PENELOPE AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE MARGINALIZED

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PENELOPE AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE MARGINALIZED

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Penelope and the Psychology of the Marginalized considers the question: can we read Penelope as a coherent character, without changing the text of the *Odyssey* as it stands? That is, are her attitudes towards her husband and the suitors consistent throughout? Does she ever—uncharacteristically—waver on the verge of infidelity, or seem to know things she should not? Since at least 1859, many scholars have argued no coherent reading Penelope exists. Thus, if such a reading does exist, then generations of scholarship on Penelope are outmoded.

This dissertation argues that a coherent reading of Penelope is possible, and that Second Wave Feminist theories of rape culture and sexual terrorism provide a solution to any discrepancies. Penelope's environment is a rape culture; over a hundred heavy-drinking young men have besieged her home in the hopes of usurping her husband's social standing through marrying her; and Penelope's value as a wife depends on the public's perception of her virtue, that is, her chastity. Thus, for as long as the suitors believe they might come to marry Penelope and take her on as their asset, they have reason not to devalue her through sexual violence, but not if they lose hope. At that point, it is in the suitors' best interests to rape her and depreciate the value of Odysseus' asset. In so doing, they will comparatively improve their own social standing in the zero-sum Ithacan hierarchy. If Penelope hopes to wait them out, then she needs to keep them suspended between the two courses of action. Any apparent variations in her stance toward these men or remarriage should be regarded as strategic performances. Paying closer attention to the

other women of the household clarifies the danger Penelope faces: Twelve women and girls will be murdered before the poem's end.

To make this case comprehensively, this dissertation includes close readings of every one of Penelope's scenes in the *Odyssey* in order, beginning with book one and ending with book twenty-four.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Emily Shanahan received her BA in Classics from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and both MA and PhD from Cornell University in the same. She specializes in philology, and while in graduate school, she completed A exams on Homer, Ovid, and Aratus. She describes herself as a Hellenist.

DEDICATED TO TALIA PETOIA

During the final stages of writing this project, on March 10th of 2023, my beloved, lifelong friend Talia Petoia was shot and killed by her boyfriend, Tyler Laughter. Talia's family believes she was trying to break up with him that night. Tyler was the only eyewitness to the shooting and—despite documented evidence of domestic abuse—police ruled Talia's death "accidental" within days.[1] Tyler was indicted for involuntary manslaughter on June 12th. Talia was twenty-seven years old when she died.

I cannot explain the depth of her loss. It is already too late for you to know her, and therefore to feel the hole she's left in the world. I can tell you a bit about her, though. Talia was brave. Even from the time that we were very small children, she was unafraid of heights, or strangers, or the bees to which she was dangerously allergic. It was her most remarkable quality, which is saying something as she was also beautiful, charismatic, loyal, effusive, a talented singer. She saw the best in everything and everyone.

I have posited in this dissertation that the so-called inconsistencies in Penelope's behavior are the product of the rational decision to avoid conflict, because she has reason to suspect that the suitors might harm her if they were to feel rejected or otherwise provoked. It might have been more admirable—certainly more honest—for Penelope to tell the suitors to go home, that they were wasting their time, rather than maneuvering around them in secret. Talia would have told them to leave. She would not have plotted and lied. I am sure of this. But confronting them could

[1] Lewis quoting Detective Huckabee of the Polk County Sheriff's Office, *Tryon Daily Bulletin*.

have been dangerous. It's not only our vices that cause trouble; our virtues are also vulnerabilities. Bravery, trust, and optimism can lead us into peril. It was Talia's best qualities that left her vulnerable to harm, and I will love her for as long as I live.

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This dissertation would not have been possible without the academic and moral support of many people to whom I owe thanks. It is possible that I may miss some, and for that I apologize in advance. To blatantly misuse the old phrase, it takes a village to raise a dissertation, and I am thankful to everyone who guided me during my time at Cornell University.

Thank you to my committee, Hayden Pelliccia (chair), Verity Platt, and Athena Kirk, who all provided invaluable feedback and encouragement on this project as it developed. They were unfailingly kind during a series of personal losses that could have derailed this project, had I not had such an understanding group of supporters. On that note, I must also thank my Director of Graduate Studies, Eric Rebillard, for the same. I would also like to thank every professor from whom I took courses during my time in graduate school, especially the wonderful Daniel Gallagher, who was so willing to give me freedom in interpreting his carefully designed assignment descriptions. I am quite sure that translations of Robert Frost into Latin were not what he had in mind for Latin Prose Composition, but he humored me kindly. Thank you to the administrative staff in the Department of Classics, and most especially Linda Brown, who has since retired. I must also thank my fellow students, Charlotte Hunt and Stephen Fodroczi especially, with whom I spent many hours learning how to be a scholar.

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INTRODUCTION

Penelope is a persistent issue in Homer scholarship, so persistent scholars often do not even argue her characterization is broken beyond repair—they just assume it. The introduction to books 1-4 in the Oxford Commentary on the *Odyssey* states:

> The prominent part which [Telemachus] plays in our *Odyssey* leaves Penelope little more than an onlooker, though vestiges remain of an earlier version in which she was Odysseus' accomplice in exacting vengeance on the suitors (the more obvious conception if her loyalty were above suspicion).[2]

Heubeck believes that the Penelope we see in the *Odyssey* as it exists today must in fact be two different versions of the character that have been spliced together. Rather than provide his reasoning, he merely footnotes Denys Page's *The Homeric Odyssey*.[3] By implication, Penelope's issues are too obvious to be worth explaining in the text. D.A. Kirchhoff, whom Page himself often cites, writes in the forward of his *Die Homerische Odyssee und Ihre Entstehung,* first edition:

> Er erhält eine Thesis ohne Begründung, ein Facit ohne die Rechnung. Ich habe diese Form gewählt night etwas, weil ich an der Möglichkeit verzweifelte das Behauptete zu erweisen,

[2] Heubeck, in Heubeck et al. 1990, pg. 51.

[3] Ibid. Page 1955.

> oder weil ich die Mühe gescheut die Rechnung wirklich auszuführen: im Gegenteil, ich getraue mir alles Wesentliche mit wissenschaftlicher Strenge Unbefangenen gegenüber bis zur Evidenz zu erweisen […].[4]
>
> [The reader] receives a thesis without grounds, a conclusion without calculation. I have chosen this form not at all because I despair at the possibility of demonstrating the claim, or because I spared the trouble of actually doing the calculation: on the contrary, I dare to do, with scientific rigor, everything essential for unbiased people up to the evidence […][5]

He then proceeds to rip large chunks out of the text as obvious interpolations, including the moment when the suitors give Penelope expensive gifts at 18.281-301, 303, without explanation as promised.[6]

Penelope's fellow characters also treat her motivation as opaque, and the stakes are significant. As with other members of the *oikos*, the text portrays her loyalty to Odysseus as "the centerpiece of her moral worth",[7] but she does not always make her intentions known, and certain statements and actions seem, at first glance, self-contradictory. Characters in Penelope's own world accuse her of sending mixed signals; e.g., in his speech at 2.85f. Antinoos claims that she encouraged him and the other suitors. But he has a clear incentive to misread her, because he wants to marry her.

In short, scholars often take as a premise that Penelope's actions and statements are, for whatever reason, inconsistent; there is no sensible way to reconstruct one coherent psychology of

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[4] Kirchhoff 1859, III. I have chosen to pull from the first edition rather than the second because this particular quote condenses an attitude that is prevalent throughout both.

[5] All translations are my own.

[6] "Zusätze der jüngeren Bearbeitung", pg. 286.

[7] Wilson 2018, pg. 47.

the character. That is to say, they believe there is no single interpretation of Penelope's personality, beliefs, and desires that explains everything she says and does.

Beginning from the above premise, different groups have offered different explanations for how these contradictions arose. Their explanations fall into two general camps. First, Analytic scholars, such as Page and Kirchhoff cited above, have tended to fault the text—and its assumed multiple authors—for inconsistencies. They claim later poets added material from competing traditions to the original text—perhaps from a version of the story where Penelope recognized Odysseus earlier in the narrative and acted on that knowledge. Or perhaps there was another version of the *Odyssey* where Penelope was unfaithful, and that is why she does not send the suitors away. Interpolated chunks of one of these alternative versions ruined the continuity of a previously unmarred and perfect *Odyssey*.[8] Either way, Penelope is two-in-one: a mishmash of inconsistent states of knowledge and desires, due to the meddling of pseudo-Homers whose work must be identified and removed in order to restore the *Odyssey* to its imagined former glory.

The other, more modern camp of scholars has argued Penelope's inconsistencies are not mistakes but are due to the narrative's purposes. These scholars place limited importance on Penelope's internal consistency. Martin West blames the (singular) author's changing needs in his *The Making of the Odyssey*.[9] As he puts it:

> Penelope's attitude toward the suitors is differently represented in different passages. Their attentions are unwanted (β 50, τ 133), and she remains faithful to Odysseus and pines for him (τ 136), supposing him to be still alive somewhere (τ 358f., cf. δ 833). Elsewhere she appears to be convinced that he is dead or at any rate will never return (β 96 = τ 141; τ 257 f., 313). She tried to put the suitors off by saying she was unavailable until she had finished the

[8] Page 1955, pg. 122-124.

[9] West 2014, pg. 68.

> winding-sheet for Laertes (β 93ff., τ 137ff., 128 ff. ω). On the other hand she still has not said a definite no to remarriage (α 249 f. = π 126 f.) […] We may argue that, given the pressures on her, a certain variability in her stance is psychologically plausible. I prefer to account for it from the pressures on [the Poet] from the needs of the story as a whole…[10]

In other words, West refuses to spend much time contemplating psychological reasons for Penelope's behavior. His reasoning is similar to the Analytic line of thought, although he thinks only one poet—whom he calls "Q", as compared the the author of the *Iliad,* "P"—is blending different versions of the story with greater regard for present convenience than Penelope's internal consistency.

Others in the 'needs of the poet/plot' camp take the argument even further. Nancy Felson argues that Penelope acts in accordance with multiple incongruous plot types, and that she herself lives in a state of uncertainty as to her actions' meaning, because it is in the poet's best interests to keep as many plot lines available as possible.[11] Marilyn Katz argues in *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the Odyssey* that Penelope's narrative function is her "indeterminacy," and that her characterization should be considered through this lens rather than, "psychological verisimilitude", again, for the sake of the plot.[12] Thus, Felson and Katz both consider the inconsistencies to be unproblematic. Richard Heitman tries to reverse-engineer Penelope's mental state from the plot's needs: she feels how the plot needs her to feel, meaning

[10] West 2014, pg. 68.

[11] Felson 1994, 1996.

[12] Katz 1991, pg. 11.

that she has not ruled out remarriage, but nevertheless prefers Odysseus to the suitors.[13] At the far end of the spectrum is Jonas Grethlein:

> Penelope's behaviour in *Odyssey* 18 and 19 is in fact not reconciled with her thoughts and feelings, but this is not the product of poor composition. What we encounter is a narrative design that privileges the plot function of scenes and their significance above the full motivation of the action.[14]

He thus frames Penelope's psychology as completely irrelevant.

Thus, for one reason or another, many scholars have attempted to handwave away Penelope's psychology with appeals to either the poem's authorship or plot. But all of these approaches fail to interrogate the original premise: Is there really no way to reconstruct a plausible, coherent characterization that explains everything?

The Homeric Question

Let us resist the impulse to appeal to Homer(s) as a solution, as so many have done already. The Analytic approach is unsatisfying in part because it makes no attempt to understand Penelope as she is before fixing her, and in part because it relies on assumptions about the nature of authorship and authority that are objectionable—namely, that the original version must be the right one, and all else is illegitimate. However, this dissertation is also not a Unitarian manifesto: I do not assume an infallible genius created the *Odyssey*. How the *Odyssey* came to be is not my concern—only whether the text as we have can be seen to make the kind of coherent sense some have denied it.

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[13] Heitman 2005.

[14] Grethlein 2018, pg. 82.

Engaging with the question, "Who composed the *Odyssey*?" requires a great deal of unsupportable conjecture, unless we stick to pure linguistics and dialectic markers.[15] Many, many scholars—from Samuel Butler to Martin West—have attempted to reconstruct the author from facets of the text, but have achieved wildly different results with regards to the poet's age, gender, place of origin, and so on.[16] No two scholars are in perfect agreement, meaning these exercises fail to meet the scientific standard of replicability: the results are far from objective. The fact is that in the absence of direct evidence, these reconstructions of Homer must rely on essentialist fallacies: what does it mean to be a young man, an old man, a great artist, etc. Visions of Homer are often based in emotion rather than reason. Consider, for instance, Douglas Young's horror at the suggestion Homer may have been illiterate.[17] In his 1965 review of Milman Parry's work, Young argues against oral tradition theory on the analogy of Gaelic poetry: Gaelic poets used formulas but did not compose extemporaneously; ergo Parry's theory is ridiculous. Setting aside Young's argument against Parry, his review drips with a scorn explicitly based on his *a priori* conception of Homer:

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[15] This is not the only possible formulation of the Homeric question. However, this is the version that is relevant to Penelope, and thus the only one that matters for the purposes of this dissertation. For an overview of the Homeric question's various formulations, see Tsagalis 2020.

[16] For a survey of ancient accounts of Homer, see Graziosi 2002.

[17] Young, 1965. The review is also extraordinarily racist. Young manages to use the n-word twice, pages 69 and 70, and refers to Serbian oral poets as, "poor poets who belong to an inferior culture in a decayed state," page 73. I have chosen this review as an example of bias-as-motive in scholarship in its most explicit form, not for the piece's scholarly merit.

> Parry's theory that Homer's formulas are primarily devices to avoid breakdown by an illiterate improviser is unproved and implausible—indeed, it is an unconscionable libel against one of the supreme men of letters.[18]

Young rejects Parry's theory as "unconscionable libel" because it fails to conform to his idea of what a great artist must be, as summed up in "the supreme men of letters": male and literate. His Homer is also a highly philological, in the sense of text-based, poet. In fact, Young seems to have imagined a man rather like himself and has become emotionally invested in this sexist and elitist vision.

Another version of the essentialist fallacy more recently reappeared in Mary Beard's "Why Homer Was (Not) a Woman: The Reception of *The Authoress of the Odyssey*".[19] Let us take Beard's work as a case study on the perils of trying to summon the long lost Homer. First published in 1897, Samuel Butler's *The Authoress of the Odyssey* famously argued that the *Odyssey*'s preoccupation with women and their lives proves that the author must have been female.[20] Beard's chapter, "Why Homer Was (Not) a Woman", covers the reception of that book.[21] In her critique,

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[18] Young 1965, pg. 75.

[19] Beard 2007.

[20] Butler 1897. Butler was not the first to make this claim. For ancient speculations on Homer's gender, see Morales 2020.

[21] Also in this chapter Beard tendentiously refers to M.I. Finley's 1968 piece, "Et Tu, Teddy White," in the *New York Review* as a review of Butler ("Why bother to reprint [it]? Why [did it seem] worth such a prominent review?"). In fact, Butler is not mentioned at all after the first two

Beard calls Butler's argument gender essentialist—it relies on broad generalizations about women writ large—and she is quite right.[22] However, Beard then concludes Homer is male. This does not follow: a bad argument is not proof against its conclusion. It is quite possible to make bad arguments for true things, e.g. 'The moon must be made of rock, not cheese, because otherwise aliens would have eaten it all on crackers.' My argument is ridiculous, yet the moon is made of rock nonetheless.

Beard has failed to notice the irony of her position: *any* conjecture about that author's gender must be essentialist, including her own, because there is no direct evidence for Homer's gender whatsoever. Beard does not attempt to argue her position, just continually loops back to the fact that most scholars agree that Homer is male. Again, this is true, but there is no direct evidence, regardless of what most scholars choose to believe.

Some such scholars have appealed to the male poets who appear in the *Odyssey*, Phemius and Demodocus, as reflections of the author, but this is not conclusive evidence, either, since we cannot know to what extent these characters act as mirrors to their author. For example, the 2012 novel *The Fault in our Stars* features a novelist-character who is an alcoholic, misanthropic recluse. Nevertheless, I do not believe we should assume as much about the author of the novel himself, although he did once say, "... I, John Green, am accidentally a character [in it]. Sort of."[23] Though Green has confirmed that his character is a reflection of himself, that character is still not

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paragraphs. The piece is primarily concerned with Theodore H. White's *Caesar at the Rubicon*, as the title suggests.

[22] For another feminist critique of Butler's argument, see Clayton 2004, Chapter 1.

[23] Green, quoted in Ellis 2018.

a 1:1 copy—as the phrase "sort of" indicates. We would need to study both figures side-by-side to determine similarities and differences. Thus, in cases where the author is not known, as with Homer, we cannot determine to what extent characters represent their author, and to what extent they are fictionalized.

Mary Beard begs the question when she asserts that Homer must be male. But why could a woman *not* be the poet of the *Odyssey*, given that we know women poets did exist, e.g. Sappho? It is simply not possible to make any arguments from the text alone without relying on broad assumptions about women and their poetic capacity. So Beard's stance on gender is just as rigid and outdated as Butler's.

Finally, if we read the *Authoress* satirically, as Beard states there is reason to do,[24] it is possible to see that Samuel Butler's arguments are not much more tenuous than plenty of "real" scholarship on the Homeric question. See, for instance, Martin West's confident assertion that "Q" was not the author of the *Iliad* but had at some point been to Delos.[25] However, since Homer is gone forever, no speculation about their[26] identity can be ruled out. The question is and always will be unanswered and unanswerable. Butler's *Authoress* demonstrates that fact, because it makes a claim that is sure to be unpopular (because it will defy many scholars' ideas about what a great poet should be, as we saw in Young's work), but which cannot ever be proven false. Butler is challenging others to duel his strawman. In fact, he goads them:

[24] Beard 2007, pg. 323.

[25] West 2014, pg. 1.

[26] I use gender non-specific pronouns for Homer.

> No reply appeared to either of my letters… it is idle to suppose that the leading Iliadic and Odyssean scholars in England and the continent do not know what I have said… It is equally idle to suppose that not one of them should have brought forward a serious argument against me, if there were any such argument to bring. Had they brought one it must have reached me, and I should have welcomed it with great pleasure;[27]

Mary Beard fell for the trap.

This is the futility of the Homeric question: no answer is decisively right, but plenty are—if not wrong—bad. Even the Analysts' original idea, that mistakes must have arisen from interpollations, seems to depend on false assumptions. After all, why should we assume that any poets after the first were bumbling fools? Why should we assume the first was infallible—what human being ever has been? Certainly there may be inconsistencies or problems in the Homeric canon, but we have no reason to believe that these are attributable to later add-ons. Therefore, rather than appealing to evidence for Homer that does not exist or attempting to divine it from the text like a ouija board, I have chosen to follow Heitman's model and assume that any later additions to an original *Odyssey*, if they exist, are "competently plotted".[28] Whether the author is a singular individual or multiple, and no matter their gender(s), I take the *Odyssey* as a coherent whole.

Homer's identity is not particularly relevant to my purpose, which is to understand Penelope. Kirchhoff's position, that Penelope acts irrationally because lines x.y-z do not belong, does not answer my question. Nor does Grethlein's, that Homer has Penelope make uncharacteristic decisions for the plot to work. Nor even does Butler's, that Penelope flirts with the suitors because the poet is an unmarried and flirtatious woman. All that matters to my argument is the text as it exists now, and what interpretations it allows; I leave the practice of literary séance to others.

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[27] Butler 1897, pg. ix-x.

[28] Heitman 2005, pg. 9.

Setting aside the dead and absent author(s) then, the question becomes, 'Can we explain everything Penelope says and does *in text*?'[29]

Theoretical Background

I argue that in order to understand Penelope's behavior, we must remember that she is a woman within the logic of the text as it surivives. As a female character, she acts under constraints that do not apply to Odysseus or Telemachus. Her situation is all the more precarious as she lives in a highly patriarchal and violent society, and in a home with no husband or father to protect her. Her interactions with the suitors must be quite different from Telemachus', because Telemachus has the social luxury of open defiance.[30] It is unfair to expect Penelope to behave as he does.

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[29] Engaging with this question at all requires a fair bit of mind-reading, and I will not debate the validity of that practice here, which is a natural human impulse to assign meaning to observed behavior. In the rest of this dissertation, I will provide a theory for understanding Penelope's thoughts and actions in order to demonstrate that there is at least one solution to the problem of her motivation, but I will not go so far as to say that all readers must or should accept my theory as unambiguously, uniquely correct. For more on the mind-reading problem as it relates to Penelope, see Currie 2022.

It also seems appropriate to state here that I use W.B. Stanford's edition of the text. Any departures from Stanford's work will be noted.

[30] The suitors will, of course, plot to murder him, but Telemachus does not seem to anticipate this response, and the suitors are represented as behaving abominably in this respect. So, while

In the world of the *Odyssey*, Penelope is not just a disembodied voice. She is physically vulnerable, and must navigate constant bodily threats, implicit though they may be. Sexual and gendered violence is a common theme in recent fictional reception of antiquity, including Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*, Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*, and Madeleine Miller's *Circe*. Nor do Atwood, Barker, and Miller take unnecessary liberties: Greek myth is full of rape, enslavement (with its implicit sexual and reproductive exploitation),[31] and forced marriage, so their characters have to navigate these dangers carefully. The women in these novels shape their behavior around their fears. We might expect Homer's Penelope to do the same.

And yet, classical scholarship has not kept up with fiction. In Emily Wilson's introduction to her 2018 translation of the *Odyssey*, she writes,

> There are certain particularly ambiguous moments in the depiction of Penelope that underline this narrative tension. For instance, in book 18, Penelope suddenly decides to show herself before the suitors, although she has previously shunned them… one may argue that Penelope… simply feels the impulse to gain greater attention from the suitors for herself—a possibility that has been neglected by most critics *only* because it is assumed, with obvious sexism, that a "good" woman would not behave in such a way.[32]

Telemachus is not safe, that is only because the suitors are not behaving in socially sanctioned ways, as Telemachus expects. His defiance is plausible given reasonable expectations of behavior in the world of the *Odyssey*.

[31] Franco 2012 points out that in Homer, "Slave mothers conceive with their masters only" (pg. 56).

[32] Wilson 2018, pg. 47-8. Emphasis mine.

Wilson argues that Penelope's behavior could be interpreted in one of several ways because the text itself does not choose for us, and she lists several possible motives for Penelope's excursion. The final possible interpretation Wilson offers: Maybe Penelope just likes male attention, which would not necessarily invalidate her loyalty to Odysseus. Here, Wilson seems to be correcting for an absurdly stringent idea of wifely faithfulness that runs rampant in the Homer criticism to which she obliquely refers. To return to our quotation from Heubeck:

> [...] vestiges remain of an earlier version in which she was Odysseus' accomplice in exacting vengeance on the suitors (*the more obvious conception if her loyalty were above suspicion*).[33]

Huebeck is reading Penelope with a level of mistrust that is not directed equally towards her philandering husband. Indeed, the contrasting expectations of fidelity for Odysseus and Penelope typify philosopher Kate Manne's "asymmetrical moral support relations" among men and women—Penelope is believed to owe her spouse a different standard of fidelity than he owes her.[34]

But I argue that there are non-sexist reasons to rule out this interpretation of the text. I believe that Penelope would not enjoy being ogled—ogled in her own home, by a horde (I am tempted to say, a fraternity) of murderous young men, whom Wilson herself calls, "boorish, selfish, immature," and "unpleasant to be around".[35] I myself would not choose to be catcalled for the pleasure of it. I would enjoy the attention of the catcallers all the less if they had recently plotted to murder my child, as the suitors have already done by book 18. It should come as no surprise then that Penelope's attitude toward the suitors is consistently hostile. As R.B. Rutherford states,

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[33] Heubeck, in Heubeck et al. 1990, pg. 51. Emphasis mine.

[34] Manne 2018, pg. xiii.

[35] Wilson 2018, pg. 28.

"In no passage in which she addresses the suitors or speaks of them when they are absent does Penelope ever fail to use language that expresses hatred and contempt."[36] Wilson's suggestion, though perhaps motivated by a desire to free Penelope from previous sexist readings, reads like a well-meaning but misdirected extension of Third-Wave Feminist sex positivity: maybe Penelope simply enjoys this particular expression of her sexuality, and we the audience ought not to condemn her for it.

The idea that Penelope enjoys the suitors' attention is discordant with the reality of the suitors' and Penelope's dynamic for the same reasons that the uncritical adoption of sex positivity has come under scrutiny of late.[37] Though sex positivity attempts to promote an anti-prudish and destigmatized sexuality for people of all genders, this ideal is often unachievable outside lab-perfect conditions. As Amia Srinivasan writes, some young people who have grown up with the doctrine report that in pursuit of a liberated sex life, they have instead found, "a life… where a discourse of empowerment and body confidence masked a deeper sense of disappointment and shame."[38] Sex happens in a context—if that context is exploitative, unsafe, or unpleasant, sex may be exploitative, unsafe, and unpleasant as well. Thus, as one young woman put it, speaking to Buzzfeed News, "It feels like we were tricked into exploiting ourselves [and] tricked into thinking it was our idea".[39] Women in Homeric society certainly could not enjoy their sexualities without

[36] Rutherford 1992, pg. 37.

[37] Srinivasan 2021, especially "Talking to My Students About Porn," pgs. 33-71; Holden 2021; Goldberg 2021.

[38] Srinivasan 2021, pg. 50.

[39] Holden 2021, n.p.

judgment; to the contrary, Victoria Pedrick has shown that when noble women in Greco-Roman literature do deviate from their restrictive social roles at the advice of a female confidant, they invariably do so to their ruin.[40] But even if sex positivity had been available to Penelope, whether she would be able to enjoy the suitors' attention is dependent on her social context. Does she feel safe, respected, and happy in the suitors' presence? No, she does not.

Thus, many scholars have failed to consider the threatening sexual dynamic in Homeric society when crafting their analyses. We might postulate that the lack of attention to sexual violence in scholarship is an oversight in a historically male-dominated field.[41] However, Wilson and others have attempted to read Penelope in a more feminist way, yet these analyses still fail to account for the reality of violence. Even feminist scholarship that centers on Penelope, such as that by Marilyn Katz, Nancy Felson, Sheila Murnaghan, and Barbara Clayton, has also been silent on the threat of sexual violence she faces—though Felson does, curiously, acknowledge the danger Odysseus poses to Nausikaä.[42] I have thus far encountered very little scholarship that references the threat the suitors pose to Penelope, though Donald Lateiner gives the subject a throwaway line:

> [The suitors] have boxed in the lord's spouse, Penelope (planted spies, activity policing, house invasion, and occupation; 2.109, 198-99, 237, 247; and threats of virtual rape or 'bride capture').[43]

[40] Pedrick 1994, pg. 97-116.

[41] For more on the gendered history of Homer studies, see Bertolín, 2008.

[42] Felson 1994, pg. 46-47.

[43] Lateiner 1993, pg. 177.

I argue that Lateiner is right, and to correct for the absence of this consideration in scholarship, I shall occasionally make use of the fiction writers cited above, Atwood especially, as examples of careful reading of ancient material. I shall not reference anything that does not have an observable basis in ancient sources, and shall demonstrate that basis when necessary.[44]

I shall also turn to feminist theory of the Second Wave with an emphasis on violence and fear in order to contextualize Penelope's behavior in the *Odyssey*. In particular, the theories of rape culture and sexual terrorism provide useful frameworks for understanding sexual or gendered violence and its effect on the human psyche. Rape culture, first discussed by Dianne Herman, is the now-famous idea that a given society may put the onus onto women for preventing their own rapes, and the unspoken assumption is that rape is a product of women's negligence in this regard, not men's violence.[45] Simultaneously, violence against women may be perceived as an offense against men, i.e. female victims' fathers and husbands may be seen as the wronged party.[46]

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[44] Atwood's introduction explains her use of ancient material, and she does not restrict herself to Epic: "…Homer's *Odyssey* is not the only version of the story. Mythic material was originally oral, and also local—a myth would be told one way in one place and quite differently in another. I have drawn on material other than *The Odyssey*, especially for details of Penelope's parentage, her early life and marriage, and the scandalous rumours circulating about her. (2005, pg. xiv).

[45] First seen in Herman, 1989. I speak of men and women here to describe broad patterns rather than hard and fast rules. There may of course be nuances or exceptions in real world cases.

[46] Herman 1989. This line of reasoning cares not at all about the experience of the woman in question. See also Cole 1984, pg. 101-2.

Consider the following passage by Lysias, where Euphiletus frames seduction of a married woman as a worse crime than rape, because the effect on her husband is greater:

> οὕτως, ὦ ἄνδρες, τοὺς βιαζομένους ἐλάττονος ζημίας ἀξίους ἡγήσατο εἶναι ἢ τοὺς πείθοντας: τῶν μὲν γὰρ θάνατον κατέγνω, τοῖς δὲ διπλῆν ἐποίησε τὴν βλάβην, ἡγούμενος τοὺς μὲν διαπραττομένους βίᾳ ὑπὸ τῶν βιασθέντων μισεῖσθαι, τοὺς δὲ πείσαντας οὕτως αὐτῶν τὰς ψυχὰς διαφθείρειν, ὥστ᾽οἰκειοτέρας αὑτοῖς ποιεῖν τὰς ἀλλοτρίας γυναῖκας ἢ τοῖς ἀνδράσι, καὶ πᾶσαν ἐπ᾽ ἐκείνοις τὴν οἰκίαν γεγονέναι, καὶ τοὺς παῖδας ἀδήλους εἶναι ὁποτέρων τυγχάνουσιν ὄντες, τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἢ τῶν μοιχῶν.[47]
>
> Therefore, gentlemen, [the lawgiver] considered rapists to be less liable than seducers; for he commanded death for the latter, but he made double damages for the former, thinking while those who do it by force are hated by the raped people, those who persuade thus corrupt their souls, so that other men's wives are more affectionate to themselves than to the husbands, and the entire household becomes theirs, and it is unclear to whom the children belong, the husbands or adulterers.

Never mind the fact that the woman in question would have a very different perspective on the matter. Additionally, sexual terrorism, which was first developed by Carole Sheffield, posits that a sexually threatening environment coerces women into compliant, fearful behavior.[48] Both theories help explain the strain Penelope is under with regard to the suitors, as I will show.

There are limitations to such frameworks. First, the theories of rape culture and sexual terrorism are insufficiently nuanced in terms of gender, race, and class; feminist theory has since moved on in its complexity. As a result, I shall complement my analysis with Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on Intersectionality in mind.[49] Different social groups within the Homeric world must approach the threat of violence in different ways: Penelope's particular tactics are not available to the other women in her household who are of lower social status, i.e. the enslaved women and girls

[47] 1.32-3

[48] Sheffield 1984.

[49] See, e.g. Crenshaw 1991.

who keep the household running. They also are in danger. Indeed, twelve of Penelope's maids will be killed by the end of the poem—and I will return to these women and girls in later chapters.

Another concern is that "rape culture" and "sexual terrorism" are analyses of American culture with reference to particular legal codes from the mid-to-late 20th-century; these theories were intended to describe the dynamic in that particular culture at that time. However, rape culture is not endemic to just American society. The patterns of behavior are widespread, and the conditions thereof can be found in Homer also. Further, there is overlap between the American legal code and Homeric *themis*, insofar as both systems work to enforce patterns of behavior. *Themistes* are customs that are considered to be divine ordinances,[50] and the force of those customs rises to that of law.[51] If the American legal code gives insight into the values of that society, surely observed customs can give similar insight into the values of Homeric society. Therefore, theories based on the law may also apply to societies with similar practices, even if they are not formally codified.

[50] "Gesetz, göttliche Ordnung, heiliger Brauch, Herkommen, Satzung, Recht…" (Autenrieth 1920, pg. 116). C.f. "a body of traditionary rules or precedents… what is established or sanctioned by custom or usage," (Cunliffe 1953, pg. 187).

[51] For *themistes* as a defining trait of human society in the *Odyssey*, see 9.112. The Cyclopes have, "οὔτ᾽ ἀγοραὶ βουληφόροι οὔτε θέμιστες," "neither advice-giving councils nor holy laws," and thus are unlike human beings.

As an example, many states in 20th-century America did not prohibit spousal rape,[52] and as a result wives had no protection against their spouses. We can reconstruct similar attitudes in ancient Greek marriage. Though the evidence dates to a later period, Rosanna Omitowoju has done excellent work on attitudes towards rape, marriage, and law in Classical Athens, in her *Rape and the Politics of Consent in Classical Athens*.[53] Omitowoju writes that consent was not "the central concern of the regulation of sexual behavior," and further, Athenian women did not have access to the legal system without the help of their *kurios*,[54] generally a husband or father, and could not act as witnesses in a lawsuit.[55] Her *kurios* was therefore, in effect, immune to her complaints against him. Similarly, to whom would a Homeric woman appeal for help in the event of spousal rape? Women's autonomy is the *sine qua non*: for as long as the husband has control, there can be no spousal rape. Thus, both American and Homeric societies once gave husbands full rights to their wives' bodies as valuable goods, and those goods were held to depreciate through certain kinds of contact, but not others. There is a shared value we can observe, and so we may draw cross-cultural comparisons. We will see how the impact of violence by a husband, as opposed to by another man, cashes out in the *Odyssey* later.

[52] For a brief history of spousal exception to rape laws in the United States through the turn of the twenty-first century, see Hasday 2000, pg. 1375-82.

[53] Omitowoju 2002.

[54] Omitowoju 2002, pg. 25.

[55] Glazebrook 2021, pg. 10-11.

On the subject of marriage, I shall also make reference to Carole Pateman's sexual contract theory, which critiques the philosophical/political concept of social contract theory.[56] Pateman argues that, in contrast to the standard version of social contract theory, which postulates that contracts are created between two equal individuals, certain contracts such as marriage are subjugating. A marriage contract determines who has rights to a woman as a sexual and procreative asset,[57] her husband or father, and the woman herself is not treated as an equal in the process of negotiation. This idea certainly seems to apply to Homeric practice, as both Athena and Eurymachus urge that Penelope should return to her father's home so that he can arrange her remarriage, implying that she is a property to be negotiated over, and that she lacks the capacity to engage in those negotiations.[58] Thus, Penelope's ability to make decisions as an individual is precarious and contingent upon her temporary lack of a *kurios*.

Unfortunately, parts of Pateman's analysis in *The Sexual Contract* do not hold up to scrutiny. For a start, she makes biological sex the be- and end-all of gender in the final chapter of her book. The result is aggressive transphobia,[59] which blatantly ignores the fact that gender non-conforming and trans people are also oppressed in a misogynistic society.[60] "Biological sex", insofar as it is

[56] Pateman 1988.

[57] For background on marriage as a financial transaction in Athenian Law, see Omitowojo 2002.

[58] 1.274-8, 2.113-4.

[59] For a representative passage, see Pateman 1988, pg. 223.

[60] For a useful criticism of Pateman's work by a trans philosopher, see Thorn 2022, 24:25-30:12.

even a scientifically observable binary,[61] is not the sole determinant of one's social role,[62] and it is the social role of "woman" with which I am concerned. Thus, Pateman's oversimplification of gender is a significant flaw in an otherwise useful theory, and in my analysis, I shall primarily consider women as a social group rather than those assigned female at birth (AFAB), with the acknowledgement that there will be significant but not universal overlap between the two groups in the *Odyssey*. Consider, for instance, how often Athena takes on the appearance and social role of a man during epiphanies.[63] As Pietro Pucci once wrote of her transformation into the figure of a woman, *Odyssey* 13.287-9: "Athèna devient elle-même… Mais, est-elle devenue elle-même? Que signifie elle-même?" "Athena becomes herself… but does she become herself? What does herself mean?"[64] These are complex questions.

Thus, neither the theory of rape culture, nor sexual terrorism, nor the sexual contract was developed with the Homeric world in mind, and none is without its flaws. However, with some tweaking, they collectively illuminate the situation in Ithaca, which Penelope has been doing her best to manage alone for years by the time Odysseus finally returns. They allow us to consider the ways in which her behavior is constrained, and the possible repercussions she may face for defying

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[61] The seminal text here is Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* 1990; for a much shorter but excellent breakdown of the scientific difficulties of biological sex, see Shahvisi 2022.

[62] For one example of how the *Odyssey* complicates the so-called gender binary, see Foley 1978.

[63] See Murnaghan 1995. For the complex relationship between grammatical gender, sex, and the divine in gendered languages, see Corbeill 2015 (though primarily on the Latin language and Roman culture, there are enough parallels to Greek to be instructive).

[64] Pucci 1986, pg. 14.

gender-role expectations. These constraints and fears, I argue, explain the perceived inconsistencies in Penelope's behavior.

Key Scenes

To begin, there are five scenes in particular which demonstrate how these dynamics—sexual terrorism, rape culture, and the sexual contract—play out in Homeric Ithaca. This argument will treat them in thematic groups.

1: What is Penelope's personality, and how does she feel?

a. 1.325f: She defers in conflict
b. 21.331f: She does not like or respect the suitors

2: What threat do the suitors pose?

c. 21.249f: They want her because of her status
d. 4.787f: They have her surrounded in her own home

3: How does Penelope navigate conflict?

e. 2.85f (19.123f, 24.125): She resorts to manipulation

Penelope Defers

In 1.325f, an appropriately early moment for a programmatic episode, the poet establishes that Penelope is at an extreme social disadvantage in her own home. When Penelope and Telemachus conflict over a song about soldiers returning from the Trojan war, Telemachus ends the interaction by ordering his mother to her room like a child, and she obeys. Discussions of this scene often

focus on what it means for Telemachus' character that he behaves as he does,[65] but it is also crucial to ask what this scene means for Penelope. Telemachus is her son and is repeatedly described as just barely an adult. He has historically posed no threat to her. Nevertheless, in the moment that he asserts his maturity, Penelope obeys his order. As a newly minted adult, Telemachus therefore passes into the group of people with the capacity to control her. Through this scene, then, the text clarifies the rules around conflict between genders in the Homeric world, at least in the upper class, and sets expectations for Penelope's conduct later on: She must defer, even to a young man, even to her own son. As a result of a lifetime of presumably similar experiences, Penelope has internalized a deferential attitude and developed a highly non-confrontational personality. Moreover, the reader should conclude that if Penelope has so little power against Telemachus, her ability to defy the suitors is even less.

Penelope's interactions with the suitors, however, are even further constrained, not just by social roles, but by fear. As Sheffield argued in "Sexual Terrorism," compliance is a natural consequence of living in sustained fear of sexual violence.[66] Moreover, she argues that a state of

[65] Emily Wilson cites this scene as evidence for her characterization of the relationship between Telemachus and Penelope as painful and conflicted (Wilson 2018, pg. 50). Further, this scene seems to be Telemachus' first (botched) attempt to assert himself as a grown man, as I will later show. For Telemachus' "stunted development" early on and its remedy, see Christensen 2020, chapter 2, "Treating Telemachus, Education and Learned Helplessness", (pg. 47-69, 56 especially). Re: the conflict with Penelope in particular: "In a development typical of adolescence, Telemachus rebels against his parent of the opposite sex in the absence of his father," (pg. 62).

[66] Sheffield, "Sexual Terrorism," 1984.

fear is not incidental. A pervasive, threatening environment is maintained via a spectrum of violent behaviors, from rape at one end to catcalls at the other. The observations of abuse counselor Lundy Bancroft support Sheffield's idea. In *Why Does He Do That?*, Bancroft—who spent 15 years counseling perpetrators of domestic abuse—states that abusers often rely on implicitly threatening behavior to control their partners, which earns them a range of advantages within the family.[67] This is true even when these same abusers are known to use battery at other times, because implicit threats are less work-intensive, harder for outsiders to identify, yet still effective. Any particular behavior does not have to be overtly violent to reinforce the victim's awareness of their own physical and social vulnerability. Implicit threats engender compliance through fear just as overt violence does. And in fact, Penelope is extremely vulnerable to the suitors, since they number over a hundred, often throw things, and spend every day in her house drinking. Their presence is a threat which pervades the environment of her home. So, scene 1.325f lends important context to Penelope's social behavior: she cannot directly oppose grown men.

She Does Not Like the Suitors

The key word here is 'oppose.' Several scholars' have claimed that Penelope's true feelings towards the suitors are unclear; however, she is openly contemptuous of them whenever she speaks of them, both in private and in their presence.[68] As she says pointedly to Eurymachus (21.331-3a):

> "Εὐρύμαχ', οὔ πως ἔστιν ἐϋκλεΐας κατὰ δῆμον
> ἔμμεναι οἳ δὴ οἶκον ἀτιμάζοντες ἔδουσιν

[67] Bancroft 2003, especially chapter 6, "The Abusive Man in Everyday Life."

[68] Rutherford 1992, pg. 37.

ἀνδρὸς ἀριστῆος·”

“Eurymachus, no one can at all have a good reputation
throughout his deme who disgraces and consumes
the home of a noble man.”

Penelope can criticize the suitors’ behavior in their presence because strong criticism is permitted, at least among elites, in Homeric society,[69] and during the contest of the bow, the suitors are at their most hopeful, and therefore least likely to lash out. And Penelope complains about them repeatedly, even wishing Antinoos dead—although she leaves the death wishes for when he is out of his earshot.[70] What she cannot do is defy them, i.e. refuse to marry one of them. She cannot get in their way, just as she could not tell Phemius to sing another song once Telemachus had told him to continue. It is marriage that the suitors are after, not her good opinion.

[69] Hohendahl-Zoetelief 1980, chapter two: “Verbal Abuse.”

[70] 17.492-5:

τοῦ δ᾽ ὡς οὖν ἤκουσε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια
βλημένου ἐν μεγάρῳ, μετ᾽ ἄρα δμῳῇσιν ἔειπεν:
“αἴθ᾽ οὕτως αὐτόν σε βάλοι κλυτότοξος Ἀπόλλων.”

And when when observant Penelope heard about him
Being hit in the hall, she said among her enslaved women,
“I wish Apollo of the famous bow would shoot you in the same way!”

The Suitors Want Her Social Status

Why, then, do the suitors want to marry Penelope? In an honor society, men's honor is vulnerable through 'their' women, such as wives and daughters, and William Thalmann has already shown that Homeric society fits that description. Consequently, Odysseus' honor is vulnerable through Penelope.[71] By marrying her, the suitors hope to symbolically overtake Odysseus in Ithacan society[72]—and perhaps take possession of some amount of his property, though the precise amount is never made clear in the text.

This competition becomes explicit during the contest of the bow. The suitor Eurymachus expresses anxiety about the comparison between himself and Odysseus when he and the other suitors are unable to string Odysseus' bow (21.249-255):

"ὦ πόποι, ἦ μοι ἄχος περί τ᾽ αὐτοῦ καὶ περὶ πάντων·
οὔ τι γάμου τοσσοῦτον ὀδύρομαι, ἀχνύμενός περ--
εἰσὶ καὶ ἄλλαι πολλαὶ Ἀχαιΐδες, αἱ μὲν ἐν αὐτῇ
ἀμφιάλῳ Ἰθάκῃ, αἱ δ᾽ ἄλλῃσιν πολίεσσιν--
ἀλλ᾽ εἰ δὴ τοσσόνδε βίης ἐπιδευέες εἰμὲν
ἀντιθέου Ὀδυσῆος, ὅ τ᾽ οὐ δυνάμεσθα τανύσσαι
τόξον· ἐλεγχείη δὲ καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι."

"Oh good god, I'm in pain for myself and all of you:
I'm not as much bothered about the marriage, although it's upsetting;
There are many other Achaean women, some here in
Sea-surrounded Ithaca itself and some in other cities;
But if in fact we fall so short of the strength of
Godlike Odysseus that we can't string
The bow; and this is a disgrace for future men to hear about."

[71] Thalmann 1998, chapter three: "Household, Honor, and the Violence of Competition."

[72] Thalmann 1998, chapter four: "The Contest at the Hearth: Family Values with a Vengeance."

Eurymachus had apparently failed to perceive, until this moment, the embarrassment he would experience if he failed at a task Odysseus was famous for completing. Whether or not Odysseus is there in the flesh, they are all still competing against his memory—which is fitting, given that the prize is Odysseus' wife. Eurymachus' dim little lightbulb moment gives insight into his motives. Marquardt argues that "the suitors, whatever their precise motives, are as much interested in Penelope's position at Ithaca as in herself," but Eurymachus' despair seems to support taking her argument a step further: The suitors have far more interest in her position than in her person.[73]

This scene explains why Penelope is permitted to openly dislike the suitors, yet she cannot send them away. If Penelope the human being is not what Eurymachus really wants, as he says, then it matters less whether she likes him than it does whether she is willing to remarry. Consequently, we must infer that this is the most important subject on which Penelope cannot safely oppose the suitors. She cannot outright refuse them the status that marriage to her would confer.

The status-driven masculine ideal depicted here is dangerous. Herman, in her foundational essay "The Rape Culture," argues that a rape culture is one which, in part, defines masculinity by dominance and competitiveness, and rape by the devaluation of property rather than a violent assault against a person.[74] I argue that these are criteria which apply both to the 20th century America Herman described and to Homeric society—the former is exemplified in Eurymachus' speech. Thus, while it would be impolite for Penelope to oppose Telemachus, conflict with the suitors is actually dangerous. There are over a hundred of them. They are frequently drunk, and

[73] Marquardt 1985, pg. 36.

[74] Herman 1989.

rude, and occasionally plot murder. Men whose status has been threatened can be volatile,[75] and Penelope is under incredible pressure not to provoke the suitors, because their very presence implies the threat of gendered violence in a way that Telemachus' does not. This is an unspoken threat, an undercurrent, but it is real.

Reading Eurymachus' outburst through the framework of a rape culture also clarifies the possible repercussions for Penelope if she disappoints these men. It is the memory of Odysseus against which the suitors compete, and they hope to overtake him via marriage to Penelope as Thalmann has shown,[76] but if such a pathway is found to be impassable, there is an alternative, according to Dianne Herman:

> Society's view of rape was purely a matter of economics—of assets and liabilities. When a married woman was raped, her husband was wronged, not her. If she was unmarried, her father suffered since his investment depreciated. It was the monetary value of a woman which determined the gravity of the crime. Because she had no personal rights under the law, her own emotions simply didn't matter. Because rape meant that precious merchandise was irreparably damaged, the severity of the punishment was dependent on whether the victim was a virgin. In some virgin rapes, biblical law ordered that the rapist marry the victim, since she was now devalued property. The social status of the victim was also important, as a woman of higher social status was more valuable.[77]

[75] Consider, for instance, the phenomenon of family annihilation, covered in Ronson 2018; Manne 2018, pgs 121-6.

[76] Thalmann 1998, Chapter three: "Household, Honor, and the Violence of Competition."

[77] Herman 1989, pg. 22. For historical data on the penalties for the rapes of free vs enslaved women in ancient Gortyn, see Cole 1984, pg. 108-9. As Herman contends, the penalty for the rape of a free woman were higher than for that of an enslaved woman.

Herman is speaking in legal terms here. A woman's feelings about her own rape can matter in a rape culture—punitive rape is a known phenomenon—but her feelings are not what makes rape a crime. It is a crime because of the damage it confers to a man's "goods", as we saw already in the issue of spousal rape.[78] And in this case, Odysseus is the owner. Thus, if the suitors cannot surpass Odysseus by taking possession of Penelope, they can get revenge against him (and her) by devaluing her through rape.

Complicating this picture further is the fact that concepts and vocabulary reinforce one another: in American English today, "rape" is a penetrative sexual assault against the victim's will, without their consent, or without their knowledge; this stands in contrast to the idea of illegal sex Herman describes above. Our current usage of this word creates the concept of a particular class of violence. However, languages with different vocabularies will understand the boundaries of related abstract concepts quite differently. The boundaries between "rape", "adultery", "illegal sex", and so on, will vary.[79] For the sake of clarity, when I speak of rape, I use the term in the

[78] It is for this same reason that the possible rape of the enslaved women of the household would be considered a far less serious crime—if such women could be raped at all, according to the dominant ideology (Srinivasan 2021, pg. 11-18). Though these women would of course be just as emotionally affected by rape, they are of a lesser value to their enslaver than his wife, and so the crime against him would be less serious. I will return to this point in the section on 20.1-30.

[79] As Rosanna Omitowoju says of the Greek language in the Classical Period:

"In Greek there is no single word for rape. Interestingly it seems that the vocabulary of sex and the vocabulary of aggression and offence are separate and need to be contextualised to implicate each other, most noticeably in legal, formal and euphemistic language: in the obscene

sense of "unwelcome sexual contact", regardless of what it would have been called (*hubris*, *bia*, *moicheia*) by a speaker of ancient Greek.

If the suitors did rape Penelope, then in so doing they would diminish Odysseus' place in Ithacan society, and comparatively improve their own. Their act of violence would not tarnish them as it would her because, as Thalmann writes of Homeric society:

> The honor that is won or lost is that of the family, and in particular a woman who loses her honor dishonors both her husband and her children, for honor or disgrace is inherited within the family. For a man, on the other hand, sexual chastity is not highly prized. Seducing another man's wife both increases his honor, as a display of manliness in the form of sexual potency, and dishonors the other man.[80]

The suitors would not experience dishonor themselves for having sex with another man's wife, and though they would be at risk for retributive violence if Odysseus were ever to return, they do not seem to see this as a possibility.[81]

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language of comedy there is a greater degree of coincidence between the sexual and the aggressive, but even there, non-obscene comic language does not necessarily unite the two. Yet the level of contextualisation required to connect the two need not be profound. For instance *bia*, force, and the related verbs *biazo* and *biao*, to force, on their own have no particularly sexual flavor; merely to say, however that the object of *bia* is women, or women and children (or boys), changes the connotation of the term significantly—it generally means rape." (Omitowoju 2002, pg. 18; cf. Cole 1984.)

[80] Thalmann 1998, pg. 118.

[81] See Eurymachus' outburst at 2.177-84a:

Thus, for as long as the suitors believe there is the possibility they might come to marry Penelope themselves, they have reason not to devalue her through sexual violence, but the situation is entirely reversed should they lose hope. At that point, it is in the suitors' best interests to attack and depreciate the value of Odysseus' asset. The above is not to argue, however, that all sexual violence is rational or motivated by status. It is assuredly not, and attempts to rationalize individual

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Τὸν δ᾽ αὖτ᾽ Εὐρύμαχος Πολύβου πάϊς ἀντίον ηὔδα·
"ὦ γέρον, εἰ δ᾽ ἄγε νῦν μαντεύεο σοῖσι τέκεσσιν
οἴκαδ᾽ ἰών, μή πού τι κακὸν πάσχωσιν ὀπίσσω·
ταῦτα δ᾽ ἐγὼ σέο πολλὸν ἀμείνων μαντεύεσθαι.
ὄρνιθες δέ τε πολλοὶ ὑπ᾽ αὐγὰς ἠελίοιο
φοιτῶσ᾽, οὐδέ τε πάντες ἐναίσιμοι· αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
ὤλετο τῆλ᾽, ὡς καὶ σὺ καταφθίσθαι σὺν ἐκείνῳ
ὤφελες!"

And Eurymachus son of Polybus spoke in response:
"Old man, come on. Go home and prophesy to
Your own kids, so they don't do anything terrible to you next:
I'm far better than you to prophesy about these things.
And lots of birds pass under the light of the sun,
And they aren't all significant; and Odysseus died
Far away, like I wish you did too
Along with him!"

instances of assault are misguided, as such attempts often lead to the refrain, "he wouldn't do that!" with reference to something *he* most certainly *did do.* Nevertheless, in this particular narrative, there are economic and social incentives at stake that must not be ignored. And Penelope is only safe for as long as she can sustain the pretense that she might be willing to remarry at some point in the distant future, but without transgressing her current marriage and damaging her "value" as a wife. Her trick with the burial shroud is an attempt to present the illusion that no time is passing and keep the suitors perpetually in their holding pattern.[82] She may be well aware of the years slipping by, but she must hope that the suitors are not.

A Note on "Women"

As we see in the case of Penelope, gendered vulnerability requires the constant calculation of physical risk. However, Penelope's noble status does afford her more protection than, for instance,

[82] C.f. Clayton 2004, pg. 43-44, who reaches a similar point through a very different line of argumentation: "Consider the effect of what Cavarero [1995] calls Penelope's "non-time" on the situation of the suitors: they remain in a virtual state of temporal suspension. Unable to marry Penelope, unwilling to marry anyone else, they persist as unmarried 'youths,' effectively halting the time and change of biological and sociological progression (masculine constructs), as long as Penelope continues to weave and unweave. The temporal limbo corresponds to Penelope's weaving-time as seen from a phallocentric perspective. However, when viewed from a feminine perspective, i.e., when judged from within and on its own terms, Penelope's non-time becomes the equivalent of memory."

an enslaved woman, fragile though her high-status protection may be. Penelope is elite; she is rich and noble. We might compare Andrea Dworkin's description of the American white middle class:

> As white, middle-class women, we lived in the house of the oppressor-of-us-all who supported us as he abused us, dressed us as he exploited us, "treasured" us in payment for the many functions we performed. We were the best-fed, best-kept, best-dressed, most willing concubines the world had ever known. We had no dignity and no real freedom, but we did have good health and long lives.[83]

The creature comforts of privileged women depend on the labor of others, and so too do Penelope's. And in the Homeric world, that labor is provided by enslaved people.

"Women" cannot be understood as a coherent category in Homeric society without accounting for class and race,[84] because different identities experience violence differently and must approach the issue with corresponding mitigation strategies, as work in intersectionality studies by Kimberlé Crenshaw indicates.[85] Crenshaw based her work on her experiences visiting battered women's shelters in minority neighborhoods in L.A., where she saw first-hand that many marginalized women were unable to access services or invoke their rights due to their race, primary language, or immigration status.[86] Though non-elite women of Homeric society encounter

[83] Dworkin 2019, pg. 51.

[84] For herders as an othered racial group in the *Odyssey*, see Murray 2021. Penelope is in a privileged position by virtue of not only her free status but also her membership in the heroic race that the Homeric epics exalt.

[85] See, for instance, Crenshaw 1991. For more on racecraft in the *Odyssey*, see Murray, 2021.

[86] Crenshaw 1991, pg. 1245.

different barriers to safety than women of color in modern L.A., they still must navigate risks differently than their free, elite counterparts.

Although the *Iliad* often glosses over the truth of Briseis' position, for instance, she is not Achilles' wife.[87] She, like other enslaved women, has no control over who has sexual access to her body.[88] Thus, her focus must be on negotiating the terms of that access. The *Iliad* almost never allows Briseis to speak, yet in the only speech the text does allow her, she expresses great sorrow over her enslavement. Even as she mourns over Patroclus' body, she says (19.285-300):[89]

"οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδέ μ᾽ ἔασκες, ὅτ᾽ ἄνδρ᾽ ἐμὸν ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεὺς
ἔκτεινεν, πέρσεν δὲ πόλιν θείοιο Μύνητος,
κλαίειν, ἀλλά μ᾽ ἔφασκες Ἀχιλλῆος θείοιο
κουριδίην ἄλοχον θήσειν ἄξειν τ᾽ ἐνὶ νηυσὶν
ἐς Φθίην, δαίσειν δὲ γάμον μετὰ Μυρμιδόνεσσι.
τώ σ᾽ ἄμοτον κλαίω τεθνηότα, μείλιχον αἰεί."

"And no, when swift Achilles killed
my husband and sacked the city of godlike Mynes,
you wouldn't let me cry, but you'd say you'd make me

[87] Wright 2016, "The Wife of Achilles", somehow manages to turn this fact into a tragedy for Achilles rather than Briseis, although Achilles is presumably able to get married any time he so chooses, and it is Patroclus who has pushed Achilles to consider marrying Briseis (19.295-9).

[88] Though there were references to female slaves and sexual laborers using their feminine wiles to outsmart men in Athenian legal rhetoric, these speeches are exclusively written and delivered by men, so such characters could well be warped by male anxieties. Moreover, there are no such characters anywhere in Homer. For more on the characterization of sex laborers in attic oratory, see Glazebrook 2021.

[89] Martin West, ed.

> the legal wife of godlike Achilles, and would lead me on ships
> to Phthia and would celebrate my marriage among the Myrmidons.
> Thus I weep endlessly for you, now dead; you were always kind."

Briseis' lament does not necessarily indicate that she has any genuine affection for Achilles (who did, in fact, kill her husband, destroy her city, and enslave her). While we may perhaps infer from Achilles' speech in book 9 that he loves Briseis, we have no sound evidence that she feels the same.[90] And while Achilles may intend, one day, to marry Briseis, here in book 19 her status is not secure. Regardless of whether she has any genuine affection for him—and enslaved persons are often compelled to perform affection for their enslavers[91]—the fact is that Achilles has the ability to do whatever he likes to Briseis either way, and it is better for her to be a wife than enslaved. She may still be viewed as Achilles' sexual asset as his wife, according to sexual contract theory, but her social standing could recover. Briseis mourns Patroclus at least in part because he represented a hope for future security to her—one which is now gone.

Nor am I the first to read Briseis' speech as primarily concerned with marital security. In Pat Barker's aptly titled 2018 novel *The Silence of the Girls*, Barker retells the *Iliad* in the first person from Briseis' point of view. Early on in the story, well before the death of Patroclus, Barker's version of Tecmessa encourages the newly enslaved Briseis to endear herself to Achilles (via reproductive labor) in the hopes of becoming his wife:

> Once or twice, Tecmessa really annoyed me with well-meant but irritating advice on how to make the best of things. I should try to make Achilles love me, she said. "He's not married, you know, he's only got one son, that's nothing for a man in his position. He could've married her, but he didn't." The son was called Pyrrhus, apparently, and Achilles hadn't seen

[90] Some scholars seem not to consider her feelings on the matter at all, e.g. Wright 2016.

[91] Cushing 2021.

> him since he was a baby. The boy was being brought up by his mother's family. "It's not the same," she insisted. "It's not like having a child and watching it grow up." The message was clear: there was a vacancy and I was a fool if I didn't try to fill it.[92]

We can see that Barker's Tecmessa has already made the leap from enslaved woman to Ajax's legal wife. She wants to help her fellow women make that leap too.[93] This is inconsistent with evidence in Sophocles' *Ajax* where Tecmessa is depicted as enslaved—her own statement νῦν δ' εἰμὶ δούλη, "but now I am a slave," is unambiguous[94]—but Barker makes her explicitly freed in the novel. Barker's Tecmessa is a double; she represents a possible future for Briseis, and their conversation foreshadows Briseis' lament later on. Even though Barker's Briseis openly hates Achilles and refuses to assimilate to Greek culture, she still laments after the death of Patroclus.

Penelope Feels Attacked

Thus, in the Homeric world, marriage is a kind of physical and social protection, but Penelope is stuck with Schroedinger's husband. As long as Odysseus might plausibly remain alive, she lives in an uncertain social position. The suitors are consequently stuck in a perpetual holding pattern, on the brink of deciding what to do, and Penelope is determined to keep them in stasis. If her

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[92] Barker 2018, pg. 82.

[93] For further reading on the enslaved women of the *Odyssey* and their exploitation by the suitors, see Murray 2021.

[94] Sophocles *Ajax*, 489a. See also 210, λέχος δουριάλωτον; but conversely she is also called Ajax's widow, χήραν, 658.

husband has died, she may be socially permitted to remarry,[95] but even if he still lives, he is nowhere to be seen. He cannot protect her. Her only tool to fend off the suitors—his enduring reputation—is also a liability, as I have shown.

The text makes clear that Penelope feels endangered in her own home. The lion simile in book four, which is the only time a lion is the victim of an attack in the *Odyssey*,[96] illustrates her state of mind (4.787-93):

> ‘Η δ᾽ ὑπερωίῳ αὖθι περίφρων Πηνελόπεια
> κεῖτ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἄσιτος, ἄπαστος ἐδητύος ἠδὲ ποτῆτος,
> ὀρμαίνουσ᾽ ἤ οἱ θάνατον φύγοι υἱὸς ἀμύμων,
> ἦ ὅ γ᾽ ὑπὸ μνηστῆρσιν ὑπερφιάλοισι δαμείη.
> ὅσσα δὲ μερμήριξε λέων ἀνδρῶν ἐν ὁμίλῳ
> δείσας, ὁππότε μιν δόλιον περὶ κύκλον ἄγωσι,
> τόσσα μιν ὀρμαίνουσαν ἐπήλυθε νήδυμος ὕπνος·
>
> And there upstairs clever Penelope
> Lay without supper, abstaining from food and drink,
> Wondering whether her noble son would escape death,
> Or be overcome by the arrogant suitors.
> And just as a lion thinks in a mob of men,
> Afraid, when they lead him into an ambush,
> So she was worrying when sweet sleep came over her.

This simile portrays Penelope as a lion, a heroic animal, but she feels trapped, ambushed. She is a powerful figure—lions are often compared to warriors in battle—yet she is imperiled because she is outnumbered. Moreover, we are told that she feels this way unambiguously because of the

[95] And to guess incorrectly on this point would be disastrous—cf. Hester Prynne.

[96] Magrath 1982, pg. 206. It is also unusual to see this image used for a woman, Foley 1978; Pache 2016.

suitors' plot against Telemachus, to which she reacts as if it were a threat to her own safety. Nevertheless, she feels unable to stop them, no matter how destructively they behave towards herself and her loved ones. She is surrounded in her own home.

She Manipulates

However, though Penelope cannot oppose the men around her directly, she has clearly learned to protect her interests through other means, as we first learn in 2.85f, Antinoos' speech about the burial shroud trick. Penelope's response to conflict can be summed up by her mother's wedding toast, as imagined by Margaret Atwood:

> Water does not resist. Water flows. When you plunge your hand into it, all you feel is a caress. Water is not a solid wall, it will not stop you. But water always goes where it wants to go, and nothing in the end can stand against it. Water is patient. Dripping water wears away a stone. Remember that, my child. Remember you are half water. If you can't go through an obstacle, go around it. Water does.[97]

According to Atwood's reading, Penelope's lack of resistance is a facade she must maintain, but she never forgets her own goals. Despite the dangerous situation in the palace and her internalized fear of confrontation, she has taken to manipulating the suitors to delay them rather than ever turn them down, which could trigger their anger. If the risk calculation indicates that a 'No' will be unwelcome, sometimes 'Later' is the only option.

[97] Atwood 2005. Pg. 34.

To return to a modern American landscape for the sake of illustration, imagine that you are a woman alone waiting for a bus, and a man approaches you. He is much bigger than you are. You hint a few times that you are not interested, but instead of backing off, he seems annoyed. The way he stands over you is frightening. You are not sure whether he would actually hurt you, but he would not be the first man to grab you in the street. He asks for your number, and there is something accusatory in his expression. You have three options.

1. You could refuse, but he already seems volatile.
2. You could give him a fake number, but you run the risk that he texts you now to check it.
3. You could comply.

So, you smile and give him your real number. He does text you, standing right there, to check if the number is fake. He does not seem bothered by the level of open distrust between the two of you, which would be odd, but you are used to it. You text him back a smiley face to prove that you got his message. He seems to relax and eventually leaves. Later that night after you have gotten home, he sends you something obscene. With some distance, it is safe to be honest, so you text back that you are not interested. He sends back a stream of insults, calls you a tease, says you led him on by giving him the number. You block him.

Antinoos acts similarly when he reports how Penelope tricked the suitors into thinking she did intend to remarry once she had finished weaving Laertes' burial shroud. Much as in the story above, Penelope attempts to buy herself time through deception, and the report of her delay-tactic appears multiple times in the *Odyssey*, at 2.85f, 19.123f, and 24.125f. However, we learn that Penelope could not prevent the fallout indefinitely. In his account, Antinoos essentially calls Penelope a tease while reporting her ruse to Telemachus during an assembly (2.87-92).

'σοὶ δ' οὔ τι μνηστῆρες Ἀχαιῶν αἴτιοί εἰσιν,

ἀλλὰ φίλη μήτηρ, ἥ τοι πέρι κέρδεα οἶδεν.
ἤδη γὰρ τρίτον ἐστὶν ἔτος, τάχα δ᾽ εἶσι τέταρτον,
ἐξ οὗ ἀτέμβει θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν Ἀχαιῶν.
πάντας μέν ῥ᾽ ἔλπει, καὶ ὑπίσχεται ἀνδρὶ ἑκάστῳ
ἀγγελίας προϊεῖσα· νόος δέ οἱ ἄλλα μενοινᾷ.’

“For your information: the Achaean suitors aren’t to blame at all,
but your dear mother, who is excessively clever.
For this is the third year already, and soon it’ll be the fourth,
since she cheated the heart in the chest of the Achaeans.
She encourages everyone and makes promises to each man,
sending messages, but her mind wants other things.”

Antinoos’ anger is right at the surface here, and therefore so is the threat of violence. Since Penelope did not have the ability to safely turn him and the rest of the suitors down, all of her encouragements were coerced.[98] It is quite possible that Penelope gave special messages to each man to keep him pacified; by Penelope’s own admission in her version of this story in book 19, she gave them all some cause to hope, since she did tell them she would remarry once finished. Antinoos tries to hold her accountable for leading them all on, as if she enjoyed this compulsory flirtation. But as we have seen, her safety depends on their hope. Her real feelings are made clear through her actions: She could not refuse, so she delayed, and in doing so, she deferred the risk of sexual violence another day.

Though scholars seem to have ignored the insidious dynamic between Penelope and the suitors, Atwood has the ghost of Antinoos finally acknowledge the danger he posed when the ghost of Penelope confronts him in the underworld:

> ‘We wanted the treasure trove, naturally,’ he said. ‘Not to mention the kingdom.’ This time he had the impudence to laugh outright. ‘What young man wouldn’t want to marry a rich

[98] I will later return to the issue of Penelope’s messages to the suitors.

> and famous widow? Widows are supposed to be consumed with lust, especially if their husbands have been missing or dead for such a long time, as yours was. You weren't exactly a Helen, but we could have dealt with that. The darkness conceals much! All the better that you were twenty years older than us—you'd die first, perhaps with a little help…'[99]

So we can imagine that Penelope had quite a few reasons to distrust the suitors, even if she could not risk saying, as Butler once put it, "Well, Antinous, whoever else I marry, you may make your mind easy that it will not be you."[100]

By placing the first iteration of the burial shroud story in book two, the text demonstrates early on that Penelope is capable of deceiving those around her. Nor will the text let us forget, given that this story appears twice more. We must understand that Penelope is an excellent liar who knows how to protect herself from the suitors with the limited tools available, operating in a society that is hostile to her free expression. This is a corrosive, self-denying way to live, but so far, it has kept her safe.

Summary

Generations of scholars have attempted to find the source of perceived inconsistencies in Penelope's characterization in the *Odyssey*. However, in this dissertation, I argue that before we attempt to determine the origins of the text's faults, we must consider whether there is a satisfactory diegetic explanation for problems. In the case of Penelope, there is.

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[99] Atwood 2005, pg. 79.

[100] Butler 1897, pg. 130.

At the start of the *Odyssey*, Penelope has been holding off the suitors for years, living in a palace where she is the *de facto* head of household. Both her husband and father-in-law are elsewhere, her mother-in-law is dead, and her son has been living in protracted adolescence up to this point. As *basileia*, she represents a powerful position in the community, and that is why the suitors want to marry her: to usurp the absent Odysseus' social status as *basileus*.

Penelope's social status is a liability—it is the reason the suitors harass her in the first place—but it is also a tool. She knows that it is in their best interests not to sexually assault her if they may one day marry her and take her on as an asset, according to the logic of rape culture. However, if they realize she will not remarry, the suitors might decide to assault her and damage her value as Odysseus' asset, thereby improving their own comparative position in the Ithacan hierarchy. It is clear from the suitors' treatment of Telemachus and general comportment that they are not above extreme violence. Thus, she keeps the suitors uncertain as to whether or not she is willing to remarry out of fear. She carefully gives them just enough hope to keep them pacified. However, her consistent delays and her vocal disapproval of the suitors' behavior speak to her true feelings. The suitors disgust her, and she has no intention of following through on marrying one of them if she can avoid it. This is how the apparent contradictions in her behavior arose. She is not inconsistent in her psychology; she is playing a delicate social game on which her safety depends.

I want to stress that this explanation for Penelope's behavior toward the suitors, fear, is compatible with true loyalty to Odysseus. She misses her husband terribly and hates the suitors—and, by protecting herself from them, she is serving her husband's interests. By Homeric standards, Penelope is a faithful and prudent wife who navigates a difficult situation as well as can be done. Joel Christensen has rightly argued that Penelope's loyalty, and its resultant grief at her husband's

absence, serves to further Odysseus' plot: the greater her grief, the more triumphant his return.[101] Nevertheless, her desire to see her husband return is a natural human response to loss, and we ought to take it seriously for its own sake.

The next chapters of this dissertation will therefore center Penelope's emotional state as an individual, rather than reading her primarily as an extension of, or resource for, the men around her. Chapter one will examine the setup for her character in the Telemachy. Chapter two will cover the wanderings, and what happens in the leadup to Odysseus' return. Chapter three will cover Penelope's character in the final books of the *Odyssey*, as well as the other women of the Laertid household.

[101] See Christensen 2020, Chapter 7: "Penelope's Subordinated Agency", pg. 175-202.

CHAPTER ONE: THE SETUP

I have just argued that Penelope's psychology is coherent: that it is possible to reconstruct what she wants once we consider the threat that the suitors pose to her, and her desires remain consistent throughout the narrative. The next section of this dissertation will provide a full timeline of everything Penelope says and does, as well as any extended reports about her by others, in order to demonstrate that all her actions fit within my interpretative framework. In doing so, I will reference other theories on Penelope's behavior as they become relevant and give them due consideration.

It is no surprise that so many have found Penelope to be an enigma. Her circumstances force her to keep other characters uncertain as to her true motivations. The same is true for Odysseus, but in his case, we the audience are allowed into his mind. His extended conversation with Athena in book thirteen will lay out his motives for the second half of the narrative in some detail, but Penelope has no similar opportunities to explain herself. Consequently, Penelope's character is puzzling to us for much of the *Odyssey*, as the various readings of her character demonstrate. The text leaves some questions about the motivation behind her behavior open until the end.

Thus, Penelope keeps us in suspense, and a flurry of monographs from the 1990s consider this to be the essential point of her character.[102] As Felson writes:

> The perspectives on Penelope as object create multiple images of her for the listener; yet only the image of the faithful wife survives into the end…. Other images—the coy tease, the enchantress, the unreliable mother, the adulteress, the hardhearted wife—are ultimately contradicted. Nevertheless, the possible plots these images generate, like FRIGIDITY AND TEASE or DALLIANCE AND ADULTERY, complicate the epic and contribute to its rich texture.[103]

Felson wants these various images to persist for as long as possible; she goes on to argue that by "pin[ning her] down" and "too soon, narrow[ing] Penelope's plot types to a single one", readers "lose out on interpretive pleasures".[104] Marilyn Katz takes this line of thought a step further. She writes that Penelope's unknowability must be her role within the story: she is meant to keep us, the audience guessing, rather than or as well as the suitors.

> My interpretation of Penelope in the *Odyssey* requires that [contradictions] be left unresolved…. I argue that the interpretive issue in the poem is constituted by the disjunction between the two conflicting directions of narrative action, and that this discordance itself should be regarded as meaningful. It operates in my view as the means for thematizing the relation between disguise and truth, and thus calling into question, the reality of reality…[105]

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[102] Felson 1994; Katz 1991; Murhaghan 1994.

[103] Felson 1994, pg. 3. Emphasis original.

[104] Felson 1994, pg. 4, 5, 5.

[105] Katz 1991, pg. 10.

In Katz's point of view, Penelope is indeterminacy personified; she embodies the themes of disguise and uncertainty. Katz does not want Penelope to have only one consistent character.

The general trend seen in Felson and Katz, among others, has set the tone for scholarship on Penelope ever since. Barbara Clayton speaks favorably of Felson's work in her 2004 monograph on Penelope.[106] Michelle Zerba, in her 2009 article, "What Penelope Knew: Doubt and Scepticism in the *Odyssey*," accepts indeterminacy as a necessary premise for her argument,[107] as does Emily Wilson wholeheartedly, writing in the introduction to her 2018 translation of the *Odyssey*, "Penelope's desires and motivations are defined as unknown." [108] And recently, Emily Hauser bases her own argument on this premise in her 2020 article, "Putting an End to the Song: Penelope, Odysseus, and Teleologies of the *Odyssey*".[109]

However, this scholarly trend leaves something to be desired. Felson and Katz's readings reduce Penelope's character to an optical illusion—both a loyal wife to Odysseus and a potential sexual partner for the suitors at the same time. I shall from here on out refer to this view as the Rabbit-Duck reading of Penelope.[110]

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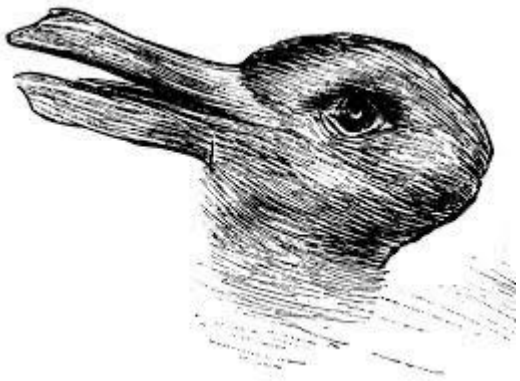
[106] Clayton 2004, pgs. 40-41.

[107] Zerba 2009.

[108] Wilson 2018, pg. 48.

[109] Hauser 2020.

[110] "*Kaninchen und Ente*," in *Fliegende Blätter*, 23 October 1892.



I have chosen this term in reference to an optical illusion of a rabbit/duck which first appeared in *Fliegende Blätter* over a century ago. The image has survived in popular consciousness due to its success as a multistable image, or an ambiguous image with multiple readings.[111] Some readers may see the duck first, or the rabbit first, but the image favors neither reading above the other. Both are correct. Similarly, the Rabbit-Duck theory of Penelope would have us take multiple readings of her character as simultaneously correct.

The Rabbit-Duck reading parallels the perspective of the men who surveil Penelope; for comparison, consider how Antinoos talks about her in book two, attempting to see her as both frigid and inviting at the same time, in order to justify his continued presence at the palace.[112] Unfortunately, this reading cares more about how Penelope appears to others than how she might understand herself—though Felson does make reference to Penelope's "psychological

[111] See Mitchell 1994, pg. 45-57.

[112] 2.87-92.

coherence",[113] her emphasis on the "images" of her character in others' eyes seems to disavow the relevance of her own self-concept.[114] The Rabbit-Duck reading is therefore, to use Martha Nussbaum's phrase, a "denial of subjectivity", or a perspective which "treats the object as something whose experiences and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account."[115] In this reading, Penelope fundamentally is whatever she seems to be to others. The Rabbit-Duck reading is therefore an objectifying approach to making sense of her character.

I prefer to read Penelope as an agent rather than object. I will not attempt to keep alternate readings of Penelope available, but to eliminate potential plot lines as it becomes reasonable to do so. Many of the potential motivations that have been ascribed to Penelope are implausible in the context of a rape culture, for example. By eliminating impossible or implausible interpretations, we may reveal aspects of Penelope's character that have gone unnoticed in these previous approaches. We shall read her as a character who navigates a challenging environment with purpose, rather than as a shimmering mirage.

Let us assume that any plot outcome is possible at the beginning of the *Odyssey*. This is an uncertain assumption; though myth does allow for polymorphic reworkings of familiar stories, there are consistent story beats from version to version. But, for the sake of discussion, let us posit an innocent listener who believes that Homer is willing to take a very free hand with their source material, that the plot could resolve itself in any way. Our listener is anxiously awaiting clues for how the narrative will unfold.

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[113] Felson 1994, pg. 19.

[114] Felson 1994, pg. 3

[115] Nussbaum 1995, pg. 257.

Felson helpfully compiles a list of six "wife-focalized" *nostos* plots that Penelope could follow, along with other characters from Homer (whether fully depicted or merely mentioned) who actually enact each plot.[116] I have sorted each of Felson's six plot types into one of three overarching categories, with respect to the effect they would have on Penelope's preexisting marriage to Odysseus:

Penelope forsakes her marriage fully:	Homeric model (if any):
1. Marriage to suitor[117]	Klytemnestra
2. Seduction by a foreigner[118]	Helen
3. Seduction by a god	Alkmene
Penelope wavers (no consummation):	
4. Dalliance and courtship	Nausicaa
5. Bride of death	Daughters of Pandareus
Penelope remains fully faithful:	
6. Disdain and cunning tricks[119]	

I have chosen to interpret these six in the following ways:

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[116] Felson 1994, ix.

[117] We might alternately term this "Seduction by suitor," depending on whether Penelope or the suitor in question are represented as more responsible—compare, for instance how Zeus condemns Aegisthos at 1.32-43.

[118] Felson speculates that Penelope may feel a strange attraction to the beggar and hope that he will win her hand in the archery contest (pg. 17) although a "conspiracy of silency" [sic] prevents her from from recognizing him prematurely (pg. 15).

[119] Felson 1994, ix. NB: Felson uses different terminology in chapter two, "Weaver," where she notes only four plot types focalized through Penelope. I have chosen to use and adapt the six types mentioned in the preface for the sake of thoroughness.

1. Penelope betrays Odysseus and marries a suitor, like Klytemnestra
2. Penelope betrays Odysseus and sleeps with a foreigner, like Helen
3. Penelope sleeps with or is raped by a god and bears his child, like Alkmene
4. Penelope has a playful flirtation with another man, but never consummates the relationship, like Nausicaa[120]
5. Penelope agrees to marry again, but dies before the wedding can take place, like the daughters of Pandareus
6. Penelope disdains all but her husband and avoids remarriage through her cleverness

If Felson is correct that these six alternatives exhaust the possible ways the situation at Ithaca as presented at the beginning of the *Odyssey* could theoretically resolve, then it is our job to pay attention to which plots Penelope's actions actually suggest during the course of the narrative, rather than give all possibilities equal weight.

In most of the plot types above, where Penelope at least contemplates remarriage, she must either:

A. consider someone other than Odysseus to be a legitimate/desirable prospect for marriage, or
B. believe that she has no other choice than to remarry, because she cannot delay any longer.

In other words, she must either want or need to remarry. Consequently, if the text indicates she neither wants nor needs to do so, most of the plot types but "disdain and cunning tricks" are ruled out (plot 3 is unaffected by this variable, but although it is technically available, it is never raised as a possibility in the text as we have it). Therefore, the most important interpretive criteria are:

[120] In the case of Nausicaa, it is ultimately Odysseus who ends the flirtation, and one does not imagine the suitors doing the same given the opportunity with Penelope. However, this is Felson-Rubin's example, and we shall suspend judgment for now.

whether Penelope shows what we might regard as a sincere interest in any person other than Odysseus; and whether she has the ability to continue holding off the suitors. So, we must now watch Penelope, and winnow options down. Thus, during the timeline of every scene in which Penelope is present or discussed at length, I will consider which plot lines the poet opens, closes, and how they do so.

Because of the structure of the Odyssey, Penelope appears only at the beginning and end of the poem. She does not appear in books 5-15, although others give reports of her activities to Odysseus from time to time. The second hand reports Homer provides are meaningful, but they are not conclusive evidence about Penelope, as other characters in the narrative will have their own various motivations, biases, and blind spots. Consequently, the first four books of the *Odyssey* must establish Penelope's character and set expectations for Odysseus' *nostos*. Any interpretations left open at the end of book four will remain open well beyond the halfway point of the poem.

There are four scenes in the Telemachy in which Penelope appears, and several others in which she is mentioned by other characters who may or may not give us honest and accurate information. What, then, does the poet sing first?

HEARSAY: TELEMACHUS TO ATHENA

The first words our innocent listener will hear about Penelope come from Telemachus. When Athena shows up in disguise as Mentes, Telemachus tells him two things about his mother. First, that he doubts her report of his paternity,[121] and second, that she has not sent the suitors away, "ἡ

[121] Odyssey 1.215-6.

δ᾽ οὔτ᾽ ἀρνεῖται στυγερὸν γάμον οὔτε τελευτὴν / ποιῆσαι δύναται," "and she doesn't refuse hateful marriage nor can she make it stop."[122] So, Telemachus seems on some level to blame his own mother for the suitors' presence in his home. There is one ambiguous detail: though Penelope "does not" refuse, she "cannot", *oute dunatai,* make them leave. Telemachus implies that Penelope

[122] Odyssey 1.249-50. The phrasing of *oute teleutēn poiēsai dunatai* literally means she cannot create an end, thus, "bring matters to a conclusion," (Cunliffe 1953, pg. 376). However, the precise nature of that "conclusion" is debated.

Cunliffe interprets these lines to mean, in context, "get rid of the suitors," (pg. 376). Penelope cannot end the process of courting, i.e. make the suitors stop what they are doing and go home. However, in addition to simply "end," *teleutē* can also be the goal or purpose of a process. Autenrieth selects as typical Il. 9.625-6: "οὐ γάρ μοι δοκέει μύθοιο τελευτὴ / τῇδέ γ᾽ ὁδῷ κρανέεσθαι", where the embassy to Achilles will not accomplish its purpose of recruiting him to rejoin the battle (1958, pg. 266). The purpose of courting is marriage, so the LSJ reads Od. 1.249, to mean *krainein teleutēn gamou* (LSJ 1892, pg. 1614). Thus, LSJ indicates that Telemachus is saying, My mother cannot bring about a marriage.

Contextually, the LSJ's reading does not work. Telemachus says that Penelope cannot, *oute dunatai,* make an end, not that she will not do so. Given that Penelope is perfectly capable of getting remarried, these lines cannot reasonably mean, Penelope cannot end the courtship in marriage. The LSJ's reading relies too much on the model of other instances of *teleutē* and too little on the situation at hand. The Cunliffe reading, that Penelope cannot stop the courting process in its tracks and without the suitors' desired resolution, is therefore preferable. She cannot make them leave *as bachelors*.

may not have full control over the situation. How he knows this is unclear; perhaps she has tried to make the suitors leave, but nothing short of swearing she will never remarry would get them out—which she will not do, for some reason. However, Telemachus does not elaborate here, and from his two statements taken together, our reasonable listener might expect some version of a Klytemnestra figure out of Penelope. The plots "marriage to suitor" and "dalliance and courtship" are now in play.

The disguised Athena does not acknowledge Telemachus' doubt but gives him the correct protocol if Penelope is in fact interested in one of her suitors (1.274-8):

> "μνηστῆρας μὲν ἐπὶ σφέτερα σκίδνασθαι ἄνωχθι,
> μητέρα δ'—εἴ οἱ θυμὸς ἐφορμᾶται γαμέεσθαι, 275
> ἄψ ἴτω ἐς μέγαρον πατρὸς μέγα δυναμένοιο·
> οἱ δὲ γάμον τεύξουσι καὶ ἀρτυνέουσιν ἔεδνα
> πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα ἔοικε φίλης ἐπὶ παιδὸς ἕπεσθαι."
>
> "First, order the suitors to disperse to their own homes,
> Then your mother, if her heart yearns to be married,
> Go back to her mighty father's great palace;
> And they will arrange the marriage and prepare
> A large dowry, as much as is right to follow a dear child."

Athena presents this as the standard procedure for marriages: the father makes the preparations and provides the dowry.[123] So, if Penelope does want to remarry, there is a set course of action for

[123] For background on the dowry/bride-price controversy, see Perysinakis 1991, Franco 2012, pg. 54-55. However, I shall not wade into that debate. The question as to whether it would have been the standard procedure for a father to provide a dowry, for a husband to offer a bride price, or for a mutual exchange of gifts is not relevant to my argument. What matters here is that a procedure

her to take. Thus, the poet has established what behavior we ought to expect from Penelope if the narrative follows "marriage to suitor" (motivated by love/seduction).

SCENE 1: THE ARGUMENT WITH TELEMACHUS

It is not long before Penelope herself arrives on the scene, here in the palace, and apparently making no preparations to go back to her father's house. She descends into the megaron, and the audience gets their first glimpse of her (1.326-35).

> Τοῖσι δ᾽ ἀοιδὸς ἄειδε περικλυτός, οἱ δὲ σιωπῇ
> ἥατ᾽ ἀκούοντες· ὁ δ᾽ Ἀχαιῶν νόστον ἄειδε
> λυγρόν, ὃν ἐκ Τροίης ἐπετείλατο Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη.
> Τοῦ δ᾽ ὑπερωϊόθεν φρεσὶ σύνθετο θέσπιν ἀοιδὴν
> κούρη Ἰκαρίοιο, περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
> κλίμακα δ᾽ ὑψηλὴν κατεβήσετο οἷο δόμοιο,
> οὐκ οἴη, ἅμα τῇ γε καὶ ἀμφίπολοι δύ᾽ ἕποντο.
> ἡ δ᾽ ὅτε δὴ μνηστῆρας ἀφίκετο δῖα γυναικῶν,
> στῆ ῥα παρὰ σταθμὸν τέγεος πύκα ποιητοῖο
> ἄντα παρειάων σχομένη λιπαρὰ κρήδεμνα·
> ἀμφίπολος δ᾽ ἄρα οἱ κεδνὴ ἑκάτερθε παρέστη.
>
> The renowned singer was singing among them, and in silence
> They sat listening; and he was singing of the Achaeans' return,
> mournful thing, which Pallas Athena laid upon them from Troy.
> And from upstairs the daughter of Ikarios took heed
> Of the holy song, observant Penelope;
> And she went down the lofty ladder of her house,
> Not alone, but two attendants also followed along with her.
> And when she, divine among women, reached the suitors,
> She stood beside a pillar of the strongly built roof,

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has been laid out which the characters of the *Odyssey* could follow, not the details or historicity of that procedure.

> Keeping her shining veil over her face;
> And then a trusty attendant stood on each side of her.

First, Penelope is upstairs, away from the suitors, in what is traditionally the women's space. She leaves the upper room on a specific errand for which she must go near the suitors in the megaron, meaning she must walk past over a hundred drunk young men.[124] When she takes her stand, she does not address them. Her body language is defensive and stiff. The three details we are given—that she stands next to a pillar rather than out in the open, wears a veil,[125] and keeps an attendant on either side as chaperones—emphasize that she keeps herself apart from the throng of men. If our listener is looking for reasons to judge Penelope following Telemachus's aspersions, there is little in her appearance that they can convict of being inappropriate.[126] She has entered into a man's space uninvited, as women in classical Athenian society did not seem to do, but she is well chaperoned,[127] as the poet emphasizes. In fact, she stays insulated from the action of the room as much as possible. This is sensible; beyond the physical threat that a group of men naturally pose to a woman alone, should there even be any hint of impropriety, it is her reputation that will suffer, not the suitors'.[128]

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[124] For more on the megaron as a public space in the *Odyssey*, see Fletcher 2008.

[125] For an account of veiling practices in the iconographic evidence, see Llewellyn-Jones 2003.

[126] Felson 1994, pg. 22.

[127] Lateiner 1992, pg. 150.

[128] Thalmann 1998, pg. 118. For more on victim blaming as a common misogynistic tendency, see Manne 2018, especially "Chapter 6: Exonerating Men", pgs. 177-219, and "Chapter 7: Suspecting

Penelope then addresses Phemios, the bard (1.336-44).

δακρύσασα δ᾽ ἔπειτα προσηύδα θεῖον ἀοιδόν·
“Φήμιε, πολλὰ γὰρ ἄλλα βροτῶν θελκτήρια οἶδας,
ἔργ᾽ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε, τά τε κλείουσιν ἀοιδοί,
τῶν ἕν γέ σφιν ἄειδε παρήμενος, οἱ δὲ σιωπῇ
οἶνον πινόντων· ταύτης δ᾽ ἀποπαύε᾽ ἀοιδῆς 340
λυγρῆς, ἥ τέ μοι αἰεὶ ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλον κῆρ
τείρει, ἐπεί με μάλιστα καθίκετο πένθος ἄλαστον·
τοίην γὰρ κεφαλὴν ποθέω μεμνημένη αἰεί
ἀνδρός, τοῦ κλέος εὐρὺ καθ᾽ Ἑλλάδα καὶ μέσον Ἄργος.”

And crying she then addressed the holy singer:
“Phemios, since you know many other spells for mortals,
The deeds of gods and men, which singers make famous;
Sit and sing one of those to them, and let them drink wine
In silence; but stop this sad song, 340
Which always hurts the dear heart in my chest,
Since constant pain touches me most of all.
For when I remember I always miss that dear face,
Of the man whose fame is throughout Hellas and central Argos.”

In Penelope’s first direct speech, she tells Phemius that grief and longing for her husband are still overwhelming—so much so that Phemius’ song about the return of the Achaean warriors is unbearable. His absence is a source of constant, ἄλαστον, pain (342), suggesting a real depth of feeling for her spouse. One does not imagine Klytemnestra so distraught over the absence of Agamemnon. Moreover, since the suitors must be within earshot, our listener will understand that Penelope is willing to talk about her absent husband in front of them. Nothing about this scene suggests flirtation.

Victims”, pgs. 220-248; and Solnit 2014, especially “Cassandra Among the Creeps,” 103-117; Herman 1989, pg. 20.

With this image of the character established, Homer then dismisses Penelope from the megaron in lines 345-64. Notably, they use Telemachus to do so. In the young man's first big moment since Athena told him to grow up,[129] Telemachus cuts her off (1.345-64).

Τὴν δ᾽ αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ηὔδα·
"μῆτερ ἐμή, τί τ᾽ ἄρα φθονέεις ἐρίηρον ἀοιδὸν
τέρπειν ὅππῃ οἱ νόος ὄρνυται; οὔ νύ τ᾽ ἀοιδοὶ
αἴτιοι, ἀλλά ποθι Ζεὺς αἴτιος, ὅς τε δίδωσιν
ἀνδράσιν ἀλφηστῆσιν, ὅπως ἐθέλῃσιν, ἑκάστῳ.
τούτῳ δ᾽ οὐ νέμεσις Δαναῶν κακὸν οἶτον ἀείδειν·
τὴν γὰρ ἀοιδὴν[130] μᾶλλον ἐπικλείουσ᾽ ἄνθρωποι,
ἥ τις ἀκουόντεσσι νεωτάτη ἀμφιπέληται.
σοί δ᾽ ἐπιτολμάτω κραδίη καὶ θυμὸς ἀκούειν·
οὐ γὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς οἶος ἀπώλεσε νόστιμον ἦμαρ
ἐν Τροίῃ, πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλοι φῶτες ὄλοντο.
ἀλλ᾽ εἰς οἶκον ἰοῦσα τὰ σ᾽ αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε,
ἱστόν τ᾽ ἠλακάτην τε, καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε
ἔργον ἐποίχεσθαι. μῦθος δ᾽ ἄνδρεσσι μελήσει
πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ᾽ ἐμοί· τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ᾽ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ."
Ἡ μὲν θαμβήσασα πάλιν οἰκόνδε βεβήκει·
παιδὸς γὰρ μῦθον πεπνυμένον ἔνθετο θυμῷ.
ἐς δ᾽ ὑπερῷ᾽ ἀναβᾶσα σὺν ἀμφιπόλοισι γυναιξὶ
κλαῖεν ἔπειτ᾽ Ὀδυσῆα φίλον πόσιν, ὄφρα οἱ ὕπνον
ἡδὺν ἐπὶ βλεφάροισι βάλε γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη.

But immediately clever Telemachus addressed her:
"Mother, why do you begrudge the faithful singer for delighting
In whatever way his mind stirs? Now, singers aren't
Responsible, but Zeus probably is, who gives
Whatever he wants to hardworking men, each one.
There's no reason to resent him for singing the awful fate of the Danaans.
People will praise the song even more,
Whichever newest one wafts around the listeners.

[129] 1.296-302.

[130] For the implications of this word in this unusual *sedes*, see Sansom 2021.

> Let your heart and soul endure listening,
> Since Odysseus alone didn't lose his homecoming day
> In Troy, but many other men were lost.
> But go home and get to your work,
> Your loom and distaff, and order your attendants
> To get to their work; talk is all men's business,
> Especially mine, who am in charge in the home."
> And she, shaken, went back to her space,
> For she took her child's well-reasoned speech to heart.
> And after going back upstairs with her attendants
> She cried for her dear husband Odysseus, until
> Glancing-eyed Athena cast sweet sleep on her eyelids.

Telemachus is asserting his role as a male authority, especially in lines 358-9, and the male prerogative as the primary audience of bardic performance.[131] In doing so, he maneuvers out of the category of non-threatening dependents in the household and into the category of grown men whom women must obey. From Penelope's surprise in line 360, it is clear that this is the first time Telemachus has seized control. She presumably has had authority over the household during Telemachus' childhood, being the only adult member of the family in residence since the death of Antikleia and withdrawal of Laertes.[132] But this is only by virtue of a power vacuum, because the man to whom she is subject is gone.[133] If Telemachus takes an adult role in the household, she loses that authority. Given Telemachus' apparent distrust of his mother, her loss of control over

[131] Doherty 1992, especially 165-7.

[132] In this way, she takes on a more masculine role during her husband's absence, as discussed in Foley 1978.

[133] For a full discussion of a woman's position relative to her husband in the household economy, see Pateman 1988, especially "5: Wives, Slaves and Wage Slaves," pgs. 116-153.

the household must be jarring to her, but she nonetheless concedes without arguing. She returns to the women's quarters and cries until she falls asleep.

The first image of Penelope is of a widow who still misses her husband terribly; behaves modestly, possibly even fearfully, in the presence of young, single men; is starting to realize that her son is attempting to take over as head of household; and backs down when confronted. None of this seems to fit well with "dalliance and courtship" or "marriage to suitor" (because of love/seduction) as we might have expected. Therefore, "disdain and cunning tricks," is now also in play.

HEARSAY: ANTINOOS AT THE COUNCIL

Homer again destabilizes our image of Penelope in the assembly scene of book two through a description from yet another viewpoint. Again, Penelope is not actually present. Instead, we hear about her from the suitor, Antinoos (2.85-94).

"Τηλέμαχ᾽ ὑψαγόρη, μένος ἄσχετε, ποῖον ἔειπες
ἡμέας αἰσχύνων; ἐθέλοις δέ κε μῶμον ἀνάψαι.
σοὶ δ᾽ οὔ τι μνηστῆρες Ἀχαιῶν αἴτιοί εἰσιν,
ἀλλὰ φίλη μήτηρ, ἥ τοι πέρι κέρδεα οἶδεν.
ἤδη γὰρ τρίτον ἐστὶν ἔτος, τάχα δ᾽ εἶσι τέταρτον,
ἐξ οὗ ἀτέμβει θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν Ἀχαιῶν.
πάντας μέν ῥ᾽ ἔλπει, καὶ ὑπίσχεται ἀνδρὶ ἑκάστῳ
ἀγγελίας προϊεῖσα· νόος δέ οἱ ἄλλα μενοινᾷ.
ἡ δὲ δόλον τόνδ᾽ ἄλλον ἐνὶ φρεσὶ μερμήριξε·"

"Telemachus, you big-talker, tantrum thrower, what the hell did you say
Trying to shame us? And you'd want to stick the blame to us.
But for your information, the Achaean suitors aren't to blame at all,
But your dear mother, who is excessively clever.
For this is the third year already, and soon it'll be the fourth,

> Since she cheated the heart in the chest of the Achaeans. 90
> She encourages everyone and makes promises to each man,
> Sending messages, but her mind wants other things.
> And she contrived another trick in her mind."

He then tells the story of her trick with the burial shroud, and how it ended. So, the second half of his speech seems to invoke "disdain and cunning tricks", while the first suggests "dalliance and courtship", or "marriage to suitor", which are incompatible narratives. Some scholars have chosen to take everything Antinoos says at face value. Martin West, for instance, has claimed that, "there is no suggestion that [Antinoos] is lying," and so takes everything he says as valid.[134] But, who, after all, is the speaker?[135] What does our listener know about Antinoos at this point in book two?

First, we know that Antinoos is a suitor. He wants to stay in the palace and court Penelope, so he has an obvious motive to say anything that might justify his presence there. Second, we know that the suitors on the whole have been behaving abominably, as everyone seems to agree.[136] Finally, we have heard Antinoos himself speak once before, when he explicitly wishes that Telemachus will never be *basileus* in Ithaca, which he admits is Telemachus' birthright, "ὅ τοι γενεῇ πατρώιόν ἐστιν."[137] So far, there does not seem to be much to recommend Antinoos to our trust or goodwill. In fact, the poet has given us unambiguous early indications of Antinoos' villainy.

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[134] West 2014, pg. 68.

[135] See, e.g., Dover 1983.

[136] 1.106-118, 1.132-4, 1.158-65, 1.225-9, 1.245-51, 1.254-5.

[137] 1.386-7.

So much for the speaker. In his speech, Antinoos attempts to pin the blame on Penelope for keeping the suitors there. But he contradicts himself. For though he claims that she encourages them all, so she has led them to believe they have hope, his report of the burial shroud trick proves that Penelope has gone to great lengths to hold them off. And, further, Antinoos knows that. The jig is up.[138] He might have been able to argue she was sending mixed signals up until the moment the ploy was revealed, but that revelation has come and gone. He cannot reasonably claim that she might actually be eager to remarry any day now, and that he has the right to wait and see. He knows full well that she is not. "Disdain and cunning tricks" displaces "dalliance and courtship" and "marriage to suitor" in his account, because any encouragements were either coerced, or part of her plan to hold the men off, as any reasonable person would infer. But Antinoos' attitude here is, as G. Devereux once said, "sour grapes," that things have not turned out as he had hoped.[139]

Further, if Antinoos is willing to lie and say he does not know what Penelope wants, he has just discredited himself as a reliable source of information. Everything else he has to say about her—including his claim that she gives them all special messages—is now suspect. That is not to say that his claim is impossible; perhaps Penelope did encourage various suitors,[140] whether to

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[138] For a discussion of the precise timeline of the trick, which is contentious, see Büchner 1940, pg. 130-2. However, no matter the specifics, it is certain that the trick has been revealed, and that Antinoos and the other suitors now know that Penelope was deceiving them.

[139] Devereux 1957, pg. 380.

[140] Athena also repeats this claim at 13.380-1. For one explanation of why Penelope may have encouraged the suitors despite hating them, see Marquardt 1985. Felson also argues that this may have been a stratagem for keeping them at bay (1994, pg. 26).

keep them placated or to pit them against each other. But our narrator is unreliable. Therefore, Antinoos' report on Penelope proves shaky evidence at best.

In the second half of his speech, Antinoos demands that Telemachus send Penelope away in marriage,[141] then ends with amounts to a threat (2.123-8):

> "τόφρα γὰρ οὖν βίοτόν τε τεὸν καὶ κτήματ᾽ ἔδονται,
> ὄφρα κε κείνη τοῦτον ἔχῃ νόον, ὅν τινά οἱ νῦν
> ἐν στήθεσσι τιθεῖσι θεοί· μέγα μὲν κλέος αὐτῇ
> ποιεῖτ᾽, αὐτὰρ σοί γε ποθὴν πολέος βιότοιο.
> ἡμεῖς δ᾽ οὔτ᾽ ἐπὶ ἔργα πάρος γ᾽ ἴμεν οὔτε πῃ ἄλλῃ,
> πρίν γ᾽ αὐτὴν γήμασθαι Ἀχαιῶν ᾧ κ᾽ ἐθέλῃσι."

> "For that's how long [the suitors] will eat up your goods and livelihood:
> As long as she has this plan, which the gods now put
> In her heart. She's making a great reputation for herself,
> But for you, the loss of much livelihood.
> And we won't go back to our former lives, nor anywhere else,
> Until she marries whichever Achaean man she prefers."

Thus, the destruction of Telemachus' inheritance is not an accidental byproduct in their suit for marriage, it is an intimidation tactic which they took up in order to pressure Penelope into making a decision.

We might compare Dorkon's escalation of tactics in his suit for Chloe in *Daphnis and Chloe*.[142] When Dorkon resolved to pursue her, "ἔγνω κατεργάσασθαι δώροις ἢ βίᾳ," "he decided

[141] 2.111-122.

[142] The evidence here dates to a very different period, but rape culture is a broad pattern, as we have already seen.

to take possession of her by gifts or by force."[143] To win her the nice way (by gifts) is his first choice, but force is an acceptable fallback option—and force, *bia*, is a longstanding term for rape in Greek, as we have seen.[144] Penelope's suitors also went about things the (sort of) nice way first, while she held them off with the ruse of the shroud. Following the revelation of the trick, they escalated to economic coercion. If they ever become certain that this tack will not succeed, force may be their fallback, too. If the listener is paying attention, he will understand that Penelope needs to hold them in suspense, lest they escapate once again. The holding pattern could break at any moment.

Later in the assembly, the suitors will shout down the prophet Halitherses when he attempts to save them from ruin,[145] further cementing the impression that they are perfectly happy to frighten rather than persuade. From this point out, then, our listener will now have three reasons not to trust Antinoos as a narrator: 1. His motivation to justify his presence in the palace 2. His dishonesty and 3. His tendency to intimidate those less powerful than he is.

However, Antonoos' speech also casts doubt on the trustworthiness of a host of other characters. It seems that the other residents of the palace may be untrustworthy. Per Antinoos, the ruse of the shroud ended when another woman gave Penelope away (2.108-110):

> "καὶ τότε δή τις ἔειπε γυναικῶν, ἣ σάφα ᾔδη,
> καὶ τήν γ᾽ ἀλλύουσαν ἐφεύρομεν ἀγλαὸν ἱστόν.
> ὣς τὸ μὲν ἐξετέλεσσε καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλουσ᾽ ὑπ᾽ ἀνάγκης·"

"And then one of the women who had known the trick told us,

[143] Longus 1.15.1.

[144] Omitowoju 2002, pg. 18.

[145] 2.178-9.

> And we caught her unweaving the shining cloth.
> So she finished it by force, and didn't want to."

Antinoos fails to name his source here; it was just some woman. Indeed, at this point in the narrative, very few women have names at all. There is Penelope herself, and Eurykleia was mentioned in 1.429, but we will not learn Eurynome or Melantho's names until much later. The two attendants who stand beside Penelope in her first scene are not even named. As a result, all of the women of the house become an undifferentiated, untrustworthy mass. In effect, Antinoos seems to be encouraging an atmosphere of distrust, pitting the members of the household against one another, and to distract Telemachus from his own behavior. To recall our quote from Lateiner in the introduction:

> [The suitors] have boxed in the lord's spouse, Penelope (*planted spies*, activity policing, house invasion, and occupation; 2.109, 198-99, 237, 247; and threats of virtual rape or 'bride capture').[146]

Though the suitors pose the true threat to Penelope's safety, Antinoos encourages us to regard the other women with some caution, because we do not know who betrayed Penelope's trust. Maybe Penelope does not know either.

Penelope herself is evidently a talented liar and manipulator when need be, assuming that the ruse of the burial shroud happened—and that would be a strange story for Antinoos to invent—and in the current environment, we cannot expect her to speak freely. We must therefore take everything she says with a grain of salt: in any given conversation, she may feel the need to disguise her true plans. It seems that perhaps no one in Ithaca can be relied on to speak plainly.

[146] Lateiner 1993, pg. 177. Emphasis mine.

Therefore, we the audience must accept that in order to understand what characters want and believe, it is necessary to consider their actions as well as—or even instead of—their words.

Therefore, while Penelope does not seem to be expressing any genuine interest in remarriage at this time, it is reasonable for the audience to reserve judgment and watch her a little longer. Perhaps her first scene—her trip to the megaron—was some kind of ruse also, although it is hard to imagine for whom she might have been performing, or to what end. But Eurymachus restates the standard procedure for marriage during the assembly scene in book two: go home, let your father make the preparations, and do the thing right.[147] The poet therefore emphasizes what Penelope ought to do, if, as Athena said, οἱ θυμὸς ἐφορμᾶται γαμέεσθαι, "her heart yearns to be married".[148] If she fails to follow through, we the audience ought to infer that she does not want to marry, regardless of what she may say.

SCENE 2: PENELOPE FINDS OUT TELEMACHUS HAS LEFT THE PALACE

By book four, Penelope has made no preparations to return to her father's home. If we do want to keep "marriage to suitor" (because of love/seduction) in play, we might wonder why she is taking her time.

By this point also, Telemachus has left the palace on his journey to his fathers' old friends, without telling his mother. He swears his old nurse Eurykleia to secrecy, despite her protests.[149]

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[147] 2.194-7.

[148] 1.275.

[149] 2.373-6.

After the suitors find out Telemachus is gone, Antinoos suggests they use his return voyage as an opportunity to murder him at sea.[150] A herald named Medon rushes to tell Penelope what is happening,[151] and before Medon can even explain why he is there, Penelope wishes the suitors would all die.[152] Her immediate reaction to Medon's news is physical and emotional (4.703-4):

> ‘`Ως φάτο· τῆς δ᾽ αὐτοῦ λύτο γούνατα καὶ φίλον ἦτορ,
> δὴν δέ μιν ἀμφασίη ἐπέων λάβε· τὼ δέ οἱ ὄσσε
> δακρυόφι πλῆσθεν, θαλερὴ δέ οἱ ἔσχετο φωνή.[153]
>
> So he spoke, and her knees and dear heart sank,
> And for a long time a loss for words seized her; and her eyes
> Were full of tears, and her strong voice was stopped.

This scene invites a comparison to Penelope's cousin Klytemnestra. In the mythological tradition, Agamemnon decides to sacrifice his daughter with Klytemnestra, Iphigenia, in order to set sail against Troy, and this decision irreparably damages the marriage. One could argue that Klytemnestra's subsequent decision to have an affair and murder Agamemnon is, if not justifiable, understandable given his murder of her daughter. Conversely, it is Penelope's suitors, her potential lovers, who threaten to harm her child, and may perhaps drive her closer to her husband's memory by comparison. In both cases, the women are motivated by maternal devotion.

At this point, I argue that it is safe to discard the idea that Penelope is either colluding with the suitors, since they have left her out of their plot, or that she may want to marry one of them. It

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[150] 4.660-72.

[151] 4.675-9.

[152] 4.683-5.

[153] 4.703-4.

is simply not plausible that she would enjoy flirting with men who are actively plotting to murder her only child. I strongly reject, from book four onward, the suggestion that Penelope enjoys the suitors' courtship. "Marriage to suitor" (because of love/seduction) is now out.

SCENE 3: PENELOPE TALKS TO THE OTHER WOMEN ABOUT TELEMACHUS

In Penelope's next scene, we learn that she again feels betrayed by the other women of the palace for failing to tell her that Telemachus had gone. When Medon leaves, Penelope cries,[154] and calls to the other women in her grief (4.721-34):

τῆς δ᾽ ἀδινὸν γοόωσα μετηύδα Πηνελόπεια·
"Κλῦτε, φίλαι· πέρι γάρ μοι Ὀλύμπιος ἄλγε᾽ ἔδωκεν
ἐκ πασέων, ὅσσαι μοι ὁμοῦ τράφεν ἠδ᾽ ἐγένοντο,
ἢ πρὶν μὲν πόσιν ἐσθλὸν ἀπώλεσα θυμολέοντα,
παντοίης ἀρετῇσι κεκασμένον ἐν Δαναοῖσιν,
ἐσθλόν, τοῦ κλέος εὐρὺ καθ᾽ Ἑλλάδα καὶ μέσον Ἄργος·
νῦν αὖ παῖδ᾽ ἀγαπητὸν ἀνηρείψαντο θύελλαι
ἀκλέα ἐκ μεγάρων, οὐδ᾽ ὁρμηθέντος ἄκουσα.
σχέτλιαι, οὐδ᾽ ὑμεῖς περ ἐνὶ φρεσὶ θέσθε ἑκάστη
ἐκ λεχέων μ᾽ ἀνεγεῖραι, ἐπιστάμεναι σάφα θυμῷ,
ὁππότ᾽ ἐκεῖνος ἔβη κοίλην ἐπὶ νῆα μέλαιναν.
εἰ γὰρ ἐγὼ πυθόμην ταύτην ὁδὸν ὁρμαίνοντα,
τῷ κε μάλ᾽ ἤ κεν ἔμεινε καὶ ἐσσύμενός περ ὁδοῖο,
ἢ κέ με τεθνηκυῖαν ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἔλειπεν."

And weeping heavily Penelope addressed them:
"Hear me, dear ones: for the Olympian gave me misery
Out of all the women who were born and raised along with me;
Surely before I lost my good, lion-hearted husband,
Who surpassed everyone among the Danaans in every sort of virtue
A good man, whose fame was wide throughout Hellas and central Argos.

[154] 4.715-20.

> Now again hurricanes have snatched my beloved son
> Away unreported from the palace, and I didn't hear him leaving.
> Awful girls, and none of you put it in mind
> To rouse me from bed, despite knowing the plan in your heart,
> Whenever it was he boarded a hollow black ship.
> If I had heard he was going on that trip,
> Then surely he would have stayed even if he wanted to go
> Or would have left me dying in the palace."

Eurykleia then admits that she did know the truth and agreed to hide it,[155] though she did it out of love for Telemachus rather than loyalty to the suitors.[156] After Eurycleia talks Penelope down from a rash plan,[157] Penelope seemingly releases her grudge and prays to Athena for Telemachus' safety.[158] Nevertheless, she has great reason to fear for herself and her son, and the other members of her household have now thwarted her interests twice.

HEARSAY: THE SUITORS SEE PENELOPE AS NAÏVE

Just prior to departing to murder Telemachus, the suitors gather in the megaron and loudly celebrate their very clever and unguessable plot (4.768-73):

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[155] Presumably the other enslaved women would have known by this point too, since at least some of them would notice as part of their household responsibilities that his bed was not slept in and he was not at meals.

[156] 4.742-57.

[157] 4.735-57. For a discussion of Eurycleia as confidant and advice giver in this scene, see Pedrick 1994.

[158] 4.758-67.

μνηστῆρες δ᾽ ὁμάδησαν ἀνὰ μέγαρα σκιόεντα·
ὧδε δέ τις εἴπεσκε νέων ὑπερηνορεόντων·
“ ‘Η μάλα δὴ γάμον ἄμμι πολυμνήστη βασίλεια
ἀρτύει, οὐδέ τι οἶδεν ὅ οἱ φόνος υἷϊ τέτυκται.”
‘`Ως ἄρα τις εἴπεσκε, τὰ δ᾽ οὐκ ἴσαν ὡς ἐτέτυκτο.

And the suitors were raising a din in the shadowy megaron,
And one of the arrogant young men would say,
“The queen we’ve all been courting is definitely getting ready
To marry, and she doesn’t know death’s been planned for her son.”
So they’d say, but didn’t know how it had been planned.

They are, of course, wrong. Penelope already knows about the plot against Telemachus, so the suitors’ behavior here speaks to their inflated self-concept. Even though Penelope has outwitted them in the past, they believe themselves to be capable of fooling her. They both overestimate their own intelligence and underestimate hers. They are arrogant enough to shout about murdering Telemachus in his own house, and only leave off when Antinoos shushes them, lest someone overhear.[159] (Our listener should therefore guess that not everyone in the palace is on their side, conspiring against Penelope, though it is not clear who is trustworthy.) Finally, the suitors believe that Penelope is on the verge of remarriage, and they do not seem to anticipate that the obvious murder of her only child might have an impact on her future plans. The audience should therefore infer that the suitors are arrogant, socially oblivious, and that they have absolutely no concern for Penelope’s grief.

[159] 7.774-7.

SCENE 4: SIMILE OF THE LION, FEAR FOR TELEMACHUS

After the suitors depart, Penelope is alone in her room. She is overwhelmed with fear for Telemachus, and there is no one around for whom she might be putting up a front, so there is no reason to doubt her sincerity. Her emotional reaction is described in the form of a lion simile, which is unusual both in that the lion is under attack,[160] and that the lion here represents a female character (4.787-94):[161]

> ‘Η δ’ ὑπερωίῳ αὖθι περίφρων Πηνελόπεια
> κεῖτ’ ἄρ’ ἄσιτος, ἄπαστος ἐδητύος ἠδὲ ποτῆτος,
> ὁρμαίνουσ’ ἤ οἱ θάνατον φύγοι υἱὸς ἀμύμων,
> ἦ ὅ γ’ ὑπὸ μνηστῆρσιν ὑπερφιάλοισι δαμείη.
> ὅσσα δὲ μερμήριξε λέων ἀνδρῶν ἐν ὁμίλῳ
> δείσας, ὁππότε μιν δόλιον περὶ κύκλον ἄγωσι,
> τόσσα μιν ὁρμαίνουσαν ἐπήλυθε νήδυμος ὕπνος·
> εὗδε δ’ ἀνακλινθεῖσα, λύθεν δέ οἱ ἄψεα πάντα.
>
> And there upstairs clever Penelope
> Lay without supper, abstaining from food and drink,
> Wondering whether her noble son would escape death,
> Or be overcome by the arrogant suitors.
> And just as a lion thinks in a mob of men,
> Afraid, when they lead him into an ambush,
> So she was worrying when sweet sleep came over her.

The suitors are here portrayed as arranging the *dolion kuklon*, Penelope seems to imagine herself in Telemachus’ place—she perceives the danger to him as danger to herself. She is desperate to think her way out, *mermērixe*, of the trap they have laid: how can Telemachus escape? However, we are not given insight into any specific ideas she might have, and before she makes any

[160] Magrath 1982, pg. 206.

[161] For more on the significance of gender here, see Pache, 2016 and Foley 1978.

decisions, Athena sends a dream vision, reassuring her that the gods are not angry with Telemachus.[162]

Once Penelope knows she is speaking to a god, she then pivots and asks Athena whether she is widowed or still married (4.830-7).

Τὴν δ᾽ αὖτε προσέειπε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
“εἰ μὲν δὴ θεός ἐσσι θεοῖό τε ἔκλυες αὐδῆς,[163]
εἰ δ᾽ ἄγε μοι καὶ κεῖνον ὀιζυρὸν κατάλεξον,
ἤ που ἔτι ζώει καὶ ὁρᾷ φάος ἠελίοιο,
ἦ ἤδη τέθνηκε καὶ εἰν Ἀίδαο δόμοισι.”
Τὴν δ᾽ ἀπαμειβόμενον προσέφη εἴδωλον ἀμαυρόν·
“οὐ μέν τοι κεῖνόν γε διηνεκέως ἀγορεύσω,
ζώει ὅ γ᾽ ἦ τέθνηκε· κακὸν δ᾽ ἀνεμώλια βάζειν.”

But observant Penelope spoke to her in turn:
“If in fact you are a god and hear divine speech,
Come to me and tell me about that poor man,
Whether he still lives and sees daylight,
Or has already died and is in Hades’ dwellings”.
And answering her the shadowy spirit said:
“I won’t tell you about that man in full
Whether he lives or has died: it’s wrong to speak the wind.”

Athena’s choice to withhold what she knows from Penelope is a curious one. The listener already knows Odysseus is alive, and that Athena is working to get him home,[164] so she could give an answer. Stanford argues this passage “heightens the pathos of [Penelope’s] situation”, but that is

[162] 795-829.

[163] For the phrase θεοῖό…αὐδῆς, see Clay 1974, pg. 133-135.

[164] In fact, the poet has a strong tendency to indicate the plot’s “chief features” well ahead of time. See Scott 1965, pg. 259.

the poet's concern, not Athena's.[165] Felson cites this scene as evidence of a "conspiracy of silency" [sic] between Athena, Odysseus, and Telemachus that forces Penelope to plan for all possible contingencies until the very last moment.[166] Though it is the case that these three have excluded Penelope from all their communications, the question still remains as to why the goddess would do so.

The gods are at their most understandable when they are at their most human, which is to say, when they misbehave. Petty jealousies, affairs, grudges, these are all recognizable human behaviors, so they render the gods understandable. However, the gods are not human, and they exist on another level of being which is often inaccessible to us. They are immortal and ageless, and thus are defined by timelessness—to the extent that their *moira* is not fated events, as it is for men, but appointed realms of influence.[167] Certainly Athena has the power to end Penelope's prolonged wait for news. She also has the power to zap Odysseus back to Ithaca at any moment, if she so chooses. And yet she does not. Is Athena acting for Odysseus' benefit, by redirecting Penelope's attention from Telemachus to her absent husband?[168] Is she a cat toying with a wounded mouse? Is she unable to comprehend mortals' experience of time and the pain of waiting? These questions are unanswerable. Perhaps it is better to admit that the gods do not have to adhere to a recognizable human psychology; that Athena is not constrained by time like the human characters;

[165] Stanford 1947, pg. 291.

[166] Felson 1994, pg. 15.

[167] Clay 1983, pg. 148-57.

[168] Murnaghan 1995, pg. 68-70.

and that if she exercised her full power at all times, there would be no story. The narrative requires our buy in, and there are some things we should not ask of the gods.

Though I do not want to default to one-size-fits-all solutions for textual problems such as "the needs of the plot trump all" I concede that this is sometimes the only possible solution. In works shaped by human hands, the occasional fingerprint will remain. However, I find it preferable to rule out any and all diegetic explanations first, as we are doing for Penelope. "Because the poet said so" should remain a last resort.

In any case, Penelope does not know whether her husband will ever reappear, and therefore whether it makes sense to continue delaying in the hopes that he will return and save her. However, she also does not know whether she is free to remarry, which might be her only recourse for protecting her son from the suitors: giving them what they want.

Summary: the Telemachy

Thus far in the poem, Penelope's behavior indicates that she does not like the suitors, and she has excellent reasons. They are poor candidates for husbands who enjoy the prospect of causing her sorrow by murdering her son.[169]

Moreover, their behavior towards her does not suggest care for her wellbeing, or even infatuation with her. They are perfectly happy to cause her terrible pain in order to achieve their ends—perhaps physically as well as emotionally. Throughout books 1-4, there have been consistent but somewhat oblique references to force and even violence: Telemachus' statement

[169] 4.768-72.

that "she can't make it stop"; Penelope's body language in the megaron; that she finished the shroud *hup' anankēs*, a phrase whose semantic range includes "by force";[170] the other women's betrayals; and the plot against Telemachus. These sinister details combine to show that Penelope must be careful not to misstep and provoke the suitors' anger, lest they erupt into violence. She must also wonder if they would use violence against her, as well.

Since the poem has given us no evidence that Penelope feels any affection for them, we can safely rule out "dalliance and courtship" as a potential plotline—if we take Felson's term to refer to a pleasant flirtation that ultimately goes nowhere. So far from coyly enjoying their attention, Penelope has not even directly spoken to one of them thus far in the poem—not once, to any of them. There has been no hint of this plotline since Telemachus' conversation with Athena in book one, and Telemachus has demonstrated a certain social ineptitude; consider his failure at the council in book two.[171] We should not trust his judgment.

We have also ruled out "marriage to suitor" (because of love/seduction) since there is no evidence that Penelope loves any of the suitors, and further she is not acting in accordance with

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[170] C.f. not only *bia*, but the account of Odysseus' rape by Calypso in 5.154-5:

ἀλλ᾽ ἦ τοι νύκτας μὲν ἰαύεσκεν καὶ ἀνάγκῃ
ἐν σπέσσι γλαφυροῖσι παρ᾽ οὐκ ἐθέλων ἐθελούσῃ:

But he would spend nights even by force
in the hollow caves beside her; she was willing, but he was not.

[171] For more on Telemachus' failure to live up to his father's reputation, see Allan 2010.

the protocol that has been iterated twice now for a proper marriage. Denys Page found the repetition of these instructions quite bothersome.[172] In the mouth of Athena, he called the advice, "a piece of nonsense in itself, wholly incompatible with the rest of her instructions and wholly at variance with what happens later."[173] However, in context, we might read Athena's instructions to Telemachus as a gentle correction of his slights against his mother. Athena is in effect saying, 'Look, your mother does not want to remarry, or this is what she would do.' Our attentive listener should observe that Penelope is tacitly refusing to return to her father's jurisdiction, at which point she would lose the ability to make her own decisions. If her father resumes his role as her *kurios*, she cannot continue to delay, so staying put is an expression of her agency.

However, as Telemachus has told us, Penelope will not swear off remarriage at some point. Perhaps this is out of fear. Penelope may either keep the possibility of remarriage alive as a last resort, or need the suitors to believe that is what she is doing. The text has not yet given strong clues either way. So, "disdain and cunning tricks" is still in play, as is "marriage to suitor" (because of fear). These plots will both remain open for the next twelve books.

[172] Page 1955, pg 53-9.

[173] Page 1955, pg. 58.

CHAPTER TWO: BUILDUP TO RETURN

Following the establishment of Penelope's character in the Telemachy, the poet shifts focus to Odysseus in books five through seventeen. As a result, Penelope becomes far less prominent in the story until the moment when she becomes aware of a new beggar in the palace in book seventeen. At that point she and Odysseus will enter into a series of interactions and negotiations that will result in their reunion. But in the meantime, we must leave Ithaca.

The narrative will be focalized through Odysseus and Telemachus in turns moving forward. In book five, the narrative centers on Odysseus and his wanderings. From book five through fourteen, the narrative is most often focalized through—or narrated by—him, and so it is from his point of view that we see most events during this stage. Homer does employ an omniscient, omnipresent narrator,[174] but characters' thoughts receive unequal amounts of attention. Some characters are kept at a greater distance from the audience. The poet also has a marked bias for

[174] De Jong 2004, pg. 14. For a full account of the narrator in the Homeric epics, see pgs. 1-24.

Odysseus, which impacts the framing of events and characters.[175] Telemachus has also left Ithaca and will not return for some time, so even when he is center stage, Penelope is nowhere to be seen.

From this point on, the listeners' access to Penelope is correspondingly changed; she is kept at a greater distance. Odysseus has not seen Ithaca or his wife in years. During his wanderings, Antikleia,[176] Athena,[177] and Eumaeus[178] report on Penelope and the state of his property. He is not completely ignorant of what has happened in his absence. However, Odysseus will still choose to verify everything himself. When he and Telemachus each return, they will both surveil the various members of their *oikos* to determine the others' loyalties before Odysseus reveals his identity.[179] Through them, our listener also will watch Penelope for signs of what she knows and what she wants.

HEARSAY: ANTIKLEIA

Though Odysseus will take nothing on faith, it is worthwhile to consider whether each account Odysseus hears of Penelope's behavior complements, corroborates, or complicates our impressions of her thus far. What might Odysseus reasonably believe of his wife's behavior in his absence?

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[175] Clay 1983, pg. 34-8.

[176] 11.180f.

[177] 13.3329f.

[178] 14.121f.

[179] 16.299-307.

In the first *nekuia*, book eleven, Odysseus meets his deceased mother, Antikleia, who he did not know had died.[180] They reunite briefly, and he asks her about the cause of her death, fates of his other family members, and his wife after his departure to Troy.[181] Antikleia answers his three questions in reverse order, beginning with Penelope and thereby lending Odysseus' relationship to her significant weight (11.180-3).[182]

‘`Ως ἐφάμην· ἡ δ᾽ αὐτίκ᾽ ἀμείβετο πότνια μήτηρ·
“καὶ λίην κείνη γε μένει τετληότι θυμῷ
σοῖσιν ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν· ὀιζυραὶ δέ οἱ αἰεὶ
φθίνουσιν νύκτες τε καὶ ἤματα δάκρυ χεούσῃ.”

So I spoke, and immediately my noble mother answered:
“She also remains with a patient heart
In your home, and her awful days
And nights wane as she pours tears.”

This account confirms what we have already seen in the Telemachy: Penelope longs for Odysseus. Antikleia does not mention the suitors, but her information is naturally dated to the time of her

[180] Page 1955 dedicates an entire chapter to decrying the spuriousness of book 11, pgs. 21-47. However, Doherty 1991 finds both art and meaning in much of what Page finds to be artless and meaningless. Her approach considers the gender dynamics and the internal audience of book 11 within the *Odyssey,* which Page unfortunately neglects.

[181] Notably, this entire section is a first-person narrative in the mouth of Odysseus. I have chosen to take at least this section of his tale, as truthful, because there is no other way for Odysseus to have known at this point certain details about his family that are later corroborated by the narrative.

[182] Doherty 1991, pg 155.

death. Thus when Antikleia died, sometime between years ten and thirteen since Odysseus had been gone,[183] the suitors had not yet descended upon the palace.

Earlier in the *nekuia*, the prophet Teiresias told Odysseus that by the time he returns home, he will find arrogant men courting his wife.[184] Odysseus must infer that his mother's information is incomplete based on Teiresias' prophecy; the situation will not hold, if it even still does in the present moment. Teiresias made no mention of how Penleope receives the suitors' attentions, and while our faithful listener knows that Penelope still longs for her husband even in year twenty of his absence, Odysseus does not. All Antikleia's report tells him is that for a time, Penelope was still faithful to him, but according to Teiresias the situation will change in uncertain ways before all is said and done.

Page objects to the contradictions between Antikleia's and Teiresias' information,[185] though the timeline de Jong constructs explains the discrepancy.[186] In my reckoning, Page has neglected to consider the impact of these discrepancies on the narrative as a whole; his focus is microtextual.[187] However, on the larger level, these two accounts provide narrative tension: Odysseus, suspicious and calculating by nature, will naturally ruminate on when and how the situation in the palace will change in his absence. Thus, the discrepancies are not only unproblematic logically, they are narratively useful.

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[183] De Jong 2001, pg. 280.

[184] 11.115-7.

[185] 1955 pgs. 40-1

[186] 2001 pg. 280

[187] For more on the micro, meso, and macro level of textual analysis, see de Jong, 2002.

In any case, Antikleia then moves on to the fates of the other members of the family (11.184-96).

"σὸν δ᾽ οὔ πώ τις ἔχει καλὸν γέρας, ἀλλὰ ἕκηλος
Τηλέμαχος τεμένεα νέμεται καὶ δαῖτας ἐίσας
δαίνυται, ἃς ἐπέοικε δικασπόλον ἄνδρ᾽ ἀλεγύνειν·
πάντες γὰρ καλέουσι. πατὴρ δὲ σὸς αὐτόθι μίμνει
ἀγρῷ, οὐδὲ πόλινδε κατέρχεται· οὐδέ οἱ εὐναὶ
δέμνια καὶ χλαῖναι καὶ ῥήγεα σιγαλόεντα,
ἀλλ᾽ ὅ γε χεῖμα μὲν εὕδει ὅθι δμῶες ἐνὶ οἴκῳ
ἐν κόνι ἄγχι πυρός, κακὰ δὲ χροῒ εἵματα εἶται·[188]
αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν ἔλθῃσι θέρος τεθαλυῖά τ᾽ ὀπώρη,
πάντῃ οἱ κατὰ γουνὸν ἀλωῆς οἰνοπέδοιο
φύλλων κεκλιμένων χθαμαλαὶ βεβλήαται εὐναί·
ἔνθ᾽ ὅ γε κεῖτ᾽ ἀχέων, μέγα δὲ φρεσὶ πένθος ἀέξει
σὸν νόστον ποθέων· χαλεπὸν δ᾽ ἐπὶ γῆρας ἱκάνει."

"And no one yet has your noble honor, but
Untroubled Telemachus inhabits your lands and eats
Equal feasts, which a lawgiver rightly furnishes
For everyone calls on him. And your father stays there
In the country, and he won't go down to the city. Nor has
He as a bed mattresses and cloaks and shining blankets,
But in winter he sleeps where the slaves do in the house,
In ashes near the fire, and he covers his skin in bad clothes.
But when summer and the thriving dog days have come,
All across the slope of the wine-giving vineyard
Low beds of fallen leaves are scattered.
He lies there grieving, and a great sorrow grows in his heart
Of longing for your return, and he's coming to a bitter old age."

[188] Lines 187-91 are also later confirmed when Odysseus returns to Ithaca.

These lines will again have different meanings to the listener and to Odysseus. From this description, at the time that Antikleia died, Telemachus was still young,[189] and Laertes had already absconded from the palace. Can this be true, and if not, how can she know that he has left the palace in the time since? I leave this question unresolved. In any case, to our listener, these lines will indicate that Penelope was the only adult member of the elite family left in the home when the suitors appeared on the scene. She had no moral support against them from the beginning, and was therefore in a vulnerable position. Her ability to withstand them for so long is therefore all the more admirable. However, to Odysseus, these lines will mean that Penelope is living without any *kurios* to monitor her behavior. That fact in combination with Teiresias' prophecy about arrogant men will not bode well, in his mind.

Finally, Antikleia explains the cause of her death (11.197-203).

"οὕτω γὰρ καὶ ἐγὼν ὀλόμην καὶ πότμον ἐπέσπον·
οὔτ᾽ ἐμέ γ᾽ ἐν μεγάροισιν ἑὸς κοπος ἰοχέαιρα
οἷς ἀγανοῖς βελέεσσιν ἐποιχομένη κατέπεφνεν,
οὔτε τις οὖν μοι νοῦσος ἐπήλυθεν, ἥ τε μάλιστα
τηκεδόνι στυγερῇ μελέων ἐξείλετο θυμόν·
ἀλλά με σός τε πόθος σά τε μήδεα, φαίδιμ᾽ Ὀδυσσεῦ,
σή τ᾽ ἀγανοφροσύνη μελιηδέα θυμὸν ἀπηύρα."

"That's how I also died and followed my fate:
And the keen archer did not in the palace
Attack and kill me with her gentle arrows,
Nor did any disease come over me, which often
Takes the life from one's limbs with awful wasting,
But longing for you, and your mind, glorious Odysseus,
And your gentleness took my sweet life."

[189] De Jong puts him at between age ten and thirteen, pg. 280.

Antikleia's character does not have much relevance after this scene. It is common in katabases for characters to reunite with deceased loved ones,[190] and given that Odysseus' son, wife, and father must all serve particular roles upon his return to Ithaca, his mother was perhaps the obvious choice for the job, so a skeptic might take her presence here as purely formulaic. But it is also worth considering what this specific reunion accomplishes in the narrative.

I propose that this passage sets up Antikleia as a potential double for Penelope. Her death proves that it really is possible to die of grief in the world of the *Odyssey*, and if Odysseus synthesizes Teiresias' and Antikleia's combined information on Penelope, he should see two possible negative consequences of his long absence: if Penelope receives the suitors' attentions positively, she might remarry and dishonor him before he returns; if she loves him and hates the suitors, she might wear out her heart in grief and die before his return. Either way, he loses his wife.

The listener by now knows that one of these potential outcomes, Penelope's seduction, is unlikely. However, the listener might consider the plotline "bride of death" as a new possibility, based on Antikleia's miserable death: Death becomes Penelope's new husband. Our listener may or may not reasonably see "bride of death" as likely, since Penelope would be an atypical example of the trope. Persephone is the paradigm: a beautiful and very young woman snatched away before her (first) wedding day.[191] Consequently, evidence from epigram suggests that in the Greek imagination, brides of death are usually quite young—there is one as young as five in the

[190] Scherer, Falconer 2020, pg. 2-3.

[191] Hunter 2019, pg. 145-6.

epigraphic record.[192] The approximately thirty-five year old and already married Penelope would be well outside the norm. However, Felson argues that, "because she has been celibate, Penelope resembles a virginal bride whose chastity Artemis oversees,"[193] and we have posited a listener who is willing to accept significant variations on familiar materials. Variants on the trope of brides entering the underworld can happen,[194] so it is conceivable that Penelope could enact a modified version of "bride of death". To be generous, let us say that our listener now sees three plotlines available to the poet: "marriage to suitor" (because of fear), "disdain and cunning tricks", and "bride of death".

HEARSAY: ATHENA

To our listener, the next report on Penelope—from Athena—comes relatively soon, in book thirteen. However, to Odysseus, seven years have passed since his *nekuia.*[195] He has had seven years to dwell on what Teiresias has said about suitors in his home, and now that he is back on Ithaca, he clearly intends to scope out the situation in the palace before taking action. Athena applauds him for his suspicious tendencies (13.329-40).[196]

> Τὸν δ᾽ ἠμείβετ᾽ ἔπειτα θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη·
> "αἰεί τοι τοιοῦτον ἐνὶ στήθεσσι νόημα· 330

[192] Hunter 2019, pg. 145-6.

[193] Felson 1994, pg. 157.

[194] For more on the trope and Euripides' *Alcestis* as a variant, see Assaël 2004.

[195] De Jong 2001, pg. 587-8.

[196] For more on the particularities of her epiphany in this scene, see Pucci 1986.

τῶ σε καὶ οὐ δύναμαι προλιπεῖν δύστηνον ἐόντα,
οὕνεκ᾽ ἐπητής ἐσσι καὶ ἀγχίνοος καὶ ἐχέφρων.
ἀσπασίως γάρ κ᾽ ἄλλος ἀνὴρ ἀλαλήμενος ἐλθὼν
ἵετ᾽ ἐνὶ μεγάροις ἰδέειν παῖδάς τ᾽ ἄλοχόν τε·
σοὶ δ᾽ οὔ πω φίλον ἐστὶ δαήμεναι οὐδὲ πυθέσθαι,
πρίν γ᾽ ἔτι σῆς ἀλόχου πειρήσεαι, ἥ τέ τοι αὖτως
ἧσται ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν, ὀϊζυραὶ δέ οἱ αἰεὶ
φθίνουσιν νύκτες τε καὶ ἤματα δάκρυ χεούσῃ.
αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ τὸ μὲν οὔ ποτ᾽ ἀπίστεον, ἀλλ᾽ ἐνὶ θυμῷ
ᾔδε᾽, ὃ νοστήσεις ὀλέσας ἅπο πάντας ἑταίρους·”

And answering him the glancing eyed goddess Athena said:
“For always there is a plan like this in your breast:
Thus I can’t abandon you even when you’re unlucky,
Because you’re gentle and shrewd and discreet.
For if another wanderer should arrive
Gladly he’d rush home to see his children and wife;
But it’s not yet dear to you to learn nor hear
Before you test your wife, who thus sits
In the home, and always her miserable
Nights and days wane as she pours tears.
But I was never doubtful, but at heart
I knew you’d return after losing all your companions.”

Athena has intuited that Odysseus intends to surveil his wife before announcing himself, and even though she knows, and tells him, that Penelope mourns for him still (336b-8), she still encourages his plan. In doing so, she also tacitly encourages the listener to appraise Penelope through the eyes of her husband.

None of Athena’s information on Penelope from lines 329-40 above is new to our listener—in fact, lines 13.337b-338 are a reprise of 11.182b-3 in Antikleia’s speech. Athena elaborates further (13.375-381):

“διογενὲς Λαερτιάδη, πολυμήχαν᾽ Ὀδυσσεῦ,
φράζευ ὅπως μνηστῆρσιν ἀναιδέσι χεῖρας ἐφήσεις,

οἳ δή τοι τρίετες μέγαρον κάτα κοιρανέουσι,
μνώμενοι ἀντιθέην ἄλοχον καὶ ἕδνα διδόντες·
ἡ δὲ σὸν αἰεὶ νόστον ὀδυρομένη κατὰ θυμὸν
πάντας μέν ῥ᾽ ἔλπει καὶ ὑπίσχεται ἀνδρὶ ἑκάστῳ,
ἀγγελίας προϊεῖσα, νόος δέ οἱ ἄλλα μενοινᾷ.”

“Divine born son of Laertes, clever Odysseus,
Think how you’ll lay hands on the shameless suitors
Who’ve lorded in your hall for three years,
Courting your godlike wife and giving gifts;
And she always mourns for your return in her heart
She encourages everyone and makes promises to each man,
Sending messages, but her mind wants other things.”

And once again, lines 380-1 are repeated from 2.91-2, Antinoos’ speech: nothing here is new to the listener, but it will be to Odysseus.

However, Odysseus, he is clearly unwilling or unable to trust that Penelope disdains the suitors without verifying for himself. Athena disguises him so that he is unrecognizable to all human beings, “ἄγνωστον… πάντεσσι βροτοῖσι,” to help him on his stealth mission.[197]

HEARSAY: EUMAEUS

Very little time passes either for the listener or for Odysseus—it is perhaps a few hours later in the world of the *Odyssey*—before Eumaeus also mentions Penelope in the subsequent book (14.121-30).

[197] 13.397. Also in book 13, the poet will use *agnōston* to describe Odysseus’ failure to recognize Ithaca as his homeland. For a fuller discussion of this other use of the word, see Clayton 2004, pg. 56-9; Pucci 1986 also discusses *agnōson*, pg. 11-12.

Τὸν δ᾽ ἠμείβετ᾽ ἔπειτα συβώτης, ὄρχαμος ἀνδρῶν·
“ὦ γέρον, οὔ τις κεῖνον ἀνὴρ ἀλαλήμενος ἐλθὼν
ἀγγέλλων πείσειε γυναῖκά τε καὶ φίλον υἱόν.
ἀλλ᾽ ἄλλως κομιδῆς κεχρημένοι ἄνδρες ἀλῆται
ψεύδοντ᾽, οὐδ᾽ ἐθέλουσιν ἀληθέα μυθήσασθαι.
ὃς δέ κ᾽ ἀλητεύων Ἰθάκης ἐς δῆμον ἵκηται,
ἐλθὼν ἐς δέσποιναν ἐμὴν ἀπατήλια βάζει·
ἡ δ᾽ εὖ δεξαμένη φιλέει καὶ ἕκαστα μεταλλᾷ,
καί οἱ ὀδυρομένῃ βλεφάρων ἄπο δάκρυα πίπτει,
ἢ θέμις ἐστὶ γυναικός, ἐπὴν πόσις ἄλλοθ᾽ ὄληται.”

And then the swineherd, leader of men answered him:
“Old man, no wanderer who comes making announcements
About him could persuade his wife and dear son,
But wanderers who need care uselessly
Lie, and they don’t want to tell the truth.
And whenever a wanderer comes to the deme of Ithaca,
He goes to my mistress and says calculated things;
And she welcomes him, befriends him, and asks him everything,
And as she cries, tears fall from her eyelids,
As is the custom of a woman when her husband died far away.”

This account finally supplies news to Odysseus and our listener both. In her bid for information, as well as in her honorary role as head of household, Penelope has taken to receiving guests and asking them for any news of her husband.[198] In other words, she has taken on a somewhat

[198] Telemachus will later complicate this in 15.512-17:

Τὸν δ᾽ αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ηὔδα·
“ἄλλως μέν σ᾽ ἂν ἐγώ γε καὶ ἠμέτερόνδε κελοίμην
ἔρχεσθ᾽· οὐ γάρ τι ξενίων ποθή· ἀλλὰ σοὶ αὐτῷ
χεῖρον, ἐπεί τοι ἐγὼ μὲν ἀπέσσομαι, οὐδέ σε μήτηρ

ὄψεται· οὐ μὲν γάρ τι θαμὰ μνηστῆρσ᾽ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ

φαίνεται, ἀλλ᾽ ἀπὸ τῶν ὑπερῳΐῳ ἱστὸν ὑφαίνει.”

And answering him clever Telemachus said directly:

“Otherwise I would order you even to go to our place;

For there is no lack of hospitality; but for you yourself

It’s better, since I will be away, and my mother won’t see you;

For she does not very often at all show herself to the suitors

In the house, but weaves her web upstairs away from them.”

These lines suggest that Penelope may not be able to receive guests, contrary to Eumaeus’ report. However, their precise meaning is unclear. The confusion rests in the verb *opsetai* in line 517, which literally means to “see”, and unlike our English idiom, does not usually have connotations of “welcome” or “accept” a guest or client into the home. Cunliffe includes “To admit to one’s presence” as the seventh meaning of the verb, but cites only this line as evidence (1953, pg. 298).

If we take the verb in its usual sense as 1) “to look, gaze” or 5) “to have sight of, see, behold” (Cunliffe 297-8), then these lines might mean that Penelope will not see the guest arriving, i.e. perceive him. Perhaps she needs a messenger to alert her to guests because she cannot see them arrive, being upstairs, as the poet stresses in 517. In any case, the bulk of the evidence will support that Penelope does, in fact, receive guests in the palace.

masculine role at home.[199] Nevertheless, she is devoted to her husband and still acts as a woman in her position should by grieving for her lost husband. Thus, Antikleia, Athena, and Eumaeus all agree: Penelope wants Odysseus back. That much is entirely consistent.

The narrative therefore sets up as the primary question of the latter half of the poem, not what Penelope's real feelings are, but how the reunion of the spouses will play out. Eumaeus' account, taken with Athena's magical help, builds anticipation: Penelope interviews all newcomers for word of her husband, and Odysseus is going home, unrecognizable. Husband and wife are going to have an interview. Odysseus will not look like himself, but Penelope is no fool. Eumaeus and perhaps Penelope also have been tricked before,[200] so Odysseus can expect any stories he tells while in disguise as the beggar to be met with skepticism. Our attentive listener will be waiting to see when and how the recognition will take place, and whether Penelope will somehow intuit the beggar's true identity, regardless of his appearance, or whether Odysseus will outsmart his perceptive wife.

However, our listener will be kept in suspense a while longer, as the narrative is about to return its focus to Telemachus.

HEARSAY: ATHENA

Book fifteen opens on Athena rushing to Sparta to send Telemachus home. She finds him on Menelaus' porch late at night and addresses him thus (15.10-23):

[199] For more on Penelope's flexible relationship with femininity, see Foley 1978.

[200] 14. 360-390.

"Τηλέμαχ', οὐκέτι καλὰ δόμων ἄπο τῆλ' ἀλάλησαι,
κτήματά τε προλιπὼν ἄνδρας τ' ἐν σοῖσι δόμοισιν
οὕτω ὑπερφιάλους· μή τοι κατὰ πάντα φάγωσι
κτήματα δασσάμενοι, σὺ δὲ τηϋσίην ὁδὸν ἔλθῃς.
ἀλλ' ὄτρυνε τάχιστα βοὴν ἀγαθὸν Μενέλαον
πεμπέμεν, ὄφρ' ἔτι οἴκοι ἀμύμονα μητέρα τέτμῃς.
ἤδη γάρ ῥα πατήρ τε κασίγνητοί τε κέλονται
Εὐρυμάχῳ γήμασθαι· ὁ γὰρ περιβάλλει ἅπαντας
μνηστῆρας δώροισι καὶ ἐξώφελλεν ἕεδνα·
μή νύ τι σεῦ ἀέκητι δόμων ἐκ κτῆμα φέρηται.
οἶσθα γὰρ οἷος θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι γυναικός·
κείνου βούλεται οἶκον ὀφέλλειν ὅς κεν ὀπυίῃ,
παίδων δὲ προτέρων καὶ κουριδίοιο φίλοιο
οὐκέτι μέμνηται τεθνηκότος οὐδὲ μεταλλᾷ."

"Telemachus, it's no longer good to wander far from home,
Leaving behind possessions and men in your home
Who are so overbearing, or they'll eat everything
And divide the goods, and you'll have traveled for nothing.
But quickly get Menelaus, good at the war cry,
To send you so you still find your mother at home.
For her father and brothers are already urging her
To marry Eurymachus; for he surpasses all
The suitors in presents and increases the bridal gifts;
Don't let her carry goods from the home against your will.
You know the sort of heart in a woman's chest;
She wants to increase the home of whoever she marries,
And she doesn't worry about her first children
And dear, dead husband, or even ask about them."

This is the first hint in quite some time that Penelope has any interest in the suitors, but Athena is directly contradicting what she just said to Odysseus in the previous book. She must be lying to one of the two men. The relevant context suggests that Athena's first speech should be taken as

fact, since it is corroborated elsewhere, whereas this speech is not corroborated.[201] In order to understand why Athena has decided to lie to Telemachus here, we must consider 1. who is speaking, 2. to whom she speaks, 3. and her way of doing so.

First, the speaker Athena loves deceit. She has just in book thirteen told Odysseus that she loves him so much because he is a liar, like she is (13.291-9):

> "κερδαλέος κ᾽ εἴη καὶ ἐπίκλοπος ὅς σε παρέλθοι
> ἐν πάντεσσι δόλοισι, καὶ εἰ θεὸς ἀντιάσειε.
> σχέτλιε, ποικιλομῆτα, δόλων ἆτ᾽, οὐκ ἄρ᾽ ἔμελλες,
> οὐδ᾽ ἐν σῇ περ ἐὼν γαίῃ, λήξειν ἀπατάων
> μύθων τε κλοπίων, οἵ τοι πεδόθεν φίλοι εἰσίν.
> ἀλλ᾽ ἄγε, μηκέτι ταῦτα λεγώμεθα, εἰδότες ἄμφω
> κέρδε᾽, ἐπεὶ σὺ μέν ἐσσι βροτῶν ὄχ᾽ ἄριστος ἁπάντων
> βουλῇ καὶ μύθοισιν, ἐγὼ δ᾽ ἐν πᾶσι θεοῖσι
> μήτι τε κλέομαι καὶ κέρδεσιν·"
>
> "He'd be crafty and wily whoever could outwit you
> In all deceit, even if a god met you.
> Unflinching, duplicitous, relentless in lies, you won't,
> Not even in your own country, leave off the frauds
> And calculated words, which you love in your bones.
> But come, let's not say these things, since we both love
> Gain, since you're far the best of all mortals
> In plan and speech, and I am famous among all gods
> In deceit and in gain."

So the poet has established that Athena should not automatically be treated as a reliable narrator in the *Odyssey*.

Second, Athena is talking to Telemachus, whom she wants to send back to Ithaca, as she stated in 13.412f. She is not telling Telemachus random lies: her speech is tailored to him. In book

[201] Stanford 1965, 239.

one, we heard Telemachus express anxieties about his mother, calling his own paternity into question and asserting that his mother would not swear off remarriage even though the suitors are damaging his inheritance. Thus, Athena knows that Telemachus is afraid his mother is not prioritizing him over the suitors, and her speech invokes the thought, *Your mom loves Eurymachus and she is going to forget you.*[202] Her false warning is designed to elicit his alarm and spur him to action.

Third, the manner in which Athena delivers this message to Telemachus is ambiguous. As a goddess, she has multiple way of communicating with mortals, and the passage does not make the details of the scene clear (15.7-9):

> Τηλέμαχον δ᾽ οὐχ ὕπνος ἔχε γλυκύς, ἀλλ᾽ ἐνὶ θυμῷ
> νύκτα δι᾽ ἀμβροσίην μελεδήματα πατρὸς ἔγειρεν.
> ἀγχοῦ δ᾽ ἱσταμένη προσέφη γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη·
>
> And sweet sleep did not hold Telemachus, but in his heart
> Throughout the immortal night anxieties for his father woke him.
> And standing nearby, glancing eyed Athena addressed him:

As a general trend in Homer, mortals are more receptive to divinities during states when the consciousness is affected, such as when asleep or severely wounded.[203] Telemachus is not asleep, but perhaps in an in-between state, lying there in the dark. We are not told that Athena appears in the guise of anyone else this time—perhaps she does not need to in the absence of light, as it is

[202] For a discussion of this epiphany as partially a manifestation of Telemachus' anxieties, see Clay 1983, p. 136-8.

[203] Pelliccia 1995, pg. 273-7.

unclear whether Telemachus can see her beside him.[204] Greek representations of epiphany in literature and material culture are varied and can invoke different senses, including sight, hearing, and smell.[205] But there are several common ways in which gods send messages in the Homeric epics specifically: in the guise of a mortal,[206] as when "Mentes" visited Telemachus at home; through a dream vision, as when "Iphthime" visited Penelope's dream; by placing an idea in a person's *thumos*; or through some combination of these. The message can be true or false, helpful or harmful, as when Zeus sends Agammemnon an "οὖλον ὄνειρον," a ruinous dream.[207] Athena is not appearing in disguise, and she does not send a dream vision. Her message perhaps comes in the form of a disembodied voice which may or may not be disguised as another's:[208] she casts the thought into his *thumos*. Thus, Telemachus might not know Athena is there at all. Mortals do not always recognize the divine for what they are,[209] and when Telemachus wakes Peisistratus, he never tells him that he has been visited by a god.[210]

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[204] Athena's epiphanies in the *Odyssey* are frequently difficult to visualize fully. For more, see Bierl 2004, pg. 46-8.

[205] Versnel 1987; Platt 2011, especially Chapter 1: "Framing Epiphany in Art and Text"; and Petridou 2015.

[206] Gods typically assume both the body and voice of the person they impersonate. See Clay, 1974; for the difficulties of divine invisibility, see also Pucci 1986.

[207] *Iliad* 2.6.

[208] For more on the difference between divine and human speech, see Clay 1974.

[209] See Clay 1983, pg. 9-25.

[210] 15.46-47.

Athena's visit to Telemachus in Sparta is of a very different kind than her epiphany to Odysseus in Ithaca, where she first took up a mortal disguise, revealed her true identity, and assured Odysseus that he was one of her personal favorite mortals. Athena is in Sparta to get Telemachus back on the road. It is a utilitarian epiphany. Given the juvenile nature of the replacement-fear she inspires in Telemachus and the lack of description of her physical form at that moment, it is possible that she is not visible and that she intends Telemachus to hear this message as if it were his own thought, in order to produce a useful emotional response.[211] And it seems to have worked, since not only does Telemachus rush back to Ithaca, but the first question he will ask Eumaeus is whether his mother left home to get remarried[212]—which Eumaeus answers in the negative (16.37-9):

> "καὶ λίην κείνη γε μένει τετληότι θυμῷ
> σοῖσιν ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν· ὀϊζυραὶ δέ οἱ αἰεὶ
> φθίνουσιν νύκτες τε καὶ ἤματα δάκρυ χεούσῃ."
>
> "She remains, sorrowing greatly at heart,
> In your palace; and her miserable nights
> And days wane as she pours down tears."

Telemachus remains uneasy,[213] but Athena's second report does not meet the threshold for legitimate evidence against Penelope.

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[211] This is not the only time that Athena manipulates one mortal emotionally to the benefit of another—she also uses Nausicaä's anticipation of marriage to Odysseus' benefit. See Murnaghan 1995, pg. 66-7.

[212] 16.31-5.

[213] 16.73-7.

SCENE 5: PENELOPE CONFRONTS ANTINOOS

Telemachus arrives back in Ithaca at the end of book fifteen, meets his father in book sixteen, and from that moment on the narrative no longer needs to jump between such different perspectives and locations to follow them. Telemachus and Odysseus now work as a unit. The story is still split between Eumaeus' hut and the palace, however, and in 16.328f, the narrator follows an unnamed messenger and Eumaeus back to the palace bearing news of Telemachus' return. Eumaeus and the messenger both arrive at the palace at the same time and share the good news.[214]

Their announcement temporarily defangs Penelope's distress from the end of book four,[215] which is the last time she appeared in the text. However, the relief will not last, as the suitors immediately begin debating another attempt on her son's life.[216] It is at this moment that she finally confronts the suitors, something which she had avoided for years (16.408-17).

> Ἡ δ' αὖτ' ἄλλ' ἐνόησε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια,
> μνηστήρεσσι φανῆναι ὑπέρβιον ὕβριν ἔχουσι·
> πεύθετο γὰρ οὗ παιδὸς ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ὄλεθρον·
> κῆρυξ γὰρ οἱ ἔειπε Μέδων, ὃς ἐπεύθετο βουλάς.
> βῆ δ' ἰέναι μέγαρόνδε σὺν ἀμφιπόλοισι γυναιξίν.
> ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ μνηστῆρας ἀφίκετο δῖα γυναικῶν,
> στῆ ῥα παρὰ σταθμὸν τέγεος πύκα ποιητοῖο,
> ἄντα παρειάων σχομένη λιπαρὰ κρήδεμνα,
> Ἀντίνοον δ' ἐνένιπεν ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζεν·

[214] 16.337.

[215] Felson 1994, pg. 21.

[216] 16.342-408.

And then she, observant Penelope, decided
To show herself to the suitors who had wanton violence.
For she heard about her son's peril in the palace;
For the herald Medon told her, who heard the plans.
And she went into the megaron with her attending women.
But when she, divine among women, reached the suitors,
She stood beside a pillar of the closely-joined roof,
Keeping her shining veil in front of her cheeks,
And she confronted Antinoos, said a speech, and called him out:

Once again, the poet stressed the precautions Penelope takes before going near the suitors, which she rarely ever does:[217] She brings chaperones, stands by the pillar, and keeps her face veiled. As always, the suitors vastly outnumber her and the handful of other women present, but she rebukes Antinoos anyway (16.418-33).

"Ἀντίνοʼ, ὕβριν ἔχων, κακομήχανε, καὶ δέ σέ φασιν
ἐν δήμῳ Ἰθάκης μεθʼ ὁμήλικας ἔμμεν ἄριστον
βουλῇ καὶ μύθοισι· σὺ δʼ οὐκ ἄρα τοῖος ἔησθα.
μάργε, τίη δὲ σὺ Τηλεμάχῳ θάνατόν τε μόρον τε
ῥάπτεις, οὐδʼ ἱκέτας ἐμπάζεαι, οἷσιν ἄρα Ζεὺς
μάρτυρος; οὐδʼ ὁσίη κακὰ ῥάπτειν ἀλλήλοισιν.
ἦ οὐκ οἶσθʼ ὅτε δεῦρο πατὴρ τεὸς ἵκετο φεύγων,
δῆμον ὑποδείσας; δὴ γὰρ κεχολώατο λίην,
οὕνεκα ληϊστῆρσιν ἐπισπόμενος Ταφίοισιν
ἤκαχε Θεσπρωτούς· οἱ δʼ ἡμῖν ἄρθμιοι ἦσαν.
τόν ῥʼ ἔθελον φθῖσαι καὶ ἀπορραῖσαι φίλον ἦτορ
ἠδὲ κατὰ ζωὴν φαγέειν μενοεικέα πολλήν·
ἀλλʼ Ὀδυσεὺς κατέρυκε καὶ ἔσχεθεν ἱεμένους περ.
τοῦ νῦν οἶκον ἄτιμον ἔδεις, μνάᾳ δὲ γυναῖκα
παῖδά τʼ ἀποκτείνεις, ἐμὲ δὲ μεγάλως ἀκαχίζεις·
ἀλλά σε παύσασθαι κέλομαι καὶ ἀνωγέμεν ἄλλους."

"Antinoos, you conniving brute, and they say
you're the best of your contemporaries in the deme of Ithaca

[217] 15.516-7.

In planning and speaking, but you aren't that kind of man.
You lunatic, why are you creating death and doom
For Telemachus, and don't you care about suppliants, who belong
To Zeus the Witness? It's prohibited to sew evils for one another.
Don't you know your father came here fleeing,
Afraid of his deme? Because they were furious,
Because by going with with Taphian pirates, he brought
Grief to the Thesprotians, who were our allies.
They wanted to destroy him and take his dear life
And consume much sweet livelihood;
But Odysseus protected and shielded him, though they were hell-bent.
Now you're eating his dishonored house, courting his wife,
Killing his son, and making me miserable:
But I'm ordering you to stop; tell the others, too."

Penelope's primary fear is for Telemachus's safety, since that is what spurs her to action. However, once the floodgates have opened, she "rebukes him with passion."[218] Her complaints are four-fold: You are ruining our livelihood, badgering me to remarry, attempting to murder Telemachus, and making me miserable. Her fear builds into unambiguous fury, and while the worst of her anger is directed at Antinoos, she clearly has no affection for the others, ἄλλους, who she demands leave also. She is well beyond her comfort confronting the suitors already, and if there were ever an appropriate moment to denounce the possibility of ever remarrying, this would be it, but she does not. She desperately wants the suitors to leave, that much is self-evident, and yet she does not refuse marriage.

Penelope's complaints are eminently reasonable, but that does not matter. Antinoos does not even need to defend himself; Eurymachus immediately steps in to deny reality (16.434-48).

Τὴν δ᾽ αὖτ᾽ Εὐρύμαχος, Πολύβου πάϊς, ἀντίον ηὔδα·
"κούρη Ἰκαρίοιο, περίφρον Πηνελόπεια,

[218] West, 2014, pg. 251.

θάρσει· μή τοι ταῦτα μετὰ φρεσὶ σῇσι μελόντων.
οὐκ ἔσθ᾽ οὗτος ἀνὴρ οὐδ᾽ ἔσσεται οὐδὲ γένηται,
ὅς κεν Τηλεμάχῳ σῷ υἱέϊ χεῖρας ἐποίσει
ζώοντός γ᾽ ἐμέθεν καὶ ἐπὶ χθονὶ δερκομένοιο.
ὧδε γὰρ ἐξερέω, καὶ μὴν τετελεσμένον ἔσται·
αἶψά οἱ αἷμα κελαινὸν ἐρωήσει περὶ δουρὶ
ἠμετέρῳ, ἐπεὶ ἦ καὶ ἐμὲ πτολίπορθος Ὀδυσσεὺς
πολλάκι γούνασιν οἷσιν ἐφεσσάμενος κρέας ὀπτὸν
ἐν χείρεσσιν ἔθηκεν, ἐπέσχε τε οἶνον ἐρυθρόν.
τῷ μοι Τηλέμαχος πάντων πολὺ φίλτατός ἐστιν
ἀνδρῶν, οὐδέ τί μιν θάνατον τρομέεσθαι ἄνωγα
ἔκ γε μνηστήρων· θεόθεν δ᾽ οὐκ ἔστ᾽ ἀλέασθαι.”
‘`Ως φάτο θαρσύνων, τῷ δ᾽ ἤρτυεν αὐτὸς ὄλεθρον.

And again Eurymachus, son of Polybos, addressed her directly:
“Daughter of Icarius, observant Penelope,
Cheer up; don’t let these things concern you in your heart.
This man doesn’t, nor will he, nor will anybody be born,
Who would lay a hand on your son Telemachus
While I’m alive and seeing upon the earth.
For I’ll say this, and truly it’ll happen:
Immediately his dark blood will stream forth around my
Spear, since me also did Odysseus the city sacker
Many times set upon his knees and put in my hands
Roasted meat, and offer red wine to me.
So Telemachus is by far most important to me of all
Men, and I order him not at all to fear death
From the suitors; but it can’t be avoided from a god.”
So he spoke encouraging her, but he devised ruin for him.

The suitors can and do use their numbers against Penelope, backing one another up as necessary. If our listener is paying attention, he might suddenly remember Telemachus’ lines from book one: “ἡ δ᾽ οὔτ᾽ ἀρνεῖται στυγερὸν γάμον οὔτε τελευτὴν / ποιῆσαι δύναται,” “and she doesn’t refuse

hateful marriage nor can she make it stop."[219] Penelope gives up and cries until Athena puts her to sleep.[220]

SCENE 6: TELEMACHUS RETURNS AND REUNITES WITH HIS MOTHER

The narrator follows Eumaeus back to his hut, and recenters Odysseus and Telemachus. We next see Penelope when Telemachus arrives back at the palace (17.31-40).

Τὸν δὲ πολὺ πρώτη εἶδε τροφὸς Εὐρύκλεια,
κώεα καστορνῦσα θρόνοις ἔνι δαιδαλέοισι,
δακρύσασα δ᾽ ἔπειτ᾽ ἰθὺς κίεν· ἀμφὶ δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἄλλαι
δμῳαὶ Ὀδυσσῆος ταλασίφρονος ἠγερέθοντο,
καὶ κύνεον ἀγαπαζόμεναι κεφαλήν τε καὶ ὤμους.
‘Η δ᾽ ἴεν ἐκ θαλάμοιο περίφρων Πηνελόπεια,
Ἀρτέμιδι ἰκέλη ἠὲ χρυσέῃ Ἀφροδίτῃ,
ἀμφὶ δὲ παιδὶ φίλῳ βάλε πήχεε δακρύσασα,
κύσσε δέ μιν κεφαλήν τε καὶ ἄμφω φάεα καλά,
καί ῥ᾽ ὀλοφυρομένη ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα·

And the nurse Eurykleia was by far the first to see him
Spreading fleeces on elaborate thrones,
And then crying she went straight to him; and the other
Enslaved women of stalwart Odysseus gathered around,
And they stroked and kissed his head and shoulders.
And observant Penelope came out of the inner room,
Like Artemis or golden Aphrodite,
And wept and threw her arms around her beloved son,
And kissed his head and both beautiful eyes,
And as she cried she spoke winged words:

[219] 1.249-50.

[220] 16.450-1.

Unlike in her previous scene with the suitors, Penelope is not at all physically reserved—she rushes to the son she thought she might lose and embraces him. She then addresses him (17.41-4):

> "ἦλθες, Τηλέμαχε, γλυκερὸν φάος. οὔ σ᾽ ἔτ᾽ ἐγώ γε
> ὄψεσθαι ἐφάμην, ἐπεὶ ᾤχεο νηὶ Πύλονδε
> λάθρῃ, ἐμεῦ ἀέκητι, φίλου μετὰ πατρὸς ἀκουήν.
> ἀλλ᾽ ἄγε μοι κατάλεξον ὅπως ἤντησας ὀπωπῆς."
>
> "You've come, Telemachus, my sweet light, and I didn't
> Think I'd see you again, since you went by boat secretly
> To Pylos, against my will, after news of your father.
> But come and tell me what sight you met with."

However Telemachus responds to his mother "coldly and imperiously" and sends her away to perform sacrifices.[221] Just as in her first scene, Penelope obeys him. West reads Telemachus' rebuff as "obviously an expansion made so as to have the seer on the scene"[222] before he answers his mother's inquiry, but this is now the second time that Telemachus has rudely dismissed his mother when she seems, in fact, to behave reasonably.

[221] Stanford 1965, pg. 282.

[222] West 2014, 252.

SCENE 7: PENELOPE ASKS TELEMACHUS ABOUT HIS TRIP; THE PROPHECY

After performing the sacrifices Telemachus demanded of her, Penelope returns and tries once again to ask Telemachus about his journey.[223] He consents, and his summary of the trip contains a disproportionately long quote from Menelaus as he reacted to news of the suitors (17.124-37):[224]

" 'ὢ πόποι, ἦ μάλα δὴ κρατερόφρονος ἀνδρὸς ἐν εὐνῇ
ἤθελον εὐνηθῆναι, ἀνάλκιδες αὐτοὶ ἐόντες.
ὡς δ᾽ ὁπότ᾽ ἐν ξυλόχῳ ἔλαφος κρατεροῖο λέοντος
νεβροὺς κοιμήσασα νεηγενέας γαλαθηνοὺς
κνημοὺς ἐξερέῃσι καὶ ἄγκεα ποιήεντα
βοσκομένη, ὁ δ᾽ ἔπειτα ἐὴν εἰσήλυθεν εὐνήν,
ἀμφοτέροισι δὲ τοῖσιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφῆκεν,
ὣς Ὀδυσεὺς κείνοισιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφήσει.
αἰ γάρ, Ζεῦ τε πάτερ καὶ Ἀθηναίη καὶ Ἄπολλον
τοῖος ἐὼν οἷός ποτ᾽ ἐϋκτιμένῃ ἐνὶ Λέσβῳ
ἐξ ἔριδος Φιλομηλεΐδῃ ἐπάλαισεν ἀναστάς,
κὰδ δ᾽ ἔβαλε κρατερῶς, κεχάροντο δὲ πάντες Ἀχαιοί,
τοῖος ἐὼν μνηστῆρσιν ὁμιλήσειεν Ὀδυσσεύς·
πάντες κ᾽ ὠκύμοροί τε γενοίατο πικρόγαμοί τε.' "

"Oh good god, they want to sleep in the bed
Of an extremely dauntless man, though they're weaklings.
It's like when a deer, in a strong lion's thicket,
Lulls to sleep her unweaned newborn fawns,
And searches the shoulders and grassy hollows,
Grazing, but he, when he returns to his own den,
Sends shameful death upon both.
That's how Odysseus will send a shameful death upon them.
I wish, Father Zeus and Athena and Apollo—
Such as he was when in well-built Lesbos
He stood up and wrestled in contention Philomeleides—
And threw him down hard, and all the Achaeans cheered,

[223] 17.96-106.

[224] Cf 4.332-50.

I wish Odysseus would fight the suitors the same way.
And they all become short-lived and bitter-married."

Menelaus' quoted outburst comprises fourteen out of the forty-two total lines Telemachus speaks about his journey. So, Telemachus spends a third of his time recounting Menelaus' opinion of how foolish the suitors are, rather than mentioning more pertinent details such as the eagle omen Helen interpreted,[225] or his new friend Peisistratus, or even introducing his guest Theoclymenus, who is apparently in the room with them. It is an odd choice. West again dismisses these lines as artless since they are reprised from book four, but they speak to Telemachus' state of mind.[226] Telemachus knows Odysseus is home and planning to surveil Penelope and the other women for signs of affection towards the suitors.[227] Whether Telemachus means to express this or not, this quote is a warning: keep your distance from the suitors. The charitable reading of Telemachus's intent is that he is trying to protect his mother from incurring his father's wrath and maybe even violence, but we cannot forget his larger pattern of distrust and resentment towards her, either. Either or both motives could be operative.

In any case, he need not worry: it is at this moment that Theoclymenus, who still has not been introduced, pipes up to prophesy Odysseus' return (17.150-61):

‘`Ως φάτο, τῇ δ' ἄρα θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν ὄρινε.
τοῖσι δὲ καὶ μετέειπε Θεοκλύμενος θεοειδής·
“ὦ γύναι αἰδοίη Λαερτιάδεω Ὀδυσῆος,
ἦ τοι ὅ γ' οὐ σάφα οἶδεν, ἐμεῖο δὲ σύνθεο μῦθον·

[225] 15.159-179.

[226] West 2014, pg. 253.

[227] 16.299-307.

ἀτρεκέως γάρ σοι μαντεύσομαι οὐδ᾽ ἐπικεύσω.
ἴστω νῦν Ζεὺς πρῶτα θεῶν, ξενίη τε τράπεζα
ἱστίη τ᾽ Ὀδυσῆος ἀμύμονος, ἣν ἀφικάνω,
ὡς ἦ τοι Ὀδυσεὺς ἤδη ἐν πατρίδι γαίῃ,
ἥμενος ἢ ἕρπων, τάδε πευθόμενος κακὰ ἔργα,
ἔστιν, ἀτὰρ μνηστῆρσι κακὸν πάντεσσι φυτεύει·
οἷον ἐγὼν οἰωνὸν ἐϋσσέλμου ἐπὶ νηὸς
ἥμενος ἐφρασάμην καὶ Τηλεμάχῳ ἐγεγώνευν.”

So he spoke and stirred the heart in her chest.
And to them godlike Theoclymenos spoke up;
“Respectable wife of Odysseus son of Lartes,
Surely he doesn’t know this well, but listen to my speech;
For I shall prophesy truly to you, and I won’t hide it.
Now let Zeus know first of the gods, and the hospitable table
And altar of blameless Odysseus, which I have reached,
That Odysseus is already in his native country,
Hastening or stealing along, learning about these wicked acts,
But he is planting misfortune for all the suitors;
I pointed out some such omen while hastening
On a well-benched ship, and I proclaimed it to Telemachus.”

At this, Penelope wishes aloud that his prophecy comes true,[228] So Telemachus should be reassured that his mother has no intention of cozying up to any of the suitors.

Summary: The Wanderings

This is Penelope’s final scene before Odysseus will arrive back at his palace in disguise. “Marriage to suitor,” “disdain and cunning tricks,” and “bride of death” are all possible at the end of this stage in Penelope’s arc. Yet, there have been few developments in connection with any of them. These

[228] 17.162-5.

plots are "wife-focalized",[229] as Felson has said, and contrary to what we might expect, Penelope's most active and dynamic relationship at this point is not her marriage, because Odysseus has been absent now for twenty years. Nor is it that with the suitors, with whom she avoids interacting as much as possible. No, Penelope is consistent with respect to both: she misses her husband and she hates the suitors. Rather, all of her scenes thus far have been negotiations of her changing relationship with Telemachus: she attempts to protect and connect with him while also respecting his maturation into adulthood. Her most active role thus far has been not wife, but mother.

Penelope's relationship with Telemachus is fraught. He often rebuffs and defies her. He does not trust her, perhaps on the influence of Athena, who has encouraged him to suspect her at least once. And yet Penelope navigates the suitors with Telemachus' safety in mind. For many years, her own misery was not sufficient motivation to confront them, but she does so for the sake of his well-being. However, despite her best efforts, the confrontation in book sixteen merely demonstrates that she has no power to make the suitors leave, at least without refusing to remarry outright.

Our attentive listener should therefore wonder why Penelope withholds the one statement that might make the suitors give up and leave, if it might save her only son. Telemachus gives us no insight—he does not understand her reticence, and believes she is behaving poorly. But the poet has demonstrated that Telemachus' disapproval is unfounded, because if Penelope refused the suitors, they might not leave the palace peacefully. Telemachus has not, thus far, shown any particular social finesse, whereas Penelope has been able to hold the suitors off for years, so perhaps we ought to grant her opinion more weight.

[229] Felson 1994, ix.

The silence is ominous. If Penelope refused marriage and the suitors did not leave the palace, if they became enraged, insulted—what might happen then? What else might they force Penelope to do *hup' anankēs?*

CHAPTER THREE: BUILDUP TO REUNION

By the end of book 17, Odysseus has arrived back at the palace in disguise where he will spy on his own wife, and our listener will spy along with him. Our listener might not know what Odysseus will do if he finds Penelope to be disloyal, but thus far, Penelope's behavior has been consistent in that she loves and misses her husband. So, they might not be concerned.

To review, Felson laid out six total plot types the narrative could follow:

Penelope forsakes her marriage fully:	Homeric model (if any):
1. Marriage to suitor	Klytemnestra
2. Seduction by a foreigner	Helen
3. Seduction by a god	Alkmene
Penelope wavers (no consummation):	
4. Dalliance and courtship	Nausicaa
5. Bride of death	Daughters of Pandareus
Penelope remains fully faithful:	
6. Disdain and cunning tricks[230]	

Penelope's behavior has suggested as many as half of these, but the plots in question do not imply incompatible psychologies. In each, Penelope hates and fears the suitors. So far, there is no support

[230] Felson 1994, ix.

for the Duck-Rabbit theory of Penelope's psychology, though she does exploit the *appearance* of indeterminacy to keep the suitors at bay. Consequently, the significant variable that we can expect to determine the course of the narrative is whether Penelope has the ability to continue tricking and delaying the suitors, or if she feels she must call off the scheme in order to protect Telemachus. She has already confronted the suitors once out of fear for his safety, to no avail.

Of course, Odysseus is now on the scene to protect his son and reclaim his house, so the listener will expect him to prevent "bride of death" or "marriage to suitor" from playing out. Our listener should therefore expect Penelope to follow "disdain and cunning tricks" on the path towards reunion. At this late stage in the plot, Sheila Murnaghan notes marked parallels between Odysseus' return to Ithaca and the traditional *theoxenia* plot type, putting Odysseus in the position of a disguised immortal.[231] In this case, if Penelope treats the beggar with untoward interest or warmth, her behavior may begin to remind us of plot three, "seduction by a god," but of course, as Odysseus is the 'god' in question, there is no real danger of infidelity.

However, it is in the final stage of Penelope's arc that readings of her character become most contentious. Her behavior in books eighteen and nineteen is controversial, as, by some scholars' reckoning, she suddenly becomes—or appears to become—favorably interested in the suitors. The meaning of her appearance before them in the megaron, of her reported dream omen, and of announcing the contest of the bow are all debated. Interpretations must hinge on whether she first recognizes her husband before the final recognition scene in book twenty-three, and

[231] Murnaghan 1987.

therefore whether she is acting with consideration of his reaction. The possibilities are three: No, yes/no, and yes.[232]

No: Many scholars believe that Penelope does not recognize Odysseus before book 23—often thanks to Athena's magical disguise.[233] The disguise makes recognition impossible, therefore Penelope cannot be reacting to knowledge of husband's scheme or attempting to communicate with him. Thus, in moments when Penelope seems to act strangely, these scholars must raise alternate explanations for her behavior.

Richard Heitman argues that Penelope cannot recognize Odysseus against his will because she, "is doomed to prove inferior in *mētis* to Odysseus on any conceivable scale."[234] He instead believes that she sets the contest of the bow out of fear for Telemachus' safety. She intends to remarry because she sees herself and her failure to appease the suitors as, "a threat to his well-being,"[235] since she has no way of knowing that Odysseus has arrived on the scene to defend his household. Helena Foley sees in Penelope an Aristotelian tragic character who must "act without critical knowledge of the circumstances."[236] She also believes that Penelope caves to the suitors'

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[232] By yes/no, I refer to the camp who argue that by leaving the issue undecided, Homer encourages us to see both possibilities simultaneously, e.g. Clayton 2004.

[233] See further, e.g., Emlyn-Jones 1984, Murnaghan 1987, Foley 1995, Heitman 2005, and Currie 2022. This list is not at all exhaustive, but includes a variety of arguments leading to the same conclusion: Penelope does not know who the stranger is until book 23.

[234] Heitman 2005, pg. 6.

[235] Heitman 2005, pg. 69.

[236] Foley 1996, pg. 93.

demands in order to protect Telemachus,[237] and further, that this is not a mark of her moral weakness: "*it is precisely by proposing to establish the contest for her hand with such evident regret that Penelope passes the test of the faithful wife*." [238] In other words, Heitman and Foley believe Penelope is acting in accordance with "marriage to suitor" (because of fear).[239] Nevertheless, both Heitman and Foley argue that Penelope behaves morally, to the best of her ability, and that her primary concern must be for Telemachus,[240] not her absent husband. I find this sensible given her focus on her son this far. Yet, it is worth questioning their assumption that Penelope remains in the dark.

Yes/no: It is at this point in the narrative that the Rabbit-Duck theory raises its head. Those scholars who refuse to take a position on the moment of recognition see the lack of an answer as the point, e.g. as Barbara Clayton puts it: "I prefer to explain Homer's silence as a calculated move to situate Penelope in a context of uncertainty."[241] Nancy Felson also prefers to answer the question of whether Penelope recognizes Odysseus as both yes and no:

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[237] Foley 1995, pg. 100-1. Büchner 1940 also takes seriously the threat against Telemachus (137-9), as does Thornton 1963.

[238] Foley 1995, pg. 103, emphasis original.

[239] I draw a distinction between what likely will happen and what Penelope believes she is doing. As stated previously, Odysseus is on the scene to prevent her remarriage, but according to Heitman, Penelope does not know this. According to his analysis, then, she must therefore believe that she is on the path of "marriage to suitor".

[240] Lesser 2017 makes a similar argument also.

[241] Clayton 2004, pg. 40.

> [Following the test of the bed] Each spouse and storyteller, now out of danger, interprets all prior events only in terms of REUNION. Thus Penelope, remembering selectively, depicts the suitors solely as villains who devoured Odysseus' household. Her version of COURTSHIP exonerates Odysseus, and herself, for their slaughter. Penelope has trimmed her plots to a single type, the story of holding the suitors at bay until Odysseus' return. Though Penelope forgets the other side of the story, Homer's audience need not. Penelope's encouragement of the suitors and her enjoyment of their attention, suggested especially by her dream-reaction to the slaughter of her pet geese, indeed diminish their criminal culpability.[242]

Felson does not only think that a reasonable listener could believe either possibility, but that the listener *should* keep both possibilities in play.

However, given that the first two-thirds of the poem give consistent positive evidence for Penelope's hostility towards the suitors, and no evidence that contradicts it, the claim that her behavior is polysemous therefore seems to me unjustified. Why only now? If we were to accept that this is the preferable reading of the character, then we would still have to concede that Penelope's indeterminacy has been badly sketched. To borrow Aristotle's opinion on appropriate characterization (*Poetics* 1454a):[243]

> τέταρτον δὲ τὸ ὁμαλόν. κἂν γὰρ ἀνώμαλός τις ᾖ ὁ τὴν μίμησιν παρέχων καὶ τοιοῦτον ἦθος ὑποτεθῇ, ὅμως ὁμαλῶς ἀνώμαλον δεῖ εἶναι.
>
> The fourth thing is consistency. For even if the character represented is someone inconsistent, and this sort of disposition is suggested, it still must be consistently inconsistent.

[242] Felson 1994, pg. 41.

[243] R. Kassel, ed. 1966.

Penelope cannot be called consistently inconsistent, and so if she is meant to embody that theme, she does so very imperfectly. I therefore take this as the least preferable of the three possibilities.

Yes: other scholars have argued that Penelope does recognize Odysseus far earlier in the narrative than book twenty-three.[244] The notion that Penelope cannot recognize Odysseus, that she is "doomed" to fail against her husband's cunning, consigns her to a disempowered and victimized role within the story. Certainly she acts within difficult constraints, but even so, John Winkler advocates for considering "how active she is in coping with the forces arrayed against her"... "instead of viewing her as a pawn in the games of male characters and of the poet".[245] He believes that Penelope came to suspect the beggar's real identity and takes action to test him. We are not often privy to Penelope's inner thoughts, and so it is impossible to confirm claims like Winkler's beyond all doubt. But if she has, in spite of his disguise, recognized Odysseus, it becomes possible to read Penelope's more questionable actions as performances for, tests of, or attempts to help the disguised Odysseus, thus rendering these moments unproblematic in the plotline "disdain and cunning tricks". I find this possibility most attractive, provided that the evidence does not preclude it.

So let us consider the evidence. The strongest argument against early recognition logically depends upon the impenetrability of Odysseus' beggar disguise, which Athena provides to him in

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[244] Harsh 1950; Winkler 1990; Vlahos 2007; Haller 2009. Russo 1982 theorizes an "unusually strong unconscious tug" between the spouses, though he does not support full, conscious recognition, pg. 6. Margaret Atwood also has her Penelope recognize Odysseus early on in her 2005 novel, the *Penelopiad*, on what I believe to be sound evidence from the epic tradition.

[245] Winkler 1990, pg. 142.

book 13.[246] It has been twenty years since Penelope last saw Odysseus, so her memory of her husband is likely to be imperfect, but we would still expect her to recognize the man before her as the husband she misses so dearly, unless the disguise magically prevents her from doing so. It is therefore prudent to review the evidence as to the disguise's efficacy.

Margaret Atwood raises some possible limitations to the goddess' magic in her *Penelopiad*. Speaking in the first person, Penelope reflects after Odysseus has become known to her:

> His disguise was done well enough—I hoped the wrinkles and baldness were part of the act, and not real—but as soon as I saw that barrel chest and those short legs I had a deep suspicion, which became a certainty when I heard he'd broken the neck of a belligerent fellow panhandler. That was his style: stealthy when necessary, true, but he was never against the direct assault method when he was certain he could win.[247]

So, Atwood has Penelope recognize Odysseus in part by his behavior, and also by his unusual physique, which does have an epic basis. Atwood seems to pull Odysseus' distinctive build not from the *Odyssey*, but *Iliad* book three. When Priam sees Odysseus in the distance, he asks Helen to identify him thus (*Il.* 3.191-4):

> δεύτερον αὖτ᾽ Ὀδυσῆα ἰδὼν ἐρέειν᾽ ὁ γεραιός·
> "εἶπ᾽ ἄγε μοι καὶ τόνδε, φίλον τέκος, ὅς τις ὅδ᾽ ἐστί·
> μείων μὲν κεφαλῇ Ἀγαμέμνονος Ἀτρεΐδαο,
> εὐρύτερος δ᾽ ὤμοισιν ἰδὲ στέρνοισιν ἰδέσθαι."
>
> Next the old man saw Odysseus and asked:
> "Come, tell me about him too, dear child, who he is;
> He's shorter by a head than Agamemnon son of Atreus,
> But broader to look at in the chest and shoulders."

[246] 13.429-40.

[247] Atwood 2005, pg. 106.

It is unclear if the poet of the *Odyssey* intended us to imagine Odysseus in the same way the poet of the *Iliad* drew him, but perhaps this is a traditional description of the character. If so, then being short yet broad certainly would set Odysseus apart in a crowd.

That is, of course, if Athena has not altered his bodily frame, and the transformation is limited to "wrinkles and baldness". This may well be the case. Athena gives the particulars of the disguise she will give Odysseus in *Odyssey* book 13 (397-403):[248]

> "ἀλλ᾽ ἄγε σ᾽ ἄγνωστον τεύξω πάντεσσι βροτοῖσι·
> κάρψω μὲν χρόα καλὸν ἐνὶ γναμπτοῖσι μέλεσσι,
> ξανθὰς δ᾽ ἐκ κεφαλῆς ὀλέσω τρίχας, ἀμφὶ δὲ λαῖφος
> ἕσσω ὅ κε στυγέῃσιν ἰδὼν ἄνθρωπον ἔχοντα,
> κνυζώσω δέ τοι ὄσσε πάρος περικαλλέ᾽ ἐόντε,
> ὡς ἂν ἀεικέλιος πᾶσι μνηστῆρσι φανήῃς
> σῇ τ᾽ ἀλόχῳ καὶ παιδί, τὸν ἐν μεγάροισιν ἔλειπες."
>
> "But come now, I shall make you unrecognizable to all mortals:
> I shall wither the beautiful skin on your supple limbs
> and remove the yellow hair from your head, and around you
> Put clothing, and anyone who sees it will hate the one wearing it,
> And I'll dim your eyes which before were lovely,
> So you'll seem ugly to all the suitors
> And your wife and your son, whom you left at home."

Athena alters Odysseus' skin (398), hair (399), and eyes (401). There is no mention of changing his physique at this time. The transformation seems to be skin-deep only,[249] an impression the text confirms as Odysseus prepares to fight Iros several books later (18.66-9):

> ‘`Ως ἔφαθ᾽· οἱ δ᾽ ἄρα πάντες ἐπήνεον. αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
> ζώσατο μὲν ῥάκεσιν περὶ μήδεα, φαῖνε δὲ μηροὺς

[248] These details are repeated in 13.429-40 when she actually casts the spell.

[249] For more on the limits of this transformation, see Clay 1983, pg. 162-5.

καλούς τε μεγάλους τε, φάνεν δέ οἱ εὐρέες ὦμοι
στήθεά τε στιβαροί τε βραχίονες·

So he spoke, and they all approved. But Odysseus
Girded his rags around groin, and he showed off
Large, healthy thighs, and his wide shoulders were apparent,
And chest and strong arms.

Thus, Atwood's idea that Odysseus' "barrel chest" and "short legs" were not obscured by the veneer of old age has strong textual support, though the question remains whether his strange build is traditional.

Some scholars might argue that the limitations of the disguise do not matter: Athena's magic renders Odysseus unrecognizable, full stop. There is no sense in searching for loopholes. That is certainly what Athena tells Odysseus in book 13. However, even if we choose to trust the famously unreliable speaker, let us consider the possible meanings of her line: ἀλλ᾽ ἄγε σ᾽ ἄγνωστον τεύξω πάντεσσι βροτοῖσι, "But come on, I shall make you unrecognizable to all mortals."[250] At first blush, the utterance is ambiguous: so she states her intention, but is it absolutely fulfilled?

I argue it is not, and that we never see the gods render a person absolutely unrecognizable. Their disguises often succeed, but we do see them fail also. E.g. in *Iliad* book three, when Aphrodite appears in the guise of an old woman Helen once knew, Helen recognizes the goddess by parts of her body that the transformation did not touch (3.395-8):

ὣς φάτο· τῇ δ᾽ ἄρα θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν ὄρινεν·
καί ῥ᾽ ὡς οὖν ἐνόησε θεᾶς περικαλλέα δειρὴν
στήθεά θ᾽ ἱμερόεντα καὶ ὄμματα μαρμαίροντα,
θάμβησέν τ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἔπειτα ἔπος τ᾽ ἔφατ᾽ ἔκ τ᾽ ὀνόμαζε·

[250] 13.397.

> So [Aphrodite] spoke, and she stirred the heart in her chest;
> And then [Helen] noticed the goddess' lovely neck
> And desirable breasts and shining eyes, she was
> Thunderstruck and spoke a word and addressed her by name.

The transformation altered the goddess' face, but not her entire body, and Helen knew the old woman well enough to spot the tells.[251] Ergo divine magic does not always work as the god intended. It is therefore possible that Odysseus' disguise might not fool those who once knew him well, who can spot cracks in the paint. His distinctive build might remain, and his scars certainly will.

This is the death of the argument about the perfection of Odysseus' disguise: Eurycleia will prove in book 19 that he can be recognized, despite Athena's magic, by the scar on his leg. Even if Athena intends Odysseus to be unrecognizable to all human beings, she does not succeed. At least one person will know him, anyway. It is therefore conceivable that Penelope also identifies her husband before he announces himself to her, though she does not out and out confront him. That, as we have seen, is not her style.

Accordingly, in my interpretation of the latter half of book 17 through book 23, I will assume that Athena's magic has *not* rendered recognition impossible. I will look for any tells that remain as to "the beggar's" true identity, and I will not assume, as Heitman does, that Penelope is incapable of outsmarting her husband. If there is sufficient evidence that she has recognized him—

[251] And, to be fair, Helen is semi-divine herself, and so may have a certain advantage in dealing with the gods. Beauty is her domain.

and she may be on the lookout for any signs of his return, given Theoclymenus' recent prophecy[252]—then we will interpret her behavior with this possibility in mind.

SCENE 8: PENELOPE WISHES ANTINOOS DEAD

When Odysseus arrives at the palace in book seventeen, he sees first-hand how volatile the suitors are. Antinoos attacks him as he begs for food, posing as the elderly homeless man he now resembles.

Word of the assault soon passes to Penelope, who did not herself witness it. Perhaps Medon tells her, as he has done before. At that moment, Penelope is tucked away in the women's quarters, surrounded by attendants. In her outrage, she wishes aloud to an older woman, Eurynome, that Antinoos would die (17.492-504).

> Τοῦ δ᾽ ὡς οὖν ἤκουσε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια
> βλημένου ἐν μεγάρῳ, μετ᾽ ἄρα δμῳῇσιν ἔειπεν·
> "αἴθ᾽ οὕτως αὐτόν σε βάλοι κλυτότοξος Ἀπόλλων!"[253]
> τὴν δ᾽ αὖτ᾽ Εὐρυνόμη ταμίη πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν·
> "εἰ γὰρ ἐπ᾽ ἀρῇσιν τέλος ἡμετέρῃσι γένοιτο·
> οὐκ ἄν τις τούτων γε ἐΰθρονον Ἠῶ ἵκοιτο."
> Τὴν δ᾽ αὖτε προσέειπε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
> "μαῖ᾽, ἐχθροὶ μὲν πάντες, ἐπεὶ κακὰ μηχανόωνται·
> Ἀντίνοος δὲ μάλιστα μελαίνῃ κηρὶ ἔοικε.
> ξεῖνός τις δύστηνος ἀλητεύει κατὰ δῶμα
> ἀνέρας αἰτίζων· ἀχρημοσύνη γὰρ ἀνώγει·
> ἔνθ᾽ ἄλλοι μὲν πάντες ἐνέπλησάν τ᾽ ἔδοσάν τε,
> οὗτος δὲ θρήνυι πρυμνὸν βάλε δεξιὸν ὦμον."

[252] 17.152-161.

[253] Punctuation mine.

> And when observant Penelope heard he'd been hit
> In the megaron, then she said among her enslaved women:
> "I wish Apollo, famed for his bow, would shoot you yourself!"
> And immediately the nurse Eurynome said this word to her:
> "For if in fact there were an answer to our prayers,
> None of them would reach lovely-throned dawn."
> And again observant Penelope said to her:
> "Nanny, yes they are all hateful, since they devise evil,
> But Antinoos especially is like black doom,
> Some unlucky guest is wandering through the house,
> Begging from the men: for poverty compels him;
> When all the others filled him up and gave things,
> That man hit the base of his right shoulder with a footstool."

This moment is in keeping with Penelope's hostility toward the suitors, and in that respect is nothing new. But it nevertheless contributes to the narrative by expanding the cast of characters in the palace.

Here is the first appearance of Eurynome, the second enslaved woman to have a name, along with Eurykleia. Our innocent listener might be surprised at the late introduction of a new character. Analysts once tried to expunge all Eurynome's appearances as obvious late additions to the *Odyssey* on the grounds that the role of old female attendant is already filled. However, other scholars have identified three reasons to reject the Analytic arguments against Eurynome's presence in the text, and conclude that she does in fact belong here.

In chronological order: first, John Scott argues that Eurykleia and Eurynome primarily care for different members of the household.[254] Eurykleia nursed Odysseus and Telemachus as babies

[254] Scott 1918.

and still tends to Telemachus in adulthood; Laertes bought her decades ago.[255] Eurynome cares for Penelope. If she is also known by the patronymic Actoris (since Actoris fills the same role as Eurynome in the one instance she is mentioned: keeper of Penelope's bedchamber),[256] she and Penelope came to Ithaca together (23.227-8).[257]

> 'ἀλλ' οἶοι σύ τ' ἐγώ τε καὶ ἀμφίπολος μία μούνη,
> Ἀκτορίς, ἥν μοι δῶκε πατὴρ ἔτι δεῦρο κιούσῃ…'
>
> "But only you and I and my one single attendant,
> Actoris, whom my father gave me when I came here…"

Eurykleia and Eurynome/Actoris therefore fill different niches in the household economy. Second, Bernard Fenik argues that character doubles are not only permitted, but "one of the most thorough-going, deeply-rooted stylistic idiosyncrasies of the poem."[258] Character pairs include Eumaeus and Philoitius, Melantho and Melanthius, as well as Eurykleia and Eurynome. These doubles often fill

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[255] For more on Eurykleia's role in the story, see Thalmann 1998, pg. 74-83; Fletcher 2008; Scheid-Tissinier 2015. Christensen argues that Eurykleia's loyalty to the owner-family trump even her own interests (2020, pg. 164).

[256] Scott 1918, pg. 77. Alternatively, Actoris may have since died, at which point Eurynome took up her post: "She was a wedding present to me from my father; her name was Actoris, and she was not at all happy to be there in Ithaca with me…I didn't blame her. As she was not at all young…she did not last long. Her death left me all alone in Ithaca, a stranger among strange people." (Atwood 2004, pg. 44).

[257] For more on Eurynome, see Thalmann 1998, pg. 80-3.

[258] Fenik 1974, pg. 172. See also pages 172-207, especially 189-92.

similar roles in the story, but complement or contrast one another. Thus, there is no grounds to strike Eurynome on the basis of style. Third, Victoria Pedrick argues that, due to their primary alignments with different family members, Eurykleia and Eurynome have distinct relationships with Penelope, and their advice to her reflects these relationships.[259] Thus, Eurynome and Eurykleia play different roles within the story. Finally, Scott, Fenik, and Pedrick all note that Penelope has greater intimacy with Eurynome than Eurykleia.[260]

Their closeness is apparent here. Penelope calls Eurynome μαῖ', "nanny", and tells her about her special hatred for Antinoos above all the other suitors, though she does not seem fond of any of them, and Eurynome empathizes with her frustration.

SCENE 9: PENELOPE ASKS EUMAEUS TO INVITE THE BEGGAR

As Eumaeus mentioned in lines 14.221-30, it is Penelope's practice to ask travelers if they have any news of Odysseus. Now that she knows a guest has arrived, she invites him for a private word with her. However, rather than sending Eurynome, to whom she was just speaking moments ago, to pass along her invitation, Penelope instead summons Eumaeus and asks him (17.508-11).

> "ἔρχεο, δῖ' Εὔμαιε, κιὼν τὸν ξεῖνον ἄνωχθι
> ἐλθέμεν, ὄφρα τί μιν προσπτύξομαι ἠδ' ἐρέωμαι
> εἴ που Ὀδυσσῆος ταλασίφρονος ἠὲ πέπυσται
> ἢ ἴδεν ὀφθαλμοῖσι· πολυπλάγκτῳ γὰρ ἔοικε."

[259] Pedrick 1994.

[260] Margaret Atwood does not include a Eurynome character in the *Penelopiad*, and as a result, Penelope is rather isolated in the palace.

> "Godlike Eumaeus, go tell the stranger to come,
> So I can welcome him and ask him
> If maybe he's either heard of stout-hearted Odysseus
> Or seen him; he looks like he's wandered a long time."

Penelope's decision to call Eumaeus is curious. Perhaps it is merely more appropriate to send a man to speak to another man, but perhaps she asks Eumaeus to invite the stranger because the two seem to know each other. There are, after all, plenty of other men she could send. Whoever told Penelope about the footstool incident may also have told her that Eumaeus and Odysseus arrived together, or that they spoke to one another at 17.349-55. So, it is conceivable that she would know they are acquainted. She may even hope that with a little prompting, Eumaeus will offer information on the man, whom she has not yet laid eyes on.

And so he does. Eumaeus explains that he has known the man now for several days and describes him in hauntingly familiar terms (17.512-21).

> Τὴν δ᾽ ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφης, Εὔμαιε συβῶτα·
> "εἰ γάρ τοι, βασίλεια, σιωπήσειαν Ἀχαιοί·
> οἷ᾽ ὅ γε μυθεῖται, θέλγοιτό κέ τοι φίλον ἦτορ.
> τρεῖς γὰρ δή μιν νύκτας ἔχον, τρία δ᾽ ἤματ᾽ ἔρυξα
> ἐν κλισίῃ· πρῶτον γὰρ ἔμ᾽ ἵκετο νηὸς ἀποδράς·
> ἀλλ᾽ οὔ πω κακότητα διήνυσεν ἣν ἀγορεύων.
> ὡς δ᾽ ὅτ᾽ ἀοιδὸν ἀνὴρ ποτιδέρκεται, ὅς τε θεῶν ἔξ
> ἀείδῃ δεδαὼς ἔπε᾽ ἱμερόεντα βροτοῖσι,
> τοῦ δ᾽ ἄμοτον μεμάασιν ἀκουέμεν, ὁππότ᾽ ἀείδῃ·
> ὣς ἐμὲ κεῖνος ἔθελγε παρήμενος ἐν μεγάροισι."

> And answering her, Eumaeus the swineherd said,
> "I wish, queen, the Achaean men would quiet down.
> He says the sort of things that would bewitch your dear heart.
> For I kept him for three nights, and I detained him for three days
> In my hut; for he reached me first after escaping from a ship.
> But he did not yet finish telling his own misfortune.
> Like when a man watches a singer who learned

from the gods and sings words that are charming to people,
and they want to listen to him insatiably whenever he sings,
so that man bewitched me when he sat nearby in my home."

This is her first clue that the beggar is not who he claims to be. Our listener must wonder how Eumaeus' description of the beggar will strike Penelope. After all, facility with words is her husband's defining trait. Is it enough, in conjunction with Theoclymenous' recent prophecy of Odysseus' return, to make her suspicious of the beggar's true identity?[261] How many people share Odysseus' ability to charm others? In the *Odyssey*, words with the root *thelg-* are "almost exclusively" associated with Odysseus, as we see here in line 521.[262] And, frankly, showing back up at his own home in disguise is exactly the sort of thing wily Odysseus would do. According to Eumaeus, this man also claims to know Odysseus, although Eumaeus doubts his honesty. He relates the stranger's claim that Odysseus will arrive shortly. Thus, if Penelope believes the stranger's second-hand prediction, she now has good reason to feel hopeful that she and Telemachus will be saved from the suitors.[263]

Penelope urges Eumaeus to pass along her invitation for a private interview, and throws in another criticism of the many suitors for good measure (17.528-40).

Τὸν δ᾽ αὖτε προσέειπε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
"ἔρχεο, δεῦρο κάλεσσον, ἵν᾽ ἀντίον αὐτὸς ἐνίσπῃ.
οὗτοι δ᾽ ἠὲ θύρῃσι καθήμενοι ἐψιαάσθων.
ἢ αὐτοῦ κατὰ δώματ᾽, ἐπεί σφισι θυμὸς ἐΰφρων.
αὐτῶν μὲν γὰρ κτήματ᾽ ἀκήρατα κεῖτ᾽ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ,
σῖτος καὶ μέθυ ἡδύ· τὰ μὲν οἰκῆες ἔδουσιν,

[261] Harsh 1950, pg. 6-7.

[262] Roisman 1990, pg. 227.

[263] Büchner 1940, pg. 138-9.

οἱ δ᾽ εἰς ἡμέτερον πωλεύμενοι ἤματα πάντα,
βοῦς ἱερεύοντες καὶ ὄϊς καὶ πίονας αἶγας,
εἰλαπινάζουσιν πίνουσί τε αἴθοπα οἶνον
μαψιδίως· τὰ δὲ πολλὰ κατάνεται· οὐ γὰρ ἔπ᾽ ἀνήρ,
οἷος Ὀδυσσεὺς ἔσκεν, ἀρὴν ἀπὸ οἴκου ἀμῦναι.
εἰ δ᾽ Ὀδυσεὺς ἔλθοι καὶ ἵκοιτ᾽ ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν,
αἶψά κε σὺν ᾧ παιδὶ βίας ἀποτίσεται ἀνδρῶν.”

And immediately observant Penelope addressed him:
“Go, summon him here, so he can tell me himself.
And let them sit around and amuse themselves either outside
Or right here in the house, since their heart is happy.
For their possessions lie untouched at home,
Food and sweet drink, which their servants consume,
while they come to our house every day,
Sacrificing cows and rams and fat goats,
They party and drink tawny wine
Worthlessly; many things are used up. For there is no man,
Such as Odysseus was, to defend the home from ruin.
But if even Odysseus should come to his ancestral land,
Along with his son he’d immediately pay back their force.”

After she speaks, Telemachus sneezes,[264] which Penelope takes as a good omen, and she again rejoices in the potential deaths of the suitors.[265] She again urges Eumaeus to invite the beggar for a private word.[266]

However, Odysseus insists on waiting until after dark to meet with her,[267] and thereby asserts a small amount of control over her.

[264] 17.541-2a.

[265] 17.542-3.

[266] 17.544-50.

[267] 17.560-73.

SCENE 10: ATHENA ENCOURAGES PENELOPE TO GO TO THE SUITORS

After the stranger's fistfight with Iros, Penelope still has not been in the same room with him. Her documented reticence to appear in the megaron makes such an occurrence unlikely before their appointment at nightfall, so Athena steps in to speed things up (18.158-68).

Τῇ δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἐπὶ φρεσὶ θῆκε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη,
κούρῃ Ἰκαρίοιο, περίφρονι Πηνελοπείῃ,
μνηστήρεσσι φανῆναι, ὅπως πετάσειε μάλιστα
θυμὸν μνηστήρων ἰδὲ τιμήεσσα γένοιτο
μᾶλλον πρὸς πόσιός τε καὶ υἱέος ἢ πάρος ἦεν.
ἀχρεῖον δ᾽ ἐγέλασσεν ἔπος τ᾽ ἔφατ᾽ ἔκ τ᾽ ὀνόμαζεν·
"Εὐρυνόμη, θυμός μοι ἐέλδεται, οὔ τι πάρος γε,
μνηστήρεσσι φανῆναι, ἀπεχθομένοισί περ ἔμπης·
παιδὶ δέ κεν εἴποιμι ἔπος, τό κε κέρδιον εἴη,
μὴ πάντα μνηστῆρσιν ὑπερφιάλοισιν ὁμιλεῖν,
οἵ τ᾽ εὖ μὲν βάζουσι, κακῶς δ᾽ ὄπιθεν φρονέουσι."

Then the glancing eyed goddess Athena put it
In the daughter of Ikarios' mind, observant Penelope,
To show herself to the suitors, so that she could open up
The suitors' heart and be the more prized
by her husband and son than she was before.
And she laughed uncharacteristically and spoke a word:
"Eurynome, my heart wants, as it never did before,
To show myself to the suitors, although I hate them deeply,
And I could say to my son that it would be better
Not to keep company with the arrogant suitors at all,
Who speak well, but intend evil later."

This passage contains a few puzzles. Much has been said about Penelope's decision and her uncharacteristic, *archeion,* laugh,[268] though I prefer to focus on the larger questions:

1. What does it mean culturally for a married woman to go before the suitors, and is this inappropriate?
2. What does this action mean to Penelope? That is, why does she think she is going downstairs?

These questions together cover the appropriateness of her actions in the following scene.

Concerning question one, we have seen Penelope descend into the megaron before, back in book one, and no one described her behavior at that time as destructive to her marriage. So, merely entering into the suitors' presence is not a problem. She is not doing anything she should not do just by going downstairs.

Question two considers her motivation for going there, though, which may impact the appropriateness of her behavior: what does she want out of this little foray, and is it injurious to her marriage? I have already referenced Emily Wilson's argument that perhaps Penelope enjoys male attention from the suitors, and that is why she goes to the megaron,[269] which could perhaps be seen as contrary to Odysseus' best interests. However, my analysis thus far shows that Penelope could not enjoy interacting with the suitors, whom she clearly hates,[270] and who mean to do her

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[268] See, for instance, Büchner 1940, pg. 141-3; Levine, 1983; and Clay, 1984. I prefer Clay's solution, "uncharacteristically", which accounts for both adverbial uses of the word in Homer: here and *Iliad* 2.269, with reference to Thersites. To laugh is an uncharacteristic action for Penelope, as up to this point she has been mourning for her husband and worrying for her son.

[269] Wilson 2018, pg. 47-8.

[270] 18.165

son harm.[271] As Murnaghan writes, "The incident is clearly masterminded by Athena… Penelope herself is portrayed as repeatedly resisting the sexual dimension of Athena's plan even as she carries it out."[272] One could also argue that Penelope's discomfort is due to the disjunction between her natural inclinations and this sudden impulse.

However, if Penelope does not want to go before the suitors for the attention, that is a problem, because it is unusual in Homer for a god to incite a human to act against their own inclinations.[273] Scholars have been so disturbed by this decision as to treat it as evidence of Penelope's "divided mind".[274] But as has been our practice thus far, we shall explore alternate possibilities than incoherence.

The text does state motives for this little excursion in lines 18.160b-2:

> ὅπως πετάσειε μάλιστα
> θυμὸν μνηστήρων ἰδὲ τιμήεσσα γένοιτο
> μᾶλλον πρὸς πόσιός τε καὶ υἱέος ἢ πάρος ἦεν.
>
> In order to greatly inflame
> the heart of the suitors and become more valued
> By her husband and son than she was before.

However, there have been discussions as to whether this clause should be attributed to either Penelope or Athena. I believe, if we must choose, it makes more sense to attribute it to Athena, as

[271] 18.168

[272] Murnaghan 1995, pg. 70.

[273] Murnaghan 1995, pg. 70.

[274] Van Nortwick 1979, pg. 270.

Büchner does.[275] Büchner, and others who place the moment of recognition in book 23, believe the clause must apply to Athena, because Penelope does not yet know that the stranger is her *posis*, line 162. If we need not choose, though, the ambiguity of the text may itself be meaningful, because it leads us to wonder if Penelope is already thinking about her spouse in connection with the mysterious stranger who has just arrived. The poet teases the possibility. And in this case, Penelope is not encouraging the suitors' admiration for its own sake, but in order to produce an effect in her husband and son. She wants them to appreciate her value—a value which we know depends on her chastity. Ergo, she will not cross any lines.

In the end, Penelope pivots. In lines 166-9, she gives Eurynome a different reason to act on her impulse—namely that she needs to warn Telemachus about the suitors' plot. Some scholars have argued that perhaps this motive is better suited to her state of mind,[276] so perhaps this is the thought she prefers to focus on. But the desire to talk to Telemachus is not, naturally, at odds with a desire to increase her social capital. Both can be operative in her decision.

Finally, I propose that there is yet another reason Penelope might want to descend to the megaron, which she would not feel comfortable expressing to anyone else, even if she felt it privately: perhaps she is curious to catch a glimpse of the mysterious stranger and does not want to wait for nightfall. In this interpretation, the *hopōs* clause above would in fact apply to both Athena and Penelope, for though only Athena knows the truth of Odysseus' identity, Penelope is wrestling with contradictory possibilities and preparing herself for either contingency. If Odysseus is downstairs in disguise, then things are not going well for him. Penlope had already been upset

[275] See Büchner 1940, pg. 143.

[276] See Rutherford 1992, pg. 29-33; Pedrick 1994, pg. 102; Murnaghan 1995, pg. 70-1.

that the suitors were cruel to the stranger before her talk with Eumaeus, but in light of his information and the recent omens, she may be all the more disturbed by the suitors' abuse. She may want to survey the situation in the megaron for herself.

When Penelope leaves the women's quarters, she does not relax her usual defenses against the suitors. In fact, she refuses to take any action that might be viewed as ostentatious (18.169-84).

Τὴν δ᾽ αὖτ᾽ Εὐρυνόμη ταμίη πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν·
"ναὶ δὴ ταῦτά γε πάντα, τέκος, κατὰ μοῖραν ἔειπες.
ἀλλ᾽ ἴθι καὶ σῷ παιδὶ ἔπος φάο μηδ᾽ ἐπίκευθε,
χρῶτ᾽ ἀπονιψαμένη καὶ ἐπιχρίσασα παρειάς·
μηδ᾽ οὕτω δακρύοισι πεφυρμένη ἀμφὶ πρόσωπα
ἔρχευ, ἐπεὶ κάκιον πενθήμεναι ἄκριτον αἰεί.
ἤδη μὲν γάρ τοι παῖς τηλίκος, ὃν σὺ μάλιστα
ἠρῶ ἀθανάτοισι γενειήσαντα ἰδέσθαι."
Τὴν δ᾽ αὖτε προσέειπε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
"Εὐρυνόμη, μὴ ταῦτα παραύδα, κηδομένη περ,
χρῶτ᾽ ἀπονίπτεσθαι καὶ ἐπιχρίεσθαι ἀλοιφῇ·
ἀγλαΐην γὰρ ἐμοί γε θεοί, τοὶ Ὄλυμπον ἔχουσιν,
ὤλεσαν, ἐξ οὗ κεῖνος ἔβη κοίλῃς ἐνὶ νηυσίν.
ἀλλά μοι Αὐτονόην τε καὶ Ἱπποδάμειαν ἄνωχθι
ἐλθέμεν, ὄφρα κέ μοι παρστήετον ἐν μεγάροισιν·
οἵη δ᾽ οὐκ εἴσειμι μετ᾽ ἀνέρας· αἰδέομαι γάρ."

And the housekeeper Eurynome spoke a word to her:
"Yes, indeed everything you say, child, is appropriate.
But say something to your son and don't hide,
Wash your skin and anoint your face;
And don't go like that, with your face defiled by tears,
Since it's rather unattractive to always mourn endlessly.
For your son is already of age, whom you
Prayed to the gods to see him reach the age of beard-growth."
And again observant Penelope addressed her:
"Eurynome, don't encourage these things, although you care,
To wash my skin and anoint with oil;
For the gods who hold Olympus destroyed my
Beauty, in the time since that man boarded hollow ships.

> But order Autonoē and Hippodameia
> To come, to stand beside me in the halls;
> But I won't go among men alone; for I am ashamed."

Eurynome encourages Penelope to clean up a little before going downstairs—something Eurykleia would not do,[277] as her primary allegiance is to Odysseus' memory—but Penelope refuses. She has never attempted to show off in front of the suitors, and she will not do so now.

Thus, for the third time, in lines 18.206-11 (cf. 1.326-35; 16.408-17), Penelope descends from the women's quarters upstairs, accompanied by two chaperones and dressed in a veil. The beauty Athena heaped upon her has an immediate effect on the suitors,[278] but Penelope ignores them. She instead vents her anxieties at Telemachus and criticizes him in front of the suitors (18.212-25).[279]

> τῶν δ᾽ αὐτοῦ λύτο γούνατ᾽, ἔρῳ δ᾽ ἄρα θυμὸν ἔθελχθεν,
> πάντες δ᾽ ἠρήσαντο παραὶ λεχέεσσι κλιθῆναι.
> ἡ δ᾽ αὖ Τηλέμαχον προσεφώνεεν, ὃν φίλον υἱόν·
> "Τηλέμαχ᾽, οὐκέτι τοι φρένες ἔμπεδοι οὐδὲ νόημα·
> παῖς ἔτ᾽ ἐὼν καὶ μᾶλλον ἐνὶ φρεσὶ κέρδε᾽ ἐνώμας·
> νῦν δ᾽, ὅτε δὴ μέγας ἐσσὶ καὶ ἥβης μέτρον ἱκάνεις,
> καί κέν τις φαίη γόνον ἔμμεναι ὀλβίου ἀνδρός,
> ἐς μέγεθος καὶ κάλλος ὁρώμενος, ἀλλότριος φώς.
> οὐκέτι τοι φρένες εἰσὶν ἐναίσιμοι οὐδὲ νόημα,
> οἷον δὴ τόδε ἔργον ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἐτύχθη,
> ὃς τὸν ξεῖνον ἔασας ἀεικισθήμεναι οὕτως.

[277] Pedrick 1994.

[278] 17.212-14.

[279] Winkler 1990 suggests that her intention here is to mark Telemachus as immature in front of the suitors so that they will not see him as a threat and abandon their murder plot against him, pg. 147.

πῶς νῦν, εἴ τι ξεῖνος ἐν ἡμετέροισι δόμοισιν
ἥμενος ὧδε πάθοι ῥυστακτύος ἐξ ἀλεγεινῆς;
σοί κ᾽ αἶσχος λώβη τε μετ᾽ ἀνθρώποισι πέλοιτο.” 225

And their knees went slack, and their heart was bewitched
With desire, and they all prayed to take her to bed.
But she addressed Telemachus, her dear son:
“Telemachus, don’t you have brains or thoughts anymore? 215
Even as a child you’d keep more cunning thoughts in mind;
But now, when you’re grown and reached the age of maturity,
And anyone would say you’re the son of a blessed man,
Looking at your stature and beauty, even a stranger.
You don’t have fit brains or thoughts anymore, 220
Indeed, such a thing happened in these halls—
That you let our guest be wronged in this way.
How now, if a guest is sitting in our home
Could he thus suffer from painful rough handling?
It would be an ugly disgrace for you among mankind.” 225

The poet does not provide any insight into Penelope’s state of mind. However we might suppose that, on the off chance that the stranger is her husband, she cannot bear to think of the suitors attacking him. Penelope knows full well that Telemachus cannot even protect himself from the suitors’ violence, but perhaps she is not speaking for his benefit anyway. She might hope to indirectly signal to the beggar, who is somewhere nearby (whoever he is), that she does not approve of this treatment even though she cannot prevent it.

Telemachus points out in 18.226-42 that Penelope’s criticisms are unfair, but before she can respond to his *apologia,* Eurymachus proves that she was right to heretofore avoid the megaron by interrupting their conversation with unrelated comments on her appearance (18.245-9):

“κούρη Ἰκαρίοιο, περίφρον Πηνελόπεια,
εἰ πάντες σε ἴδοιεν ἀν᾽ Ἴασον Ἄργος Ἀχαιοί,
πλέονές κε μνηστῆρες ἐν ὑμετέροισι δόμοισιν
ἠῶθεν δαινύατ᾽, ἐπεὶ περίεσσι γυναικῶν

εἶδός τε μέγεθός τε ἰδὲ φρένας ἔνδον ἐΐσας."

"Daughter of Ikarios, observant Penelope,
If all Achaean men throughout Iasian Argos saw you,
Even more suitors in your halls would dine
Dawn till dusk, since you surpass other women
In appearance and stature and balanced mind within."

Eurymachus is being annoying. Though his speech is sometimes read as "an effusive comment,"[280] his clumsy interjection is a textbook example of cat-calling, per philosopher Kate Manne's definition:

> ... a male bid for women's attention, which she is held to owe him (falsely). And he may also evince his sense of (again, illicit) entitlement to openly rank her in terms of her attractiveness and thus social status-conferring value.[281]

Not only does Eurymachus demand attention from Penelope while she is otherwise engaged, but he explicitly ranks her against other women. He communicates that he and the other suitors are motivated by her beauty, and thus the status and pleasure she would confer to a husband. There is always a certain peril in attempting cross-cultural generalizations: can we be sure that catcalling would have been as unwelcome in another place and era as it is in ours? Without attempting any universal response, I will say that Penelope does not respond warmly to Eurymachus, and so there is no evidence that the behavior was any more welcome in Homeric society than it is now. If our listener is savvy, they will recognize this behavior as an imposition.

Eurymachus also puts Penelope in a bit of a social bind. Though she may well have hoped that the suitors' admiration would increase her value in the eyes of her husband and son, she must

[280] Hölscher 1996, pg. 135.

[281] Manne 2018, pg. 115.

also realize that if the stranger is Odysseus in disguise, the situation looks bad. Here she is, hosting crowds of men,[282] while they openly court her, in his own home. Yes, she is desirable as a wife, but only so long as she maintains propriety.

If Penelope wants Odysseus to trust her, she must find a way to show her disdain for the suitors. However, her options are limited—we have already seen that the suitors do not respond well to confrontation. In Atwood's words:

> I knew it would do no good to try to expel my unwanted suitors, or to bar the palace doors against them. If I tried that, they'd turn really ugly and go on the rampage and snatch by force what they were attempting to win by persuasion.[283]

She must navigate the ever present threat of violence with tact.

> But I was the daughter of a Naiad; I remembered my mother's advice to me. *Behave like water*, I told myself.[284]

This is her strategy. While the stranger is still nearby, Penelope denies the compliment,[285] name-drops Odysseus,[286] but then she implies that it is time to remarry, invoking a command Odysseus may or may not have actually given her (18.257-71):

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[282] The Greek concept of hospitality is quite different from the modern one. It is a social and religious obligation that Zeus oversees, and hosts are not in a position to freely turn away guests. I am using the work "hosting" here with the Greek sense of the word in mind.

[283] Atwood 2005, pg. 83.

[284] Atwood 2005, pg. 83.

[285] 18.250-3.

[286] 18.253-5.

"ἦ μὲν δὴ ὅτε τ᾽ ἦε λιπὼν κάτα πατρίδα γαῖαν,
δεξιτερὴν ἐπὶ καρπῷ ἑλὼν ἐμὲ χεῖρα προσηύδα:
'ὦ γύναι, οὐ γὰρ ὀΐω ἐϋκνήμιδας Ἀχαιοὺς
ἐκ Τροίης εὖ πάντας ἀπήμονας ἀπονέεσθαι·
καὶ γὰρ Τρῶάς φασι μαχητὰς ἔμμεναι ἄνδρας,
ἠμὲν ἀκοντιστὰς ἠδὲ ῥυτῆρας ὀϊστῶν
ἵππων τ᾽ ὠκυπόδων ἐπιβήτορας, οἵ κε τάχιστα
ἔκριναν μέγα νεῖκος ὁμοιΐου πολέμοιο.
τῷ οὐκ οἶδ᾽ ἤ κέν μ᾽ ἀνέσει[287] θεός, ἦ κεν ἁλώω
αὐτοῦ ἐνὶ Τροίῃ· σοὶ δ᾽ ἐνθάδε πάντα μελόντων.
μεμνῆσθαι πατρὸς καὶ μητέρος ἐν μεγάροισιν
ὡς νῦν, ἢ ἔτι μᾶλλον ἐμεῦ ἀπονόσφιν ἐόντος·
αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν δὴ παῖδα γενειήσαντα ἴδηαι,
γήμασθ᾽ ᾧ κ᾽ ἐθέλῃσθα, τεὸν κατὰ δῶμα λιποῦσα.'
κεῖνος τὼς ἀγόρευε· τὰ δὴ νῦν πάντα τελεῖται."

"Indeed when he was leaving, forsaking his native country,
Taking my right hand by the wrist he said:
'Wife, I don't think all the well-greaved Achaeans
Will sail back from Troy unharmed;
For they even say the Trojan men are warriors,
Both darters and archers of arrows
And riders of swift-footed horses, which most quickly
Decide the great strife od distressing war
Therefore I don't know whether god will restore me, or I will be
Caught of something in Troy; So all that remains here is yours.
Remember my father and mother in this home
As now, or still more while I am gone.
But when you see our child grow a beard,
Marry whoever you want, and leave your home.'
He said that; and now it will all happen."

[287] Unknown word. See Stanford 1965, pg. 310.

In other words, Penelope encourages the suitors to believe it might finally be their time, then she convinces them to offer impressive bride prices,[288] all the while emphasizing the inappropriateness of their present conduct.[289]

Some scholars take this story as entirely sincere: Odysseus did tell her to move on eventually, and she believes that the time has come.[290] Yet, given all of the signs that Odysseus is at that very moment on his way home, I am in agreement with Büchner:

> Von einer Entscheidung zugunsten der Freier kann unter diesen Umständen[291] natürlich keine Rede sein. Sie muß versuchen, Zeit zu gewinnen und die Telemach und auch ihr selbst drohende Gefahr einer Gewalttat auf andere Weise abzuwenden.[292]
>
> There can naturally be no talk under these circumstances of a decision in favor of the suitors. She must seek to buy time and divert imminent danger of violence from Telemachus and also herself by other means.

[288] Lesser 2017 points out that she does not directly ask for bridal gifts (pg. 117), but I argue the implications of her words here are clear. If the suitors actually mean to compete for her hand, they need to pay the price of entry.

[289] 18.250-80

[290] See, for instance, Hölscher 1996.

[291] Namely, while her hopes are raised that Odysseus might be on his way home, finally, per Eumaeus' report.

[292] Büchner 1940, pg. 139.

So Penelope invents a new ruse. If the suitors were clever, they would become suspicious when she suddenly gives them a path forward after years of putting them off.[293] Luckily, we know they are not.

Penelope's story is a particularly effective performance because it will carry different meanings to different internal audiences. It gives the suitors the belief that she might remarry, so she has the freedom to also criticize their behavior while their hopes are raised and their frustrations lowered. She has long had the right to resent their constant imposition on her household, but she only demands recompense now that they have reason to be happy with her, i.e. while they are less likely to lash out. The suitors do indeed offer large gifts in the hope of winning favor.[294]

On the other hand, the stranger, regardless of whether he is or is not Odysseus, will hear her criticism of their behavior and hopefully understand that she is not fond of these men. Also, though Penelope cannot know this, the real Odysseus should recognize that this is a manipulation tactic since Athena warned him ahead of time that Penelope leads them on with insincere encouragements, which do not represent her true wishes (13.379-81): [295]

> "ἡ δὲ σὸν αἰεὶ νόστον ὀδυρομένη κατὰ θυμὸν
> πάντας μέν ῥ' ἔλπει καὶ ὑπίσχεται ἀνδρὶ ἑκάστῳ,
> ἀγγελίας προϊεῖσα, νόος δέ οἱ ἄλλα μενοινᾷ."
>
> "And she, always weeping for your return in her heart,
> Encourages everyone and makes promises to each man,

[293] Büchner 1940, pg. 140.

[294] 18.283-303. This is the passage to which Kirchhoff (1859) objected as an obvious interpolation, as we saw in chapter one.

[295] 13.381.

Sending messages, but her mind wants other things."

Her implication that she might now, finally get remarried, could easily fall under 'she makes promises to each man' without implying genuine interest. Some scholars go so far as to argue that Penelope's trick will be obvious to Odysseus particularly if he gave Penelope no such instruction to get remarried once Telemachus is of age.[296] Finally, given his own tendency to deceive others, Odysseus ought to respect the trick and appreciate the material gain from it: a woman after his own heart.[297]

Accordingly, Odysseus reacts positively to her scheme (18.281-3):

'`Ως φάτο· γήθησεν[298] δὲ πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς,
οὕνεκα τῶν μὲν δῶρα παρέλκετο, θέλγε[299] δὲ θυμὸν
μειλιχίοις ἐπέεσσι, νόος δέ οἱ ἄλλα μενοίνα.

So she spoke, and much suffering, godlike Odysseus smiled,
Because she drew gifts from them, and charmed their heart
With sweet words, but her mind wanted other things.

We can infer that Odysseus recalls Athena's information about Penelope here: 18.283b is a verbatim reprisal of 13.381b. So, he knows how she feels about the suitors and accepts a positive

[296] Büchner 1940, pg. 141; Winkler 1990, pg. 147.

[297] See 13.290-310.

[298] For smiling as an indicator of superiority and emotional self-control, see Colakis 1986. Smiling can also express affection. Thus, the suitors, by contrast, often laugh, but never smile; they lack Odysseus' self control and feel falsely superior to everyone else (Levine 1983).

[299] Note that here *thelgō* is used of Penelope while she is acting like Odysseus.

interpretation of her interaction with them. We might expect Penelope to watch Odysseus from a distance, and if she catches sight of his smile here, she will feel encouraged that they are on the same wavelength.

Thus, far from being a sign of Penelope's interest in remarriage, this moment is evidence of her contempt for the suitors, a performance of *homophrosyne* with her husband,[300] and a test of the beggar's identity.

MELANTHO APPEARS

The suitors offer their gifts, and Penelope returns upstairs. The next scene is focalized through Odysseus as he turns his attention to the enslaved women of the household.

First, Odysseus offers to tend to the fire in the megaron so the women can go back upstairs with Penelope.[301] In response, they laugh at him,[302] and we are introduced to a third enslaved woman by name (18.321-5):

> τὸν δ᾽ αἰσχρῶς ἐνένιπε Μελανθὼ καλλιπάρῃος,
> τὴν Δολίος μὲν ἔτικτε, κόμισσε δὲ Πηνελόπεια,
> παῖδα δὲ ὣς ἀτίταλλε, δίδου δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἀθύρματα θυμῷ·
> ἀλλ᾽ οὐδ᾽ ὣς ἔχε πένθος ἐνὶ φρεσὶ Πηνελοπείης,
> ἀλλ᾽ ἥ γ᾽ Εὐρυμάχῳ μισγέσκετο καὶ φιλέεσκεν.[303]

[300] Winkler 1990, pg. 147.

[301] 18.311b-19.

[302] 18.320.

[303] Odysseus will later act as if he were privy to this information (20.1-14), though it is provided by the narrator, and is never spoken aloud.

> And Melantho of the pretty cheeks addressed him disgracefully,
> Whom Dolios fathered, and Penelope took care of her,
> And raised her like her child, and gave her toys for her heart's delight;
> But even so, she had no concern at heart for Penelope,
> But she would have sex with and loved Eurymachus.

Since this is the first young enslaved woman whom we meet (Eurykleia and Eurynome both seem to be old enough to be grandmothers), Melantho serves as a representative for all her agemates. She was the recipient of Penelope's care and affection as a small child, implicitly along with Telemachus, meaning she is likely quite young. She is characterized as ungrateful, because even though Penelope raised her, Melantho "had no concern" for her mother-figure.

In this, Melantho stands in contrast to Eumaeus, who was raised by the mistress of the house one generation previously and remains devoted to his own mother-figure Antikleia. He describes his relationship to her thus (15.361-72):

> "ὄφρα μὲν οὖν δὴ κείνη ἔην, ἀχέουσά περ ἔμπης,
> τόφρα τί μοι φίλον ἔσκε μεταλλῆσαι καὶ ἐρέσθαι,
> οὕνεκά μ᾽ αὐτὴ θρέψεν ἅμα Κτιμένῃ τανυπέπλῳ,
> θυγατέρ᾽ ἰφθίμῃ, τὴν ὀπλοτάτην τέκε παίδων·
> τῇ ὁμοῦ ἐτρεφόμην, ὀλίγον δέ τί μ᾽ ἧσσον ἐτίμα. 365
> αὐτὰρ ἐπεί ῥ᾽ ἤβην πολυήρατον ἱκόμεθ᾽ ἄμφω,
> τὴν μὲν ἔπειτα Σάμηνδ᾽ ἔδοσαν καὶ μυρί᾽ ἔλοντο,
> αὐτὰρ ἐμὲ χλαῖνάν τε χιτῶνά τε εἵματ᾽ ἐκείνη
> καλὰ μάλ᾽ ἀμφιέσασα, ποσὶν δ᾽ ὑποδήματα δοῦσα
> ἀγρόνδε προΐαλλε· φίλει δέ με κηρόθι μᾶλλον. 370
> νῦν δ᾽ ἤδη τούτων ἐπιδεύομαι· ἀλλά μοι αὐτῷ
> ἔργον ἀέξουσιν μάκαρες θεοὶ ᾧ ἐπιμίμνω·"

> "While she then was alive, although grieving constantly,
> It was dear to me to check in and question her
> Since she herself raised me alongside Ktimene with the flowing robe,
> Her comely daughter, the youngest of the children she bore;
> I was raised with her, and she honored me a little less. 365

> But when we both reached attractive youth,
> They gave her to Same and chose countless things;
> But she, after dressing me in a cloak and tunic
> And very beautiful clothing, and giving me sandals for my feet,
> Sent me to the country; but she loved me more with all her heart. 370
> And now I don't have these things; but the blessed gods
> Prosper the work in which I am busy."

Eumaeus expresses unmixed gratitude for Antikleia, despite the fact that, in adulthood, the family that raised him forces him to live a difficult life in the country for their economic benefit (366-72). Moreover, the experience of growing up in a family as the least-favorite child (365), who was immediately sent away to work upon coming of age (366-70),[304] would likely be disturbing, even traumatic. It is unreasonable to demand that a person feel grateful for such an upbringing. Nevertheless, the text frames gratitude as the proper reaction in these two passages.[305] The logic seems to be 'The mistress did more than she was obligated to do for this child, and any proper slave will know their place, recognize that they have no right to expect equal treatment with free-born children, and be grateful for what they got.' However, Melantho clearly does not feel this way in 18.321-5. Therefore, the text seems to argue, she is wronging Penelope, by failing to love her the way Eumaeus loves Antikleia, or at least act as if she does. The parallel between their upbringings sets up the two as foils: Eumaeus is the "good slave"; Melantho is the "bad slave".

[304] For the sexual implications of sending Eumaeus away once he hit adolescence, see Murray 2021.

[305] For the enslaver's tendency to demand affective labor from their slaves, see Cushing 2021.

Melantho then rebukes Odysseus, still disguised as the beggar, whom she naturally does not recognize as her enslaver (18.326-336):[306]

ἦ ῥ᾽ Ὀδυσῆ᾽ ἐνένιπεν ὀνειδείοις ἐπέεσσιν·
“ξεῖνε τάλαν, σύ γέ τις φρένας ἐκπεπαταγμένος ἐσσί,
οὐδ᾽ ἐθέλεις εὕδειν χαλκήϊον ἐς δόμον ἐλθών
ἠέ που ἐς λέσχην, ἀλλ᾽ ἐνθάδε πόλλ᾽ ἀγορεύεις,
θαρσαλέως πολλοῖσι μετ᾽ ἀνδράσιν, οὐδέ τι θυμῷ
ταρβεῖς· ἦ ῥά σε οἶνος ἔχει φρένας, ἤ νύ τοι αἰεὶ
τοιοῦτος νόος ἐστίν, ὃ καὶ μεταμώνια βάζεις.
ἦ ἀλύεις, ὅτι Ἶρον ἐνίκησας τὸν ἀλήτην;
μή τίς τοι τάχα Ἴρου ἀμείνων ἄλλος ἀναστῇ,
ὅς τίς σ᾽ ἀμφὶ κάρη κεκοπὼς χερσὶ στιβαρῇσι
δώματος ἐκπέμψῃσι, φορύξας αἵματι πολλῷ.”

“And she addressed Odysseus with shaming words,
Enduring stranger, were you hit in the head?
And you don’t want to go and sleep at a smithy,

[306] For more on Melantho and Melanthios’ accidental verbal transgressions, see Christensen 2020, pg. 167-172. c.f. Murray 2021, pg. 144, 149-50 on “ritual deference”. Note that the *Odyssey* defines the morality of enslaved characters with respect to their enslavers. In the dominant ideology of the time, a slave cannot be a “good person” in the full sense of that phrase, only a good slave. As Aristotle put it in the *Poetics*, 1454a:

ἔστιν δὲ ἐν ἑκάστῳ γένει: καὶ γὰρ γυνή ἐστιν χρηστὴ καὶ δοῦλος, καίτοι γε ἴσως τούτων τὸ μὲν χεῖρον, τὸ δὲ ὅλως φαῦλόν ἐστιν.

“And [goodness] is in keeping with each kind: for even a woman is good, and a slave, even if of the two of them one is perhaps an inferior kind, and the other is entirely low.”

This narrative enforces the dominant ideology, as narratives are wont to do. The *Odyssey* implicitly endorses social hierarchy—see Thalmann 1998.

> Or perhaps at an inn, but talk a lot here,
> Boldly among many men, and you're not at all
> Frightened at heart; wine's got your wits, or
> Your brain's always like this; so you talk uselessly.
> Are you puffed up because you beat the homeless Iros?
> Watch out that no one better than Iros stands up to fight you
> Who could hit you around the head with strong hands
> And send you from the palace, covering you in a lot of blood."

Melantho's point boils down to a—perhaps reasonable—concern that the strange man might be planning to spend the night in the palace uninvited, but her tone is aggressive and derisive. Odysseus retaliates by threatening her,[307] and the girls scatter.[308]

Our first look at Melantho does not seem engineered to inspire any love for her. Over the course of the next few books, her character will grow in prominence, and we will return to discussions of her and her fellow girls later.

SCENE 11A: INTERVIEW WITH THE BEGGAR

Let us return to Penelope upstairs. By this point, there have been two omens, one suspicious description (possibly a familiar physique), and an enigmatic smile all pointing towards the beggar's true identity. Let us explore the possibility that Penelope has guessed the truth. She is perhaps not certain, but reasonably confident. If Odysseus has returned, then there is hope that she may be saved. This is the best possible outcome for her.

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[307] 18.337-9.

[308] 18.340-2.

After the suitors have left the palace for the night,[309] Penelope comes back downstairs to meet with the beggar. For the first time, the text does not emphasize her defensive posture in the megaron (19.53-5):

> ‘Η δ’ ἴεν ἐκ θαλάμοιο περίφρων Πηνελόπεια,
> Ἀρτέμιδι ἰκέλη ἠὲ χρυσέῃ Ἀφροδίτῃ.
> τῇ παρὰ μὲν κλισίην πυρὶ κάτθεσαν, ἔνθ’ ἄρ’ ἐφῖζε…
>
> But observant Penelope came from her room,
> Like Artemis or golden Aphrodite.
> And they set her chair by the fire, then she sat on it…

She is compared to a goddess, which seems to suggest that she now embodies a self-assured and comfortable presence. No longer flanked by attendants, carefully veiled, and taking her position next to a pillar, she goes to the fire. Before, she kept on her feet, as if prepared to turn and go at any moment, but now she settles into a chair. In sum, she acts more at ease around the beggar than she ever has around the suitors.

From the beginning of this scene, Penelope is friendly towards her guest. She again insists that he be treated with respect. She overhears Melantho tell him off again (19.65-9):

> ἡ δ’ Ὀδυσῆ’ ἐνένιπε Μελανθὼ δεύτερον αὖτις·
> “ξεῖν’, ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἐνθάδ’ ἀνιήσεις διὰ νύκτα
> δινεύων κατὰ οἶκον, ὀπιπεύσεις δὲ γυναῖκας;
> ἀλλ’ ἔξελθε θύραζε, τάλαν, καὶ δαιτὸς ὄνησο·
> ἢ τάχα καὶ δαλῷ βεβλημένος εἶσθα θύραζε.”
>
> And then Melantho addressed Odysseus a second time;
> “Stranger, are you still bothering us here, wandering around
> The palace all night long, staring at the women?
> Go outside, wretch, and enjoy your meal;

[309] 18.426-6.

Or soon you'll be hit with a torch, and outside anyway."

Odysseus attempts to tell her off,[310] then Penelope also intervenes in his defense. She asserts his right to be there in no uncertain terms (19.89-95):

‘`Ως φάτο· τοῦ δ’ ἤκουσε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια,
ἀμφίπολον δ’ ἐνένιπεν ἔπος τ’ ἔφατ’ ἔκ τ’ ὀνόμαζε·
“πάντως, θαρσαλέη, κύον ἀδεές, οὔ τί με λήθεις
ἔρδουσα μέγα ἔργον, ὃ σῇ κεφαλῇ ἀναμάξεις·
πάντα γὰρ εὖ ᾔδησθ’, ἐπεὶ ἐξ ἐμεῦ ἔκλυες αὐτῆς,
ὡς τὸν ξεῖνον ἔμελλον ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἐμοῖσιν
ἀμφὶ πόσει εἴρεσθαι, ἐπεὶ πυκινῶς ἀκάχημαι.”

So he spoke, and observant Penelope heard him,
And she spoke a word and called the attendant out:
“Bold girl, fearless bitch, you don't at all escape me,
Doing a great deed, that'll come back on your own head;
For you knew it all well, since you heard me myself
That I was going to question the guest in my halls
About my husband, since I'm deeply distressed.”

This moment speaks to Penelope's social maneuvering. With the suitors and Telemachus, we have seen her defer. However, with an enslaved woman, she is free to be direct and even harsh. She conforms to her position as a noble woman who is expected to control the female staff, but not to overstep her authority when men are around. She has internalized her social role and acts in accordance.

Penelope then turns to Eurynome and asks her to bring out a chair and fleece, δίφρον καὶ κῶας,[311] for the beggar, and once he is situated, Penelope begins the interview by asking who he

[310] 19.70-88.

[311] 19.97

is.[312] She may be waiting for Odysseus to identify himself now that the suitors are gone and they can speak in relative privacy. Granted this is not complete privacy, as the other women are still nearby,[313] but surely Odysseus can work out some sign or token of his identity, if he so chooses. However, he refuses to give any answer at all.[314]

As per Penelope's usual, she is unwilling to confront him directly, so next she starts speaking more and more pointedly, trying to coax him into an admission. Klytemnestra did, in fact, murder Agamemnon upon his return from the war, so maybe Odysseus has legitimate grounds to fear her, after all. Her speech, then, is built around assuaging any concerns he might have. She starts by name-dropping Odysseus once again (19.123-8):

> Τὸν δ᾽ ἠμείβετ᾽ ἔπειτα περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
> "ξεῖν᾽, ἦ τοι μὲν ἐμὴν ἀρετὴν εἶδός τε δέμας τε
> ὤλεσαν ἀθάνατοι, ὅτε Ἴλιον εἰσανέβαινον
> Ἀργεῖοι, μετὰ τοῖσι δ᾽ ἐμὸς πόσις ἦεν Ὀδυσσεύς
> εἰ κεῖνός γ᾽ ἐλθὼν τὸν ἐμὸν βίον ἀμφιπολεύοι,
> μεῖζον κε κλέος εἴη ἐμὸν καὶ κάλλιον οὕτω."
>
> And then observant Penelope answered him:
> "My guest, surely the gods ruined my virtue,
> Beauty, and figure, when the Argives went to
> Ilion, and among them was my husband Odysseus
> If that man would come and care for my livelihood
> My reputation would be better and nobler in this way."

'Gee, I sure wish my husband would come home!'

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[312] 19.103-5

[313] Winkler 1990, pg. 148-50.

[314] 19.106-22.

Then, she emphasizes that the suitors are there against her will, in case he somehow missed that during her performance in the megaron earlier, and reiterates her desire to see her husband return (129-36):

> "νῦν δ᾽ ἄχομαι· τόσα γάρ μοι ἐπέσσευεν κακὰ δαίμων.
> ὅσσοι γὰρ νήσοισιν ἐπικρατέουσιν ἄριστοι,
> Δουλιχίῳ τε Σάμῃ τε καὶ ὑλήεντι Ζακύνθῳ,
> οἵ τ᾽ αὐτὴν Ἰθάκην εὐδείελον ἀμφινέμονται,
> οἵ μ᾽ ἀεκαζομένην μνῶνται, τρύχουσι δὲ οἶκον.
> τῷ οὔτε ξείνων ἐμπάζομαι οὔθ᾽ ἱκετάων
> οὔτε τι κηρύκων, οἳ δημιοεργοὶ ἔασιν·
> ἀλλ᾽ Ὀδυσῆ ποθέουσα φίλον κατατήκομαι ἦτορ."
>
> "But now I'm in pain, for some god set such great evils against me.
> For as many great men rule islands,
> Doulichion and Same and sandy Zacynthos,
> And who dwell around far-seen Ithaca,
> They court me against my will, and waste my home.
> Therefore I don't care for guests or suppliants
> Nor even heralds, who do public works;
> But I melt in my dear heart longing for Odysseus."

She repeats the story of her burial-shroud trick,[315] and emphasizes that now the trick has been found out, she is running out of time before she must remarry despite her opposition (157-61):

> "νῦν δ᾽ οὔτ᾽ ἐκφυγέειν δύναμαι γάμον οὔτε τιν᾽ ἄλλην
> μῆτιν ἔθ᾽ εὑρίσκω· μάλα δ᾽ ὀτρύνουσι τοκῆες
> γήμασθ᾽, ἀσχαλάᾳ δὲ πάϊς βίοτον κατεδόντων,
> γιγνώσκων· ἤδη γὰρ ἀνὴρ οἷός τε μάλιστα
> οἴκου κήδεσθαι, τῷ τε Ζεὺς κῦδος ὀπάζει."

[315] 137-156. For more on this particular iteration of the trick of the web, see Büchner 1940, pg. 132-4.

> "And now I can't avoid marriage nor invent
> Another trick; but my parents urge me
> To be married, and my child knows and hates that
> They eat his livelihood; for he is already the kind of man
> To care for the household, to whom Zeus gives glory."

Penelope has comprehensively addressed every concern about herself or her loyalty that she can anticipate Odysseus might have.[316] Finally she asks the beggar once again to identify himself, and he responds with another long, fake life story, calling himself Aethon, and claiming to have met Odysseus many years ago.[317]

For the time being, Penelope is stymied. After twenty years of waiting, the signs all indicate that her husband is on the way home, and here is a man who looks, acts, and sounds like her husband, plus some wear and tear. His presence is soothing and familiar. Odysseus is the one person who could step in and save her and Telemachus from the suitors; she has waited years for this very moment. Yet she is either wrong, or he is refusing to let her in on his plan. If the latter, she must ask herself 1. Why he would disguise himself from his own wife, not just the suitors, 2. Whether he still does not trust her, and 3. What he plans to do next.

Penelope reacts to his claim that he met Odysseus once many years ago by bursting into tears (19.203-12).

> ᾽Ίσκε ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα·
> τῆς δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἀκουούσης ῥέε δάκρυα, τήκετο δὲ χρώς·

[316] For the sake of fairness, it is worth noting that even if Penelope does not suspect the beggar's identity, she might still be attempting to signal her fidelity to the beggar in case he has information about her husband. She wants him to know that any information he has would be welcome.

[317] 164-202.

ὡς δὲ χιὼν κατατήκετ᾽ ἐν ἀκροπόλοισιν ὄρεσσιν,
ἥν τ᾽ Εὖρος κατέτηξεν, ἐπὴν Ζέφυρος καταχεύῃ·
τηκομένης δ᾽ ἄρα τῆς ποταμοὶ πλήθουσι ῥέοντες·
ὣς τῆς τήκετο καλὰ παρήϊα δάκρυ χεούσης,
κλαιούσης ἑὸν ἄνδρα παρήμενον. αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
θυμῷ μὲν γοόωσαν ἑὴν ἐλέαιρε γυναῖκα,
ὀφθαλμοὶ δ᾽ ὡς εἰ κέρα ἕστασαν ἠὲ σίδηρος
ἀτρέμας ἐν βλεφάροισι· δόλῳ δ᾽ ὅ γε δάκρυα κεῦθεν.

He told many lies that sound like truths;
And as she listened tears streamed, and her face melted;
And as snow melts in high mountains,
And Euros melts it, when Zephyr pours down;
And then flowing rivers are filled with the snow-melt;
So her beautiful cheeks melted as she poured down tears,
Weeping for her husband beside her. But Odysseus
Was taking pity in his heart on his own mourning wife,
But his eyes were up, unwavering in his eyelids, as if they
Were horn or iron; and he hid his tears with deceit.

It is easy to imagine her sense of overwhelm: fear for the future, grief, frustration, and confusion. What he says sounds true, yet she had such strong suspicions.[318] So Penelope cries, but she does not give up yet.

[318] The phrase ψεύδεα πολλὰ ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, "many lies that sound like truths," could be focalized to Penelope, to the listener/audience, or it could be a general statement about an innate quality of his speech: these lies would sound true to anyone who happened to hear them. Given the lack of indication that the phrase should be attached to a particular individual, I prefer to read it as a general statement, and therefore to infer that the lies had the specified effect on Penelope when she heard them.

First, she probes a little further into his claims. Much as she did with the suitors in the previous book, Penelope plays along with the stranger here and does not rebut his story. However, she does ask for confirmation, testing his knowledge of Odysseus (19.215-19).

> "νῦν μὲν δή σευ, ξεῖνέ γ', ὀΐω πειρήσεσθαι, 215
> εἰ ἐτεὸν δὴ κεῖθι σὺν ἀντιθέοις ἑτάροισι
> ξείνισας ἐν μεγάροισιν ἐμὸν πόσιν, ὡς ἀγορεύεις.
> εἰπέ μοι ὁπποῖ' ἄσσα περὶ χροῒ εἵματα ἕστο,
> αὐτός θ' οἷος ἔην, καὶ ἑταίρους, οἵ οἱ ἕποντο."
>
> "Now then, my friend, I plan to test you, 215
> If you really in fact, with his godlike companions,
> Hosted my husband there, as you say.
> Tell me what sort of clothes he wore on his body,
> And what he was like, and his companions, who followed him."

She asks a question that the real Odysseus would also be able to answer. In fact, Odysseus would have a far easier time describing himself and his own clothes than an acquaintance who met him once, many years ago. So, when "the stranger" gives a detailed description of a real brooch Odysseus once owned, he makes his fake identity less plausible, not more.[319] He also makes what Vlahos terms a "cruel statement" about how the women of Crete admired Odysseus in his *chiton*, which is perhaps not exactly a sensitive thing to say to a grieving widow about her lost husband, but which reinforces Odysseus desirability as a spouse.[320] Penelope confirms that she remembers the brooch, and the beggar responds by announcing that Odysseus will be home in the very near future.

[319] Harsh 1950, pg. 11.

[320] Vlahos 2007, pg. 110.

Thus, the beggar's story has some flaws, and Penelope knows her husband is nothing if not deceptive. So, she switches tactics and begins gently baiting him into an admission by insisting that Odysseus will never come home.[321] She only grows more friendly and hospitable toward him with time. As Büchner says, "Nun er wird der 'liebe Fremdling', und sie kann sich nicht genug tun in seiner Ehrung," "now he becomes the 'dear stranger,' and she can't do enough in his honor," when she orders her enslaved women to bathe his feet and prepare a bed for him in 18.317-34.[322]

Büchner, who does not propose early recognition, notes her friendliness with some confusion and attributes it to her attraction to the beggar, "Penelope der Anziehungskraft des unerkannt bei ihr sitzenden Gatten immer mehr erliegt," "Penelope progressively succumbs to attraction to her unrecognized husband as he sits beside her".[323] This interpretation strikes me as unlikely both because of the omens about her husband's return and because, while Athena's disguise may not have rendered Odysseus perfectly unidentifiable, it did certainly make him less physically attractive. However, Odysseus does retain his charming personality, so Büchner's idea is not entirely without merit.

Conversely, if our listener prefers the early recognition theory, they may start to wonder if the poet is referencing "seduction by a foreigner" or "seduction by a god" with a heavy dose of dramatic irony. Here is Odysseus taking on the role of a foreigner/god in disguise, here is Penelope acting in concert, although she has recognized Odysseus for who he really is. It is a delightful bit of playacting between them, built on the unspoken understanding that no true impropriety is

[321] 19.308-16.

[322] Büchner 1940, pg. 134.

[323] Büchner 1940, pg. 134.

occuring—Odysseus knows who he is, we the audience know who he is, and Penelope probably does too. Moreover, Penelope keeps her solicitousness within the plausible deniability of *xenia*, so she has not opened herself to any accusations of infidelity, if for some reason she finds that she has guessed wrongly. No one can accuse her of impropriety with another man.

To Penelope's offer of a foot bath, Odysseus protests that only a person who has suffered as he has should touch his feet.[324] Penelope then summons Eurykleia (18.353-60):

"ἔστι δέ μοι γρηῢς πυκινὰ φρεσὶ μήδε᾽ ἔχουσα,
ἣ κεῖνον δύστηνον ἐὺ τρέφεν ἠδ᾽ ἀτίταλλε,
δεξαμένη χείρεσσ᾽, ὅτε μιν πρῶτον τέκε μήτηρ,
ἥ σε πόδας νίψει, ὀλιγηπελέουσά περ ἔμπης.
ἀλλ᾽ ἄγε νῦν ἀνστᾶσα, περίφρων Εὐρύκλεια,
νίψον σοῖο ἄνακτος ὁμήλικα. καί που Ὀδυσσεὺς
ἤδη τοιόσδ᾽ ἐστὶ πόδας τοιόσδε τε χεῖρας·
αἶψα γὰρ ἐν κακότητι βροτοὶ καταγηράσκουσιν."

"I have an old woman, quite sharp in her mind,
Who reared and raised well that unlucky man,
Received him into her arms, when first his mother bore him,
Who will wash your feet, although she's feeble.
But come now, stand up, observant Eurykleia,
Wash your lord's agemate. And I'm sure Odysseus
Has feet and hands like this by now;
Since mortals in bad circumstances age quickly."

Note that Penelope summons his own former nurse, not Eurynome, her attendant. She chooses someone who knows Odysseus better than anyone. She also compares the beggar to Odysseus in explicit terms, priming Eurykleia to notice similarities. Once again, this seems to be a test: if

[324] 19.343-8.

Penelope's suspicions are correct, Eurykleia will know. And in fact, she does. It is during the footbath that Eurykleia recognizes Oysseus' scar.

Our listener must here realize that Athena's magic is not fail-proof, since Eurykleia is clearly covered under πάντεσσι βροτοῖσι. Penelope has not seen the scar, but if the magic can fail, then it is perfectly reasonable to assume that Penelope is capable of knowing her husband through other tokens, such as his build, personality, or voice, even if they are not as decisive as his unique scar.

However, Penelope does not learn that her test succeeded because Athena intervenes: "ἡ δ' οὔτ' ἀθρῆσαι δύνατ' ἀντίη οὔτε νοῆσαι· / τῇ γὰρ Ἀθηναίη νόον ἔτραπεν," "but she couldn't look over or notice, for Athena diverted her attention".[325] This moment signals that Athena is aware of, and unbothered by, the limitations of Odysseus' disguise. She knows that it is not impenetrable, and so perhaps she did not mean for her original statement to Odysseus to be taken literally. There are some it will work against, some that it will not, and she is there to prevent those limitations from becoming a problem for Odysseus' scheme. So though Penelope has succeeded in arranging things so that his identity is confirmed, she misses that pivotal moment, lost in reverie.

SCENE 11B: THE DREAM OMEN

When Penelope snaps back to reality, she still cannot bring herself to challenge the beggar's fake life story, but the pause has given her time to formulate a new plan.[326] She gets more and more

[325] 19.478-9

[326] Vlahos 2007, pg. 111.

creative in nudging him towards an admission. After yet another recitation of her sorrow,[327] and a reiteration of how little time she has left before she must remarry,[328] in 535-53, she reports a spectacularly unsubtle dream in which an eagle kills her flock of geese and then explains the allegorical[329] nature of his own action.[330] In the dream, she was at first disturbed by the deaths of her beloved pets (19.535-43):

> "ἀλλ᾽ ἄγε μοι τὸν ὄνειρον ὑπόκριναι καὶ ἄκουσον.
> χῆνές μοι κατὰ οἶκον ἐείκοσι πυρὸν ἔδουσιν
> ἐξ ὕδατος, καί τέ σφιν ἰαίνομαι εἰσορόωσα·
> ἐλθὼν δ᾽ ἐξ ὄρεος μέγας αἰετὸς ἀγκυλοχείλης
> πᾶσι κατ᾽ αὐχένας ἦξε καὶ ἔκτανεν· οἱ δ᾽ ἐκέχυντο
> ἀθρόοι ἐν μεγάροις, ὁ δ᾽ ἐς αἰθέρα δῖαν ἀέρθη.
> αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ κλαῖον καὶ ἐκώκυον ἔν περ ὀνείρῳ,
> ἀμφὶ δ᾽ ἔμ᾽ ἠγερέθοντο ἐϋπλοκαμῖδες Ἀχαιαί,
> οἴκτρ᾽ ὀλοφυρομένην ὅ μοι αἰετὸς ἔκτανε χῆνας." [331]
>
> "But come now, listen and explain my dream.
> Throughout my house, twenty geese from the water
> Were eating grain, and I was happy watching them;
> But then a huge, hook-beaked eagle came from the mountain
> Broke all their necks and killed them; and they were flung
> In heaps in the hall, but he soared into the holy atmosphere.
> But I shrieked and cried, though I was dreaming,

[327] For background on the daughter of Pandareos to whom she compares herself (517), see Anhalt 2001 and Levaniouk 2008.

[328] 19.509-34.

[329] For justification of this dream as true allegory, see Kotwick 2020.

[330] C.f. the unsubtlety of "wine-skin" prophecy of Euripides' *Medea*, 663-81.

[331] Russo 1982 notes that the construction *ho moi aietos* invites the reading "my eagle", dative of possession, though an ethical dative or dative of disadvantage is more likely, pg. 8.

And around me the long-haired Achaeans gathered,
Weeping piteously because the eagle killed my geese."

However, the eagle then tells her that the geese are not really her pets (546-50):

"'θάρσει, Ἰκαρίου κούρη τηλεκλειτοῖο·
οὐκ ὄναρ, ἀλλ᾽ ὕπαρ ἐσθλόν, ὅ τοι τετελεσμένον ἔσται.
χῆνες μὲν μνηστῆρες, ἐγὼ δέ τοι αἰετὸς ὄρνις
ἦα πάρος, νῦν αὖτε τεὸς πόσις εἰλήλουθα,
ὃς πᾶσι μνηστῆρσιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφήσω.'" 550

"'Take heart, daughter of renowned Icarius:
This is no dream but a good true vision which will be realized.
The geese are the suitors, and I was an eagle previously,
now again I have come as your husband,
who shall send a shameful death to all the suitors.'" 550

Despite the straightforward nature of the dream that explains itself, scholars have read this scene in contradictory ways. Some say that since Penelope likes her geese, she must like the suitors, too.[332] If we do not believe that Penelope has any suspicions about the beggar, then in this scene she naively reports her affection for them to her own husband. However, this interpretation requires us to either ignore Penelope's thus-far emphatic hatred for the suitors; accept that her character has splintered at this late point in the narrative;[333] or appeal to the subconscious. I have already made cases against the first two possibilities elsewhere. Let us now consider the third.

The argument that Penelope has repressed desires for the suitors which become apparent in dreams was proposed in Devereux's 1957 article in *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*. This journal,

[332] See, for instance, Devereux 1957, Rankin 1962, Clayton 2004, pg. 45-6.

[333] For a useful recap and refutation of various iterations of this argument, see Rozokoki 2001, pgs. 2-3; Levaniouk 2008, pg. 21-24.

as the name suggests, was not focused on classical scholarship, but on the then-new field of psychoanalysis. Devereux took theories of the unconscious and applied them to Homer and Penelope. I argue that this tactic is problematic because the theory that repressed feeling can reveal itself in symbolic representation is anachronistic to antiquity. That the poet is representing Penelope as unconsciously revealing an unconscious desire requires a (Freudian) conceptual apparatus we have no reason to believe was available to them.[334] I find it unwise to build arguments upon Devereux's Freudian analysis, though his work has had a long afterlife.[335]

However, if we, like Winkler and Harsh, believe that Penelope suspects Odysseus's disguise, the situation is quite different. In that case, the dream is not an innocent report, but a power play, since she challenges the stranger to explain it to her. Multiple scholars have read the dream as such. Vlahos, for instance, interprets her affection for the dream-geese as a retaliatory barb for the stranger's earlier comment about Odysseus' popularity with the Cretan women,[336] though this is not my preferred reading, as it seems to cheapen their relationship. Winkler believes the dream is a power play and goes so far as to suggest that perhaps she invented it whole cloth:

> Critical discussion of this passage has, without exception, assumed that Penelope is here a translucent speaker… as if she were the homeric narrator of facts and not a character with designs of her own… Though Penelope does have dreams in the *Odyssey*, I see no reason

[334] Pratt 1994.

[335] E.g. Felson 1994, pg. 41: "Penelope's encouragement of the suitors and her enjoyment of their attention, suggested especially by her dream-reaction to the slaughter of her pet geese…"

[336] 19.353. Vlahos 2007, pg. 113.

> to believe that she actually had this dream. It can be seen in its context of covert and guarded negotiation as her attempt to convey a message…[337]

Winkler makes a prudent observation in that Penelope is not a disinterested narrator, but a character with her own goals and fears. There are benefits to this theory in that it allows her some agency in this situation and fixes the problem of splintered characterization. However, Winkler goes perhaps a step too far in arguing that she perhaps never had this dream at all.

The same imagery in Penelope's dream, an eagle killing geese, reflects two previous omens that we know did happen. First, the eagle omen at assembly warned the suitors to vacate Odysseus' estate (2.146-54):

> ‘`Ως φάτο Τηλέμαχος, τῷ δ᾽ αἰετὼ εὐρύοπα Ζεὺς
> ὑψόθεν ἐκ κορυφῆς ὄρεος προέηκε πέτεσθαι.
> τὼ δ᾽ ἕως μέν ῥ᾽ ἐπέτοντο μετὰ πνοιῇς ἀνέμοιο
> πλησίω ἀλλήλοισι τιταινομένω πτερύγεσσιν·
> ἀλλ᾽ ὅτε δὴ μέσσην ἀγορὴν πολύφημον ἱκέσθην,
> ἔνθ᾽ ἐπιδινηθέντε τιναξάσθην πτερὰ πυκνά,
> ἐς δ᾽ ἰδέτην πάντων κεφαλάς, ὄσσοντο δ᾽ ὄλεθρον·
> δρυψαμένω δ᾽ ὀνύχεσσι παρειὰς ἀμφί τε δειρὰς
> δεξιὼ ἤιξαν διά τ᾽ οἰκία καὶ πόλιν αὐτῶν.
>
> So spoke Telemachus, and to him farseeing Zeus sent
> two eagles to fly from the peak of the mountain on high.
> And first they flew with the break of wind
> Stretching their wings beside one another;
> But when they reached the middle of the chatter-filled assembly
> Then they shook their wings fast, whirling around,

[337] Winkler 1990, pg. 153. Note that in the years since, readings of this scene have been less naive—Felson-Rubin, for instance, reads Penelope as cleverly anticipating several possibilities at once.

And they looked at everyone's heads and forboded death;
And tearing at cheeks and throats with talons
They shot to the right through their homes and city.

Second, there is the omen in Sparta, which also presages the suitors' deaths—several scholars have already noted its clear parallels to the dream (15.160-5).[338]

‘`Ως ἄρα οἱ εἰπόντι ἐπέπτατο δεξιὸς ὄρνις,
αἰετὸς ἀργὴν χῆνα φέρων ὀνύχεσσι πέλωρον,
ἥμερον ἐξ αὐλῆς· οἱ δ᾽ ἰΰζοντες ἕποντο
ἀνέρες ἠδὲ γυναῖκες· ὁ δέ σφισιν ἐγγύθεν ἐλθὼν
δεξιὸς ἤϊξε πρόσθ᾽ ἵππων· οἱ δὲ ἰδόντες
γήθησαν, καὶ πᾶσιν ἐνὶ φρεσὶ θυμὸς ἰάνθη. 165

Thus then on the speaker's right a bird flew,
An eagle carrying a huge white goose,
A tame one from the courtyard; and men and women
Followed shouting; but it, coming near them
Darted right in front of the horses; and the others
Who saw rejoiced, and the heart in their chest was glad. 165

Helen interpreted that omen thus (15.171–8):

τὸν δ᾽ Ἑλένη τανύπεπλος ὑποφθαμένη φάτο μῦθον·
“κλῦτέ μευ· αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ μαντεύσομαι, ὡς ἐνὶ θυμῷ
ἀθάνατοι βάλλουσι καὶ ὡς τελέεσθαι ὀΐω.
ὡς ὅδε χῆν᾽ ἥρπαξ᾽ ἀτιταλλομένην ἐνὶ οἴκῳ
ἐλθὼν ἐξ ὄρεος, ὅθι οἱ γενεή τε τόκος τε, 175
ὣς Ὀδυσεὺς κακὰ πολλὰ παθὼν καὶ πόλλ᾽ ἐπαληθεὶς
οἴκαδε νοστήσει καὶ τίσεται· ἠὲ καὶ ἤδη
οἴκοι, ἀτὰρ μνηστῆρσι κακὸν πάντεσσι φυτεύει.”

And Helen of the flowing robe sais a word before he did:

[338] Rankin 1962; Rozokoki 2001, pg. 2; Stockdale 2019 greatly expands on the idea.

> "Hear me: but I shall prophesy, since the immortals
> Put in my mind how I think it will be accomplished.
> As this animal snatched the goose raised in the house
> After coming from the mountain, where its stock and offspring are,
> So Odysseus after suffering many evils and wanding far and wide,
> Will come home and take vengeance: or even he's already
> At home, but he's nurturing misfortune for all the suitors."

Thus, the narrative has already established that Odysseus is a savage eagle and the suitors are tame geese in ornithomantic symbolism. That Penelope uses the same imagery seems to add credibility to her story: this is how the gods have represented such an event already. I therefore believe that Penelope had a dream involving geese, an eagle, and the impression that it was a portent, though she may have tweaked or dramatized it for the beggar's benefit—and for her to relate this dream at all is a motivated decision. It amounts to a subtle challenge. I believe that the crucial point is that by baiting Odysseus into acknowledging her dream is a divine omen, Penelope forces him to allude to his plot against the suitors, even if he is not willing to speak openly with her.

So, let us postulate that Penelope had some version of this dream, and that her dream is related to Zeus' omen from book fifteen, and perhaps also to the omen from book two as well. Though Vlahos would have us believe that Penelope reports sadness for her geese in order to needle Odysseus, and others would have us believe that this sadness reflects sincere affection for the suitors, the parallels to these other omens seem to contradict such ideas. In the case of the omen in book fifteen, those who care for the tame geese are at first horrified by the eagles' attacks, until the prophetic nature of the event becomes evident. It therefore follows that Penelope's initial sadness at the deaths of her beloved pets does not necessitate any emotional attachment to the suitors they represent: the workers at Sparta who chased that eagle have no attachment to the suitors either. Moreover, when the dream eagle addresses Penelope and explains the omen, he

"stopped" her crying, κατερήτυε.[339] She was no longer sad once she knew the birds were no birds at all.[340] She is not sorry that the suitors will die. The meaning of the suitors as geese therefore lies not in the geese's relationship to Penelope (beloved pets), but in their relationship to an eagle (prey). Odysseus is a warrior, and the eagle symbolizes his ferocity. The suitors are also birds, but of a very different nature; they are tame animals that spend their days in a domestic setting eating and being tended by others, as the suitors do.[341]

When Penelope asks the stranger to interpret the dream for her, he does so in the only way possible ('ὦ γύναι, οὔ πως ἔστιν ὑποκρίνασθαι ὄνειρον / ἄλλῃ ἀποκλίναντ'),[342] but still he says nothing about his own identity. In her frustration, Penelope insists that the dream might not be real at all (19.559-69):

Τὸν δ' αὖτε προσέειπε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
"ξεῖν', ἦ τοι μὲν ὄνειροι ἀμήχανοι ἀκριτόμυθοι
γίγνοντ', οὐδέ τι πάντα τελείεται ἀνθρώποισι.
δοιαὶ γάρ τε πύλαι ἀμενηνῶν εἰσὶν ὀνείρων·
αἱ μὲν γὰρ κεράεσσι τετεύχαται, αἱ δ' ἐλέφαντι·
τῶν οἳ μέν κ' ἔλθωσι διὰ πριστοῦ ἐλέφαντος,
οἵ ῥ' ἐλεφαίρονται, ἔπε' ἀκράαντα φέροντες·
οἱ δὲ διὰ ξεστῶν κεράων ἔλθωσι θύραζε,
οἵ ῥ' ἔτυμα κραίνουσι, βροτῶν ὅτε κέν τις ἴδηται.
ἀλλ' ἐμοὶ οὐκ ἐντεῦθεν ὀΐομαι αἰνὸν ὄνειρον
ἐλθέμεν· ἦ κ' ἀσπαστὸν ἐμοὶ καὶ παιδὶ γένοιτο."

[339] 19.545.

[340] It is for this reason that I am not completely convinced by Vlahos' claim that Penelope is needling Odysseus with the possibility that she enjoys the suitors' presence.

[341] Kotwick 2020, pg. 15-16.

[342] 19.555-6

But then observant Penelope addressed him again:
"My guest, really dreams are inexplicable gibberish,
And not all of them are accomplished for people.
For there are two gates of fleeting dreams,
For one is made of horn, the other of ivory,
Those which go through sawn ivory,
Deceive men, bearing pointless words;
But those that go out through polished horn,
They bring truths to pass, when someone sees them.
But I don't think my dreadful dream came
From there; it'd be welcome to me and my son though."[343]

Thus, she challenges him again: Prove to me that my dream will happen.[344]

Penelope then pivots and tries one last tack. She announces that she is arranging a bride-contest for the very next day (19.570-81):[345]

"ἄλλο δέ τοι ἐρέω, σὺ δ' ἐνὶ φρεσὶ βάλλεο σῇσιν·
ἥδε δὴ ὡς εἶσι δυσώνυμος, ἥ μ' Ὀδυσῆος
οἴκου ἀποσχήσει· νῦν γὰρ καταθήσω ἄεθλον,
τοὺς πελέκεας, τοὺς κεῖνος ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἑοῖσιν
ἵστασχ' ἐξείης, δρυόχους ὥς, δώδεκα πάντας·

[343] Rozokoki 2001 again cites this line as evidence that Penelope does not care for the suitors, despite her initial sadness, pg. 3.

[344] For theories on the meaning of the imagery of horn and ivory gates, Rozokoki 2001 gives a useful summary of scholarship on the issue up through the turn of the 21st century, pgs. 4-6; see also Russo 2002, pg. 223-30; DeSchmidt 2006; Vlahos 2007, pg. 114-115; Haller 2009; Anghelina 2010. The quality of theories ranges from vaguely plausible to unconvincing. However, I shall not attempt yet another guess on the matter. Suffice it to say that Penelope's meaning is clear enough anyway.

[345] For background on marriage competitions, see Laemmle 2021.

στὰς δ᾽ ὅ γε πολλὸν ἄνευθε διαρρίπτασκεν ὀϊστόν.
νῦν δὲ μνηστήρεσσιν ἄεθλον τοῦτον ἐφήσω·
ὃς δέ κε ῥηΐτατ᾽ ἐντανύσῃ βιὸν ἐν παλάμῃσι
καὶ διοϊστεύσῃ πελέκεων δυοκαίδεκα πάντων,
τῷ κεν ἅμ᾽ ἐσποίμην, νοσφισσαμένη τόδε δῶμα
κουρίδιον, μάλα καλόν, ἐνίπλειον βιότοιο,
τοῦ ποτὲ μεμνήσεσθαι ὀΐομαι ἔν περ ὀνείρῳ.”

“And I’ll tell you another thing, and you cast it in your heart:
This morning will dawn ill-omened, which shall part me
From the house of Odysseus; for now I shall set as a contest,
Those axes which he used to set up in a row
In his home, like ship’s props, all twelve;
And standing well far away he’d shoot through them.
But now I shall set this contest for the suitors.
Whoever most easily strings the bow in his hands
And shoots through all twelve axes,
I’ll marry him, turning my back on this, my marital home,
Though beautiful and full of life;
I think I’ll remember it as if it were a dream.”

This bride contest suits Odysseus’ purposes; Murnaghan believes that by setting it, Penelope “uniquely acts as his accomplice without knowing who he is,” unlike Eumaeus, Philoitios, and Telemachus, who all act in full knowledge of Odysseus’ identity.[346] I rather take this as a sign that Penelope is aware of her husband’s presence in the palace, whether she admits it or not.

The contest is a call to action: Here is how to make the goose-dream a reality, and here is what will happen if you fail to act.[347] She also sets a ticking time-bomb, which would be a strange thing to do if she did not know her husband is in the palace already, but makes sense if she has

[346] Murnaghan 1987, pg. 20.

[347] See Haller 2009.

suspicions.[348] Perhaps she is simply unwilling to wait much longer for him to right the ship of home. So she puts a weapon in his hands and sets a deadline to act.[349] Moreover, she establishes rules for the contest that are obviously designed to find, not the 'best' man, *aristos*, as is customary in marriage competitions, but her own husband.[350] Odysseus knows, and so does she, that he used to perform the trick regularly, as the iterative διαρρίπτασκεν (575) indicates. The subtext could not be clearer. Penelope has no interest in marrying anyone but her husband, and she has come as close to accusing the stranger of being him as she can manage. If ever there were a moment to come forward as the real Odysseus, then this is it.

However, all the beggar does is tell her not to delay and state that Odysseus will be there before the suitors manage the feat.[351] Penelope gives up, goes to bed, and cries until Athena puts her to sleep.[352]

MELANTHO AGAIN

After the interview, the spouses depart to their separate beds, and book nineteen ends. Penelope does not appear at the beginning of book twenty, nor is she mentioned, but its opening passage has

[348] Harsh 1950, pg. 12-3.

[349] Vlahos 2007, pg. 116-7.

[350] Thalmann 1998, 173.

[351] 19.582-7

[352] 19.603-4.

bearing on her all the same. This scene is focalized through Odysseus as he settles in to sleep (20.1-13).[353]

Αὐτὰρ ὁ ἐν προδόμῳ εὐνάζετο δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς·
κὰμ μὲν ἀδέψητον βοέην στόρεσ᾽, αὐτὰρ ὕπερθε
κώεα πόλλ᾽ ὀΐων, τοὺς ἱρεύεσκον Ἀχαιοί·
Εὐρυνόμη δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἐπὶ χλαῖναν βάλε κοιμηθέντι.
ἔνθ᾽ Ὀδυσεὺς μνηστῆρσι κακὰ φρονέων ἐνὶ θυμῷ
κεῖτ᾽ ἐγρηγορόων·
Ταὶ δ᾽ ἐκ μεγάροιο γυναῖκες
ἤϊσαν, αἳ μνηστῆρσιν ἐμισγέσκοντο πάρος περ,
ἀλλήλῃσι γέλω τε καὶ εὐφροσύνην παρέχουσαι.
τοῦ δ᾽ ὠρίνετο θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλοισι·
πολλὰ δὲ μερμήριζε κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν,
ἠὲ μεταΐξας θάνατον τεύξειεν ἑκάστῃ,
ἦ ἔτ᾽ ἐᾷ μνηστῆρσιν ὑπερφιάλοισι μιγῆναι
ὕστατα καὶ πύματα· κραδίη δέ οἱ ἔνδον ὑλάκτει.[354]

But godlike Odysseus was lying on the sleeping porch;
And beneath was stretched an untanned bull's hide, and above
Were many sheeps' fleeces, which the Achaeans would sacrifice;
And Eurynome put a cloak on him as he lay.
There Odysseus lay contemplating evils in his heart for the suitors,
Awake;
but some women were going out of the house,
Who would sleep with the suitors even before,
Laughing and chattering with one another.
And the temper in his dear chest was roused;
And he debated bitterly in his heart and mind
Whether he should arise and bring death to each girl,
Or let them sleep with the arrogant suitors
For the last and final time; but the spirit in him howled.

[353] For further reading on female desire in the *Odyssey*, see Peradotto 1993, though it does not mention the young enslaved women.

[354] For some unusual features of this scene I will not discuss, see Russo 1968, pg. 291-4.

Here, Odysseus overhears some of the enslaved women departing the palace for the night, who, he intuits, are going to sleep with the suitors.[355] The poet emphasizes their merriness in line 8, implying that these women are going to the suitors freely, so the relationships must be consensual. The girls are not individualized, nor are we encouraged to see them through any other lens than their relation to their enslaver, Odysseus. Most of them do not even have discrete identities. The elderly nurses Eurykleia and Eurynome clearly are not part of this group, so Melantho is the only one among them given a name. She is a figurehead for the group of young women as a whole, and our listener is encouraged to imagine them all as she has been characterized thus far: mouthy, promiscuous, a liability to the household.

This characterization is not fair.[356] In the two previous books, we have heard Melantho twice rebuke the disguised Odysseus, symbolically betraying her enslaver, and our listener is encouraged to smart at the injustice of such disrespect. However, Melantho does not know who this stranger is, so she did not mean to disrespect Odysseus. Moreover, in both cases, her complaint is reasonable. She just does not want a strange man creeping around her home late at night, watching her.[357]

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[355] That they leave the house to do so indicates that they actively pursue these relationships, rather than merely being pursued themselves as Fulkerson 2002 notes (pg. 346).

[356] For a reading of the enslaved characters of the Odyssey through the lens of Disability Studies, see Christensen 2020, chapter 6, "Marginalized Agencies and Narrative Selves," pg. 149f.

[357] 18.326-336; 19.65-9.

We have seen Penelope go to great pains to insulate herself from men, and in this her noble status is both an advantage and a disadvantage, because although the suitors are only after her because of her status in the first place, Homeric society's concern with Penelope's chastity offers fragile protection from sexual abuse (by a man to whom she is not married, anyway). Penelope's position subjects her to scrutiny, yes, but also shields her from some kinds of harm, because she only has value to the suitors as a wife for as long as her reputation remains intact. The very footprint of the palace, with private upstairs quarters just for her, is designed with her protection in mind.

However, the enslaved women who run the household do not have this advantage, double-edged though it is. They work throughout the palace and cannot stay hidden away upstairs, nor do the suitors value them as potential wives. In Atwood's words: "We ground the flour for lavish wedding feasts, then we ate the leftovers; we would never have a wedding feast of our own, no rich gifts would be exchanged for us; our bodies had little value." [358] Male guests have no reason to care about harming these women's social standing, so the maids are vulnerable to whoever wanders by. A strange man in the palace late at night, in other words, may pose a very real threat to Melantho and the other women, so their reason for wanting to get rid of him is likely to be the same as my own would be in a similar situation.

The unfortunate irony is that, although enslaved women have less insulation from harm, their enslaver would still feel entitled to control his slaves' sexuality, because they are also valuable

[358] Atwood 2005, pg. 12.

assets,[359] if of less value than a wife.[360] Greek society conflates wealth, including slaves, with honor in the term *geras*,[361] so damaging a man's assets damages his social status as well. Slaves are—quite literally—objectified in this system as physical manifestations of a hero's prestige. To illustrate, consider how Achilles perceived the loss of Briseis qua *geras* as damaging his standing among the Achaean warriors in the *Iliad*. And indeed, some scholarship reproduces this phenomenon in the modern day. E.g. Sheila Murnaghan's discussion of the conflict between Achilles and Agamemenon in *Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey* makes repeated mention of Achilles' lost "prize" without acknowledging that the prize in question was a human being.[362]

Moreover, when Agamemnon attempted to reconcile with Achilles through bribery in *Iliad* 9, he emphasized that he would not only pay huge rewards for Achilles' return to battle, but he also offered to return Briseis, Achilles' asset, undamaged (9.131-4):

> "τὰς μέν οἱ δώσω, μετὰ δ᾽ ἔσσεται ἣν τότ᾽ ἀπηύρων,
> κούρη Βρισῆος· ἐπὶ δὲ μέγαν ὅρκον ὀμοῦμαι
> μή ποτε τῆς εὐνῆς ἐπιβήμεναι ἠδὲ μιγῆναι,
> ἣ θέμις ἀνθρώπων πέλει, ἀνδρῶν ἠδὲ γυναικῶν."

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[359] See Christensen 2020, pg. 164, for an analysis of the sexual control of slaves re: Eurykleia.

[360] For some historical evidence on the comparative legal punishments for the rape of those of various social positions in ancient Gortyn, see Cole 1984, pg. 108-9. The fines for the rapes of enslaved women were lower than those for the rapes of free women.

[361] Autenrieth 1920, pg. 56: "Ehrengabe", "Ehrenstellung", "Ehre". C.f. "A meed of honour, a special prize apart from the general division of spoils…something given by way of showing honour to a person… the dignity or honours of a king," (Cunliffe 1953, pg. 77).

[362] Murnaghan 1987, pg. 6.

> "I shall give him these, and with them will be her whom I took,
> The daughter of Briseus; and I shall swear a great oath
> That I never took her to bed and had sex with her,
> As is the custom of men and women."

Agamemnon implies that, because he has not had sex with Briseis, she retains the same value she had before he took her, so by returning her, he will reinstate Achilles' honor to its previous level, with the boost of his extra gifts. I argue that this is why Odysseus feels entitled to dictate the sex lives of Melantho and the others: because they are assets on his estate, as part of the wealth that contributes to his high status in the community.

Odysseus likely also feels entitled to control their reproductive labor, i.e. he would feel entitled to father their children. This is common in Homer: Menelaus had a son Megapenthes *ek doulēs*, from a slave,[363] and though Laertes renounced his right to sleep with Eurykleia when she was young, he did so out of respect for his wife Antikleia, not for Eurykleia's wellbeing.[364] In fact, the only enslaved women described as mothers in Homer bear the children of their owners, not of lovers or partners of lower status,[365] whose children are presumably beneath our notice. Setting aside the emotional complexities of a mother raising the child of the man who owns and has raped her,[366] reproductive labor is physically taxing. The pregnancy itself lasts for nearly a year. If the mother survives giving birth, she requires a significant recovery period afterwards, and will need

[363] 4.10-11.

[364] 1.428-33.

[365] Franco 2012, pg. 56.

[366] This is a central concern of Barker's 2018 novel *The Silence of the Girls*, which follows Briseis in the Achaean war camps during the Trojan war.

to nurse the child for another two years or so. If the enslaver feels entitled to the benefit of this labor on his own behalf, then the possibility of a slave becoming pregnant by one of his rivals might trigger his anger. Hence Odysseus' fury when the maids go to sleep with the suitors in 20.1-13—although, curiously, the poet seems hesitant to make this connection explicit, as none of the young maids are ever described as pregnant or mothers already.

Finally, Odysseus as an enslaver must fear any expression of independent agency by his slaves, since enslaved people sit in the uneasy position of both "object" and "person". Seneca reports a Roman proverb which seems fitting here: *totidem hostes esse quot servos*, a person has as many enemies as slaves.[367] Slaves who disobey are dangerous. Consider, for example, Eumaeus' former nursemaid, whose story he tells back in book 15 (417-22):

> "ἔσκε δὲ πατρὸς ἐμοῖο γυνὴ Φοίνισσ᾽ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ,
> καλή τε μεγάλη τε καὶ ἀγλαὰ ἔργα εἰδυῖα·
> τὴν δ᾽ ἄρα Φοίνικες πολυπαίπαλοι ἠπερόπευον.
> πλυνούσῃ τις πρῶτα μίγη κοίλῃ παρὰ νηΐ
> εὐνῇ καὶ φιλότητι, τά τε φρένας ἠπεροπεύει
> θηλυτέρῃσι γυναιξί, καὶ ἥ κ᾽ εὐεργὸς ἔῃσιν."
>
> "And there was in my father's house a Phoenician woman,
> Lovely and tall and knowledgeable of impressive works;
> And then the exceedingly crafty Phoenician men seduced her.
> First, while she was washing beside the hollow ship, one of them mixed
> With her in sex and love, which seduces the mind
> Of female women, even if she's good."

Through sex, the "object"/"woman" who was Eumaeus' caretaker became irreparably corrupted. And because enslaved people are not merely objects, but people with their own thoughts and

[367] Seneca, *Epistula Morales*, 47.

feelings, the nursemaid is dangerous in a way that a broken tripod is not. Eumaeus' former nurse betrayed her enslavers by placing her personal desire to leave with the Phoenician men over her duties to the family as nurse, an action that had devastating consequences for young Eumaeus. Further, Eumaeus' claim that sex ruins women appears to be representative of a pervasive belief, given the depiction of Melantho and the others. The girls qua property have been damaged; the girls qua people cannot be trusted.

However, even with all these factors at play—Odysseus' previous dislike for Melantho, his entitlement to the womens' bodies and labor, his potential fear of betrayal—the explosive rage here in book twenty seems to exceed the occasion. Note that Odysseus cannot, logically, know where these women are going. All he sees and hears is that these women are leaving the palace late at night, after their shift is over, as it were, and he correctly guesses that they are en route to sleeping with the suitors. He is not privy to the information that Melantho would habitually sleep with Eurymachus, because though the narrator tells the audience so at 18.324-5, no one told Odysseus. We might argue that he must have found out κατὰ τὸ σιωπώμενον, that the poet spared telling Odysseus because they do not want to waste time communicating information to him that the listener already knows, but this is an inelegant solution. Or, perhaps the poet is hesitant to spend more time humanizing the women by giving them too much in the way of lives and personalities. In any case, Odysseus condemns these women on the basis of mere innuendo.

We might perhaps speculate, then, that Odysseus' anger in book twenty is not entirely a product of the character's psychology, but also of narrative utility. The text raised the specter of sexual jealousy when Odysseus decided to spy on Penelope back in book thirteen, during his conversation with Athena. We, the audience, should be reasonably confident by this point in the narrative that there will be no payoff as far as Penelope is concerned. Therefore, the text needs

someone expendable to take her place in order to give that plot satisfying resolution. Thus, in book eighteen, the poet introduces Melantho to serve as payoff for that plotline at the narrative's climax. Odysseus' rage has a target, one which has been painstakingly rendered as not worth mourning once she is gone, because she is just a "bad slave". That is not to say that Odysseus' anger is psychologically incoherent—I hope I have shown that it is a product of the violation of cultural norms and entitlements—only that the narrative has intensified it to redirect the listener's suspicions away from Penelope.

Let us then return to the opening of book twenty, but switch perspectives and focus on the maids' points of view rather than Odysseus'. Here, they are universally portrayed as willing sexual partners for the suitors. Yet, because they have been serving the suitors for years, they may well have been exposed to sexual abuse over a long period. Atwood, attempting to flesh out these characters more fully, dramatized their situation. She speaks once again in the voice of Penelope, as she reflects on her life:

> …[T]here was no master of the house. So the Suitors helped themselves to the maids in the same way they helped themselves to the sheep and pigs and goats and cows. They probably thought nothing of it.[368]

It is also possible that some of the maids could have consented to sleeping with the suitors. They would also have come to know these men over several years, and some may have formed sincere attachments, as Atwood imagines:

> Several of them did fall in love with the men who had used them so badly. I suppose it was inevitable. They thought I couldn't see what was going on, but I knew it perfectly well. I

[368] Atwood 2005, pg. 90.

> forgave them, however. They were young and inexperienced, and it wasn't every slave-girl in Ithaca who could boast of being the mistress of a young nobleman.[369]

Atwood presents the women's experiences as more varied than the *Odyssey* does, perhaps unsurprisingly given that the *Odyssey* only gives an unique identity to one girl. But in Atwood, some of them were in love, some were victims, some were both. We might imagine that a real group of a dozen or so women would naturally have different experiences. And, recalling Sheffield's theory of sexual terrorism, which argues that the constant threat of sexual violence engenders the victims' compliance,[370] it is no wonder that the enslaved women and girls of the Laertid household would comply with the suitors' expectations for them. All in all, the maids' actual situation re: the suitors is far more complex than anything the *Odyssey* describes.

The text itself extends the women no sympathy. Part of this may be explained by rape culture's tendency to victim-blame,[371] but I argue the women's enslaved status also contributes to their villainization. Amia Srinivasan writes, concerning the problem of rape in the modern world:

> Brown and black women in places of white domination have often been considered, owing to their supposed hypersexuality, unrapeable. Their rape complaints are therefore discredited *a priori.* In 1850 in the British-ruled Cape Colony, in present-day South Africa, an eighteen-year-old laborer, Damon Booysen, was sentenced to death after confessing to raping his boss's wife, Anna Simpson. Days after sentencing, William Menzes, the judge

[369] Atwood 2005, pg. 91.

[370] Sheffield 1984.

[371] Manne 2018, especially "Chapter 6: Exonerating Men", pgs. 177-219, and "Chapter 7: Suspecting Victims", pgs. 220-248; and Solnit 2014, especially "Cassandra Among the Creeps," 103-117; Herman 1989, pg. 20. E.g Herodotus 1.4.2: δῆλα γὰρ δὴ ὅτι, εἰ μὴ αὐταὶ ἐβούλοντο, οὐκ ἂν ἡρπάζοντο, "for clearly if the women hadn't wanted it, they wouldn't have been carried off."

> in the case, wrote to the governor of Cape Colony to say he had made a terrible mistake. He had assumed Anna Simpson was white… Menzies urged the governor to commute the sentence, and the governor obliged.[372]

I do not naively equate the indigenous population of colonial Africa with enslaved persons in the ancient Greek speaking world as somehow interchangeable. However, enslaved people certainly constitute a dominated population, one which is regularly condemned in the text. Eumaeus, in his role as "the good slave", expresses this pervasive bias against his fellows most clearly (17.320-3):

> "δμῶες δ᾽, εὖτ᾽ ἂν μηκέτ᾽ ἐπικρατέωσιν ἄνακτες, 320
> οὐκέτ᾽ ἔπειτ᾽ ἐθέλουσιν ἐναίσιμα ἐργάζεσθαι·
> ἥμισυ γάρ τ᾽ ἀρετῆς ἀποαίνυται εὐρύοπα Ζεὺς
> ἀνέρος, εὖτ᾽ ἄν μιν κατὰ δούλιον ἦμαρ ἕλῃσιν."
>
> "But slaves, when their masters no longer rule over them, 320
> Then they no longer want to do what's right;
> For far-seeing Zeus takes away half a man's virtue
> When the day of enslavement takes him."

So this is just how slaves are, according to the *Odyssey*: untrustworthy.[373]

There may also be a racial component as well, for though racial lines were not constructed in the same way they are today, race was still a powerful social force in Homeric society, as Jackie Murray writes.[374] The system of enslavement we see in Homer is not race-based as it was in some more modern European and American systems, but it seems probable that members of the disadvantaged race of herders would have been more susceptible to kidnap and enslavement, and

[372] Srinivasan 2021, pg. 12-3.

[373] Thalmann 1998, pg. 70-4.

[374] Murray 2021.

so may be overrepresented among enslaved populations.[375] Penelope, on the other hand, is indisputably a member of the privileged heroic race. The relationship between Penelope and Melantho does seem to be racialized according to Murray's criteria: Murray argues that Eumaeus is subject to kinship restrictions, which are "a mechanism of racecraft," on the basis of his status as a herder.[376] Similarly, although Penelope raised Melantho like her own child,[377] as the text goes to great lengths to emphasize,[378] Melantho, like Eumaeus before her, was dropped from the family unit and put to work upon coming of age. Both their familial ties are alienable.

In any case, the narrative implies that Melantho and the other nameless, faceless women of the house are irredeemable. We are invited to assume that all these women have betrayed Odysseus through sexual activity, because he is the rightful owner of their sexuality and reproductive capacity. The poet does not care whether these girls would have much choice in their relationships with the suitors. Like Anna Simpson, the enslaved girls are responsible for any sexual contact with men. 'Girls like that' do not have chastity which can be violated through rape. The enslaved women of the *Odyssey*, and Melantho especially, are unrapeable—anything that happens to them is not rape.

That is also how Odysseus sees them, and he will treat them in kind.

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[375] Murray 2021, pg. 146-7.

[376] Murray 2020, pg. 144; 147-9.

[377] 18.322 seems to suggest that Penelope took Melantho from her rightful parents in order to enjoy the experience of raising her.

[378] 18.321-5

In discussing scene 11A we briefly raised the question, Why does Odysseus disguise himself from the *women* of the palace—from Penelope and the rest? The answer: he wants to see if they are behaving appropriately around the suitors. And what will he do if they do not meet his standards of behavior? The answer: he will kill them (20.10-13):

> πολλὰ δὲ μερμήριζε κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν,
> ἠὲ μεταΐξας θάνατον τεύξειεν ἑκάστῃ,
> ἦ ἔτ᾽ ἐῷ μνηστῆρσιν ὑπερφιάλοισι μιγῆναι
> ὕστατα καὶ πύματα· κραδίη δέ οἱ ἔνδον ὑλάκτει.
>
> And he debated bitterly in his heart and mind
> Whether he should arise and bring death to each girl,
> Or let them sleep with the arrogant suitors
> For the last and final time; but the spirit in him howled.

Victoria Wohl argues that "One reason that the idealization and ideologization of Penelope's submission can be portrayed as so natural and unproblematic is that the violence is worked out in Odysseus' relations to other women, namely the seductresses Circe and Calypso".[379] Though I agree with the first part of Wohl's argument, I argue that gendered violence is far more blatantly "worked out in relation to" the enslaved women, who are at Odysseus' mercy, than the goddesses Circe and Calypso. Melantho and her fellows embody the sexual openness Penelope cannot, and they will die.

I argue that in 20.10-13 Odysseus is plotting honor killings, which are a pattern of violence whereby a family attempts to restore its collective honor through violence against the member who incurred dishonor:

[379] Wohl 1993, pg. 23.

> The collective reputation of extended families depends on their female members' sexual purity, and it is the obligation of the male relatives to control their conduct tightly and prevent them from shaming their families. Once this honor is lost, the deviant woman cannot regain it. According to the unwritten honor code, the shame can only be purged, and the family's reputation restored, if she is killed by her kin. There are ample reports of cases in which minor transgressions of conduct norms such as wearing "immodest" clothes, talking to men, and smoking have been interpreted as signs of immoral behavior and have resulted in a homicide. Victims of rape also have been killed by their families due to their loss of sexual purity, irrespective of the circumstances.[380]

Contrary to common misconception, honor killings are not inherently tied to Islamic religious practice, but are cross-cultural.[381] Rather, the four cultural and structural roots of these killings are

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[380] Oberwittler, Kasselt 2014, pg. 653.

[381] Oberwittler, Kasselt 2014, pg. 658. We often see in Greek literature that when honor is lost through sexual indiscretion, the only recourse is violence. Consider, for instance, the words of Candaules' wife, after Gyges had seen her naked (Herodotus 1.11):

'νῦν τοί δυῶν ὁδῶν παρεουσέων Γύγη δίδωμί αἵρεσιν, ὁκοτέρην βούλεαι τραπέσθαι. ἢ γὰρ Κανδαύλεα ἀποκτείνας ἐμέ τε καὶ τὴν βασιληίην ἔχε τὴν Λυδῶν, ἢ αὐτόν σε αὐτίκα οὕτω ἀποθνήσκειν δεῖ, ὡς ἂν μὴ πάντα πειθόμενος Κανδαύλῃ τοῦ λοιποῦ ἴδῃς τὰ μὴ σε δεῖ. ἀλλ᾽ ἤτοι κεῖνόν γε τὸν ταῦτα βουλεύσαντα δεῖ ἀπόλλυσθαι, ἢ σε τὸν ἐμὲ γυμνήν θεησάμενον καὶ ποιήσαντα οὐ νομιζόμενα.'

'Now, Gyges, I give you the choice of two present paths, whichever you want to turn down. For either kill Candaules and have me and the kingdom of the Lydians, or you must yourself die right now, so that you don't obey everything Candaules says in future and see things you shouldn't. But either he must die for wanting things, or you must die for seeing me naked and doing things, which are not permitted.'

as follows: “patriarchal control of female sexuality”; “collectivism of extended family clans”; a “pastoral economy”; and “lack of a monopoly of power”.[382] I argue that Homeric society meets all these conditions. There is no centralized authority to which Odysseus can appeal to redress his grievances, so it is up to him to protect his family honor, nor would he see this violence as illegitimate or unjust, but rather as his right.[383] On that very note, another distinctive feature of honor killings is that they often involve the joint action of co-offenders who may be the victim’s own blood relatives, because these killings are socially sanctioned. Oberwittler and Kasselt mention the case of one killing in which a husband and teenage son acted together to kill the boy’s mother and her partner.[384] This seems an obvious parallel to Odysseus and Telemachus’ joint suspicions against Penelope.

Here the wife is enforcing sexual norms, but it is nevertheless clear that her honor has been taken from her, and her only recourse is to kill one of the men responsible, with the result that the number of men who have seen her naked is once again singular. Thus her disgrace will not become public, and the family cannot lose their respectability in the eyes of their community.

[382] Oberwittler, Kasselt 2014, pg. 657. This last criterion, “the lack of a monopoly of power,” distinguishes the Homeric world from Classical Athens, for example, where there was a legal system in place to handle crimes of adultery and assault. See Cole 1984; Omitowoju 2002 for more on that legal system and its moral implications.

[383] Oberwittler, Kasselt 2014, pg. 654.

[384] 2014, pg. 663

Following such reasoning, Odysseus will kill any woman who brings shame to the family unit, including Melantho, but also his own wife.[385] The maids experience what could have happened to Penelope. Odysseus spies on her, too—and in fact, he puts far more effort into determining her loyalty than any other woman's. As a nobleman's wife, modesty dictates that Penelope must keep her distance from other men, because she is an extension of Odysseus via marriage, and her reputation reflects back on him,[386] so her behavior is paramount. Greek myth presents wives as capable of either virtue or treachery; some treacherous wife types are embodied in Klytemnestra and Helen.[387] And if Odysseus finds Penelope not to be conducting herself as a married woman should, the remedy for her behavior is the same as for Melantho's. He is in disguise because he needs to assess how his family's honor has fared in his absence, so he can decide how to proceed. Our listener will by this point trust in Penelope's faithfulness to him, and Odysseus himself also seems satisfied on that issue by book twenty, but observant Penelope must sense that there are real stakes to passing his tests. He is still deciding which, and how many, women to kill.

We can use Agamemnon and Klytemnestra as an example here. Imagining the situation from Klytemnestra's point of view, after her affair with Aegisthus had begun, she had no choice but to murder Agamemnon upon his return or be murdered herself. And for her crimes, her own

[385] Some modern studies indicate that as many as 40% of honor killings are carried out by the victim's romantic partner (Oberwittler, Kasselt 2014, pg. 654). There does not seem to be any indication, as far as Homeric literature attests, of another mechanism to resolve a family's shame.

[386] Thalmann 1998, pg. 118.

[387] For a comparison of Helen and Penelope in the epic poetry, see Gregory 1996 and Lesser 2019.

son Orestes will later murder her in turn. Her sexual indiscretion necessitated the end result, and there was no possible outcome that did not involve violence after that point.

Thus, the men around Penelope—the suitors and Odysseus—scrutinize her for her value as a wife, and they all pose threats to her physical safety. She cannot rebuff the suitors too harshly lest they rape her in vengeance, but she also cannot encourage them and incur her husband's wrath, lest he kill her. And Telemachus, too, has expressed his frustrations with her for the effect of the suitors on his inheritance, though this is not within her control. Penelope is surrounded by men who all want something different from her. And if she fails to balance their interests—as twelve of the maids fail—she will lose everything.

SCENE 12: PENELOPE PRAYS TO ARTEMIS

Penelope wakes before dawn in great distress. She did everything in her power to coax the stranger into revealing that he is Odysseus, and nothing worked. While they were together, she felt confident in her belief of who he was, but with a little time and distance, her confidence is shaken. Worse, she has made a terrible gamble, because if she is wrong about the stranger, then today she might have to marry one of the suitors.[388]

[388] She has not publicly announced the contest and could, in theory, fail to follow through, but the text does not present this as a possibility. Penelope seems to feel that this decision cannot be unmade.

Night affords women the privacy to speak freely in Greek literary convention.[389] In fear and sadness, Penelope prays out loud to Artemis. First, she asks to be snatched away like the daughters of Pandareos (20.61-78).[390] Then in the second half of her prayer, she reveals that she had a dream of Odysseus the previous night (20.79-90):

"ὣς ἔμ᾽ ἀϊστώσειαν Ὀλύμπια δώματ᾽ ἔχοντες,
ἠέ μ᾽ ἐϋπλόκαμος βάλοι Ἄρτεμις, ὄφρ᾽ Ὀδυσῆα
ὀσσομένη καὶ γαῖαν ὕπο στυγερὴν ἀφικοίμην,
μηδέ τι χείρονος ἀνδρὸς ἐϋφραίνοιμι νόημα.
ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν καὶ ἀνεκτὸν ἔχει κακόν, ὁππότε κέν τις
ἤματα μὲν κλαίῃ, πυκινῶς ἀκαχήμενος ἦτορ,
νύκτας δ᾽ ὕπνος ἔχῃσιν—ὁ γάρ τ᾽ ἐπέλησεν ἁπάντων,
ἐσθλῶν ἠδὲ κακῶν, ἐπεὶ ἄρ βλέφαρ᾽ ἀμφικαλύψῃ—
αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ καὶ ὀνείρατ᾽ ἐπέσσευεν κακὰ δαίμων.
τῇδε γὰρ αὖ μοι νυκτὶ παρέδραθεν εἴκελος αὐτῷ,
τοῖος ἐὼν οἷος ᾖεν ἅμα στρατῷ· αὐτὰρ ἐμὸν κῆρ
χαῖρ᾽, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἐφάμην ὄναρ ἔμμεναι, ἀλλ᾽ ὕπαρ ἤδη."

"I wish those who have Olympian homes would destroy me,
or fair-haired Artemis would shoot me, so that even seeing
Odysseus I might go below the hateful earth,
and never at all please the mind of a worse man,
but someone has even a bearable misfortune, whenever
he cries by day, grieving constantly at heart,
but sleep holds his nights—for he forgets everything,
good and bad, when it enfolds his eyelids—
but a spirit sends even evil dreams against me.
For again this night, someone like him slept beside me,
just like the one who went with the army: but my heart

[389] See Bensch-Schaus 2020.

[390] See Levaniouk 2008 and Lesser 2017 for more on the myth of Pandareos and its connection to Penelope. Though this comparison does invoke "bride of death" as a plot type, now that Odysseus is on the scene and planning to move against the suitors, the plot is unlikely at this stage.

rejoiced, since I didn't think it was a dream, but reality already." 90

Penelope dreamed about someone 'like him,' like Odysseus, but the dream only upsets her more. If the contest of the bow goes awry, she will lose the hope that she could ever sleep beside Odysseus again. She would honestly rather die than remarry.

SCENE 13: PENELOPE FETCHES THE BOW

After eavesdropping on the suitors again,[391] Penelope goes to fetch Odysseus' bow for the marriage competition.[392] Her fears have not stopped her from going forward with the competition, but she continues to stack the deck in her husband's favor. She specifically seeks out this particular bow, rather than allowing the suitors to choose their own weapons, and the text digresses into the bow's mythological history.[393] Not only is the competition based around Odysseus' own special trick,

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[391] 20.387-9:

> 'Η δὲ κατ᾽ ἄντηστιν θεμένη περικαλλέα δίφρον
> κούρη Ἰκαρίοιο, περίφρων Πηνελόπεια,
> ἀνδρῶν ἐν μεγάροισιν ἑκάστου μῦθον ἄκουε.
>
> But observant Penelope, daughter of Ikarios
> having set an elaborate throne in a spot across from them
> heard the speech of each man in the hall.

Ἄντηστιν (387) is a hapax, but from context it must be an out-of-the-way position within earshot, perhaps across from the men somehow.

[392] For further reading on the physical description of such weapons, see Balfour 1890; Rose 1934; MacLeod 1984. For the significance of this bow as a symbol of the economy of *xenia*, see Ready 2010.

[393] 21.1-41.

but she forces the participants to compete using a weapon that only he is familiar with—another significant advantage over everyone else.

When Penelope reaches the storeroom where the bow is kept, she reacts to her husband's heirloom emotionally (21.42-56):

> ‘Η δ’ ὅτε δὴ θάλαμον τὸν ἀφίκετο δῖα γυναικῶν
> οὐδόν τε δρύϊνον προσεβήσετο, τόν ποτε τέκτων
> ξέσσεν ἐπισταμένως καὶ ἐπὶ στάθμην ἴθυνεν,
> ἐν δὲ σταθμοὺς ἄρσε, θύρας δ’ ἐπέθηκε φαεινάς·
> αὐτίκ’ ἄρ’ ἥ γ’ ἱμάντα θοῶς ἀπέλυσε κορώνης,
> ἐν δὲ κληῖδ’ ἦκε, θυρέων δ’ ἀνέκοπτεν ὀχῆας
> ἄντα τιτυσκομένη· τὰ δ’ ἀνέβραχεν ἠΰτε ταῦρος
> βοσκόμενος λειμῶνι· τόσ’ ἔβραχε καλὰ θύρετρα
> πληγέντα κληῖδι, πετάσθησαν δέ οἱ ὦκα.[394]
> ἡ δ’ ἄρ’ ἐφ’ ὑψηλῆς σανίδος βῆ· ἔνθα δὲ χηλοὶ
> ἕστασαν, ἐν δ’ ἄρα τῇσι θυώδεα εἵματ’ ἔκειτο.
> ἔνθεν ὀρεξαμένη ἀπὸ πασσάλου αἴνυτο τόξον
> αὐτῷ γωρυτῷ, ὅς οἱ περίκειτο φαεινός.
> ἑζομένη δὲ κατ’ αὖθι, φίλοις ἐπὶ γούνασι θεῖσα,
> κλαῖε μάλα λιγέως, ἐκ δ’ ἧρεε τόξον ἄνακτος.

[394] Stanford 1965 describes the door's mechanism thus (359): "The nature of the door's fastenings and method of opening them have been much discussed. We learn from 4.802 that the leather thong (ἱμάς) passed through an aperture in the door, and from 1.441-2 that it was used to lock the door from the outside by shooting out the bolt (which was on the inside). When the room was unoccupied, this thong would be tied to a hook (κορώνη) on the outside of the door; this hook was also used as a handle for pulling the door to (cp. 1.441-2). The thong could not *open* the door from the outside. For this purpose a curved key… had to be inserted with a careful aim (τιτυσκομένη) to strike back the bolt. In order to do this it was necessary, of course, first to untie the thong from the κορώνη."

> But when she, divine among women, reached the storeroom,
> And stepped up on the oak threshold, which a craftsman once
> Skillfully sanded and straightened to the line,
> And joined in the posts, and put on the shining doors,
> Then quickly she loosed the leather strap from the handle,
> And put the key in, and aiming it she pushed back the bars
> Of the doors; and they made a noise like a bull
> Grazing in a field; so the beautiful doors rang out
> When struck with the key, and swiftly they opened like wings.
> And she stepped on the lofty floor; and there stood
> The chests and in them lay perfumed clothing.
> There she reached out and took the bow from its peg
> With its case, which brightly covered it.
> Sitting right there, putting it on her dear lap,
> She cried very shrilly, and grasped her lord's bow.

This bow and its history is reminiscent of a time before the war,[395] and the sensory description of it and the storeroom—with its scents, sounds and textures—makes Penelope's overwhelm palpable. Perhaps, though, she is crying not from sorrow for the past so much as from fear for what will happen next. The poet does not say.

SCENE 14: THE CONTEST

When Penelope has gathered herself, she returns with the bow to the megaron and the suitors. In comparison to her easy manner the night previously, for the fourth time, the text iterates her careful self presentation: her spot by the pillar, her veil, and the attendants on either side.[396] Then, she announces the contest to the suitors (21.67-79):

[395] Van Nortwick 1983.

[396] 21.63-6.

αὐτίκα δὲ μνηστῆρσι μετηύδα καὶ φάτο μῦθον·
“κέκλυτέ μευ, μνηστῆρες ἀγήνορες, οἳ τόδε δῶμα
ἐχράετ᾽ ἐσθιέμεν καὶ πινέμεν ἐμμενὲς αἰεὶ
ἀνδρὸς ἀποιχομένοιο πολὺν χρόνον· οὐδέ τιν᾽ ἄλλην
μύθου ποιήσασθαι ἐπισχεσίην ἐδύνασθε,
ἀλλ᾽ ἐμὲ ἱέμενοι γῆμαι θέσθαι τε γυναῖκα.
ἀλλ᾽ ἄγετε, μνηστῆρες, ἐπεὶ τόδε φαίνετ᾽ ἄεθλον·
θήσω γὰρ μέγα τόξον Ὀδυσσῆος θείοιο·
ὃς δέ κε ῥηΐτατ᾽ ἐντανύσῃ βιὸν ἐν παλάμῃσι
καὶ διοϊστεύσῃ πελέκεων δυοκαίδεκα πάντων,
τῷ κεν ἅμ᾽ ἐσποίμην νοσφισσαμένη τόδε δῶμα
κουρίδιον, μάλα καλόν, ἐνίπλειον βιότοιο,
τοῦ ποτὲ μεμνήσεσθαι ὀΐομαι ἔν περ ὀνείρῳ.”

And immediately she addressed the suitors and spoke a word:
“Hear me, heroic suitors, you who use this house
To eat and drink unendingly while my husband
Has been gone for a long time; nor could you
Use any other pretext of speech,
But wanting to marry me and make me your wife.
But come, suitors, since this shines out as the prize.
For I will set out the great bow of godlike Odysseus;
Whoever most easily strings the bow in his hands
And shoots through all twelve axes,
I’ll marry him, turning my back on my marital home,
Though beautiful and full of life;
But I think I’ll always remember it in dreams.”

So she sets the competition as promised, reprising lines 19.577-81 exactly.

During the competition, she is no friendlier to the suitors than she ever is. They struggle to string the bow, and Eurymachus exclaims in shock and embarrassment (21.249-255):[397]

[397] The speech itself is somewhat disjointed because, as Stanford 1965 put it, “Eurymachus’ emotion disturbs his syntax” (364).

"ὦ πόποι, ἦ μοι ἄχος περί τ᾽ αὐτοῦ καὶ περὶ πάντων·
οὔ τι γάμου τοσσοῦτον ὀδύρομαι, ἀχνύμενός περ–
εἰσὶ καὶ ἄλλαι πολλαὶ Ἀχαιΐδες, αἱ μὲν ἐν αὐτῇ
ἀμφιάλῳ Ἰθάκῃ, αἱ δ᾽ ἄλλῃσιν πολίεσσιν–
ἀλλ᾽ εἰ δὴ τοσσόνδε βίης ἐπιδευέες εἰμὲν
ἀντιθέου Ὀδυσῆος, ὅ τ᾽ οὐ δυνάμεσθα τανύσσαι
τόξον· ἐλεγχείη δὲ καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι."

"Oh good god, I'm in pain for myself and all of you:
I'm not as much bothered about the marriage, although it's upsetting;
There are many other Achaean women, some here in
Sea-surrounded Ithaca itself and some in other cities;
But if in fact we fall so short of the strength of
Godlike Odysseus that we can't string
The bow; and this is a disgrace for future men to hear about."

If our listener had any doubts about the suitors' interest in Penelope until this point, this should be the end of them. The suitors do not want her for her own sake, but for the high-status position she represents in the community. They want to fill the power vacuum Odysseus has left in his wake, and if they fail in this task, they will be humiliated. Thus, Eurymachus gives the game away, that all along, he and the other suitors have seen Penelope as a transferable asset. By that logic, as we have seen in the introduction, it is only in the suitors' interests to maintain her value for as long as they have hope of possessing her. If she remains a part of Odysseus' *oikos* and its cumulative wealth, then they can damage his community standing by damaging her.

At Eurymachus' outburst, then, our listener is reminded of the reality of Penelope's dilemma for all these years: how on earth can she manage the suitors' threats against herself, against the household she is responsible for protecting, and against her son—while also preserving her honor? Let us not forget that if her husband does return, and she has not remained celibate during his absence, she may well become *his* victim in an honor killing. It is an impossible task. And now, if none of the suitors can string the bow, and cannot take possession of her through the

marriage competition, and are proven inferior to Odysseus by their failure, this is an exceptionally dangerous moment for her, because they may turn violent. She wants the suitors to fail, but only if Odysseus is here to reclaim his control of the household, because without his protection her situation is worse than ever. If she sets the contest, she must trust that he is here and, as always, has a plan.

So he does. The stranger asks to try his hand at the bow,[398] and though the suitors refuse, Penelope backs him up enthusiastically. She tells Antinoos off (21.312-19):

> "Ἀντίνοˑ, οὐ μὲν καλὸν ἀτέμβειν οὐδὲ δίκαιον
> ξείνους Τηλεμάχου, ὅς κεν τάδε δώμαθ' ἵκηται.
> ἔλπεαι, αἴ χ' ὁ ξεῖνος Ὀδυσσῆος μέγα τόξον
> ἐντανύσῃ χερσίν τε βίηφί τε ἦφι πιθήσας, 315
> οἴκαδέ μ' ἄξεσθαι καὶ ἐὴν θήσεσθαι ἄκοιτιν;
> οὐδ' αὐτός που τοῦτό γ' ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν ἔολπε·
> μηδέ τις ὑμείων τοῦ γ' εἵνεκα θυμὸν ἀχεύων
> ἐνθάδε δαινύσθω, ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδὲ ἔοικεν."
>
> "Antinoos, it's neither noble nor right to mistreat
> Telemachus' guests, who has come to this house:
> Do you expect, if the guest strings the great bow
> of Odysseus, trusting in his hands and strength, 315
> that he will lead me home and make me his wife?
> I'm sure he himself doesn't expect this in his heart,
> so let none of you feast here grieving in your heart
> because of this, since it isn't likely, definitely not."

The extra emphasis on *oude men oude* calls to mind, 'the lady doth protest too much, methinks,' but the suitors do not seem to notice. They have no reason to guess her suspicions about the beggar's identity, and therefore have no reason to doubt her motives.

[398] 21.275-84.

They still are not happy though, and Eurymachus argues (21.320-9):

Τὴν δ᾽ αὖτ᾽ Εὐρύμαχος, Πολύβου πάϊς, ἀντίον ηὔδα·
“κούρη Ἰκαρίοιο, περίφρον Πηνελόπεια,
οὔ τί σε τόνδ᾽ ἄξεσθαι ὀϊόμεθ᾽, οὐδὲ ἔοικεν·
ἀλλ᾽ αἰσχυνόμενοι φάτιν ἀνδρῶν ἠδὲ γυναικῶν,
μή ποτέ τις εἴπῃσι κακώτερος ἄλλος Ἀχαιῶν·
‘ἦ πολὺ χείρονες ἄνδρες ἀμύμονος ἀνδρὸς ἄκοιτιν
μνῶνται, οὐδέ τι τόξον ἐΰξοον ἐντανύουσιν·
ἀλλ᾽ ἄλλος τις πτωχὸς ἀνὴρ ἀλαλήμενος ἐλθὼν
ῥηϊδίως ἐτάνυσσε βιόν, διὰ δ᾽ ἦκε σιδήρου.’
ὣς ἐρέουσ᾽· ἡμῖν δ᾽ ἂν ἐλέγχεα ταῦτα γένοιτο.”

And answering her Eurymachus, son of Polybos, said:
“Daughter of Ikarios, observant Penelope,
Of course we don’t think this guy would marry you; it’s not likely;
But ashamed about our reputation among men and women,
In case some other, less noble Achaean says
‘Much worse men are courting the wife of an
Excellent man, and they don’t even string his polished bow;
But a wanderer and a beggar came and
Easily strung the bow, and shot through iron.’
That’s how they’ll talk, and it’d be embarrassing for us.”

At this point, Penelope loses her temper and insults Eurymachus (21.330-3).

Τὸν δ᾽ αὖτε προσέειπε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
“Εὐρύμαχ᾽, οὔ πως ἔστιν ἐϋκλεΐας κατὰ δῆμον
ἔμμεναι οἳ δὴ οἶκον ἀτιμάζοντες ἔδουσιν
ἀνδρὸς ἀριστῆος· τί δ᾽ ἐλέγχεα ταῦτα τίθεσθε;”

Then wise Penelope addressed him again,
“Eurymachus, no one can at all have a good reputation
Throughout his deme who disgraces and consumes the home
Of a noble man; why do you consider this a disgrace?”

She then proposes a more appropriate prize for a man who is not eligible for marriage in a final attempt to put the bow into Odysseus' hands.[399]

However, Telemachus jumps in and orders his mother to her room again.[400] Penelope has lost all control over the situation, so she goes (21. 354-8):

> 'Η μὲν θαμβήσασα πάλιν οἶκόνδε βεβήκει·
> παιδὸς γὰρ μῦθον πεπνυμένον ἔνθετο θυμῷ.
> ἐς δ' ὑπερῷ' ἀναβᾶσα σὺν ἀμφιπόλοισι γυναιξὶ
> κλαῖεν ἔπειτ' Ὀδυσῆα, φίλον πόσιν, ὄφρα οἱ ὕπνον
> ἡδὺν ἐπὶ βλεφάροισι βάλε γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη.
>
> And she, astounded, went back to her space,
> For she took her child's well-reasoned speech to heart.
> And after going back upstairs with her attendants
> She cried for her dear husband Odysseus, until
> Glancing-eyed Athena cast sweet sleep on her eyelids.

So ends Penelope's role in the battle against the suitors. Athena, Odysseus, and Telemachus will prevent her remarriage by force, but they will not grant Penelope self-determination. The control over her life that she has thus far managed to assert through her social savvy has run out.

KILLING GIRLS

Following the killings of the suitors—an action which can, at least, be read as "preemptive self-defense"—Odysseus vents his rage on the women of the palace, an action which cannot.[401] His

[399] 21.334-43.

[400] 21.344-53.

[401] Wilson 2018, pg. 41.

cold-blooded vindictiveness, and the particular form of retribution taken, are key to understanding the social landscape for the women of Ithaca. This scene is therefore inseparable from the poem's handling of moral themes.[402] However, the killings of the slaves are understudied, both in their own right and in connection with Penelope. Consider how, for instance, in the introduction to *The Ethics of Revenge and the Meaning of the* Odyssey, Loney discusses Odysseus' culpability in the deaths of two groups: his fellow Ithacan warriors, and the suitors.[403] Nowhere in the introduction does Loney even mention the enslaved people Odysseus has killed in book 22, though he is far more responsible for their deaths than for his fellow warriors'. Odysseus orders the girls killed, but he is responsible for the deaths of his men only through his failures as a leader, not by intent. It is possible that Loney neglects the deaths of the enslaved women because, although family members of the men who die express their anger toward Odysseus, no one does so for the women—not even Dolios, Melantho's father. Thus, the enslaved women's deaths may be excluded from practice of *tisis* (vengeance, payback), which Loney studies. However, in failing to consider social exclusions in that practice, he has in fact reproduced them in his own book.

First, Odysseus summons Eurykleia and asks her to tell him which women are "innocent", νηλείτιδές, and which ones "are dishonoring" him, ἀτιμάζουσι.[404] Eurykleia answers him thus (22.419-29):

> Τὸν δ᾽ αὖτε προσέειπε φίλη τροφὸς Εὐρύκλεια·
> "τοιγὰρ ἐγώ τοι, τέκνον, ἀληθείην καταλέξω.
> πεντήκοντά τοί εἰσιν ἐνὶ μεγάροισι γυναῖκες

[402] Fulkerson 2002. See also Davies 1994 on the mutilation of Melanthius in this book.

[403] Loney 2019, pg. 1-9.

[404] 22.418.

δμῳαί, τὰς μέν τ᾽ ἔργα διδάξαμεν ἐργάζεσθαι,
εἴριά τε ξαίνειν καὶ δουλοσύνην ἀνέχεσθαι·
τάων δώδεκα πᾶσαι ἀναιδείης ἐπέβησαν,
οὔτ᾽ ἐμὲ τίουσαι οὔτ᾽ αὐτὴν Πηνελόπειαν.
Τηλέμαχος δὲ νέον μὲν ἀέξετο, οὐδέ ἑ μήτηρ
σημαίνειν εἴασκεν ἐπὶ δμῳῇσι γυναιξίν.”

And immediately the dear nurse Eurykleia told him:
“For I’ll lay out the truth, my child.
There are fifty female slaves in your palace
Whom I taught how to do their work
Both to comb wool and to carry out a slave’s job;
Of these, twelve in all stepped into shamelessness,
And honored neither me nor Penelope herself.
And Telemachus only recently came of age, and his mother
Did not let him take charge of the slave women.”

So, there are twelve women out of fifty total who behaved shamefully. Though Euryklia herself helped train all of them, she hands them over to Odysseus without hesitation.

Eurykleia offers to wake Penelope, but Odysseus bids her to hold off, and instead fetch the young women who ἀεικέα μηχανόωντο, “devised shameful things”.[405] Thus far, the language is euphemistic; Odysseus and Eurykleia continually turn to words of honor, shame, and dishonor, but how did these girls “step into” shame? Again, the only sensible conclusion seems to be that sex ruins even good women.[406] Wilson reads the necessity of their deaths arising not from “a nonexistent crime’, but as an effort to purge the house of the last traces of the suitors.[407] But we should not forget Odysseus’ rage from the beginning of book twenty; he clearly holds animosity

[405] 22.432.

[406] 15.417-22.

[407] Wilson 2018, pg. 52.

towards the girls. Whatever happens next is a result of that rage. His revenge fantasies from that scene will be made real.

Odysseus then speaks to Telemachus, Eumaeus, and Philiotios, and he uses more explicit terms (22.435-45):

αὐτὰρ ὁ Τηλέμαχον καὶ βουκόλον ἠδὲ συβώτην
εἰς ἓ καλεσσάμενος ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα·
“ἄρχετε νῦν νέκυας φορέειν καὶ ἄνωχθε γυναῖκας·
αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα θρόνους περικαλλέας ἠδὲ τραπέζας
ὕδατι καὶ σπόγγοισι πολυτρήτοισι καθαίρειν.
αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν δὴ πάντα δόμον κατακοσμήσησθε,
δμῳὰς ἐξαγαγόντες ἐϋσταθέος μεγάροιο,
μεσσηγύς τε θόλου καὶ ἀμύμονος ἕρκεος αὐλῆς,
θεινέμεναι ξίφεσιν τανυήκεσιν, εἰς ὅ κε πασέων
ψυχὰς ἐξαφέλησθε, καὶ ἐκλελάθωντ᾽ Ἀφροδίτης,
τὴν ἄρ᾽ ὑπὸ μνηστῆρσιν ἔχον μίσγοντό τε λάθρῃ.”

But he called Telemachus and the cowherd and the goatherd
To himself and addressed them with winged words:
“Begin carrying out the corpses, and order the women to help;
But then make them clean the lovely chairs and tables
With water and porous sponges.
But when you have put the whole house in order,
Lead the slaves out of the well-built hall,
Between the rotunda and the faultless courtyard wall,
And strike them with long swords until you have stripped away
All their lives, and they forget the sex,
Which they had under the suitors and mixed secretly.”

Lines 22.443-5 reiterate that, from Odysseus’ perspective, it is the maids’ having sex with the suitors that is the ultimate source of their dishonor. As we’ve seen, in honor societies, women’s sexual indiscretions are believed to tarnish the entire family’s reputation. Of course, we might wonder if Odysseus is also acting with an eye toward the future. Perhaps it is practical to consider whether any of these women might one day produce an heir to one of the dead suitors who could

return and seek revenge on behalf of their fathers in future. Forward-thinking Odysseus is concerned with such things at least as early as the *Iliou Persis*, where it is he who kills the baby Astyanax.[408] However, if Odysseus is thinking along those lines here in book 22, he makes no mention of that fear. We can only guess as to his other motivations.

Strangely, Odysseus outsources the violence itself. After ten books' worth of build-up, beginning with his conversation with Athena in book thirteen, through his first hostile interaction with Melantho in eighteen, to his eruption into vengeful rage in book twenty, we have been led to expect him to exact the punishment himself; but here, right at the plotline's climax, he suddenly finds he is otherwise engaged and asks Telemachus, Philoitius, and Eumaeus to do the dirty work for him. Why? It is almost as if the poet, once again, is attempting to deflect culpability from the primary couple. Let us remember that this narrative plot began with Odysseus' suspicions against Penelope. But when it became clear that there could be no payoff to his suspicions, a decoy onto which to displace them was found in Melantho. This renders that plotline one step removed from the narrative's main couple. Now again, the poet swaps Odysseus out for Telemachus: two steps removed. Melantho is (bad) Penelope; Telemachus (bad) Odysseus.

Odysseus tells Telemachus, Philiotius, and Eumaeus how to kill the girls in specific terms: stab them with swords. Furthermore, before having them killed, Odysseus wants the men to put the doomed girls to work cleaning up the blood of the men they once slept with. Atwood's versification of this scene captures the viscerally horrifying and emotionally disturbing aspects of the maids' work:

We scrubbed the blood

[408] West 2013, pg. 226. In other versions of the myth, it is Neoptolemos who kills the baby.

Of our dead
Paramours from floors, from chairs

From stairs, from doors,
We knelt in water
while you stared[409]

This is not a quick or easy job. Over a hundred men have been killed, tables overturned, a feast ruined. This is hours of difficult and disgusting work that the girls must do, all while their future murderers watch on.

After the women have finished cleaning the megaron and carrying out the bodies, Telemachus "takes initiative, to an almost unprecedented degree," (22.457-64):[410]

αὐτὰρ ἐπειδὴ πᾶν μέγαρον διεκοσμήσαντο,
δμῳὰς δ᾽ ἐξαγαγόντες ἐϋσταθέος μεγάροιο,
μεσσηγύς τε θόλου καὶ ἀμύμονος ἕρκεος αὐλῆς,
εἴλεον ἐν στείνει, ὅθεν οὔ πως ἦεν ἀλύξαι.
τοῖσι δὲ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἦρχ᾽ ἀγορεύειν·
"μὴ μὲν δὴ καθαρῷ θανάτῳ ἀπὸ θυμὸν ἑλοίμην
τάων, αἳ δὴ ἐμῇ κεφαλῇ κατ᾽ ὀνείδεα χεῦαν
μητέρι θ᾽ ἡμετέρῃ παρά τε μνηστῆρσιν ἴαυον."

But when they set the entire hall in order,
After leading the the slave girls out of the well-built hall,
Between the rotunda and the faultless courtyard wall,
They shut them in the confined space, from which they couldn't flee;
But then wise Telemachus began speaking to the men;
"I can't take their life with a clean death,
They who poured disgrace on my head and
My mother and they would sleep beside the suitors."

[409] Atwood 2005, pg. 6.

[410] Wilson 2018, pg. 52.

Telemachus goes above and beyond preventing any future heirs from returning and causing trouble. Rather than killing the women with swords, as directed, he chooses a method of execution that is, by his reckoning, appropriately disgraceful for them.[411] Telemachus' particular form of retribution against these girls is even more vindictive than his father's. What is more, these women are likely his agemates, and people he grew up with. His rage towards the women is more personal than Odysseus' cold calculations.

Moreover, there seems to be a strange parallelism between the competition of the bow and these women's deaths. For the competition, Penelope asked the suitors to shoot through twelve ax heads arranged in a line.[412] In this test of manhood, the suitors fail at the first hurdle, while Odysseus succeeds, and Telemachus would likely have succeeded also if not for his father's interference (21.125-9):

> τρὶς μέν μιν πελέμιξεν ἐρύσσεσθαι μενεαίνων,
> τρὶς δὲ μεθῆκε βίης, ἐπιελπόμενος τό γε θυμῷ
> νευρὴν ἐντανύειν διοϊστεύσειν τε σιδήρου.
> καί νύ κε δή ῥ᾽ ἐτάνυσσε βίῃ τὸ τέταρτον ἀνέλκων,
> ἀλλ᾽ Ὀδυσεὺς ἀνένευε καὶ ἔσχεθεν ἱέμενόν περ.
>
> Three times he struggled, wanting to draw it,
> And three times he relaxed his might, hoping at heart
> To stretch tight the string and shoot through the iron.
> And now he would have stretched it by force, drawing it a fourth time,
> But Odysseus nodded at him and he stopped trying.

[411] "Hanging was always considered a dishonourable and shameful death by the Greeks," (Stanford 1965, pg. 389); "The difference between death by sword and by rope is one of honor," (Fulkerson 2002, pg. 343), though she differentiates between moral and religious judgments against the maids.

[412] 21.74.

Telemachus allows himself to fail so that Odysseus can reassert himself as the rightful head of the household. However, now that Telemachus has free reign over these women, he lines the twelve of them up in a row, just like the ax heads. He then kills them with "excessive violence and cruelty" [413] in a perversion of the ritual.

So, Melantho and her peers die, and the text even embellishes their deaths with a poignant simile (22.465-73):

> ὣς ἄρ᾽ ἔφη, καὶ πεῖσμα νεὸς κυανοπρῴροιο
> κίονος ἐξάψας μεγάλης περίβαλλε θόλοιο,
> ὑψόσ᾽ ἐπεντανύσας, μή τις ποσὶν οὖδας ἵκοιτο.
> ὡς δ᾽ ὅτ᾽ ἂν ἢ κίχλαι τανυσίπτεροι ἠὲ πέλειαι
> ἕρκει ἐνιπλήξωσι, τό θ᾽ ἑστήκῃ ἐνὶ θάμνῳ,
> αὖλιν ἐσιέμεναι, στυγερὸς δ᾽ ὑπεδέξατο κοῖτος,
> ὣς αἵ γ᾽ ἑξείης κεφαλὰς ἔχον, ἀμφὶ δὲ πάσαις
> δειρῇσι βρόχοι ἦσαν, ὅπως οἴκτιστα θάνοιεν.
> ἤσπαιρον δὲ πόδεσσι μίνυνθά περ οὔ τι μάλα δήν.
>
> So he then spoke and he fastened a rope from a great, dark-prowed
> Ship on a pillar, and he cast it around the rotunda,
> Tying it up high so that no one could touch the ground with their feet.
> And just like when long-winged thrushes or doves
> Fall into a trap which is set in a thicket
> While going to their roost, but a hateful bed receives them,
> So they held their heads in a row, and around all
> Their necks were nooses, so they would die very pitifully.
> And their feet twitched for a little while, but not very long.

If the suitors are fat, tame geese, and Odysseus is a wild eagle, the maids are not even lazy, fat geese like the suitors, but small, delicate doves or thrushes:[414] trapped, easily broken. It is not a

[413] Allan 2010, pg. 24

[414] See Fulkerson 2002, pg. 339-40.

triumphant, heroic simile like those we usually see when warriors take down their enemies. It is pitiful. The simile seems to draw the ethics of Telemachus' decision into question.

Thus the text disposes of its embodiment of female faithlessness and treachery, and Penelope is saved.[415] Odysseus then has the house purged with sulfur, greets the remaining thirty-eight enslaved women of the palace, and sends Eurykleia to fetch his wife.[416]

SCENE 15: THE AFTERMATH; PENELOPE WAKES UP

Our listener knows well what has happened, but Penelope misses everything. Book twenty-three opens with Eurykleia rushing upstairs to find her still asleep in her room (23.1-9).

Γρηῢς δ᾽ εἰς ὑπερῷ᾽ ἀνεβήσετο καγχαλόωσα,
δεσποίνῃ ἐρέουσα φίλον πόσιν ἔνδον ἐόντα·
γούνατα δ᾽ ἐρρώσαντο, πόδες δ᾽ ὑπερικταίνοντο.[417]
στῆ δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς καί μιν πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν·
"ἔγρεο, Πηνελόπεια, φίλον τέκος, ὄφρα ἴδηαι
ὀφθαλμοῖσι τεοῖσι τά τ᾽ ἔλδεαι ἤματα πάντα.
ἦλθ᾽ Ὀδυσεὺς καὶ οἶκον ἱκάνεται, ὀψέ περ ἐλθών·
μνηστῆρας δ᾽ ἔκτεινεν ἀγήνορας, οἵ θ᾽ ἑὸν οἶκον
κήδεσκον καὶ κτήματ᾽ ἔδον βιόωντό τε παῖδα."

The old woman went upstairs cackling,[418]
To tell her lady that her dear husband was home;
Her knees bent and her feet flew.

[415] Fulkerson 2002, pg. 343-5.

[416] 22.480-500.

[417] Uncertain word. "[app. *up-, upo-* (4) + an unknown *eriktainomai*]", Cunliffe 1953, pg. 396. Logically, it must be a verb of hastening.

[418] Stanford 1965, pg. 391.

And she stood above her head and addressed a word to her;
"Get up, Penelope, dear child, so you can see
With your own eyes what you want every day.
Odysseus has come and reached home though gone so long;
He killed the arrogant suitors, who would trouble
His home and eat his possessions and overpower his son."

Penelope's immediate response is to refuse to admit Odysseus could be home on Ithaca again (23.10-24).

Τὴν δ᾽ αὖτε προσέειπε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
"μαῖα φίλη, μάργην σε θεοὶ θέσαν, οἵ τε δύνανται
ἄφρονα ποιῆσαι καὶ ἐπίφρονά περ μάλ᾽ ἐόντα,
καί τε χαλιφρονέοντα σαοφροσύνης ἐπέβησαν·
οἵ σέ περ ἔβλαψαν· πρὶν δὲ φρένας αἰσίμη ἦσθα.
τίπτε με λωβεύεις πολυπενθέα θυμὸν ἔχουσαν
ταῦτα παρὲξ ἐρέουσα καὶ ἐξ ὕπνου μ᾽ ἀνεγείρεις
ἡδέος, ὅς μ᾽ ἐπέδησε φίλα βλέφαρ᾽ ἀμφικαλύψας;
οὐ γάρ πω τοιόνδε κατέδραθον, ἐξ οὗ Ὀδυσσεὺς
ᾤχετ᾽ ἐποψόμενος Κακοΐλιον οὐκ ὀνομαστήν.
ἀλλ᾽ ἄγε νῦν κατάβηθι καὶ ἂψ ἔρχευ μέγαρόνδε.
εἰ γάρ τίς μ᾽ ἄλλη γε γυναικῶν, αἵ μοι ἔασι,
ταῦτ᾽ ἐλθοῦσ᾽ ἤγγειλε καὶ ἐξ ὕπνου ἀνέγειρε,
τῷ κε τάχα στυγερῶς μιν ἐγὼν ἀπέπεμψα νέεσθαι
αὖτις ἔσω μέγαρον· σὲ δὲ τοῦτό γε γῆρας ὀνήσει."

And immediately observant Penelope addressed her;
"Dear nurse, the gods made you mad, who can make
someone senseless even though they're quite sensible,
And put the feeble-minded into wisdom;
They've misled you; before you were right in your thoughts.
Why do you mock me when my heart is grieving,
Saying these things off the mark, and you wake me from sweet
Sleep, which closes and binds my sweet eyelids?
For I haven't yet had such sleep since the time Odysseus
Went to see that villainous, unnameable place Swillium.
But come on, go downstairs, back to the megaron.

For if any other woman of mine
Came and announced these things and woke me up,
Then I'd send her away immediately and severely
Into the megaron again; but your old age will save you."

This has been Penelope's stance all along: continue waiting while all the time denying the possibility that he might still be alive.[419]

However, then Eurykleia explains that the stranger is Odysseus in disguise, and that Telemachus was in on the scheme (23.25-33).

Τὴν δ᾽ αὖτε προσέειπε φίλη τροφὸς Εὐρύκλεια·
"οὔ τί σε λωβεύω, τέκνον φίλον, ἀλλ᾽ ἔτυμόν τοι
ἦλθ᾽ Ὀδυσεὺς καὶ οἶκον ἱκάνεται, ὡς ἀγορεύω,
ὁ ξεῖνος, τὸν πάντες ἀτίμων ἐν μεγάροισι.
Τηλέμαχος δ᾽ ἄρα μιν πάλαι ἤδεεν ἔνδον ἐόντα,
ἀλλὰ σαοφροσύνῃσι νοήματα πατρὸς ἔκευθεν,
ὄφρ᾽ ἀνδρῶν τίσαιτο βίην ὑπερηνορεόντων."
᾽Ὣς ἔφαθ᾽· ἡ δ᾽ ἐχάρη καὶ ἀπὸ λέκτροιο θοροῦσα
γρηῒ περιπλέχθη, βλεφάρων δ᾽ ἀπὸ δάκρυον ἦκεν

And then the dear nurse Eurykleia addressed her in turn;
"I'm not mocking you, dear child, but it's true:
Odysseus has come and arrived home, as I say,
The stranger, whom everyone was dishonoring in the palace.
But Telemachus has known he's here a long time,
But he hid his father's plans with good sense,
So he could pay back the overbearing men's violence."
So she spoke, and the other rejoiced and leaping from bed
embraced the old woman, and let a tear fall from her eyes

[419] Zerba 2009 reads her behavior as a practice of skepticism, and argues that she refuses to act on a question that is not yet settled. I personally believe, as I have argued elsewhere, that Penelope knows more than she lets on. Penelope attempts to keep others in suspense, not herself.

Eurykleia's eagerness for Penelope to get with the program already emphasizes her fundamental alignment with Odysseus and the male line over Penelope.[420] She is attempting to hasten Odysseus' triumphant reunion with his wife, not thinking about Penelope's understandable hesitancy. She therefore foils Penelope in her caution.

At the news that the stranger is Odysseus and the suitors are dead, Penelope is overjoyed. Her sudden positive reaction coheres with the view that she had suspected the beggar's identity. Likewise, her lack of sorrow over the suitors' deaths once again confirms that she has no fondness for them. She only asks how Odysseus could have managed to fight off so many men alone (23.34-8):

καί μιν φωνήσασ᾽ ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα·
"εἰ δ᾽ ἄγε δή μοι, μαῖα φίλη, νημερτὲς ἐνίσπες,
εἰ ἐτεὸν δὴ οἶκον ἱκάνεται, ὡς ἀγορεύεις,
ὅππως δὴ μνηστῆρσιν ἀναιδέσι χεῖρας ἐφῆκε
μοῦνος ἐών, οἱ δ᾽ αἰὲν ἀολλέες ἔνδον ἔμιμνον."

And she addressed her speaking winged words:
"Come on, if you're telling me the truth, dear nanny,
If he really has come home, as you say,
How did he put hands on the shameless suitors
Alone, who always stayed together inside?"

Her question is natural given that he had been up against over a hundred other men, apparently with no help, since he had not let Penelope know that Athena herself would be pitching in during the slaughter.[421]

[420] Thalmann 1998, pg. 81.

[421] Odysseus did imply that the gods were involved to Telemachus at 19.41-6.

Eurykleia then explains how Odysseus managed to kill the suitors; however, she has not yet mentioned that so many women are also now dead, though she was the one who betrayed their names to Odysseus, presumably with the knowledge of what might happen to them. As Eurykleia has always been primarily attached to Odysseus and Telemachus over the women of the house, their deaths may be unimportant to her.[422] From this point on, though, the text seems to want us to forget Melantho and the others. Those women are dealt with and gone, and they deserve no more of our attention. Ultimately, they are treated as disposable, unlike Penelope, because of her important position relative to Odysseus. She is not replaceable, by the plot's logic.[423] However, our listener will know what is missing from Eurykleia's story, and will know that the other women were not merely killed, but hung. Our listener should therefore remember the danger Penelope faces going into the reunion—she is not yet safe from violent retaliation.

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[422] Her lack of concern for them is reminiscent of the speaker's attitude toward Philoneos' mistress in Antiphon 1.20—it is an afterthought:

"ἀνθ᾽ ὧν ἡ μὲν διακονήσασα καὶ χειρουργήσασα ἔχει τὰ ἐπίχειρα ὧν ἀξία ἦν, οὐδὲν αἰτία οὖσα—τῷ γὰρ δημοκοίνῳ τροχισθεῖσα παρεδόθη—ἡ δ᾽ αἰτία τε ἤδη καὶ ἐνθυμηθεῖσα ἕξει, ἐὰν ὑμεῖς τε καὶ οἱ θεοὶ θέλωσιν."

"For these actions, the woman who performed and carried them out has the wages worthy of them, although she's not responsible—for she was tortured and handed over to the executioner—but the woman responsible and who premeditated it will have hers too, if you and the gods are willing."

[423] See Hauser 2020 for Penelope's significance to the closure of Odysseus' *nostos* plot, though I do not cosign Hauser's reading of Penelope's own plot.

Penelope, meanwhile, is not ready to wholeheartedly accept that her husband has returned, though Eurykleia assures her that she has seen a *sēma*, his scar, which proves his identity.[424] This is not enough. Despite her initial suspicions about the stranger's identity, the fact that he ignored opportunity after opportunity to reveal himself and his plans may have made her lose confidence in her intuition. This situation has developed rapidly and in directions she may not have foreseen. She agrees to go downstairs to see him,[425] but has no idea how to react to him (23.85-95):

‘`Ως φαμένη κατέβαιν᾽ ὑπερώϊα· πολλὰ δέ οἱ κῆρ
ὥρμαιν᾽, ἢ ἀπάνευθε φίλον πόσιν ἐξερεείνοι,
ἦ παρστᾶσα κύσειε κάρη καὶ χεῖρε λαβοῦσα.
ἡ δ᾽ ἐπεὶ εἰσῆλθεν καὶ ὑπέρβη λάϊνον οὐδόν,
ἕζετ᾽ ἔπειτ᾽ Ὀδυσῆος ἐναντίη, ἐν πυρὸς αὐγῇ,
τοίχου τοῦ ἑτέρου· ὁ δ᾽ ἄρα πρὸς κίονα μακρὴν
ἧστο κάτω ὁρόων, ποτιδέγμενος εἴ τί μιν εἴποι
ἰφθίμη παράκοιτις, ἐπεὶ ἴδεν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν.
ἡ δ᾽ ἄνεω δὴν ἧστο, τάφος δέ οἱ ἦτορ ἴκανεν·
ὄψει δ᾽ ἄλλοτε μέν μιν ἐνωπαδίως ἤϊσκεν,
ἄλλοτε δ᾽ ἀγνώσασκε κακὰ χροὶ εἵματ᾽ ἔχοντα.

So speaking she descended from upstairs; but her heart stirred
Relentlessly, whether to question her dear husband from a distance,
Or stand beside him, kiss his head, and take his hands.
But when she entered and crossed over the stone threshold,
She sat across from Odysseus, in the firelight,
By the other wall; but he had sat against a great pillar,
Looking down, awaiting if his strong wife would say
Anything, when she saw him with her own eyes.
And she had sat silently, and amazement reached her heart;
And sometimes she found a likeness by looking in his face,
But sometimes she wouldn't know him, with awful clothes on.

[424] 23.73-4.

[425] 23.81-4.

Earlier today she went to lie down, and now, in a matter of hours, scores of people are dead, and the stranger is calling himself the real Odysseus. It is too much to process, too much to come to terms with so suddenly. As Lateiner puts it, "imagine your intimate or lover of twenty years ago, the loved one unseen since then, now suddenly back and very bloody" [426] Penelope wavers on whether to accept him.

Eurykleia and Telemachus, however, do not seem to understand how jarring this must be. Telemachus, ever critical of his mother, jumps in "impatiently" to criticize her reaction,[427] but Penelope tells him she needs to be sure of him first (23.104-10):

Τὸν δ᾽ αὖτε προσέειπε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
"τέκνον ἐμόν, θυμός μοι ἐνὶ στήθεσσι τέθηπεν,
οὐδέ τι προσφάσθαι δύναμαι ἔπος οὐδ᾽ ἐρέεσθαι
οὐδ᾽ εἰς ὦπα ἰδέσθαι ἐναντίον. εἰ δ᾽ ἐτεὸν δὴ
ἔστ᾽ Ὀδυσεὺς καὶ οἶκον ἱκάνεται, ἦ μάλα νῶϊ
γνωσόμεθ᾽ ἀλλήλων καὶ λώϊον· ἔστι γὰρ ἡμῖν
σήμαθ᾽, ἃ δὴ καὶ νῶϊ κεκρυμμένα ἴδμεν ἀπ᾽ ἄλλων."

And then observant Penelope addressed him,
"My child, the heart in my chest is astonished,
And I can't speak or say a word
Or look directly into his eyes. But if it's true,
He's Odysseus, and has come home, surely we
Will know each other and better; for we have
Signs, which are hidden from others, but we know."

[426] Lateiner 1994, pg. 266.

[427] 23.97-103. Stanford 1965, pg. 395.

At this, Odysseus backs Penelope up against their son:[428] Telemachus has been asserting his authority at Penelope's expense since their first scene together in book one, but Odysseus is now back as the head of household. This is his job.

Odysseus and Telemachus both depart to stage a fake wedding, and Eurynome washes the gore off Odysseus.[429] Penelope is alone with her thoughts for the time being.

SCENE 16: THE TEST

Penelope needs to establish for herself that this is real, so she devises a new test during the interlude, just as she devised a new tack during the interlude in the interview of book 19.

The stranger returns, cleaned and returned to his former glory, and becomes agitated that she does not respond immediately (23.164-72):

> ἂψ δ᾽ αὖτις κατ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἕζετ᾽ ἐπὶ θρόνου ἔνθεν ἀνέστη,
> ἀντίον ἦς ἀλόχου, καί μιν πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπε·
> "δαιμονίη, περί σοί γε γυναικῶν θηλυτεράων
> κῆρ ἀτέραμνον ἔθηκαν Ὀλύμπια δώματ᾽ ἔχοντες·
> οὐ μέν κ᾽ ἄλλη γ᾽ ὧδε γυνὴ τετληότι θυμῷ
> ἀνδρὸς ἀφεσταίη, ὅς οἱ κακὰ πολλὰ μογήσας
> ἔλθοι ἐεικοστῷ ἔτεϊ ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν.
> ἀλλ᾽ ἄγε μοι, μαῖα, στόρεσον λέχος, ὄφρα καὶ αὐτὸς
> λέξομαι· ἦ γὰρ τῇ γε σιδήρεον ἐν φρεσὶ ἦτορ."
>
> Then he sat back down on the chair he had stood up from,
> Across from his wife, and spoke a speech to her;

[428] 23.11-122.

[429] Thalmann stresses that Eurynome's presence in this scene balances Eurykleia's (1998, pg. 81). Odysseus and Penelope each have an ally.

"Crazy woman, they who have homes on Olympus
Made your heart harder than all women's;
No other woman with a stubborn heart
Would stand apart this way from her husband, who after suffering
Much misfortune returned in the twentieth year to his native land.
But come on, nanny, lay out my bed for me, so I can go to bed alone;
for the heart in this one's chest is iron."

Then Penelope responds (23.173-180):

Τὸν δ᾽ αὖτε προσέειπε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
"δαιμόνι᾽, οὔτ᾽ ἄρ τι μεγαλίζομαι οὔτ᾽ ἀθερίζω
οὔτε λίην ἄγαμαι, μάλα δ᾽ εὖ οἶδ᾽ οἷος ἔησθα
ἐξ Ἰθάκης ἐπὶ νηὸς ἰὼν δολιχηρέτμοιο.
ἀλλ᾽ ἄγε οἱ στόρεσον πυκινὸν λέχος, Εὐρύκλεια,
ἐκτὸς[430] ἐϋσταθέος θαλάμου, τόν ῥ᾽ αὐτὸς ἐποίει·
ἔνθα οἱ ἐκθεῖσαι πυκινὸν λέχος ἐμβάλετ᾽ εὐνήν,
κώεα καὶ χλαίνας καὶ ῥήγεα σιγαλόεντα."

Then observant Penelope answered him;
"Crazy man, I'm not proud, I'm not slighting you,
nor am I too amazed, and I know very well what sort of man
you were when you left Ithaca on a long-oared ship.
But go ahead, lay out the thick bed, Eurykleia,

[430] Though there have been arguments about manuscript readings for the direction the bed is to be moved, I ascribe to O'Sullivan's point (1983, pg. 24): "[that argument] concentrates on the direction in which the bed is supposed to be moved, out or in, whereas the basically alarming thing for Odysseus about Penelope's words is their unmistakable implication that the bed that he left literally rooted to the spot is mobile at all, that these weak women can be casually instructed to shift it about. It is this, without any attention to direction, that suggests to him that someone else must already have shifted his bed from the spot in which it was rooted." I therefore follow the manuscript reading.

> Outside the wellbuilt bedroom, which he himself made
> Put the strong bed out there and put on the mattress,
> Fleeces and covers and shining blankets." 180

Penelope is hesitant to trust him, but rather than risk provoking him by declaring her skepticism, she soothes him. Her use of the second person *eēstha*,[431] which Stanford once called a "confused abridgement" of 'I know what sort of person Odysseus was…' [432] is intentional, though it is not an unambiguous statement of belief. She pacifies him with some misdirection: I remember you; I will not contradict your claim.[433]

Yet, in the next breath she tests the man. Moments before, in 171, Odysseus asks Eurykleia to prepare a bed for him—no surprise, as she is his own nurse. Penelope now turns to her and reiterates the request to prepare their marriage bed, but to do so outside the bedroom itself. *Ektos*, outside, takes the first foot sedes of line 178, lending it emphasis. Only three people know the bed cannot be moved—herself, Odysseus, and Actoris (which might be a patronymic for Eurynome)—because it was carved out of a tree that grew on the site of the home. That Penelope may ask Eurykleia, not Eurynome, to move the bed is fortunate, because Eurykleia cannot give up the trick by reacting in surprise to an impossible command.

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[431] 23.175.

[432] Stanford 1998, pg. 397-8.

[433] Vlahos takes this also as a rebuke along the lines of, This is not how you used to treat me: "Penelope is telling Odysseus that she is standoffish because she remembers and wants back the same considerate, gentle and loving husband who left for Troy twenty years earlier" (2007, pg. 125).

Penelope's trick here shows that she is learning. She knows from her conversation with the stranger in book 19 that she cannot coax this man into telling the truth, if he is Odysseus, so instead, she lays a trap for him. If the stranger does not react, he is not the real Odysseus and not her husband. In such a case, then at least she has temporarily placated this dangerous stranger while she figures out what to do next. If he does react, then she can reassure him the bed has not been cut from its post.

That is exactly what happens. In anger, *ochthēsas*,[434] the stranger reveals that he knows the truth about their bed, proving that he is in fact Odysseus. Thus, Penelope's manipulation successfully identifies the real Odysseus, a character who is himself known for his own skilled manipulation. The text lends strong emphasis to the symbol of Penelope's trick. As Stanford says, "for the first time in the whole *Od.* Odysseus is mastered by a sudden impulse." [435] When he exclaims in shock and anger, he utters the phrase *mega sēma*, a term elsewhere used for a divine sign from Zeus.[436] The bed itself is a sign: first, it indicates to Penelope that Odysseus is the same person he claims to be i.e. the son of Laertes; second, it confirms that Odysseus is the same man to *her*, the husband who loves her;[437] and third, it indicates to the reader that Penelope is Odysseus' intellectual equal.

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[434] 23.183. Cf. *Il.* 2.308: "ἔνθ᾽ ἐφάνη μέγα σῆμα: δράκων ἐπὶ νῶτα δαφοινὸς"; see also *Il.* 24.349: "οἳ δ᾽ ἐπεὶ οὖν μέγα σῆμα πάρεξ Ἴλοιο ἔλασσαν".

[435] Stanford 1998, pg. 398.

[436] 23.188

[437] Vlahos 2007, pg. 120-1. For more on these two separate kinds of recognition, see Currie 2022.

The reader is already well used to Odysseus' lies. As the beggar he consistently provides different backstories to the people he encounters, presumably in order to appeal to each one personally, as when he tells the enslaved Eumaeus that his own mother was enslaved too.[438] This is a claim he does not repeat in the fake life story he gives Penelope in book 19 when there is no camaraderie to be gained from an enslaved relation. Our listener is therefore well-versed in Odysseus' particular tactics. However, even though Odysseus operates in a socially marginalized position when posing as a beggar, he never faces the same gendered constraints she does, nor the threat of gendered violence. When the text indicates that she is capable of manipulating not only the suitors, but Odysseus himself, it makes a clear point about her personality and capabilities that can be read back into all of her previous interactions. It is for this reason that I reject Richard Heitman's argument that Penelope "is doomed to prove inferior in *mētis* to Odysseus on any conceivable scale." She has unambiguously outsmarted him at least once, and the text emphasizes her like-mindedness with her husband, suggesting they are on par with one another.[439]

Penelope is then able to explain herself and calm Odysseus down again once she is certain of his identity (23.205-217):

‘`Ως φάτο· τῆς δ᾽ αὐτοῦ λύτο γούνατα καὶ φίλον ἦτορ, 205
σήματ᾽ ἀναγνούσῃ τά οἱ ἔμπεδα πέφραδ᾽ Ὀδυσσεύς.
δακρύσασα δ᾽ ἔπειτ᾽ ἰθὺς δράμεν, ἀμφὶ δὲ χεῖρας
δειρῇ βάλλ᾽ Ὀδυσῆϊ, κάρη δ᾽ ἔκυσ᾽ ἠδὲ προσηύδα·
“μή μοι, Ὀδυσσεῦ, σκύζευ, ἐπεὶ τά περ ἄλλα μάλιστα
ἀνθρώπων πέπνυσο· θεοὶ δ᾽ ὤπαζον ὀϊζύν, 210

[438] 14.203. For more on how Odysseus tailors his life story to suit his audience, see Ahl, Roisman 1996, pg. 161-6.

[439] Heitman 2005, pg. 6.

οἳ νῶϊν ἀγάσαντο παρ᾽ ἀλλήλοισι μένοντε
ἦβης ταρπῆναι καὶ γήραος οὐδὸν ἱκέσθαι.
αὐτὰρ μὴ νῦν μοι τόδε χώεο μηδὲ νεμέσσα,
οὕνεκά σ᾽ οὐ τὸ πρῶτον, ἐπεὶ ἴδον, ὧδ᾽ ἀγάπησα.
αἰεὶ γάρ μοι θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλοισιν
ἐρρίγει μή τίς με βροτῶν ἀπάφοιτο ἔπεσσιν
ἐλθών—πολλοὶ γὰρ κακὰ κέρδεα βουλεύουσιν·”

So he spoke, and her knees and dear heart dropped,
As she recognized clear signs that Odysseus gave.
And she cried and ran straight to him, threw her arms
Around Odysseus’ neck, and kissed his face and said:
“Don’t be angry with me, Odysseus, since in everything else
You’re smarter than everyone; but the gods gave us misery,
Who resented us remaining beside each other
To enjoy our youth and reach the threshold of old age.
But don’t be mad at me about this or fight with me,
Because I didn’t at first, when I saw you, welcome you.
Since the heart in my dear chest always
Shuddered in case someone would come and trick me
With words; for many people plan evil profits.”

Penelope now explains her extreme caution. She is afraid that if she had betrayed her husband even by accident, she would still be liable for the destruction of her chastity—and the destruction of her marriage, which she has been valiantly preserving. In other words, she has gone to great lengths to avoid Felson’s plot types two and three, “seduction by a foreigner” and “seduction by a god”, out of fear for the repercussions such an indiscretion would have.[440] Once a woman’s chastity is lost, it cannot be regained,[441] so it was more prudent to wait until there was no doubt about the identity of her husband. Sheila Murnaghan stresses that the “brilliance” of Penelope’s test lies in

[440] For more on Odysseus’ return as *Theoxenia*, see Murnaghan 1987.

[441] Oberwittler, Kasselt 2014, especially pg. 653.

its reciprocal nature: it establishes Penelope's faithfulness at the same time that it proves her husband's identity, and so their bond is mutually reinforced.[442]

Penelope then contrasts herself with Helen (23.218-230):

"οὐδέ κεν Ἀργείη Ἑλένη, Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα,
ἀνδρὶ παρ᾽ ἀλλοδαπῷ ἐμίγη φιλότητι καὶ εὐνῇ,
εἰ ἤδη ὅ μιν αὖτις ἀρήϊοι υἷες Ἀχαιῶν
ἀξέμεναι οἶκόνδε φίλην ἐς πατρίδ᾽ ἔμελλον.
τὴν δ᾽ ἦ τοι ῥέξαι θεὸς ὥρορεν ἔργον ἀεικές·
τὴν δ᾽ ἄτην οὐ πρόσθεν ἐῷ ἐγκάτθετο θυμῷ
λυγρήν, ἐξ ἧς πρῶτα καὶ ἡμέας ἵκετο πένθος—
νῦν δ᾽, ἐπεὶ ἤδη σήματ᾽ ἀριφραδέα κατέλεξας
εὐνῆς ἡμετέρης, ἣν οὐ βροτὸς ἄλλος ὀπώπει,
ἀλλ᾽ οἷοι σύ τ᾽ ἐγώ τε καὶ ἀμφίπολος μία μούνη,
Ἀκτορίς, ἥν μοι δῶκε πατὴρ ἔτι δεῦρο κιούσῃ,
ἣ νῶϊν εἴρυτο θύρας πυκινοῦ θαλάμοιο,
πείθεις δή μευ θυμόν, ἀπηνέα περ μάλ᾽ ἐόντα."

"And Argive Helen, born of Zeus,
Would not have mixed with a foreign man in love and bed,
If she had known that the warlike sons of the Achaeans
Would lead her home again to her native country.
But a god stirred her to act against her will;
And not before a god put it deep in her heart, a ruinous
Folly, because of which grief first came to us, too.
But now, since you've laid out obvious signs
Of our bed, which no other mortal had seen,
But only you and I and my one single attendant,
Actoris, whom my father gave me when I came here,
Who guarded the doors of our concealed bedroom,
You've persuaded the heart of me, although it's hard."

[442] Murnaghan 2011, pg. xii.

The current situation's correspondence to the exemplum here is somewhat loose, as homeric exempla often are.[443] But it is not so irrational as some have argued. Penelope does not compare, i.e,. liken herself, to Helen, as some have said, but instead emphasizes their differences: even someone as shameless as Helen (and therefore unlike herself) would not have acted so recklessly if the consequences had been apparent from the outset.[444] Penelope does give a generous interpretation of Helen's actions, though, in claiming she acted under divine influence.[445] Some scholars find this invocation of Helen's name inappropriate,[446] or even argue the speech nearly amounts to an admission of guilt. Per Wohl, "This is really a defense of herself: if Helen can be forgiven for having committed adultery, she should be pardoned for almost having done the same. It is an admission of how close she came to infidelity, an apologia for her awareness of her own sexuality." [447] Yet contextually this does not work: Penelope is apologizing for holding back, not rushing headlong. Moreover, the gods' involvement is not an exoneration of the actions of mortals,[448] as in Homer, mortals are still culpable for their behavior even if the gods put them to it. So Penelope does not excuse Helen, but uses her as a worst-case-scenario example of what could have happened if she herself had not been cautious: the anti-Penelope.[449] Women's hasty

[443] Slater 1983.

[444] See Morgan 1991.

[445] Cf. Sappho 16.5-13a.

[446] See for instance Fredricksmeyer 1997.

[447] Wohl 1993, pg. 44.

[448] It may mitigate her culpability, as Gregory 1996 argues, though (pg. 15).

[449] See Lesser 2019, pg. 195-8, 202-3.

decisions have ruinous consequences, and Penelope would have been responsible for the destruction of her family, if she had welcomed the wrong man into her bed, as Helen did. No matter the reason.

I thus reject Marilyn Arthur's argument, working from Helen's example, that women were not considered morally culpable for adultery in Homer:

> Such an attitude… proceeds from a social climate in which the moral code encompassed men alone. Chastity or faithfulness for women in such a period was not a moral obligation but a simple regulation which was ordinarily adhered to; when the rule was broken it was a matter between the men in whose power the women were understood to be and whose responsibility they were.[450]

To the contrary, Penelope positions herself and Helen both as moral agents in 23.218-30. Helen caused grief, and Penelope is desperate not to do the same. And while Helen, semi-divine, is never punished for her crimes, that does not mean that Penelope would not be. As the text tells us, Helen is the daughter of Zeus, and through her, Menelaus will receive immortality;[451] no one is going to butcher that golden goose. When it comes to a close and personal relationship to Zeus, Penelope has more in common with the dead enslaved girls than with Helen, hence her vulnerability to violent retaliation.

Luckily, the signs prove Odysseus' identity. Penelope has evaded adultery and is safe (23.231-40):

> ‘`Ως φάτο· τῷ δ᾽ ἔτι μᾶλλον ὑφ᾽ ἵμερον ὦρσε γόοιο·
> κλαῖε δ᾽ ἔχων ἄλοχον θυμαρέα, κεδν᾽ εἰδυῖαν.
> ὡς δ᾽ ὅτ᾽ ἂν ἀσπάσιος γῆ νηχομένοισι φανήῃ,

[450] Arthur 1973, pg. 17.

[451] 4.561-9.

ὧν τε Ποσειδάων εὐεργέα νῆ᾽ ἐνὶ πόντῳ
ῥαίσῃ, ἐπειγομένην ἀνέμῳ καὶ κύματι πηγῷ—
παῦροι δ᾽ ἐξέφυγον πολιῆς ἁλὸς ἤπειρόνδε
νηχόμενοι, πολλὴ δὲ περὶ χροῒ τέτροφεν ἅλμη,
ἀσπάσιοι δ᾽ ἐπέβαν γαίης, κακότητα φυγόντες—
ὣς ἄρα τῇ ἀσπαστὸς ἔην πόσις εἰσοροώσῃ,
δειρῆς δ᾽ οὔ πω πάμπαν ἀφίετο πήχεε λευκώ.

So she spoke, and the urge to weep arose even more in him,
And he cried, holding his beloved wife, with a trustworthy heart.
As when welcome land comes into sight of swimmers,
Whose wellbuilt ship Poseidon smashed upon the sea
Weighed down by wind and a strong wave—
And few swimmers escaped the gray sea to dry land
And much seawater has crusted on their skin,
And they happily reach land, fleeing misfortune—
That's how her spouse was welcome to her when she saw him,
And she wouldn't let her white arms go from his neck at all.

The reverse-sex simile[452] is surprising;[453] Odysseus was the subject in line 232, and so we would logically expect this comparison will be to him. Yet the feminine pronoun in 239 tells us all along that we have been hearing about Penelope. The simile places her in a dangerous environment that makes manifest the invisible and unnamed perils of her home in Odysseus' absence. She, as the swimmer, is immersed in danger and responsible for navigating it unaided, just as Penelope has been immersed in the threats of the suitors, traitorous slaves, and lying travelers. Though noble wives were expected to stay inside and supervised at all times—their white arms, πήχεε λευκώ, untouched by sunlight—and therefore out of harm's way, Penelope has been forced to take on a more active role in her husband's absence. She has been working tirelessly to cultivate the pretense

[452] See Foley 1978.

[453] Verbal misdirections are well attested in Homeric comparisons. See Pelliccia 2002.

that she may be on the verge of remarrying at any time in order to keep the suitors treading water, so to speak. Thus, the shipwrecked sailors are an appropriate metaphor.

But Odysseus is dry land, who replaces her dangerous and uncertain environment with safety and certainty. His arrival signals a return to Penelope's rightful place, where she does not have to work to maintain her own safety. That is Odysseus' job now. She can be clever and capable when need be, but she does not relish the responsibility. Until now, she has avoided the stewardship of other men via the specter of Odysseus, paradoxically asserting agency through "rules intended to deny her privilege".[454] Claiming that Odysseus might return at any time may well have been a ploy to keep other men at arms' length, regardless of whether she had any hope left, but she now welcomes the return of her rightful *kurios*. She is the perfect wife by Homeric standards because although she is like-minded with her cunning husband, she desires above all to return to her place under her husband's control. Rather than working against her husband as Klytemnestra and Helen do, she uses her considerable intellect to "exercise… the subtlest feminine arts of self-defense," and preserve his continued authority over herself.[455]

Joel Christensen has argued that, because Penelope subsumes her interests to Odysseus' in this way, "Even the best woman in Homer does not get to be a fully realized human being." [456] By this he seems to mean that the constraints of the text force her to prioritize Odysseus over herself, and that, since this is portrayed as constituting correct morality, she is therefore unable to act with individual autonomy. Christensen is correct insofar as Penelope does work to serve Odysseus'

[454] Gregory 1996, pg. 16.

[455] Stanford 1998, pg. 399.

[456] Christensen 2020, chapter 7: "Penelope's Subordinated Agency," pg. 175f: 202.

interests, as she must do being a woman, but I disagree that her marginalized status renders her an incomplete human being. The fact is that many women throughout history have had to prioritize their husbands over themselves. This is reality, and if the constraints of a patriarchal society render a person less than human, then many actual, historical women cannot be fully human either.

But Penelope exhibits a subtle understanding of the limitations of her position, and works to ensure that, of the few roles available to her, she preserves the one which pleases her best. There is no outcome that involves emancipation from the patriarchy. However, though she has less capacity for self determination than her husband, she uses what she has to achieve the best possible outcome available to her. She professes devotion to her husband, and remaining his wife (or anyone's wife) means living under male control, so she consents to do so. It can be difficult to untangle to what extent she does subsume herself to Odysseus' interests, and to what extent their interests simply align, but I would propose that many of the choices she makes serve both of them. The same is true for her relationship to Telemachus: when Penelope acts with Telemachus' safety in mind, she also acts on her own behalf, because she loves her son and does not want to see him harmed. Their best interests naturally align because they care for one another. I therefore argue that we ought to give Penelope more credit: she preserves her happiness as well as she can under a repressive system.

This is Penelope's last scene in the *Odyssey*, though ghosts in the underworld will talk about her and her legacy during the second *nekuia* of book 24. The ghost of Amphimedon explains the cause of his early death to the ghost of Agamemnon, including the third iteration of the story of the web.[457] Not every detail Amphimedon reports corresponds to the poet's narrative of the

[457] 24.120-90.

events he relates, but the suitors have been consistently wrong about everything, so this is not a problem, nor do I think it wise to hold Penelope accountable to others' impressions of her. Agamemnon then responds with an encomium of Penelope,[458] praising her as the model woman, in comparison to his own wife, Klytemnestra: "οἱ κλέος οὔ ποτ᾽ ὀλεῖται / ἧς ἀρετῆς," "the fame of her virtue will never die".[459] Agamemnon, great misogynist that he is, is a curious choice to deliver this verdict, though he is most qualified to speak on the dangers of an unfaithful wife. He knows best that if Penelope had not been virtuous and had failed Odysseus' tests, one or the other of the spouses would have had to die. It is because of her faithfulness that both are still alive, far from the halls of Hades. "Disdain and cunning tricks" ends in Reunion.

[458] 24.191-204.

[459] 24.196-7.

CONCLUSIONS

In this dissertation, I hope to have provided an alternative to accepting the so-called incoherence or indeterminacy of Penelope's character. I have argued that throughout all Penelope's scenes, from book one up to the spouses' reunion in book twenty three, she has expressed contempt for the suitors. There is no evidence that she has any fondness for them, or that she even knows them very well. Nor does the poet allow the suitors any particularly attractive qualities in the first place. Fenik, e.g., has described the two most prominent suitors, Antinoos and Eurymachus, respectively, as "the most hardened and unredeemed criminal in the story," and "surreptitiously vicious".[460] The suitors shift between "flattery" and "naked enmity" to get what they want,[461] have no compunctions about violence, and are defined by "fraudulent dissimulation and defiant knavery."[462] In the scenes commonly cited to argue for an attraction between Penelope and one or

[460] Fenik 1974, pg. 198. For a full account of their characterization and roles as figureheads for the group as a whole, see pg. 198-207.

[461] Fenik 1974, pg. 203.

[462] Fenik 1974, pg. 204.

the other of them, I have argued that the relevant features of Penelope's comportment can be better read as symptoms of fear. Penelope avoids, deceives, and sometimes leads on the suitors in order to maintain her own and her son's safety.

For this argument, I have made use of the wealth of scholarship that precedes me both within and outside of Classics. Feminist theory of the second wave, especially work by Hermann and Sheffield, was crucial. Anthropological research into honor cultures and honor killings, including Thalmann's *The Swineherd and the Bow*, also contributed immeasurably to this argument. Finally, I hope to have contributed to the early recognition theory popularized by Harsh and Winkler—and by Margaret Atwood in her *Penelopiad*, a work which I regard as a valuable commentary on the poem.

Using these frameworks, I have isolated and analyzed every one of Penelope's scenes from the *Odyssey* so as not to miss any material that might contradict my argument. I have also included material that has been somewhat neglected in other studies on women in that text. Namely, this dissertation takes a close look at Melantho and her fellow girls' fate as a dark mirror of Penelope's. All the women of Ithaca—Penelope, Melantho, all of them—are defined by their relationship to men, especially Odysseus, and those who ally themselves with the wrong men are killed. It is my opinion that Melantho's death meets the definition of an honor killing, and I argue that Penelope may sense that this is a possible outcome for herself as well. Penelope survives because she is faithful to her husband, but also because she proceeds with utmost caution at all times.

Some scholarship on Penelope seems almost to discuss a different character from the Penelope I conceive—one who wavers on the precipice of infidelity. To return to an argument of Felson's quoted in a previous chapter:

> "Each spouse and storyteller, now out of danger, interprets all prior events only in terms of REUNION. Thus Penelope, remembering selectively, depicts the suitors solely as villains who devoured Odysseus' household. Her version of COURTSHIP exonerates Odysseus, and herself, for their slaughter. Penelope has trimmed her plots to a single type, the story of holding the suitors at bay until Odysseus' return. Though Penelope forgets the other side of the story, Homer's audience need not. Penelope's encouragement of the suitors and her enjoyment of their attention, *suggested especially by her dream-reaction to the slaughter of her pet geese,* indeed diminish their criminal culpability."[463]

Felson describes a character who enjoyed the suitors and their attention, who floats between the roles of faithful wife and irredeemable flirt, only to rewrite the narrative in retrospect. In this characterization, Penelope is partially responsible for the suitors' presence in her house and therefore also for their subsequent deaths. Yet we have never seen her express affection for them directly. The strongest evidence Felson offers for Penelope's culpability is her reaction to her dead pets in the dream omen—about which the suitors knew nothing. Can that dream justify Felson's claim that Penelope encouraged the suitors to remain in the palace? Perhaps not. The idea of Penelope's fractured character, put forward by generations of scholars, is not borne out by the evidence. Neither does it support the Duck-Rabbit reading, nor does it support the Analytic arguments against Penelope's coherence that came before, since both arguments depend on the existence of contradictory evidence. However, I argue that the Analytic tendency in Homer criticism has failed on the psychological level, and that their misreading was then picked up by Homer scholars of the 1990s and repackaged as indeterminacy.

It is possible that the invention of false problems was an inevitable by-product of the scholarly tradition, in that the Analytic tendency in Homer criticism resembles "paranoid criticism" as described by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. It indulges in an unrestrained "hermeneutics

[463] Felson 1994, pg. 41. Emphasis mine.

of <positivist> suspicion" and obsessively pursues vestiges of pseudo-Homers, like Penelope sniffing out pseudo-Odysseuses.[464] Because so little is known about the origin of the text, any given verse is a possible candidate for 'interpolation,' and scholars become determined not to miss any. As Sedgwick writes:

> [P]aranoia, once the topic is broached in a nondiagnostic context, seems to grow like a crystal in a hypersaturated solution, blotting out any sense of the possibility of alternative ways of understanding things *or* things to understand.[465]

The assumption that any given textual problem arises from interpolation(s), and that identifying interpolations is the scholar's priority, is a foregone conclusion in the paranoid mindset. This is because paranoia tends to grow with time; it is necessary from its nature:

> That paranoia is anticipatory is clear from every account and theory of the phenomenon. The first imperative of paranoia is *There must be no bad surprises*, and indeed, the aversion to surprise seems to be what cements the intimacy between paranoia and knowledge per se […].[466]

Thus, Analytic scholars *want* to find problems, and so do not seek solutions other than the scalpel to remedy them: there are no alternative explanations; there must be no bad surprises. And "an inferior poet wrote this garbage," is an interpretative stance that seems both invulnerable and versatile, capable of being mobilized against any number of issues, from lexical abnormalities, to incongruous stylistic features, to character defects. Thus, any verse that strikes the ear as odd can be marked as illegitimate.

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[464] Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," in *Touching Feeling*, 2003.

[465] Sedgwick 2003, pg. 131.

[466] Sedgwick 2003, pg. 130.

In my introduction I have already argued against using the "originality" of any given verse as a measure of its validity: I do not believe that we should assume that an infallible Ur-text existed and is reconstructable. Moreover, though, I here suggest that Analytic misreadings of Penelope may be influenced by gender bias. As we have seen from the multitude of interpretations of her character, character analysis is more an art than a science. Different people will find different patterns of behavior to be natural or unnatural, depending on the influence of their personal experiences and culture. When scholars had gendered expectations for her behavior that the text did not support—because they assumed that a "faithful" wife would be simple, easily understood, and that she would defy all men but her husband—they blamed the poet(s). They did not consider how Penelope's physical safety was at stake, and then they criticized the text for failing to meet their expectations. It was not their expectations that were wrong, they decided, but the text itself. Denys Page, for instance, mocks Penelope's behavior in the recognition scene, saying: "And then, to our bewilderment, we are led to believe that Penelope already knows him to be Odysseus and is only 'making trial of her husband'!" [467] He has entirely failed to consider that Penelope can and must lie. Yet, the fact that he has no trouble recognizing that same behavior in Odysseus shows that he is capable of identifying a lie for what it is… when a man is speaking.

Unfortunately, the idea of Penelope's fractured character may be a symptom of a larger problem, because any Analytic argument on the basis of character could be subject to social biases, as we tend to assess characters on the page with the same expectations we use to assess characters in real life. These biases may influence analyses, because the wrong set of expectations will yield the wrong results. We can imagine this problem as a mathematical function: plugging correct x

[467] Page 1955, pg. 115.

values (data) into the wrong mathematical function (gender, racial or classist assumptions) will yield an entirely different graph. In the same way, characters who exist in marginalized social positions are subject to misreading, because we apply inappropriate sets of expectations to them. And as we have seen, misreadings can persist for decades.

Of course, some bias is also baked into the text and does not arise from misreading. Penelope was glorified, but Melantho vilified. Both of them were forced to navigate the same power vacuum and the opportunistic grifters who appeared on the scene, but the two women had different rights, privileges, and tools available to them.

Unlike Penelope, Melantho had no protection from the suitors. Realistically, it was in her best interests to ally herself with them, because avoiding them was not an option. Maybe it was she who betrayed Penelope's trick to the suitors—remember the words of Antinoos at the council (2.108-110):

> "καὶ τότε δή τις ἔειπε γυναικῶν, ἣ σάφα ᾔδη,
> καὶ τήν γ᾽ ἀλλύουσαν ἐφεύρομεν ἀγλαὸν ἱστόν.
> ὣς τὸ μὲν ἐξετέλεσσε καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλουσ᾽ ὑπ᾽ ἀνάγκης·"
>
> "And then one of the women who had known the trick told us,
> And we caught her unweaving the shining cloth.
> So she finished it by force, and didn't want to."

Melantho was sleeping with Eurymachus, and so it is not a stretch to think that she may have revealed this information to him, whether accidentally or on purpose. Given that so few enslaved women are granted names at all, as we have previously seen, it is perhaps natural to want to stick the blame to one we know, and so Melantho is our best bet. In the world of the text, revealing the trick is an act of betrayal; surely Eurynome and Eurykleia would never. But if Melantho did betray this information, can we be sure she did not do so for her own safety, trying to ingratiate herself to

men who posed a threat? What did Melantho owe, morally speaking, to the people who enslaved her? Nevertheless, the text casts her as a villain and sacrifices her along with the suitors at the end.

If there is a villain of the *Odyssey* Penople might have had affection for, it was not a suitor but Melantho. We see glimpses of their relationship in the text: we know that Penelope raised Melantho as a small child. It seems that Melantho's alliance with the suitors has angered Penelope,[468] and the fact that Penelope enslaved Melantho once she was old enough, as Antikleia did to Eumaeus before her, unambiguously shows that Penelope was no real mother to her. She harmed her. Nevertheless, she may have also, selfishly, cared for her—just as Achilles may have loved Briseis, whether or not Briseis loved him back.

The text does not center their relationship, and interestingly, since we do not see Penelope finding out that twelve of the enslaved girls have died in the *Odyssey*, the poet is spared depicting her reaction. But one may imagine that Melantho's death would have been distressing for Penelope in a way that the suitors' were not. Margaret Atwood offers one possible version of the scene. She has Eurykleia tell Penelope that the girls have been killed at the same moment in which she announces Odysseus has returned:

> 'But which maids?' I cried, beginning to shed tears. 'Dear gods—which maids did they hang?'
>
> 'Mistress, dear child,' said Eurycleia, anticipating my displeasure, 'he wanted to kill them all! I had to choose some—otherwise all would have perished!'
>
> 'Which ones?' I said, trying to control my emotions.
>
> 'Only twelve,' she faltered. 'The impertinent ones. The ones who'd been rude. The ones who used to thumb their noses at me. Melantho of the Pretty Cheeks and her cronies—that lot. They were notorious whores.'
>
> 'The ones who'd been raped,' I said. 'The youngest. The most beautiful.'
>
> …

[468] 18.321-5.

> Dead is dead, I told myself. I'll say prayers and perform sacrifices for their souls. But I'll have to do it in secret, or Odysseus will suspect me, as well.[469]

Atwood's version honors the emotional complexity of Penelope's reunion with her husband, which comes with painful costs as she negotiates his chronic mistrust and violent disposition. However, in the text of the *Odyssey* as we have it, Penelope, who raised Melantho "like her own child," παῖδα δὲ ὣς, cannot mourn her.[470] The surviving thirty-eight enslaved women cannot mourn her. The poet will not let them. It is criminal.

[469] Atwood 2005, pg. 125-6.

[470] 18.323.

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