

21

The Great Bow

Book Twenty-One

The trial meant to choose a new husband becomes the trap that dooms the suitors. One after another they heave at Odysseus' great bow and cannot bend it; they warm it, grease it, and still fail. Then the ragged beggar asks for a turn – and, as easily as a bard strings his lyre, he strings the bow, plucks a note clear as a swallow's, and sends an arrow singing through twelve axes. Zeus thunders overhead. The reckoning has begun.

NAME

SET

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BOOK TWENTY-ONE

The Great Bow

The hall, and the contest of the bow. None of the suitors can string Odysseus' great bow; the beggar takes it up, strings it with ease, and shoots clean through the axes.

WHAT HAPPENS

- Penelope brings out Odysseus' bow – a gift with a grim history – and sets the contest: string it and shoot through twelve axes.
- Telemachus lines up the axes and nearly strings the bow himself; the suitors try one by one and fail.
- Odysseus reveals himself to Eumaeus and Philoetius by his scar and enlists them; the hall is quietly sealed.
- Over the suitors' protests, the beggar is given the bow; Penelope withdraws upstairs.
- Odysseus strings the bow as easily as a minstrel strings a lyre, and sends an arrow through all twelve axes.

WHO WE MEET

Odysseus

the only man who can wield his own bow

Telemachus

master of the house, and his father's ally

Eumaeus & Philoetius

the loyal servants, now armed for the fight

Antinous & Eurymachus

the suitors, failing and afraid

WHY IT MATTERS FOR ESSAYS

Book 21 is the great reversal: the contest meant to give Penelope away instead arms her husband. Note the bow's history as a token of hospitality abused, Telemachus' emergence, the sealing of the hall, and the serene lyre-simile that frames Odysseus' mastery. **Prescribed:** examined in context – know it closely.

The Great Bow

— PENELOPE FETCHES THE BOW

Athene, goddess of the flashing eyes, now prompted the wise Penelope, Icarius' daughter, to confront the Suitors in the palace with the bow and the axes of grey iron that were to be a test of their skill and the instruments of their destruction. She went upstairs to
 5 her room and with her strong hand picked up a well-made bronze key with an ivory handle. She then made her way with her ladies to a store-room in a distant corner of the palace where her lord's treasure was kept – bronze, gold and wrought iron. Here too was the supple bow and quiver full of deadly arrows which had been given to him by
 10 his friend the godlike Iphitus, Eurytus' son, when they met in Lacedaemon.

The two came across each other at the house of the shrewd Ortilochus in Messene. Odysseus had come over to recover a public debt, some Messenians having stolen three hundred sheep from
 15 Ithaca, and their shepherds too, and carried them off in their many-oared ships. This was the business that brought Odysseus so far afield, though a mere boy at the time. His father and the other elders had entrusted him with the mission. Iphitus, for his part, had come in search of a dozen mares he had lost, with their sturdy little mules at
 20 foot. In the event these horses led to his death in a fatal encounter with Heracles, the lion-hearted Son of Zeus and hero of the mighty Labours. For Heracles killed him in his own house, though he was Iphitus' host, caring no more in that cruel heart of his for the vengeful eye of the gods than for the hospitality he had given him –
 25 feasted the man first, then killed him, and appropriated the large-hooved mares, keeping them in his own palace stables.

— THE BOW OF IPHITUS

It was on his quest for these animals that Iphitus met Odysseus and gave him the bow, which in years gone by **the great Eurytus, his father**, had carried and at his death bequeathed to him in his lofty
 30 palace. In return, Odysseus gave Iphitus a sharp sword and a strong spear as a token of a warm friendship. But before the two could meet as host and guest, the son of Zeus had killed the heroic Iphitus, the giver of the bow. This bow Odysseus never took on to his black ships with him when he sailed to the war, but laid it up at home in memory
 35 of a treasured friend, though he used it on his own estate.

The great lady reached the store-room and set foot on the oaken threshold – the work of some carpenter of bygone days, who had smoothed it well and trued it to the line, fixed the door-posts in their sockets and hung the polished doors on them. She quickly undid the

LINES 28–29

the great Eurytus, his father The great bow has a dark history. It was a gift from **Iphitus**, whose father **Eurytus** was a famous archer; the two men swapped tokens of friendship – but Iphitus was later murdered by **Heracles**, a guest who broke every law of hospitality. A fitting weapon, then, to punish suitors who have done the same.

40 thong attached to the hook, passed the key through the hole, and with an accurate thrust shot back the bolt. With a groan **like the roar of a bull at grass** in a meadow, the doors flew open before her, and she stepped on to the raised floor-boards. Here stood the chests where clothing was laid in scented herbs. Reaching up, Penelope

45 lifted the bow in the shining case off its peg. And there she sat down with the case on her knees and burst into tears and wept aloud as she drew out her husband's bow. But when the torrent of tears had brought its own relief, she set out for the hall to face the proud Suitors, carrying the supple bow and the quiver with its deadly load

50 of arrows in her hands, and her women followed with a box full of the iron and bronze axes that their master had won as prizes. When she drew near to the Suitors the great lady drew a fold of her shining veil across her cheeks and took her stand by a pillar of the massive roof, with a faithful maid on either side. Then she issued her challenge to

55 the Suitors:

— THE CONTEST SET

'Listen, proud Suitors. You have exploited this house, in the long absence of its master, as the scene of your endless eating and drinking, and you could offer no better pretext for your conduct than your wish to win my hand in marriage. Come forward now, my gallant

60 lords: the prize stands before you. I shall now place the great bow of godlike Odysseus in front of you. Whoever strings the bow most easily and shoots an arrow through every one of these twelve axes, with that man I will go, bidding goodbye to this house which welcomed me as a bride, this lovely house so full of all good things,

65 this home that even in my dreams I never shall forget.'

She then turned to the good swineherd Eumaeus and told him to hand over the bow and the iron axes to the Suitors. As he took them from her and set them down, Eumaeus burst into tears, and the cowman beyond him also began sobbing when he saw his master's

70 bow. Antinous turned on them with abuse. 'You snivelling peasants,' he exclaimed, 'who can't see further than your noses! You miserable pair, what are you standing there for, snivelling and upsetting your mistress, as though the loss of her beloved husband weren't painful enough? Sit down and eat your food in silence; or else clear out of

75 here and cry outside. But leave the bow where it is, the bow that will seal our fate. I don't think that polished bow will prove easy to string! There's not a man in this whole company like Odysseus. I saw him myself; I remember it well, though I was only a child at the time.'

In spite of what he said, Antinous nursed a secret hope that he

80 himself might string the bow and shoot through all the iron rings. In fact he was to be the first to sample an arrow from the hands of the peerless Odysseus whom, sitting there in the palace, he was

LINES 41–42

like the roar of a bull at grass A vivid **simile**: the storeroom doors, thrown open, groan 'like the roar of a bull at grass'. Homer lifts an everyday sound into something ominous as the fatal bow is brought out.

insulting, and encouraging all his friends to do the same.

But the great Telemachus broke in: ‘Extraordinary! Zeus seems to
 85 have taken away my wits. My dear mother, in her wisdom, says she
 will leave this house to marry again, and here I am, smiling and
 chuckling to myself like a witless idiot. Well, gentlemen, step
 forward. Here is your prize – a lady whose like you will not find today
 in all Achaea, no, not in sacred Pylos, nor in Argos, nor Mycene, nor
 90 in Ithaca itself, nor on the dark mainland. But you know this well
 enough. What need for me to no sing my mother’s praises? So come
 along! No false excuses or long delays! String the bow and then we’ll
 see. I shouldn’t mind trying myself. And if I string the bow and shoot
 an arrow through the axes, I won’t be too upset if my mother says
 95 goodbye to this house and goes away with another man leaving me
 here, as I’ll know that at last I’m capable of winning the fine prizes my
 father won.’

— TELEMACHUS SETS THE AXES

As he finished speaking Telemachus leapt from his seat, thrust the
 purple cloak off his shoulder and removed the sword hanging there.
 100 He proceeded to **dig a single long trench for all the axes**; then he
 planted them in it, getting them exactly in line, and stamped down
 the earth around them. The men watching could not help admiring
 the neat way in which he set them up, though he had never seen it
 done before. Then he took his stance on the threshold and tried the
 105 bow. Three times he made it quiver in his efforts to bend it; three
 times his strength failed, though he still hoped to succeed in
 stringing it and shooting through the iron rings. And the fourth time
 he put such pressure on the bow that he might well have strung it
 yet, if Odysseus had not put an end to his attempts with a shake of
 110 the head.

‘Dammit!’ the great Telemachus exclaimed. ‘I suppose I shall always
 be a coward and a weakling. Or perhaps I’m too young, not sure
 enough yet of my own strength to defend myself against anyone
 who may care to pick a quarrel with me. Well, sirs, it is now up to
 115 you, who are stronger men than I; let’s get the contest settled.’

With this he put the bow down on the ground, propping the tip
 against the polished woodwork of the door with the arrow resting
 against the beautiful door-handle. Then he resumed his seat.
 Antinous, Eupheithes’ son, called out: ‘Come forward, friends, one by
 120 one, from left to right, beginning from where the wine is poured.’
 This was agreed, with the result that the first man to get up was
 Leodes, son of Oenops, who used to officiate at their sacrifices and
 always sat by the great wine-bowl in the far corner. Unlike the rest,
 he abhorred the Suitors’ recklessness, and their conduct filled him

LINE 100

dig a single long trench for all the axes

Telemachus digs a trench and lines up the twelve axe-heads for the arrow to pass through. He then very nearly strings the bow himself – at the fourth heave he would have done it – proof that he is truly Odysseus’ son, until his father’s glance warns him off.

125 with indignation. Rising now to take the first turn, he picked up the bow and arrow, took his stand on the threshold and tried the bow. But long before he could string it, the effort of bending it tired out his delicate, unhardened hands.

— LEODES FAILS

He turned to the Suitors. ‘My friends,’ he said, ‘I cannot string it; let
130 the next man try. Believe me, **this bow will break the heart and spirit of many** a champion here. Yet it is far better to die than to live on without ever winning the prize that lures us all here every day and keeps us always hoping. As it is some of you are hoping and longing to marry Odysseus’ wife Penelope. Let them try the bow and see!
135 They’ll soon be courting and laying their gifts at the feet of some other long-robed Achaean woman. And so Penelope will be able to marry the man who offers most and is her destined husband.’

Leodes relinquished the bow, propping the tip against the polished woodwork of the door with the arrow leaning against the beautiful
140 door-handle, and so resumed his seat. But Antinous took him to task with asperity: ‘Leodes! What a preposterous speech! It’s a monstrous suggestion, which I strongly resent, that this bow will “break the heart and spirit of many a cham- pion here” – just because you cannot string it yourself. It’s clear that your good mother didn’t bring
145 you into the world to string bows and shoot arrows. However, there are others in this noble company who will string it soon enough.’ Then he turned to Melanthius the goatherd. ‘Look sharp, Melanthius,’ he ordered, ‘and make a fire in the hall, draw up a big stool with a fleece on it, and bring a large round of tallow from the stores, so that
150 we young men can warm and grease the bow before we try it and settle the match.’

— GREASING THE BOW

Melanthius quickly made up the fire, which was still glowing, drew up a stool, on which he spread a fleece, and fetched a large round of tallow from the store. The young men **greased the bow with the hot**
155 **tallow**, tried their best, but failed to string it; they were not nearly strong enough. Antinous, however, and Eurymachus of the godlike looks, held back for the time being, though they were the leaders of the party and by far the best men in it.

— THE LOYAL SERVANTS

Meanwhile the cowman and the swineherd of the noble Odysseus
160 had joined forces and slipped out of the house. Odysseus himself followed them out, and when they had passed through the door and the courtyard, he called out, ‘Cowman! Swineherd!’ and then proceeded tactfully to sound them out: ‘Shall I speak out, or shall I

LINES 130–131

this bow will break the heart and spirit of many Leodes, the suitors’ soothsayer and the gentlest man among them, tries first and fails. His words are grimly prophetic: this bow, he says, will break the hearts of many – as indeed it will.

LINES 154–155

greased the bow with the hot tallow The suitors soften the bow with fire and tallow to help it bend – and still cannot string it. Their failure measures the gulf between them and the man whose bow it is.

hold my tongue? No, I feel I must speak. If it came to fighting for
 165 Odysseus, what line would you men take – supposing he were to
 turn up from somewhere, suddenly, brought back by some god?
 Would you be on the Suitors' side or his? Tell me which way your real
 feelings lie.'

'Father Zeus,' the cowman said, 'hear my prayer. May some power
 170 lead him home! You'd soon know my strength and the power of my
 right arm.' And Eumaeus added a prayer to all the gods that the wise
 Odysseus might see his home again.

Odysseus, thus assured of their genuine feelings, said: 'Well, here I
 am! Yes, I myself, home again in my own country in the twentieth
 175 year after much suffering. I know that you are the only two of all my
 men who will be glad to see me back, for I have not heard a single one
 of the others put up a prayer for my return. So I'm going to tell you
 two exactly what the future holds for you. If the powers above let me
 overthrow these arrogant Suitors, I'll find you each a wife, give you
 180 possessions and build you houses near to mine; and from that day I
 shall regard you both as Telemachus' friends and brothers. I will now
 show you something as positive proof so that you can be absolutely
 sure in your hearts who I am – it is this scar, where I was struck by a
 boar's tusk when I went to Parnassus with Autolycus' sons.'

As he spoke, **he drew his rags aside and exposed the long scar**. The
 185 two men looked, and examined it carefully. Then, weeping, they
 flung their arms round wise Odysseus' neck, and showered kisses on
 his head and shoulders. Odysseus in turn kissed their heads and
 hands: and the sun would have gone down on their weeping had not
 190 Odysseus himself checked them: 'Stop crying,' he said, 'or someone
 coming from the hall may see us and tell the people indoors. Go in
 now, one after the other, not together. I shall go first; and you must
 follow. And here's your cue. The others, those fine Suitors, will refuse
 to let me have the bow and quiver. When that happens, good
 195 Eumaeus, bring the bow down the hall and put it in my hands. Also,
 tell the women to lock that tight-fitting door which leads to their
 rooms, and say that if they hear groans or any other noise from the
 men's part of the palace, they are not to stir from their quarters but
 to stay quietly where they are and get on with their work. The job of
 200 bolting and barring the courtyard gate I give to you, good Philoetius.
 Fasten it tight!' When he had given them these instructions
 Odysseus went back into the stately palace and sat down on the
 stool he had recently left. The two servants of the godlike Odysseus
 followed him in.

— EURYMACHUS DEFEATED

By now **the bow had come into the hands of Eurymachus**, who was

LINE 185

he drew his rags aside and exposed the long scar Outside the hall, Odysseus bares the **scar** to the cowherd Philoetius and the swineherd Eumaeus and reveals himself. The two weep with joy and are enlisted – he will need loyal hands for what is coming.

LINE 205

the bow had come into the hands of Eurymachus Eurymachus, the ablest of the suitors, warms the bow and strains at it – and fails, groaning that the shame will haunt them for ever: they have been shown up as lesser men than Odysseus.

turning it round and round in front of the glowing fire to warm it. But he failed to string it for all that, and he groaned from the depth of his proud heart. 'Damnation take the thing!' he cried in his rage. 'I feel this bitterly, not for myself alone but for us all. I'm not upset so

210 much about the marriage, though that is a bitter blow – there are plenty of women left in sea-girt Ithaca and in other towns. What does grieve me is the thought that our failure with his bow proves us such weaklings compared with the godlike Odysseus. The disgrace will stick to our names for ever.'

215 But Antinous, Eupheithes' son, protested: 'Eurymachus, it won't be like that, and you know it. **Today is a public holiday in honour of the god.** Is that a time for bending bows? Put the thing down and forget it. And why not leave the axes standing where they are? I'm sure nobody's going to break into the palace of Laertes' son and steal

220 them. Come, let the wine-steward go round and pour a little into each cup. We'll make our libations and give archery a rest. And tomorrow tell the goatherd Melanthius to bring in the very best goats from all his flocks, so that we can sacrifice thigh-bones to the great Archer, Apollo, and then try the bow and see who wins.'

225 This was very much to their liking. Accordingly their squires came and sprinkled their hands with water and the pages filled the mixing bowls to the brim with drink, and then, after first pouring a little into each man's cup, served them all with wine. When they had made their libations and satisfied their thirst, the crafty Odysseus came

230 out with a wily suggestion.

— THE BEGGAR ASKS TO TRY

'**Listen to me, Suitors of our famous Queen,** and let me tell you what I feel I must. And my plea is particularly directed to Eurymachus, and godlike Antinous, who spoke so sensibly. Lay aside the bow for the moment and leave the issue to the gods. Tomorrow the Archer god

235 will grant his favourite the strength to win. Meanwhile just pass me the polished bow, so that while you watch I can test the strength of my hands and find out whether there's any power left in these limbs that were once so supple, or whether the privations of a roving life have robbed me of it all by now.'

240 His request enraged them beyond measure, for they really feared he might string the bow; and Antinous turned on him in a fury: 'Miserable intruder, you're quite out of your mind. Can't you be content to dine in peace with your betters, to get your share of every dish and to listen to our talk, which no other visitor or tramp is

245 privileged to hear? This mellow wine has got to you. It's the downfall of any man who gulps it down instead of drinking in moderation. Remember Eurytion the famous Centaur! It was the wine that

LINES 216–217

Today is a public holiday in honour of the god

Antinous saves face by calling a halt: today is a **feast of Apollo** the archer-god, no day for bending bows. They will try again tomorrow – a tomorrow that never comes.

LINE 231

Listen to me, Suitors of our famous Queen

The beggar asks for a turn with the bow. The suitors are enraged: they dread the disgrace the beggar would bring on them if he should string it. Penelope and Telemachus overrule them.

stupefied him in brave Peirithous' palace, during his visit to the Lapithae. Stupefied with drink he perpetrated that outrage in
 250 Peirithous' very home. His hosts leaped up in anger, dragged him to the porch and threw him out of doors; but not before they had ruthlessly sliced his ears and nose off with a knife. He staggered away stupefied, carrying the burden of his folly in his darkened mind. That was the beginning of the feud between Centaurs and men. But
 255 he was the first to suffer, and he brought his troubles on himself by getting drunk. And you, I warn you, will come to grief in much the same way, if you string this bow. You will be given no sympathy in our part of the country. We'll pack you off in a black ship to King Echetus the Destroyer; and nothing will get you out of his clutches!
 260 So drink in peace, and don't attempt to compete with men younger than yourself.'

But here the prudent Penelope intervened: 'Antinous, it is neither good manners nor common decency to show such meanness to people who come to this house as Telemachus' guests. Do you
 265 imagine that if this stranger has enough faith in his own strength and bends the great bow of Odysseus he is going to carry me home with him and make me his wife? I don't believe he ever thought of such a thing himself. So do not let that spoil anyone's dinner here. That is out of the question.'

270 It was Eurymachus, Polybus' son, who answered her: 'Daughter of Icarius, wise Penelope, we do not imagine that this man will win your hand. That is out of the question. What we shrink from is what men and women will say. We don't want the common people to be saying: "A poor lot, these; not up to the fine man whose wife they
 275 want to marry! They can't string his bow! But in comes some casual tramp, strings the bow with the greatest ease, and shoots through the iron rings!" That is the sort of comment they will make and that would bring disgrace on us.'

'Eurymachus,' wise Penelope retorted, 'no men who desecrate and
 280 destroy a great man's household can anyhow have a high reputation among the people, so why would that comment bring disgrace on you? Our guest here is a very big and well-built man, who also claims to be of noble birth. So give him the bow now and let us see what happens. I promise – and these are no idle words – that if Apollo
 285 answers his prayer and he succeeds in stringing it I shall give him a fine new cloak and tunic, a sharp javelin to keep off dogs and men, and a two-edged sword, as well as sandals for his feet, and I shall see him safely to wherever he wants to go.'

— PENELOPE WITHDRAWS

'As for the bow, mother,' shrewd Telemachus interposed, '**there is not**

LINES 289–290

there is not a single Achaean who has a better right Telemachus asserts himself as master of the house, declaring the bow his to give or withhold, and sends his mother upstairs. She goes – and Athene sends her to sleep, sparing her the bloodshed to come.

290 a single Achaean who has a better right than I to give it or refuse it as I wish. And that applies to every chieftain here in rugged Ithaca or in the isles off Elis where the horses graze. There is not one of them who will override my decision, even if I make up my mind to give this bow to my guest once and for all and let him take it away. So go to
 295 your quarters now and attend to your own work, the loom and the spindle, and see that the servants get on with theirs. The bow is the men's concern, and mine above all; for I am master in this house.'

Penelope was taken aback, but retired to her own room, for she took her son's sensible decision to heart. Attended by her maids she went
 300 upstairs to her bedroom, where she gave way to tears for Odysseus, her beloved husband, till bright-eyed Athene closed her eyes in sweet sleep.

Meanwhile the worthy swineherd had picked up the curved bow and was taking it along, when protests rang out from all the Suitors in the
 305 hall. One of the insolent youths, expressing the general feeling, yelled: 'Where are you taking that bow, you wretched swineherd, you vagabond? If Apollo and the other immortal gods favour us, the very dogs you've bred will tear you to pieces, out there among your pigs away from everybody.'

310 Eumaeus, cowed by the angry cries in the hall, then and there put down the bow. But now Telemachus' voice came loud and menacing from the other side. 'Come on, bring the bow, old fellow! You'll soon find that you can't obey us all. Take care I don't chase you up the fields with a shower of stones. I may be young, but I am more
 315 powerful than you. If only I had the same advantage in muscle over all the Suitors in the place, I'd soon send them packing back where they belong and out of this house of mine where they hatch their ugly plots.'

The Suitors greeted this speech with roars of hilarious laughter,
 320 which took the edge off their resentment against Telemachus. The swineherd picked up the bow, carried it down the hall to wise Odysseus and put it in his hands. He then called the nurse Eurycleia from her quarters and said: 'Eurycleia, you're sensible. Telemachus' orders are for you to lock those close-fitting doors to the women's
 325 rooms. And if anyone hears groans or any other noise from the men's part of the house, they are not to stir from their quarters, but must stay quietly where they are and get on with their work.'

— THE HALL SEALED

Without a word Eurycleia went and locked the doors leading out of the great hall. At the same time Philoetius slipped quietly out and
 330 barred the door leading into the courtyard, which he made fast with a ship's hawser of reeds that was lying under the colonnade. This done,

LINE 328

Eurycleia went and locked the doors The trap is sprung shut: Eurycleia locks the women into their quarters and the cowherd bars the courtyard gate. Once Odysseus has the bow, no suitor will leave the hall alive.

he went in and sat down on the stool he had left, with his eyes fixed on Odysseus.

Odysseus now had the bow in his hands and was twisting it about
 335 and bending it at both ends, in case worms had eaten into the horn
 in the long absence of its owner. The Suitors glanced at one another
 and one said: 'Ha! Quite the expert, with a critic's eye for bows! No
 doubt he collects them at home or wants to make one, judging by the
 way he twists it about. The old vagabond is up to no good.' Another
 340 arrogant youth said: 'I hope he has as much luck at that as he has
 chance of ever stringing the bow!'

— ODYSSEUS STRINGS THE BOW

While they were talking Odysseus, master of stratagems, had picked
 up the great bow and checked it all over. *As a minstrel skilled at the
 lyre* and in song easily stretches a string round a new leather strap,
 345 fixing the twisted sheep-gut at both ends, so he strung the great
 bow without effort or haste. Then with his right hand he tested the
 string, and it sang as he plucked it with a sound *like a swallow's
 note*. The Suitors were utterly mortified; the colour faded from their
 cheeks; and to mark the moment there came a thunderclap from
 350 Zeus, and Odysseus' long-suffering heart leapt up for joy at this sign
 of favour from the Son of Cronos of the devious ways.

One arrow lay loose on the table beside him; the rest, which the
 Achaean lords were soon to experience, were still inside their hollow
 quiver. He picked up this shaft, set it against the bridge of the bow,
 355 drew back the grooved end and the string together, all without rising
 from his stool, and, with a straight aim, shot. Not a single axe did he
 miss. From the first handle-ring, right through them all and out at the
 last the arrow sped with its burden of bronze.

— THROUGH THE AXES

Odysseus turned to his son. 'Telemachus,' he said, 'the stranger
 360 sitting in your hall has not disgraced you. *I did not miss the target*,
 or make hard work of stringing the bow. My powers are unimpaired,
 and the Suitors did me an injustice when they disparaged me. But
 the time has come now to get their supper ready, while it is light, and
 after that to pass on to the further pleasures of music and dancing,
 365 which add to the delights of a banquet.'

As he finished, he gave a nod. Whereupon noble Odysseus' son,
 Telemachus, slung on his sharp-edged sword and gripping his spear
 took his stand by the chair at his father's side, armed with
 resplendent bronze.

LINES 343–344

As a minstrel skilled at the lyre The great moment, in a **simile** of peace: as easily as 'a minstrel strings a new string on his lyre', Odysseus bends and strings the mighty bow – the feat not one of them could manage.

LINES 347–348

like a swallow's note He plucks the taut string and it sings 'clear as a swallow's note' (a **simile**); at that instant **Zeus** thunders in sign of favour, and the suitors turn pale.

LINE 360

I did not miss the target Without even rising from his stool, Odysseus sends the arrow clean through all twelve axe-heads. The contest is won – and he turns to Telemachus, for the real target is about to change.

