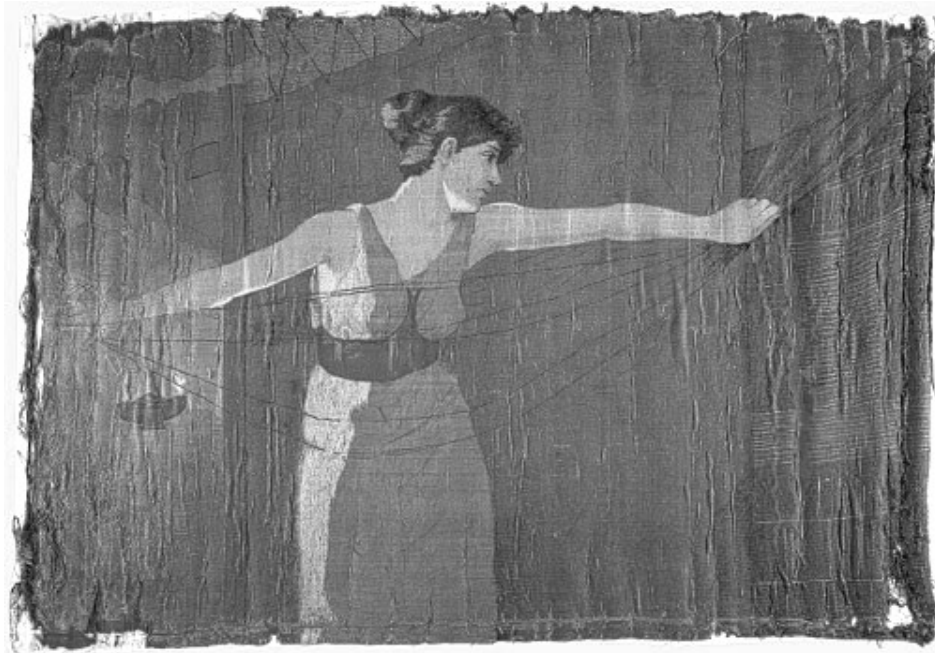


PENELOPE, QUEEN OF ITHAKA

A study of female power and worth in the Homeric society



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ABSTRACT

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This paper deals with the character of Penelope, in Homer's *Odyssey*, of her power and worth. Also how female power and worth were measured in Homeric society, which was a world ruled by men. Penelope is unique because she survived in a male dominated world without any magical power, but by her own strength. She protects her family and home from her enemies. This dissertation will explore Penelope's realm of power, how much authority she had and what means she used, and also how her actions and character measures her worth as a woman. She will be both compared to other female characters and to the standards of a patriarchal society.

Classical sources and modern sources will be analyzed and compared, to understand hidden meanings, popular discussions and new theories. Also lexical Greek word as οἶκος, μήτις and κλέος will be explored and linked to Penelope's power and worth.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“...Son of Laertes-
 mastermind-what a fine, faithful wife you won!
 What good sense resided in your Penelope-
 how well Ikarios’ daughter remembered you,
 Odysseus, the man she married!
 The fame of her great virtue will never die.
 The immortal gods will lift a song for all mankind,
 a glorious song in praise of self-possessed Penelope.”
*Od.24.211-218*¹

Thus the epic of Odysseus comes to an end, with the praise of his wife, Penelope, without whom he would probably never have been able to return to his kingdom and regain his throne. Such praise of a woman is very unusual in the Homeric world, as well as in the later Classical Greek society, where men ruled their domains with firm hands. Yet the daughter of Ikarios succeeded. Her power and worth are told and retold within the lines of *Odyssey*; by exploring her actions, abilities, obstacles and what others thought of her, one might understand the complexity of such a character and the importance of her role in such a great epic and ancient society.

1.1 Aim and goal

The reason for choosing Penelope as the topic, was because I found her as a person, fictive or not, very intriguing. The importance of her character in the *Odyssey* is remarkable and noteworthy. The obvious role she played was to aid her husband and his homecoming, but the more complex one is her impact on the society and its rules that Homer depicted. Penelope was in the epic a woman who was wielding power in a misogynistic society, and she had to bend and break rules to gain and justify the authority she had over Ithaka.

My aim is to break down the character of Penelope into pieces and analyze her as a character from different angles and then put her back together; so I can, hopefully, explore and understand how she ruled as a woman within a man’s world of kings and heroes, and thereby explore the possibilities of female power and authority in the Homeric world.

To do so I will divide my research in two main themes: power and worth. I will explore how much power and authority Penelope appears to have and what her limitations are within the οἶκος (home, household), and I will also treat her worth: in her κλέος (glory, fame), μῆτις (intelligence, cunningness) and Penelope as her own person.

¹ Robert Fagles’ translation.

1.2 Theory

I have formulated the following questions to be discussed, and hopefully answered in any discussion:

- What was the “limits” of Penelope’s power?
- How did she justify her authority?
- What were the methods and means she used?
- What is the link between female power, marriage and the οἶκος?
- How does she use her μήτις to protect her οἶκος, household and marriage, and how does it reflect on her as a person?
- What kind of κλέος does she possess, how did she earn it and how does it reflect her worth?
- As a person and a woman how much was she worth in the context of Homeric society?

I will be comparing Penelope with other female characters, both similar and opposite, to establish certain patterns, and also with male virtues and rules. To be able to do so I will only concentrate on the parts and discussions which are relevant to my dissertation and to Penelope as a character.

1.3 Methods

The methods I plan to use is the study of primary and secondary literary sources on the topics of the *Odyssey*, i.e. the text itself as well as later comments and discussions, but also literary sources that concerns the theory of gender issues in classical Greece, as well as lexical works on Greek words; its translations and meaning.

The ancient material I will be focusing on is the *Odyssey*, because of the simple reason that the epic concerns Penelope, her rule and the return of Odysseus. I will be analyzing the text; what it says and what is said between the lines in order to detect any hidden messages and symbols. It is also necessary to discuss what meaning the author wanted to present, and what the Greek audiences might have understood; compared to a modern audience. What was real and acceptable by the ancient Greeks and what scholars of our time may perceive acceptable or just pure fiction may differ. Homer’s other epic, the *Iliad*, will be used as reference to compare the similarities and differences represented in the two societies; especially concerning the representation of gender.² Both the classical Greek version and translations will be used. Besides that, Classical Greek and English dictionaries and grammar

² Trans. Robert Fagles, 1996

will be helpful tools to translate a specific word and shades its grammatical usage, and the *Homeric Dictionary* by Georg Autenrieth³ will be used for better definitions. Other dictionaries that I will be using are *Oxford Classical Dictionary* and other mythological dictionaries to establish the origin of a certain character or mythological event.

The Loeb edition of the *Odyssey* has a bilingual arrangement, which makes it possible to cross-reference between English and Greek.⁴

Others are mostly only an English translation without the original Greek text. There are many English translations; acclaimed and not so famous, old and modern. Some may have chosen to translate according to the hexameter verse and others only translated the sentences.

The secondary sources will be used as an aid for my research: what is the modern scholars take on the topic; how do they agree or disagree with my analyses of the epic? There are three kinds of secondary sources I have used to aid my research. The first are literary sources that focus on reading Homer in general, secondly; scholars who focus on more specific topics and themes within the *Odyssey* and on Penelope, and last but not least research on gender issues. The theory of gender issues will be a useful tool for my discussions, I will read and analyze the *Odyssey* while viewing it from a gender viewpoint. There are not many studies that are specified on gender theory of the *Odyssey*, especially on the topics I have chosen to discuss. Therefore, I have to look into modern gender theory and find parallels with the Homeric world.

Other than literary sources I will be using lexical works on Greek words to analyze the text within the *Odyssey*; the concept and meaning of the words, the way they were used and where. Also the translations are a vital resource, to see where and what English word the translators used in their translations. There may be hidden and symbolic meaning of the word used or it may be just a word, and if the message it does send is used within a context. In many cases there are no simple translations of a Homeric word; therefore each translation has to select one of several possible interpretations. Any such selection influences the way we read and interpret the story. Sometimes the words can be a bit ambiguous, have different meaning in different contexts; whether the scene or the character. Some words might describe different attributes depending on the character and its gender. Words like οἶκος, κλέος and μῆτις,⁵ which I will use to analyze Penelope's character, are ambiguous and needs to be

³ Autenrieth, 2009.

⁴ Trans. A. T. Murray, vol I & II, 1960.

⁵ The proper translations and definitions will be dealt with later.

explained, both what their direct translation means and what other uses they can have.

Besides Greek words and their concepts I will be using English words as my tool, to explain and discuss different subjects within the research. Words like power and authority. With power I mean the control Penelope has over a certain domain and the extent of her control, and authority is the tool she uses to utilize her power. Another word I will be using quite often is worth; it is to explain Penelope's worth as a mother, woman and/or ruler.

1.4 Structure

As I mentioned before I will divide my research into two themes, power and worth in order to structure, explain and discuss the differences between these themes and its importance for Penelope to gain power. Within these two themes I will subdivide them into a couple of chapters, concerning different subjects. Because all of these subjects and discussions are linked to each other, some may overlap and I will at the end tie them all together.⁶

After the introduction there will be a short chapter on lexical Greek words, which I have chosen to use and analyse in my research, and also their different translations and meanings.

Chapter three is a short literary review of the data I have collected and will use. It will be derived from classical literature of Homer to more recent discussion on my topics. Some are only helpful tools for translation, mythological origin or certain social concepts, but will be as important as the classical and secondary sources. I will explain the problems I might encounter and how I will try to solve them. Also the theory and methods I will use to analyse the data collected.

The fourth chapter is an analysis and discussion on Penelope's power, divided into two topics; "Succession" and "Οἶκος". Both parts results in Penelope's right to authority. The succession issue will explain the reason why Penelope is in charge of Ithaka in the first place. The incapability of the royal men around her, has strengthened her position as the ruler of Ithaka. The οἶκος, which here is taken to mean home and household, is Penelope's reason to fight, which in turn gives justification for her authority in her οἶκος. A perfect and harmonious marriage is the result of a stable and strong οἶκος. By comparing her to Nausikaa and Arete, two important and strong female characters of the *Odyssey*, I will establish the foundation of Penelope's successful marriage and authority as a queen.

⁶ I will also be using present and past tense, the *Odyssey* will be viewed upon as if it is in present tense, and only the stories and events that are retold in the epic will be considered in past tense. It is to give a sense of living into the epic, that we are the audience.

The next chapter will continue on the discussion of Penelope's success, but instead of her power, it will focus on her character and her worth as a woman and wife, in other words her μῆτις and κλέος, two Greek words with utmost importance in the *Odyssey*. They are both usually male attributes, but are now used to describe a woman. With her μῆτις, intelligence, she will protect her οἶκος from her enemies, and strengthen her bond to her husband, proving to be his match. With the second part, κλέος, meaning fame, I will analyse the fruit of her success, and how it turns her into a strong and successful woman, and demonstrate the difference between her and other women and her new status beside her husband.

The last part will be a discussion and conclusion, to summarize the previous chapters, and see how both power and worth are linked to each other. In this chapter I will try understand and look at the dissertation as a whole and what path it might have gone. Is the result what I have expected? What new theories and studies have derived from my research? Any new revelations? Were there any problems I might have bumped into during my research? And so on.

With this dissertation I will hopefully understand the importance of Penelope's character in the *Odyssey*, women's position and the tools they have at their disposal to wield their power.

2. EXPLENATION OF WORDS

Here I will explain more specific the use and concept of each Greek word: what different concepts they may encompass and which definition I will focus on and why. Because these words can have different meaning depending on gender, I will often use both the male and female definitions. The focus will be on the female definition, attributes given to Penelope or other women, and compare it with the definition given to men, those were usually the main definitions because they were often given to men and seldom women.

Οἶκος Could mean house, home and household; therefore it could mean both property and people.⁷ In Homeric epics οἶκος was an important place; either a physical structure or a mental place. Οἶκος was a place that heroes would fight for and protect from the outside and long for, while women would protect their οἶκος from the inside or be trapped within its walls. Because the focus is on Penelope, I would use the word to describe home and household, the domain she uses to exert her power. Over and over again the importance of a harmonious and successful marriage is mentioned in the *Odyssey*. A successful marriage represents a stable and powerful οἶκος, which in turn would give Penelope the authority she needs to wield her power.⁸

Μῆτις Means intelligence, cleverness and/or cunningness.⁹ The mythological word derived from a mythical creature that was named Metis and she personified intelligence. One of the reasons Zeus choose Metis to be his mate was probably because of her intelligence. When she finally bore a child, Athena, Zeus was warned that the child might one day overthrow him; a child who would be both powerful and intelligent. So he swallowed Metis to prevent such destiny, and later Athena burst out through his forehead. Because of this both Zeus and Athena was attributed with and known for their intelligence; Zeus having intelligence, Metis, within him and Athena being the daughter of intelligence.¹⁰ Athena was also the goddess who protected and endowed Odysseus with

⁷ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1204-1205; Patterson 1998, 41.

⁸ *Od.* 6.198-203; Odysseus explains the greatness of finding a soul mate and building a harmonious marriage would lead to glory., Doherty 1992, 173-174; Schein 1995, 23.

⁹ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1130

¹⁰ *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 969; Hansen 2004 ,68, 121-123,328.

intelligence. Usually μῆτις is given as an attribute to men, Athena appears to be the one of the few female characters in mythology whom personify μῆτις, and she herself seldom bestow the gift of μῆτις to women, mostly men. The concept of μῆτις was not used as a female attribute; therefore it is a very important part of Penelope's character, because she was known for her μῆτις.

In the *Odyssey*, both Penelope and Odysseus use μῆτις to retain their power and survive, but in different ways; depending on their situations and sometimes their gender. Μῆτις in the *Odyssey* symbolizes their similarities, which in turn symbolizes harmony and a stable οἶκος. Therefore, I will focus on the definition of μῆτις given to Penelope as a female attribute and compare it to Odysseus' μῆτις.

Κλέος Means renowned, glory and fame. It comes from the word κλύω, hear, and it is about what others hear about a person.¹¹ Κλέος is an important theme in both Homeric epics, especially concerning men's κλέος. Fame was everything for the Homeric heroes because with κλέος one might gain the respect of one's people, city and the gods, which in turn could grant the heroes immortality. Like μῆτις, κλέος was usually an attribute given to men, but in the *Odyssey* the word κλέος was used both for men and Penelope. Therefore, κλέος could be earned differently depending on the situation and gender. Surviving the war and returning home would earn Odysseus κλέος, and for Telemachus; his quest for his father would earn him κλέος, while Penelope earns κλέος thanks to her loyalty to her οἶκος and husband.¹²

Μῦθος The word can be strictly translated into myth, but it could also mean speech. However, the concept of speech itself has many different meanings, in a *Homeric Dictionary* it could have a more specific definition: i.e. conversation, request, counsel, command etc.¹³ So thus appears the problem of translation, one Greek word can have different English translations. Some scholars, like Clark and Chaston claim that μῦθος in Homer's epics mean authoritative speeches, and that when women use such authoritative speeches they were seldom

¹¹ *A Greek- English Lexicon*, 958; Jones 1988, 498.

¹² Graziosi & Haubold 2005, 134, 136-138; Jones 1988, 496, 506, *Od.* 24.211-218.

¹³ *Homeric Dicitonary*, 214.

effective, or were not authoritative speeches, μῦθος, at all.¹⁴ Therefore, μῦθος can be a word that is defined by gender. I will translate μῦθος as speech only, and have in mind that μῦθος may be reserved for men only, but women in the *Odyssey* do use μῦθος. It does not matter whether or not Penelope is using μῦθος or not, or if it authoritative or not, she is still holding speeches and using words as tools.

Μέγαρον In the *Homeric Dictionary* it means a large room, but specifically the men's dining hall, which is the chief room in the Homeric world.¹⁵ Women appear not to be allowed in this room, and they have their own chambers. However, in the *Odyssey*, a couple of women do appear in the presence of men in the μέγαρον. Those who do appear in the μέγαρον have to follow certain codes of conduct.

¹⁴ Chaston 2002, 3-9; Clark 2001, 338, 343-345.

¹⁵ *Homeric Dictionary*, 202.

3. RESEARCH HISTORY

3.1 Introduction

Data for research concerning fictive characters of Homer must be derived from sources such as literature and art. However, this research will strictly deal with written sources; primary and secondary, from Homer himself to modern scholars. There is not that much modern research data or theories that specialize specifically on the research topic I have chosen; many may only touch a certain area and or have more general theories. Therefore it is crucial to this research that the main analysis is derived from the original text. This is reflected against what is important for my research in the modern theories, whether they have certain discussion on the topics I am analyzing or may guide me to a new path.

3.2 Classical sources

The Homeric world represents a misogynistic world, where heroes and kings ruled and women were objects, as spoils of war or prizes symbolising a wealthy and great family.¹⁶ In the *Iliad* glory and fame were the main themes, the heroes and kings had to follow specific codes to win fame and glory, which would earn them immortality after death, while women stood powerless and watched their loved ones defend their home and decide their fates.¹⁷ In the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, women had more to say and had more power to wield. In this epic it was the women who were in charge of Odysseus fate. Without them he would not been guaranteed a safe return or a return at all. Female creatures like the sirens and Skylla could have prevented Odysseus from returning home, luring him into his death, and the witch Kirke and the nymph Kalypso could have also kept Odysseus in captivity and prevented him from returning home to his wife. Instead they let him continue his journey and even guided him past danger. Mortal women like queen Arete and Penelope were also crucial for the hero's safe homecoming. The former fed, clothed and gave gifts to the hero so he could continue his journey, and the later, his own wife, kept his home and throne safe and had to be the one who accepted and gave his title and power back.

Also the rules in the *Odyssey* have been changed, or at least have a different concept, in comparison to the *Iliad*. In the *Iliad* the heroes and kings tried to win fame through warfare, which was often their primary concern, while Odysseus' primary concern was to

¹⁶ Briseias, Helen, Andromakhe and Penelope.

¹⁷ Ahrens Dorf 2000, 589; Jaeger 1959, 137-138.

return home, and he won fame through survival and the use of his wits. Even if the heroes homecoming did end up in violence, with the slaughter of the suitors, Odysseus defended his οἶκος from the inside, not the outside, and his primary concern was not to die valiantly, but to defend his own home and his power. Also, through the main part of the epic, there was no male authority present in Ithaka. Penelope, a woman, had to defend her οἶκος, and unlike the women in the Iliad, who stood and watched defencelessly how their homes were attacked, Penelope fought back, with the tools she had.

There are many different English translations of the *Odyssey* and the earliest translation was made by Chapman, around 1857, his take on Homer's *Odyssey* was translated into verse and rhymes.¹⁸ Lattimore, on the other hand, made an attempt on English hexameter, and tried to be as true to the original as the structure of English would allow.¹⁹ Rieu choose to translate the epic as a prose, with no rhythmic lines and division in-between sentences according to the hexameter, instead the sentences flows on, one after another like any other modern fiction.²⁰ Last but not least, Fagles' translation is in verse, but unlike Chapman and Lattimore it does not rhyme and its lines are uneven, so no words had to be changed because of its length and sound.²¹

All of these translations listed are well known and used for studies and private use. The reasons why I choose these few translations were to compare the different approaches of the translators and also the use of specific words and concepts. They are all praised and criticized, but mentioning all their faults and mistakes would take too much of my time and be too tedious to read, instead I am going to briefly mention the problems I encountered.

Chapman's version was translated in the early 17th century; so the iambic pentameter and rhymes had an "Elizabethan touch". It has been praised to be stylistic and beautiful, and it is interesting because it is the first English translation of the *Odyssey*. However, I quite often found it difficult to read and comprehend, especially when some words were shortened and rearranged to follow the rhythm and rhyme. Moreover, instead of using the Greek names of the mythical gods, he used their Latin names. Also Chapman has been criticized for mistranslating certain words and contexts. Even if he had his reasons and translated the words according to his interpretation of the *Odyssey*, it is still very biased and

¹⁸ Chapman 2002.

¹⁹ Lattimore 1991, 22.

²⁰ Rieu 1991.

²¹ Fagles 1996.

also misleading for this research, especially when the placement and use of certain Greek words are crucial for the research.²² Then, in contrast, Rieu's translation of the *Odyssey* would be the perfect translation, because it is easier to read and understand, because it was written in prose. However, because of its unobstructed flow of sentences, it is harder to quote from and cross-reference to a certain line in the original text, even if it has numbers on the side of the pages.

The translations that will be mostly used are the Loeb, translated by A. T. Murray, and Fagles' translations. The former will be mostly helpful to understand and analyse a certain word's placement, use and meaning in the poem, and the later is easy to comprehend and quote, since Fagles tried to capture the essence of the characters, scenes and the use of words and idioms. The quotes made in the English translations will come from the Fagles' translation, while the references come from the Loeb edition.

Of course it is important to keep in mind that many of these translations are personal, even if it was not intended. Since the translator choose the styles to translate the *Odyssey* in and the use and place of words can be misleading or lose the meaning it intended; especially when the author chooses to change the word or translation to match a certain length for the rhythmic stanza or to rhyme the previous sentence. But then again who is to say what meanings Homer intended to convey, mainly because many of the words used has several meanings and concepts depending on the situation, character and gender.

Either way, all of these translations are useful in their ways, as long as one remembers to be objective. They are used to cross-reference Greek words; like οἶκος, μήτις and κλέος.

3.3 Secondary sources

There are many texts on how to read Homer and understand the intended meanings of the epic. Many are collected essays of large scholarly publishers, with the intention to be a sort of a companion for the reader.²³ Others might just discuss the works of Homer in wider topics, which cover most of the themes in Iliad and Odyssey, without in-depth analyses. They are useful, when one is trying to understand the world of Homeric society; like the heroic codes, gender, godly interventions, traditions or even the origin of Homer himself.

²² Chapman 2002, XV.

²³ *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Fowler 2004, is one of many companions to understand Homer and his work better.

Many important themes and concepts are discussed and proved to be informative. Of course these companions do not contain everything there is to say about the Homeric world. For instance, the topics that are discussed are mostly male dominated, because it analyses a misogynous society. When women are mentioned they are usually treated as the other, inferior to gods and men. They are compared to men and their weakness or lack of power is the themes. Usually they are analyzed and discussed in general and grouped into one short topic.²⁴ When discussing women's position of power, it is usually about the restrictions they have and the bad women who deceive and murder, there is not much on the authority they actually hold.

Therefore sources that concentrate on Penelope and other women in her position are essential for the research. Because Penelope was primarily a main character of the *Odyssey*, most of the analyses of her character have been made from the *Odyssey*, and thus the research and its topics may sound repetitive. Doherty, Katz, Lefkowitz and Felson, among others, are all modern scholars who have specialized in women in classical literature in general and also treated Penelope. The main topics were usually analyses of a certain character; comparing them to each other and putting them in different categories. Lefkowitz made a study of *Women in Greek Myth*, in which she divided mythological women in different categories.²⁵ The *Odyssey* may not be the main research and Penelope is briefly mentioned few of the chapters, but it is a good background source: comparing Penelope with other women in Greek myths and their position in fictive societies. Doherty focuses on gender, narrator and audiences in the *Odyssey*, because the whole epic in itself is a story of stories. Her research is mostly on the main character Odysseus, his speeches and his audiences, but she also discusses Penelope's part in the epic.²⁶ Katz and Felson, on the other hand, made Penelope their main topic. Katz discussed Penelope's different attributes while Felson divided Penelope into different characters, discussing her worth, versatility and power position. Both scholars analyses the *Odyssey*, and tries to figure out the heroine, as a character and her interaction with other characters.²⁷

These scholars may choose different research areas or angles, however, most of them touch the same topics and often refers to the same or similar earlier discussions.²⁸ The

²⁴ Graziosi & Haubold 2005, 95-119.

²⁵ Lefkowitz 2007.

²⁶ Doherty 1995.

²⁷ Felson 1994; Katz 1991.

²⁸ Penelope is mention in other primary sources, however they usually only mention her briefly and talk use her name to record bloodlines. When it comes to the struggles of Penelope awaiting her husband's return, *Odyssey* is the only source.

discussion could be traced all the way back to the 1920s, and probably even earlier. However, most quote from the research of the 1970s to 1980s, where the gender issues became established and scholars strived to have a better understanding of the representation of the female gender. However, this does not mean that the research is necessary outdated and irrelevant, instead it reflects the path the discussions had gone. The scholars have interesting and important theories of a certain topic, even if they may not agree with each other. For that reason it is important to analyze the previous discussions about the character, but also be perceptive of the new theories that may derive from the old ones.

Since the data can be repetitive, it may be helpful and problematic to my research. The topics the scholars have researched appear to be analyzed and discussed thoroughly with references and their own conclusions, which provides me with solid data to work with. At the same time there appear to be less focus on many of the research topics I have chosen to analyze. A lot of them analyze other aspects of Penelope as a character and her actions, and quite often she is only viewed as a supporting character; and therefore a lot of the text is on other characters and their actions. Others might only touch a certain part of my research. For instance, in the case of the character of Arete, the Queen of the Phaeakians, the secondary sources are usually about her daughter Nausikaa, her husband or Odysseus visit in her country. Therefore it is crucial to not only analyze her scenes in the *Odyssey*, but also in the few lines which I can find in the data I have collected to do a somewhat deeper analysis of her character.

Lastly, other sources that might not be specifically on Penelope or even the *Odyssey*, are also crucial, that is literature that focuses on themes as in representation of gender in general and women in the ancient societies. Through these sources a general understanding and background for each topic can be established. *Women in the Classical World: Image and Text* is a good example of such a publication. It is a compilation made by several female scholars who specializes on women in the Greek and Roman world.²⁹ They are tools to help us understand the rules and ideas of an ancient society, through the thoughts and values of real ancient cultures compared with modern thoughts. It is important to understand and remember that modern values might not always explain the feelings, thoughts and actions of the characters in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The feelings and actions of Penelope are often compared and explained with modern representation of women, their rights and power. Quite

²⁹ Fantham et.al 1994.

often Penelope's and Arete's influence in their kingdom compared to the idea of modern gender equality, and the result is that their actions are seen as futile, they are weak and powerless, as in the case of Sealey.³⁰ Others might analyze from a feministic point of view and portray the two queens and other female characters as strong and powerful women.³¹ It is important to find a balance to analyze female characters from an ancient text.

Another matter, which is important to consider, is that even if these sources describes an actual society, i.e. the Classical Greece, it can often be used to compare and understand the Homeric society, as long as one always remembers that there are similarities and differences, that not everything that was described in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* might have been describing an actual ancient Greek society. The society described by Homer is an epic. It is also a "better" society with heroes, gods and royalties; a moral and entertaining story for mortals.

Gender is a vital theme in the *Odyssey*, as well as the *Iliad*, the male and female are often compared or seen as each other's opposites, whether it's a definition of a word, the attributes given or the rules and values of the Homeric society. To understand Penelope's power and worth it is necessary to understand the male dominated society she lives in and the social rules she has to obey or bend to.

³⁰ Sealey 1990, 144, 147, is one of the scholars who finds the action of women in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, relatively passive.

³¹ As does Felson (1994) amongst other.

4. PENELOPE'S POWER

4.1 Introduction

The authority and the power Penelope wields over Ithaka and her household has perplexed many scholars, because in a patriarchic world, such as the society portrayed by Homer and also the ancient Greek society, it was very uncommon for a woman to have any power or authority. To analyze and understand the extent of Penelope's power over Ithaka and her household one must comprehend the complex succession rules of the Ithakan royal family and also Penelope's authority of the οἶκος.

4.2 Succession

The rules of succession in the Homeric society were strictly made by and for men. The throne would either stay within the family, from father to son or next in kin, or would be taken by force by a male enemy. Throughout the *Odyssey* the audience is reminded that Telemakhos will be the rightful successor of Ithaka one day; either because of the death of Odysseus or given by Odysseus at a later age, and at the same time one is reminded that Penelope has to give up her power to her son or returning husband.³²

Women appear to have no place or rules that would favour them in the succession process, because they were often portrayed as weak beings that were always under the guardianship of a relative. They appear to not have any independence at all.³³ In the *Iliad* Andromakhe, the wife of Hektor, fully depended on her husband, because her whole family was killed in a war all she had was him: “-you are my father now, my noble mother, a brother too...”³⁴ Therefore it is not surprising that Penelope's power and authority was constantly questioned by the men around her and also by the modern scholars. The few Greek women who did have the opportunity to rule, both fictive and historical, often only ruled for a short period of time, usually during periods of war or in times of crisis when the female successor was keeping the power for her absent husband and/or underage son.³⁵ Quite often it would not end well, either the woman was physically weak and could not protect their kingdom from enemies, or they would be mentally weak and give in to temptation and kill their husbands for their lovers, as in the case of Klytemnestra.³⁶ Penelope was one of the few who succeeded in

³² *Od.*1.245-251; 1.356-359; 19.156-163.

³³ Lefkowitz 2007, 25.

³⁴ *Il.* 6.508-509, Robert Fagles' translation.

³⁵ Lefkowitz 2007, 145.

³⁶ *Od.*11.387-439.

protecting Ithaka and returning it to her husband.

Even if Penelope was never the rightful ruler, or considered as a legitimate successor or had rules and laws that would aid her and legitimize her authority, she was still queen of Ithaka and its ruler for twenty long years. She was the wife of a king, the mother of a prince and the daughter of a king.³⁷ Odysseus found her worthy and gave her the authority to rule in his absence, and she was the one that could choose the outcome of the kingdom.³⁸

Penelope's claim and justification of authority can be explained by the lack of authority in her son, Telemakhos, and father-in-law, Laertes. Both are men with equal rights to the throne, but none of them ever claims it or has the ability to do so, which leaves Ithaka in the hands of a woman.

4.3 The authority of Telemakhos.

Even if the male succession tradition prevents Penelope to fully gain authority over Ithaka, it at the same time prevents Telemakhos from taking the authority away from his mother. According to Penelope Odysseus allowed her to rule over Ithaka until she could "...see the beard on the boy's cheek"³⁹, which implies that when Telemakhos has grown up and of age she may give the throne to him; the rightful heir. When the *Odyssey* begins Telemakhos has already grown up, he should be over twenty years old, because he was born right before Odysseus went to war, and when Odysseus finally return to his home he himself says he has been gone for twenty years.⁴⁰ If Penelope had followed her husband's instructions word for word she should have given the kingdom to their son at the first sign of beard on the boy's cheek, yet Penelope was still the one in charge and Telemakhos had no authority in his home. By his own actions and the remarks and actions by others, including his mother and Athena, Telemakhos appears to be too weak to gain his rightful place on the throne and lacking the respect attributed to a king or a man. When he tries to claim authority and respect he does not really succeed. In Book 1 Telemakhos rebukes his mother who disapproved of a song sung by the bard, he scolds her for involving herself in matters of men; *μῦθος* and the power over the household, and sends her back to her quarters.⁴¹

³⁷ *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1135, Penelope's father was Ikarios, a Spartan king, and Penelope is also the cousin of Helen.

³⁸ *Od.*18.256-270.

³⁹ *Od.*18.269-270.

⁴⁰ *Od.*19.482-484.

⁴¹ *Od.*1.345-364.

“So, mother,
go back to your quarters. Tend to your own tasks,
the distaff and the loom, and keep the women
working hard as well. As for giving orders,
men will see to that, but I most of all:
I hold the reins of power in this house.”

Astonished,
she withdrew to her own room. She took to heart
the clear good sense in what her son had said.”

*Od.1.410-416*⁴²

However, even if Penelope obeys her son and even appears to understand his reasons for sending her away, Penelope is still the one with the authority and she still in several scenes spoke amongst men. Also when he tried to gain authority amongst the suitors, they only scolded, ridiculed or belittled him.⁴³ They even plotted to kill him, before he could grow strong and legally become the king.⁴⁴ In other words, something more than just age seems to be required of a young heir in order to assume the throne.

4.3.1 Discussion

The extent of Penelope’s authority and Telemakhos incapability of gaining legal authority has puzzled many, but their extent of authority or lack of it are linked to each other, one cannot gain full authority in the presence of the other. In the scene where Telemakhos scolds his mother for interfering in matters of men, he tries to take the authority of *μῦθος*, speech and power over her household away from her. How much impact it had on Penelope’s or Telemakhos authority depends on the issue if *μῦθος* was explicitly for men or if *μῦθος* was also the domain of women.

What is so unique with the *Odyssey* is that women were more independent and had the freedom to involve themselves in what was considered as domains reserved for men, especially compared to the *Iliad*. Clark has calculated that in the *Odyssey* mortal women were responsible for twenty-seven occasions/scenes involving various forms of the word *μῦθος*, compared to the *Iliad* were there were only five occasions/scenes.⁴⁵ However, he also discussed that the speeches made by male characters, imply that *μῦθος* might be exclusively

⁴² Robert Fagles’ translation.

⁴³ *Od.1.365-366*. The suitors disrespectfully in front of the prince started shouting and howling, making rude remarks that they would like to lie with his mother. *Od.1.383-387, 1.399-404*. The main suitors Antinous and Eurymachus disrespects Telemakhos after he bravely stood up against the suitors. The former claimed that the prince lack courage and speech because they had to have come from the gods, and the latter implied that there could be someone else ruling Ithaka.

⁴⁴ *Od.16.383-392,16.448*.

⁴⁵ Clark 2001, 343-344.

reserved for men or that the women's *μῦθος* appear to be weak. *Μῦθος* could mean public and authoritative speech, which was only used by men, and when women used *μῦθος* it might have seemed futile.⁴⁶

Chaston agrees that *μῦθος* was used as meaning an authoritative speech in Homeric society, and names a couple of examples of Penelope using *μῦθος* amongst men. But her speeches may seem futile, because the listeners, regardless of whether it was her son or the suitors, usually corrected her or scolded her.⁴⁷ I do not want to go in too deep into the discussion on exactly what the concept of *μῦθος* means, whether or not it was only restricted to men or that if women did use *μῦθος* it was considered weak, because it will be too time consuming and long winded. Instead I will focus on the fact that Penelope, and other women did make speeches in the *Odyssey*. Even after the first scene in Book 1, Penelope still continued make authoritative speeches among men, no matter how ineffective it may have appeared, against Telemakhos' orders. Penelope's *μῦθος* appear to be verbal struggles against the suitors and sometime her son. She was a queen who was trapped in her own house with many greedy and strong men, and the only tool she had was her words and her intelligence. As the warriors of the Trojan War struggled to and fro for many years so did Penelope, but with *μῦθος*. If her words were ineffective, so was the words of Telemakhos; both of them had some authority, but not full or legal authority to wield and intimidate the suitors.

Either way, Penelope did yield to Telemakhos in Book 1, and it might symbolize Telemakhos' authority. However, the farther events support my view that Penelope was still in charge. She retired to her own quarters because she was following a patriarchic social rule, she was being present in a room where women usually were banned, not because she feared or yielded to her sons claim for authority.⁴⁸ Also she might have left the hall so that her son would not lose face in front of men who should respect and fear him, she was preparing him to be the man he should or would become.

It was only at the very end, when Telemakhos returns from his voyage, that Penelope recognized him as a man and started to take his *μῦθος* seriously. In one scene Penelope scolds her son for still behaving and thinking like a boy, even when he physically appears to be a grown man, he then corrects his mother: "My heart takes note of everything, feels it, too, both the good and bad-the boy you knew is gone."⁴⁹ Later Penelope even admits

⁴⁶ Clark 2001, 338, 344-345.

⁴⁷ Chaston 2002, 3-9, she uses the examples from book 1, 16, 18 and 21.

⁴⁸ Chaston 2002, 4, either the *μέγαρον*, the hall, was banned from women or not, because the suitors occupied the hall it became a public place; Doherty 1992 162, 165.

⁴⁹ *Od.* 18.258-259, Robert Fagles' translation.

to the disguised Odysseus in Book 19, that Telemakhos has indeed become the man of the house: "...my son is galled as they squander his estate-he sees it all. He's a grown man by now, equipped to tend to his own royal house and tend it well..."⁵⁰ Telemakhos openly declare that he is no longer a boy, before he only tried to claim authority, but now he returns with determination and explains not only is he a man, he is also fulfilling his role as a leader by observing his surroundings, and knows the difference between good and bad. Penelope then acknowledges him and his ability to be a great leader.

4.4 Telemakhos' rites of passage

Telemakhos could not succeed at home, so he had to go out on a journey of his own. Heroes and kings of the mythological world had to either go and fight in a war or out on a voyage and fight monsters and defend kingdoms.⁵¹ In the *Odyssey*, unlike the *Iliad*, there was no epic war; instead a journey had to be made, Odysseus journey home and Telemakhos' rite of passage. Telemakhos' voyage is so significant that the first four chapters centre on this. Before he embarked on his journey he did not only lack the respect of the suitors, he himself appears to lack respect for his father. When speaking to a disguised Athena, Telemakhos indicates, that he himself is not sure if his father is Odysseus, and that he believes that his father probably died at sea, which is not honourable and leaves no honour for him either.⁵² He had heard about his father all his life, but he himself never really knew him and the occupation of his house and estate by the suitors has made him bitter. But on his journey he meets people with news about his father and he returns home with a new found respect for him. When he finally returned to Ithaka he appears to have matured and able to claim authority and respect, something his mother acknowledged. This was important because she was the only one who could give him the control of Ithaka, if Odysseus was actually dead.⁵³ As his final test, he was able to string the same bow that only his father could master, proving that he was his father's son and that he had become the great man that one day would rule Ithaka.⁵⁴

4.4.1 Discussion

Telemakhos' lack of authority was not because his mother had monopolised it, it had to do

⁵⁰ Od.19.178-180, Robert Fagles' translation.

⁵¹ Finkelberg 1995 12.

⁵² Od.1.166-168, 213-220.

⁵³ Od.19.156-161; Van Wees 1995, 161.

⁵⁴ Od.21.128-129; Telemakhos appear to be able to string the bow on his fourth try, when Odysseus signaled him to fail.

with him as a person. He was already of age, it could not be his lack of facial hair that kept him away from his rightful throne; it was probably his mental maturity and what others thought of him. Since being of age physically did not guarantee the right to his father throne, Telemakhos had to be mentally prepared to take charge and also to demonstrate his maturity in front of others in order to gain the respect and acknowledgment of the suitors and his mother.

His threats to the suitors were futile; they did not fear him until they realized he was planning a journey.

“By god, what a fine piece of work he’s carried off!
 Telemakhos-what insolence-and we thought his little jaunt
 would come to grief. But in spite of us all, look,
 the young cub slips away, just like that-
 picks the best crew in the land and off he sails.
 And this is just the start of the trouble he can make.
 Zeus kill that brazen boy before he hits his prime!
 Quick, fetch me a swift ship and twenty men-
 I’ll waylay him from ambush, board him coming back
 in the straits between Ithaka and rocky Same.
 This gallant voyage of his to find his father
 will find *him* wrecked at last!

*Od.4.746-757*⁵⁵

This speech is made by Antinous when he finds out that Telemakhos has disembarked on a journey in secret. He, like the other suitors, appears not to consider Telemakhos as an equal; he calls him a “young cub” and hopes that Zeus will “kill that brazen boy before he hits his prime”. The suitors might have feared he would bring reinforcement; either his father or friends and allies, but they also feared that he, as he in fact did, would return in his “prime” and retake his kingdom and gain the authority and respect which was rightfully his. However, before they knew of the journey or started speculate on the outcome of the journey, the suitors did not view him as an equal or a threat to their plans to marry his mother and become the king of Ithaka.⁵⁶ The immaturity of Telemakhos is treated also by Athena, who reminds him that he had to grow up and become a man: You must not cling onto your boyhood any longer-it’s time you were a man.”⁵⁷ She also encourages him to take action against his enemies and suggested that a journey was the answer.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Robert Fagles’ translation.

⁵⁶ Halverson 1986 123.

⁵⁷ Od1.341-342, Robert Fagles’ translation.

⁵⁸ Od.1.293-297.

“For you
 I have some good advice, if only you will accept it.
 Fit out a ship with twenty oars, the best in sight,
 sail in quest of news of your long-lost father.
 Someone may tell you something
 or you may catch a rumour straight from Zeus,
 rumour that carries news to men like nothing else.
 First go down to Pylos, question old King Nestor,
 then cross over to Sparta, to red-haired Menelaus,
 of all the bronze-armoured Achaeans the last man back.
 Now, if you hear your father’s alive and heading home,
 hard-pressed as you are, brave out one more year.
 If you hear he’s dead, no longer among the living,
 then back you come to the native land you love,
 raise his grave mound, build his honors high
 with full funeral rites that he deserves-
 and give your mother to another husband.

*Od.1.320-337*⁵⁹

Telemakhos had to earn κλέος like any other hero, even if his quest was different from the others; he did not have to fight a war, slay monsters or try to find his way home like his father. To earn κλέος Telemakhos had to find himself and his father, his κλέος was linked to his honourable heritage. In the *Iliad* κλέος was often achieved through heroic deeds; if one died in battle one may be given a heroes’ funeral or a monument.⁶⁰ Usually a young hero’s or a king’s heroic deeds could bring κλέος to one’s family; especially the elders or one’s state, like Hektor.⁶¹ However, it could have the effect the other way around, ones royal and heroic lineage can bring one κλέος. If Telemakhos could find his dead father and give him the heroic funeral he deserved, than it would not matter if her returned without his father, instead he would have given his father κλέος which he would “inherit”.⁶²

Like many adolescents the prince of Ithaka was looking for his identity, he had been told over and over again that he was the son of Odysseus, and yet he questioned his heritage.⁶³ It would not matter if he could return with his father or not, as long as he found himself, and to do so he had go on a journey. On his journey he meets people who are loyal and knows his father, they told Telemakhos of Odysseus deeds and character. Knowing his royal ancestry was not enough, he had to know what kind of person his father was too. Even if he does not find his father on his journey or know about his whereabouts, Telemakhos has

⁵⁹ Robert Fagles’ translation.

⁶⁰ Jones 1988, 498; *Od.5.* 308-312.

⁶¹ Jones 1988, 498.

⁶² *Od.1.*236-240.

⁶³ *Od.1.*213-220.

heard of his father's κλέος, a κλέος he could proudly call his families and his own. Telemakhos' rite of passage did not mean physical growth, but emotional growth, by recognizing his father as a great man, he himself is one step closer of becoming a great man, a new path has been shown to him.

4.5 Laertes, father of Odysseus

Laertes, the former king of Ithaka, is not mentioned much in the *Odyssey*, he only exists in the background. He has no brothers, like Odysseus and Telemakhos.⁶⁴ He and his wife, Antikleia, appear to have abdicated the throne and made Odysseus and Penelope the king and queen of Ithaka, before the Trojan War. Both he and his wife seem to have been healthy when they abdicated, because in book 11 and 15 it is explained that the couple turned worried and ill after Odysseus joined the Trojan War and later disappeared. Antikleia died of grief and Laertes turned worse after his wife died.⁶⁵ When the epic of the *Odyssey* begins, Laertes had already settled down at a farm, living with few servants, far away from the palace and its problems. He appears to have no interest in returning to the throne to protect his kingdom from enemies.

4.5.1 Discussion

Laertes absence and impassiveness to the affairs of his kingdom is perplexing. Nowhere in the text is there a proper explanation when and why he abdicated the throne. Old age does not appear to be a probable cause in a Homeric society, especially when kings like Priam of Troy was still ruling in his old age, and did not abdicate to any of his many adult and mature sons. The illness and weakness of Laertes is described, but appears to have occurred after Odysseus left Ithaka, and had worsened after his beloved wife's death.⁶⁶ So he seems to have at least been capable of ruling up until the departure of Odysseus, but yet he had already given the throne to his son.

There are also no mentioning of Odysseus taking the throne by force, because over and over again in the *Odyssey*, Laertes decline in health is explained because he worried of his son's absens and the love for his son.⁶⁷ Also Odysseus for some reason leaves his

⁶⁴ *Od.*16.117-120.

⁶⁵ *Od.* 11.180-204;15.351-360.

⁶⁶ *Od.*15.351-360.

⁶⁷ Finkelberg 1991, 306.

kingdom in the hands of his wife and not his father.⁶⁸ Maybe, unlike other royal families, the Ithakan tradition was to leave the throne to a son who has proven himself worthy to take the place and responsibility of a king. Maybe age and health of the present king does not matter as long there is a successor worthy of the crown. Unlike the king of Troy, who could only give advice and watch his sons fight the war, the king of Ithaka is capable to make his own decisions and fight the battle too. The reluctance of Penelope to let her son take over the throne and take the rite of passage Telemakhos had to endure might be a reflection of a local tradition of succession. The authority to rule, which Telemakhos gained after his journey, did not only prepare him to take over the kingdom in his father's absence, but also later in the future when it would be time for Odysseus to retire from the throne.

Whatever the reasons are for Laertes abdication, he is still absent both mentally and physically. He completely removed himself from the states affairs. He does not show or give any support to his daughter-in-law or grandson. Advice from an elder could have been very helpful to a leader without legal authority, especially because he used to be the king of Ithaka, but he was not present for that either. Telemakhos had to grow up without a proper father figure and Penelope had to bring up a prince and rule over Ithaka without the support of a male relative. His mere presence in the court would probably have aided Penelope and Telemakhos. It is also not clear if his absence is because of his grief and physical weakness. Could Laertes have been present if he was not grieving, or is his absence another part of his abdication? Because he is the only son and so is Odysseus and there is no possibility for any strong male relative to assist, it would be apparent thing for the father of the king to be the one guiding the troubled queen and prince, but that is also not explained or mentioned in the *Odyssey*. Penelope and Telemakhos do not even expect that Laertes will come and help. When Penelope finds out that the suitors are planning to kill her son, she plans to turn to her father-in-law for help because she cannot do anything herself, but she is at the same time doubtful that he will be of any help.⁶⁹

None of the characters questions Laertes absence. It is as if there is a mutual agreement that he has no authority left and no one seems to rely on him to take charge again. Penelope's power struggle is always with her son or the suitors, each with their reason to rule and claim for power and wealth, but Laertes has never been in a power struggle with Penelope, nor has anyone questioned her authority because it should belong to the former king.

⁶⁸ *Od.*18.259-270.

⁶⁹ *Od.*4.735-741.

Because there are no proper explanations or even a suggestion within the text of the *Odyssey*, it is not possible to fully understand the abdication and absence of Laertes. It is either an unspoken understanding that these are the succession rituals of Odysseus' family or just a plot to make Penelope's struggles more difficult. There may be further explanations in the parts of the Homeric cycle of epics that are now lost to us. Either way, the former king's absence gives Penelope right to power, because there is no rightful king who could take the throne and power away from her.

4.6 Penelope, king of Ithaka?

With no appropriate male successor to rule Ithaka, the only one left is Penelope, even though her authority is not absolute. In the *Odyssey*, Penelope loses and regains her power several times. It is a power struggle between her and the men residing in the palace, whether it is her own son or one of the suitors. Penelope has to remind the suitors that Odysseus gave her orders; that she should be the one in charge of his affairs and his parents while he was away, and that one day if he did not return, she may marry whomever she wished.⁷⁰ She is also complimented by Odysseus himself, although in disguise, that she could be compared to a king; leader of powerful men and leading its people and kingdom to prosperity,⁷¹ elevating her to a status of a man, and above the status of a woman.

Whenever Penelope's authority is given or claimed it is compared to that of a man's, while every time her authority is questioned and criticized, her weakness shows her lack of male authority. When Telemakhos argues with his mother, she is reminded that she is a woman and should leave things to him, the man of the house,⁷² and when the suitors question her authority they remind her that she cannot rule the kingdom on her own as woman and that she should quickly subdue herself and become someone's wife and not ruler. However, neither the suitors nor Telemakhos were able to force Penelope to remarry, until after Telemakhos returned from his voyage and Penelope herself felt that the time has come to remarry. All the men could do was complain and urge the queen to remarry.⁷³ They all beg of her to return to her father's home and choose whomever she likes to marry her. No matter if it is Telemakhos or Penelope's father, who gives her away or approves of her remarriage, Penelope appears to be the one who has the last word on whom she wants to marry. At the end of the epic saga, and through many trials Penelope accepts the disguised beggar as her

⁷⁰ *Od.*18.260-270.

⁷¹ *Od.*19.106-116.

⁷² *Od.*1.345-364; 18.226-242.

⁷³ *Od.*1.275-276; *Od.*2.113-114; 127-128; 2.130-140.

husband, and he can once again become the man of the house. The great scene of Book 23, when the couple finally meet, after the death of the suitors, they appear to have to return to square one; getting to know each other, test each other and regaining their trust of each other, as if she has to give her hand away once again to her husband.

“Penelope felt her knees go slack, her heart surrender,
recognizing the strong clear signs Odysseus offered.
She dissolved in tears, rushed to Odysseus, flung her arms
around his neck and kissed his head and cried out,
“Odysseus-don’t flare up at me now, not you,
always the most understanding man alive!...”

In my hearts of hearts I always cringed with fear
some fraud might come, beguile me with his talk;
the world is full of the sort,...

But now, since you have revealed such overwhelming proof-...
you’ve conquered my heart, my hard heart, at last!”

*Od.23.230-258*⁷⁴

And with her heart, Odysseus also is given his throne back. Now they can rule the kingdom as king and queen, as husband and wife.

4.6.1 Discussion

Penelope’s “succession” is complex; she has been compared to being as great as a king, but she is still not recognized as the king of Ithaka. She might not be able to succeed the throne, but she more or less holds the power to determine the next king. The audience is constantly reminded that Penelope is a woman and not a man, and even if she tries to compete with men and abide by the rules and laws of the society, she cannot succeed because she is a woman, no matter what power she was given by her own husband. Telemakhos tries to take the authority away from his mother by reminding her of her place as a woman and wishing her to quickly remarry so he can rightfully take over the throne.⁷⁵ The suitors and her parents also keep on reminding her that she cannot rule on her own that it is her duty as a woman to find a new suitable husband.⁷⁶

She has to focus on the strength she has as a woman and the queen of the

⁷⁴ Robert Fagles’ translation.

⁷⁵ *Od.1.356-361.*

⁷⁶ *Od.2.113-114; Od.19.156-159.*

kingdom as well as putting on a persona of a man.⁷⁷ She is confined to the walls of her own home as a woman, but she also engages with the men in verbal discussions, something which is usually reserved for men. Several times Penelope is in the company of men. Although she is always escorted by her women, and her words may appear futile, she is still in the presence of men and is not afraid of saying what she has on her mind.⁷⁸ Penelope's presence in the *μέγαρον* may appear passive, but that is her tool to exercise authority. There are very few women who were allowed in the *μέγαρον*, and even fewer who may speak in the *μέγαρον*. Other women like Helen and Arete, both queens in the *Odyssey*, they appear to join the companies of men in the *μέγαρον*, but both of them has their husbands present, and when they do speak it is to aid and agree with their husbands.⁷⁹ Penelope's actions appear to be passive because she does not take physical actions to rule. She schemes and she uses her words to argue or lure her enemies. Physical actions are reserved for men in the Homeric society, and it is reserved for Odysseus when he finally returns.

Even though she was compared to a king by her husband, it is only an attribute she was given.⁸⁰ It is an attribute which was similar to his when he was king, but it still does not mean he gave her the legal authority to become king in his absence.⁸¹ The words of her husband appear not to be enough to convince the suitors, however, the promise of her being the one to choose her next husband, appear to give her some power; power over the succession of Odysseus' kingdom. Many scholars claim that the land of Ithaka is not for Penelope to give away, because it will go directly to her son.⁸² Nevertheless, if Telemakhos would be disposed of, the kingdom would naturally be given away along with the bride, if not whole of the kingdom at least the palace and the status.⁸³ The suitors had been occupying the palace ever since Odysseus left for war, even then Penelope's hand in marriage was tempting. As the plot of a Greek tragedy, one of the eligible suitors could marry Penelope and be the guardian of a young Telemakhos and take the responsibility as a substitute ruler over the kingdom, and later, while the prince was still young, easily dispose of him and become the legal successor of Ithaka.

Therefore, Penelope's position as a ruler is very important and she wields some authority as the queen of Ithaka. She might not have the title of a king, but with her family

⁷⁷ Gregory 1996, 17.

⁷⁸ *Od.*18.206-211; *Od.*21.63-73; Marquardt 1993, 153.

⁷⁹ Van Wees 1995, 155-156.

⁸⁰ *Od.*19.107-114.

⁸¹ Chaston 2002, 7; Foley 1995, 105.

⁸² Halverson 1986, 121-122.

⁸³ Halverson 1986, 122-123; Finkelberg 1991, 307; *Od.*16.383-386; 22.49-53.

lineage, wealth and power she is able to decide who can be the next successor.⁸⁴ Because of the lack of other male successors, Laertes is old and absent, Telemakhos is too young and with the consent of her husband, Penelope appears to have the authority to decide the faith of Ithaka. Even at the very end Penelope has to be the one who accept and approves of Odysseus, so he can come back as her husband and king. Without her approval, and their trust in each other, they would not become a husband and wife in a harmonious marriage.⁸⁵

4.7 Οἶκος

As discussed earlier the Greek word οἶκος has many different definitions, especially in Homeric epics, depending on situation and gender. The definition that will be focused on is οἶκος for women, or more likely heroines. For women, οἶκος is not only the walls of a house but also the people who reside within the walls; the household and family. The definition of οἶκος for heroines is also household and family, but they could also use it to strengthen their power by establishing a harmonious and respected marriage. A stable οἶκος could represent authority for women.⁸⁶

4.8 Nausikaa: the promising bride

Throughout the epic, the audience is offered the image of a perfect and harmonious marriage; its importance and the rewards. The Phaeakian kingdom depicts a utopian society, where men and women almost appear equal. Odysseus first encounters princess Nausikaa, whom is of age and ready to marry. Our hero starts with well wishing the princess for a perfect marriage:

“And may the good gods give you all your heart desires:
 husband, and house, and lasting harmony too.
 No finer, greater gift in the world than that...
 when man and woman posses their home, two minds,
 two hearts that work as one. Despair to their enemies,
 a joy to all their friends. Their own best claim to glory.”

*Od.6.198-203*⁸⁷

Nausikaa believes she has found her perfect mate and starts a courting dance. She realises that what the stranger thinks of a perfect marriage, is what she is looking for in a husband and a marriage, the traditions she has been thought by her own parents. She tells her maids:

⁸⁴ Thomas 1988, 264.

⁸⁵ Chaston 2002, 15-16.

⁸⁶ Pedrick 1988.

⁸⁷ Robert Fagles' translation.

“At first he seems appalling, I must say-
now he seems like a god who rules the skies up there!
Ah, if only a man like *that* were called my husband,
lived right here, pleased to stay forever...”

*Od.6.268-271*⁸⁸

Later when she guides Odysseus through her city, through the rumours she thinks her people would spread, she insinuates what she truly feels and hopes:

“Now who’s that tall, handsome stranger Nausikaa has in tow?
Where’d she light on *him*? Her husband-to-be, just wait!
But who-some shipwrecked stray she’s taken up with,
some alien from abroad? Since nobody lives nearby.
Unless it’s really a god come down from the blue
to answer all her prayers, and to have her all his days.
Good riddance! Let the girl go roving to find herself
a man from foreign parts.

*Od.6.303-310*⁸⁹

Nausikaa had found out what Odysseus wished for in a perfect marriage, and she wanted to let him know that she also had the same wishes for marriage. She indirectly told him that she approved of him, by describing him as a god more than once makes him a perfect candidate to match her. Also she mentions that a man from outside her community does not matter, and that she is prepared to give him a home, if he decides to stay with her forever.

This image of a perfect marriage is not only for Nausikaa, but it also symbolizes what Odysseus and Penelope are aiming for and what makes their bonds so strong. This passage is one of the main themes through the whole epic, a model which every woman should aim for and achieve for great happiness and blissful οἶκος.⁹⁰

4.8.1 Discussion

The harmonious marriage Odysseus speaks of represents a unity and like-mindedness between two people, who eventually will become one. While home and alone, Penelope has to maintain and keep the balance of her part. She has to stay strong and remember her duties as a perfect wife, so when Odysseus does return, they might unite and become one again. Both

⁸⁸ Robert Fagles’ translation.

⁸⁹ Robert Fagles’ translation.

⁹⁰ Felson 1997, 47.

husband and wife are gifted by Athena with same attributes; wisdom and knowledge, and Odysseus compared his wife's role as a ruler to his own greatness.⁹¹ They trick their opponents in different ways, Penelope with Laertes shroud and Odysseus by fooling the Cyclop.⁹² They even trick and test each other when Odysseus is disguised as a beggar in front of his wife and when she tests her husband at the very end. They appear to be perfect for each other and can compensate each other where there is need. One of the reason Penelope is the ideal wife is because she can compliment her husband as his equal; the similar attributes the couple is given, are male attributes, not female. By receiving male attributes Penelope is worthy of being Odysseus wife.

The death of the suitors is a collaboration by both Penelope and Odysseus. One would not succeed without the other. Penelope had to set up the plan, and lure the suitors into the bow competition.⁹³ The one to finish it had to be Odysseus, winning the competition and slaying their enemies.

The courtship dance Nausikaa went through probably represents what Odysseus and Penelope once did when they were young and what they have to do once again do to unite their marriage. Like Nausikaa wanted to be satisfied that Odysseus was the perfect match for her, Penelope has to be sure that Odysseus was indeed her husband and not an imposter, which happens a lot in Greek mythology.⁹⁴ They do not only have to approve of each other, but also has the same dreams and hopes for a successful marriage.⁹⁵ Where Nausikaa did not get a mutual agreement of marriage, Penelope and her husband had a mutual agreement that they could once again trust each other and reunite.

4.9 Arete, wife, mother and queen

Like Penelope Arete has an important blood lineage. She came of a dynasty of godly kings who were the offspring of the gods, and she herself is the daughter of the former king and married her uncle who was next in line for the throne.⁹⁶ The text also makes clear that she was respected by her husband, children and people. Twice has Odysseus been told that Arete is the person whom Odysseus should plead to if he wants a safe return.⁹⁷ She has been praised for her wisdom and her words are of importance to her husband and the men in her kingdom.

⁹¹ *Od.*2.116-122; *Od.*19.106-116.

⁹² *Od.*2.93-109.

⁹³ *Od.*21.68-79.

⁹⁴ Sealey 1990, 145.

⁹⁵ Felson & Slatkin 2004, 104.

⁹⁶ *Od.*7.54-72.

⁹⁷ *Od.*6.303-315; 7.73-77.

Following the advice he has received, Odysseus approaches Arete first and not the king, Alkinous, and pleads for her compassion.⁹⁸

However, Arete stays silent for most of the conversations. Alkinous and others in his court are the ones debating and making the decisions. When she does speak, she appears rude and questions her guest; about his name, origin and clothes.⁹⁹ Other than that she appear to be sitting by the hearth, spinning her purple yarn, close to her husband, and always aware of Odysseus and listening into the conversation. She even joins the men in their feasting.¹⁰⁰

4.9.1 Discussion

If Nausikaa represented the beginning of a perfect marriage, Arete represented the harmonious marriage. The Phaeakian idea of marriage appears to be the idea of equality. Because of Arete's blood line she can be seen as an equal to Alkinous; an equal heiress.¹⁰¹ Also because they appear to have marriages within their own community, Arete and Alkinous appear to stand on equal ground. Arete does not have to move in to her husband's home, like most women do in the ancient society.¹⁰²

Homer builds up the picture of a powerful and strong woman who is able to determine the fate of her people, but when Odysseus finally meets this great woman, she does not act. At first hand this might appear confusing, especially when it is mostly Alkinous who acts and gives orders.¹⁰³ However, one must always remember that equality in our modern society might not have the same meaning in ancient society. Arete and her husband represents equality as good as it gets. First of all Arete has κλέος that even the gods know of.¹⁰⁴ She is shown a lot of respect by her people and especially her husband and he "honours her as no woman is honoured on this earth, of all the wives now keeping households under their husbands' way."¹⁰⁵ Arete and Alkinous complement each other, and almost represent the ideal image of a couple who shares the royal burden. Arete speaks, when she does speak, and Alkinous is in charge of the action.¹⁰⁶ In the *Odyssey* book 7, she is mentioned to be known to

⁹⁸ *Od.*7.142-152.

⁹⁹ *Od.*7.236-239.

¹⁰⁰ *Od.*6.303-309.

¹⁰¹ Patterson 1998, 60.

¹⁰² Fantham et al.1994, 27.

¹⁰³ Clark. 2001, 346; Sealey 1990, 147: describes Arete as being passive and not taking any initiative; Wohl 1993, 29.

¹⁰⁴ *Od.*7.73-77 Athena is one of the people who informs Odysseus about the great reputation of Arete.

¹⁰⁵ *Od.*7.77-79 the transl. Robert Fagles.

¹⁰⁶ Wohl 1993, 30-31.

dissolve the quarrel of men, but it does not mention on how she does it, or gives any example on such circumstance. Probably she verbally dissolves quarrels, using her intelligence, and Alkinous does not appear to get involved in her matters. If Nausikaa and Athena are right and Odysseus only needs the approval of the queen to return home, it would probably be Arete's trust and verbal approval he needs, and then later Alkinous action to gather the ship and men to return home to Ithaka. That is why, even if Arete does not act or speak, she is always by her husband's side, listening and watching; making sure that Odysseus is a man whom they can trust. She even rudely interrogates the hero about who he is and where he got his clothes, because she knew the clothes he wore was from her household; a sign that she is the one who can grant him such gifts, and that she is very wise and will not let a stranger like him trick her.¹⁰⁷ Also by not speaking and almost being not present in the company of men, symbolises a stable οἶκος. The initial reception of a guest was the duty of a man and not a woman.¹⁰⁸ By being by her husband's side she can protect their οἶκος together.

The same goes for Penelope's and Odysseus' relationship, she is the one who speaks and Odysseus acts. She fights of the suitors with words, while Odysseus tries to survive his journey with physical labour, and later Penelope lures the suitors with words into a bow competition and Odysseus is the one who with physical strength kills the suitors. They together survive, defeat their enemies and protect their οἶκος.¹⁰⁹

4.10 Conclusion

Penelope's authority over Ithaka is very complex; one moment she appears to have control and in the next she has none. Her authority was given by Odysseus himself, and he specifically says that she has to tend to all his matters when he is gone, but her authority has her limits. Because she is not a man and she has no legitimate rights to the throne she is forced to rule without a title. She has the status of a queen, but not of a king. Also her authority appears to be limited to her own οἶκος making her a prisoner of her own home.

However, because there are no legitimate male heirs to the throne at the moment, she is the only one who is qualified to rule; because Odysseus left Ithaka in her care, Telemakhos is not yet of age and Laertes is absent. Therefore, her position is very important, especially because a marriage with her would entitle one of the suitors the kingdom, when there is no suitable heir to take the throne away.

¹⁰⁷ Pedrick 1988, 92.

¹⁰⁸ Pedrick 1988, 87.

¹⁰⁹ Chaston 2002, 12; Felson & Slatkin 2004, 103.

Because she can only fight her battles from within the walls of her οἶκος protecting it with whatever tool she has is important. By keeping the foundation of her marriage strong she can protect her οἶκος from intruders. As the other half of a perfect marriage she had to uphold her role as the ideal wife, and through that she could justify her authority as the queen and wife of Odysseus. Even if their marriage might not look ideal and equal to modern standards, it appears to be in the ancient society; where both wife and husband share responsibilities, to the extent ones gender might allow.

By regarding these factors Penelope justified her authority to the extent she was allowed in a male dominated society, fought the battles she could, earned the respect of an ideal woman and protected her οἶκος to the very end.

5. PENELOPE'S WORTH

5.1 Introduction

Except of Penelope's succession position and her harmonious marriage, κλέος and μῆτις are two other tools she can use to establish a safe οἶκος and justification of her authority. However, κλέος and μῆτις are two qualities that do not only reflect Penelope's power but also her worth as a woman.

5.2 Μῆτις

The Greek word μῆτις translates into shrewdness and wisdom.¹¹⁰ It is one of the attributes that is not only used to describe Odysseus, but even his wife, making it one of the gifts that unites the couple in mental-similarity. Μῆτις appear to be a family attribute, which is quite uncommon, because men and women usually have different gendered attributes. Athena inherited great wisdom from her parents, and in her turn granted the gift of wisdom to both Odysseus and Penelope.

Μῆτις, when used, is a positive attribute given to men, while if given to women it usually has a negative attribute to their characters, which is why it is unique that Penelope accomplish a lot of things with her μῆτις. She protected her οἶκος through her cunningness by tricking the suitors several times,¹¹¹ her intelligence made her likeminded with her husband and unified them and through her wisdom she earned herself κλέος.

5.3 A game of Intelligence

Like most Greek mythology, there is no single origin of the mythology of Metis. One myth says that like many other of Zeus conquests, Metis was also married to Zeus by force. He chased her and finally captured and made her his wife. To be able to escape him Metis had to use her intelligence to trick the god of thunder. She appeared to have the power of metamorphosis and changed her appearances, however, Zeus was as cunning and foiled her every plan. Both Metis and Zeus competed to trick each other. Of course Zeus won at the end and made her his wife.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ *Homeric dictionary*, s.v. μῆτις.

¹¹¹ She tricks the suitors for three whole years with her weaving of Laertes shroud, *Od.*2.103-109; 19.148-151; later she charms the suitors to bring her gifts, she tells them it is a way for them to win her over, while in fact she uses the gifts for the wealth of her οἶκος, *Od.*18.271-289; and she also tricks the suitors into joining the bow competition, *Od.*21.68-79.

¹¹² Detienne and Vernant 1978, 20-21.

This sort of myth is common, where a male deity chases and tries to capture a woman, either mortal or immortal, but in this scenario both of the participants was trying to outsmart the other one with tricks and magic. Penelope and Odysseus use *μητις* in their courting game, from the moment they met in the latter half of the epic. They have both tested each other with their intelligence, trying to guess the other's motive or identity. They dance round and round each other until the truth finally reveals itself at the end, wrapping the epic in a nice package. The one who is most puzzling is Penelope. Odysseus motives are already explained and made clear, it is his story one follows, while his wife's motive is not obvious. Because Penelope is veiled in mystery, the game of intelligence is even more interesting, not knowing her motives and where her next step leads.

5.3.1 Discussion

Penelope's *μητις* is linked to the Oceanid Metis; through Athena and the deeds of Metis. Like Metis, Penelope is almost like a metamorphic; to trick her enemies, she put on several personas, an act that may confuse the audience. Through the *Odyssey* the heroine has become a shape shifter, one moment she can be the virtuous wife and return to her quarters away from the suitors, and in the next she can seduce the suitors by posing as a price at the bow contest, especially when she was not sure that the old beggar was Odysseus or if he would show up and save the day.¹¹³ Contradictory scenes like these may imply that Penelope is not as faithful as she was portrayed, that she might be the deceitful wife who only thinks of her own interest. However, it is in my mind better explained as an act she put on, using her cunningness; playing different roles to deceive her enemies. Even if she did not know if Odysseus is alive or not, she made a decision and a plan to let the winner marry her; either it is Odysseus who is the winner, or it might be someone who has the same strength as her husband and is worthy of being a substitute. If the latter was the outcome, Penelope would have used her intelligence to protect her *οἶκος* from further attacks from her enemies and further elevate Odysseus status and *κλέος* by marrying a man similar to him.

I claim that the cat and mouse chase between Metis had with Zeus, when both of them tricked each other over and over again, are similar to the reunion scene of Penelope and Odysseus in Book 19 and 23 of the *Odyssey*. Even if there are no actual transformation and no physical chasing between the married couple, they still use tricks to test each other, which slowly turn into a contest. Zeus tried to capture Metis to make her his wife and Metis tried to

¹¹³ *Od.*1.360-364; 18.302-303; *Od.*21.68-79.

escape him over and over again. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is trying to find out if Penelope has been faithful over the twenty years he has been missing, to be able to make her his wife again, while Penelope wants to escape any doubts she has that the man in front of her might be an imposter.

The couple is reunited in Book 19, where Odysseus was disguised as a beggar, Penelope not knowing for sure that he is her husband, and he not sure himself if she has been faithful, the conversations they have might appear to be a queen complaining and a guest consoling the queen with words, but in reality the “chase” begins here. By complaining she also tries to prove her fidelity and her loyalty to her husband, and by listening and interrogating her he can find out if she really has been faithful. She tests the beggar and sees if he actually knew of her husband, which he answers by describing the clothes he himself wore when he left Ithaka; Penelope recognizes the clothes she made, and she starts to question if the beggar might be Odysseus.¹¹⁴ Then she tells him of a dream, and she wants him to interpret its meaning, which results in the plan of the bow contest; the slaughtered geese being the suitors and the eagle that kills the geese being none other than Odysseus himself.¹¹⁵ Not sure of the stranger in front of her is her husband or not, but by letting him know of her plans, she hopes that if he is Odysseus, he will know when to act.

Later in Book 23, when their enemies are dead or have escaped, the couple is still playing the game. Penelope is still questioning the identity of the stranger. To prove himself, he once again goes through a change; he has a wash and change of clothes, and with the help of Athena transforms into a new and improved Odysseus.¹¹⁶ Lastly, Penelope tests her husband, and at the same time she proves her loyalty and fidelity. She tells one of her servants to move the bed Odysseus has carved from their bed chambers, which Odysseus claims is impossible because it is built out of a tree which stands as the root of their house and marriage, something that only they would know.¹¹⁷

Thus by testing each other back and forth, and using their intelligence and cunningness, they have played a game of μῆτις. Unlike the chase between Zeus and Metis, where Zeus was the winner,¹¹⁸ in the *Odyssey* both wife and husband rise as winners. Odysseus made sure that his wife has been faithful for so many years, and Penelope made sure that Odysseus was really her husband at the same time proving her fidelity and loyalty. They have

¹¹⁴ *Od.*19.215-248.

¹¹⁵ *Od.*19.535-587.

¹¹⁶ *Od.*23.129-163.

¹¹⁷ *Od.*23.173-232.

¹¹⁸ Doherty 1995, 3.

proven that they think as one, both protecting their marriage and οἶκος.

5.4 Penelope's cunningness

Penelope's cunningness helps her to survive the harsh fate she has been given. She uses it in different ways; however, the results are the same, she protects her οἶκος and proves her worth as a wife, ruler and woman.

Like-mindedness unifies Penelope and Odysseus, both of them uses their μῆτις to deceive their enemies. While Odysseus disguised himself during his journey, from the Cyclop and even his own wife, Penelope used what she had at her disposal; the inside of her οἶκος and her words. Weaving is also a word in the Homeric society which has an ambiguous meaning. Weaving can mean the physical action of household chores, but also weaving, as in weaving a web of lies and deceit. Like μῆτις, weaving is an art which was given from Athena to women, while Penelope uses both μῆτις and weaving to deceive the suitors. With the shroud of Laertes, she was able to keep the suitors at bay for three whole years. She would weave during the day and unravel it at night. With her clever words she assured the suitors that it was her womanly duty to weave a shroud to her father-in-law and promised to marry one of them after she finished it. Yet her plans were foiled by one of her treacherous maids.¹¹⁹ The suitors curse her for her deceitful scheme, but still they praise her for her intelligence, which in turn makes her more desirable.¹²⁰

Another successful plan is the bow contest. Thanks to a dream she had she and her husband got rid of their enemies once and for all together.¹²¹ Even if it was not planned that Odysseus would be the winner, the plan is still a successful plot to ensure the safety and welfare of her husband's οἶκος.

5.4.1 Discussion

Weaving was an important domestic chore for women in ancient society. By weaving women made many textiles necessary in a well equipped household, such as beddings, bags, and clothes, many with artful patterns or figurative motifs. They were made for both their own families and other people within their household. These supplies could serve as an extra income besides what the men might bring home from farming, trading and looting.¹²² It could

¹¹⁹ *Od.*19.148-155.

¹²⁰ Lowenstam 2000, 335; *Od.*2.85-104; 2.115-122.

¹²¹ *Od.*19.508-587.

¹²² Pantelia 1993, 493.

also be used as gifts to friends and guests. Women took pride in their weaving because the result would reflect their skills, which in turn would reflect the prosperity of their οἶκος, but also earn them κλέος, a fame that would be remembered for generations.¹²³ Penelope, on the other hand, did not only weave for the fortune of her household, she also used this domestic chore as a ploy to trick the suitors and protect the welfare of her οἶκος.¹²⁴ The shroud of Laertes was a very skillfully planned scheme; she used what tools she has at disposal as a woman, namely weaving and the gender rules to her advantage.¹²⁵ Penelope claimed that she as a wife and a daughter-in-law had to make a shroud for her old father-in-law as a farewell gift before she could choose to marry; otherwise she would shame herself in the eyes of the people in her community.¹²⁶ With this pleading speech, the men of her society accepted her wish, because it was natural for a woman of such status and virtue to uphold her worth of an ideal wife. She weaved her web during the day and unraveled the threads in secret during night. Such a simple plan protected her from the suitors for three years, her scheme only unfolded on the fourth year.¹²⁷ The one who foiled her plans was one of her maids, probably the one named Melantho.¹²⁸ This means that her plan was only ruined by another woman and not by a man. Penelope's scheme appears to be so devious that men folk could not be aware of it, and if Melantho had not betrayed her, her ploy could have gone on for another year or so. The shroud, if it would not have been unraveled each night by Penelope, should have been finished a lot faster than then the three long years she fooled the suitors. It is either because the suitors believed in Penelope's skills as a weaver and that a shroud could be so intricate to make, or men appear to not know how long it takes to weave a shroud. Either way, Penelope chooses a great tool to deceive the suitors, she played on her reputation of a great weaver and used a women's chore mislead her enemies, and she hid it from them by hiding the shroud in an area only accessible for women. Maybe that is why only a woman was able to unfold Penelope's tricks.

The suitors were outraged by Penelope's deception and in several speeches scolds and blame her for such deceit; however, at the same time the men praise her for her

¹²³ Pantelia 1993, 495.

¹²⁴ Blundell 1995, 55; Fantham et al. 1994; 33; Felson 1997, 19.

¹²⁵ Pedrick 1988, 94.

¹²⁶ *Od.* 19.141-147.

¹²⁷ *Od.* 19.148-155.

¹²⁸ Felson 1997, 20; Winkler 1990, 149: he believes that the traitor could be Melantho because in *Od.* 19.91-92 Penelope mentions a shameless act made by Melantho towards her that might be the revealing of Laertes shroud; *Od.* 18.324-325 Also Melanthos is supposed to be in love with Eurymachus, one of the leaders of the suitors. Lowenstam 2000, 337: on the other hand, thinks that who it was exactly is uncertain because Penelope herself in *Od.* 19.154 says "the maids" in general. Either way it was a woman or women who unfolded Penelope's tricks.

intelligence, almost envious of her cunning. They claim that they have never heard of such cunning in a woman, and that no one appears to be able to match her intelligence.¹²⁹ It is a huge achievement for a woman to be able to hold wisdom which could excel men's intelligence. No wonder the suitors hate her for such a treacherous act, but at the same time envy and complement her for her gifts.¹³⁰ Her μῆτις makes her more desirable, which proves her worth as a woman. Any man who married such a woman would also receive her intelligence, especially when Penelope was known to be a loyal and virtuous wife.

Another intelligent move of hers is the planning of the bow contest. In the *Odyssey*, she explains to the disguised Odysseus, that she had a dream.

“I keep twenty geese in the house, from the water trough
 they come and peck their wheat-I love to watch them all.
 But down from a mountain swooped this great hook-beaked eagle,
 yes, and he snapped their necks and killed them one and all
 and they lay in heaps throughout the halls while he,
 back to the clear blue sky soared at once.
 But I wept and wailed-only a dream, of course-
 and our well-groomed ladies came and clustered around me,
 sobbing, stricken: the eagle killed my geese. But down
 he swooped again and settling onto a jutting rafter
 called out in a human voice that dried my tears,
 ‘Courage, daughter of famous king Ikarios!
 This is no dream but a happy waking vision,
 real as a day, that will come true for you.
 The geese were your suitors-I was once the eagle
 but now I’m your husband, back again at last,
 about to launch a terrible fate against them all!’”

*Od.*19.604-620

The stranger explains that it is a vision sent to her by her husband, and that she should do as the dream guides her.¹³¹ Judging from this scene, one might think either that the spouses came up with the idea of the bow contest together, or only Odysseus himself, or by divine intervention. However, it may also be interpreted as a plan, by which Penelope herself tests the mysterious stranger who has given her hope of a solution to her difficult situation.

Firstly, there is no proof that the dream was sent by the gods, because the dream was not mentioned anywhere prior to the meeting between Penelope and the beggar, it is not

¹²⁹ *Od.*2.85-104; 2.115-122.

¹³⁰ Lefkowitz 2007, 124.

¹³¹ *Od.*19.535-587.

mentioned earlier.¹³² Penelope weaved the whole story up, to test the man she believed might be her husband, explaining indirectly what she had planned.¹³³ That the disguised Odysseus claims that he himself had sent the dream to her, appears to be absurd, because nowhere before or after in the *Odyssey* does Odysseus take such action, and he does not appear to have the power to send dreams across the sea to his wife, neither does he seem to be in cahoots with any of the gods who could have sent her this dream.

Even if her dream was divine intervention, when she reveals her plan to use a bow for a competition amongst the suitors,¹³⁴ the idea of using a bow is nowhere to be found in the dream she speaks off. It seems that she planned it herself. Also the reason she claims that Odysseus spoke to her in her dream is probably because she needs Odysseus to believe that he came up with the signs himself; making this his battle, and moreover she needed a male authority to put her idea in action.

So if Penelope is the one who weaved the plans of the bow contest, or planned it with her husband, she is a cunning woman who used her intelligence to protect her husband's οἶκος.¹³⁵ Her μῆτις proves of her worth for every cunning scheme she plans and makes her a frightening and powerful woman. The suitors claim that there is no one who could equal her in intelligence; it might be true because she even appears to outsmart her own husband, who should be her equal in many ways. Penelope appears to be superior to Odysseus intelligence with her final scheme; the meeting of the spouses in book 23, where she tests him about their bed, and has him prove himself to be the true Odysseus, at the same time proving her fidelity to her husband.¹³⁶

5.5 Κλέος

Another virtuous attribute that Penelope can claim for herself is κλέος. By protecting her οἶκος, being a faithful wife and using cunning intelligence, among other deeds she has made, she has earned herself κλέος. Κλέος means fame and glory, which was an honor that could be bestowed upon an utmost remarkable person. Κλέος is an important theme in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, heroes in battles or voyages tried hard to earn themselves fame, a mission that often resulted in their own death. Dying in the battle could earn them κλέος, which would resound

¹³² Foley 1995, 106.

¹³³ Penelope appear to in some level think the beggar is her husband in disguise, because otherwise, why would she tell a stranger of her plans, when she cannot even trust her own maids.

¹³⁴ Od.19.570-581.

¹³⁵ Felson 1997, 33-34.

¹³⁶ Chaston 2002, 14-15; Felson 1997, 38-39.

for eternity after their death, earning them a sense of immortality.¹³⁷

However, κλέος was not only achieved through deeds on the battlefield. The κλέος Telemakhos is searching for in the *Odyssey* came from honoring and inheriting fame through bloodline.¹³⁸ Odysseus fame came from his journey of survival and safe return.¹³⁹

There were many ways for men in the Homeric society to earn them fame through physical labor, though κλέος for women was another issue.¹⁴⁰ Fame for women was achieved through female attributes and deeds. They could receive it for their beauty, domestic skills etc. Nevertheless, their κλέος were usually never as important or great as for men. Male κλέος was more memorable than female κλέος, probably because it was harder for women to achieve fame, and if they did it would be considered less interesting stories for an audience of men.¹⁴¹

Penelope, like other women has been complimented for her beauty and domestic skills, but unlike others she earned her memorable κλέος by her intelligence and her devotion to her husband. Making her stand out amongst women, and almost placing her amongst men.

5.6 Penelope's κλέος

Penelope earns her κλέος throughout the *Odyssey*. She is flattered and complimented for several things but the most important κλέος she earned is the κλέος of an ideal and good woman and wife. For instance the κλέος she achieves from the suitors is only potential, but the κλέος she earns for her loyalty to her husband and his οἶκος is permanent.¹⁴² Her κλέος appear to be strongest as the role of the wife; when Odysseus left for war, her κλέος decreased and it would only become great after the return of her husband.¹⁴³ By protecting the οἶκος for her husband, remembering him and being the loyal wife she won herself eternal κλέος. Agamemnon who is a spirit in the kingdom of the dead praises Penelope for her excellence and loyalty, promising her that her fame will be sung by the gods.¹⁴⁴

“Happy Odysseus!”

Agamemnon's ghost cried out. “Son of Laertes-mastermind-what a fine, faithful wife you won!”

¹³⁷ Schein 1984: 68-69.

¹³⁸ Jones 1988 498.

¹³⁹ Felson 1997, 131; Foley 1995, 95.

¹⁴⁰ Chaston 2002, 12.

¹⁴¹ Foley 1995, 95.

¹⁴² Felson 1997, 34; Foley 1995, 105.

¹⁴³ *Od.*19.124-163.

¹⁴⁴ Foley1995, 108; *Od.*24.191-202.

What good sense resided in your Penelope -
 how well Ikarios' daughter remembered you,
 Odysseus, the man she married once!
 The fame of her great virtue will never die.
 The immortal gods will lift a song for all mankind,
 a glorious song in praise of self-possessed Penelope.
 A far cry from the daughter of Tyndareus, Klytemnestra-
 what outrage she committed, killing the man *she* married once!-
 yes, and the song men sing of her will ring the loathing.
 She brands with a foul name the breed of womankind,
 even the honest ones to come!"

*Od.24.210-223*¹⁴⁵

In several passages in the *Odyssey*, one may read about this treacherous deed, retold by different people.¹⁴⁶ Everyone appear to have heard of this heinous deed, both gods and men, and they are all similar, except for the fact on how involved Klytemnestra was in the death of her husband.

5.6.1 Discussion

The tale of Klytemnestra takes no big part of the main plot of the epic, but it still lingers in the background as a moral story, teasing the audience. Her actions warn the audience how scandalous a lone woman's situation can become. Through the poem, no one really knows what choices Penelope will make, especially when she appears to be two-faced, always changing persona for her survival. The Character of Klytemnestra is supposed to guide Penelope's actions, what she should not do and will not do.

The degree of Klytemnestra's involvement in her husband's death varies depending on the story teller. The first passages of her deeds in the first half of the poem, told by Zeus and Nestor, make her a passive character, where she did not directly participate in Agamemnon's death.¹⁴⁷ She appears to have been resistant when she was first seduced by Aigisthos, but when she was finally subdued, it appears it was her lover who planned and murdered her husband.¹⁴⁸ Later it is Menelaus, Agamemnon's brother who retells the story and appears to give her more blame in the killing of her husband, but still describes her as passive.¹⁴⁹ In the last reminiscence of the past it is Agamemnon himself retelling the story of his unfortunate faith, and in his version Klytemnestra was involved in his death and in

¹⁴⁵ Robert Fagles' translation.

¹⁴⁶ *Od.* 1.32-43; 3.254-313; 4.90-92; 11.387-439 and 24.196-202.

¹⁴⁷ *Od.* 1.32-43; 3.254-313.

¹⁴⁸ Sealey 1990, 140-141.

¹⁴⁹ *Od.* 4.90-92; Sealey 1990, 142.

Cassandra's, the woman he brought home after the Trojan War.¹⁵⁰

What is interesting about the tale of Klytemnestra it is told by men only, and all of them condemn the action of a woman. It does not matter that Agamemnon himself brought Cassandra back home as a slave and mistress, but it is unforgivable that Klytemnestra took a lover. Especially when she appears to not have been involved in Agamemnon's death in the first passages, and all she is guilty of is her adultery. Also what is not told by the men in the *Odyssey*, is that the *oikos* of Agamemnon and Klytemnestra had already crumbled before the Achaeans even set foot on Trojan soil. Agamemnon had angered the goddess Artemis and had to sacrifice one of his daughters to be able to continue on their expedition. Trough lies Klytemnestra was convinced and sent their daughter Iphigenia to her father.¹⁵¹ Some versions of the myth explain Klytemnestra's betrayal because of the death of their daughter.¹⁵² Their *oikos* was unstable, neither of the spouses appear to be able to protect their household.

Klytemnestra's involvement in the death of her husband appear to increase recollection by recollection; the more personal it gets, the more severe is her deeds. How much she participated may not be of importance, but the smearing of her reputation is. No matter the degree of her actions were, she is still remembered as a bad and wicked woman. The fact that it is only men who retells the story of Klytemnestra proves the differences between men and women: a woman can gain a bad reputation which will be remembered throughout time, as easy as a warrior can gain *kleos* for his efforts and actions in war. Not only does it stain her reputation for eternity, her mistakes curse all women folk.¹⁵³

Penelope becomes the exact opposite of Klytemnestra, even if they might have started in the same situation, but the actions and choices Penelope made, makes her a better woman and an ideal wife; earning her a *kleos* which will resound forever.¹⁵⁴ Unlike Klytemnestra Penelope stays faithful to her husband, by remembering him and the *oikos* he has built.¹⁵⁵ Whether she wins *kleos* with or without her husband is a bit vague, because her *kleos* is achieved for being the perfect and loyal wife. Remembering her husband and protecting what is his, she achieved that on her own, but that her *kleos* increases with the return of Odysseus reflects her need to become the other half of a great marriage.¹⁵⁶ Also, unlike Agamemnon and Klytemnestra, Odysseus and Penelope trusted each other. Odysseus

¹⁵⁰ *Od.* 11.387-439; 24.196-202; Sealey 1990, 142-143.

¹⁵¹ Hansen 2004, 83.

¹⁵² Hansen 2004, 90.

¹⁵³ *Od.* 24.199-202.

¹⁵⁴ *Od.* 24.191-202.

¹⁵⁵ Felson & Slatkin 2004, 107; Foley 1995, 105.

¹⁵⁶ Felson 1997, 57; Foley 1995, 96; Pedrick 1988, 95.

could not think of anything but returning home, and Penelope tried to protect the marriage and remembering as it was before Odysseus left. Agamemnon's and Klytemnestra's failed marriage symbolises the foundation of their οἶκος, when the marriage crumbles so does their οἶκος.

Penelope's κλέος earns her an individual fame, which is only hers and the gods will sing of only her, and all mankind will hear of it, while Klytemnestra's misdeeds will not only smear her own reputation but the reputation of all women, whether they are honest or not. The reputation of men, good or bad were individual, but women's appear to be only individual if they have done something remarkable, while one woman's bad reputation was shared by all women. This only proves how great Penelope's achievements are, that she could gain a κλέος that she does not have to share with others, that it belonged only to her, and she rises above the bad reputation given to all women. According to Homeric rules, earned κλέος usually result in immortality, with Penelope's κλέος resonating through time one might say that she has earned her immortality too. This places her in a position amongst men, with all the heroes who has songs sung for them through all eternity.

5.7 Conclusion

Penelope's power does not only derive from her position in her household, it also derives from her character. Her worth is measured by her action and choices and what others think of her. She is praised by men and placed on a level of status only equaled to men.

Her μῆτις complements her husbands, making them like-minded and together they protect their οἶκος through deceptions. They do not only deceive their enemies, but also each other. Like Metis and Zeus, they put on a competition, using their intelligence to always be a step ahead of each other, and waiting for their opponent to make their next move. Zeus wins over Metis, while Penelope appears to be the winner in their contest. She not only tricks Odysseus to reveal himself in book 23, but she also indirectly assures him of her fidelity within that trick. Because Penelope is a woman her μῆτις is suppose to match her husband's, becoming his equal, but time after time she seem to be more cunning the Odysseus, himself. Penelope is not the lead character, which makes her character a puzzle. The audience is not allowed to know her true intentions until the end, and even then her character might still raise some questions. This makes her actions and cunning plans more devious, so devious that she can out smart her own husband.

Her κλέος is earned by her cunning actions, her protection of the οἶκος and

holding onto her marriage. She is given κλέος for different reasons, but her final and greatest κλέος is given at the return of Odysseus and harmony is returned to their home. This is only successful because she chose the right path, and always remembered and stayed loyal to her husband. If she had been unfaithful like Klytemnestra, her opposite, the οἶκος she and Odysseus had built would fall apart and end up in tragedy. Her loyalty has earned her individual κλέος, which would make her immortal. Raising her above all the slander women folk might gain, putting her at a level which could make her appear an equal not only to her husband, but other great men.

With her μητις and κλέος, Penelope has proven her worth as a woman and wife.

6. DISCUSSION

Penelope's power and worth has now been discussed, and many of the previous discussions related to each other, there is no one without the other. Therefore, the answers to the questions of this research overlap each other too. There is one clear theme that is repeated throughout the *Odyssey*: for Penelope to be able to wield power and prove her worth she had to protect her οἶκος, from its enemies and she does it by remembering and honouring her husband and preserving the traditions of his οἶκος. It all links to the οἶκος, even her μήτις and κλέος were used to protect her οἶκος from her enemies. With her intelligence she cleverly devised plans to protect and preserve her home, which in turn earned her individual fame that reflects on her husband, family and kingdom. Therefore, her power comes from protecting the οἶκος and her worth from the methods she used and her success.

6.1 Penelope's authority and its limits.

As the head of the household, Penelope never had full authority and her power is severely limited, compared to that of a male ruler. The kingdom appears to never have been in her control, only the palace itself, and even there she did not have full power. Her gender prevents her from becoming the legal ruler over Ithaca, even if she is the best candidate, with her royal lineage, and title as the queen of Ithaca. Therefore, she has to share her power, with her son, husband and even her enemies. Telemakhos has the right to inherit the throne as the next successor, but before he becomes of age, Penelope is his guardian, protecting and ruling the kingdom for his future. Penelope is keeping the οἶκος safe until Odysseus returns, and she is constantly reminded that her authority is not permanent. She shares power with the suitors because she cannot get rid of them, they still live in her home, threatening the οἶκος from within. However, none of them can really take the authority she wields from her. In the beginning of the *Odyssey* Telemakhos cannot take the throne away from his mother because of his lack of maturity, and as long as Odysseus is away from home he has to trust his kingdom to his wife. When he does return, she has to be the one who acknowledges him, returning his full power to him. Also the suitors know they are living under her roof and that she is the one in charge of the οἶκος, she might not be able to chase them out of her home, but they cannot forcefully make her take one of them as her husband either.

Penelope's power is give and take; every time she might be able to claim any

power, it is taken away from her, men correcting her errors and her place in society,¹⁵⁷ and every time a man tries to take her power, they are reminded of her status and their own place in society.¹⁵⁸

Penelope's power is not only shared because she needs it to survive in a patriarchal society, but the men around her need her power too. Without her there would be no appropriate substitute successor, Telemakhos was still not ready to take of the rule after twenty years of Odysseus being absent and Laertes has been proven to be of no use to his family or Ithaka. There were no male relatives who could stand in for Odysseus, and having one of the suitors to help was not possible, because they wanted permanent power. There were also no advisor or close male friend who would help Odysseus, therefore Penelope was the only alternative. Odysseus needed her as much as she needed him.

Odysseus needs his wife not only to become a substitute ruler, to tend to his affairs, but also someone who would remember and preserve his legacy and remind others of it. Preserving the οἶκος the way Odysseus left it before going to war would make it possible for him to return and retake it. One might think that Odysseus could retake his kingdom without Penelope, but if she did not preserve his οἶκος they could have ended up like Klytemnestra and Agamemnon, or have to go through a bigger battle to regain his home, or even return to a kingdom ruled by Telemakhos. If one would follow the succession tradition, and Telemakhos did become the king and Odysseus return, he would probably not be able to reclaim the throne, he would have to automatically abdicate and live on some farm like Laertes.

Even when Odysseus and Penelope were not physically close to each other, they still shared responsibilities, symbolizing a strong marriage that could survive anything. While Odysseus is out on a voyage home, Penelope is prepared for his homecoming. She has kept the suitors at bay with the shroud of Laertes, while Odysseus tricked his enemies at sea. Penelope laid out the bow competition and enticed the suitors with her as the prize, while her husband won the competition, killed the suitors and retook the control of their kingdom. In both situations Penelope used words to lure her enemies, she made promises of her being the prize, if the suitors agreed to her conditions.¹⁵⁹ Odysseus, on the other hand used brute force as well as words, when he tricked and blinded the Cyclops and eliminated all the suitors. Those are the roles Penelope and Odysseus have taken as wife and husband, she relies on

¹⁵⁷ *Od.* 1.356-359.

¹⁵⁸ *Od.* 18.265-270.

¹⁵⁹ *Od.* 2.96-110; 21.68-79.

verbal means and he takes action.

Penelope justifies her authority by preserving the traditions of the royal Ithakan household, by doing so she can preserve the οἶκος Odysseus left her in charge of. When Odysseus left Ithaka, he left instructions of succession to Penelope. She was only to give away the throne of Ithaka to their son, and only when he was ready of such duty. So Penelope did not remarry, and brought their son up on her own. She never took the title of king and anyone else as king, thus protecting the tradition of patrilinear society.¹⁶⁰ Penelope might have been reluctant to give the power to her son, because she was hoping for her husband to return, but also because she saw her son too immature and unfit to rule, especially in a situation where he would have been forced to defend himself as a ruler from the suitors. She was protecting Ithaka from a weak ruler. Also she knew if she really gave the throne to her son the succession would be final.

She also promised to weave a shroud to Laertes, as a good daughter-in-law should do.¹⁶¹ The day she married Odysseus and left her home, she became a member of Laertes' οἶκος, and by tradition she had to honour Laertes as her own father, so it was not only the duty of a daughter-in-law, but also the duty of a daughter to honour her present home with a farewell gift to her parent. By doing so she protects the tradition between a father and daughter.

Penelope proves that she has protected and kept their kingdom the way Odysseus would, when Odysseus disguised as a beggar praises his wife and elevates her to the status of a king. "Fame of a flawless king's...who governs a kingdom vast, proud and strong-who upholds justice...and under his sovereign sway the people flourish."¹⁶² This is another example that shows their mutual hopes and dreams for their kingdom, and a harmonious marriage leads to a prosperous and stable οἶκος.

6.2 Penelope's methods of ruling

Because Penelope's authority is limited by her gender, she used the rules governing female behaviours against her enemies. She always worked within the frames of the patriarchic society, never overstepping the boundaries, only stretching or blurring the lines.

One important thing to remember is that throughout the whole epic, Penelope has never verbally claimed power for herself. Penelope wore the title of queen and mother of

¹⁶⁰ Pantelia 1993, 497.

¹⁶¹ *Od.*2.96-102.

¹⁶² *Od.*19.119-125 translated by Robert Fagles.

a prince, but never claimed the title of a king. She always made sure that others knew her intention of ruling. That she was doing it for her husband and her son's future, never for herself.¹⁶³ By doing so she is preserving Odysseus οἶκος and traditions, and the rules of patriarchy, she only enhanced her status as just the wife of a king by ruling in his absence. She was not going against any social rules and could justify the limited authority she had.¹⁶⁴

She also blurs the line between the male and the female. As a woman, Penelope's place is within the walls of her οἶκος, especially the women's chambers. However, as the head of the household, she can move more freely in the areas mostly reserved for men, the μέγαρον, making it her battlefield. Of course she is still well aware of her gender and social rules, so she never enters the μέγαρον unescorted, keeps her distance from the men and wears appropriate clothes in their presence.

“Ikarios’ daughter Penelope, wary and reserved,
and down the steep stairs from her chamber she descended,
not alone: two of her women followed close behind.
That radiant woman, once she reached her suitors,
drawing her glistening veil across her cheeks,
paused now where a column propped the sturdy roof,
with one of her loyal handmaids stationed either side.

*Od.1.379-385*¹⁶⁵

Protecting her virtue would protect her οἶκος. Only resisting marriage would not be enough, she also had to keep up the appearance of a loyal and chaste wife.¹⁶⁶ Penelope has verbal battles not physical in the μέγαρον, befitting a proper woman.

All the choices and actions Penelope makes, she uses her status as a woman as a tool, whether it is using her μήτις or κλέος, she protects her οἶκος because that is where her power comes from. Men fight battles outside the walls of ones home, while women have to fight battles within it.

6.3 Penelope's power, the link between female power, marriage and οἶκος

Male power was earned in the battlefields and female power, if there was any, could be earned through their οἶκος, by preserving its traditions and a stable marriage. Men could win praises

¹⁶³ Gregory 1996, 16.

¹⁶⁴ Gregory 1996, 16.

¹⁶⁵ Robert Fagles' translation.

¹⁶⁶ Fletcher 2008, 77.

as a warrior, women won their praises as the perfect wife and by upholding men's honour.¹⁶⁷ The foundation of the *oikos* was built on the strength of a marriage. Because women's power derived from their *oikos*, they had to share the power with their husbands, and for a successful marriage, the power had to be given by men, not taken.

Through out the *Odyssey*, remarkable and strong willed women has been portrayed and compared to Penelope, in character and power. All of these women either shared power with their husbands, or was not given any power from a husband or father, and some even claimed power on their own. Nausikaa is portrayed as the beginning of a harmonious marriage, still with no authority at all - she has not been given any yet because she is still unmarried, a daughter, not a wife. Arete and Helen appear to be able to join their husbands in feasts,¹⁶⁸ while Nausikaa goes straight to her room instead, where an old chambermaid serves her supper.¹⁶⁹ In book 6, when Nausikaa encounters Odysseus, she lets him bath, gives him clothes to wear and invites him to her home. She has taken authoritative actions that do not belong to her but to her mother.¹⁷⁰ Therefore, when Arete recognizes the clothes Odysseus wears and rudely questions him:

“she'd (Arete) spotted the cape and shirt Odysseus wore,
fine clothes she'd made herself with all her women,
so now her words flew brusquely, sharply: ‘Stranger,
I'll be the first to question you-myself.
Who are you? Where are you from?
Who gave you the clothes you're wearing now?
Didn't you say you reached us roving on the sea?’”

*Od.7.270-276*¹⁷¹

She is suspicious of the man who suddenly appeared in front of them, wearing clothes *she* had made herself with *her* women, which means he did not turn to her first, and there has been some miss use of her authority by her own daughter. However, Arete later reclaims her position by being the one who properly welcomes their guest and showers him with gifts, and she makes sure he remembers it.¹⁷²

While Nausikaa appears to have no authority, Arete is the woman in charge in her *oikos*. She, like Penelope shares her power with her husband Alkinous, they complement

¹⁶⁷ Fletcher 2008, 79.

¹⁶⁸ Van Wees 1995, 156-157.

¹⁶⁹ *Od.7.3-13*.

¹⁷⁰ Pedrick 1988, 92-93.

¹⁷¹ Robert Fagles' translation.

¹⁷² *Od.8.459-462*.

each other. The husbands are the ones in charge, and the wives assist them.¹⁷³ Arete and Alkinous represent a harmonious marriage, where both spouses are equal, or at least close enough by Homeric standard, but with different roles. Husband and wife appear to be equal in succession too, Arete being the daughter of the former king, and Alkinous the brother.¹⁷⁴ However, Arete's power appears to be given by her husband, who respects her highly and let her mediate quarrels amongst men.¹⁷⁵ In return she is the perfect wife and hostess, and let him make the final decisions.

Klytemnestra, on the other hand, tried to take power, power derived from a different οἶκος than she and Agamemnon represented. Whether she was directly involved with the death of her husband or not, she abandoned the foundation of the οἶκος she had built with Agamemnon and tried to build a new marriage and οἶκος on the previous one. Her new found power was not long lasted or righteous, because she built it on the traditions of Agamemnon's οἶκος.

Penelope's power was also given by her husband, but unlike Arete, she was given authority to rule in Odysseus absence. She justified and maintained her power by remembering her husband, their marriage and οἶκος. She ruled Ithaka like Odysseus would have done himself, at the same time she always kept in mind that it was not her own power, but the borrowed power of her husband, assisting him in his absence. She kept his family traditions and stayed faithful, protecting their οἶκος from outsiders. Also by complementing Odysseus as his other half, with her intelligence and his traditions, she established a harmonious marriage, where both spouses share the same dreams and hopes.

One might consider that as a woman Penelope wielded great power, because she received as much power as a woman could possibly gain in a Homeric society. Female power appears to be shared power. Penelope's shares power with Odysseus when he is home, and in his absence she shared power with others. Even if she shared power with others, none of them wielded as much power as she did. They might have fought her and tried to take power from her, but none of them was the ruler of Ithaka, she was.

6.4 Penelope's μήτις

While the Homeric society uses physical violence to defeat their enemies, Penelope has her cunningness. She is always watching and observing her surroundings. Like Metis, who could

¹⁷³ Gregory 1996, 17.

¹⁷⁴ *Od.*7.54-66.

¹⁷⁵ *Od.*7.66-74.

see the future and change the outcome, Penelope carefully calculated her choices, actions and consequences to survive,¹⁷⁶ i.e. how to behave and when to retire from the *μέγαρον*, or using the patriarchic rules to her favour.

Laertes' shroud can be seen as an ingenious move made by Penelope. She uses weaving, a tool reserved for women only. Men would probably not know the work and time it would take to make a shroud, especially if it was a special fine weave. She explained her need for weaving a shroud, as a good wife and daughter-in-law it was her duty, earning her *κλέος* and following a family tradition. As a final step to have the suitors fall for her trap, she uses herself as a prize. With the suitors fooled, she could escape from marriage at least for a couple of years and give time for her husband to return. If the plan fails, which indeed it did, she still would have upheld her daughterly duties.

The bow competition and the dream leading to it is another cunning plan of hers. Other than planning to kill the suitors, the dream and bow competition had other purposes. Firstly, she needed to share this plan with the man that she come to suspects is her husband and have him take the physical action, because she is incapable of doing so herself. But she also needs to include him into the plans, making him the hero who saves the day. Making sure that the final plan will succeed demonstrated that the spouses complement each other, and that he knows of her fidelity. Secondly, if the beggar is not her husband, she has still covered her grounds for any other consequences. She needed someone to understand her motives, that the competition is the best for her *οἶκος*. If Odysseus would not return in time, hopefully a man equal of his strength would win. Then she could marry a man, who was like Odysseus, and she would still remember and preserve some of their *οἶκος* in her new home, and she could give the throne to Telemakhos, who is now ready to take control.

In book 23, Penelope lays out her best scheme ever, when she even tricks her own husband. Once again Penelope has calculated the choices she has and the consequences which will follow. Odysseus could be an imposter, and she needs to be sure he is not to prove herself, she could not have all her plans foiled when she is so close of succeeding.

Penelope tries to lure her husband into her trap:

“Come, Eurycleia,
move the sturdy bed out of our bridal chamber-
that room the master built with his own hands.
Take it out now, sturdy bed that it is...”

¹⁷⁶ Detienne & Vernant 1978, 108.

Odysseus is then outraged, and he explains that no one can move his bed. “Not a man on earth...would find it easy to prise it up and shift it,”¹⁷⁸ because their bed and bed chamber is carved out of a rooted olive tree. He describes how he built the bed chamber and the bed in detail for his wife. “There’s our secret sign, I tell you, our life story!”¹⁷⁹ A secret only shared between our hero and his wife. Satisfied with the answer Penelope explains why she had to test him.

With this little trick Penelope found out that the man in front of her is indeed her husband, but most importantly have proved her fidelity, and made clear that she had to use such tricks so he understands her intentions and situation. It also puts her in a position of control, by making sure that he knows that without her he would not have an οἶκος to return to, and he needed her approval to return to his position as a ruler. She is not the only one in need of her other half, the same is true of Odysseus. Both spouses are needed for a perfect marriage and a stable and prosperous οἶκος.

Penelope’s cunningness, proved her worth as a woman, wife, and ruler. That a woman against many enemies in a difficult situation could prevail, and her μῆτις equal to her husband’s, even their enemies praises her for her cunningness.¹⁸⁰

6.5 Penelope’s κλέος

All the choices and actions made by Penelope earn her κλέος. Penelope’s κλέος changes through the events of the epic. In the beginning she has the κλέος as a daughter of a royal family, the mother of a prince and as the wife of a king. At the end she earns herself permanent fame for ruling wisely, remembering her husband and protecting their οἶκος. What is so great about the κλέος she receives at the end is she earned it on her own. Even her son, Telemakhos had to earn κλέος through the κλέος of his father, not an individual fame.

Unlike Klytemnestra whom shares her negative reputation with all women folk, Penelope can claim her κλέος as her own. Also the honour Arete receives is from her husband and children, while Penelope’s fame resounds through the afterlife.¹⁸¹ Not many women appear to be praised as highly as Penelope, which makes her κλέος unique, positioning her amongst heroes who have their fame echoing for generations.

¹⁷⁷ Robert Fagles’ translation.

¹⁷⁸ *Od.23.210-211* translation of Robert Fagles.

¹⁷⁹ *Od.23.226*, translation of Robert Fagles.

¹⁸⁰ *Od.2.115-122*.

¹⁸¹ *Od.7.66-72; Od.24.192-198*.

Penelope might have only received permanent κλέος after the return of her husband, but it is not the efforts of Odysseus that enables Penelope to protect and stay faithful all these years. Her κλέος reflects Odysseus own κλέος, οἶκος and marriage.¹⁸² Odysseus is praised for having such faithful wife, a rarity amongst other heroes. Because of her devotion, she protected their οἶκος for twenty years, so he could come back to return order. Her κλέος symbolizes a harmonious marriage where both spouses trusted each other. Penelope longed for Odysseus and he longed to come home to her.

6.6 Penelope's worth, in the context of Homeric society

Penelope, with her own strength proves that it is possible for a woman to gain power and earn fame. The *Odyssey* had many strong willed female characters, most of them magical, descendents of gods, or queens in a protected and stable οἶκος. Penelope, on the other hand, is a mortal woman without any magical powers and is also a single mother amongst enemies. No other woman appears to have gone through such ordeals and earned such κλέος. Therefore, her worth in the context of Homeric society is very high, especially when Homeric society is a world ruled by men, with no place for powerful women. She has ruled Ithaka for twenty years and no man has been able to claim and take away her position.

Penelope is repeatedly compared to other women in the epic, either as a parallel or a warning of possible future outcomes. However, she is also compared to men, or given male attributes. Because it is a male dominated society, male attributes appear to weigh more than female attributes. Penelope is viewed as an equal to her Odysseus, in intelligence and also as his perfect soul mate. She even outwitted her suitors several times. Her plan of the Laertes' shroud was only unfolded by her maid/maids.¹⁸³

She might not have ever been given the status of a king, but she has been compared to a king and her choices as a ruler have been praised.¹⁸⁴ Although it is only praises from her husband, it only proves that he approves of her way of ruling and they are of similar thoughts, uniting them as spouses.

Also her κλέος will be sung by the gods for all eternity, which usually were preserved for men only. Heroes of the Trojan War sought for eternal κλέος, because that would grant them immortality. By winning battles and honoring their states they could be remembered, not only by their families but also others for generations.¹⁸⁵ If one followed the

¹⁸² Foley 1995, 105.

¹⁸³ *Od.* 19.148-155.

¹⁸⁴ *Od.* 19.106-144.

¹⁸⁵ Ahrens Dorf 2000, 589; Jaeger 1959, 137-138.

rules of Homeric immortality, Penelope has definitely earned her immortality, which is a rarity for women. Odysseus will also have his κλέος sung in his afterlife, which means in death both of their names will be sung, which makes their perfect marriage harmonious.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The main aim for this dissertation was to explore the relationship between female power and οἶκος and female worth in Homeric society, through the life and actions of Penelope. To do so I had to examine Penelope's position in patriarchic society and compared her character to other female characters, with similar situations like hers.

In chapter 4 I have tried to demonstrate situations Penelope were in and the power struggle she had to go through. The succession issue dealt with her limits, as well the limits of her son and suitors. Penelope appeared to not have full authority, however, neither did anyone else. The link between female power, marriage and οἶκος was also discussed, by comparing Penelope with Nausikaa and Arete, characters who represented harmonious marriages in different ways.

In chapter 5 the character of Penelope, her choices and actions were more fully examined. She used her μῆτις to make up plans and trick her enemies to protect her οἶκος, schemes like the Laertes' shroud, bow contest etc. By being faithful and remembering Odysseus and protecting their οἶκος and marriage earned her κλέος, which was unlike any other. Her deeds proved that she was a capable ruler, a cunning woman and a faithful wife.

The last part tries to tie the both chapter together and find common themes to explain Penelope's power and worth. The main themes that could be found throughout the dissertation were that Penelope's power and worth depended not only on the protection of the οἶκος but also the preservation of the essence of an οἶκος. She did so by remembering Odysseus and their traditions of their οἶκος. Female power also meant shared power, as a result, Penelope's position was very complex. By sharing power she followed the rules of patriarchy, and did not have full power, but because shared power also meant female power, to an extent she was the ruler of Ithaka. Penelope's worth was measured by her cunning plans. Her μῆτις was her power against her enemies, she would carefully calculate her every move, the choices she had in the different situations, and what the consequences could be depending on certain actions. Her deeds won her κλέος, which also measured her worth, proving that she was as important to her husband as he was to her.

As Penelope's name will resound forever in the songs of gods, her name is made immortal by the words of Homer. The research has been interesting because Penelope is one intriguing character, especially when the Homeric world is filled with heroes and immortals, all of them either blessed by gods or magical themselves. She is a powerful and intelligent

woman living in a world ruled by men. Her power and worth has been measured within this dissertation as she has been in the *Odyssey*. By analyzing Penelope's character from different angles and situations I could understand the link between female power and worth with the οἶκος within the Homeric society.

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