

**"Penelope gone to the war": The brutality of home in *Neverhome* and *Father Comes Home from the Wars***

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**ABSTRACT**

Both Laird Hunt's novel, *Neverhome* (September 2014), and Suzan-Lori Parks's triptych of plays, *Father Comes Home from the Wars Parts 1, 2, & 3* (2015) rehearse the *Odyssey* in their Civil War settings. Hunt's novel features an Indiana housewife, Constance, who disguises herself as a man to fight in the war while her meek husband minds the homestead; Parks's plays features a slave, Hero (later renamed Ulysses) who leaves his love Penny behind while he serves the Confederacy in hope of gaining freedom. For Constance and Hero, the war brings no glory, and the homecomings bring no peace; in fact, their homecomings are marred by an excessive violence, both emotional and physical, that most clearly recalls the brutal violence by which Odysseus retakes his position in Ithaca. Unlike the potentially peaceable reunion offered between Odysseus and Penelope, Hunt and Parks foreclose any possibility of the restoration of their protagonists' domestic bonds. While Hunt and Parks sketch out very similar trajectories as the *Odyssey's* plot—departure, war, disguises, delay, and finally return—I am interested in how each work ends not in restoration of rule but rather in the irredeemable destruction of home. By denying their characters a triumphant or even a peaceful return, I argue that Hunt and Parks invoke the *Odyssey* to compel us to reconsider the celebratory narratives of the Civil War as a triumph of emancipation and an end to violence within the "homes" of the nation and the family.