

PENELOPE'S PERSPECTIVE: CHARACTER FROM PLOT

Nancy Felson-Rubin

Penelope in the *Odyssey* spins and interprets plots. She takes pleasure in the plots she has woven. Yet the traditional view of Penelope limits her to a single plot, Marriage-Avoidance, and confines her to a single role, faithful and enduring wife.¹ This single plot belongs primarily to a larger plot schema: Return of Husband, Regaining of Wife as Bride, Vengeance against Suitors.² As a subordinate plot, it lacks autonomy, and its heroine seems to act more to suit her husband than out of personal desire.

This univalent Penelope whom Western Tradition has taken for granted, can be seen to originate in the *Odyssey* itself. She emerges from the remarks of Agamemnon's ghost when, in Book 24, he couples praise of Penelope with blame of his own wife Clytemnestra (192-202), setting the two heroines in an opposition to one another which has persisted through the centuries.³

But how objective and how reliable is Agamemnon as a narrator of Ithacan and Argive events? Are his praise of Penelope and his blame of Clytemnestra convincing? Do they offset those doubts about her virtue raised by the same ghost figure in the first *Nekyia* of Book 11 (441-56)? I shall contend that, on the contrary, the doubts of Agamemnon of Book 11, once raised, remain (regardless of who raised them, under what circumstances⁴) because the primary narrator never dispels them. Moreover, the Agamemnon of Book 24 who affirms Penelope's virtue is a conspicuously unreliable judge of female character, for the primary narrator expressly undermines his evaluation of the two heroines by having it ensue from a dead suitor's mistaken report of events in Ithaca. In explaining their slaughter Amphimedon's shade includes this piece of misinformation:

“αὐτὰρ ὁ ἦν ἄλοχον πολυκερδείησιν ἄνωγε
τόξον μνηστήρεσσι θέμεν πολίον τε σίδηρον,
ἡμῖν αἰνομόροισιν ἀέθλια καὶ φόνον ἀρχήν.”

(24.167-9)

The slain suitor mistakenly supposed that Penelope recognized her husband before the contest, and mistakenly ascribed to Odysseus sole responsibility or blame for initiating that event.⁵ Penelope thus earns praise from Agamemnon's ghost on false grounds: she is not held accountable for the contest of the bow.

Other scenes reveal a Penelope far more complex than the ghost of Agamemnon imagines. To recover some of that complexity, I shall examine passages which seem to indicate contradictory motives and inconsistent behavior, and which make a reader apt to stay confused as to what Penelope desires until that moment of clarity (for Penelope and the reader) in 23.205, when her knees loosen and she finally embraces Odysseus as her husband.⁶ Incidentally, such reasonable bewilderment has spawned numerous scholarly attempts to excise passages which challenge the comfortable notion of Penelope as unproblematically faithful.⁷ I shall take a different route.

I propose to show that Homer,⁸ by withholding information from Penelope until 23.205, offers her no rational position toward her dilemma of whether to await Odysseus. In plot language, he assigns her roles in more than one type of plot: in Bride-Contest as well as Marriage-Avoidance, with each plot-type further specified for a maiden or widow and for a matron.

1. Bride-Contest (maiden or widow)
2. Bride-Contest (matron)
3. Marriage-Avoidance (maiden or widow)
4. Marriage-Avoidance (matron)

If, using these distinctions, we assume the perspective of various male characters (particularly Agamemnon, the suitors, and Odysseus), we may label the plot-types as follows:

1. *Bride-Prize*: suitors compete via a contest for a maiden or widow's hand;
2. *Adultery*: a matron betrays her husband and succumbs to a lover;
3. *Frigidity and Tease*: a maiden thwarts her suitors' desires and refuses to choose one (but leads them on);
4. *Loyalty and Cleverness*: a matron thwarts her suitors' desires and cleverly holds them at bay until her husband returns.

Using the same distinctions but assuming Penelope's own female-centered perspective we come up with four corresponding labels (some virtually indiscernible from the above):

1. *Courtship and Marriage*: a maiden or widow desires male attention and sets a contest to choose a husband;
2. *Dalliance and Infidelity*: a matron (her husband away) enjoys courtship and engages in an act of infidelity;
3. *Disdain and Bride of Death*: a maiden disdains unworthy suitors and prefers virginal death to any marriage;
4. *Patience*: a matron willingly withstands seduction and loyally awaits her husband's return.

Though I do not use all of these terms equally, I present them here because it is important for us to know that the bride has her own story, even when it is not presented in full.⁹ The last group takes into account the maiden or matron's own desires and attitudes toward her actions (to the extent that we can observe them). The same sequences of action take on a different shade of meaning and acquire a different label depending on whether they are 'focalised'¹⁰ from a male or female center. In what follows, I pay special attention to female-focalised plots, which are usually overlooked in readings of the *Odyssey*.

By keeping her ignorant as to her marital status, Homer represents Penelope as uncertain as to which of her several plots she is in at any moment. Much of her behavior becomes intelligible to us if we consider that she is unremittently vexed by the question: 'Am I moving irrevocably toward new union or toward reunion?' Behavior shameful if her husband lives would seem normal if he has perished at sea.¹¹ Hence the legitimacy and reasonableness of her multiplicity of purposes which in turn engenders our perplexity.

Homer has Penelope, in this state of ignorance, set up the contest. She does not take this step positive that Odysseus will return in time, confident in omens and in statements of seers or beggars, for that would be imprudent and inconsistent with her being *περίφρων* ('thinking all-around'¹²). Nor does she propose the contest relying, as some have thought, on her intuition that her husband is home already.¹³ Certainly she feels she has exhausted her strategies for deferring the decision; she hopes that her husband will arrive in time. Additional sentiments can be adduced as influencing her move: an attraction to the stranger, her loneliness,¹⁴ her ripeness for *eros*, her son's coming of age.¹⁵ None of these, however powerful, changes the fact that by setting up the contest now she risks Infidelity.¹⁶

To these several possible motivations we may add an explanation from plot. What if Penelope, spinner of plots (as her name, from *πήνη*,

suggests¹⁷), calculated her move to fit simultaneously into several possible plots? What if, indeed, she is complicitous with her author in that she willingly takes up several threads of plot simultaneously?

We can learn much about her character by posing this question, even if we should eventually discard it as overstated.¹⁸ We then ask *how* Penelope spins plots, and whether she interprets plots she has woven. Is she a character who, like Odysseus, aims to control events as they happen but, inevitably, sometimes falls short, due to obstacles unforeseen and results unintended? Does she, like Odysseus when he 'spoke to his own great-hearted spirit'¹⁹ (5.464-73) or 'plotted out the destruction of the overmastering suitors' with Athena (13.372-439; also 20.38-54) or with Telemachus (16.233-321), preview and rehearse imagined sequences of events and retrospectively formulate them in a coherent narrative?²⁰ In narrating her life events, does she select and reshape with the freedom of a story-teller? Is she a 'plotting' character?

Perhaps we can envision a scale for describing characters, from unwitting agents who act within whatever plot is given to them, on the one hand, to supreme plotters who seemingly control their fictional lives, on the other. Would we not place both Odysseus and Penelope closer to the latter pole than to the former? When she previews her plots in dreams and fantasies, and when she retrospectively interprets them, Penelope does seem empowered to select and arrange the events and thus, like a narrator, to form a *μῦθος* in the Aristotelian sense, as a *σύνθεσις πραγμάτων*, 'a putting together of deeds' (Arist. *Po.* 1450a 4-5).

Building up Penelope's features as a spinner of plots requires that we know, at each plot moment, what she knows, what beliefs and convictions she holds, what she desires and fears, and what actions she thinks are possible and permissible for her to take. We must treat her as if she were a character in real life, with a world of her own.²¹ We ascribe to her a psychological coherence which, admittedly, we as readers construct. We are mute on the question of Homer's absolute intentionality, since we are focusing here on the impact of the text rather than on its production.

Our study aims, then, to expand the interpretation of Penelope's most frequent epithet, *περίφρων*, 'thinking all-around', as well as the etymological pun on her name as 'spinner' or 'weaver'. From our analysis *περίφρων Πηνελόπεια* finally emerges as a character aware of the plots she spins and, like Odysseus, cunning in securing her own interest in survival and duty and pleasure. Thus she acts for her own sake as well as for the limited purposes which Agamemnon's ghost assigns her, namely, to assure Odysseus' glory and safety. Agamemnon's world-view is male-dominated and male-oriented, whereas Homer offers us a larger perspective. Examining Penelope's character from plot leads us to supplement her traditional image as patient, faithful, enduring wife with

a fuller portrait – of a complex, problematic figure who ultimately remains faithful to her absent husband but comes dangerously close, and for good reasons, to an unintentional betrayal. And in the course of her life story she participates in a multitude of plots.

Penelope and plot

Penelope engages in the following actions: she offers words of encouragement and promises to each suitor, devises the trick of the web, appears before the suitors and solicits gifts, dreams, ponders, scolds, weeps and prays, interviews the stranger and tells him her dream, sets up the contest of the bow, eventually entraps her husband into divulging his secret knowledge of their marriage bed, and reunites with him. Some of these activities she enacts before our eyes; others a character recounts. I shall try to recover her motives and self-knowledge as she previews and makes her decisions and acts upon them, and as she retrospectively evaluates her choices. The passages I treat are out of textual order; A and B demonstrate Penelope's sincerity in setting up the contest; B and C are retrospections by Penelope which I take to indicate her plot awareness; D-H indicate Penelope's participation in several plot-types as she makes her choices.

My analysis depends on the assumption which the next two passages support, namely, that Penelope is sincere in setting up the contest of the bow to determine whom she will marry, and that indeed she envisions her wedding taking place.

A. Tears

ἐζομένη δὲ κατ' αὐθι, φίλοις ἐπὶ γούνασι θεῖσα, 55
 κλαῖε μάλα λιγέως, ἐκ δ' ἤρεε τόξον ἄνακτος.
 ἢ δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν τάρφθη πολυδακρύτοιο γόοιο,
 βῆ ῥ' ἵμεναι μέγαρόνδε μετὰ μνηστῆρας ἀγαοῦς
 τόξον ἔχουσ' ἐν χειρὶ παλίντονον ἠδὲ φαρέτρην
 ἰοδόκον· πολλοὶ δ' ἔνεσαν στονόεντες οἴστοι.

(21.55-60)

Penelope sheds these bitter tears in private when she has placed her husband's bow on her knees. The mood of the passage is sombre: a wife wanting to remain steadfast has run out of strategies. She weeps not only at the sight of the weapons, the reminders of her absent husband, but also at the implications of her decision to wait no longer.²²

Penelope's mournful behavior as she collects the weapons belongs, if

she is a matron, not to a successful Marriage-Avoidance plot (Loyalty and Cleverness/Patience) but to a failed one, a remarriage, which is equivalent to Adultery/Infidelity.

B. Helen apology

Penelope also reveals her sincerity in setting up the contest when, in retrospect, she tacitly acknowledges to her husband how close she had come to adultery. This is the problematic Helen passage which many consider an interpolation but which in fact illuminates the complexity of Penelope.²³

“μή μοι, Ὀδυσσεῦ, σκύζευ, ἐπεὶ τά περ ἄλλα μάλιστα
 ἀνθρώπων πέπνυσο· θεοὶ δ’ ὤπαζον οἷζόν,
 οἱ νῶϊν ἀγάσαντο παρ’ ἀλλήλοισι μένοντε
 ἦβης ταρπῆναι καὶ γήραος οὐδὸν ἰκέσθαι.
 αὐτὰρ μή νῦν μοι τόδε χῶεο μηδὲ νεμέσσα,
 οὔνεκά σ’ οὐ τὸ πρῶτον, ἐπεὶ ἴδον, ὦδ’ ἀγάπησα.
 αἰεὶ γάρ μοι θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλοισιν
 ἐρρίγει μή τίς με βροτῶν ἀπάφοιτο ἔπεσσιν
 ἐλθῶν· πολλοὶ γάρ κακὰ κέρδεα βουλεύουσιν.
 οὐδέ κεν Ἄργεΐη Ἑλένη, Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα,
 ἀνδρὶ παρ’ ἀλλοδαπῷ ἐμίγη φιλότητι καὶ εὐνῆ,
 εἰ ἦδη ὁ μιν αὐτίς ἀρήϊοι υἱεὶς Ἀχαιῶν
 ἀξέμεναι οἰκόνδε φίλην ἐς πατρίδ’ ἔμελλον.
 τὴν δ’ ἦ τοι ῥέξαι θεὸς ὄρορεν ἔργον ἀεικές·
 τὴν δ’ ἄτην οὐ πρόσθεν ἐῶ ἐγκάτθετο θυμῷ
 λυγρῆν, ἐξ ἧς πρῶτα καὶ ἡμέας ἵκετο πένθος.
 νῦν δ’, ἐπεὶ ἦδη σήματ’ ἀριφραδέα κατέλεξας
 εὐνῆς ἡμετέρης, τὴν οὐ βροτὸς ἄλλος ὀπώπει,
 ἀλλ’ οἷοι σύ τ’ ἐγὼ τε καὶ ἀμφίπολος μία μούνη,
 Ἄκτορίς, ἦν μοι δῶκε πατήρ ἔτι δεῦρο κιούση,
 ἦ νῶϊν εἴρυτο θύρας πυκινοῦ θαλάμοιο,
 πείθεις δὴ μευ θυμόν, ἀπηνέα περ μάλ’ ἐόντα.”

(23.209-30)

Penelope’s attitude toward Helen is unusually empathetic. Her remark that Helen would not have lain with a foreigner had she known that the sons of the Achaeans would bring her home again (218-21), suggests that it is not the betrayal itself, but the state of ignorance as to the future which is ruinous folly (ἄτη). The implication is that, had Penelope either yielded to a stranger claiming to be Odysseus or married a suitor, she too would have been subject to reproach; since she did not,

she ought to be absolved from blame.²⁴ Thus by exonerating Helen she hopes to exonerate herself from blame on two counts: 1) for not immediately embracing her husband and 2) for nearly causing a 'Trojan' War!

Accentuating the similarity between their two situations leads Penelope to veil one conspicuous distinction, namely that Helen abandoned Menelaus out of sheer desire. Penelope's principle, that any woman might unwittingly betray her husband, does not apply to Helen at the time of the initial betrayal. This distortion of the comparison, for her argument's sake, reveals the degree of understanding Penelope has gained of how dangerously close she came to marrying a suitor, with her husband already nearby!

This is the closest Penelope comes to reflecting on the theme of infidelity. Her worst possible scenario would have been marriage to a stranger or a suitor followed by Odysseus' return. This, she now realizes, would have earned her ill-repute for all time and made her indistinguishable from Helen. Except in this passage, she never alludes to such a possibility or hints at second thoughts about proposing the contest. Now, for the first time, she begins to minimize her near betrayal by arguing the legitimacy of a bride-contest if a woman thinks herself a widow. Her insistence on Helen's ignorance (as if Menelaus were permanently missing when Helen departed with Paris) causes me, as reader, not to object to the passage, but, relying upon it, to add a dimension to my own sense of Penelope's complexity and plot-awareness as she asks her husband for pardon.

A second retrospection that gives us a sense of Penelope as a spinner of plots is her account to Odysseus after their love-making.

C. Penelope's tale

The narrator tells how Penelope, herself as narrator, reduced her plots to a single type:

Τὼ δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν φιλότιτος ἐταρπήτην ἐρατεινῆς, 300
 τερπέσθην μύθοισι, πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐνέποντε,
 ἢ μὲν ὄσ' ἐν μεγάροισιν ἀνέσχετο δῖα γυναικῶν,
 ἀνδρῶν μνηστήρων ἐσορῶσ' ἀΐδηλον ὄμιλον,
 οἱ ἔθεν εἵνεκα πολλὰ, βόας καὶ ἴφια μῆλα,
 ἔσφαζον, πολλὸς δὲ πίθων ἠφύσσετο οἶνος

(23.300-5).

This is the story of holding the suitors at bay until Odysseus' return. It is Loyalty and Cleverness/Patience, and it has no affinity with Adultery/

Infidelity. Penelope's story corresponds to Odysseus' adventures seen only as obstacles to return, with no reference to any pleasure the adventurer took in his travels (306-41, 350-4). Each spouse-storyteller, now at last out of danger, interprets all prior events in terms of Reunion. Moreover, by depicting the suitors as villains who attacked Odysseus' household and by focusing solely on their misdeeds, Penelope's story helps justify their slaughter. Though she blithely dismisses the other side of their story, we as readers cannot: her encouragement of them and indeed enjoyment of their attention lessens their criminal culpability. Penelope's omission of this aspect of her story helps launder her own image for posterity.

We turn now to Penelope's behavior before she embraces Odysseus in 23.205-8, in five passages (or groups of passages) which, together, disclose a multivalent Penelope:

- D. encouragements and promises to the suitors (2.87-92, 13.379-81) and ambivalence (1.245-51, 16.122-8, 24.125-8);
- E. trick of the loom (2.93-110, 19.138-56, 24.128-46);
- F. appearance before the suitors (18.158-303);
- G. geese dream and decision to hold the contest (19.535-81);
- H. prayers to Artemis (18.202-5 and 20.61-90).

D. Encouragements, promises, ambivalence

The text is unrelenting in informing us, always through a character's narration, that Penelope encouraged the suitors. Telemachus (1.245-51; = 16.122-8) and Amphimedon (24.125-8) state that 'she would not refuse the hateful marriage, nor would she bring it about'; Amphimedon adds: 'but she was planning our death and destruction with this other stratagem of her heart's devising ...', connecting the deceit of the loom to Penelope's non-committal behavior toward them. The suitor Antinous (2.87-92) and the goddess Athena (13.379-81) observe that she raises the suitors' hopes and makes promises to each, 'but her mind has other intentions' (νόος δέ οἱ ἄλλα μεμοινᾶ, 2.92, 13.381).

E. The loom

In the Second *Nekyia* the spirit of Amphimedon quotes Penelope's proposal of the ruse of the loom:

‘κοῦροι, ἐμοὶ μνηστῆρες, ἐπεὶ θάνε δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς,

μίμνεντ' ἐπειγόμενοι τὸν ἔμὸν γάμον, εἰς ὃ κε φᾶρος
 ἐκτελέσω, μή μοι μεταμόνια νήματ' ὄληται,
 Λαέρτη ἥρωϊ ταφήϊον, εἰς ὅτε κέν μιν
 μοῖρ' ὀλοή καθέλησι τανηλεγέος θανάτοιο, 135
 μή τίς μοι κατὰ δῆμον Ἀχαιιάδων νεμεσῆση,
 αἶ κεν ἄτερ σπείρου κῆται πολλὰ κτεατίσσας.'

(24.131-7)

Then he tells of her servant's betrayal which led the suitors to discover Penelope 'in the act of undoing her glorious weaving', so that 'against her will and by force, she had to finish it' (145-6).

Earlier, describing to the stranger/Odysseus her treatment of the suitors (19.130-61), Penelope recalled how some spirit (δαίμων) 'put the idea of the web in my mind' (138). She quoted herself announcing the project, and promising to marry one of her suitors when she had finished weaving the shroud (141-7 = 24.131-7 = 2.96-102). This promise, however deceitful, contributed to the complaints the suitors Antinous (Book 2) and Amphimedon (Book 24) harbored against her.²⁵ It also keeps us as readers somewhat perplexed as to Penelope's real intentions.

Words of encouragement and secret promises would not in themselves prove a heightened interest in the suitors or a turning toward men for attention, since they could be part of a stratagem to placate oppressive suitors (Patience). Other passages contribute to our sense of an increasingly sensuous Penelope who participates actively in a Courtship plot.²⁶

F. Appearance before the suitors

It is Athena who 'put it in the mind of ... Penelope to show herself to the suitors':

Τῇ δ' ἄρ' ἐπὶ φρεσὶ θῆκε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη,
 κοῦρη Ἰκαρίοιο, περίφρονη Πηνελοπείη,
 μνηστήρεσσι φανῆναι, ὅπως πετάσειε μάλιστα 160
 θυμὸν μνηστήρων ἰδὲ τιμήεσσα γένοιτο
 μᾶλλον πρὸς πόσιός τε καὶ υἱέος ἢ πάρος ἦεν.
 ἀχρεῖον δ' ἐγέλασσαν ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζεν·
 "Εὐρυνόμη, θυμός μοι ἐέλδεται, οὐ τι πάρος γε,
 μνηστήρεσσι φανῆναι, ἀπεχθομένοισι περ ἔμπης· 165
 παιδὶ δέ κεν εἵποιμι ἔπος, τό κε κέρδιον εἶη,
 μὴ πάντα μνηστήρησιν ὑπερφιάλοισιν ὀμιλεῖν,
 οἷ τ' εὐ μὲν βάζουσι, κακῶς δ' ὄπιθεν φρονέουσι."

(18.158-68)

Though the purpose clauses introduced by ὅπως (160) express the goddess' intentions in putting this idea in Penelope's mind,²⁷ the expression 'my heart desires' (θυμός μοι ἐέλδεται, 164) suggests to me that Athena's 'intervention' does not lessen Penelope's responsibility for her decision. We can assume that Athena could only influence Penelope in accord with Penelope's own character and disposition. Thus Athena's purpose, planted in Penelope's mind (ἐπι φρεσὶ θῆκε, 158), becomes Penelope's even though it contradicts her dominant feeling, hatred for the suitors, a hatred explicit in her earlier wish for their demise (4.681-95).

Appearance before suitors is a standard Courtship motif, and Homer shows us a Penelope allowing herself to be courted. Which men does she aim to impress? Clearly, the hated suitors. Indeed, her embarrassed laugh is a sign of her own discomfort at the incongruity between her actions and this dominant, negative emotion;²⁸ at the same time, the laughter invites us to think of the laughter-loving goddess Aphrodite, whose influence suggests coquetry. An embarrassed Penelope conceals her coquetry from her nurse Eurynome, who would tend to disapprove of her mistress' flirtation.

Penelope's appearance has its intended impact on the suitors (212-13). At the same time, it impresses Odysseus, who 'was happy because she beguiled gifts out of them and enchanted their spirits with blandishing words, though her own mind had other intentions' (281-3). That last formulaic clause must represent Odysseus' assessment of her motivations, along with the narrator's (cf. Athena's comment to Odysseus in 13.381). How accurate an assessment is it? Is the narrator totally cognizant of his own character's intentions? Does he allow Penelope to take pleasure in the suitors as she beguiles them, and possibly to overlook the cost of that pleasure, namely a plot moving rapidly toward a Bride-Contest resolution? Is Penelope's behavior with the suitors incautious in the same way as Odysseus' with Polyphemus?

Odysseus is not offended when he sees his wife winning male attention. He values economic gains which will help replenish the household. As a trickster himself, he respects what he sees as her tactics to win gain. Moreover, as one of her attentive males, he does not feel threatened by competition. Rather, he expects to (re-)claim Penelope, and her value is enhanced for him if he has to fight for her. For the reader, this emphasizes the theme of the Regaining of the Bride (Bride-Contest for a matron, where husband = suitor and wife = bride). Relevant here is a scene on the brooch which Penelope gave Odysseus when he departed twenty years earlier (19.226-31). The scene itself suggests an erotic conquest: the capture of a fawn by a hound who 'preyed on the fawn and strangled it and the fawn struggled with his feet as he tried to escape him' (230-1). Odysseus is the hound pursuing Penelope, and her flirtations

with others (a resistance of sorts) excite and arouse him rather than incur his wrath.²⁹

G. Dream and contest

The interview of Penelope with the stranger begins with Odysseus' compliment to Penelope (19.107-14) and his elaborate, persuasive lie (165-202), and culminates with his mention of her departure gifts to her husband (225-35) and with his prediction that Odysseus will presently come home (269-307). Penelope offers the stranger a bath and addresses him as 'Dear friend ...' (350). But at the crucial point when Eurycleia recognizes Odysseus by his scar and turns to Penelope to inform her (467-77), Athena averts her perception (478-9).³⁰

Shortly thereafter Penelope begins to share her innermost thoughts with the stranger. First, she confides her sharp anxieties over Telemachus (512-34),³¹ and soon her dream of the eagle and the geese.³²

“ἀλλ’ ἄγε μοι τὸν ὄνειρον ὑπόκριναι καὶ ἄκουσον. 535
 χῆνές μοι κατὰ οἶκον εἰκόσι πυρὸν ἔδουσιν
 ἐξ ὕδατος, καὶ τέ σφιν ἰαίνομαι εἰσορώωσα·
 ἐλθὼν δ’ ἐξ ὄρεος μέγας αἰετὸς ἀγκυλοχείλης
 πᾶσι κατ’ αὐχένας ἤξε καὶ ἔκτανεν· οἱ δὲ κέχυντο
 ἀθρόοι ἐν μεγάροις, ὁ δ’ ἐς αἰθέρα διὰν ἀέρθη. 540
 αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ κλαῖον καὶ ἐκώκυον ἐν περ ὄνειρῳ,
 ἀμφὶ δ’ ἔμ’ ἠγερέθοντο εὐπλοκαμίδες Ἀχαιαί,
 οἴκτρ’ ὀλοφυρομένην ὃ μοι αἰετὸς ἔκτανε χῆνας.
 ἄψ δ’ ἐλθὼν κατ’ ἄρ’ ἔζετ’ ἐπὶ προὔχοντι μελάθρῳ,
 φωνῆ δὲ βροτῆ κατερήτυε φώνησέν τε· 545
 ‘θάρσει, Ἰκαρίου κούρη τηλεκλειτοῖο·
 οὐκ ὄναρ, ἀλλ’ ὕπαρ ἐσθλόν, ὃ τοι τετελεσμένον ἔσται.
 χῆνες μὲν μνηστῆρες, ἐγὼ δέ τοι αἰετὸς ὄρνις
 ἦα πάρος, νῦν αὐτε τεὸς πόσις εἰλήλουθα,
 ὃς πᾶσι μνηστῆρσιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφήσω.’ 550
 ὣς ἔφατ’· αὐτὰρ ἐμὲ μελιθεῖς ὕπνος ἀνήκε·
 παπτήνασα δὲ χῆνας ἐνὶ μεγάροισι νόησα
 πυρὸν ἐρεπτομένους παρὰ πύελον, ἦχι πάρος περ.”
 (19.535-53)

To this confidence the stranger/Odysseus replies:

“ὦ γύναι, οὐ πῶς ἔστιν ὑποκρίνασθαι ὄνειρον
 ἄλλη ἀποκλίναντ’, ἐπεὶ ἦ ῥά τοι αὐτὸς Ὀδυσσεὺς
 πέφραδ’ ὅπως τελείει· μνηστῆρσι δὲ φαίνεται ὄλεθρος

πᾶσι μάλ', οὐδέ κέ τις θάνατον καὶ κῆρας ἀλύξει." (19.555-8)

Penelope's response is to deny the validity of the dream. She offers the allegory of the two gates through which dreams pass: this one, she insists, passed through the gate of ivory and cannot be believed (19.560-9); it is 'ineffectual', ἀμήχανος, and 'difficult to decipher', ἀκριτόμυθος (560). Thereupon, she announces the bride-contest (570-81).

The pleasure she took as she watched the suitors and her grief as she previewed their death³³ reveal a Penelope awaiting her husband's return yet reluctant to relinquish her attachment to the suitors. The careful construction of the dream precludes our inferring that Penelope is ambivalent toward Odysseus' homecoming, or that she would continue her attachment to the suitors if she knew Odysseus was home. For she does not mourn in her dream once the eagle/Odysseus tells her 'now I am your own husband, come home' (549). And yet with things as they are, to her knowledge, at this moment in the story, the suitors' presence is her sole pleasure, though a mixed one. Should Odysseus not return, she hankers for a continuation of that pleasure, naturally disguising this from herself by expressing her grief for dead suitors in terms of grief over pet geese.

Penelope awakens to experience a jarring discrepancy between the dream events and reality (551-3). When she finds her geese still alive, she feels the dream message doubly annulled. That is, the presence in her palace of real geese eating from the trough undermines the dream figure's equation between geese and suitors – asserting, visually, that geese are geese and, further, that her geese are yet alive. Moreover, if she means to sustain the dream metaphor and use 'geese' to designate her suitors (a possibility which the text leaves indeterminate), then the presence in her palace of the suitors eating like animals is incongruent with the image, so vivid in the dream, of suitors slain.³⁴ Perhaps she is both denying that equation by saying 'geese are geese' and denying the death of the suitors by saying 'my suitors are still feeding ...'³⁵

Penelope's predominant reaction against the dreamt suggestion that Odysseus is home and that she forego her attachment to the suitors ('Do not fear ...') is to affirm the Courtship plot by setting up the bride-contest.

If we grant that Penelope takes pleasure in her suitors/geese, and now look back to the deceit of the loom, that event (which Amphimedon's ghost saw as purely deceitful) takes on new ambiguities. The deferral tactics of Penelope the weaver serve two functions: they enable her, first, to hold off the suitors for some years to give her husband a chance to return home in time to rescue her (i.e., prolonging the courtship for his sake), and second, to defer the remarriage so that she can take pleasure

as long as possible in 'watching her pet geese' (i.e. prolonging the courtship for her own sake). The one plot is Loyalty and Cleverness/Patience, the other Courtship; if, however, Penelope suspects that Odysseus is home and still enjoys Courtship, the plot-type is Dalliance – a weak or incompleting form of Infidelity.

The weaving itself as a physical process is double-edged: she weaves by day (moving toward remarriage) and unweaves by night (undoing her day's progress).³⁶ She has told the suitors to defer their suit until she finishes the shroud, insinuating that she will marry one of them eventually. Like her messages of encouragement to each, the project itself entices and allures and indeed entraps them. But this allurements is aimed not only at their destruction should Odysseus return but at prolonging their wooing as well. It perpetuates Courtship *for her sake*. In short, the web for Laertes' shroud reveals and symbolizes Penelope's full ambivalence toward the suitors and toward her situation. All the while that she weaves she is saying 'yes' to them, but it is an outward 'yes', contradicted by a secret 'no' at night. The suitors legitimately accuse her of leading them on (Tease); their anger has grounds. Telemachus, too, is aware of this coquettish side of Penelope's behavior, and it angers him as well.

Odysseus accepts a complex Penelope who laments over her geese. He consoles her in the dream but in real life he can give her only limited consolation. He cannot repeat his assurance to her that her geese are as good as dead or that Odysseus is as good as home. He must leave her in a state of ignorance as to whether Odysseus will return and kill the suitors.

Without such consolation (Odysseus has not returned, as far as she can tell), Penelope reacts to her disappointment by reaffirming Courtship and Marriage. She prefers this plot to no action at all. She is not ready (as her dream shows) to give up the attention of the suitors and the possibility of marrying one of them – until she has sure knowledge that Odysseus has arrived.

Note that the idea for the contest comes to Penelope suddenly, like the brainstorm of the web. Both ideas have several facets and reflect the complexity of Penelope. The bow contest, as focalised by Penelope at the moment she proposes it, could be an event in Courtship and Marriage (for a widow); it could also fit into Patience. Penelope does not see it as an event in Adultery/Infidelity – the Clytemnestra plot. Like a skilled chess player, Penelope knows when she proposes it that she is choosing a move which will fit into more than one plot trajectory. Compare in this connection Antinous' comment to Telemachus that Penelope 'is winning a great name (κλέος) for herself, but for you she is causing much loss of substance' (2.125-6). He sees Penelope's flirtations and encouragements of the suitors as bringing her some gain. Consider, too, the sustained parallelism between her and Odysseus:³⁷ just as he

enjoys his adventures even though they delay his homecoming (cf. 1.3),³⁸ so she 'loves to watch' (ἰαίνομαι εἰσορόωσα, 19.537) her pet geese.

Odysseus and Penelope each have plots obstructing Reunion and plots which lead to it. Odysseus' Adventures retard his homecoming. Similarly, Penelope's Courtship by scores of suitors whom she enjoys watching is not at all for the sake of, nor does it facilitate, her husband's safe return. Neither of these two plots moves rapidly toward closure; part of our fascination with the *Odyssey* is watching them leisurely unfold. Either her husband's return or her marriage to a suitor will put an end to the pleasurable Courtship of Penelope, unless she is wanton enough to keep it going even once she knows Odysseus is home (Dalliance).

H. Prayer to Artemis

This prayer echoes an earlier wish on the occasion of her tempting the suitors (18.202-5) that 'chaste Artemis would give me a death so soft, and now, so I would not go on in my heart grieving all my life, and longing for love of a husband excellent in every virtue, since he stood out among the Achaeans'. It is another prayer for death instead of hateful remarriage:

“Ἄρτεμι, πότνα θεά, θύγατερ Διός, αἴθε μοι ἤδη
 ἰὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι βαλοῦσ' ἐκ θυμὸν ἔλοιο
 αὐτίκα νῦν, ἢ ἔπειτά μ' ἀναρπάξασα θύελλα
 οἴχοιτο προφέρουσα κατ' ἠερόεντα κέλευθα,
 ἐν προχοῆς δὲ βάλοι ἀψορρόου Ὀκεανοῖο. 65
 ὡς δ' ὅτε Πανδαρέου κούρας ἀνέλοντο θύελλαι·
 τῆσι τοκῆας μὲν φθίσαν θεοί, αἱ δὲ λίποντο
 ὄρφαναι ἐν μεγάροισι, κόμισσε δὲ δῖ' Ἀφροδίτη
 τυρῶ καὶ μέλιτι γλυκερῶ καὶ ἠδέϊ οἴνω·
 Ἥρη δ' αὐτῆσιν περὶ πασέων δῶκε γυναικῶν 70
 εἶδος καὶ πινυτήν, μῆκος δ' ἔπορ' Ἄρτεμις ἀγνή,
 ἔργα δ' Ἀθηναίη δέδαε κλυτὰ ἐργάζεσθαι.
 εὗτ' Ἀφροδίτη δῖα προσέστιχε μακρὸν Ὀλυμπον,
 κούρης αἰτήσουσα τέλος θαλεροῖο γάμοιο, 75
 ἐς Δία τερπικέραυνον – ὁ γάρ τ' εὖ οἶδεν ἅπαντα,
 μοῖρ' ἄμμορίην τε καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων -
 τόφρα δὲ τὰς κούρας ἄρπυιαι ἀνηρείψαντο
 καὶ ῥ' ἔδοσαν στυγερῆσιν ἐρινύσιν ἀμφιπολεύειν·
 ὡς ἔμ' αἰστώσειαν Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντες,
 ἢ ἐμ' εὐπλόκαμος βάλοι Ἄρτεμις, ὄφρ' Ὀδυσῆα 80
 ὀσσομένη καὶ γαῖαν ὑπο στυγερῆν ἀφικοίμην,

μηδέ τι χείρονος ἀνδρὸς εὐφραίνοιμι νόημα.
 ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν καὶ ἀνεκτὸν ἔχει κακόν, ὅπποτε κέν τις
 ἦματα μὲν κλαίῃ, πυκινῶς ἀκαχήμενος ἦτορ,
 νύκτας δ' ὕπνος ἔχῃσιν – ὁ γάρ τ' ἐπέλησεν ἀπάντων, 85
 ἐσθλῶν ἠδὲ κακῶν, ἐπεὶ ἄρ βλέφαρ' ἀμφικαλύψῃ -
 αὐτὰρ ἔμοι καὶ ὄνειρατ' ἐπέσσευεν κακὰ δαίμων.
 τῆδε γὰρ αὖ μοι νυκτὶ παρέδραθεν εἴκελος αὐτῶ,
 τοῖος ἐὼν οἷος ἦεν ἅμα στρατῶ· αὐτὰρ ἔμὸν κῆρ
 χαῖρ', ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἐφάμην ὄναρ ἔμμεναι, ἀλλ' ὕπαρ ἤδη.”
 (20.61-90)

In this long and complex prayer, Penelope asks for death as a new way of avoiding remarriage. Though we know little about the myth of the daughters of Pandareos from other sources, it is clear from their gifts that the goddesses intend marriage for the maidens as the culmination of their tale.³⁹ Moreover, nothing in the bestowal of gifts on the maidens by Aphrodite, Hera, Artemis or Athena portends their ultimate destiny. Nor do we find a hint of reluctance to marry, or joy at their 'rescue'. Unincorporated, the *muthos* was a tale not of Disdain, like the myths of Io, Daphne, Cassandra, the Danaids and others, but rather of negative Courtship and Marriage – of marriage prevented by tragic and premature death.

Penelope reverses the positive and the negative in her use – for her own purposes – of the tale, which nevertheless retains the language of violent abduction.⁴⁰ But in place of the villainous abductor or his agent⁴¹ Penelope imagines a benefactor-rescuer (gods or Artemis) who responds to her plea. Furthermore, she fantasies that her rescuer will, in a second act of kindness, reunite her, in death, with her husband. Preferring death to remarriage, she prays not for union but for reunion. The language of marriage suits her fantasy: she will become a bride of sorts. In terms of plot, Penelope recasts Marriage-Avoidance for a widow as Bride of Death. She has relinquished Patience, with husband returning in the nick of time – despite the assurances of Theoclymenus and the stranger that her husband *will* return in time.

The language describing the readiness for marriage of the daughters of Pandareos is sensuous and alluring, whereas Penelope describes their alternative destiny in harrowing terms: being handed over to the 'hateful Furies'. Yet she wishes nonetheless for a similar rescue and death, with a surprise twist: she will die only to reunite with Odysseus in the Underworld. As virtual Bride of Death she is comparable to Persephone, but, unlike Persephone, Penelope prefers such an outcome; she disdains marrying a live but inferior suitor. Thus she expands the traditional tale, Patience, by coupling it with Disdain, and by adding Bride of Death.⁴² In doing so she has invented a new pattern, a hybrid of

Courtship-and-Marriage and Patience – a resumption, in death, of her present marriage, a reunion in the Underworld with her husband. In this hybrid plot she fuses two heretofore antithetical types of plot.

The sensuousness of the language describing the virgin maidens and their pending marriage anticipates the sensuousness surrounding Penelope as she moves toward an uncertain future. Whatever happens, it will be different from the state of chastity and sexual limbo in which she has lived for twenty years. This language suits Penelope's fantasy of a reunion with Odysseus in the Underworld. For her, 'blossoming marriage' may turn out to be marriage to a suitor, reunion with an Odysseus who has returned and reclaimed her, or reunion in death with Odysseus.

Penelope's prayer to Artemis appears to be a prayer for avoidance not only of a pending marriage, but of betrayal and infidelity as well. Her dilemma, reflected keenly in the prayer, is the need to be mindful simultaneously of Artemis as goddess of chastity and of Aphrodite as goddess of sexuality: she should neither become a strident virgin⁴³ nor succumb to the wrong union at the wrong time. The passage is linked to her identification with Helen in Book 23. As she prepares to remarry, it is easier and emotionally safer to consider Odysseus dead than about to arrive in Ithaca, but too late.

The interplay of Artemis and Aphrodite around the character Penelope permeates not only this passage, but numerous others from Book 18 to 23.205. The co-presence of these two goddesses is often felt.⁴⁴ Whether she will turn to Artemis or to Aphrodite is a key question raised early in the text and sustained as a question until that moment of embrace. Penelope is herself as uncertain of her divine affinities as are other characters (Telemachus, Odysseus, the suitors). Even we cannot yet know whether Penelope will remain chaste for Odysseus.⁴⁵

A network, then, of passages which can be understood as part of Penelope's plan to hold out against the criminal-suitors, also reveals a sensuous Penelope under the influence of Aphrodite as well as Artemis. Ambiguity as to Penelope's intentions is deliberately sustained for the reader until 23.205; the release for Penelope at that moment, as her knees give way, is a λύσις ('release') for us, too: her unchanneled eroticism felt dangerous to any of us willing to imagine that she might turn out to be a Helen or even a Clytemnestra.

Curiously, once she is safe and knows she is safe, Penelope turns playful. She flagrantly alludes to the possibility of infidelity in the famous deceit of the marriage bed (23.177-80). The possibility to which she alludes is one which she barely managed to avoid: the intrusion of some other man into the sanctity of her marriage bed. Only in the safety of her husband's presence, in the safety of knowing that he is back, can a playful and erotic Penelope tease him on so serious a subject as adultery.

The bold taunt admits to their discourse a theme which Folktale might have handled much more openly and crudely: the chastity test of the wife whose husband has just returned from a long journey.⁴⁶ The marriage-bed test, anticipated much earlier in Telemachus' question to Eumaeus ('... whether my mother endures still in the halls, or whether some other man has married her, and the bed of Odysseus lies forlorn of sleepers with spider webs grown upon it', 16.33-5) is at once a husband test and a chastity test, the latter in that by suggesting she was unfaithful – that someone moved their bed – Penelope affirms her fidelity. For Odysseus, rage at the prospect of a faithless Penelope melts into joy at full knowledge that she has waited for him and endured. Via the bed-ruse she reveals to him, on her own initiative and of her own accord, that she has chosen to be his faithful wife.⁴⁷

Conclusion: a multivalent Penelope

In Book 24 Agamemnon, lacking Odysseus' subtlety, misses the mark in his assessment of two heroines, Penelope and Clytemnestra. His is a male-centered view: a woman either is or is not faithful. Any suggestion that Penelope encouraged the suitors would have activated a misogynist condemnation, as Odysseus' characterization of Agamemnon in Book 11 makes plain. As readers, we are more privileged with information than he was: the passages discussed above indicate a side of Penelope not entirely consonant with the side he celebrates. We are therefore faced with reconciling conflicting evidence about her state of mind. Unlike Agamemnon and Amphimedon, we know that it was she, and not Odysseus, who decided to set the contest when she did. We know she flirted and held on to Courtship and Marriage when Odysseus was urging her (in his interpretation of her dream) to relinquish her attachment to the suitors. In short, we find her far more prudent about her own security and attentive to her own pleasures than others (both characters and critics) have acknowledged.

Our περίφρων Πηνελόπεια is the creator of several plots which we can label from her own female-centered perspective: Courtship and Marriage, Dalliance, Disdain and Bride of Death, and Patience. She dreaded Infidelity and wanted to avoid it. At crucial moments of decision she showed an awareness of all these plots and, in her decisions, she fulfilled her epithet περίφρων, 'thinking all-around', for she took into account her own safety and well-being along with that of her family. Her greatest challenge was recognition of her own desires, and her apology for Helen illustrates the extent to which she realized, in retrospect, how close to a disastrous decision she had been.

Notes

A slightly expanded version of this paper will appear in Schein ed. (forthc.).

1. Penelope, despite rival traditions (notably, association with Pan and other love adventures; see E. Wüst, *RE* 19 s.v. 'Penelope', esp. col. 479-81), is popularly considered the paragon of the virtuous wife since Homer; cf. Wüst, *ibid.* col. 483.
2. For plot terms (which I capitalize) cf. my list of plot-types on p. 62-3; the labels for Odysseus' plots are of only marginal interest to this study.
3. For Nagy (1979) this passage "reflects a formal tradition of praise poetry centering on the theme of Penelope, as distinguished by the contrasting blame poetry about Clytemnestra" (36 n. 1); in his discussion of *psogoi* and *enkomia* he cites 24.200-2 as "one of the clearest instances of blame as blame poetry" (255 n. 1).
4. In a forthcoming book I argue that the Agamemnon of Book 11 is a creature fashioned by Odysseus to suit his purposes of winning safe and cautious convoy from the Phaeacians. It is in his interest, as teller of his own adventures, to make Agamemnon in the Underworld suspect even Penelope of potential betrayal.
5. The observation that "dead Amphimedon's statement ... is his own inference" dates to the scholiast (Dindorf II 725.15) and is offered by Finley (1978: 14 n. 6) as one of several examples of the poem showing people's wrong ideas. It is baffling that Page (1955: 101-36) takes the ghost so seriously, and relies so heavily on this "inconsistency" in the Second *Nekyia* to argue for contamination by "the other version" in which Penelope recognized Odysseus before the setting of the contest.
6. I see this moment, when Penelope's knees loosen, as a λύσις, or 'release', for the reader as well, perhaps even a λύσις of the plot in the Aristotelian sense of 'dénouement', as opposed to δέσις, 'complication' (Arist. *Po.* 1455b24-1456a10). Until 23.205 even the knowing reader feels suspense as to whether Penelope and Odysseus will ever happily reunite. Note how, though we know (from 1.76-9) that Odysseus will return, we are never directly informed that Penelope will have waited for him, and the references to her possible inconstancy form a virtual *Leitmotiv*.
7. For a summary and discussion of the Analytic position vis-à-vis the so-called "Continuation" of the *Odyssey* (Page's term), which includes the Second *Nekyia*, see Page (1955: 101-36), Kirk (1962: 244-52), Moulton (1974: esp. 154 n. 7), and Wender (1978).

To the arguments made by Erbse (1972), Moulton, Finley (1978), and others against the Analyst assertion that the first and second *Nekyiai* are incompatible, we can add a narratological observation. The first *Nekyia*, as Odysseus' 'creation', need not be compatible with the second, Homer's, since Odysseus as a character-teller need be neither omniscient nor truthful.

I shall not deal with issues concerning the genesis of the text since my concern is rather with its impact on the reader, given its form.

8. I use 'HOMER' as a convenient label for the author who made the epic, and 'Homer' for his primary narrator in the text. If we were to imagine a color-coded description of our text, with blue representing the real world outside the text, red representing the fictional world of the text, orange representing secondary narrations and yellow tertiary, we could color HOMER and the readers, myself included, blue; Homer or the primary narrator and all he depicts or narrates in his own voice red; Odysseus' or Penelope's or Amphimedon's narrations orange; yellow would be reserved for stories or conversations within a secondary (i.e. character's) narration, such as the whole Agamemnon-Odysseus passage of Book 11.
9. For the comparable observation that the witch in fairy-tale has her story too, see Gilbert & Gubar (1979: esp. 79). The notion of female-centered plots was suggested to me by Gilbert & Gubar and by Miller (1980: xi).

10. An illuminating discussion of the concept of focalisation is given in Bal (1985: 100-15). The term comes from Genette (1980: 189-210).
11. Emlyn-Jones (1984: 12) interprets her 'inability to make an end' (16.126-7) as referring "not to her personal preferences or to some 'feminine' weakness but to the social situation" since "the exact situation with regard to Penelope's prerogatives in this matter is confused". On the topic of Penelope's prerogatives, particularly the lack of agreement on who is her *κύριος* (the person in whose charge she is), see Lacey (1966: 61-6) and references in Emlyn-Jones (1984: 17 nn. 51 and 52) and in Marquardt (1985: esp. 33-4 and n. 3). In my opinion, Odysseus' parting words (18.259-70) define Penelope's prerogatives more than social pressure, customs of the times, etc. (see note 26).
12. In compounds *περι-* is usually translated 'very' except in pseudo-passives like *περίπεμπτος* and *περίφορος* (LSJ), and I grant that that meaning is the dominant one. Nevertheless, the more literal rendering 'all-around' is so closely tied with 'very', and gives so much more vivid a reading of *περίφρων Πηνελόπεια*, that I have used it throughout.
13. This position has become increasingly popular. It emerged out of the ingenious but overstated proposal by Harsh (1950) that Odysseus and Penelope communicate by code. Critiquing Harsh, Amory (1963: 104) suggested that Penelope intuits the presence of her husband "intermittently". For Austin (1975: 232), "The spiritual harmony between the two, shown in their understanding of each other's language, makes it hardly credible that no recognition has taken place". Austin and Russo (1982) support Amory's notion of intuition. Emlyn-Jones (1984) faults all these 'Intuitionists' (including Harsh) for ignoring certain passages, but mainly he is ideologically and/or temperamentally opposed to 'psychologizing' (see note 14, where I defend and locate this form of criticism).
 Both Amory and Austin give full analyses of the emotional state of Penelope from the time she first encounters the stranger. Neither makes enough, in my opinion, of Penelope's self-interest and both (together with Harsh) overestimate what she knows. Amory's Penelope emerges as an unconscious and unreflective being, very 'female' in an old sense of the word but not so very 'like-minded' to Odysseus. Austin perhaps overromanticizes the level of communication achieved by the pair.
 My reconsideration of Penelope passages is meant to provide an alternative to the hypothesis that Penelope based her decision to set up the contest on intuition alone, and an alternative as well to the model of total communication between a couple, even a couple such as Odysseus and Penelope whose relationship rests on *homophrosyne*.
14. Devereux (1957) gives a convincing psychoanalytic portrait of Penelope's lonely state, as indicated in her dream; Russo, too (1982: 6-11), offers a psychological interpretation of the dream of Book 19. Another sensitive psychological interpreter, Van Nortwick (1979), links Penelope's divided mind in Books 18 and 19 with Homer's portrayal of Nausicaa. Others cite Devereux with apparent approval.
 Emlyn-Jones (1984), on the other hand, vehemently opposes postulating any "psychological 'sub-text'" (4) for understanding characters in the *Odyssey*; he prefers a genetic explanation. In my view, the locus for a psychological interpretation is in the interpreter, who may legitimately base such inferences about Penelope's psyche on clues in the text. The problem with eschewing this whole approach is that one is left only with genetic explanations, which, even when ingenious, do not account for literary impact.
15. Among explanations offered to explain away Courtship or indeed Dalliance, the appeal to plot needs is prominent. Woodhouse (1930), who names his tenth chapter "Penelopeia's Collapse", states that "A new departure on the part of Penelopeia is the only way of overcoming the deadlock" (84) and this explains her "sudden

- resolve" which is "without motive, without justification, and apparently runs counter to the epithet of 'sensible' or 'wise'" (84, 83). Tolstoi (1934) and Hölscher (1967) take the coming-of-age of Telemachus, a folktale motif, as determining the moment of Penelope's decision to hold the contest. While admiring all these ingenious contributions, I do not find that they 'explain' Penelope's decision on the level which here concerns me, namely, that of the psychological plausibility and consequent intelligibility to the reader of the character Penelope.
16. See note 2: I mean not only infidelity, but Infidelity as a plot-type.
 17. On the derivation of Πηνελόπεια from πήνη, 'loom', cf. E. Wüst, *RE* 19 s.v. 'Penelope', esp. col. 461. Wüst refers to Eustathius, 1421.64-1422.2 (*ad* 1.344) as an ancient source for this etymology. Of course, name puns, to be effective, need not rely on valid etymologies. I am grateful to Professor Howard Porter for teaching me this.
 18. Consider, in Vaihinger (1913), the expediency of fictions in furthering understanding. My proposal that Penelope is Homer's accomplice in weaving strands of plot is to be taken as such an 'as if' proposal, in a spirit of useful play.
 19. The translation used throughout this paper is that of Richmond Lattimore.
 20. On narration as cognition, see White (1980: 1) and Alter (1981: 155-77 "Narration and Knowledge").
 21. My approach was influenced at an early stage by several efforts by literary theorists to apply the philosophical concept (dating from Leibniz) of 'possible worlds' to literary worlds, especially by Doležel (1976), Ryan (1985), and Pavel (1986: 43-72 "Salient Worlds"). Doležel uses the concept of modalities in a way which influenced my formulation of the questions we must ask about Penelope. Ryan, developing Pavel's notion (1980) of 'character's domain', has proposed a way to map out a world from the perspective of a character.
 22. Hölscher (1967) and Finley (1978) both see the importance of Penelope's tears in establishing her sincerity. Combellack (1973: 32-40) convincingly shows that Penelope's earlier tears, after the interview (19.603), and her second prayer to Artemis (20.61-90) are "completely incompatible with the Harsh-Amory woman who knows that Odysseus is asleep downstairs" (38). Then he follows Whallon (1961: 128) in asserting that Penelope believed the suitors would certainly fail in the contest (39). This 'solution' is, however, inharmonious with the tears in 21.55-60.
 Thornton's idea (1970: 105), that Penelope's decision proves her "utter loyalty to Odysseus" since she is obeying his instructions, gets us back to a univalent Penelope. Another proposal, that Penelope uses the contest as a divining test (Amory 1963, followed by Austin, 1969 and 1975), gives us a Penelope who is too passive, who allows her fate to rest 'in the lap of the gods'. Contrast Zeus' statement in the council of Book 1 (32-43); would Penelope be the sort of character, like Aegisthus, to blame the gods if things did not turn out favorable? It seems unlikely. Consider as well Athena/Mentes' statement to Telemachus (1.203-5) that Odysseus will find a way home, 'since he is a man of many resources' (ἐπεὶ πολυμήχανός ἐστιν). Why would we expect Penelope to be different?
 23. For a summary of the arguments in favor of athetesis see Van der Valk (1949: 194-6). He claims that "the lines are no interpolation but in fact they show us very clearly the inner emotion of Penelope" because "Penelope has for a long time wavered and actually failed to recognize her husband ... It is obvious she is afraid of Odysseus' reaction and wrath" (196). Beye, too, anticipates my point when he comments (1974: 97) that Penelope defends Helen "on the ground that chastity is a very chancy thing", and that "Within one human heart exist several desires or reactions, but some of them, while they can be acknowledged, must be suppressed". His brief study uncovers many dimensions of Penelope's character, through parallels to Helen, Clytemnestra, and even Circe.

24. It is an argument *a fortiori* (cf. Arist. *Rh.* 1358a14-17 and 1397b12-29): 'If Helen acted thus, and is absolved, why cannot I, who *almost* committed a *less severe* breach of faith, be forgiven?' Thus Penelope distorts factual truth for argument's sake (I am grateful to my colleague John Kirby for these observations).
25. She is viewed by them as a bewitcher, almost a Circe figure. Her web is an entrapment for them, much like Circe's island for Odysseus' men. See the excellent discussion of Penelope as a Circe figure in Beye (1974).
26. The Ancient Tradition was as ambivalent on the topic of Penelope's sensuality as modern scholars (see Wüst: cf. note 1). Some, wanting an uncomplicated Penelope, align themselves with the character Agamemnon: they tend to excise what does not suit their image of the heroine. Others, using the *Odyssey* as social history, explain Penelope's actions as reactions to social constraints. Marquardt (1985), e.g., who collects and treats all these passages, and anticipates my case for a complex Penelope (48), vitiates her own argument by underestimating Penelope's autonomy. For example, she concludes that Penelope "goes through the motions of encouraging courtship" (35) because of "social constraints and obligations on her" pressing her "to remarry once there is no realistic hope of Odysseus' return" (33). She sees no evidence of choice on Penelope's part, though Odysseus' parting words (quoted by Penelope in 18.259-70) – if we accept them as 'authentic' and not Penelope's *ad hoc* invention – make it clear that it is her decision whether to proceed with marriage plans or not. If we contrast Penelope's situation with that of Clytemnestra (3.267-8: 'a man was there, a singer, whom Agamemnon, when he went to Troy, had given many instructions to keep watch on his wife'), we can imagine that the social fabric reflected in the *Odyssey* admitted at least these two different sorts of marital relationship (see note 11).
27. On Athena as the plan and guiding hand of the poet, cf. Reinhardt (1960: 45). If this is so, which plots does the goddess, in the poet's stead, further? She knows Penelope is a matron, so that eliminates all maiden plots. Bride-Contest for a matron (which appears to the suitors as Bride-Contest for a maiden and is therefore a δόλος or 'deceit') is an expedient plot for her to support; so is Marriage-Avoidance (for a matron). To make Penelope τιμῆσσα ... μᾶλλον ... ἢ πάρος, 'more cherished than before', is a way of goading husband and son toward competing through the bride-contest for her hand (with the son helping win her for his father – an unusual situation in bride-contests). That is, Athena increases the intensity of competition among men for a beautiful woman. The scene is archetypically powerful.
28. Levine (1983) argues that, besides representing her confusion, Penelope's laughter expresses her cunning: "Penelope laughs at the notion of fooling the suitors because she knows she can succeed" (176). I link her laughter to coquetry and a new awareness of *eros*. Cf. the similarly arresting laughter of Heaven, Earth and Sea just before Persephone plucks the narcissus (a proleptic symbol of her loss of virginity), in *HyDem* 13-14.
29. The brooch is a complicated symbol. In semiotic terms, it conveys meaning as a physical object and for the image which decorates it. As a physical object – a departure gift from wife to husband – it binds Odysseus, reminding him of Penelope's claims. Its decorative image symbolizes the erotic chase, perhaps even the first capture of Penelope by Odysseus. But the chase itself is not unambiguously 'male captures female'. Consider Penelope's trick of the marriage bed – a sort of verbal trap in which she ensnares her husband; the chase scene on the brooch could proleptically point to this entrapment, with Odysseus the fleeing fawn and Penelope the chasing hound!
30. It is here that Page (1955) and others argue that recognition must have taken place in the earlier version. The activity of Athena points toward the poet's management of the story; see note 27.

31. See Marquardt's convincing discussion of the simile of the daughter of Pandareos (1985: 40).
32. On the irony produced by the polyphony of narrative voices in the *Odyssey*, particularly in the narration of Penelope's dream, see Delrieu, Hilt & Létoublon (1984: 190-3). Odysseus, the narrator, Euryycleia and the audience know that the liar is Odysseus, and that he is already home; Penelope believes that the dream is false, but that the stranger is truly the Cretan Aethon (192).
33. She mourns their death as geese in the dream as she will have no chance to mourn them later in reality. Note Penelope's grief for the suitors, emphasized by triple repetitions: 'Then *I began to weep* – that was in my dream – and *cried out aloud*, and around me gathered the fair-haired Achaeae women as *I cried out sorrowing* for my geese killed by the eagle' (19.541-3).
34. Scholarly debate remains inconclusive as to Penelope's meaning when she says 'then ... I saw the geese in my palace, feeding on their grains of wheat from the water trough, just as before' (552-3). Marquardt (1985: 43 n. 12) reviews the literature and then sides with the Literalists as opposed to the Psychological Critics (Russo a.o.). For me Penelope's remark is provocatively enigmatic, as we cannot know whether or not she accepts the equation geese = suitors offered by the dream-figure Odysseus and affirmed by the stranger. It feels like a teasing gesture from HOMER.
35. The dream is an explicit portent of the future. Nevertheless, to the dreamer herself the presence of the geese/suitors may seem to contradict the dream message. In the dream itself the death of the geese (= suitors) is vividly felt. On augury in the *Odyssey*, particularly in connection with this passage, see Podlecki (1967); on the possibility that Penelope used the contest as a form of divination, see Amory (1963: 113-16), followed by Austin (1975: 234-7 and 278 n. 28).
36. This scene has contributed to the archetypal image of Penelope as virtuous wife (see note 1). Scholars rarely notice that the loom deceit contains an encouragement to the suitors. For a different view of Penelope's weaving, as part of an argument for a solar-lunar interpretation of the courtship of Odysseus and Penelope, see Austin (1975: esp. 252-3).
37. For 'like-mindedness' (ὄμοφροσύνη) as a principle of marriage, the often-cited passage from Odysseus' prayer for Nausicaa is worth quoting in full:

180

“σοὶ δὲ θεοὶ τόσα δοῖεν ὅσα φρεσὶ σῆσι μενοινᾶς,
 ἄνδρα τε καὶ οἶκον καὶ ὄμοφροσύνην ὀπάσειαν
 ἐσθλὴν· οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ γε κρείσσον καὶ ἄρειον,
 ἢ ὅθ' ὄμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχητον
 ἀνὴρ ἠδὲ γυνή· πόλλ' ἄλγεα δυσμενέεσσι,
 χάρματα δ' εὐμενέτησι· μάλιστα δὲ τ' ἔκλυον αὐτοί.”

(6.180-5)

The reciprocity suggested by ὄμοφροσύνη is evident in the Penelope-Odysseus relation, in their mutual sharing of μύθοι in the marriage bed and in Homer's allotting them parallel, multiple plots.

38. Cf. Cavafy's *Ithaca* as an interpretation of the adventures along this line.
39. Cf. Pandora's preparation by the goddesses in Hes. *Op.* 60-82 in anticipation of her marriage to Epimetheus.
40. Compare lines 66, ἀνέλοντο θύελλαι and 77, ἄρπυιαι ἀνηρείψαντο, two parts of a ring-composition framing the simile. The parallel lines in the comparant (61-2, Ἄρτεμι ... βαλοῦσ' ἐκ θυμὸν ἔλοιο and 63, μ' ἀναρπάξασα θύελλα) also suggest violence and unwillingness.

For the language of rape cf. *HyDem* 19-20 (ἀρπάξας δ' ἀέκουσαν ... ἤγ' ὀλοφυρομένην) and for the victim's own description of force-feeding (an analogue of rape) and abduction, cf. 413 (ἄκουσαν δὲ βίη με προσηνάγκασσε πάσασθαι) and 431-2 (φέρων ... πόλλ' ἀεκαζομένην).

41. The figure is villainous especially (and perhaps only) when focalised by the virgin; cf. Hades in Persephone's account of the force-feeding and the abduction to her mother (see note 40).
42. This is the Peleus-Thetis or Pandora-Epimetheus sub-type, wherein divinities adorn the bride.
43. I mean 'virgin' in the Greek sense of παρθένος as 'unmarried woman'.
44. Cf. 18.193 and 202 just before Penelope descends to tempt the suitors; 19.54 as she comes to her interview with the stranger 'looking like Artemis or like golden Aphrodite'; and 20.61, 68, 71 and 73 in this prayer to Artemis.
45. Artemis oversees Penelope's chastity, I suggest, because Penelope is like a virgin bride.
46. These are listed under 'Marriage tests' (H300-H499, esp. H360-H479) in Thompson (1955). Woodhouse (1930) is particularly interesting in his analyses of such Folktale elements, though his labels are a bit idiosyncratic.
47. Compare Alcestis' attempt (*E. Alc.* 280-98) to explain to Admetus that she chose to die on his behalf despite knowing that she had other options.

