

PART 2

The Return of Odysseus

Review and Anticipate

In Part 1 of the Odyssey, Odysseus and his companions face many perils on their voyage from Troy to Ithaca. At some moments, they are tempted to forsake their voyage; at others, their lives are endangered by powerful enemies. Ultimately, Odysseus' men bring about their own destruction at the hand of Zeus when they kill the cattle belonging to Helios.

As Part 2 begins, Odysseus is alone when he reaches Ithaca after a twenty-year absence. What do you predict will happen when Odysseus arrives home?

“Twenty years gone, and I am back again . . .”

Odysseus has finished telling his story to the Phaeacians. The next day, young Phaeacian noblemen conduct him home by ship. He arrives in Ithaca after an absence of twenty years. The goddess Athena appears and informs him of the situation at home. Numerous suitors, believing Odysseus to be dead, have been continually seeking the hand of his wife, Penelope, in marriage, while overrunning Odysseus'

palace and enjoying themselves at Penelope's expense. Moreover, they are plotting to murder Odysseus' son, Telemachus, before he can inherit his father's lands. Telemachus, who, like Penelope, still hopes for his father's return, has journeyed to Pylos and Sparta to learn what he can about his father's fate. Athena disguises Odysseus as a beggar and directs him to the hut of Eumaeus, ¹ his old and faithful swineherd. While Odysseus and Eumaeus are eating breakfast, Telemachus arrives. Athena then appears to Odysseus.

. . . From the air

she walked, taking the form of a tall woman,

handsome and clever at her craft, and stood

1000 beyond the gate in plain sight of Odysseus,

unseen, though, by Telemachus, unguessed,

for not to everyone will gods appear.

Odysseus noticed her; so did the dogs,

who cowered whimpering away from her. She only

1005 nodded, signing to him with her brows,

a sign he recognized. Crossing the yard,

he passed out through the gate in the stockade

to face the goddess. There she said to him:



“Son of Laertes and the gods of old,

1010 Odysseus, master of landways and seaways,

[dissemble](#) to your son no longer now.

The time has come: tell him how you together

will bring doom on the suitors in the town.

I shall not be far distant then, for I

1015 myself desire battle.”

Saying no more,

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
1020 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,
1025 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!
Be kind to us, we’ll make you fair oblation²
and gifts of hammered gold. Have mercy on us!”

1030 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
1035 as he embraced his son.

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!

1040 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!”

1045 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

1050 fortune and his wanderings are mine.

Twenty years gone, and I am back again

on my own island.

As for my change of skin,

that is a charm Athena, Hope of Soldiers,

uses as she will; she has the knack

1055 to make me seem a beggar man sometimes

and sometimes young, with finer clothes about me.

It is no hard thing for the gods of heaven

to glorify a man or bring him low.”



When he had spoken, down he sat.

Then, throwing

1060 his arms around this marvel of a father

Telemachus began to weep. Salt tears

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,

1065 whose nestlings farmers take before they fly.

So helplessly they cried, pouring out tears,

and might have gone on weeping so till sundown,

had not Telemachus said:

“Dear father! Tell me

what kind of vessel put you here ashore

1070 on Ithaca? Your sailors, who were they?

I doubt you made it, walking on the sea!”

Then said Odysseus, who had borne the barren sea:



“Only plain truth shall I tell you, child.

Great seafarers, the Phaeacians, gave me passage

1075 as they give other wanderers. By night

over the open ocean, while I slept,

they brought me in their cutter,³ set me down

on Ithaca, with gifts of bronze and gold

and stores of woven things. By the gods’ will

1080 these lie all hidden in a cave. I came

to this wild place, directed by Athena,
so that we might lay plans to kill our enemies.
Count up the suitors for me, let me know
what men at arms are there, how many men.
1085 I must put all my mind to it, to see
if we two by ourselves can take them on
or if we should look round for help.”

Telemachus

replied:

“O Father, all my life your fame
as a fighting man has echoed in my ears—
1090 your skill with weapons and the tricks of war—
but what you speak of is a staggering thing,
beyond imagining, for me. How can two men
do battle with a houseful in their prime?⁴

For I must tell you this is no affair

1095 of ten or even twice ten men, but scores,
throng of them. You shall see, here and now.

The number from Dulichium alone

is fifty-two picked men, with armorers,

a half dozen; twenty-four came from Same,

1100 twenty from Zacynthus; our own island

accounts for twelve, high-ranked, and their retainers,

Medon the crier, and the Master Harper,

besides a pair of handymen at feasts.

If we go in against all these

1105 I fear we pay in salt blood for your vengeance.

You must think hard if you would conjure up
the fighting strength to take us through.”

Odysseus

who had endured the long war and the sea

answered:

“I’ll tell you now.

1110 Suppose Athena’s arm is over us, and Zeus
her father’s, must I rack my brains for more?”



Clearheaded Telemachus looked hard and said:

“Those two are great defenders, no one doubts it,
but throned in the serene clouds overhead;

1115 other affairs of men and gods they have
to rule over.”

And the hero answered:

“Before long they will stand to right and left of us
in combat, in the shouting, when the test comes—
our nerve against the suitors’ in my hall.

1120 Here is your part: at break of day tomorrow
home with you, go mingle with our princes.

The swineherd later on will take me down
the port-side trail—a beggar, by my looks,
hangdog and old. If they make fun of me

1125 in my own courtyard, let your ribs cage up
your springing heart, no matter what I suffer,
no matter if they pull me by the heels
or practice shots at me, to drive me out.

Look on, hold down your anger. You may even
1130 plead with them, by heaven! in gentle terms
to quit their horseplay—not that they will heed you,
rash as they are, facing their day of wrath.

Now fix the next step in your mind.

Athena,

counseling me, will give me word, and I

1135 shall signal to you, nodding: at that point

round up all armor, lances, gear of war

left in our hall, and stow the lot away

back in the vaulted storeroom. When the suitors

miss those arms and question you, be soft

1140 in what you say: answer:



'I thought I'd move them

out of the smoke. They seemed no longer those

bright arms Odysseus left us years ago

when he went off to Troy. Here where the fire's

hot breath came, they had grown black and drear.

1145 One better reason, too, I had from Zeus:

suppose a brawl starts up when you are drunk,

you might be crazed and bloody one another,
and that would stain your feast, your courtship. Tempered
iron can magnetize a man.'

Say that.

1150 But put aside two broadswords and two spears
for our own use, two oxhide shields nearby
when we go into action. Pallas Athena
and Zeus All-Provident will see you through,
[bemusing](#) our young friends.

Now one thing more.

1155 If son of mine you are and blood of mine,
let no one hear Odysseus is about.

Neither Laertes, nor the swineherd here,
nor any slave, nor even Penelope.

But you and I alone must learn how far

1160 the women are corrupted; we should know
how to locate good men among our hands,
the loyal and respectful, and the shirkers
who take you lightly, as alone and young."



Argus

Odysseus heads for town with Eumaeus. Outside the palace, Odysseus' old dog, Argus, is lying at rest as his long-absent master approaches.

While he spoke

an old hound, lying near, pricked up his ears

1165 and lifted up his muzzle. This was Argus,

trained as a puppy by Odysseus,

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,

1170 but he had grown old in his master's absence.

Treated as rubbish now, he lay at last

upon a mass of dung before the gates—

manure of mules and cows, piled there until

fieldhands could spread it on the king's estate.

1175 Abandoned there, and half destroyed with flies,

old Argus lay.

But when he knew he heard

Odysseus' voice nearby, he did his best

to wag his tail, nose down, with flattened ears,

having no strength to move nearer his master.

1180 And the man looked away,

wiping a salt tear from his cheek; but he

hid this from Eumaeus. Then he said:

"I marvel that they leave this hound to lie

here on the dung pile;

1185 he would have been a fine dog, from the look of him,
though I can't say as to his power and speed
when he was young. You find the same good build
in house dogs, table dogs landowners keep
all for style."

And you replied, Eumaeus:

1190 "A hunter owned him—but the man is dead
in some far place. If this old hound could show
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

1195 he'd brought to bay in the deep woods; on the scent
no other dog kept up with him. Now misery
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

1200 they have no will to labor, or excel.

For Zeus who views the wide world takes away

half the manhood of a man, that day

he goes into captivity and slavery."



Eumaeus crossed the court and went straight forward

1205 into the megaron among the suitors:

but death and darkness in that instant closed

the eyes of Argus, who had seen his master,

Odysseus, after twenty years.



The Suitors

Still disguised as a beggar, Odysseus enters his home. He is confronted by the haughty [7](#) suitor Antinous. [8](#)

But here Antinous broke in, shouting:

“God!

1210 What evil wind blew in this pest?

Get over,

stand in the passage! Nudge my table, will you?

Egyptian whips are sweet

to what you’ll come to here, you nosing rat,

making your pitch to everyone!

1215 These men have bread to throw away on you

because it is not theirs. Who cares? Who spares

another’s food, when he has more than plenty?”

With guile Odysseus drew away, then said:



“A pity that you have more looks than heart.

1220 You’d grudge a pinch of salt from your own larder

to your own handyman. You sit here, fat

on others’ meat, and cannot bring yourself

to rummage out a crust of bread for me!”



Then anger made Antinous' heart beat hard,

1225 and, glowering under his brows, he answered:

“Now!

You think you'll shuffle off and get away

after that impudence? Oh, no you don't!”

The stool he let fly hit the man's right shoulder

on the packed muscle under the shoulder blade—

1230 like solid rock, for all the effect one saw.

Odysseus only shook his head, containing

thoughts of bloody work, as he walked on,

then sat, and dropped his loaded bag again

upon the door sill. Facing the whole crowd

1235 he said, and eyed them all:

“One word only,

my lords, and suitors of the famous queen.

One thing I have to say.

There is no pain, no burden for the heart

when blows come to a man, and he defending

1240 his own cattle—his own cows and lambs.

Here it was otherwise. Antinous

hit me for being driven on by hunger—

how many bitter seas men cross for hunger!

If beggars interest the gods, if there are Furies¹⁰

1245 pent in the dark to avenge a poor man's wrong, then may

Antinous meet his death before his wedding day!”



Then said Euphithes' son, Antinous:

“Enough.

Eat and be quiet where you are, or shamble elsewhere,

unless you want these lads to stop your mouth

1250 pulling you by the heels, or hands and feet,

over the whole floor, till your back is peeled!”

But now the rest were mortified, and someone

spoke from the crowd of young bucks to rebuke him:

“A poor show, that—hitting this famished tramp—

1255 bad business, if he happened to be a god.

You know they go in foreign guise, the gods do,

looking like strangers, turning up

in towns and settlements to keep an eye

on manners, good or bad.”



But at this notion

1260 Antinous only shrugged.

Telemachus,

after the blow his father bore, sat still

without a tear, though his heart felt the blow.

Slowly he shook his head from side to side,

containing murderous thoughts.

Penelope

1265 on the higher level of her room had heard

the blow, and knew who gave it. Now she murmured:

“Would god you could be hit yourself, Antinous—
hit by Apollo’s bowshot!”

And Eurynome¹¹

her housekeeper, put in:

“He and no other?

1270 If all we pray for came to pass, not one
would live till dawn!”

Her gentle mistress said:

“Oh, Nan, they are a bad lot; they intend

ruin for all of us; but Antinous

appears a blacker-hearted hound than any.

1275 Here is a poor man come, a wanderer,
driven by want to beg his bread, and everyone
in hall gave bits, to cram his bag—only

Antinous threw a stool, and banged his shoulder!”

So she described it, sitting in her chamber

1280 among her maids—while her true lord was eating.

Then she called in the forester and said:

“Go to that man on my behalf, Eumaeus,

and send him here, so I can greet and question him.

Abroad in the great world, he may have heard

1285 rumors about Odysseus—may have known him!”





Penelope

In the evening, Penelope interrogates the old beggar.

“Friend, let me ask you first of all:

who are you, where do you come from, of what nation
and parents were you born?”

And he replied:

“My lady, never a man in the wide world

1290 should have a fault to find with you. Your name

has gone out under heaven like the sweet

honor of some god-fearing king, who rules

in [equity](#) over the strong: his black lands bear

both wheat and barley, fruit trees laden bright,

1295 new lambs at lambing time—and the deep sea

gives great hauls of fish by his good strategy,

so that his folk fare well.

O my dear lady,

this being so, let it suffice to ask me

of other matters—not my blood, my homeland.

1300 Do not enforce me to recall my pain.

My heart is sore; but I must not be found

sitting in tears here, in another’s house:

it is not well forever to be grieving.

One of the maids might say—or you might think—

1305 I had got [maudlin](#) over cups of wine.”

And Penelope replied:

“Stranger, my looks,

my face, my carriage,[12](#) were soon lost or faded

when the Achaeans crossed the sea to Troy,

Odysseus my lord among the rest.

1310 If he returned, if he were here to care for me,

I might be happily renowned!

But grief instead heaven sent me—years of pain.

Sons of the noblest families on the islands,

Dulichium, Same, wooded Zacynthus,[13](#)

1315 with native Ithacans, are here to court me,

against my wish; and they consume this house.

Can I give proper heed to guest or suppliant

or herald on the realm’s affairs?

How could I?

wasted with longing for Odysseus, while here

1320 they press for marriage.

Ruses[14](#) served my turn

to draw the time out—first a close-grained web

I had the happy thought to set up weaving

on my big loom in hall. I said, that day:

‘Young men—my suitors, now my lord is dead,

1325 let me finish my weaving before I marry,

or else my thread will have been spun in vain.

It is a shroud I weave for Lord Laertes
when cold Death comes to lay him on his bier.

The country wives would hold me in dishonor
1330 if he, with all his fortune, lay unshrouded.'

I reached their hearts that way, and they agreed.

So every day I wove on the great loom,
but every night by torchlight I unwove it;
and so for three years I deceived the Achaeans.

1335 But when the seasons brought a fourth year on,
as long months waned, and the long days were spent,
through impudent folly in the slinking maids
they caught me—clamored up to me at night;
I had no choice then but to finish it.

1340 And now, as matters stand at last,
I have no strength left to evade a marriage,
cannot find any further way; my parents
urge it upon me, and my son
will not stand by while they eat up his property.

1345 He comprehends it, being a man full-grown,
able to oversee the kind of house
Zeus would endow with honor.

But you too
confide in me, tell me your ancestry.

You were not born of mythic oak or stone.”



Penelope again asks the beggar to tell about himself. He makes up a tale in which Odysseus is mentioned and declares that Penelope's husband will soon be home.

1350 "You see, then, he is alive and well, and headed

homeward now, no more to be abroad

far from his island, his dear wife and son.

Here is my sworn word for it. Witness this,

god of the zenith, noblest of the gods,¹⁵

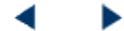
1355 and Lord Odysseus' hearthfire, now before me:

I swear these things shall turn out as I say.

Between this present dark and one day's ebb,

after the wane, before the crescent moon,

Odysseus will come."



The Challenge

Pressed by the suitors to choose a husband from among them, Penelope says she will marry the man who can string Odysseus' bow and shoot an arrow through twelve axhandle sockets. The suitors try and fail. Still in disguise, Odysseus asks for a turn and gets it.

And Odysseus took his time,

1360 turning the bow, tapping it, every inch,

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!”

1365 “Dealer in old bows!”

“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!”



1370 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

1375 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

1380 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

1385 where it lay bare: the rest were waiting still

in the quiver for the young men's turn to come.

He nocked¹⁶ 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

1390 arrow from twanging bow clean as a whistle

through every socket ring, and grazed not one,

to thud with heavy brazen head beyond.

Then quietly

Odysseus said:

"Telemachus, the stranger

you welcomed in your hall has not disgraced you.

1395 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—

supper by daylight. Other amusements later,

1400 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

1405 stood by his chair, in the forefront near his father.



Odysseus' Revenge

Now shrugging off his rags the wiliest¹⁷ 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.

1410 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:

1415 the wine was even at his lips: and did he dream of death?

How could he? In that revelry¹⁸ 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

1420 and punched up to the feathers through his throat.

Backward and down he went, letting the winecup fall
from his shocked hand. Like pipes his nostrils jetted
crimson runnels, a river of mortal red,

and one last kick upset his table

1425 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,

1430 not a good ashen spear was there for a man to take and 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!”

1435 For they imagined as they wished—that it was a wild 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

1440 home from the land of Troy. You took my house to plunder. . .

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.

Your last hour has come. You die in blood.”



1445 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.

Eurymachus¹⁹ alone could speak. He said:

“If you are Odysseus of Ithaca come back,

1450 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

to do these things. He cared less for a marriage

1455 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.

He is dead now and has his portion. Spare

your own people. As for ourselves, we'll make

1460 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.”

Odysseus glowered under his black brows

1465 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.

You forced yourselves upon this house. Fight your way out,
1470 or run for it, if you think you'll escape death.
I doubt one man of you skins by."



They felt their knees fail, and their hearts—but heard
Eurymachus for the last time rallying them.

"Friends," he said, "the man is implacable.

1475 Now that he's got his hands on bow and quiver
he'll shoot from the big doorstone there
until he kills us to the last man.

Fight, I say,

let's remember the joy of it. Swords out!

Hold up your tables to deflect his arrows.

1480 After me, everyone: rush him where he stands.

If we can budge him from the door, if we can pass
into the town, we'll call out men to chase him.

This fellow with his bow will shoot no more."



He drew his own sword as he spoke, a broadsword of fine bronze,

1485 honed like a razor on either edge. Then crying hoarse and loud

he hurled himself at Odysseus. But the kingly man let fly

an arrow at that instant, and the quivering feathered butt

sprang to the nipple of his breast as the barb stuck in his liver.

The bright broadsword clanged down. He lurched and fell aside,

1490 pitching across his table. His cup, his bread and meat,

were spilt and scattered far and wide, and his head slammed on the ground.

Revulsion, anguish in his heart, with both feet kicking out,
he downed his chair, while the shrouding wave of mist closed on his eyes.

Amphinomus now came running at Odysseus,
1495 broadsword naked in his hand. He thought to make
the great soldier give way at the door.

But with a spear throw from behind Telemachus hit him
between the shoulders, and the lancehead drove
clear through his chest. He left his feet and fell
1500 forward, thudding, forehead against the ground.

Telemachus swerved around him, leaving the long dark spear
planted in Amphinomus. If he paused to yank it out
someone might jump him from behind or cut him down with a sword
at the moment he bent over. So he ran—ran from the tables
1505 to his father's side and halted, panting, saying:

“Father let me bring you a shield and spear,
a pair of spears, a helmet.

I can arm on the run myself; I'll give
outfits to Eumaeus and this cowherd.

1510 Better to have equipment.”

Said Odysseus:

“Run then, while I hold them off with arrows
as long as the arrows last. When all are gone
if I'm alone they can dislodge me.”

Quick

upon his father's word Telemachus

1515 ran to the room where spears and armor lay.

He caught up four light shields, four pairs of spears,
four helms of war high-plumed with flowing manes,
and ran back, loaded down, to his father's side.

He was the first to pull a helmet on

1520 and slide his bare arm in a buckler strap.

The servants armed themselves, and all three took their stand
beside the master of battle.

While he had arrows

he aimed and shot, and every shot brought down
one of his huddling enemies.

1525 But when all barbs had flown from the bowman's fist,

he leaned his bow in the bright entryway

beside the door, and armed: a four-ply shield

hard on his shoulder, and a crested helm,

horsetailed, nodding stormy upon his head,

1530 then took his tough and bronze-shod spears. . . .



Aided by Athena, Odysseus, Telemachus, Eumaeus, and other faithful herdsmen kill all the suitors.

And Odysseus looked around him, narrow-eyed,

for any others who had lain hidden

while death's black fury passed.

In blood and dust

he saw that crowd all fallen, many and many slain.



1535 Think of a catch that fishermen haul in to a half-moon bay
in a fine-meshed net from the whitecaps of the sea:
how all are poured out on the sand, in throes for the salt sea,
twitching their cold lives away in Helios' fiery air:
so lay the suitors heaped on one another.



Penelope's Test

Penelope tests Odysseus to prove he really is her husband.

1540 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
1545 taller, and massive, too, with crisper hair
in curls like petals of wild hyacinth
but all red-golden. Think of gold infused
on silver by a craftsman, whose fine art
Hephaestus²⁰ taught him, or Athena: one
1550 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,
1555 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.
1560 Her heart is iron in her breast.”

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.
I know so well how you—how he—appeared
1565 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.”



1570 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?
No builder had the skill for that—unless

1575 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!



An old trunk of olive
1580 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,
1585 hewed and shaped that 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
1590 of oxhide thongs dyed crimson.
There's our sign!
I know no more. Could someone else's hand
have sawn that trunk and dragged the frame away?"
Their secret! as she heard it told, her knees
grew tremulous and weak, her heart failed her.
1595 With eyes brimming tears she ran to him,
throwing her arms around his neck, and kissed him,

murmuring:

“Do not rage at me, Odysseus!

No one ever matched your caution! Think

what difficulty the gods gave: they denied us

1600 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,

1605 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—

1610 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,

1615 his dear wife, clear and faithful, in his arms,

longed for as the sunwarmed 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

1620 to crawl, clotted with brine, on kindly beaches

in joy, in joy, knowing the abyss²¹ behind:
and so she too rejoiced, her gaze upon her husband,
her white arms round him pressed as though forever.



Apply Skills

from the *Odyssey, Part 2* Quick Review

Part 2 at a Glance

Odysseus returns home, defeats the suitors, and reclaims his wife and kingdom.



For: Self-test

Visit: www.PHSchool.com

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Epic Simile: an elaborate comparison that may extend for several lines

Historical and Cultural Context: the events, beliefs, and customs that define the time and place in which a work is set or in which it was written

Thinking About the Selection

- 1. Respond:** Who do you think faced greater hardships—Odysseus or Penelope? Explain your response.
- 2. (a) Recall:** When Odysseus returns to his home, who helps him? **(b) Interpret:** What does the varying social status of Odysseus' helpers suggest about his character?

3. **(a) Recall:** What planning does Odysseus do before he battles the suitors? **(b) Analyze:** How does his planning help him defeat his opponents?

4. **(a) Recall:** What is Penelope’s test, and how does Odysseus pass it? **(b) Infer:** Why does Penelope feel the need to test Odysseus even though he has abandoned his disguise? **(c) Interpret:** Is the mood after the test altogether happy? Explain.

5. **(a) Connect:** Are Odysseus’ actions in dealing with the suitors consistent with his actions in earlier episodes of the epic? Explain. **(b) Make a Judgment:** Do you think that Odysseus’ revenge is justified? Why or why not?

Literary Analysis

6. **(a)** Using a chart like the one shown, analyze the **epic simile** in lines 1613–

Items Being Compared	Details of Epic Simile	Purpose

1624.

(b) Why is this simile a powerful and fitting image for the conclusion of the *Odyssey*?

Reading Skill

7. **(a)** What attitudes and values are reflected in Odysseus’ actions toward the suitors? **(b)** What do his actions suggest about the **cultural and historical context** of Homer’s *Odyssey* and the attitudes and values of ancient Greeks? Explain your answer.

8. **(a)** Name one of Odysseus’ cultural beliefs, attitudes, or practices that is similar to an idea or a tradition in your own culture. **(b)** Name one that is significantly different. **(c)** Do you think that Odysseus’ values are unique to his culture, or are they universal? Explain.

Vocabulary Builder

Practice Indicate whether each statement is *True* or *False* . Explain your answers. Then, revise false sentences to make them true.

1. People sometimes **dissemble** in order to hide their true feelings.
2. An event that is common and predictable evokes **incredulity** .
3. If road signs are **bemusing** drivers, the signs are working well.
4. A good judge is one with a strong sense of **equity** .
5. A pep band should play **maudlin** songs if it wants to excite fans.
6. Successful salespeople always show **contempt** for customers.

Adding Words to Your Vocabulary Use a dictionary to find the adjective form of the noun *incredulity* . Use that adjective in a sentence. Then, explain the difference between that adjective and *incredible* .

Writing

Write a short **biography of Odysseus** based on details in the *Odyssey* . Present the basic facts of his life and adventures, and hold the reader’s attention by describing the dramatic situations with gripping detail.

- List events in the *Odyssey* that are suitable for your biography. Focus on events that reveal the character of Odysseus.
- As you draft, include quotations from the epic to add detail and depth.

For **Grammar, Vocabulary, and Assessment**, see **Build Language Skills** .

Extend Your Learning

Listening and Speaking

Conduct a **debate** to determine whether Odysseus should be prosecuted for the murders of Penelope’s suitors.

- Divide into two opposing teams.
- With teammates, prepare an argument expressing your position. Be sure to support it with details from the *Odyssey* .

Present your argument before the class, and then switch sides so that each team debates the issue from both sides.

Research and Technology

With the help of a teacher, select and view a movie based on the *Odyssey*. Take notes on which aspects of the film come from the epic and which show the director's modern influences or perspective. Record your ideas, including an assessment of the director's purpose in making the film, in a **“Director’s Influences” chart**.

