

## PART TWO: COMING HOME

*In Book 13, Odysseus, laden with gifts, is returned in secret to Ithaca in one of the magically swift Phaeacian ships. In Ithaca, Athena appears to the hero. Because his home is full of enemies, she advises him to proceed disguised as a beggar. This new hero of the postwar age must succeed not only by physical power but also by intelligence.*

*In Book 14, Odysseus, in his beggar's disguise, finds his way to the hut of his old and trusty swineherd, Eumaeus. Eumaeus is the very image of faithfulness in a servant – a quality much admired by Homer's society. The introduction of members of the so-called servant class as important actors is unusual in epic poetry, and it indicates Homer's originality. Odysseus is politely entertained by Eumaeus, but the king remains disguised from his old servant.*

*In Book 15, Athena appears to Odysseus' son, Telemachus. The young man has gone to Pylos and Sparta to talk to old comrades of his father's to try to discover if Odysseus is alive or dead. Athena advises him to return to Ithaca. His home – the palace of Odysseus – is overrun with his mother's suitors. These arrogant men have taken over Odysseus's house. They are partying with money for the son's inheritance and demanding that his mother, Penelope, take one of them as a husband. Athena warns Telemachus that the suitors plan to ambush him. Telemachus boards a ship for home, lands secretly on Ithaca, and heads toward the cottage of the swineherd.*

*As father and son move closer and closer together, the suspense becomes great. Now Homer is ready for what could be the most dramatic moment in the epic. Remember that Odysseus has not seen his son for twenty years. Telemachus has been away from Ithaca for a year.*

- Why does Athena believe it is important that Odysseus be disguised as a beggar when he returns home?
- What theme is highlighted in this description of Eumaeus?
- How do you think Odysseus is feeling now that he is finally home in Ithaca?

## THE MEETING OF FATHER AND SON

But there were two men in the mountain hut—  
Odysseus and the swineherd. At first light  
blowing their fire up, they cooked their breakfast  
and sent their lads out, driving herds to root  
in the tall timber.

935                    When Telemachus came,  
the wolfish troop of watchdogs only fawned on him  
as he advanced. Odysseus heard them go  
and heard the light crunch of a man's footfall—  
at which he turned quickly to say:

940                    “Eumaeus,  
here is one of your crew come back, or maybe  
another friend: the dogs are out there snuffling  
belly down; not one has even growled.  
I can hear footsteps—”

                         But before he finished  
his tall son stood at the door.

945    The swineherd  
rose in surprise, letting a bowl and jug  
tumble from his fingers. Going forward,  
he kissed the young man's head, his shining eyes  
and both hands, while his own tears brimmed and fell.  
Think of a man whose dear and only son,  
950    born to him in exile, reared with labor,  
has lived ten years abroad and now returns:  
how would that man embrace his son! Just so  
the herdsman clapped his arms around Telemachus  
and covered him with kisses—for he knew  
955    the lad had got away from death. He said:

                         “Light of my days, Telemachus,  
you made it back! When you took ship for Pylos  
I never thought to see you here again.  
Come in, dear child, and let me feast my eyes;  
960    here you are, home from the distant places!  
How rarely, anyway, you visit us,  
your own men, and your own woods and pastures!  
Always in the town, a man would think  
you loved the suitors' company, those dogs!”

965    Telemachus with his clear candor said:

                         “I am with you, Uncle. See now, I have come  
because I wanted to see you first, to hear from you  
if Mother stayed at home—or is she married  
off to someone, and Odysseus' bed

**966. Uncle:** here, a term of affection

- What important Greek value does Telemachus's and Eumaeus's treatment of the unknown beggar reveal?

**984. trenchers:** wooden platters

**993. lithe:** limber

970 left empty for some gloomy spider's weaving?"  
Gently the forester replied to this:"

At home indeed your mother is, poor lady  
still in the women's hall. Her nights and days  
are wearied out with grieving."

Stepping back

975 he took the bronze-shod lance, and the young prince  
entered the cabin over the worn door stone.  
Odysseus moved aside, yielding his couch,  
but from across the room Telemachus checked him:

"Friend, sit down; we'll find another chair  
980 in our own hut. Here is the man to make one!"

The swineherd, when the quiet man sank down,  
built a new pile of evergreens and fleeces—  
a couch for the dear son of great Odysseus—  
then gave them trenchers of good meat, left over  
985 from the roast pork of yesterday, and heaped up  
willow baskets full of bread, and mixed  
an ivy bowl of honey-hearted wine.  
Then he in turn sat down, facing Odysseus,  
their hands went out upon the meat and drink  
990 as they fell to, ridding themselves of hunger. . . .

*Not realizing that the stranger is his father, Telemachus agrees to protect him as best he can. But he says that the beggar cannot stay in the palace hall because he will be abused by the drunken sailors.*

*The swineherd is sent to Penelope with news of her son's return. Now even Athena cannot stand the suspense any longer. She turns to Odysseus, who is still in beggar's rags:*

. . . She tipped her golden wand upon the man,  
making his cloak pure white, and the knit tunic  
fresh around him. Lithe and young she made him,  
ruddy with sun, his jawline clean, the beard  
995 no longer gray upon his chin. And she  
withdrew when she had done.

Then Lord Odysseus  
reappeared—and his son was thunderstruck.  
Fear in his eyes, he looked down and away  
as though it were a god, and whispered:  
"Stranger,  
1000 you are no longer what you were just now!  
Your cloak is new; even your skin! You are  
one of the gods who rule the sweep of heaven!"

**1003: oblation:** offering of a sacrifice.

Telemachus thinks the stranger is a god.

- What does Telemachus's response to Odysseus' transformation suggest about the relationship between the ancient Greeks and their gods?

**1012. incredulity:** disbelief

- **Homeric Simile:** To what are the cries of Odysseus and Telemachus compared?

Be kind to us, we'll make you fair oblation  
and gifts of hammered gold. Have mercy on us!"

1005 The noble and enduring man replied:

"No god. Why take me for a god? No, no.  
I am that father whom your boyhood lacked  
and suffered pain for lack of. I am he."

Held back too long, the tears ran down his cheeks  
as he embraced his son.

1010 Only Telemachus,  
uncomprehending, wild  
with incredulity, cried out:

"You cannot  
be my father Odysseus! Meddling spirits  
conceived this trick to twist the knife in me!

1015 No man of woman born could work these wonders  
by his own craft, unless a god came into it  
with ease to turn him young or old at will.  
I swear you were in rags and old,  
and here you stand like one of the immortals!"

1020 Odysseus brought his ranging mind to bear  
and said:

"This is not princely, to be  
swept  
away by wonder at your father's presence.  
No other Odysseus will ever come,  
for he and I are one, the same; his bitter  
1025 fortune and his wanderings are mine.  
Twenty years gone, and I am back again  
on my own island. . . ."

Then, throwing  
his arms around this marvel of a father,  
Telemachus began to weep. Salt tears

1030 rose from the wells of longing in both men,  
and cries burst from both as keen and fluttering  
as those of the great taloned hawk,  
whose nestlings farmers take before they fly.

So helplessly they cried, pouring out tears,  
1035 and might have gone on weeping so till sundown. . . .

(from Book 16)

## THE BEGGAR AND THE FAITHFUL DOG

*Telemachus returns to the family compound and is  
greeted tearfully by his mother and his old nurse,  
Eurycleia. A soothsayer has told his mother, Penelope,  
that Odysseus is alive and in Ithaca. But Telemachus does*

- Why doesn't Telemachus tell his mother that he has seen his father?

- How does this description of the dog, Argos, make you feel?

- What does this reaction reveal about Odysseus' character?

*not report that he has seen his father. The suspense builds as Odysseus, once again disguised as a beggar, returns to his home, accompanied only by the swineherd. He has been away for twenty years. Only one creature recognizes him.*

While he spoke  
an old hound, lying near, pricked up his ears  
and lifted up his muzzle. This was Argos,  
trained as a puppy by Odysseus,  
1040 but never taken on a hunt before  
his master sailed for Troy. The young men,  
afterward,  
hunted wild goats with him, and hare, and deer,  
but he had grown old in his master's absence.  
Treated as rubbish now, he lay at last  
1045 upon a mass of dung before the gates—  
manure of mules and cows, piled there until  
field hands could spread it on the king's estate.  
Abandoned there, and half destroyed with flies,  
old Argos lay.

But when he knew he  
heard  
1050 Odysseus' voice nearby, he did his best  
to wag his tail, nose down, with flattened ears,  
having no strength to move nearer his master.  
And the man looked away,  
wiping a salt tear from his cheek; but he  
1055 hid this from Eumaeus. Then he said:  
  
"I marvel that they leave this hound to lie  
here on the dung pile;  
he would have been a fine dog, from the look of  
him,  
though I can't say as to his power and speed  
1060 when he was young. You find the same good build  
in house dogs, table dogs landowners keep  
all for style."

And you replied, Eumaeus:

"A hunter owned him—but the man is dead  
in some far place. If this old hound could show  
1065 the form he had when Lord Odysseus left him,  
going to Troy, you'd see him swift and strong.  
He never shrank from any savage thing

- Why is this scene ironic?

**1078. megaron:** great hall or central room

- What is significant about Argos passing away at the end of this episode?

- What qualities does Penelope reveal about herself through her actions here?

- Based on what you know about Odysseus, what do you predict his strategy will be for dealing with the suitors?

he'd brought to bay in the deep woods; on the scent  
no other dog kept up with him. Now misery  
1070 has him in leash. His owner died abroad,  
and here the women slaves will take no care of  
him.

You know how servants are: without a master  
they have no will to labor, or excel.  
For Zeus who views the wide world takes away  
1075 half the manhood of a man, that day  
he goes into captivity and slavery."

Eumaeus crossed the court and went straight  
forward  
into the megaron among the suitors;  
but death and darkness in that instant closed  
1080 the eyes of Argos, who had seen his master,  
Odysseus, after twenty years. . . .

(from Book 17)

*In the hall, the "beggar" is taunted by the evil suitors, but Penelope supports him. She has learned that the ragged stranger claims to have news of her husband. Unaware of who the beggar is, she invites him to visit her later in the night to talk about Odysseus.*

*In Book 18, Penelope appears among the suitors and reproaches Telemachus for allowing the stranger to be abused. She certainly must have warmed her husband's heart by doing this and by singing the praises of her lost Odysseus.*

*In Book 19, the suitors depart for the night, and Odysseus and Telemachus discuss their strategy. The clever hero goes as appointed to Penelope with the idea of testing her and her maids. (Some of the maids have not been loyal to the household and have even slept with the suitors.) The faithful wife receives her disguised husband. We can imagine the tension Homer's audience must have felt. Would Odysseus be recognized?*

*The "beggar" spins a yarn about his origins, pretending that he has met Odysseus on his travels. He cannot resist praising the lost hero, and he does so successfully enough*

- Why do you think Odysseus does not reveal his identity to Penelope yet?

*to bring tears to Penelope's eyes. We can be sure that this does not displease the beggar.*

*The storytelling beggar reveals that he has heard that Odysseus is still alive and is even now sailing for home. Penelope calls for the old nurse and asks her to wash the guest's feet – a sign of respect and honor. As Eurycleia does so, she recognizes Odysseus from a scar on his leg.*

*Quickly Odysseus swears the old nurse to secrecy. Meanwhile, Athena has cast a spell on Penelope so that she has taken no notice of this recognition scene. Penelope adds to the suspense by deciding on a test for the suitors on the next day. Without realizing it, she has now given Odysseus a way to defeat the men who threaten his wife and kingdom.*

*In Book 20, Odysseus, brooding over the shameless behavior of the maidservants and the suitors, longs to destroy his enemies but fears the revenge of their friends. Athena reassures him. Odysseus is told that the suitors will die.*

## THE TEST OF THE GREAT BOW

*In Book 21, Penelope, like many unwilling princesses of myth, fairy tale, and legend, proposes an impossible task for those who wish to marry her. By so doing, she causes the bloody events that lead to the restoration of her husband. The test involves stringing Odysseus' huge bow, an impossible feat for anyone except Odysseus himself.*

- What images does Homer use to help his audience visualize even something as ordinary as this scene at the storeroom?
- Why is Penelope crying?
- Why do you think Homer chooses to mention her beauty here?

*Odysseus had left his bow home in Ithaca twenty years earlier.*

Now the queen reached the storeroom door and halted.

Here was an oaken sill, cut long ago  
and sanded clean and bedded true. Foursquare  
1085 the doorjambs and the shining doors were set  
by the careful builder. Penelope untied the strap  
around the curving handle, pushed her hook  
into the slit, aimed at the bolts inside,  
and shot them back. Then came a rasping sound  
1090 as those bright doors the key had sprung gave way—  
a bellow like a bull's vaunt in a meadow—  
followed by her light footfall entering  
over the plank floor. Herb-scented robes  
lay there in chests, but the lady's milk-white arms  
1095 went up to lift the bow down from a peg  
in its own polished bow case.

Now Penelope

sank down, holding the weapon on her knees,  
and drew her husband's great bow out, and sobbed  
and bit her lip and let the salt tears flow.

1100 Then back she went to face the crowded hall  
tremendous bow in hand, and on her shoulder hung  
the quiver spiked with coughing death. Behind, her  
maids bore a basket full of ax heads, bronze  
and iron implements for the master's game.

1105 Thus **in her beauty** she approached the suitors,  
and near a pillar of the solid roof  
she paused, her shining veil across her cheeks,  
her maids on either hand and still,  
then spoke to the banqueters:

“My lords, hear me:

1110 suitors indeed, you recommended this house  
to feast and drink in, day and night, my husband  
being long gone, long out of mind. You found  
no justification for yourselves—none  
except your lust to marry me. Stand up, then:  
1115 we now declare a contest for that prize.  
Here is my lord Odysseus' hunting bow.  
Bend and string it if you can. Who sends an arrow



through iron ax-helve sockets, twelve in line?  
I join my life with his, and leave this place, my  
home,  
1120 my rich and beautiful bridal house, forever  
to be remembered, though I dream it only.” . . .

*Many of the suitors boldly try the bow, but not a man can  
even bend it enough to string it.*

Two men had meanwhile left the hall:  
swineherd and cowherd, in companionship,  
one downcast as the other. But Odysseus  
1125 followed them outdoors, outside the court,  
and coming up said gently:  
“You, herdsman,  
and you, too, swineherd, I could say a thing to you,  
or should I keep it dark?”

No, no; speak,  
my heart tells me. Would you be men enough  
1130 to stand by Odysseus if he came back?  
Suppose he dropped out of a clear sky, as I did?  
Suppose some god should bring him?  
Would you bear arms for him, or for the suitors?”

The cowherd said:  
“Ah, let the master come!  
1135 Father Zeus, grant our old wish! Some courier  
guide him back! Then judge what stuff is in me  
and how I manage arms!”

Likewise Eumaeus  
fell to praying all heaven for his return,  
so that Odysseus, sure at least of these,  
told them:  
1140 “I am at home, for I am he.  
I bore adversities, but in the twentieth year  
I am ashore in my own land. I find  
the two of you, alone among my people,  
longed for my coming. Prayers I never heard  
1145 except your own that I might come again.  
So now what is in store for you I’ll tell you:  
If Zeus brings down the suitors by my hand  
I promise marriages to both, and cattle,  
and houses built near mine. And you shall be  
1150 brothers-in-arms of my Telemachus.  
Here, let me show you something else, a sign

- Why does Odysseus decide to reveal his identity to the two men now?

**1154. Parnassus:** As a young man, Odysseus had gone hunting on Parnassus, his mother’s home, and was gored above the knee by a boar.

- What does Odysseus plan to do to vanquish the suitors?

that I am he, that you can trust me, look:  
this old scar from the tusk wound that I got  
boar hunting on Parnassus—. . .”

Shifting his rags

1155 he bared the long gash. Both men looked, and  
knew  
and threw their arms around the old soldier,  
weeping,  
kissing his head and shoulders. He as well  
took each man’s head and hands to kiss, then said

—  
to cut it short, else they might weep till dark—

1160 “Break off, no more of this.  
Anyone at the door could see and tell them.  
Drift back in, but separately at intervals  
after me.

Now listen to your orders:

when the time comes, those gentlemen, to a man,  
1165 will be dead against giving me bow or quiver.  
Defy them. Eumaeus, bring the bow  
and put it in my hands there at the door.  
Tell the women to lock their own door tight.  
Tell them if someone hears the shock of arms  
1170 or groans of men, in hall or court, not one  
must show her face, but keep still at her weaving.  
Philoeteus, run to the outer gate and lock it.  
Throw the crossbar and lash it.” . . .

*Now Odysseus, still in his beggar’s clothes, asks to try the bow. The suitors refuse to allow a mere beggar to try where they have failed, but Penelope insists that the stranger be given his chance. The suspense is very great – by this act, Penelope has accepted her husband as a suitor.*

*Eumaeus, the swineherd, hands Odysseus the bow and tells the nurse to retire with Penelope and the maids to the family chambers (the harem) and to bolt the doors. Odysseus had earlier told Telemachus to remove the suitors’ weapons from the great hall. Now he takes the bow.*

And Odysseus took his time,

1175 turning the bow, tapping it, every inch,

- What do Odysseus’ actions here suggest about his state of mind?

- What epithet is being used here? Where else has Home used this epithet for Odysseus?

1198. Cronus: father of Zeus, called crooked minded because of his schemes to destroy his children.

for borings that termites might have made  
while the master of the weapon was abroad.

The suitors were now watching him, and some  
jested among themselves:

“A bow lover!”

“Dealer in old bows!”

1180 “Maybe he has one like it  
at home!”

“Or has an itch to make one for himself.”

“See how he handles it, the sly old buzzard!”

And one disdainful suitor added this:

“May his fortune grow an inch for every inch he  
bends it!”

1185 But the man skilled in all ways of contending,  
satisfied by the great bow’s look and heft,  
like a musician, like a harper, when  
with quiet hand upon his instrument  
he draws between his thumb and forefinger  
1190 a sweet new string upon a peg: so effortlessly  
Odysseus in one motion strung the bow.  
Then slid his right hand down the cord and plucked  
it,  
so the taut gut vibrating hummed and sang  
a swallow’s note.

In the hushed hall it smote the  
suitors

1195 and all their faces changed. Then Zeus thundered  
overhead, one loud crack for a sign.  
And Odysseus laughed within him that the son  
of crooked-minded Cronus had flung that omen  
down.

He picked one ready arrow from his table  
1200 where it lay bare: the rest were waiting still  
in the quiver for the young men’s turn to come.  
He nocked it, let it rest across the handgrip,  
and drew the string and grooved butt of the arrow,  
aiming from where he sat upon the stool.

Now flashed  
1205 arrow from twanging bow clean as a whistle  
through every socket ring, and grazed not one,

1202. **nocked**: fitted to the bowstring

- How many auditory images can you find in this passage? (List them below.)

to thud with heavy brazen head beyond.

Then quietly

Odysseus said:

“Telemachus, the stranger

you welcomed in your hall has not disgraced you.

1210 I did not miss, neither did I take all day  
stringing the bow. My hand and eye are sound,  
not so contemptible as the young men say.  
The hour has come to cook their lordships’ mutton—  
1215 supper by daylight. Other amusements later,  
with song and harping that adorn a feast.”

He dropped his eyes and nodded, and the prince  
Telemachus, true son of King Odysseus,  
belted his sword on, clapped hand to his spear,  
and with a clink and glitter of keen bronze

1220 stood by his chair, in the forefront near his father.

(from Book 21)

## DEATH AT THE PALACE

*The climax of the story is here, in Book 22. Odysseus is ready to reclaim his rightful kingdom. But first he must deal with more than a hundred young and hostile suitors. The first one he turns to is Antinous. All through the story, Antinous has been the meanest of the suitors and their ringleader. He hit Odysseus with a stool when the hero appeared in the hall as a beggar, and he ridiculed the disguised king by calling him a bleary vagabond, a pest, and a tramp.*

- What is the major question you expect the climax to answer?

**1226.** Odysseus prays to Apollo because this particular day is one of the god’s feast days. Apollo is also the god of archery.

- What makes this description of Antinous’s death especially powerful?

Now shrugging off his rags the wiliest fighter of the  
islands  
leapt and stood on the broad doorsill, his own bow in  
his  
hand.

He poured out at his feet a rain of arrows from the  
quiver  
and spoke to the crowd:

“So much for that. Your clean-cut game is  
over.  
1225 Now watch me hit a target that no man has hit before,  
if I can make this shot. Help me, Apollo.”

He drew to his fist the cruel head of an arrow for  
Antinous  
just as the young man leaned to lift his beautiful  
drinking cup,  
embossed, two-handled, golden: the cup was in his  
fingers,  
1230 the wine was even at his lips, and did he dream of  
death?  
How could he? In that revelry amid his throng of  
friends  
who would imagine a single foe—though a strong foe  
indeed—  
could dare to bring death’s pain on him and darkness  
on  
his eyes?  
Odysseus’ arrow hit him under the chin  
1235 and punched up to the feathers through his throat.

Backward and down he went, letting the wine cup fall  
from his shocked hand. Like pipes his nostrils jetted  
crimson runnels, a river of mortal red,  
and one last kick upset his table  
1240 knocking the bread and meat to soak in dusty blood.  
Now as they craned to see their champion where he  
lay  
the suitors jostled in uproar down the hall,  
everyone on his feet. Wildly they turned and scanned  
the walls in the long room for arms; but not a shield,  
not a good ashen spear was there for a man to take  
and

1238. runnels: streams

- What has just happened? What do you predict will happen next?

- What does Homer mean when he says the suitors “imagined as they wished”?

1262. entrails: guts

1245 throw.  
All they could do was yell in outrage at Odysseus:  
“Foul! to shoot at a man! That was your last shot!”  
“Your own throat will be slit for this!”

“Our finest lad is down!

You killed the best on Ithaca.”

“Buzzards will tear your eyes  
out!”

For they imagined as they wished—that it was a  
wild  
1250 shot,  
an unintended killing—fools, not to comprehend  
they were already in the grip of death.  
But glaring under his brows Odysseus answered:

“You yellow dogs, you thought I’d never make it  
home from the land of Troy. You took my house to  
1255 plunder,  
twisted my maids to serve your beds. You dared  
bid for my wife while I was still alive.  
Contempt was all you had for the gods who rule  
wide  
heaven,  
contempt for what men say of you hereafter.  
1260 Your last hour has come. You die in blood.”

As they all took this in, sickly green fear  
pulled at their entrails, and their eyes flickered  
looking for some hatch or hideaway from death.  
Eurymachus alone could speak. He said:

1265 “If you are Odysseus of Ithaca come back,  
all that you say these men have done is true.  
Rash actions, many here, more in the countryside.  
But here he lies, the man who caused them all.  
Antinous was the ringleader, he whipped us on  
1270 to do these things. He cared less for a marriage  
than for the power Cronion has denied him  
as king of Ithaca. For that  
he tried to trap your son and would have killed  
him.

**1271. Cronion:** another name for Zeus, meaning  
“son of Cronus”

- What does Eurymachus’s speech reveal about his character?
- What two things has Odysseus done that make it nearly impossible for the suitors to “fight [their] way out or run for it”?
- Why does the appearance of Athena’s shield make the suitors “made with fear”?

1275 He is dead now and has his portion. Spare  
your own people. As for ourselves, we'll make  
restitution of wine and meat consumed,  
and add, each one, a tithe of twenty oxen  
with gifts of bronze and gold to warm your heart.  
Meanwhile we cannot blame you for your anger."

1280 Odysseus glowered under his black brows  
and said:  
"Not for the whole treasure of your fathers,  
all you enjoy, lands, flocks, or any gold  
put up by others, would I hold my hand.  
There will be killing till the score is paid.

1285 You forced yourselves upon this house. Fight your way out,  
or run for it, if you think you'll escape death.  
I doubt one man of you skins by." . . .

*Telemachus joins his father in the fight. They are helped by the swineherd and cowherd. Now the suitors, trapped in the hall without weapons, are struck right and left by arrows, and many of them lie dying on the floor.*

At this moment that unmanning thundercloud,  
the aegis, Athena's shield,  
took form aloft in the great hall.

1290 And the suitors mad with fear  
at her great sign stampeded like stung cattle by a  
river  
when the dread shimmering gadfly strikes in  
summer,  
in the flowering season, in the long-drawn days.

After them the attackers wheeled, as terrible as  
falcons  
from eyries in the mountains veering over and  
diving  
1295 down  
with talons wide unsheathed on flights of birds,  
who cower down the sky in chutes and bursts along  
the  
valley—  
but the pouncing falcons grip their prey, no frantic  
wing  
avails,  
and farmers love to watch those beakèd hunters.

1295. eyries: nests built in high places

- **Homeric Simile:** To what are Odysseus and his men compared?
- What does this bloody scene add to the epic's theme about the value of hospitality and about what happens to people who mock divine laws?

1300 So these now fell upon the suitors in that hall,  
turning, turning to strike and strike again,  
while torn men moaned at death, and blood ran smoking  
over the whole floor. . . .

(from Book 22)



Examine the painting above. Select a quotation from the text to use as a subtitle or caption for the painting.



## ODYSSEUS AND PENELOPE

*Odysseus now calls forth the maids who have betrayed his household by associating with the suitors. He orders them to clean up the house and dispose of the dead. Telemachus then “pays” them by hanging them in the courtyard.*

*Eurycleia runs to Penelope to announce the return of Odysseus and the defeat of the suitors. The faithful wife – the perfect mate for the wily Odysseus – suspects a trick from the gods and decides to test this stranger who claims to be her husband.*

1305 Crossing the doorsill she sat down at once  
in firelight, against the nearest wall,  
across the room from the lord Odysseus.

There

leaning against a pillar, sat the man  
and never lifted up his eyes, but only waited  
for what his wife would say when she had seen him.

1310 And she, for a long time, sat deathly still  
in wonderment—for sometimes as she gazed  
she found him—yes, clearly—like her husband,  
but sometimes blood and rags were all she saw.  
Telemachus’s voice came to her ears:

“Mother,

1315 cruel mother, do you feel nothing,  
drawing yourself apart this way from Father?  
Will you not sit with him and talk and question him?  
What other woman could remain so cold?  
Who shuns her lord, and he come back to her  
1320 from wars and wandering, after twenty years?  
Your heart is hard as flint and never changes!”

Penelope answered:

“I am

stunned, child.

I cannot speak to him. I cannot question him.  
I cannot keep my eyes upon his face.

1325 If really he is Odysseus, truly home,  
beyond all doubt we two shall know each other

- Do you think the maids’ punishment fits their crimes, or is it excessive? Explain.
- How do you think Odysseus is likely to react to Penelope’s “testing”?
- Why does Penelope have so much trouble recognizing Odysseus?
- What do you think Penelope is thinking during this scene?

better than you or anyone. There are  
secret signs we know, we two.”

1330 A smile  
came now to the lips of the patient hero, Odysseus,  
who turned to Telemachus and said:

“Peace: let your mother test me at her leisure.  
Before long she will see and know me best.  
These tatters, dirt—all that I’m caked with now—  
make her look hard at me and doubt me still. . . .”

*Odysseus orders Telemachus, the swineherd, and the  
cowherd to bathe and put on fresh clothing.*

1335 Greathearted Odysseus, home at last,  
was being bathed now by Eurynome  
and rubbed with golden oil, and clothed again  
in a fresh tunic and a cloak. Athena  
lent him beauty, head to foot. She made him  
1340 taller, and massive, too, with crisping hair  
in curls like petals of wild hyacinth  
but all red-golden. Think of gold infused

on silver by a craftsman, whose fine art  
Hephaestus taught him, or Athena: one  
1345 whose work moves to delight: just so she lavished  
beauty over Odysseus’ head and shoulders.  
He sat then in the same chair by the pillar,  
facing his silent wife, and said:

“Strange  
woman,

the immortals of Olympus made you hard,  
1350 harder than any. Who else in the world  
would keep aloof as you do from her husband  
if he returned to her from years of trouble,  
cast on his own land in the twentieth year?

Nurse, make up a bed for me to sleep on.  
Her heart is iron in her breast.”

1355 Penelope  
spoke to Odysseus now. She said:

“Strange  
man,  
if man you are... This is no pride on my part  
nor scorn for you—not even wonder, merely.

- To what does this simile compare Odysseus?

- In Greek, the word for “strange woman” is *daimonie*. Odysseus means that Penelope’s wits may have been taken away by a *daimon*, or some sort of supernatural force.

1360 I know so well how you—how he—appeared  
boarding the ship for Troy. But all the same . .

Make up his bed for him, Eurycleia.  
Place it outside the bedchamber my lord  
built with his own hands. Pile the big bed  
with fleeces, rugs, and sheets of purest linen.”

1365 With this she tried him to the breaking point,  
and he turned on her in a flash, raging:

“Woman, by heaven you’ve stung me now!  
Who dared to move my bed?

1370 No builder had the skill for that—unless  
a god came down to turn the trick. No mortal  
in his best days could budge it with a crowbar.  
There is our pact and pledge, our secret sign,  
built into that bed—my handiwork  
and no one else’s!

1375 An old trunk of olive  
grew like a pillar on the building plot,  
and I laid out our bedroom round that tree,  
lined up the stone walls, built the walls and roof,  
gave it a doorway and smooth-fitting doors.  
Then I lopped off the silvery leaves and branches,  
1380 hewed and shaped the stump from the roots up  
into a bedpost, drilled it, let it serve  
as model for the rest, I planed them all,  
inlaid them all with silver, gold, and ivory,  
and stretched a bed between—a pliant web  
of oxhide thongs dyed crimson.

1385 There’s our sign!  
I know no more. Could someone else’s hand  
have sawn that trunk and dragged the frame  
away?”

1390 Their secret! as she heard it told, her knees  
grew tremulous and weak, her heart failed her.  
With eyes brimming tears she ran to him,  
throwing her arms around his neck, and kissed him,  
murmuring:

- What was the process by which Odysseus built the bed?

- What do Penelope’s physical sensations suggest she is feeling?

“Do not rage at  
me, Odysseus!

No one ever matched your caution! Think  
what difficulty the gods gave: they denied us  
1395 life together in our prime and flowering years,  
kept us from crossing into age together.  
Forgive me, don't be angry. I could not  
welcome you with love on sight! I armed myself  
long ago against the frauds of men,  
1400 impostors who might come—and all those many  
whose underhanded ways bring evil on! . . .  
But here and now, what sign could be so clear  
as this of our own bed?  
No other man has ever laid eyes on it—  
1405 only my own slave, Actoris, that my father  
sent with me as a gift—she kept our door.  
**You make my stiff heart know that I am yours.”**

Now from his breast into his eyes the ache  
of longing mounted, and he wept at last,  
1410 his dear wife, clear and faithful, in his arms,  
longed for  
as the sun-warmed earth is longed for by a  
swimmer  
spent in rough water where his ship went down  
under Poseidon's blows, gale winds and tons of  
sea.  
Few men can keep alive through a big surf  
1415 to crawl, clotted with brine, on kindly beaches  
in joy, in joy, knowing the abyss behind:  
and so she too rejoiced, her gaze upon her  
husband,  
her white arms round him pressed, as though  
forever. . . .

*(from Book 23)*

- What does Penelope mean when she refers to her “stiff heart”?

- The description of Odysseus and Penelope's bed is famous – and complex. Draw a picture of the bed as you visualize Homer's description of it. What characteristics of the bed suggest the strength and endurance of their love?
- The journey ends with an embrace. What simile helps you understand the joy Odysseus feels in the arms of his wife? (Include specific quote with line numbers.)