was abandoned here.

If you're her husband you must realise,

Even the prettiest of us must age!

My father has pursued her endlessly;

By force, by guile, by sorcery, he's tried

To lure her into bed with him. But she

Swore loyally to keep herself untouched

And pure, until she could be with the man,

The only man that she had ever loved.

MENELAUS

That's splendid news! How overjoyed she'll be

To get away from Proteus and escape

Back home to Greece at last, with me.

EIDOTHEA

Indeed she spends her nights in constant fear,
Repelling the advances of the lustful king.
She weeps when she's alone and cries in grief
Missing the man she loves, and longing for
The day he'll come and take her off to Troy.

MENELAUS

Of course, she knew that's where I'd be. My love!
She hoped to share my tent and give me strength
To carry on the war until the end.
How she has suffered, growing old!
O what a wife! What loyalty and love!

EIDOTHEA

Once more you get it wrong. I was not her.
Not Helen. Nor's the man that Helen loves
Called Menelaus. It's not you she dreamed
Would come, but Paris – who she ran
Away with gladly to escape from you!
She found you dull, and inexperienced in bed.
Since I know everything it must be true.

MENELAUS

Alas, alack, o lackaday! Ah me!
Not only naked, lost, alone, without
A friend and penniless, I see my life
Before my shipwreck here was all in vain.
I went to Troy to get her back, and spent
Ten years of youth in pointless, senseless war.
I kept up hope survived the sea, and came
To Egypt, to discover how the gods
Make utter mockery of human lives.

Dear priestess, you are close to god, can you
Advise me, please! What should I do? What now?

EIDOTHEA

I am a priestess, and I dedicate
My life to doing all the good I can.
I see my father mired in sinfulness.
He lusts after your wife and has a plan
To build a pleasure-house to keep her in,
Adorned with treasures that were robbed from you.
I am a pious daughter, it's my task
To eradicate temptation I where I can.
Thus I intend to benefit Papa
Depriving him of opportunity
For lust and fornication, and to do
You good in helping you recover both
Your fortune and your errant wife: I don't
Condone adultery, or pardon her
For leaving you and running off with him.

MENELAUS

Then there is hope for me again! Much thanks!
If I get home to Argos with at least
My money back, I won't seem such a twat..
And Helen ...well, let's wait and see ...
But how will Proteus your father let
Me take the things that mean so much to him?

EIDOTHEA

My father's not an easy man at all.
But let me help you understand just why
He is the way he is. He was renowned
Throughout the world for hospitality –
He was incapable of saying no

To any stranger who made a request –
Regardless how unreasonable it was.
So visitors exploited him, made him a fool,
Abusing Proteus' generosity.
So to avoid hearing requests – which he
Must honour – he began to use a super power,
When any guest prepared to ask a favour
It didn't matter what the favour was –
He'd use his power and, if he chose, he'd use
It on petitioners that caused his woe.

MENELAUS

What was this power of which you speak?

EIDOTHEA

He changes shape! He changes shape himself,
And has the power to transform others too.
Look at these seals, my father's slaves, they once
Came here as visitors, and whether gods
Or human here they stay – compelled to dive
For fish and serve my father's every whim:
Poseidon's son, Pharaoh of Egypt, Lord
Of all the Seals, the Old Man of the Sea,
An ancient god with supernatural powers.⁷
He's out there now, surrounded by his court.
Soon they will leave the sea, and heave themselves
Ashore, and bask upon the sand. Proteus
Will count them; next he'll lead them all
Into this cave, then, with his seals, he'll sleep
Just like a shepherd with his flock of sheep..

MENELAUS

I picture him among his sleeping seals.

⁷ Odyssey 4. 351 - 592.

But How can I get close enough to ask
My favour of him? If he sees me first
He'll fly into a rage and turn me to
A seal, some creature subject to his will.

EIDOTHEA

Not easy I admit. You must disguise
Yourself. I can supply you with a skin,
A seal skin you must wrap yourself inside.
Don't mind the stink -you'll have to live with that,
And don't be put off by the pungent reek
Than emanates from scores of farting seals.
So clad you'll wriggle through the snoring herd
And get up close. Then summon all your strength
And leap on him, and hold him down. Use all
The wrestling tricks you know to hold him tight.

MENELAUS

I'm holding him, he's struggling, what now?

EIDOTHEA

Don't let him go! He'll change and change
Again to every animal there is,
From tiger to a tiny mouse: keep hold!
He'll turn to water and to fire, but you
Must not let go, tighten your grip, until
He's done his total repertoire, and is
Back in his natural shape. Then quick! Ask him
To give you Helen and your treasure back,
Together with a ship and sailors who
Will take you safely home to Greece!
Once overpowered he can't refuse requests!
You must conceal yourself until I bring
The seal-suit that you'll need for your disguise.

Now I'll tell Helen she should go and pack;

Her lover's come at last to take her back.

I tell you are Paris, so she'll bite - .

I'm sure you'll find some way to put her right!

She disappears as Menelaus retreats into his hiding-place. The satyrs emerge from the surf, paying court now to Proteus, Lord of the Seals, who struts imperiously amongst them.

CHORUS

Glory to Proteus, our lord!

To serve you is its own reward!

Keep us in safety whilst we sleeps!

You are our shepherd, we your sheeps!

It's such joy to swim with you,

And frolic in the ocean blue.

We cherish surfing by your side.

You are our leader and our guide.

O how we love you, Lord of Seals

You give us appetising meals

The tasty haddock, coley, pollocks

So delicious – you're the bollocks!

Not just our king, also a god

We worship you who bring us cod

Though what would make me lick my lips,

A lovely steaming bag of chips!

But now it's time we had our snooze –

I'm sleepy even without booze.

I have to say it's really fab

To lie down on this slimy slab.

The seals drag themselves inside the cave for their siesta, shepherded by Silenus and the king.
They pause outside:

SILENUS

Dear Proteus, your majesty, come in
And rest your royal bottom on this rock.
You're king and god and master of the seals,
You must be tired from all your royal tasks ...

PROTEUS

I know you hate me, all my subjects do!
I hate the person I've become. For once
I was a kindly, decent chap. A king
Keen to be known as friend to everyone.

SILENUS

What turned you into this unpleasant grump?

PROTEUS

My generosity it was that got me down.
I can't say no to anyone. I've tried,
But every time I'm asked, I find myself
Just meekly saying yes to everything.
When I was young I gave away so much
When asked, I'd almost nothing left.
So I decided not to hear another plea,
Another question ever in my life.
That way I would preserve my sanity
And what remained of Egypt's wealth as well.
I met all visitors with rage, and used
My super power to stop requests
Before they uttered them. But everyone
Now thinks I am a monster, hates my guts!

SILENUS

Nobody knows how nice you really are
And how hospitable you are inside.

PROTEUS

Thank you old friend, it's good to know someone
Appreciates the suffering I bear.
Here is our cave amongst the rock
Let's both go in and join my flock.

CHORUS (within)

Hushaby seal-pup stuffed full of fish
Tell your seal mummy your favourite dish?
Give me a kipper, want it to stink!
Baby will puke and he won't sleep a wink. [repeat as necessary]

EIDOTHEA returns with the seal-costume.

EIDOTHEA

I've got your costume. Put it on at once.
Proteus is in that cave amongst his seals,
Those pampered seals he loves much more than me!
Helen's been told that rescue's near.
She'll meet you on the beach when you
Have finished off your business with the king! Exit

MENELAUS

Zeus, holy fishtails! That was quick! But she's
A goddess – all is simple, I suppose.
Let's try to get this stinky seal-skin on.
Well that's surprising! There's no smell.
Or rather there's scent of fine perfume,
Like Helen used to wear before ...O how
I miss her, how I long to hold her once
Again – I'm sure that when she sees me she'll

Forget that Trojan pretty boy, when I

Stand proud before her as a real man! [He looks utterly ridiculous in his seal costume]

I'm all dressed up, it's time to go to work!

He enters the cave, dragging himself awkwardly in his worthy attempt to look like a surreptitious seal. A brief silence, punctuated by loud snores and grunts from within. Suddenly a scream.

PROTEUS

Help! Help! Someone's got hold of me, in here⁸

SILENUS

Someone's attacking someone here. Be quiet!

PROTEUS

They're still on top of me, let go! Let go!

A SATYR

The king's under attack. Let us discuss

What we should do. But let's not make a fuss!

ANOTHER SATYR

I know what's best! Arouse the other seals!

And ask, in turn, each of them how he feels.

A THIRD SATYR

Nonsense! No this is what I think is best:

Stop the intruder causing further stress.

A FOURTH

My vote is with that seal. No matter how!

To save our leader's life, we must act now!

A FIFTH

No need to panic we should all keep calm

Until we know the king has suffered harm.

A SIXTH

All talk, no action! We are wasting time!

⁸ cf Agamemnon 1343 ff

We should do something to prevent this crime

YET ANOTHER

We need to think with care of our position

Let's not all rush into rash decision.

SATYR EIGHT

I disagree. We cannot save the king

Simply by talking. We must do something!

SATYR NINE

It's all gone quiet. That means the attacker's won.

It's over, finished. Nothing can be done

TENTH SATYR

No point in guessing; We don't know for sure

Let's sit here quietly, till we find out more.

The Chorus' utterances have been punctuated by an array of animal noises, roars, squeals, squeaks, trumpeting, barking, miaowing etc. – and grunts from Menelaus.

HELEN

They said I'd find my lover here. They said

"He's come at last to carry you away!"

Away from a decade of life which I

Spent dodging day and night that creep

The king, the dirty old man of the sea.

He's never given up his tedious quest

To get me in his bed – by trickery or force.

To be quite honest, I'm exhausted by

The constant efforts keeping honour safe.

O what a most obnoxious man he is!

But where is Paris now, my one true love?

I picture how he might look, ten long years

Since I last gazed into his eyes. He will be so

Much wiser, stronger, beautiful, and fit.

I'll peep inside this cave. I'll bet that's where

He has prepared a spot where we shall soon

Be celebrating in each other's arms!

She goes cautiously into the cave. Sounds of struggle resume, She rushes out, crawling on hands and knees.

O Zeus and all the gods, I'm overwhelmed!

Those hideous black shapes, were they the Furies,

Come up to punish me? I feel a pang

A nausea; I sense a surge of guilt

Rise up to choke me. Menelaus has

Been killed, cut down at Troy, and all

Because I left him! It's my fault he's dead!

She recovers.

But then I saw they were a herd of seals,

Snoring and farting happily. A sigh

Of pure relief. But then a second shock!

A shaft of sunlight picked him out. The man!

My Paris, naked as it seemed bestride

A ravening beast he'd pinioned to the floor:

A stag, a tiger, I could not decide.

But what entranced me was the man himself:

His rippling muscles, solid back, his grip –

His total domination of the beast.

And this is he who's come to rescue me!

My super-hero, Paris, prince of Troy!

SILENUS [emerging worriedly from the cave]

My dear young woman, whoever you are,

It's not safe here. In just a moment seals

Sea-mammals snorting, steaming will charge down

This beach, fresh from their rest and desperate

To plunge once more into the salty sea.

Move further off, keep back, or you may find

Your gorgeous body crushed and trampled on!

HELEN

They scared me when I saw them first, I have

No wish for close encounters with their sort.

Although you're ugly, just like them,

You seem quite kind and gentle – lead the way.

Silenus, whose intentions are by no means entirely pure, leads her away. Menelaus and Proteus emerge from the cave arm in arm, sweating but joyful

PROTEUS

Well that was quite a fight! I'm out of puff!

MENELAUS

I never thought I'd beat you! It was tough!

PROTEUS

No one has gone the distance You're the first!

MENELAUS

The lion was a test, but not the worst!

PROTEUS

That wriggling nearly had you, no mistake!

MENELAUS

When you so cleverly became a snake?

PROTEUS

Then I went large again – a giant bear?

MENELAUS

You nearly crushed me. Gave me quite a scare.

PROTEUS

The snarling panther next – my favourite shape.

MENELAUS

I nearly strangled you, so how did you escape?

PROTEUS

I liquefied and turned to running water next.

MENELAUS

A wicked trick. That got me really vexed.

PROTEUS

My final throw – an oak tree in full leaf.

MENELAUS

I pulled you up! That's how you came to grief.

PROTEUS

You found me back where I began, As me!

It's years since I performed my repertoire –

I feel rejuvenated, full of life.

I cannot wait to grant you your request!

MENELAUS

You are a generous man I know, but you

May not approve of what I'm going to ask.

PROTEUS

After that workout I could not refuse.

Though there is something I can't bear to lose

One object that is far too dear to me -

My Helen, my beloved bride-to-be.

MENELAUS

Don't try to cheat me; you must know you've

No latitude, no room to move.

When you've been beaten in a wrestling match!

The gods and all the world know there's no catch!

So give me Helen, and a ship, and heap

On board the treasure that you've tried to keep.

And while you're at it – those poor seals as well!

Release these Satyrs from that magic spell

They've served you well and been good slaves;

There's lots more seals to swim with in the waves.

PROTEUS

I thought I'd try! But right is there with you.
You'll have your woman, and the treasure too.
Silenus, you are corpulent once more,
With all your naughty bits you had before
And Satyrs, take those seal-masks off. And thanks
For surfing with me ...all those pranks ..
I'd love to chat here with you all the night =
Sorry. I'm hot and sweaty from the fight.
I need to cool off in the ocean's foam
My father Poseidon will see you home! Exit

The Satyrs will much cheering rapturously throw off their seal masks and costumes. They
concernedly check that all their apparatus is intact and working still. They surround Menelaus.

CHORUS

Well thank you sir for all your help.
Let's hope that's my last sniff of kelp!
We've been set free from that vile spell
I don't mind saying, it was hell!

We had to do what Proteus said
The only way we could get fed –
On fish for breakfast, lunch and tea
How'd you like dinner out at sea?

We had a pescatarian diet
You should really have to try it!
Don't picture lobster thermidor
But bony sprats we swallowed raw.

And then the frolics out at sea!
I hate to get my hair wet, me!
Think what we suffered, o my gosh
We satyrs never even wash!

He made us join his watery games,
Our only sport is chasing dames!
I leapt to order like a trout
And had to bounce balls on my snout

But now I dream of getting boozy,
In the bushes with a floozy,
We Satyrs are a jolly crew.
And now we're free, all thanks to you!

But now it doesn't matter what he
Did to us. Bring on the totty!
Soon we'll have wine flow down our throat
Just let us climb aboard your boat.

Menelaus accepts their devotion. Enter Helen, pursued by a still-seal-like Silenus

HELEN

I've just been propositioned by a seal!

SILENUS [whipping off his mask] I'm one no longer, You see me, for real!

HELEN

I see a portly antique red-faced letch,
Whose priapism frankly makes me retch.

SILENUS

I'm simply showing off my pure delight
To see a gorgeous female. What's not right?

MENELAUS

Be off, old goat, and go and join your crew.

Your years have saved you from a seeing-to.

Exit Silenus hurriedly. Pause. As Menelaus takes in the fact of Helen standing before him.

This the my long-lost love, From Troy I've come.

And now I look at you at last, I'm numb!

HELEN

You must have suffered much since Troy was sacked

And do its topless towers still stand intact?

MENELAUS

The Town of Troy's no more. Its time is past.

(Please no more rhymes. I can't be arsed)

HELEN

O my brave hero. How I've longed for you!

MENELAUS

And sweetheart I longed for you too...

HELEN

My dearest you remind me what I've missed

MENELAUS

And you do me. Come here now and be kissed!

HELEN

My dearest darling, crush me in your arms ...

MENELAUS

Let's consummate our love, reveal your charms ...

HELEN

How I adore you, worship you...Paris!

MENELAUS

You call me Paris, surely some mistake?

HELEN

Paris my Paris, you're my one true love.

MENELAUS

Calm down a moment, steady on. Back off.

HELEN

What's wrong, my love? Are you rejecting me?

MENELAUS

{aside} So I am Paris. { to Helen} Say my name again!

HELEN

[sexily] Paris, Paris, and Paris once again!

MENELAUS

You recognise me after all these years?

HELEN

I recognise your beauty and your strength.

The handsome man who saved my life when I

Was threatened every day with ravishment

By that disgusting pig, Proteus, the king.

How wonderful you looked bestride the beast

As he struggled to wriggle free, and you,

Your muscles gleaming, pinioned him until

He'd run through all his changes and you forced

Him to release me to go home with you.

MENELAUS

[aside] She thinks I'm Paris. What should I resent?

She thinks I'm handsome strong and brave and fit.

Why tell her I'm the husband that she spurned?

I'll play along with her. No need to spoil her dream.

I'll be her Paris, and we'll take the ship

And take a long relaxing trip

Along the Nile or where our fanc-

y Leads us, savouring romance.

A month, a year, or more, of love

With Helen, still rated above

All other women – I can bear
The little signs of wear and tear.
Perhaps when we are old and grey
I'll snuggle up to her and say
[I'm Menelaus and we'll chuckle
At the joke and then we'll fuck -all
Over again!]
I'm really Menelaus, what d'you think?
We'll have a laugh and pour another drink.
"I always knew," she'll say, "that was your name;
I couldn't bear to spoil your little game!"

The Satyrs form a guard-of-honour as the entwined figures of Menelaus and Helen make their way slowly towards the future.

CHORUS

Take it away!
The girls in Hellas feeling needy
With no Satyrs in Mycenae
They say they'll have take up spinning
Give up all that lovely sinning.

So when we bounce up -
Clio, Phaedra, Pandora and Deianeira
On the corner yakking, bet your life is something you lacking,
When we're home you'll know what you're missing:
Don't feel down! We're on our way. Satyrs soon back in town

Once more!
The girls in Athens feeling randy
Since there are no Satyrs handy
No wild oats are being sown

They have to go to bed alone.

Clio, Phaedra etc.

With acknowledgements to "Jean and Dinah" by The Mighty Sparrow 1960 (melody on itunes)

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Satyr-plays:

Deflate, undermine and sabotage Tragedy (the entire genre, and specifically the tragic predecessors of the trilogy).

They use obscenity, anachronism, colloquialisms, and references to everyday life.

They are named for a hero, or villain.

Plots invariably involve:

- Defeat of the villain/monster/ogre

- Fraud and trickery

- Bondage and escape.

- Hospitality (xenia) and its abuse

- A helpless victim, taken by a monster is freed by a hero using trickery

- Moral clarity - good triumphs over evil.

Settings are often exotic, outside Greece.

The Chorus is always a crew of idle, worthless, cowardly, boastful alcoholic sex-obsessed satyrs, portrayed as men with horses' ears and tail, and possibly hoofs. Their father, Silenus is both chorus leader and a character.

The satyr-play is never a sequel to the trilogy, rather a spin-off from an incident mentioned in one of the other plays in the tetralogy. In the case of Proteus, it picks up on the mystery of Menelaus' fate, referred to in Agamemnon 674 – 679. For Clytemnestra, substitute Helen, for Agamemnon, Menelaus, for Cassandra, Eidothea. For murder, love!

Only one satyr-play survives in full – Euripides' Cyclops; Sophocles' Ichneutai was reconstructed from a fragmentary papyrus discovered only in 1912. No satyr-play by

Aeschylus survives – except in small fragments and quotations. Nothing at survives of Proteus beyond its title.

