

## 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 crimping 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<sup>20</sup> 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:

1555 "Strange woman,  
the immortals of Olympus made you hard,  
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?

1560 Nurse, make up a bed for me to sleep on.  
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

### Literary Analysis

**Epic Simile** Which details in the epic simile in lines 1547–1551 compare Odysseus' hair to a work of art?

**20. Hephaestus** (hē fes' tēs)  
god of fire and metalworking.

### 37 Reading Check

Who helps Odysseus defeat the suitors?

from the *Odyssey*, Part 2 1111



1565 nor scorn for you—not even wonder, merely.  
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.”

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!

### Literary Analysis

**Epic Simile** Explain why the simile comparing the olive trunk to a pillar is not an epic simile.

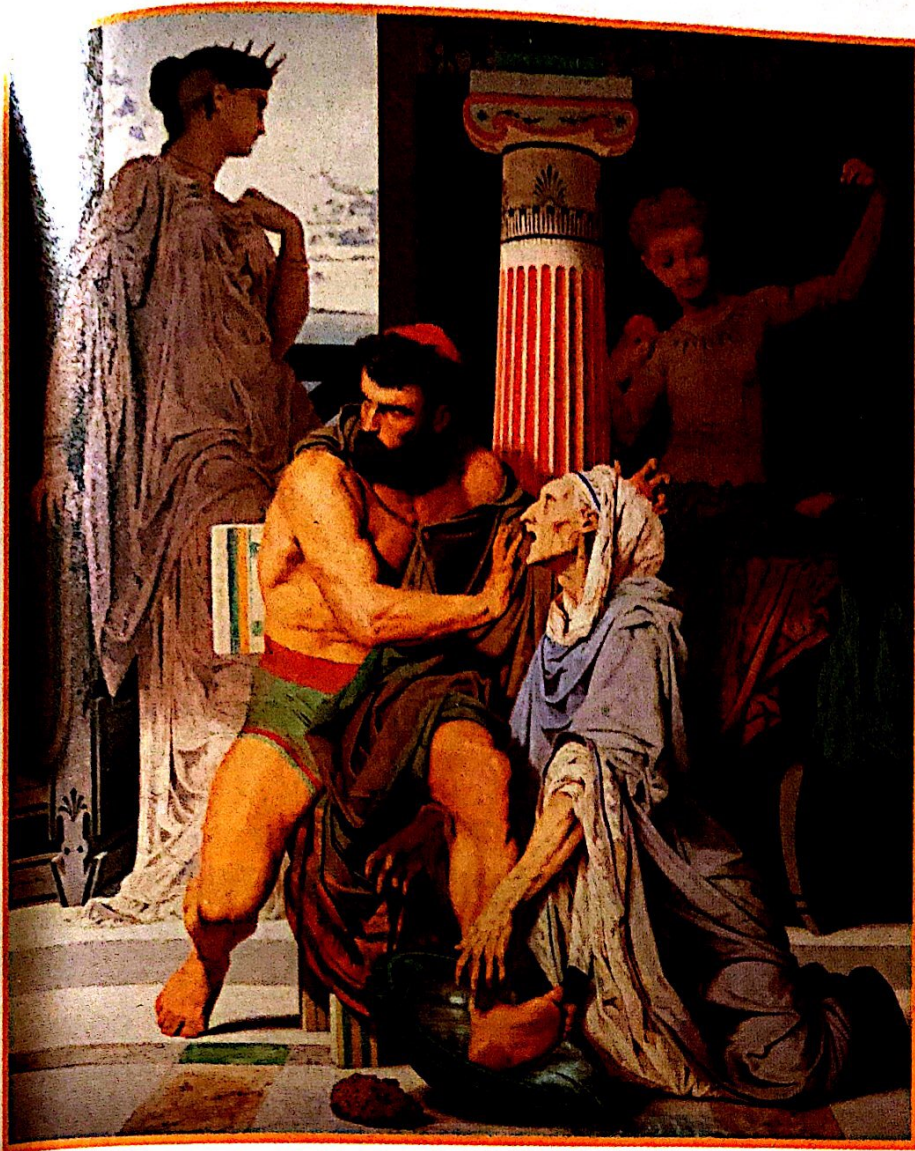
38 | An old trunk of olive  
1580 | grew like a pillar on the building plot,  
and I laid out our bedroom round that tree,  
lined up the stone walls, built the walls and roof,  
gave it a doorway and smooth-fitting doors.  
Then I lopped off the silvery leaves and branches,  
1585 | hewed and shaped 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!





39

◀ **Critical Viewing**

How does this image convey the events in text? [Connect]

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.”

40

✓ **Reading Check**

How does Odysseus react to Penelope's attitude toward him?

from the *Odyssey*, Part 2 1113



1615 Now from his breast into his eyes the ache  
of longing mounted, and he wept at last,  
his dear wife, clear and faithful, in his arms,  
longed for as the sunwarmed earth is longed for by a  
swimmer

41 spent in rough water where his ship went down  
under Poseidon's blows, gale winds and tons of sea.  
1620 Few men can keep alive through a big surf  
to crawl, clotted with brine, on kindly beaches  
in joy, in joy, knowing the abyss<sup>21</sup> behind:  
and so she too rejoiced, her gaze upon her husband,  
her white arms round him pressed as though forever.