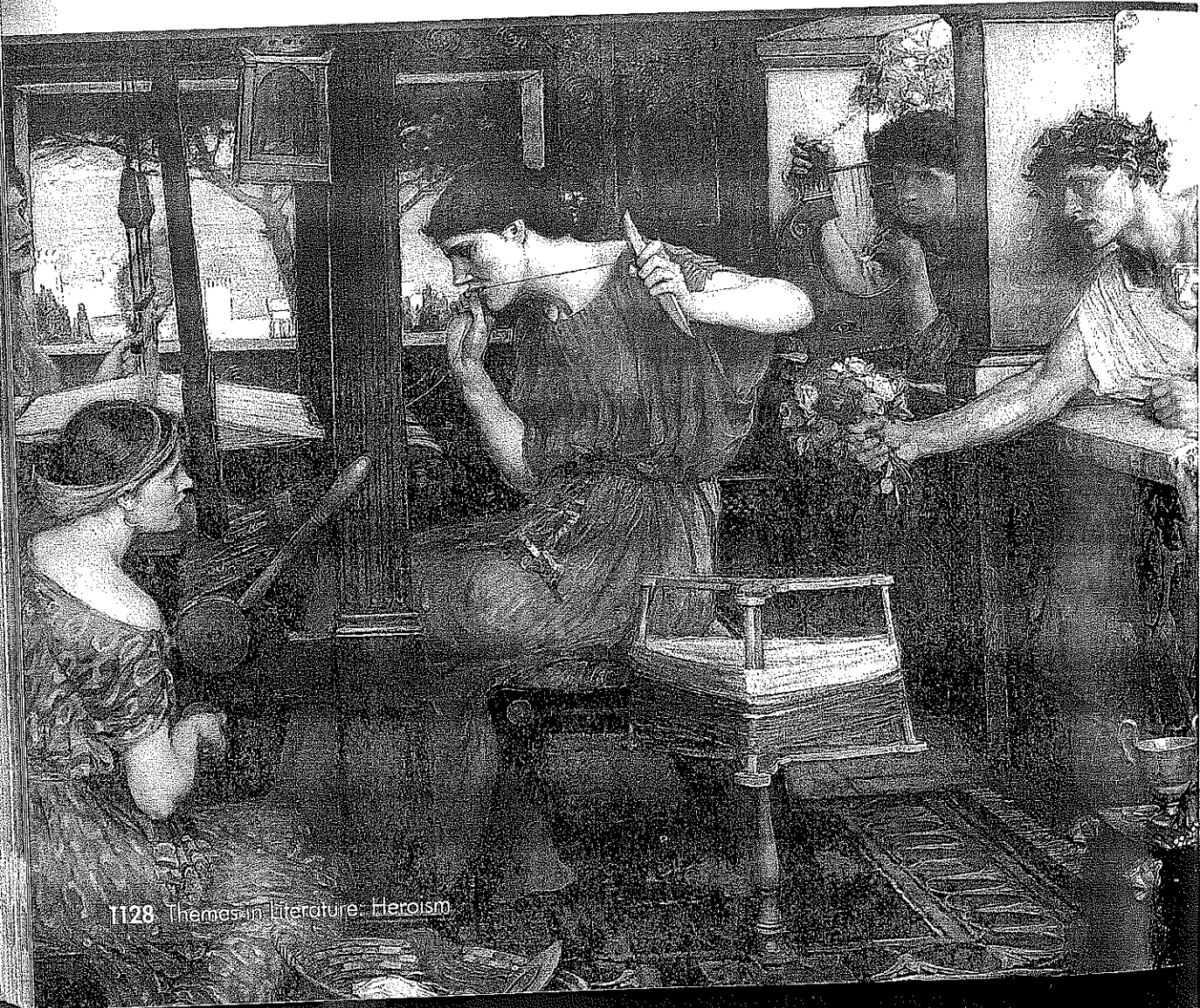


# *An Ancient Gesture*

*Edna St. Vincent Millay*



I thought, as I wiped my eyes on the corner of my apron:  
Penelope did this too.

And more than once: you can't keep weaving all day  
And undoing it all through the night;

- 5 Your arms get tired, and the back of your neck gets tight;  
And along towards morning, when you think it will never  
be light,

And your husband has been gone, and you don't know  
where, for years,

Suddenly you burst into tears;  
There is simply nothing else to do.

- 10 And I thought, as I wiped my eyes on the corner of my apron:  
This is an ancient gesture, authentic, antique,  
In the very best tradition, classic, Greek;  
Ulysses<sup>1</sup> did this too.

But only as a gesture,—a gesture which implied

- 15 To the assembled throng that he was much too moved  
to speak.

He learned it from Penelope . . .  
Penelope, who really cried.

1. Ulysses Latin name for Odysseus.

## Critical Thinking

1. **Respond:** What do you think it means to “really cry”? Explain.
2. (a) How is the speaker similar to Penelope? (b) **Summarize:** According to the speaker, what caused Penelope to use this ancient gesture? (c) **Make Inferences:** Why might the speaker have made a similar gesture?
3. (a) According to the speaker, who else made this ancient gesture? (b) **Compare and Contrast:** How did this gesture differ from Penelope's? (c) **Analyze:** What do the different qualities of their gestures reveal about these characters?
4. (a) **Assess:** What questions about the speaker are left unanswered? (b) **Analyze Cause and Effect:** What effect do these unanswered questions create?



### Do heroes have responsibilities?

- (a) According to this interpretation, does Odysseus live up to his responsibility as a husband? Explain.
- (b) Who do you think the author felt was the hero in the *Odyssey*—Penelope or Odysseus? Explain.

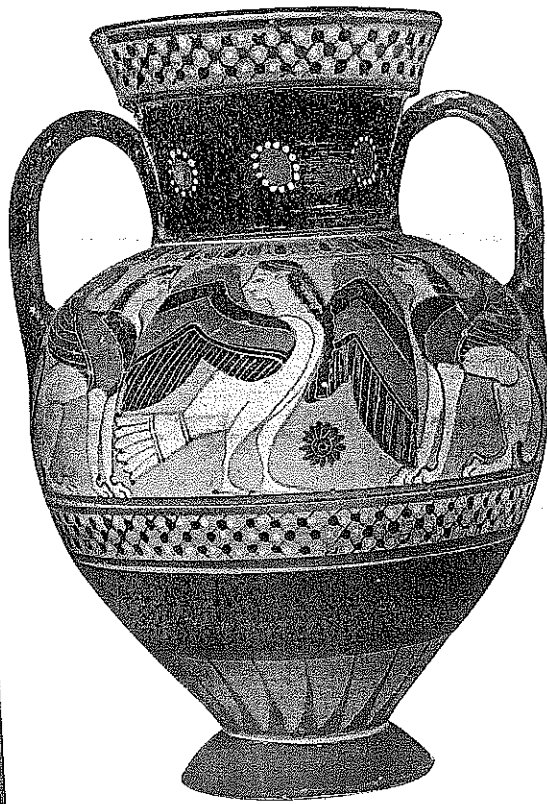
### Literary Analysis Literary Influences

Analyze lines 1–9. How has the *Odyssey*, a piece of mythic, classical, and traditional literature, influenced these lines from a piece of 20th century literature?

**Vocabulary**  
**authentic** (ô then' tik)  
adj. genuine

◀ **Critical Viewing**  
What is Penelope's attitude toward the suitors? How can you tell?  
[Infer; Support]

 **Support**  
your responses  
with evidence  
from the text.



# SIREN SONG

Margaret Atwood

## Literary Analysis Literary Influences

Analyze lines 4–9. How has the *Odyssey*, a piece of mythic, classical, and traditional literature, influenced these lines from a piece of 20th century literature?

This is the one song everyone  
would like to learn: the song  
that is irresistible:

5 the song that forces men  
to leap overboard in squadrons  
even though they see the beached skulls

the song nobody knows  
because anyone who has heard it  
is dead, and the others can't remember.

10 Shall I tell you the secret  
and if I do, will you get me  
out of this bird suit?<sup>1</sup>

1. **bird suit** Sirens are usually represented as half bird and half woman.

I don't enjoy it here  
squatting on this island  
15 looking picturesque and mythical

with these two feathery maniacs,  
I don't enjoy singing  
this trio, fatal and valuable.

I will tell the secret to you,  
20 to you, only to you.  
Come closer. This song

is a cry for help: Help me!  
Only you, only you can,  
you are unique

25 at last. Alas  
it is a boring song  
but it works every time.

### Vocabulary

**picturesque** (pik' cher esk') *adj.* attractive and interesting

### Literary Analysis

#### Literary Influences

What does the contemporary Siren say to flatter and lure the listener?

## Critical Thinking

- 1. Respond:** Do you like the speaker in this poem? Why or why not?
- 2. (a)** In the first stanza, what song does the speaker say everyone wants to learn? **(b) Analyze:** What does this song have the power to do?
- 3. (a)** What does the speaker want in exchange for revealing the song's secret? **(b) Interpret:** Why does the speaker want to make this deal?
- 4. (a) Analyze:** Why do you think the speaker's compliment in lines 23 and 24 is so effective? **(b) Make Generalizations:** What might the speaker be saying about the relationships between men and women?
- 5. (a) Make Inferences:** How does the speaker feel about her song and its purpose? **(b) Draw Conclusions:** How much influence has the *Odyssey* had on "Siren Song," and how much is due to Atwood's own imagination?



### Do heroes have responsibilities?

- (a)** How does the Siren affect heroes? Explain.
- (b)** Do you think the Siren should be held responsible for her effect on heroes? Why or why not?

 Support  
your responses  
with evidence  
from the text.

# To a Last Lover

Marie Delgado Travis

## Vocabulary

**opal** (ō' pəl) *adj.*  
like an opal; being  
semi-transparent and  
reflecting light to give  
the appearance of many  
colors

## Vocabulary

**beveled** (bev'əld') *adj.*  
sloped; cut at a slant

I lingered on  
The shore alone,  
Hair tousled softly  
By the ocean breeze.

5 The opal sea  
—Jealous,  
No doubt, of the  
Blue depths  
Of his eyes—  
10 Had claimed  
My lover  
As her own  
Many years  
Before.

15 Invoking his spirit,  
I asked if he still  
Remembered.

And the sea  
Began to churn  
20 In beveled colors.

Blind Homer himself  
Would have been  
Dazzled by the  
Foam-white and  
25 Wine orchids  
Shimmering  
In the rosy  
Sunset.

I knew then  
30 For certain.

My Odysseus  
Never left me.

And I remain  
His true  
35 Penelope.

### Literary Analysis

#### Literary Influences

Analyze the last two stanzas. How has the *Odyssey*, a piece of mythic, classical, and traditional literature, influenced the theme of this poem, a piece of 21st century literature?

## Critical Thinking

1. **Respond:** What is your opinion of the speaker? Explain.
2. **(a)** What is the speaker doing? **(b) Assess:** What is the speaker's state of mind?
3. **(a)** What was the sea jealous of? **(b) Draw Conclusions:** What has happened to Odysseus? How do you know?
4. **(a) Summarize:** How does the sea respond to the speaker's question in lines 16–17? **(b) Analyze:** How does this description evoke the language and feeling of the *Odyssey*? **(c) Draw Conclusions:** How do the allusions to the *Odyssey* add meaning to the poem?
5. **(a) Make Inferences:** How does the speaker know that Odysseus never left her? **(b) Interpret:** What does the speaker mean in the final lines?



### Do heroes have responsibilities?

- (a)** Who is the hero in this poem? Explain. **(b)** Does this hero have responsibilities? If so, to whom?

Support  
your responses  
with evidence  
from the text.

# Ithaca

Constantine Cavafy

When you start on your journey to Ithaca,  
then pray that the road is long,  
full of adventure, full of knowledge.  
Do not fear the Lestrygonians<sup>1</sup>

- 5 and the Cyclopes and the angry Poseidon.  
You will never meet such as these on your path,  
if your thoughts remain lofty, if a fine  
emotion touches your body and your spirit.  
You will never meet the Lestrygonians,  
10 the Cyclopes and the fierce Poseidon,  
if you do not carry them within your soul,  
if your soul does not raise them up before you.

- Then pray that the road is long.  
That the summer mornings are many,  
15 that you will enter ports seen for the first time  
with such pleasure, with such joy!  
Stop at Phoenician markets,  
and purchase fine merchandise,  
mother-of-pearl and corals, amber and ebony,  
20 and pleasurable perfumes of all kinds,  
buy as many pleasurable perfumes as you can;  
visit hosts of Egyptian cities,  
to learn and learn from those who have knowledge.

1. **Lestrygonians** (les tri gō' nē ənz) *n.* cannibals who destroy all of Odysseus' ships except his own and kill the crews.

◀ **Critical Viewing**  
Which aspects of  
this image relate to  
Odysseus' journey?  
[Connect]

**Vocabulary**  
**lofty** (lōf' tē) *adj.* very  
high; noble

**Literary Analysis**

**Literary Influences**

Analyze lines 1–12. How  
has the *Odyssey*, a piece  
of mythic, classical, and  
traditional literature,  
influenced these lines in  
a piece of 20th century  
literature?

**Reading  
Check**

What advice does the  
speaker give about meet-  
ing the Lestrygonians?

### Literary Analysis Literary Influences

How does Odysseus' desire for an end to his journey differ from the contemporary poet's attitude toward the journey?

### Vocabulary

**defrauded** (dē frôd' əd)  
v. cheated

 Support  
your responses  
with evidence  
from the text.

Always keep Ithaca fixed in your mind.

- 25 To arrive there is your ultimate goal.  
But do not hurry the voyage at all.  
It is better to let it last for long years;  
and even to anchor at the isle when you are old,  
rich with all that you have gained on the way,  
30 not expecting that Ithaca will offer you riches.

Ithaca has given you the beautiful voyage.  
Without her you would never have taken the road.  
But she has nothing more to give you.

- And if you find her poor, Ithaca has not defrauded you.  
35 With the great wisdom you have gained, with so much  
experience,  
You must surely have understood by then what Ithaca  
means.

## Critical Thinking

- 1. Respond:** Does the journey in this poem appeal to you? Explain.
- 2. (a) Analyze:** How is the role played by the Lestrygonians, the Cyclopes, and Poseidon in "Ithaca" different than their role in the *Odyssey*? **(b) Make Inferences:** Why might a person carry such terrors as these in his or her soul?
- 3. (a)** What three things does the speaker say you should pray for on the journey to Ithaca? **(b) Connect:** What activities and pleasures are linked to these prayers?
- 4. (a)** According to the speaker, why is Ithaca important? **(b) Make Inferences:** What might Ithaca symbolize for the poet?
- 5. (a) Interpret:** What message is conveyed in the last three lines of the poem? **(b) Assess:** Do you agree with this message? Explain.
- 6. (a) Speculate:** What advice might the speaker have given to Odysseus during his long journey? **(b) Take a Position:** Do you agree with this advice? Explain.



### Do heroes have responsibilities?

- (a)** What does the "journey to Ithaca" symbolize?  
**(b)** Do you think people have a responsibility to take a "journey to Ithaca" in their own lives? Why or why not?