



Ruses° served my turn

130 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,  
 let me finish my weaving before I marry,  
 135 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  
 if he, with all his fortune, lay unshrouded.’  
 140 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.  
 But when the seasons brought a fourth year on,  
 145 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.  
 And now, as matters stand at last,  
 150 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.  
 He comprehends it, being a man full grown,  
 155 able to oversee the kind of house  
 Zeus would endow° with honor.

129 Ruses: tricks; schemes.

136 It is . . . Laertes: Penelope has claimed to be weaving a burial cloth (shroud) for Odysseus's father.

137 bier: a platform on which a corpse or coffin is placed before burial.

145 waned: drew to an end.

146–147 through . . . night: After outwitting the suitors for more than three years, Penelope is finally betrayed by some of her own sneaky (slinking) maids, who crept into her room at night and caught her in the act of undoing her weaving.

156 endow: provide or equip.

## The Test of the Bow

*Resigned to ending the suitors' reign over her home, Penelope cries herself to sleep that night, dreaming of the husband she believes is lost forever. The next day the suitors return to the hall, more unruly than ever. Penelope appears, carrying the huge bow that belongs to Odysseus. Her maids follow, bearing twelve iron ax heads. Penelope has a proposition for the suitors.*

“My lords, hear me:

suitors indeed, you commandeered this house  
 to feast and drink in, day and night, my husband

### Vocabulary

**commandeer** (kom' ən dēr') v. to seize by force or threats



5 being long gone, long out of mind. You found  
 no justification for yourselves—none  
 except your lust to marry me. Stand up, then:  
 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  
 10 through iron axe-helve sockets, twelve in line?<sup>o</sup>  
 I join my life with his, and leave this place, my home,  
 my rich and beautiful bridal house, forever  
 to be remembered, though I dream it only."

*One by one the suitors try to string the bow, and all fail. Only Antinous delays his attempt. In the meantime, Odysseus steps outside with the swineherd Eumaeus and Philoetius (fi loi' tē əs), another faithful herdsman, and reveals his identity to them. Odysseus returns to the hall and asks to try his hand at stringing the bow. Antinous sneers at this idea, but Penelope and Telemachus both insist he proceed. Telemachus orders the women to leave, Philoetius locks the gates of the hall, and Eumaeus presents to Odysseus the great bow he has not held for twenty years.*

15 And Odysseus took his time,  
 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:

20 "A bow lover!"

"Dealer in old bows!"

"Maybe he has one like it  
 at home!"

"Or has an itch to make one for himself."

25 "See how he handles it, the sly old buzzard!"<sup>o</sup>

And one disdainful suitor added this:

9–10 Bend . . . line: The challenge has two parts: First, a suitor must bend and string the heavy bow—a task requiring strength and skill. Second, he must shoot an arrow through the narrow holes of twelve ax-heads set in a row.

14–25 And Odysseus . . . old buzzard: As Odysseus examines the old bow for termite holes (borings) that might have weakened the wood since he last used it, the suitors take the chance to make fun of the "beggar."

### Vocabulary

**justification** (jus' tə fə kā' shən) *n.* a reason for an action that shows it to be just, right, or reasonable

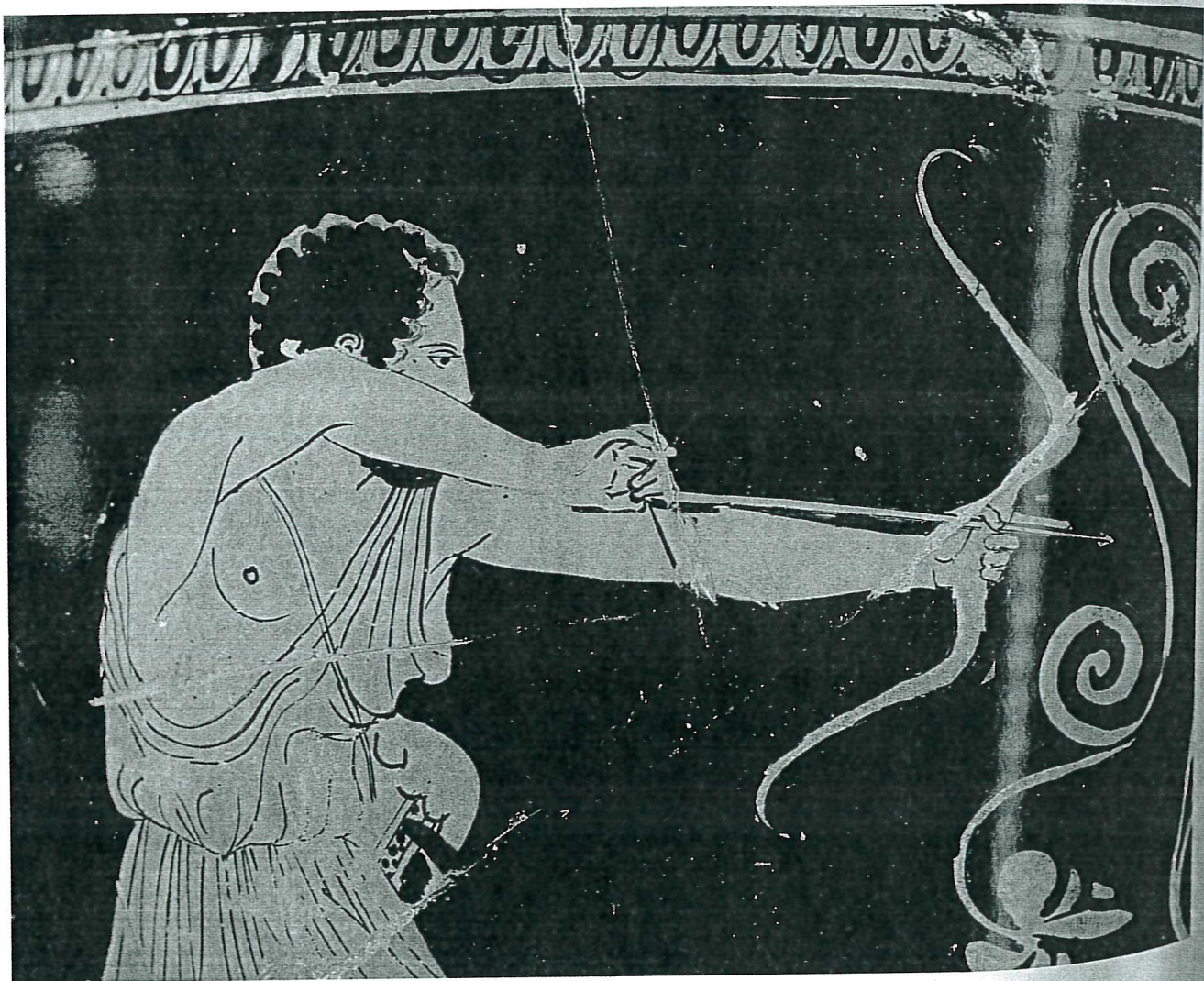




“May his fortune grow an inch for every inch he bends it!”

But the man skilled in all ways of contending,  
satisfied by the great bow's look and heft,<sup>o</sup>  
30 like a musician, like a harper, when  
with quiet hand upon his instrument  
he draws between his thumb and forefinger  
a sweet new string upon a peg: so effortlessly  
Odysseus in one motion strung the bow.  
35 Then slid his right hand down the cord and plucked it,

29 heft: weight.



*Odysseus Competes with the Suitors* (detail). 5th century B.C., Greek. Attic red-figured skyphos. Staatliche Museum, Antikensammlung, Berlin, Germany.

**Viewing the art:** What do you suppose Odysseus is thinking as he takes aim?



so the taut gut<sup>o</sup> vibrating hummed and sang  
a swallow's note.

In the hushed hall it smote<sup>o</sup> the suitors  
and all their faces changed. Then Zeus thundered  
40 overhead, one loud crack for a sign.

And Odysseus laughed within him that the son  
of crooked-minded Cronus had flung that omen down.<sup>o</sup>  
He picked one ready arrow from his table  
where it lay bare: the rest were waiting still  
45 in the quiver for the young men's turn to come.<sup>o</sup>  
He nocked it,<sup>o</sup> 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

50 arrow from twanging bow clean as a whistle  
through every socket ring, and grazed<sup>o</sup> not one,  
to thud with heavy brazen head<sup>o</sup> beyond.

Then quietly

Odysseus said:

55 "Telemachus, the stranger  
you welcomed in your hall has not disgraced you.  
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.  
60 The hour has come to cook their lordships' mutton<sup>o</sup>—  
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,  
65 belted his sword on, clapped hand to his spear,  
and with a clink and glitter of keen bronze  
stood by his chair, in the forefront near his father.



### Vocabulary

**omen** (ō' mən) *n.* a sign or event thought to foretell good or bad fortune;  
forewarning

**contemptible** (kən temp' tə bəl) *adj.* deserving of scorn; disgraceful

36 **taut gut**: tightly drawn bowstring  
(made of animal "gut" or intestine).

38 **smote**: struck, as though from a hard  
blow; affected suddenly with a powerful  
and unexpected feeling, such as fear.

39–42 **Then Zeus . . . down**: Odysseus  
recognizes the crack of thunder as a sign  
that Zeus is on his side.

44–45 **the rest . . . come**: The remain-  
ing arrows will be used by the contestants  
who follow Odysseus.

46 **nocked it**: fitted the nock, or notched  
end, of the arrow into the string.

51 **grazed**: touched.

52 **brazen head**: brass arrowhead.

60 **cook their lordships' mutton**:  
literally, cook their sheep meat. But  
Odysseus is using a phrase that  
Telemachus can take metaphorically,  
like the phrase *cook their goose*  
("get even").





# Responding to Literature

## Personal Response

Did any aspects of Odysseus's behavior surprise you in part 3? Explain, telling what you might have done if you were in his place.

### ANALYZING PART 3

#### RECALL AND INTERPRET

1. What role does Athena play in reuniting Odysseus with his son, Telemachus? Give two reasons why Telemachus might have had trouble identifying his father.
2. In the first 85 lines of "The Beggar at the Manor," find at least two examples of **foreshadowing** that the suitors will be punished.
3. Why does Penelope summon Odysseus? What is **ironic** about her interview with him? What does his restraint say about his character?
4. What is "the test of the bow"? In your opinion, is this a fair test? Explain your answer.

#### EVALUATE AND CONNECT

5. In your opinion, is the recognition scene between Telemachus and Odysseus true-to-life? Explain why or why not.
6. Describe how Homer establishes Antinous as Odysseus's principal **antagonist** among the suitors. (See Literary Terms Handbook, page R1.)
7. What do you think of Antinous's behavior toward the "beggar"? Do people treat each other this way today? Explain.
8. Paraphrase lines 28–37 of "The Test of the Bow." Why do you suppose Homer uses an **epic simile** to describe this moment? (See page R5.)

### EXTENDING YOUR RESPONSE

#### Literature Groups

**Assessing Options** Odysseus is planning to make the suitors pay for their behavior—but do they all deserve the same fate? What do you predict will happen? What do you want to happen? Discuss these questions in your group. Then discuss the advantages and disadvantages of two opposite courses of action available to Odysseus and Telemachus. Call one "Let 'em have it" and the other "Let's be reasonable." Vote on which course of action you prefer. Share your results with the class.

#### Personal Writing

**A Sweet Reunion** Reread "Father and Son" from part 3. Then imagine that you are either Odysseus or Telemachus. Write in your journal what you were thinking and feeling when you became reunited with your loved one. Remember that it's been twenty years since the two have seen each other and that Telemachus was just a little boy when his father left home.

 **Save your work for your portfolio.**

### Literary ELEMENTS

#### Characterization

**Characterization** is the method a writer uses to reveal a character's personality. In **indirect characterization**, a character's personality is revealed through the character's words, thoughts, or actions or through those of other characters. In **direct characterization**, direct statements are made about a character's personality.

1. What methods of characterization does Homer use to reveal Penelope's personality? Support your ideas with examples.
  2. For another character in part 3, find an action, a line or two of dialogue, or another clue to characterization. Tell what this evidence suggests about the character's personality.
- See **Literary Terms Handbook**, p. R2.