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### **The Works of George Lord Lyttleton**

**Lyttelton, George <Lord>**

**London, 1774**

V. Ulysses - Circe.

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## DIALOGUE V.

ULYSSES—CIRCE. *In Circe's Island\*.*

CIRCE.

YOU will go then, Ulysses; but tell me without reserve—  
What carries you from me?

ULYSSES.

Pardon, goddess, the weakness of human nature. My heart  
will sigh for my country. It is an attachment which all my  
admiration of you cannot entirely overcome.

CIRCE.

This is not all. I perceive you are afraid to declare your  
whole mind: but what, Ulysses, do you fear? my terrors are  
gone. The proudest goddess on earth, when she has favoured  
a mortal as I have favoured you, has laid her divinity and  
power at his feet.

ULYSSES.

It may be so, while there still remains in her heart the ten-  
derness of love, or in her mind the fear of shame. But you,  
Circe, are above those vulgar sensations.

CIRCE.

I understand your caution; it belongs to your character;  
and therefore, to remove all diffidence from you, I swear by  
Styx, I will do no manner of harm, either to you, or your  
friends, for any thing which you say, however offensive it may

\* N. B. This cannot be properly called a Dialogue of the Dead; but we have one of the same  
kind among Cambray's Dialogues, between Ulysses and his companion Grillus, when turned to  
a boar by the enchantments of Circe; and two or three others, that are supposed to have past  
between living persons.



be to my love or my pride; but will fend you away from my island with all marks of my friendship. Tell me now truly, what pleasures you hope to enjoy in the barren rock of Ithaca, which can compensate for those you leave in this paradise, exempt from all cares, and overflowing with all delights?

## U L Y S S E S.

The pleasures of virtue; the supreme happiness of doing good. Here I do nothing. My mind is in a palsy: all its faculties are benumbed. I long to return into action, that I may worthily employ those talents, which I have cultivated from the earliest days of my youth. Toils and cares fright not me. They are the exercise of my soul; they keep it in health and in vigour. Give me again the fields of Troy, rather than these vacant groves. There I could reap the bright harvest of glory; here I am hid, like a coward, from the eyes of mankind, and begin to appear contemptible in my own. The image of *my former self* haunts and seems to upbraid me, wheresoever I go. I meet it under the gloom of every shade: it even intrudes itself into your presence, and chides me from your arms. O goddess, unless you have power to lay that spirit, unless you can make me forget myself, I cannot be happy here, I shall every day be more wretched.

## C I R C E.

May not a wise and good man, who has spent all his youth in active life and honourable danger, when he begins to decline, be permitted to retire, and enjoy the rest of his days in quiet and pleasure?

## U L Y S S E S.

No retreat can be honourable to a wise and good man, but in company with the Muses. Here I am deprived of that sacred society. The Muses will not inhabit the abodes of voluptuousness and sensual pleasure. How can I study, or think,



while such a number of beasts (and the worst beasts are men turned into beasts) are howling, or roaring, or grunting all about me?

C I R C E.

There may be something in this: but this, I know, is not all. You suppress the strongest reason that draws you to Ithaca. There is another image, besides that of *your former self*, which appears to you in this island; which follows your walks; which more particularly interposes itself between you and me, and chides you from my arms. It is Penelope, Ulysses, I know it is.—Don't pretend to deny it. You sigh for Penelope in my bosom itself.—And yet she is not an immortal.—She is not, as I am, endowed by nature with the gift of unfading youth. Several years have past since her's has been faded. I might say without vanity that in her best days she was never so handsome as I. But what is she now?

U L Y S S E S.

You have told me yourself, in a former conversation, when I enquired of about her, that she is faithful to my bed, and as fond of me now, after twenty years absence, as at the time when I left her to go to Troy. I left her in the bloom of youth and beauty. How much must her constancy have been tried since that time! how meritorious is her fidelity! Shall I reward her with falsehood? shall I forget my Penelope, who **can't** forget me; who has no pleasure so dear to her as my remembrance?

C I R C E.

Her love is preserved by the continual hope of your speedy return. Take that hope from her. Let your companions return, and let her know that you have fixed your abode with me, that you have fixed it for ever. Let her know that she is free to dispose as she pleases of her heart and her hand. Send  
my



my picture to her; bid her compare it with her own face.— If all this does not cure her of the remains of her passion, if you don't hear of her marrying Eurymachus in a twelve-month, I understand nothing of womankind.

## U L Y S S E S.

O cruel goddess! why will you force me to tell you truths I desire to conceal? If by such unmerited, such barbarous usage, I could lose her heart, it would break mine. How should I be able to endure the torment of thinking, that I had wronged such a wife? what could make me amends for her being no longer mine, for her being another's? Don't frown, Circe; I must own, (since you will have me speak) I must own *you* could not.—With all your pride of immortal beauty, with all your magical charms to assist those of nature, you are not so powerful a charmer as she. You feel *desire*, and you give it: but you have never felt *love*, nor can you inspire it. How can I love one who would have degraded me into a beast? Penelope raised me into a hero. Her love ennobled, invigorated, exalted my mind. She bid me go to the siege of Troy, though the parting with me was worse than death to herself. She bid me expose myself there to all the perils of war among the foremost heroes of Greece, though her poor heart sunk and trembled at every thought of those perils, and would have given all its own blood to save a drop of mine. Then there was such a conformity in all our inclinations! When Minerva was teaching me the lessons of wisdom, she delighted to be present; she heard, she retained, she gave them back to me, softened and sweetened with the peculiar graces of her own mind. When we unbent our thoughts with the charms of poetry, when we read together the poems of Orpheus, Musæus, and Linus, with what taste did she discern every excellence in them! My feelings were dull, compared to her's. She seemed herself to be the Muse who had inspired those verses, and had tuned their lyres  
to



to infuse into the hearts of mankind the love of wisdom and virtue, and the fear of the Gods. How beneficent was she, how tender to my people! what care did she take to instruct them in all the finer elegant arts; to relieve the necessities of the sick and aged; to superintend the education of children; to do my subjects every good office of kind intercession; to lay before me their wants, to mediate for those who were objects of mercy, to sue for those who deserved the favours of the crown! And shall I banish myself for ever from such a consort? shall I give up her society for the brutal joys of a sensual life, keeping indeed the form of a man, but having lost the human soul, or at least all its noble and godlike powers? Oh Circe, it is impossible; I can't bear the thought.

CIRCE.

Be gone—don't imagine that I ask you to stay. *The daughter of the sun* is not so mean-spirited, as to solicit a mortal to share her happiness with her. It is a happiness which I find you cannot enjoy. I pity and despise you. All you have said seems to me a jargon of sentiments fitter for a silly woman than a great man. Go, read, and spin too, if you please, with your wife. I forbid you to remain another day in my island. You shall have a fair wind to carry you from it. After that, may every storm, that Neptune can raise, pursue and overwhelm you!—Be gone, I say, quit my sight.

ULYSSES.

Great goddess, I obey—but remember your oath.—

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