

PENELOPE, DOMESTIC POWER AND THE
MORALITY OF DECEIT IN HOMER'S *ODYSSEY*

by

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A Thesis Submitted in

Partial Fulfilment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in Ancient Myth and Society

at

University of Wales, Trinity Saint David

November 2012

Abstract

Penelope's use of trickery to delay her marriage to one of the persistent suitors of *The Odyssey* is, on the surface, exemplified by a ruse which is effective in its simplicity. The weaving, and subsequent un-weaving, of Laertes' shroud is a brilliant ploy which successfully keeps the suitors at bay until the trick is revealed by one of her maids. This, however, is not the only example of Penelope's ability to deceive. Although much has been made of the cunning and resourceful means by which Penelope, as the good wife, attempts to preserve the memory and physical household of her husband, it seems that little attention has been paid to her role her deceit plays in preserving her own status within the *oikos*.

By raising my focus out of the physical boundaries of Odysseus' palace and to a more abstract consideration of the concept of the *oikos* in Homer's text it is my intent that this dissertation will overcome this barrier by focussing on Penelope's actions in light of a marked distinction between her spiritual and physical presence. Deceit, I will argue, is the vessel by which Penelope remains both loyal to the abstract understanding of Odysseus' *oikos* and empowered within its physical walls. As one of the primary themes of *The Odyssey*, my research will focus specifically on the examples of deceit which in some manner pertain to the notion of household integrity. It is by these means that I hope to establish a "Morality of Deceit" for instances where lying and deception are employed by the perpetrator solely to contribute to the integrity of the *oikos*. Placing Penelope in this context will allow an exploration of how both her fidelity and deceit, whilst morally in the service of the *oikos*, serve to sustain her domestic control over Odysseus' physical household.

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1. INTRODUCTION

To many, the trick of the weaving and un-weaving of Laertes' shroud (*Od.*19.146-7) is the defining moment of Penelope's deceit in the *Odyssey*. Here the audience can sample the simplicity of a ruse which has enabled Penelope to stave off the advances of a group of persistent suitors, eager to win marital favour in the absence of Odysseus, whilst allowing the besieged Queen to remain visibly faithful to both the memory of her husband and her own role within his household. It is by these means that the text introduces us to a Penelope whose ability to deceive is conditioned by a social awareness of her status as "wife" and, specifically, the personal repute fostered by her actions, e.g. "lest any Achaian women in this neighbourhood hold it against me" (*Od.*19.146).

This link between deception and repute is also visible when Penelope encourages her suitors to court her with "glorious presents" by playing on the fact that "the behaviour of these suitors is not as it was in time past" (*Od.*18.275-80). Again it is apparent that Penelope's ease of deceit is assisted by an emphasis upon a conceived and recognised notion of a traditional behaviour of repute. In respect of this, an establishment of a literary relationship between deceit and personal repute in the *Odyssey* will come to form the bare bones of my research. For now, however, it is my intent to touch upon a history of attitudes towards Penelope and deceit from which my own analyses of this character will originate.

Celebrated in the ancient world as a paradigm of the “good wife” Penelope was “reputed chaste and good” (Aristoph. *Thes.*533) and, like Alcestis, proved herself to be honoured by the gods as “in time of distress they proved themselves faithful and dutiful to their husbands” (Aristot. *Econ.*3.1). Penelope’s ability to deceive is not referred to and, thus, seemingly not relevant to the writers of antiquity who were keen to praise Penelope for her outwardly displays of fidelity and devotion to the absent Odysseus, but paid no heed to the intrinsic nature of her character. It is interesting to note that the concept of a woman made from the “mischievous vixen whose mind gets into everything” of Semonides’ misogynistic poem (7.43-9) is perhaps now, as we shall see, more fitting an attribute to the modern understanding of Penelope than anything noted by the ancient critics.

When Winkler (1990) advocates a modern feminist anthropological approach to reading the *Odyssey*, which sees the “resourcefulness of women in cultures where they had hitherto been reported to be passive victims of male manipulation”, I believe we can begin to appreciate just how big a leap modern scholarship has made in its approach to the female characters of the text.¹

Interpreting Penelope by these means allows Winkler to present an intelligent, cunning figure who in the closest possible sense is equal in mind to Odysseus and, consequently, “the best wife for the best husband”.² No longer is Penelope the trophy wife of antiquity but part of “team Odysseus” with an intricate, and essential role to play in her husband’s *nostos*.

¹ Winkler, (1990), p.130.

² Winkler, (1990), p.161.

This theme, to varying extents, permeates much of contemporary research on Penelope. Moreover, it can also be chiefly characterised by its ability to foster huge divides between those scholars who, like Winkler (1990) and Foley (1995), believe (in very different ways) that Penelope's deceit empowers her to aid Odysseus' return and alternative theories such as those from Marquardt (1985) which are keen to maintain that Penelope only strives to protect her own position through deceit. With an appreciation of how much control Penelope actually wields over her own destiny and household also swamped in scholarly dispute, it appears that the indeterminate nature of this matter must clearly serve as a bone of contention for those wishing to engage with the nuances of this character on a deeper level.

My own approach to this problem will primarily seek to define Penelope in terms of her abstract position within the household of Odysseus. By moving away from the physical confines of the *oikos* I intend to explore just how Penelope functions spiritually as a wife to an absent husband. The text of the *Odyssey* does much to emphasise the heartbreak and grief that Odysseus' Queen endures until his return (*Od.*1.363, 15.450, 18.596) however it becomes quickly apparent that a lonely heart is not the only thing keeping her in tissues. For in as much as Penelope remains spiritually married to Odysseus the physicality of his absence in the household raises problems which consistently challenge the strength of this union.

The calls for Penelope to remarry (*Od.* 2.113, 18.288-9) would certainly, as Heitman notes, "mean a break with all she knows and loves" and "the loss of

her personal reputation and glory, her *kleos*".³ For Penelope this would not only mean she would have to curb her grief for Odysseus, but also that the repute she gained (*Od.* 24.196-8) by remaining chaste and loyal to her husband for so many years would quickly disperse.⁴ Both Morgan (1991) and Fredricksmeier (1997) argue that Penelope effectively emphasises her commitment to marriage, and chastity, by contrasting her own actions with those of Helen of Troy. This is an analysis which I will explore further in due course, for now its significance lies in its implication that Penelope does not desire remarriage, even if this is something Odysseus himself has instructed:

When you see our son grown up and bearded, then you may marry
whatever man you please, forsaking your household.

(*Od.*18:269-70)

With this in mind my research will consider whether Penelope's loyalties, even to the wishes of her husband, are necessarily committed to serving anything other than her own desires. Subsequently, the question as to in whose interests Penelope is actually working is one that will prevail and come to represent an aspect of this study which is significant for its role in helping me to develop an understanding of why Penelope deceives in the context of her position in the *oikos*.

The problems created by Odysseus' absence are, as I will discuss, a catalyst for the physical actions Penelope takes but it is the indeterminate reasoning of our Queen which really contributes to the intrigue surrounding the nature of her

³ Heitman (2008), p. 70.

⁴ Penelope's fidelity and repute is exemplified in the text by the constant comparisons which appear between her and Clytemnestra. See *Od.*11.444-53, 3.265-72 and 24.193-203. Also, Murnaghan (1987, p.126).

deceit. Like Clayton (2004) my approach will reflect the notion, and my own personal belief that Penelope is a conscious “weaver of *mētis*”, with the trick of the shroud representing the ultimate metaphor for Penelope’s ability to employ her deceit on both a physical and spiritual level.⁵ The link between the loom, female virtue and domestic order that is well attested by modern scholars such as Pantelia (1993) and Shoichet (2007) will also allow the weaving metaphors of both the *Odyssey* and a range of other Classical texts to provide a fascinating and undeniable link between Penelope’s deceit and the social order/disorder of the household from which she operates to become an essential aspect of my study.⁶ This research will examine examples of deceit from various characters of the *Odyssey* in order to ascertain whether their actions, like Penelope’s, can be linked with household integrity.

From this I intend to discuss whether a “morality of deceit”, where lying and deception are employed by the perpetrator solely to contribute to the integrity of the *oikos*, exists in the *Odyssey*. I will argue that Penelope’s own deceit is the vessel by which she remains both loyal to the abstract understanding of Odysseus’ *oikos* and empowered within its physical walls. In this way she becomes both the protector and the protected, allowing for an analysis of a link between the morality of her actions and her level of domestic control which has not been considered before.

To summarise, it is my aim that this dissertation will now allow me to demonstrate just how and why I believe that Penelope’s deceit helps to sustain

⁵ Clayton (2004), p.32.

⁶ Other examples of weaving myths will include Helen in *Iliad* 3.125-28, Arachne in *Ov.Met* 6.1-244 and Philomela in *Ov.Met* 6.571-619.

her moral standing and level of domestic control in the *Odyssey*. My approach to the text of the *Odyssey* will characterise that of a traditional literary criticism which will allow me to analyse the words, symbols, characters and voice of the plot as an integrated whole. Using this method, I will base my research on the assumption that there are no interpolations in the text which might disrupt the thematic connectivity between the scenes I will analyse. It is by these means that I intend to ground my research firmly within the context of the *Odyssey* and its related literature in order that I might avoid the danger of solely initiating my discussion from any external approaches to the text.⁷

Structurally, the main body of my work will consist of a literature review and four chapters. The first of these chapters: “Not Built on Solid Ground: Genealogical Constructs and the Integrity of the *Oikos*”, will allow me to explore the theme of the *oikos* in the *Odyssey*. This chapter will operate with the intent of defining Penelope’s domestic situation and thus establishing the link between Penelope, household and deceit that will characterise my dissertation.

“Penelope as Trickster” succinctly sets the tone of Section 4 which aims to employ Penelope as a case study of deceit in the *Odyssey*. Here, I will examine Penelope’s primary ruse of the trick of the shroud (*Od.*2.104-9) and her role as an active trickster who operates deceitfully in order to maintain her position within, and the integrity of, the *oikos*. This discussion will allow me to advance my study towards Section 5 and a focus on “Penelope’s Morality of Deceit”.

⁷. This is not to say that any socio/psycho/ anthropological methods such as those referenced by Winkler (1990) are unwarranted, or will not be considered, only that my research and its presentation will remain largely text based.

In this section I will examine the broader presentation of Penelope's trickery in the *Odyssey* in order to develop my thesis that Penelope's actions might be interpreted in the context of a "morality of deceit". To support this, I will also focus this section on an investigation of the relationship between Penelope's *mētis* and her virtue.

Finally, Section 6 entitled, "Still King of Her Castle? Penelope and the Art of Maintaining the Status Quo", will argue for an analysis of Penelope which seeks to unify the conflicting virtuous and deceitful aspects of her character under the structure of my proposed "morality of deceit". I will close this chapter with an examination of how Penelope's ability to maintain the status quo of the household through *mētis* enables her to establish, and retain, a position of domestic power in Odysseus' absence.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research into the nature of deception in the *Odyssey* is widespread, fostering many theories as to how and for what purpose Penelope deceives. As the aim of my study concerns itself specifically with the relationship between Penelope's deceit and her levels of moral standing and domestic control it is my intent to focus this review on the aspects of the literature which, thematically, can be linked to this end.

These themes are significant to my study since they form the basis of what is to become a broader analysis of Penelope and power. A discussion of Penelope's moral standing will thus enable me to establish critical interpretations of the extent of Penelope's virtue, whereas a review of Penelope's domestic control will introduce the debate surrounding her household status and its connection with the intent behind her deception of the suitors. As the scope of the literature available on these topics is too vast to be considered here in its entirety, I will ensure that the nature of Penelope's deceit remains my overriding concern and focal point of this review.

2.1 Penelope's Moral Standing

Morality in Homer is defined in part by Gagarin (1987, p.292) as a "sense of obligation toward unprotected persons" which is based upon a reasoning that this type of concern would not be "motivated by self-interest". In the context of

the *Odyssey*, this would relate to the concept of *xenia* or “guest-friendship” and the emphasis on importance of hospitality towards strangers in the poem.⁸

Foley (1995, p.96) observes that Penelope was entrusted with the care of the household because of her capacity for “moral responsibility” which, I believe, would have included an expression of *xenia* as it is a theme that Odysseus so often engages with himself.⁹ The assertion that Penelope repeatedly shows that “she shares in the value system of her men” thus further supports this association.¹⁰

Mueller’s (2010, p.12) discussion of hospitable women, who gave clothes and textiles as guest gifts like Helen does in *Odyssey* 15.125-7 is also comparable with Penelope who shows concern for the correct treatment of guests within her home and makes promises that they will depart with new clothes (*Od.*19.309-28, 21.339). Moreover, Marquardt’s (1985) discussion of Penelope’s interaction with the suitors is similarly indicative of a display of hospitality as it demonstrates her acceptance of their presence. In view of this, Allen’s (1939, p.106) question of “why didn’t she just dismiss the suitors?” could, perhaps, be answered with recourse to the hospitality code. In short, both critical opinion and text based evidence largely support the notion of a hospitable Penelope which, by Gagarin’s standings, contributes to a level of moral standing.

Another way in which critics interpret Penelope’s moral standing is through *aretē* or “excellence”. Foley (1995, p.95) argues that both sexes can achieve

⁸ Note the Cyclops episode (*Od.*9.355-414) and the broader Phaeacian episode Books 7-12, specifically *Od.*7.159-65. For Penelope’s concern for guests see *Od.*19.317-28, 18.223-4.

⁹ Foley in Cohen (1995). For Odysseus and hospitality see *Od.* 8.204-211, where he demonstrates the behaviour of a good guest. Also in *Od.*9.355-414 and *Od.*9.196-205 which highlights the exchange between host and guest.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

kleos for their actions by publicly demonstrating *aretē*. Indeed, Heitman (2008, p.104) notes that the “Iliadic hero earns his lasting fame (*kleos*) for his excellence (*aretē*) in battle”. Agamemnon applies this concept to Penelope in *Odyssey* 24.192-98. However, Penelope’s *kleos* originates not from battle, but from the loom, and her ability to weave Laertes’ shroud in order that she might avoid remarriage (*Od.*2.104-9).

Clayton (2004, p.24) argues that, by virtue of the shroud trick, Penelope becomes comparable to Odysseus as a significant bardic figure in her own right as she weaves her story through a web of deceit.¹¹ This concurs with Felson-Rubin who additionally labels Penelope as a weaver of plots.¹² However, to weave, as Shoichet (2007, p.23) argues, was to participate in a domestic activity that was symbolic of classical feminine virtue.¹³ The recurring question of how Penelope could both be virtuous and deceitful through her use of the loom thus poses problems for critics like Foley (1995) who look to support Penelope’s epithet of *aretē* and, subsequently, her moral standing.¹⁴ Moreover, for those who wish to explore Penelope’s *mētis* the door is seemingly wide open for the intriguing analyses of critics such as Harsh (1950), Winkler (1990) and Marquardt (1985) to begin to challenge the traditional approach to Penelope as simply a “good wife”.¹⁵ Indeed, the move towards a consideration of Penelope’s “*kleos* for *aretē* in *mētis*” is a trend which will be prominent in my study.

Consequently, an analysis of Penelope’s true moral intent and character has come to significantly divide contemporary scholarship, with some critics arguing

¹¹ See Mueller (2010, p.349). Also, for comparison with Odysseus as bard, Segal (1996,p.202).

¹² Felson-Rubin in Schein (1996), p.165.

¹³ Also Pantelia (1993), p.493.

¹⁴ See Foley in Cohen (1995).Also, Emlyn-Jones (1984) and Morgan (1991).

¹⁵ Aristoph.*Thes.*533

for a virtuous Penelope who is genuinely confused by her options, whilst others maintain that she is clever and in control of her own agenda through deceit. My broader thesis will contribute to this debate by identifying if, by the definition of a “morality of deceit” linking the themes of virtue and deception in the *Odyssey*, I might offer a means by which we might begin to unify these conflicting approaches.

2.2 Penelope’s Domestic Control

Scholarly opinion of how much domestic control or power Penelope may hold is often examined in relation to her ability to deceive in order to further her own agenda. The beguiling of the suitors through the trick of the shroud (*Od.*2.104-9), amongst other examples of Penelope’s coquetry (*Od.*18.158-303, 23.174-208), is thus a widely debated topic by critics such as Marquardt (1985), Winkler (1990) and Heitman (2008) who, to varying degrees, argue that Penelope is “clever” and in control of her social situation.¹⁶ This approach enables scholars to critically assess Penelope’s *mētis* in an attempt to define the scope of her ability to exert domestic control.¹⁷

It is argued by Emlyn-Jones (1982, p.12) that Penelope’s decision to call the contest of the bow (*Od.* 21.1-79) further acts as a mark of independence and control as it signifies that Penelope, herself, has the prerogative to decide to

¹⁶ My arguments in Sections 5 and 6 will concur with this approach by demonstrating how Penelope uses her *mētis* to gain domestic control.

¹⁷ Hesychius of Alexandria provides the following meanings of *metis*; intelligence, plan, council, skill, trick and thought. For further definitions of *mētis* see Detienne and Vernant (1991, p.115) and Bergren (1993), p.8.

whom, and when, she will remarry.¹⁸ Foley (1995, p.101-2) suggests that Penelope moves towards a decision to remarry because this action would be in the best interests of her son, Telemachus. This contention is supported by Heitman's (2008) reading of the text which argues that it is Penelope's love and concern for Telemachus (*Od.4.819*) that is the driving force behind her decisions as all she wants is for her son to reach maturity and continue Odysseus' family line through the preservation of the *oikos*.¹⁹ In view of this, it appears that the current direction of scholarship on Penelope's deceit and household status is edging towards a greater focus on the role of Telemachus.²⁰

A contrasting position to the forward thinking independent Penelope of the above critics is offered by Murnaghan, who states that Penelope is powerless and a victim of her social situation.²¹ This approach focuses on *kleos*, which is won through Penelope's ability to demonstrate her loyalty to Odysseus as his wife or, as Foley suggests, "as a person powerless to act except in relation to another".²² Foley's (1995, p.108) Penelope is thus powerless like Murnaghan's as she is unable to defend her reputation in the same way as a powerful warrior or leader would; however, this time she is not a victim of her social status but a character defined by her responsibilities and the *kleos* she can gain from operating loyally from within her dedicated role.²³

¹⁸ This is emphasised by Telemachus statement that he will not push his mother to remarry (*Od.2.129-137*).

¹⁹ Heitman (2008), p.39-40. In Section 5 (p.51), I will contest this by arguing that Penelope's scolding of Telemachus (*Od.18.215-55*) acts as a plot device to undermine his maturity and thus secure her own domestic power at the expense of progressing Telemachus' claim.

²⁰ For broader scholarship on the role of Telemachus see Belmont (1967&1969) and Jones (1988).

²¹ Murnaghan in Skinner (1987, p.107ff.)

²² Foley (1995), p.108.

²³ *Ibid*

Challenging Murnaghan's analysis in particular, Winkler (1990) leans to the direction of feminist anthropology and argues that Penelope is active in "coping with the forces arrayed against her", thus offering a reading of Penelope which "avoids the assumptions of victimage".²⁴ Subsequently, Winkler's Penelope is clever, shrewd and not weighed down by the confusion of her situation in the way that Murnaghan's study would profess. Moreover in this instance, she has, as Winkler notes, richly earned her *kleos* for *mētis*.²⁵

Relevant to any analysis of Penelope's domestic control is discussion of the extent to which we might take Penelope on her word. I can only emphasise the significance this argument holds for how critics approach an interpretation of Penelope's motivation and intent, not just in this episode but for the *Odyssey* in its entirety. Indeed, as noted earlier in this review, scholarly consideration of how much domestic control or power Penelope may hold is often examined in relation to her ability to deceive in order to further her own agenda. Moreover, Penelope's *kleos* is also reliant on the intent of the speeches which pass her lips.²⁶

Heitman (2008, p.10) focuses on what we can learn from the plot if we accept that Penelope offers a "strikingly accurate and straightforward account of her own feelings, intentions and beliefs". Basing his approach on the contention that as the audience readily accepts what Odysseus is saying when there is no evidence that he is lying, that they should also be prepared to do the same for

²⁴ Winkler (1990), p.142.

²⁵ Winkler (1990), p.130.

²⁶ For example, Penelope's appearance before the suitors (*Od.* 18.158-303).

Penelope.²⁷ However, Murnaghan's (1987, p.104) observation that the "possessor of *mētis* is able to say one thing while thinking another and to overcome his enemies through deceit" could only lead to an analysis of Penelope that would comply with the approach of Heitman if we are willing to accept that the character of Penelope also receives the same treatment. Personally, I feel that Heitman's (2008) approach excludes the possibility that Homer might have intended for his characters to have the ability to deceive their audiences. Thus, by taking account of these observations, it is my intent that this study will not limit its scope in analysing Penelope's deceit by taking her solely on her word.

To conclude, despite the differences in these scholarly approaches to Penelope's deceit, it is Penelope's concern for her *kleos* that appears to be the consistently emerging theme which unites each of these interpretations. My study will therefore develop this pattern in order to establish a clear link between the intent behind Penelope's deceit and her desire for *kleos* in the hope that I might successfully argue for an analysis of Penelope which recognises the fact that, above all other things, her actions function to serve a very personal agenda.

In order that I might facilitate the above, my research and its following presentation will rely primarily, but not exclusively, on Lattimore's (1965) eloquent translation of the *Odyssey* as I believe that this text offers the most clear and accessible means of interpreting the poem.²⁸ Translations by Cook

²⁷ Heitman (2008), p.9-10. See also Emlyn-Jones (1986) and Griffin in Fowler (2004), p.156-67 for further discussion of Odysseus' speech making.

²⁸ When required, I will also use Lattimore's (1951) translation of the *Iliad*.

(1967) and Fagles (1996) will also be taken into account. For lexical referencing, I will consult Autenrieth's (1891) *A Homeric Dictionary for Schools and Colleges* and Liddell & Scott's (1940) *A Greek-English Lexicon*. I will, intermittently, use the name "Homer" to refer to the poet of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*; however this is simply for descriptive ease and does not intend to negate of the question of authorship.²⁹

²⁹ Sherratt in Schein (1992, p.145) succinctly defines the "Homeric Question" as the "circumstance of the formation and final composition of the poems". See also Davies; Hainsworth in Schein (1992, p.145) and Fowler (2004) for scholarship on both historical and contemporary approaches towards an understanding of the origins of these poems and who or what "Homer" actually represented.

3. NOT BUILT ON SOLID GROUND: GENEALOGICAL CONSTRUCTS AND THE INTEGRITY OF THE *OIKOS*

The themes of household and family in the *Odyssey* are essential to my study as they significantly underlie my intent to develop an analysis of Penelope which considers both her physical and spiritual position as Odysseus' wife. This chapter will explore an understanding of the *oikos* and the use of genealogy in Homeric literature in order to determine the role of the *oikos* and Penelope's place within it. I will also argue that we might view the *oikos* as both a physical and abstract concept in which the family base of the *Odyssey* may function as an integrated whole, even through physical separation. This argument supports my broader thesis; that Penelope remains spiritually connected and subservient to her husband whilst exerting her own level of domestic control over his physical household.

Continuing this theme of a physical/abstract divide, I will also explore any challenges to the integrity of the *oikos*, both in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, in order that I might introduce the concept of deceit as an abstract threat. Though morally questionable, I intend to examine just how deceit can be seen to function for the benefit of the household in these texts with the hope of placing my subject firmly in the context of the significance of her role in maintaining Odysseus' *oikos*. Notably, Penelope's trick of the shroud (*Od.*19.146-7) will be referenced as a primary example of this "beneficial deceit".

It is by these means that I aim to support an objective of this study to outline Penelope's status and situation and discuss the greater theme of household in the *Odyssey*, whilst also establishing a link between Penelope, the *oikos* and

deceit that will come to permeate and drive the remainder of my dissertation. In view of this, I believe the best place to start is with a definition of *oikos* and, thus, an understanding of how we might best interpret the use of this term in its Homeric context.

The Liddell and Scott entry for *oikia* translates this word as meaning “building, house or dwelling”. *Oikos* is also referenced here as defining a person’s estate or the property left upon his death, however this was under Attic law and the entry states that it was in this jurisdiction that *oikos* was distanced from *oikia* which simply meant “dwelling house”.³⁰ MacDowell (1989, p.10-20) discusses this point and states that in legal contexts it was more usual for *oikia* to mean “house” and *oikos* to mean “property” or “family” but goes on to conclude that it was only by the late fifth and fourth centuries that *oikos* acquired the sense of “family”.³¹ In short, the older senses of this term were either *oikia* “house” or *oikos* “property”. This observation may limit the extent to which I can use *oikos* as an all encompassing term to define both Odysseus’ family and household in my study. However, it is my intent that this chapter’s discussion of household preservation will go some of the way to establish a sense of family in the Homeric use of *oikos* that pre-dates any official recognition.³² This will give me the scope to offer an analysis of Penelope which incorporates both her position within, and as representative of, Odysseus’ *oikos*.

³⁰ Liddell and Scott (1940)

³¹ MacDowell (1989), p.10-11,20.

³² This is supported by Autenrieth’s definition of *oikos* as “house as home, including the family, and other inmates and belongings”.

3.1 Household Preservation

Greek society was patriarchal and, despite his physical absence from Ithaca, Odysseus would have remained both master of the *oikos* and head of the family.³³ *Kyrios* or “governor” was the term used to describe this position and, as Lacey (1968, p.21) contends, “only a man could be *Kyrios* of a family”. In consideration of this, Penelope’s claim in *Odyssey* 19.526 that she will “keep all in order, *my* property, *my* serving maids, and *my* great high-roofed house” perhaps gives us an interesting insight into her own frame of mind concerning the authority she held while Odysseus was away.³⁴ However, Lacey is keen to stress that although women like Penelope were trusted to look after a man’s property in his absence this was only a temporary measure until the original *Kyrios* returned or a new one was established.³⁵ A point exemplified in *Odyssey* 5.208 where, despite being a goddess (*Od.*5.85), Kalypso urges Odysseus to remain within her palace and “be the lord of this household”.³⁶

In view of this, Penelope’s “official” position in Ithaca was clearly very much one of guardianship (*Od.*11.178), and not the ownership that her claims at 19.526 suggest. However, her role as “mistress of his *oikos*” and “mother of his dear son” allows Finley (1977, p.127) to suggest Penelope was very much part of what Odysseus meant by “home”. Indeed, Penelope’s claim that “this house”

³³ See Finley (1977), p.90 and Pomeroy (1994) p.22 for matriarchy. Here, Finley observes that “neither Penelope nor Arête met the genealogical requirements of a matrilineal kinship structure, let alone of matriarchy”.

³⁴ Italics represent my own emphasis.

³⁵ Lacey (1968), p.22.

³⁶ There is some debate amongst scholars whether the use of *basileus* denotes king or leader in the text of the *Odyssey*. See Halverson in Emlyn-Jones et al (1992, p.182ff) and Finley (1977, p.83ff) for contrasting arguments. Also appropriate here is Bertolín’s (2008, p.99) observation that Telemachus only wants to be “Lord” and not “King” *Od.*1.397-8.

was “a lovely place and full of good living” (*Od.*21.77-9) and Odysseus’ own association between family and property (*Od.*11.174-9) are perhaps indications this Homeric *oikos* should be viewed as much more than just a physical establishment. A view supported by Patterson’s (1998, p46-7) argument that by emphasising “that the *oikos* was a place around which were focussed experiences of living and dying, producing and reproducing”, Homer has enabled *oikos* to take on an “inclusive sense which could embrace both persons property”.³⁷

As *Kyrios*, Odysseus would have also counted his lands, buildings, wealth, servants and livestock amongst his possessions. His absence perhaps providing an earlier instantiation of the conversation between Socrates and Critobulus in which the opinion that; “everything which a man has got, even though some portion of it may lie in another part of the world from that in which he lives, forms part of his estate”, is purported.³⁸ This opinion is certainly true of Odysseus’ detainment on Kalypso’ island for seven years (*Od.*7.259) which sees the hero still lamenting for his home (*Od.*5.81-5, 154-8) despite tempting offers of power, immortality and the company of the beautiful goddess (*Od.*5.208-13). However, the eagerness of Odysseus to return to his home and wife after all these years away (*Od.*5.216-20) may not solely rest with a sense of longing and excitement for reunion with family, but rather may be reflective of a sense of responsibility for his property that connects Odysseus to both the wellbeing of his family and the protection of his *oikos*.

³⁷ Patterson (1998), p.46-7.

³⁸ Xenophon *Oeconomicus* 1

Patterson's reference to Hector's "appeal to civic patriotism" (*Il.*15.496-8) is significant here as it emphasizes how an honourable death in defence of his country would allow a hero, like Odysseus, to die protecting his wife, children, house and property.³⁹ If we compare this with Vernant's observation that Odysseus has "disappeared without glory" and that for "as long as he remains secluded and hidden with Kalypso (his) state is neither that of the living nor that of the dead" we can perhaps begin to appreciate Odysseus' desire to return home.⁴⁰ For as long as Odysseus remains absent from home his honour is compromised, he has not lost his life in Troy but he is still unavailable to protect his property and defend the integrity of his household in Ithaca.⁴¹ Indeed, Halverson (1992, p.188) argues that what personal honour was in the *Iliad*, the honour of the *oikos* is in the *Odyssey*, thus equating Odysseus' war prize with his home and possessions. Thus, it comes as no surprise that, for the first time in literary tradition, the Kalypso episode presents "what might be called the heroic refusal of immortality".⁴² For Odysseus to be celebrated in life he must die as an honourable *Kyrios*. In short, it is thus Odysseus' actions alone that are ultimately responsible for the preservation of his *oikos*.

3.2 Genealogy

Family histories appear frequently in both Homeric works; the genealogies of Glaukos and Aineias in the *Iliad* (6.150-210, 20.213-241), and Arete in the *Odyssey* (12.54-68) to name but a few. Book 11 of the *Odyssey* also offers us a Homeric "catalogue of heroines" (*Od.*11.225-329) which Doherty argues bears a

³⁹ Patterson (1998), p.45. Also Lacey (1968), p.34.

⁴⁰ Vernant in Schein (1996), p.187.

⁴¹ A situation comparable with that of Agamemnon in *Od.*11.405-44.

⁴² Vernant in Schein (1996), p.188.

striking resemblance to the surviving fragments of Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*.⁴³ Critics have offered varying responses to the reasoning behind this detailing of the past in Homer, a scope of consideration which far exceeds the limits of this section. However, it is my intent to now explore some of the theories which relate the use of genealogies specifically to an understanding of the relationship of the family to the household. It is by these means that I hope to establish how the status and honour of the *Kyrios* are the values upon which the integrity of *oikos* rests. This will not only allow me to further promote the connection between family and household in the *Odyssey*, but will also provide a good benchmark for my later analysis of Penelope's *kleos*.

Finley (1977, p.98-9) observes that in the permanently hostile environment which faced the early Greek man the only means open by which he could build alliances were through the channels of household and family; marriage thus served as an opportunity to develop new lines of kin and establish mutual obligation. This sense of family alliance is exemplified in *Odyssey* 10.438-441 when Odysseus speaks of how he was tempted to cut Eurylochos' head off, "even though he was nearly related to me by marriage". The choice of bride was thus an important one, with Finley stating that, when selecting a wife, "only a man from whom Zeus had taken his wits would have neglected considerations of wealth, power and support".⁴⁴ By these measures, Penelope who, as we are told, was the daughter of Ikarios, the king of Sparta (*Od.*1.328), would therefore have been (because of her lineage) as desirable a catch for the suitors as she originally was for Odysseus. In view of this, Finley argues that the recital of genealogies within the Homeric texts allowed the characters (and the audience)

⁴³ Doherty (2008), p.63.

⁴⁴ Finley (1977), p.99.

to make some sense of the “intricate, and sometimes confusing, network of obligations” that were often the result of several generations of such marriages, but still pertinent to the decisions of the day.

Developing this notion of family obligation, Patterson (1998, p.49) focuses her own interpretation of *genos* on the “origin or natural group” to which a person or thing belongs, arguing that this revelation of identity could act as justification for any future or past action by a character if it honours their particular “group”. This theory could also be applied to both Patterson’s and Finley’s discussions on the family obligations surrounding blood vengeance and blood feuds which detail that the responsibility for the punishment of a murderer lay “rooted in the household” with the victim’s closest relatives.⁴⁵ In this sense, Finley (1977, p.94) is correct when he states that “personal power meant the strength of the household and the family”, a notion exemplified by Odysseus’ and Telemachus’ own cooperation in slaying the suitors (*Od.15.235-9*).

Lacey’s (1968, p.38) discussion of the use of genealogy in the *Odyssey* takes a slightly different path asserting that “a claim to status by pedigree is the likeliest explanation of the growth of catalogue poetry”. For Lacey, it is not so much obligation which fosters these histories, but rather a “pride in lineage” which saw leaders seeking to establish their status and claim to rule through verbal documentation of their “descent from the ruling gods”.⁴⁶ Relevant to this approach is Finley’s (1977, p.75) observation that although Agamemnon is called on several occasions the “most kingly” of the heroes at Troy, it is his

⁴⁵ Patterson (1998), p.52-3. Finley (1977), p.94. Also Orestes slaying of Clytemnestra to avenge the death of his father Agamemnon in Euripides *Electra* 1147-89 may further exemplify my point here.

⁴⁶ Lacey (1968), p.38.

inherited position of power which awards him this title, not his earned heroism on the battle field. The implication that it was powerful lineage, rather than heroic action, which determined what man held the highest levels of status and honour in early Greece can perhaps also be used to explain why the genealogies of women also feature in the Homeric texts.

Women may not have found *kleos* in battle, but could perhaps be afforded a position of honour and status by virtue of their genetics and dedication to their own sphere of duty; the household. Indeed, Doherty (2008, p.71) observes that, by giving “unusual prominence” to the women of each genealogical line, Hesiod’s *Catalogue* resembles the Phaiakian episode of the *Odyssey* in its admission of women’s importance and their centrality to the survival and success of a family. A good example of this link between genealogy and household status can be found in the situation of Queen Arête. When we consider the details of Arête’s lineage, which connects her both to her husband, Alkinoös (her uncle), and the sea god Poseidon (*Od.*7.54-68), we can, by Lacey’s standards, perhaps begin to appreciate why Homer might have portrayed her as holding the considerable level of influence and power that she does on Scheria (*Od.*7.66-74).⁴⁷ Arête’s shared genealogy with her husband means that they also share a tradition of status and honour that would, I believe, be undermined if Arête did not at least enjoy some of the level of social standing that her husband does. Indeed, Bertolín (2008, p.101) notes that both Arête and Alkinoös recline when they sit, suggesting that this is indicative of the notion that neither has authority over the other (*Od.*6.304-8). It is thus for this

⁴⁷ According to the Scholiast on Homer 7.54 in Fragment 49 of Hesiod’s *Catalogue of Women* Arête was the sister of Alkinoös. However, Shewan (1925, p.146) argues against this and maintains that Arête married her uncle.

reason, and not because of hints of a repressed ancient matriarchal system, as Pomeroy (1975, p.22) suggests, that I believe Arête holds her exceptional status on Scheria.⁴⁸

Although Penelope's situation differs to that of Arête in that she does not share blood ties with Odysseus (and thus her position of domestic control is characterised by the absence, not presence, of her husband), some comparisons can be drawn between these two women of royal lineage. Like Penelope, Arête is honoured and respected by both her husband and her people, and is considered to possess a clever mind with an ability to settle quarrels amongst men (*Od.7.66-74*).⁴⁹ Similarly Andromache, another woman of royal lineage, was also honoured as a good wife and said to have provided sound counsel to her husband.⁵⁰ In short, I believe that these examples demonstrate a clear connection between the genealogical and household status of Homeric women in which their honour is very much dependant on the family values and actions which function to preserve the integrity of the *oikos*. Subsequently, it is my intent that this observation will come to underpin and justify my own theory as to how and why Penelope's desire for *kleos* is so essential to maintaining her position of control in Ithaca.

⁴⁸ See n.32.

⁴⁹ Penelope could perhaps be viewed as settling arguments amongst men when she calls the contest of the bow *Od.21.68-78*.

⁵⁰ *Iliad* 6.390-470.

3.3 Perspectives on Household and Deceit

My discussion so far has established how the abstract themes of heritage and obligation play a significant role in enabling the *Kyrios* to garner the honour and status needed to successfully protect the integrity of his household. Building upon this, I believe that we can also view the *oikos* as both an abstract and physical concept, in which the reality that faces Penelope within the structural confines of her household can be considered independently from her position within a broader and more abstract understanding of what it means to be part of Odysseus' *oikos*.

As considered above, it is clear that physical separation from the boundaries of his household does not make Odysseus any less responsible for the protection of his property or the defence of his resources than if he was present on Ithaca. In this sense, his role as *Kyrios* is still very much intact on an abstract level even if he remains absent and unaccounted for amongst his peers. By these means, I believe that Homer, through an emphasis on genealogy and a network of obligations, has constructed an opportunity for the audience of the *Odyssey* to appreciate the concept of an abstract *oikos* in which, even if its members do not share a physical base, the established domestic order of the *Kyrios* can still operate. Indeed, perhaps appropriate to this is Penelope's constant weeping for her husband (*Od.*4.800-1,11.181-3) and her dreams of his return (*Od.*19.535-53) which, I believe, may well serve as literary devices to ensure Odysseus's memory, and thus his authoritative status, are not forgotten.⁵¹ A theory which could also be supported by Halverson's suggestion (1992, p.186) that

⁵¹ Phemios' song in *Od.*1.337ff and also that of Demodokos *Od.*8.73-106 perhaps serve a similar purpose.

“Odysseus’ continual yearning for his home keeps the theme (of the *oikos*) alive”. In this light, I will argue that Penelope, by remaining the faithful, subservient guardian of Odysseus’ material *oikos*, thus honours her place within a concept of household which, like the genealogical ties of the Homeric texts, does not lose its significance by transcending a solely physical base.

Memories and dreams are, however, abstract concepts in themselves and weak substitutes for the harsh reality of the challenges to her livelihood that Penelope faces whilst living within the physical boundaries of the household. Penelope has no reason to believe that Odysseus will return, indeed Halverson (1992, p.186) notes that what holds Penelope is “not her belief that Odysseus is still alive, but her loyalty and attachment to her well settled household”.⁵² This theory centralises the theme of the *oikos* in the *Odyssey* and, later in this study, will support my own proposition that Penelope’s actions serve primarily to maintain her position of control within the household. Thus, for as long as Odysseus remains absent, I believe that Penelope is in charge and appears to enjoy a status of authority which is afforded to her because of her ambiguous position and, for the most part, the inability of her son to take control the situation (*Od.1.296-7*).⁵³ In consideration of this, I believe that we can view Penelope’s actions from two perspectives; firstly, that of her desire to preserve the memory of, and her role within, the abstract household of her husband. Secondly, the necessity to secure her own physical environment and maintain

⁵² See also Heitman (2008, p.48) who argues that all of Penelope’s “actions and decisions are founded upon a conviction that most likely her husband is dead and will not return”.

⁵³ Critics have also questioned why Laertes was not King of Ithaca. See Finley (1977, P.86-7) for the suggestion that Laertes may not have been fit to rule and so passed the kinship to his son Odysseus. Also Halverson in Emlyn-Jones et al (1992, p.182) for the theory that Odysseus’ rule lacked any real political function, implied by the fact that Ithaca had got on well enough without it for twenty years, which might indicate that there was no real need for Laertes to take the responsibility in Odysseus’ absence.

her position within it. As with the concept of the *Kyrios*, I will argue that Penelope also models her own style of leadership on the same values of status and honour and remains consistently dedicated to these values to ensure the integrity of the household. In order to do this, Penelope would have had to deal with both physical and spiritual threats to the stability of Odysseus' *oikos*. Thus, in order to subsequently establish the necessity for Penelope's deceit, I will now consider the nature of the attacks that the *oikos* may have needed to be protected from.

Physical threats to the *oikos* are significant features of the epic genre. In the *Iliad* the Trojan War is initiated after Paris dishonours Menelaus by staying in his house as a guest and then taking his wife, Helen.⁵⁴ Whilst in the *Odyssey*, the slaying of Agamemnon, on his return from Troy, by his wife's lover Aegisthus is also recorded as an offence to the stability of his household (*Od.11.409-11*).⁵⁵ Apollonius' *Argonautica* tells us how Medea not only abandons her family home to travel with Jason, but is even involved in the murder of her brother who has come in pursuit of her (*Arg.4.188-96, 4.459-68*). In Penelope's case, the physical threat comes from the suitors of the *Odyssey* who have launched a twofold assault on the house of Odysseus by not only attempting to win her hand in marriage, but also by wasting Odysseus' resources as uninvited and unwelcome guests in the process (*Od.1.245-51*). Perhaps less evident, but equally as damaging to the integrity of the *oikos*, are the abstract threats which are often exemplified in the Homeric texts by transgressions of honour and/or the use of deceit. One of Penelope's maids

⁵⁴ Apollodorus, *Epitome* 3.4.

⁵⁵ See Euripides plays *Electra* and *Orestes* for examples of family instability in the aftermath of Agamemnon's murder.

both dishonours the household and betrays her mistress by revealing the trick of the shroud to the suitors (*Od.2.108*); this in turn intensifies their marital pursuit of Penelope (*Od.2.127-8*). Moreover, Penelope's reservation that the returned Odysseus may be another man in disguise that had come to fool her (*Od.22.215-7*) indicates awareness that both her own integrity, and consequently that of Odysseus' *oikos*, may be compromised by an act of deceit.⁵⁶

Odysseus also remains cautious of threats to his property after his encounter with Agamemnon in the land of the dead (*Od.11.405-44*); however, in this case, the use of deception proves to be beneficiary, rather than potentially damaging, to the *oikos*. On his return to Ithaca, Odysseus is disguised as a beggar by Athena (*Od. 13.396-403, 429-38*) in order that he might take his vengeance upon the suitors without prior risk "of perishing by an evil fate in my palace, like Atreus' son Agamemnon" (*Od.13.383-4*). This positive use of deception is also exemplified by Helen's use of a "medicine of heartsease" with which she drugs Telemachus and his companions so that they might no longer feel sorrow at the recounted tales of the heroes of Troy (*Od.4.220-8*). Furthermore, Telemachus' own instruction to his nurse Eurykleia that she should not reveal his absence to his mother, Penelope, "so she may not ruin her lovely skin with weeping" (*Od.2.373-6*) could again be read as an example of the use of deceit with "good intent"; a concept which, as I will now discuss, will remain pertinent to my entire study.

⁵⁶ See also *Od.15.194-5* for Telemachus' similar reaction to that of Penelope here when Odysseus reveals his identity to him.

How we choose to interpret this use of deceit with “good intent” is a matter which, I believe, rests in an understanding of the morals and values of the culture in which the Homeric works were set. As previously discussed, honour was the ultimate aim for the warrior whose purpose in life was to protect his *oikos* from exterior threats.⁵⁷ Moreover, Finley’s (1977, p.113) suggestion “that status was the chief determinant of values, and status was transmitted from the person to his possessions” further demonstrates the significance of the link between the preservation of a person’s property and his social standing. It is in this context that, I believe, we can begin to appreciate a situation where, if it were to benefit the integrity of the *oikos*, the use of deceit could be considered moral by the social standards and expectations of the day. Indeed, Walcot observes how the work of social anthropologists in contemporary Greek communities has uncovered an attitude to falsities and lying in which these actions can be seen as a form of “social assertion”.⁵⁸ In this light, Walcot (1992, p.55) argues that Odysseus does nothing wrong by lying and states that what is significant here is his skill in doing so, which, subsequently, acts as a measure of his ability and not his moral failings.⁵⁹

Thus, by Walcot’s standards, I believe we might conclude that lying to preserve the *oikos* was more likely to bring admiration and honour to the deceiver than it was to compromise his or her moral standing. Penelope’s trick of the shroud (*Od.*19.146-7) is a key example of this as, although it is clear that her actions to avoid the suitors were intentionally deceitful, Penelope is still honoured by her community for her attempts to maintain the *oikos* of her missing husband

⁵⁷ Finley (1977), p.113.

⁵⁸ Walcot in Emllyn-Jones et al (1992), p.48ff

⁵⁹ For examples of Odysseus’ lying tales see *Odyssey* 13.256-86, 14.191-359, and 17.415-44.

(*Od.*2.125-6). In view of this, and the examples above, it is my intent that this study will now argue for the recognition of a “morality of deceit” in the *Odyssey* where the deceiver may find honour if his/her actions are in the interests of the integrity of the household. Specifically, my focus will remain with Penelope and, later, I will propose my own theory that Penelope’ deceitful actions may well also function to preserve her own position of independence in the *oikos*. By means of this section, I hope to have now established a clear link between Penelope, her place in Odysseus’ *oikos* and an initial reasoning behind her deceit which will help support this. With this in place, I will now turn my attention to a greater analysis of Penelope in the context of her deceit.

4. PENELOPE AS TRICKSTER

Penelope's penchant for deceit in the *Odyssey* is marked primarily by the trick of the shroud (*Od.*2.104-9) but can, arguably, also be observed in three other areas of the plot. The extraction of gifts from the suitors (*Od.*18.265), the contest of the bow (*Od.*21.60ff) and the trick of the marriage bed (*Od.* 23.175). Subsequently, each of these examples will come to play a significant role in demonstrating that Penelope was an active trickster who operated deceitfully in order to maintain her position within the *oikos*. However, since the intent that fostered the trick of the shroud (*Od.*2.104-9) perhaps represents the sole area of Penelopean scholarship where critics remain, on the whole, unified in their analysis of the reasoning behind Penelope's deceit, I believe that it is important that my focus in this chapter remains with an analysis of Penelope's desire and ability to deceive which is grounded in the context of this ruse.⁶⁰

Specifically, I will consider the trick of the shroud in relation to the links between Penelope's personal gain and the *oikos*, gendered *mētis* and the loom as a case study for comparative deceit, and the level of control Penelope held over her decision to deceive. It is by these means that I will offer, in Section 5, a fuller examination of Penelope's other examples of trickery which find their origins in the intent which fuelled the weaving of Laertes' shroud.

⁶⁰ This is, also, the only example of deceit that Penelope herself confesses to *Od.*19.137ff. I believe the centrality of the trick of the shroud to the *Odyssey* is also emphasised by the fact that it is referenced on three separate occasions; *Od.*2.104-9, 19.138-156 and 24.128-46. See Clayton (2004, p.23) for argument against the fact that these retellings support an analyst reading of the text. In view of this I will base my own examination of Penelope on the assumption that the text of the *Odyssey* represents a unified whole, without any interpolations.

4.1 Personal Gain and the *Oikos*

Since Telemachus was fast approaching manhood, and an age at which he might begin to assume control of his father's property (*Od.*2.289-97, 19.160-1), it seems, as Marquardt (1985, p.34) argues, unlikely that Penelope held any realistic hope of remaining a "widow" with the same status as she held as Odysseus' wife. This, Marquardt suggests (1985, p.32), might explain Penelope's reasoning behind her "long delayed courtship" and her "private messages (of encouragement) (*Od.*2.91-2) to the suitors". In this sense, it appears that the trick of the shroud would have allowed Penelope to create the right conditions in which she could delay her decision to remarry and, significantly for my thesis, maintain the domestic status quo, in the hope (or guise of hope) that her husband might soon return.⁶¹

Continuing this theme, Marquardt goes on to note that despite her lack of commitment, Penelope "never acts as though she has any option of dismissing outright the prospect of remarriage".⁶² This theory is developed by Heitman (2008, p.22) who suggests that it was, perhaps, in Penelope's best interests not to "frustrate the marital hopes" of the suitors who had "no incentive for squandering an estate they had hoped to acquire themselves".⁶³ An estate which, as Foley (1995) observes, Penelope had a moral obligation to preserve

⁶¹ My thesis will later argue that Penelope preserves the household for her own benefit and not Odysseus' return. See Heitman (2008, p.48) for evidence that Penelope does not believe Odysseus will return.

⁶² Marquardt (1985), p.35.

⁶³ See Lacey 1966 and 1968 for debate over who would have inherited Odysseus' estate in the event of Penelope's remarriage.

in the absence of her husband and for the sake of her son Telemachus, whose status as heir made him vulnerable to attack from the suitors.⁶⁴

It is in light of this textual context that Felson (1994, p.27) establishes a theory in which Penelope's tactics serve two plot functions, the first enabling her to defer the suitors for a number of years in the hope that Odysseus will return in time to reclaim her. The second allows for the deference of her remarriage and thus the possibility that she may be courted as long as possible.⁶⁵ Both of these functions support the notion that, whilst eager not to remarry, Penelope had at least entertained the thought that the disclosure of her true feelings might only serve to weaken her position amongst the suitors. In view of the above, it thus appears to be generally agreed that, with the aim of stalling the increasing advances of the suitors, the weaving of Laertes' shroud marks Penelope's first steps towards an attempt to control her destiny by means of deceit.

This section will thus illustrate that the deceit involved in the trick of the shroud originates solely from a desire to maintain a domestic position which is only tenable under the exceptional circumstances of an absent husband and an immature/vulnerable son (*Od.4.818*). Consequently, Penelope benefits from her deceit because it allows her to maintain the "status quo" and thus her loyalty to, and relative position of authority and independence as guardian of, Odysseus' *oikos*.

As previously discussed, this observation will later contribute to my argument for the recognition of a "morality of deceit". For now, however, my attention will

⁶⁴ Foley (1995), p.95, 101. Also Section 3 (p.22-23) for my discussion of Penelope as guardian.

⁶⁵ Felson (1994), p.27.

turn to a closer examination of Penelope and the trick of the shroud in order that I might further clarify Penelope's relationship with *mētis* by discussing the broader connections between the loom and gendered deceit in classical literature. I will advance my thesis by exploring whether the theme of virtue has any place in the context of deceit and, if so, how this will shape my own assessment of the motives behind Penelope's trickery.

4.2 Gendered Mētis, the Loom and Comparative Deceit

By contextualising Penelope's deceit within a gendered understanding of *mētis*, I will now illustrate that the trick of the shroud has its roots in female experience and how this helps to cement the status of the loom as a *sema* of gendered *mētis*.⁶⁶ This focus will allow me to promote links between the *oikos*, virtue and the nature of Penelope's deceit; an exercise which will prove imperative in preparing the groundwork for my later investigation into the links between examples of deceit and the upholding of the integrity of the household.

Holmberg (1997, p.2) argues that ancient Greek culture commonly employed polarity "as a means of structuring a reality in which gender differentiation and association are prime elements". In this light *mētis* or cunning intelligence is contrasted with logical, abstract, philosophical thought, elements which pertain to the masculine in the context of Greek literature and culture.⁶⁷ By this standard Holmberg maintains that "the Greeks (did) perceive *mētis* as inherently connected with the female" and goes on to contend that males with

⁶⁶ Appropriate here is Detienne & Vernant's (1991, p.115) observation that *mētis* can find expression in "anything that is twisted together, woven, plotted, arranged and contrived". Bergren (1993, p.8) also provides a definition which denotes "weaving twisting and knotting".

⁶⁷ Holmberg (1997), p.2.

mētis, like Odysseus, would “distinguish themselves from females with *mētis* by commemorating their *mētis* with the establishment of a *sema*.”⁶⁸

As a metaphorical representation of male *mētis*, I believe Holmberg’s *sema* could equally be interpreted as a marker of masculine authority and space when considered in a gendered context. When Bertolín (2008, p.92) notes that the word “*istos*” meaning “the standing beam” is used both to refer to Penelope’s loom and the mast of Odysseus’ ship evidence of the origins of a *sema* that operates in both the masculine and feminine sphere becomes apparent. The mast of Odysseus’ ship is not the *sema* of his *mētis* but the tool by which the *sema* is produced. Thus, without the mechanisms of his ship Odysseus would not have been able to journey his specific tale of *mētis* in much the same way that Penelope would not have been able to foster the trick of the shroud without the functions of her loom. In this context, Laertes’ shroud is, arguably, a sign of Penelope’s *mētis* in the same way that Holmberg claims that the “wooden horse is both a product of Odysseus’ *mētis* and a symbol or *sema* of that *mētis* by design”.⁶⁹ Whether this represents a challenge to Holmberg’s theory, or merely an indication that Penelope’s *mētis* should also be associated within the masculine sphere is yet to be determined.

If, from the above, we are to accept that Penelope’s weaving was inspired by *mētis* and that the loom is indeed a *sema* of that *mētis* then, I believe, it is important at this point to support this theory by considering, comparatively, how critics have analysed the use of the loom by some of the other female

⁶⁸ Holmberg (1997), p.3.

⁶⁹ Holmberg (1997), p.15. See also Sourvinou-Inwood (1995, p.136-9) for the Homeric use of *semata*; noteworthy here, “The primary type of reference in the signs referred to as *sema* is indexical; but the indexical reference slides into a symbolic one which is more pronounced in some types of *semata* and less so in others. See also Nagy (1992), p.202-223.

characters of classical literature. Significantly for my thesis, this will not only allow me to determine whether a relationship between weaving and deceit can be drawn from these examples, but to also examine any whether any other metaphorical functions of the loom might be pertinent to this discussion.

The use of the loom in connection with female *mētis* is not unprecedented. Indeed, Shoichet (2007, p.26) discusses the view of “weaving as a tool to highlight social immodesty”, and draws from the examples of Circe, Calypso, Helen and Arachne in order to demonstrate that in each case an appreciation of the feminine virtue of weaving is compromised by the immodest, and often deceitful, intent of the character at the loom. This is a far cry from Pantelia’s (1993, p.499) claim that the Homeric women “see weaving as an escape from a state of domestic disorder”. The scholarly argument that I will now consider is weighted towards an analysis of Penelope’s *mētis* that is very much connected with the loom and can, therefore, only emphasise the fact that her weaving was, for good or bad, an integral part of her solution to her “domestic disorder”.

Both Pantelia (1993) and Shoichet (2007) demonstrate, in different ways, how the loom functions in Homeric society as a metaphor for feminine virtue that is somewhat defined by the intent and/or status of the women who operate it. Identifying a difference between women such as Arete (*Od.*6.306) and Helen (*Od.*4.131-34) who spin and Circe (*Od.*10.226-8) and Calypso (*Od.*5.61-2) who weave, allows Pantelia to claim that the method used is indicative of domestic stability.⁷⁰ Arguing that those who spin have security, whilst those who weave have insecure homes, Pantelia establishes the notion that, like Circe and

⁷⁰ Pantelia (1993), p.493-4.

Calypso who both live without a husband, Penelope weaves because her “status is not yet determined” and that the purpose of her weaving is “indicative of her concern for traditional familial and social order”.⁷¹ This argument is strengthened by the fact that Penelope does indeed begin to spin upon Odysseus’ return (*Od.* 17.96-7).

Whilst Pantelia’s claims allow the operations of the loom to signify levels of domestic stability, Shoichet’s theory offers a definition of the weaving metaphor in which the loom is inverted by both Homer and Ovid to represent a tool that symbolises “female resistance to the mores of a social patriarchy”.⁷² By illustrating the cases of Homer’s Penelope and Ovid’s Philomena and Arachne, Shoichet demonstrates how each of these women use the loom to “author their own destinies” in an exhibition of power and control that runs contrary to male expectation.⁷³ In this sense the loom, the “classical emblem of obedience and passivity”, conversely functions in a manner which gives a voice to those who weave.⁷⁴ Indeed, Philomela’s use of the loom to relay the event of her rape to her sister Procne, after the perpetrator Tereus had cut out her tongue (*Ov.Met.*6.553-60) clearly strengthens the argument that the loom and its products function as a metaphor for the female voice: recording historical events or cultural information from women that might otherwise have remained unheard.

⁷¹ Pantelia (1993), p.496-7.

⁷² Shoichet (2007), p.24.

⁷³ Shoichet (2007), p.29. Helen is also a notable comparison here as she records the battles of Troy through her weaving in the *Iliad* 3.125-28 and in *Odyssey* 15.125-9 gives Telemachus a self-made robe for his future bride – which serves as a textual reminder of Helen’s weaving abilities and perhaps a hint that Telemachus is now mature and should be married. For further discussion see Mueller (2010, p.1) who discusses “weaving for *kleos*” and notes that Helen’s gift to Telemachus was bestowed with the hope that it would act as a “monument to the hands of Helen” (*Od.*15.126); an observation which will later become relevant to my own discussion of Penelope’s *kleos*.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

When we relate this to the nature of Penelope's deceit and her weaving and unpicking of Laertes' shroud (*Od.*2.104-9, 19.149-51) we can perhaps see how the progress Penelope makes in daylight is as superficial as her vocal promises to choose a suitor, whereas her silent unpicking each evening represents a more accurate, but unspoken, depiction of her hidden desire not to remarry. With this in mind there is also a comparison to be drawn between the loom, silence and chastity since it is when Penelope's loom is at its quietest that she remains furthest from the prospect of remarriage, and, subsequently, at her most sexually distant from the suitors.⁷⁵

The nightingale imagery conjured up from the myth of Philomela also makes for an interesting association between loom and voice when we consider Pantelia's (1993, p.498) observation that Circe and Calypso are the only characters who sing whilst they weave (*Od.*10.226-8, 5.61-2). Fletcher (2008, p.77) suggests a link between chastity and silence where feminine silence is idealised and unrestrained speech equates to a lack of sexual restraint.⁷⁶ Given that Homer's accounts of Odysseus' sexual encounters with Circe and Calypso feature both of these women demonstrating "unrestrained speech" through song whilst at the loom, Fletcher's theories may indeed be accurate.⁷⁷ In contrast to the behaviour of Circe and Calypso, Penelope remains silent and is praised for her chastity

⁷⁵ The introduction of sexual distance and, thus, the virtue of chastity to my analysis of the trick of the shroud, will prove to be significant to my Chapter 4 discussion of the extent to which, and for whom, Penelope attempts to uphold the integrity of the household. With that aim in sight, my focus will now return to a textual analysis of some of the classical links between chastity and silence.

⁷⁶ See Foley (2001) *Female acts in Greek Tragedy* for relevant scholarship on the "speaking women".

⁷⁷ Note also The Sirens (*Od.* 7.39-46), although not connected to loom, the behaviour of these creatures is another good example of a link between unrestrained speech through song and female behaviour that poses a threat to men.

(*Od.* 24.193-8). Moreover, Eurycleia, who, Fletcher notes, is also celebrated throughout the text for her celibacy, capacity for remaining silent, and weaving abilities, is also a good example of this association between chastity and the loom.⁷⁸ Significantly for Fletcher's argument, it is Melantho, the maid with the "sharp tongue", who does not keep quiet or go inside to weave who proves to be sexually involved with the suitors (*Od.* 18.320-40). This interweaving of the themes of chastity, silence and the loom emphasises the notion that, at least for Homer, female moral standing was very much connected with both the physical and spiritual presence of the woman within the *oikos*, an area which I will be keen to revisit when I present my own analysis of Penelope.

Like Shoichet, Katz Anhalt (2001, p.145) also associates the myth of Philomela and Procne with Penelope's use of loom but this time does not focus on voice but rather the identification of an inverse parallel between Philomela's weaving and Penelope's un-weaving. Katz Anhalt observes that Philomela's weaving is a deceptive act which allows communication with Procne and the revelation of Tereus' betrayal, whilst, inversely, Penelope's un-weaving is the deceptive act by which she thwarts the suitors and prevents her own betrayal of Odysseus.⁷⁹ By this analysis, it appears that we can again forge a link between gendered *mētis* and the loom in which both Penelope and Philomela demonstrate a clear awareness of their use of deceit, and thus a departure from the usual feminine virtue associated with the act of weaving. In view of this, Penelope's self identification with the nightingale in *Odyssey* 19:512-34 seemingly gives

⁷⁸ Fletcher (2008), p.81.

⁷⁹ Katz Anhalt (2001), p.154.

Homer's audience the opportunity to draw their own comparisons between the myth of Philomela's weaving and Penelope's own tale of deceit.⁸⁰

To conclude, it is evident that contemporary scholarship exhibits a significant, but comprehensible, bias towards a discussion of the connection between female *mētis* and the loom which appears to exclude the possibility that the women involved might retain a level of virtue in their deceit. In Section 6, I will aim to offer an analysis of Penelope which "turns the tables" on this perspective and allows for the potential that, in some form, these conflicting theories might coexist.

4.3 Levels of Control

Having discussed Penelope's ability to engage with *metis* a discussion of the extent to which she is in control of her actions is now pertinent to my broader thesis. Thus, in order to strengthen my later analysis of Penelope's position of power in Odysseus' *oikos*, I will now consider Penelope in the context of her own approach to her deceit and the potential influence wielded by Athena's presence in the text.

Clayton (2004, p.32) asserts that Penelope is greatly aware of herself as a weaver of *mētis* and the association between loom and deceit is exemplified by her claim that she is a "spinner of ruses" (*Od.* 19.137). Felson (1994, p.19) also

⁸⁰ Shoichet (2007, p.32) suggests that by doing this, "the poet set out to undermine the assumption that one who demonstrates skill in the domestic arts must be virtuous". A view which is supported by Felson's (1994, p.42) claim that notably, by the literary demonstration of her contemplating her actions, Homer ensures that Penelope functions as his accomplice in weaving plots.

maintains that Penelope is “conscious of the plot she weaves” and Shoichet (2007, p.30) similarly argues that Penelope is “not passive” in her actions. This, to some extent, is contrasted by Murnaghan (1987, p.130) who questions Penelope’s ability to control her difficult situation and suggests that her level of understanding diminishes with each successive plot. However, even Murnaghan maintains that the trick of the shroud is “most clearly deliberate”.⁸¹ Subsequently, it appears that the prevailing view of contemporary scholarship does not contest Penelope’s own declaration of self awareness (*Od.* 19.137), and thus responsibility for her deceit.

At this point a consideration of the influence of Athena is significant. As the daughter of Mētis and patron of weaving, Clayton describes the goddess as “the most obvious connection between this domestic female activity and the power of cunning intelligence”.⁸² Athena’s association with both women’s work and wisdom is demonstrated by the Phaiakian women of the *Odyssey* who are “skilled in weaving and dowered with wisdom bestowed by Athene” (*Od.*7.110). Moreover, Athena’s penchant for the art and skill of weaving is also demonstrated in the myth of Arachne who views a challenge with the goddess as the ultimate test of her weaving abilities. From this, we can, perhaps, begin to appreciate how Penelope’s decision to deceive may well have been influenced by the agenda (and gender) of a character whose attributes of weaving and trickery can be both symbolically linked to the trick of the shroud (*Od.*2.104-9) and the notion of gendered *mētis*.⁸³

⁸¹ Murnaghan (1987), p.130.

⁸² Clayton (2004), p.24.

⁸³ *Ov. Met* 6.1-244. As well as turning Arachne into a spider, Athena is also a master of disguise, with her ability to transform her own appearance often serving to characterise her deceit. This is exemplified in both the *Iliad*, where Athena takes on the appearance of Deiphobos in order to deceive Hector into bravely facing Achilles (*Il.*22.222-47), and also in the *Odyssey* where she

One supporter of this view is Murnaghan (1995, p.66-8) who argues that Athena perceives the “volatile realm of female sexuality” as a major threat to the social order of the *Odyssey* and that, consequently, she becomes actively involved in making sure that “Penelope’s thoughts are properly under control and not veering in directions that might undermine Odysseus’ success”.⁸⁴ Athena is clearly working in the interests of Odysseus (*Od.*1.80-95, 13.392-403) and, significantly for Murnaghan’s argument, the text does indicate that her alleged influence prevails at the very points where Penelope is making her most difficult decisions.⁸⁵ Indeed, the references to Athena inspiring or “putting (things) in the mind of” Penelope, which appear consistently at the critical moments of the text of the *Odyssey*, can only serve to emphasise the notion that the goddess held some level of influence over Penelope’s thoughts and actions (*Od.*18.158-60, 21.1-4). Indeed, Doherty’s (1991, p.36) suggestion that Athena is not only privy to Odysseus’ plan but a “prompter of it” certainly defines the role of the goddess in the context of this analysis.⁸⁶

The extent of Athena’s influence is, however, opened to debate when we consider the textual evidence of Penelope’s own expressions of free will.

becomes Mentos and encourages Telemachus to take a ship and seek out news of his father (*Od.*1.180, 279-97). Doherty (1991, p.34.) notes that Athena is the only character other than Odysseus to assume a disguise (mostly male) in the *Odyssey*. This observation is significant because it not only links Athena’s behaviour with that of the most prominent male character of the poem but also highlights a penchant for “cross-dressing” or association with her masculine side which is consistent with her representation outside the text (*Aesch. Eum.*736-40). Also of interest here is Doherty’s (1991, p.33) observation that, as well as female domestic activity, Athena also presides over the masculine sphere of warfare, thus suggesting a continuity between the genders; a note which will be pertinent to my later consideration of Penelope and Odysseus’ “like-mindedness”.

⁸⁴ Also appropriate here is that Athena’s status as a virgin goddess (*Athena Parthenos*) is notable in cementing Doherty’s (1991, p.41) argument that the characterisation of Athena as asexual serves an important function in the text of the *Odyssey* where the “dangers of sexuality are thematically central”.

⁸⁵ See also Athena’s patronage of Odysseus at *Od.*23.782-83.

⁸⁶ *Od.*2.127-36 exemplifies Athena’s prompting of Telemachus.

Despite pressure from others (*Od.* 1. 248, 2.89-90, 19.158-9), Penelope does not concede to remarriage (*Od.*1.249), nor does she do anything but resist Athena's attempts to sexualise her through beautification: here the goddess succeeds in augmenting Penelope's features but is unable to control what she says (*Od.*18.190-99).⁸⁷ Both of these examples indicate that Penelope retains a level of independent thought which is also evidenced in her questioning of Athena's motives at *Odyssey* 4.830-7.

Moreover, Zeus himself states that even though the gods are often apportioned blame, they are not responsible for the recklessness of mortals (*Od.*1.28-34).

This observation relates well to Dodds (1951, p.10-11) contention that the ascribing of "all sorts of mental and physical events to the intervention of a nameless and indeterminate daemon or 'gods' is the most characteristic feature of the *Odyssey*". For Dodds, these ascriptions are "realistic" and "reflect the way people spoke". Furthermore, they are not indicative of any serious notion that the "gods" were actually to blame.⁸⁸ When applied to this analysis of Athena's influence over Penelope, I believe that these arguments thus strengthen my position that Penelope predominantly acts alone.

⁸⁷ Compare *Odyssey* 18.187-9 "She drifted a sweet sleep over Ikarios' daughter" with Dodds' (1951, p.5, 17) discussion of *ate*. Dodds argues that the notion of *ate*; "a state of mind or temporary clouding" (compare with Odysseus in *Od.*12.317 and Patroclus in *Il.*16.805) enabled the Homeric man to project his unbearable feelings of shame on to an external power. As we hear in *Od.*18.184, Penelope believes it is "immodest" to go alone amongst men and that she shields her face with a shining veil (*Od.*18.210) (See also Cairns (2001) for links between anger, shame and veiling). In this context, Athena's intervention may indeed be an example of Penelope's own projection of *ate*. This observation will support my upcoming argument that Penelope is not influenced by Athena.

⁸⁸ Dodds exemplifies this by alluding to the foolishness of Odysseus blaming the gods because he had left without a cloak (*Od.*14.488-9). See also Kearns in Fowler (2004, p.70) of at what level of seriousness the Homeric deities were understood.

If, as I believe, we are to conclude from this that Athena does not ultimately influence or control Penelope's decision making then how instead can we describe her relationship with Penelope? I propose that an answer may lie in a consideration of the examples of Athena's encouragement (in the guise of Mentor) to Telemachus to leave behind his childhood and take a ship in order to search out news of his father (*Od.*1.279-98) and, in her later appearance as Mentor, during the battle of the suitors, when she scolds Odysseus for his lack of "strength and valour", but "did not yet turn the victory their way" (*Od.*22.225-6, 236-37). These examples illustrate, in my mind, how Athena, whilst being seen to persuade or give a nudge in the direction of her intent, often takes (if only primarily *Od.*22.297-309) a step back from the main action, thus allowing the characters concerned to be "inspired" but not fully controlled by her involvement.⁸⁹ It is the nature of this proposed relationship between divine and mortal which I believe characterises the interaction between Penelope and Athena and which will, thus, allow me to argue that Penelope was indeed solely responsible for her deceit.⁹⁰

Having established the motives and responsibility behind the trick of the shroud, we can, I believe, now appropriately label Penelope as "Trickster". It is with this "identity" in mind that we must turn to the concept of a "morality of deceit" that the following section will discuss.

⁸⁹ Again the example of Penelope's appearance before the suitors (*Od.*18.190-99) is relevant here.

⁹⁰ Telemachus' influence over Penelope is also noteworthy because even though he demonstrates an apparent ability to control her physical activity (*Od.*1.356-7, 21.350-2), his influence upon his mother's decision to deceive does not originate from any specific instruction he gives her, but rather her own concern that she is acting in what she believes to be the best interests for her and her son. For Penelope's concern for Telemachus see *Od.*4.733-6, 19.157-61. See also Heitman (2008, p.36) for further suggestion that Penelope feels the threat to her son as a mortal threat to herself. This supports my argument that it is Penelope's own thoughts which are controlling her actions.

5. PENELOPE'S MORALITY OF DECEIT

Having established an initial examination of Penelope's *mētis* which links her use of deception in the *Odyssey* to the preservation of the integrity of Odysseus' household, I will now focus on a broader analysis of Penelope as "Trickster" in order that I might propose that her actions be understood in the context of a "morality of deceit". It is by these means that I intend to advance my study towards a final discussion of Penelope's household status and level of domestic control.

5.1 Virtuous Deceit

The trick of the shroud (*Od.*2.104-9) may be Penelope's only self-confirmed example of deceit (*Od.*19.137ff.) but, as noted earlier, I believe that the text of the *Odyssey* contains another three scenes where Penelope's trickery can be observed. By considering the circumstances surrounding Penelope's appearance before the suitors (*Od.*18.158-303), the calling of the contest of the bow (*Od.* 21.1-79) and the trick of the marriage bed (*Od.* 23.174-208), it is thus my intent to now demonstrate how the reasoning behind these examples of deceit mirror the trick of the shroud in their ability to function for the benefit of the *oikos*.

The appearance before the suitors (*Od.* 18.158-303) constitutes, as Levine highlights, Penelope's first successful attempt to gain an advantage over the suitors.⁹¹ Whereas the trick of the shroud failed in its attempt to keep the suitors at bay (*Od.* 2.109-15), Penelope's speech succeeds in an extraction of gifts

⁹¹ Levine (1983), p.176.

(*Od.*18.274-300) which critics have attributed to this character's penchant for *mētis* and which they have viewed as an example of her domestic control.⁹²

Hölscher's (1996, p.134) approach to this scene suggests that Penelope's decision to show herself to the suitors stemmed not from her desire to seduce or deceive but from her willingness to accept that the maturity of Telemachus meant that it was now time for her remarriage. Hölscher argues that Odysseus' parting instruction to Penelope that she should remarry "when you see our son grown up and bearded" (*Od.*18.269-70) bears the "stamp of the folktale" and adds justification to Penelope's lack of fidelity to her husband here. By this, Hölscher maintains that we should not be reluctant, as some critics are, to take Penelope at her word.⁹³

In contrast to this, Heitman (2008, p.45) offers a good summary of the critical responses to the authenticity of Odysseus' instruction concluding that most scholars assume that Penelope is making the whole thing up, an approach with which I concur.⁹⁴ However, Heitman himself contends that, although this instruction might have served Penelope's delaying tactics in the past, now

⁹² See Marquardt (1985) p.38, Levine (1983), p.176 and Felson-Rubin in Schein (1996) p.174. Penelope's extraction of gifts from the suitors here can be compared with scholarship which suggests that Odysseus' tale of his wanderings to the Phaeacians (*Od.* 9.19-12.453), which also results in him receiving gifts, is also fantastical (*Od.*13.10-15). See Schein (1996, p.18) and Murnaghan (1987, p.172) for this. The element of Penelope's domestic control in this episode will be developed later in my study.

⁹³ Hölscher furthers his argument by demonstrating how Penelope discusses Telemachus' coming of age in relation to her giving up hope of Odysseus' return in both the prologue to this episode (18.175-6) and, subsequently, during her meeting with the beggar (19.160-61). See also Murnaghan in Skinner (1987, p.105) and Heitman's (2008, p.10) arguments for taking Penelope at her word.

⁹⁴ Perhaps the most interesting of these responses comes from Hexter in Heitman (2008, p.45) who claims that "If this is what Odysseus had told her, he would have indeed felt the urgency to get back to Ithaca". Levine (1983, p.177) also takes a similar approach by claiming outright that Odysseus knows Penelope is lying (*Od.*18.281ff) because "he never made the speech she ascribes to him".

Telemachus is mature it can only suggest that she is indeed seriously preparing to remarry.⁹⁵ I wish to contest this by suggesting that Penelope's scolding of Telemachus in *Odyssey* 18.214-33 could act as an indication that, despite his physical appearance (*Od.*1.301) she does not believe he is yet a fully mature and responsible adult and, as Heitman suggests, that he is still "childish" and "incompetent to deal with men in either battle or the assembly" as is emphasised in *Odyssey* 4.818.⁹⁶ The fact that in *Odyssey* 18.222-5 Penelope derides her son for his ill treatment of guests certainly suggests that this earlier description might still apply.

In view of this, I will argue here that Penelope subtly demonstrates to the audience that the conditions of Odysseus' parting instruction to her have not yet been met before she goes on to "beguile gifts" and "enchant spirits" from the suitors with her enticing promise to remarry (*Od.*18.269-84). Appropriately, Penelope gives no firm indication of when she will choose a suitor (as you might expect if her intentions to follow this instruction were genuine), and with Odysseus' own observation that "her own mind had other intentions" (*Od.* 18.283) it seems apparent that, through deceit, Penelope has found herself yet another delaying tactic and thus the opportunity to further preserve Odysseus' *oikos*.

In keeping with my examination of Penelope's penchant for trickery, I will now argue for an analysis of the contest of the bow which identifies a concern for

⁹⁵ Heitman (2008), p.46-7.

⁹⁶ Heitman (2008), p.52.

kleos as a distinguishing feature of Penelope's deceitful intent.⁹⁷ Earlier, I noted how women, without the opportunity to find *kleos* in battle, could find honour in dedication to the household as their own sphere of duty. I believe that this observation is relevant here since it underlies the fact that the reason Penelope was willing to call the contest of the bow was not because she had necessarily given up hope of Odysseus' return (*Od.*1.249-50, but because, more significantly, the life of her son Telemachus (*Od.*16.409-411), and subsequently the continuation and integrity of the broader concept of Odysseus' *oikos* and family line, was threatened by her reluctance to marry one of the suitors (*Od.*16.370-2). By taking this approach, I intend to offer an analysis of this episode which functions independently of whether Penelope has, or has not earlier recognised Odysseus disguised as a beggar (*Od.*19.89-604).⁹⁸

When Penelope holds Odysseus' bow and weeps (*Od.*21.54-7) we are not given a reason, but from the text immediately before, which details the history of how Odysseus obtained the bow (*Od.*21.13-41), I believe we can begin to

⁹⁷ Penelope's actions at this point have baffled critics who have been unable to fathom why, after much deliberation and concern for her reputation, she decides to call the contest of the bow (*Od.* 21.1-79), and thus make herself available for remarriage. In an attempt to overcome this problem, contemporary scholars now define Penelope's intent and actions during the contest of the bow by the extent to which they believe that she is conscious of the beggar's true identity.

Debate as to whether Penelope recognises that the beggar is actually Odysseus in disguise (Book 19) is now vast in scope and ranges from Harsh's (1950) assertion that early recognition allows Penelope to, secretly, take an active role in Odysseus' vengeance plot to Emlyn-Jones' (1984) contention that Penelope does not recognise Odysseus and that the bow contest (*Od.* 21.1-79) is just a good example of her tendency to do "bad or unmotivated things".⁹⁷ The middle ground here is represented by Amory's (1967) claim that Penelope's recognition of Odysseus is "mostly unconscious", yet influential enough to direct her speeches during this episode. For further scholarship on this debate see Emlyn-Jones (1984, p.3-4) for description of "Intuitive Penelope" and the "Analyst Hypothesis" with regards to early recognition. Also, Harsh (1950) for early recognition, Amory (1967) for "subconscious recognition". For non- recognition, Murnaghan (1987), Felson (1997) and Heitman (2008). See also Gainsford (2003) for a detailed structural analysis of recognition scenes in the *Odyssey*.

⁹⁸ I will consider this episode in isolation of the recognition argument. By doing so it is not my intent to underplay the significance of whether Penelope's decision here is influenced (or not) by her recognition of Odysseus, but rather to offer an analysis of this episode which functions despite this ambiguity.

understand why. This bow signified “the memory of a dear friend” (*Od.*21.40-41) to Odysseus in much the same way as it now acts as a reminder to Penelope of her absent husband and the fact that she must now, if only superficially, betray her fidelity by using the very object which best encapsulates her memories of him (*Od.*21.55-7).⁹⁹ Interestingly, Penelope may have no real intent to remarry here; indeed I agree with critics who have noted that she might even be employing further delaying tactics as the skill and strength needed by the suitors to send “an arrow clean through all the twelve axes” (*Od.*21.76) is likely to prove beyond their abilities (*Od.*21.91-4).¹⁰⁰ However, and regardless of whether Penelope’s intentions are genuine or not, I do believe that the most important observation to be made here is that by simply professing that she is ready to remarry (*Od.*21.75-3), Penelope undoubtedly does irrefutable damage to the *kleos* she has earned for her previously staunch fidelity to Odysseus (2.125-6).

Considering the above in the context of my previous discussion of Odysseus’ parting instruction to Penelope (*Od.*18.269-70), I believe that this earlier deception by Penelope can also function as a means of facilitating a scenario where Penelope’s visible lack of fidelity in arranging the bow contest can be countered by this demonstration of her adherence to the wishes of her absent husband.¹⁰¹ In view of Penelope’s attempts to garner *kleos* (2.100-01, 18.184),

⁹⁹ See Felson, (1997) p.58 for a discussion of how the beggar’s description of Odysseus’ clasp brings back similar painful memories to Penelope of her husband. Also note how Eumaios and the ox herd also weep at the sight of the bow for the memories of Odysseus it holds (*Od.*21.82-3).

¹⁰⁰ See Amory in Cook (1967) p.319 and also Murnaghan in Skinner (1987) p.109 who states that all three of these tricks represent “actions that seem to hasten Penelope’s marriage to the suitors, but in fact prevent it”.

¹⁰¹ Indeed see Foley in Cohen (1995) for Aristotle’s claim that “the Homeric wife’s virtue apparently consists in her ability to obey with intelligence and self-control the instructions of her

it then seems that this course of deceitful action is indeed preferable to the alternative option of simply declaring a willingness to remarry and abandoning her long held desire that Odysseus would return; an attribute which, as I reiterate, has won her much *kleos* in the past (*Od.*11.181-5, 11.444-46) and for which I believe she weeps in *Odyssey* 21.54-7.

My final example of Penelope's deceit, the trick of the marriage bed (*Od.* 23.174-208), also continues to display her concern for *kleos*. This comes as no surprise when we consider that, at this most crucial point of the *Odyssey*, Penelope's repute is most at stake. Indeed, if the stranger who claims to be Odysseus (*Od.*23.27-8) is in fact an imposter then Penelope, herself, risks falling victim to deceit and losing all the hard-earned *kleos* that she has earned for her years of fidelity to her absent husband. Since the unique construction of Odysseus' bed, built around the "bole of an olive tree" (*Od.* 23.188-205), rendered it unmovable, Penelope's request that Eurykleia should make up this bed outside of Odysseus' chamber (*Od.*21.177-80) clearly represents a ploy to test the reaction of its creator and thus determine the true identity of the stranger (*Od.*21.81). Odysseus' angry, and descriptive, reaction to this suggestion (*Od.*21.181-205) thus confirms he is not an imposter and enables the long awaited reunion between husband and wife to take place (*Od.*21.205-8).

Penelope's decision to test Odysseus in this manner has been widely discussed by critics who agree that Penelope's motives centre on a desire to take the

husband, even when he is absent". In view of the signs that Odysseus is soon to return (*Od.* 2.153-184, 17.625-635, 19.292-334) it would thus be pertinent for Penelope to call this contest to indicate to her husband that she is following his wishes.

initiative and assert control over the recognition scene.¹⁰² It is by doing this that, I believe, Penelope directs the flow of events to ensure that she is never at risk of letting down her guard (*Od.*23.85-7) or compromising her *kleos*.¹⁰³ When Penelope speaks of “signs” or “*sema*” that will aid in her identification of Odysseus as “they are secret to others” (*Od.*23.110) it is the marriage bed or, as Heitman (2008, p.99) argues, the emotional attachment that Odysseus holds to his construction of it, to which she refers.¹⁰⁴ By deceiving Odysseus in this way, Penelope thus recognises that the marriage bed can function both as a *sema* of the stability of their marriage and, as Murnaghan argues, “a *sema* of another type - a token that convinces her of his (Odysseus’) identity” (*Od.* 23.206).¹⁰⁵

Whilst this episode can never act as a guarantee to Odysseus that his wife has remained faithful, the mutual significance they both attach to the secrecy surrounding the construction of the marriage bed and the fact that Penelope has chosen this particular *sema* would, in my mind, indicate to Odysseus that this is the case.¹⁰⁶ By these means, it then seems that Odysseus’ physically strong and stable marriage bed can be viewed as a metaphor for Penelope’s fidelity; allowing her to equally become, as Bergen (1993, p.10) suggests, “Odysseus’ unmoving, immovable space”. Thus, from Penelope’s perspective, her *kleos*

¹⁰² See Felson (1997) p.62-5, Murnaghan (1987) p.141 and Emllyn-Jones (1984) p.9.

¹⁰³ Note also Penelope’s fear that she might be deceived by another man (*Od.*23.215-17).

¹⁰⁴ Also relevant is Heitman’s (2008, p.99) observation that this emotional attachment indicates that Odysseus continues to hold the values he held when he made the bed, thus further confirming his identity as the man Penelope married.

¹⁰⁵ Murnaghan (1987), p.141, Emllyn-Jones (1984) p.9. In this sense, Penelope is yet again “commemorating (her) *mētis* with the establishment of a *sēma*”, a practice which, as previously discussed in Chapter 2, Holmberg maintains is usually applied by males to distinguish their *mētis* from that of females. See Holmberg (1997), p.3.

¹⁰⁶ Bergren (1993), p.19.

remains intact and the audience have yet another example of deceit which functions to support the integrity of the *oikos*.

In short, it is Penelope's consistent (and persistent) concern for *oikos* and *kleos* as demonstrated in the above examples of her trickery which indicate that we should indeed characterise Penelope's use of her *mētis* as virtuous by intent. With the aim of supporting this, my discussion here will now progress to a broader analysis of deceit within the *Odyssey* which will develop out of the "deceit with good intent" motif of Section 3 and towards a closer examination of its specific links with the household.

5.2 Establishing a Morality of Deceit

Rather than Penelope, it is Odysseus who is famed for his ability to deceive in classical literature.¹⁰⁷ Though, when we compare Odysseus' *mētis* with that of his wife, it becomes apparent that he is equally using his abilities to ensure the stability of his *oikos* by deceiving in order to ensure a safe return home. Indeed, when Odysseus is in the cave of the Cyclops he expresses his desire to journey home (*Od.*9.261, 350) before deceiving Polyphemos with the "Nobody" trick and making his escape (*Od.*9.364-472).¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Odysseus' account of his wanderings to the Phaeacians (*Od.* 9.19-12.453) and the example of his "lying tales" (*Od.*13.256-86, 14.191-359, 17.415-44) also do much to illustrate the

¹⁰⁷ See Apollod. *Epit.* e.5.14 and *Od.*8.493-4 for Odysseus' Trojan Horse ruse. Also, Aristot. *Poet.* 1451a for Odysseus feigning madness to avoid leaving Ithaca to go to war.

¹⁰⁸ For further examples, note Odysseus' encounter with Hermes (*Od.*10.286-301) who gives him a potion which frees him from the influence of Circe's magic and thus enables him to gain enough honour from her to ensure the release of himself and his companions (*Od.*10.316-489). See also, Athena's disguise of Odysseus which allows him to return home without attack (*Od.*13.396-403).

level of deceit to which he is willing to rise in order to aid his return to Ithaca.¹⁰⁹

In view of this, Odysseus is clearly a skilled speaker and manipulator who appears to use his vocal platforms for deceit, as Penelope does during her appearance before the suitors (*Od.*18.158-303), to contribute to the well-being and stability of the *oikos*.¹¹⁰

In addition to Penelope and Odysseus, we can also see other examples of characters in the text who deceive in the interest of their own households. In *Odyssey* 5.160-70 Kalypso advises Odysseus that he might leave at her will, yet it is Zeus who originally decides, on Athena's urges (*Od.*5.5-20), that Odysseus should be liberated from Kalypso's island (*Od.*5.30-1). I suggest that Kalypso lies to Odysseus at this point in order to present herself in a more favourable light when she requests that Odysseus might choose to stay and be lord of her household (*Od.*5.208). In doing so, Kalypso is clearly using deceit as a tool by which she might solidify the integrity of her *oikos* by obtaining a *Kyrios*.

Another good example of this type of "deception for the good of the household" can be found in book 6 of the *Odyssey*. Here, Nausicaa, upon her encounter with Odysseus, suggests that he should arrive at the palace of her parents

¹⁰⁹ See Walcot in Emlyn-Jones et al (1992), p.61-2 for discussion of Odysseus' willingness to cruelly deceive his own father (*Od.*24.304-14) and p.55 for the argument that Odysseus must lie but what he says is fraught with meaning. Indeed, his accounts of his treatment by the Cyclops (*Od.*9.195-566) and Circe (*Od.*10.210-489) may function as an attempt to instruct the xenophobic Phaeacians (*Od.*12.30-3) of the rules of hospitality in the hope they will aid his return to Ithaca. Also compare this with the content of the "lying tales" (*Od.*13.256-86, 14.191-359, 17.415-44), which, like Odysseus' physical disguise, "serve to conceal his presence and protect him from suitors" Murnaghan (1987, p.168), thus also assisting his return. See also Emlyn-Jones (1986) for further discussion on these "lying tales".

¹¹⁰ Griffin in Fowler (2006, p.159-60) argues that speeches in the *Odyssey* allow us to follow narrative episodes in the same way as the characters experience them. Moreover (p.167), they also play "a vital role in guiding the mind of the audience"; expressing "strong and clear moral judgements" that the poet does not. In this context, I believe that Odysseus' focus on hospitality and his *nostos* represents a clear intent that he deceives in order to achieve this goal. I will return to a more detailed comparison between Penelope, Odysseus and *mētis* later in Chapter 4.

alone for fear that her reputation might be damaged if she is seen in the company of a male stranger (*Od.*6.262-90). It is by disassociating himself from Nausicaa in this way that Odysseus can be assured that he might secure “a voyage home from (her) father” (*Od.*6.290). Odysseus then takes this deceit one step further by telling Alkinoös that it was his decision, and not his daughter’s, to arrive alone, thus ensuring that she is not blamed for a lack of hospitality (*Od.*6.299-7). These events, then, have allowed Nausicaa to honour her father’s *oikos* by winning *kleos* for being both chaste and hospitable under circumstances which, without deception, would have become mutually exclusive if she were to help Odysseus.¹¹¹

Thus, we can see that the use of deceit in the *Odyssey* is, for the most part, intrinsically connected to household stability and prosperity. Indeed, the only two instances I can identify where deceit is used to the detriment of the *oikos* can be found in *Odyssey* 17.65-66 where the uninvited suitors are “in the deep of their hearts devising evils” against Telemachus even though outwardly “they were all speaking him fair”.¹¹² As this affront to Odysseus’ household and hospitality later results in the suitor’s punishment by death (*Od.*12.35-43), I contend that this outcome only strengthens the fact that deceit is considered an acceptable asset when it functions for the good of the household.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Nausicaa’s situation here could be compared to that of Penelope who would have been initially obliged to show hospitality to the suitors even though their presence now acts as a threat to her fidelity. See Van Nortwick (1979) for further comparison between Penelope and Nausicaa.

¹¹² See also *Od.*16.445-49 for similar example.

¹¹³ I maintain here that the suitors’ behaviour should not be interpreted as functioning for the good of their own households as the threat they pose to Telemachus damages the integrity of any union they might have with Penelope.

Also relevant here is the earlier discussion about family ties and blood vengeance.¹¹⁴ Like blood vengeance, the use of deceit is vindicated, and perhaps even expected, if the integrity of the *oikos* is at stake.¹¹⁵ Considering this, I therefore argue for the establishment and recognition of a “morality of deceit” in the *Odyssey* in which instances of lying and deception become seemingly justifiable and even celebrated (*Od.*18.281-2) when they are employed solely to contribute to the integrity of the *oikos*. I believe that this proposal helps to both define the motives behind Penelope’s trickery in the poem and, like Odysseus (*Od.*1.1), thus allows her to be positively presented as a skilled deceiver. With this in mind, let us now turn again to Penelope. My final chapter will further establish how Penelope garners *kleos* for virtue and domestic control by means of her *mētis*.

¹¹⁴ See Chapter 1 Patterson (1998), p.52-3 and Finley (1977), p.94.

¹¹⁵ See Walcot (1992), p.44ff

6. STILL KING OF HER CASTLE? PENELOPE AND THE ART OF MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO

Developing out of my argument that Penelope's *mētis* is representative of a "morality of deceit", I now intend to bridge a divide in contemporary scholarship by proposing that the current conflicting aspects of Penelope's character analyses (i.e. ranging from whether she is a passive, good wife or an active schemer) may also be unified within a structure determined by this burgeoning relationship between virtue and *mētis* in the *Odyssey*. Additionally, my the final part of this section will illustrate how Penelope's concern for the integrity of the *oikos* and maintenance of the status quo through *mētis* enables her to enjoy a position of domestic power in the absence of her husband.

6.1 Penelope as Moral Representative of the *Oikos*

Having demonstrated in Section 5 how Penelope gains *kleos* for virtue by means of deceit, my aim here is to further support this claim by exploring Penelope's engagement with the broader themes of hospitality and fidelity in the household. In view of this, I will argue that Penelope's exemplary virtuous behaviour is fuelled by a desire for *kleos* by which her actions, although unwittingly, lead to her literary establishment as the "good wife" and thus the "moral representative" of Odysseus' *oikos*.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ In antiquity, Penelope was "reputed chaste and good" (Aristoph. *Thes.*533).

The correct treatment of guests is an important theme of the *Odyssey*.¹¹⁷ Not only can *repute* be measured by hospitality (*Od.*18.223-25), but it is the very emphasis placed upon this code throughout the text which is indicative of the plot significance of the unwelcome suitors who take up residence in the palace (*Od.*1.245). By refusing to leave and stop living off Odysseus' household in the hope that Penelope will eventually concede and choose a mate, the suitors continue to break all the rules of hospitality until they are slaughtered by Odysseus (*Od.*22.401-12). Indeed, this is just one of a number of examples in the text where the violation of hospitality leads to despair for the perpetrator.¹¹⁸

Considering this, Penelope's concern for the good treatment of guests in her home (*Od.*19.317-28,18.223-4) can be seen to not only function as a contrast to the violation of the hospitality codes by the suitors, but also as a reminder to her critics that their behaviour has not arisen from her own ignorance of the rules.¹¹⁹ By this analysis, I argue that Penelope wins *kleos* for functioning as the virtuous wife, whilst simultaneously displaying her ability, through *mētis*, to actively direct the audience to the conclusion that the situation with the suitors is not her fault.¹²⁰

Penelope may symbolise the prize (*Od.*21.73-8) which fuels the suitor's persistence but it is her determination to ensure her fidelity to Odysseus for which she attracts the most *kleos* and, in my mind, is eager in this instance to

¹¹⁷ Correct treatment of guests would also win favour with Zeus who was god of hospitality and travellers see Martin's "Gift" entry in Gagarin (2010).

¹¹⁸ For further examples, see the cattle of Helios episode *Od.*12.297 -450 and Odysseus' encounters with Circe (*Od.*10.310-344) and Polyphemos (*Od.*9.355-414).

¹¹⁹ Both Shoichet (2007, p.30) and Clayton (2004, p.32) argue that Penelope is not passive.

¹²⁰ See Griffin in Fowler (2004, p.167) for scholarship on the ability of the speaker to guide the mind of his/her audience.

appear blameless.¹²¹ Penelope's maids, on the other hand, are not so chaste (*Od.*18.325, 20.7). Indeed, it seems that the suitors, not content with eating their way through the food supplies (*Od.*1.250), are also willingly violating Odysseus' *oikos* by sleeping with some of his maids. For their betrayal to the master and his household the guilty maids meet a fate similar to that of their suitor "partners in crime" and are hung, quite brutally, by Telemachus in the courtyard of the palace (*Od.*22.461-72).¹²² Other than an interest over the "mechanics of the death", critics of this incident often overlook the harsh punishment of the maids.¹²³ However, scholarship which contrasts their promiscuous and vocal behaviour with the solid, silent, fidelity expressed by Penelope does, I believe, go some of the way towards an explanation of why they were executed in this manner.¹²⁴

The death of the maids by hanging is considered significant by Fulkerson (2002, p.343) and later Fletcher (2008, p.89) who both discuss the close association between the mouth and the female genitals in the Greek genealogical texts. In light of this, it appears that the maid's transgression may have been as much connected to their voices as their promiscuity.¹²⁵ If this is the case, then

¹²¹ Penelope also attempts to appear blameless in her speech to Odysseus following the bed trick *Od.*23.209-230. For further analysis of this speech see Felson-Rubin in Schein (1996, p.171) who describes it as Penelope's closest reflection on her fidelity, also, Heitman (2008, p.103), for "a modest account of her virtue" and (p.882-4) for her concern for repute. See also Harsh (1950, p.6) for repute.

¹²² For further discussion on Telemachus' role and purpose here see Felson (1997), p.87 and Fulkerson (2002), p.337.

¹²³ Fulkerson (1997), p.337.

¹²⁴ See Felson (1997), p.87. Fulkerson (1997), p.343-7, especially for comparisons between Penelope and the vocal maid Melanthe. Also, Fletcher (2008), p.88-89.

¹²⁵ One of the treacherous maids was also responsible for revealing the trick of the shroud to the suitors (*Od.*104-109), thus further emphasising this link between sexual promiscuity and voice. The maid Melanthe also betrays the *oikos* by acting rudely and inhospitably to the disguised beggar (*Od.*18.326-336, 19.65-9). See Fletcher (1997, p.78) for further discussion of how women's voices pose a threat to men.

Fulkerson's emphasis that the hanging method might have been chosen because "each of the maid's 'mouths' brings trouble upon the household", could, I believe, be accurate.¹²⁶ When we compare this with the links between speech and chastity discussed in Section 4 (p.41-3), I believe that we can begin to appreciate how this episode serves as both a stark reminder of the importance of household integrity in the *Odyssey* and an indication that no analysis of Penelope's virtue could be now considered complete without a consideration of her voice.¹²⁷

The poet's general reluctance to allow Penelope any real voice within the text means that the audience are never privy to Penelope's inner-most thoughts or feelings, and, as Murnaghan suggests, can only attempt to "deduce her state of mind from outward gestures and speeches".¹²⁸ This approach is hardly ideal when we consider the fact Penelope herself has admitted duplicity (*Od.*19.137ff) and that the only two examples of where she comes anywhere near to making a heartfelt speech (before the suitors in *Od.*18.158-303 and following the bed trick in *Od.*23.209-230) are also shrouded in ambiguity.¹²⁹ Despite this, it seems that when we note Aristotle's assertion that "silence brings glory to women" then this portrayal of a somewhat introvert Penelope does indeed become relevant to the broader arguments of this section.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Fulkerson (2002), p.343, emphasised by the fact that whilst Penelope's abstinence wins her good *kleos* (*Od.*24.191-9), the maid's association with the suitors can only attract a negative *kleos* (19.497-8) which damages the integrity of the household (19.497-8).

¹²⁷ Note also Odysseus' actions here in the context of my Section 3 (p.26) discussion of family obligations to exact revenge on those who threaten the stability of the *oikos*.

¹²⁸ Murnaghan in Skinner (1987), p.104-5. Note also other critical responses to taking Penelope at her word in Heitman (2008), p.9-10, Winkler (1990) and Felson (1997), p.16.

¹²⁹ See n.8. for scholarship concerning Penelope's speech at *Od.*23.209-230.

¹³⁰ Arist.*Pol.*1.5 1260a 21-24 in Foley in Cohen (1995), p.94.

For Penelope to win *kleos* she should remain publically silent since, as Fletcher (2008, p.77) notes, “Feminine silence is idealised”. However, as I have argued in Section 5, Penelope, like Odysseus, is a skilled speaker with the ability to use speech as the agent through which she can also attract *kleos* by means of deceit.¹³¹ Considering this, I believe the poet treads a fine line between allowing Penelope to predominantly appear as the silent, virtuous wife whilst also ensuring that she is vocal enough to deceive.¹³² It is, I believe, for this reason that Penelope does not challenge Telemachus’ authority when he tells her to return to the domestic interiors of the palace (*Od.*1.356, 21.350) but is confident enough to chastise him for his inhospitable behaviour in front of the suitors she is about to beguile (*Od.*18.223-25).¹³³ This apparent conflict in Penelope’s authoritative behaviour thus further emphasises Penelope’s capacity for duplicity and her use of deceit to attract *kleos* at any given opportunity.

In short, I propose that an analysis of Penelope which identifies her as both the “good wife” and the “active schemer” is textually justifiable and functions under the umbrella of a broader concern for *kleos* that prevails throughout Penelope’s presentation in the *Odyssey*. This argument thus unifies the current division within critical thought over the categorising of Penelope and also offers debate

¹³¹ Another example of the use of speech to deceive for *kleos* can be found in Bracke’s (2009, p.100) observation that Odysseus “distorts his narration of events” to the Phaeacians when he relates his experience with Circe in order to suggest that she beguiled him. Bracke suggests that Odysseus does this so he might impress Alkinoös and emphasis his faithfulness to Penelope.

¹³² Notably, Scodel’s in Fowler (2004, p.54) observation that “by stressing some details and ignoring others, a storyteller can impose a moral on his tale” is perhaps relevant to this context.

¹³³ This is also exemplified during the, arguably, (see Section 5, p.51-5) deceitful bow contest (*Od.*21.311-343) and again before the trick of the marriage bed (*Od.*23.173-81). In both these instances, I believe Penelope can be considered confident enough to attempt to exert authority over men in the context of her deceit.

to those critics who argue that women who weave do not retain any level of virtue in their deceit.¹³⁴ In view of the above, my argument for the recognition of a “morality of deceit” thus lies at the very heart of this analysis since it justifies Penelope’s use of *mētis* with virtuous intent.

6.2 Penelope and Power

By arguing that Penelope’s virtuous behaviour casts her in the role of “moral representative” of Odysseus’ *oikos*, it has been my intent, up to this point, to characterise her position within the spiritual concept of the *oikos* by means of her expression of family loyalty. Following on from this, I will now discuss how Penelope’s behaviour enables her to establish a physical level of domestic power and control which, regardless of the nature of her intent, is symptomatic of her loyalty to Odysseus.

The critical divide over an understanding of Penelope’s laugh at *Odyssey* 18.163 represents a matter which, in its widest sense, prevails throughout the *Odyssey*: the question of Penelope and power. Critics have been unable to agree on an analysis of the exact reasoning behind this expression, or indeed Penelope’s intent at all when she even states herself that, up until now, she did not want to show herself to the suitors (*Od.*18.164-5). Indeed, the various descriptions that have been attributed to this laugh: idle (Lattimore, 1999), pale, forced, silly, needless, forced and artificial, to name a few, have been dismissed by Levine (1983, p.172) who argues that Penelope’s laughter is not necessarily an expression of embarrassment or confusion, “but rather a mark of confidence

¹³⁴ See Section 4 (p.42-44)

when she sees that she will be able to fool the suitors”.¹³⁵ This interpretation allows Levine to compare Penelope’s behaviour with that of Hera in *Iliad* 15.100f. who laughs when “she conceives the plan to embroil Ares with Zeus”, and also with Odysseus (*Od.* 9.413) when he laughs at his success in fooling the Cyclops. In view of this, Levine’s analysis of Penelope’s laugh suggests that her actions of deceit in this context are indeed deliberate and part of a larger plan.¹³⁶

Another interpretation of the use of *achreion* in this context is that it denotes Penelope trying to disguise her feelings.¹³⁷ This observation becomes particularly interesting when considered in conjunction with Detienne and Vernant’s (1991, p.22-3) note that *mētis* a “power of cunning and deceit operates through disguise”.¹³⁸ By these means Penelope is, as Levine suggests, engaging with deceit in this episode, but this time the comparisons with Hera and the Cyclops are rooted in their vocal expressions of *mētis*, rather than simply boastful confidence. My own faith in this analysis is cemented by the fact that Odysseus, before his articulation of the ruse of the Trojan horse,

¹³⁵ Byre (1988), p.163, disagrees, He argues that a translation of *achreion* can be rendered adequately by “aimless” or “pointless” and thus interprets Penelope’s laugh as an index of her uncertainty of how to react to an inexplicable impulse to show herself to the suitors. This analysis highlights Byre’s reasoning that Penelope is not fostering any specific intent in this episode; thus complementing Hölscher in Schein (1996), p.135. suggestion that “nothing she does indicates that she is planning to deceive the suitors”.

¹³⁶ Levine (1983), p.175. Appropriately for my discussion here, Levine also notes that Penelope laughs “immediately after Athena prompts her to excite the suitors in order to gain good repute in the eyes of her son and husband”. See both Levine (1983), p.177 and *Od.*18.160-62.

¹³⁷ Liddell and Scott (1940) also associate this translation of *achreion* with *Il.*2.269 and *Theoc.*25.72.

¹³⁸ Notably, the only two characters who physically disguise themselves in the Odyssey, Athena (*Od.*1.105) and Odysseus (*Od.*13.398-403), are also the two figures most predominantly associated with the theme of *mētis* (*Od.*1.1, 13.291-415).

pretends to have lost his tongue.¹³⁹ Through this action, as Detienne and Vernant argue, Odysseus demonstrates how those who are about to employ *mētis* “conceal their inner deceit beneath a reassuring or seductive exterior”.¹⁴⁰ This description is clearly appropriate to Penelope in the context of her laugh, and her subsequent beautification by Athena, which impresses the suitors (*Od.*18.190-199, 18.212-13).¹⁴¹

I believe that Penelope’s appearance before the suitors thus encapsulates a good thematic overview of the means by which Penelope may be considered to hold some level of domestic control in a setting which, by intention or not, also demonstrates her ability to successfully deceive. To support my argument, I will now use the context of this episode to explore some other examples of how Penelope exhibits domestic power through deceit.

Byre (1988) contends that Athena initiated Penelope’s appearance before the suitors in order that Odysseus might witness for himself the relationship between his wife and these men.¹⁴² However, Levine’s (1983, p.176) note that it is “normal Homeric technique to attribute a character’s sudden impulse to divine inspiration” and Felson-Rubin’s (1996, p.173) assurance that Athena’s intervention does not lessen Penelope’s responsibility for her decision to appear, does much to indicate that some level of personal intent supported

¹³⁹ Detienne & Vernant (1991), p.22-3. //3.205-244

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ This implicates Athena’s involvement in both Penelope’s and Odysseus’ *mētis* as it was Athena who initiated Odysseus’ disguise before his return to Ithaca (*Od.*13.398-403). Also notable here is Cairns’ (2001, p.24) contention that “one conceals with a veil when one’s honour is at stake” which could be interpreted as an indication that Penelope is, indeed, about to deceive (*Od.*18.158-61).

¹⁴² Byre (1988), p.170.

Penelope's choice.¹⁴³ Indeed, Marquardt (1985, p36-37) suggests that this character has much to gain from her relationship with the suitors.¹⁴⁴ This is because Penelope has made her "arrogant wooers her protectors" who make secure her position in Odysseus' house. Consequently, the suitors may be eating into Odysseus' estate but for as long as they are there Penelope can remain protected by their presence; a security fuelled by her personal encouragement of their suit (*Od.*2.91-2, 18.272-3).

With the bride gifts she extracts from the suitors during this episode thus serving as both a source of replacement for the wealth of the *oikos* and a "demonstration of her compelling presence" it is not difficult to appreciate how Marquardt's Penelope continues to succeed in exercising a level of domestic control through deceit.¹⁴⁵ Penelope's authority during this episode is also supported by Bertolín's (2008, p.94) observation that when she shows herself to the suitors she stands by a pillar, an action which he claims is indicative that Penelope is still mistress of her household.¹⁴⁶

This image of an *oikos* centric Penelope is a far cry from Fletcher's (2008, p.77) description of the character's "cloistered existence", with veiled and chaperoned appearances suggesting that she acts as if she is in a public space rather than her own home, and even further, perhaps, from Foley's (1995, p.96) suggestion that "Penelope is not fully herself without her husband". However, if we accept

¹⁴³ Felson-Ruben in Schein (1996), p 173.

¹⁴⁴ For scholarship on Penelope's dream of the death of her pet geese see Russo (1982) p.8-9, Rozokoki (2001) p.1-4 and Pratt (1994). Perhaps Penelope's weeping upon their demise (*Od.*19.535-545) is indicative of a level of affection for the suitors who, it is argued, the geese are believed to represent, Russo (1982, p.9).

¹⁴⁵ Marquardt (1985), p.38. Lacey (1968), p.41 for *Hedna*.

¹⁴⁶ This is supported by Heitman (2008), p.102-3. Also Fulkerson (2002), p.337-8 who notes that Penelope's chastity is identified with the pillar in Book 23.

Halverson's (1992, p.186) argument that the integrity of the *oikos*, not Odysseus' homecoming, is the central and dominating issue of the *Odyssey* then, I believe, we can also begin to appreciate the theoretical space from which Marquardt's analysis originates.

In view of this, the notion that Penelope beguiles to maintain a position of power and independence within the *oikos* is, in my mind, beyond doubt. Indeed, we need only consider Bracke's (2009, p.337) assertion of a link between Penelope at *Odyssey* 21.68 and the *mētis* displayed by Pindar's Medea (Pind. *P*.4.23) through their mutual use of the male speech pattern *keklute* or "listen" to comprehend how both these women skilfully and authoritatively employ "rhetoric as deception".¹⁴⁷ Moreover, when we couple Bracke's note that Penelope is the only Homeric woman to use this predominantly male term of speech with her observation that "this is an act of *mētis* approximating to her husband's cunning", I believe that the notion of a shared *mētis* between Penelope and Odysseus also comes into play.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ This also compares with Odysseus who uses the phrase "Hear me, you leaders of the Phaiakians" before beguiling his audience with the tales of his wanderings (*Od*.8.26). Moreover, Bracke (2009, p.337) notes that Medea and Penelope can also be compared here for their wisdom and cunning intelligence used for the benefit of the hero, thus supporting my Section 5 (p.49-51) argument that Penelope is being duplicitous through speech in this episode. Relevant to this notion of beguiling speech, Segal (1996, p.202) notes that Alkinoös' explicitly compares Odysseus to a bard in *Od*.11.368 as his song is that of a professional singer which "casts a spell or enchantment" like that of Phemius in *Od*.1.337. See Mueller (2010, p.349) for an argument of Penelope's role as a complement to that of Odysseus as bard. Also Clayton (2004), p.24.

¹⁴⁸ Aside from the use of male speech there are other instances in the text of Penelope where is linked with masculine epithets. *Od*. 4.787-794 likens Penelope to a "pondering" lion caught in a "crowd of men" and in *Od*.19.108-114 Odysseus describes her as a "good king". Appropriately for my argument here, these are terms which are often used to denote power, thus linking Penelope's authority to that of a man or, more specifically, that of her husband king, Odysseus. See Doherty (1991, p.34) for further discussion.

To conclude, both Penelope and Odysseus share a penchant for *mētis* which, as I argued in Section 5, allows them to operate deceitfully in the interests of household integrity.¹⁴⁹ However, whereas Odysseus deceives to ensure safe passage home and his re-establishment as *Kyrios*, Penelope, I argue, deceives in order to preserve a stable position of virtue and respectability within a not so steady household.¹⁵⁰ This approach allows Penelope to continue to gain *kleos* and maintain a level of domestic power through an expression of loyalty to Odysseus which is dependent on her ability to actively avoid remarriage through deceit and thus retain her present status. Telemachus' maturity equally poses a threat to Penelope's authority since an acceptance of his adulthood, and subsequently his claim to his father's property, would also bring Penelope's period of household governance to an end (*Od.*19.157-61).¹⁵¹ In view of this, and all the above, I thus propose that Penelope's ability to successfully transform her *mētis* into the art of maintaining the status quo of Odysseus' *oikos* ensures that, at least for now, she can remain "king of her castle".

¹⁴⁹ For further discussions of Penelope and Odysseus' shared *mētis* and *homophrosunē* see Murnaghan in Skinner (1987), p.104 ff, Felson (1997), p.45,64, Winkler (1990), p.129 ff and Heitman (2008), p.102.

¹⁵⁰ The behaviour of the suitors and the treacherous maids (*Od.*18.325, 20.7), coupled with Penelope's ambiguous domestic status, signifies a constant threat to the stability of Odysseus' household (*Od.* 1.245, 2.123-8).

¹⁵¹ See Section 3 (p.22-23) for discussion of Penelope as governor of Odysseus' *oikos*. Heitman (2008, p.50-62) provides a detailed analysis of Telemachus' maturity and observes that Penelope labels him as *nēpios* or "childish". In the context of my argument here, Penelope may be keen to emphasise that her son is not yet ready to take on the reigns of the household and thus further secures her position.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study was initiated with the aim of demonstrating how and why Penelope's deceit helps to sustain her moral standing and level of domestic control in the *Odyssey*. It was my intent that this would be achieved by focussing on a number of objectives that would contextualize Penelope's position, behaviour and intent within the *oikos* of her absent husband, Odysseus. Specifically, these objectives were set to focus on:

1. A discussion of Penelope's domestic situation and the greater theme of household in the *Odyssey*.
2. An analysis of Penelope's role as active trickster and the connections between this behaviour and her domestic status.
3. An investigation of the links between virtue and *mētis* in the poem and the subsequent proposal of a "morality of deceit".
4. An assessment of Penelope's domestic power based on her ability to deceive in order to maintain the status quo.

In view of the above, this section will now revisit the objectives listed in order that I might summarize my discussions and offer concluding remarks on the critical analyses and arguments that I have presented. To finalise my work, I will offer recommendations on how this research study may influence or be progressed by future critics of the *Odyssey*.

7.1 Summary

Penelope's role within Odysseus' household was discussed in Section 3 where I established, through an exploration of the definitions of *oikos* and *Kyrios*, that the absent Odysseus still remained lord of his household. With ultimate control remaining with her husband, I discussed how Penelope's role was therefore one of guardianship and not complete authority.¹⁵²

My analyses here also emphasised how a stable family unit was of central importance to the well being and integrity of the *oikos*, a term which, I argued, encompassed both family and possessions and not just physical property. These observations enabled me to develop the concept of an abstract *oikos* in which, through preservation of memory, dispersed family members might retain a sense of spiritual unity. I thus supported this through an exploration of the emphasis on the use of genealogy and family ties in the Homeric works.

As Section 3 allowed me to characterise Penelope's domestic position, Section 4 enabled me to advance my research towards an examination of Penelope's socially active deceit. In the context of the trick of the shroud (*Od.*2.90-109), I discussed the use of the loom in connection with female *mētis* and outlined scholarly opinion that those women who weave in order to deceive do not retain the virtue associated with their skill in this particular domestic area.

¹⁵² Though, also noting the quote at *Odyssey* 19.526 which seems to suggest that Penelope's own reflection of her status might somewhat be at odds with this interpretation. See Section 3 (p.22).

From this, I also offered a textual analysis of some of the classical links between chastity and silence in order to further demonstrate how female *mētis* was distanced from virtue by its connection with women's voice. To close this section, I considered the influence of Athena on Penelope's deceit and argued that Penelope was both conscious of, and responsible for, her beguiling nature. An initial examination of Penelope's *mētis*, which links her use of deception to her domestic status and the integrity of Odysseus' household, was also presented here.

Section 5 signified a move from my focus on the trick of the shroud in Section 4 to a broader exploration of Penelope's use of trickery (*Od.*18.265, 21.60ff, 23.175) and comparative deceit. Through this section I established that, like the shroud trick, these examples of deceit predominantly functioned for the benefit of the *oikos*. Moreover, a discussion of Penelope's deceitful intent also led me to identify a concern for *kleos* as the primary motive for her behaviour.

By applying these findings to an examination of the thematic links between *mētis* and virtue, I thus argued for the recognition of a "morality of deceit" in the *Odyssey* which justified instances of lying and deception when they were employed solely to contribute to the integrity of the *oikos*. To emphasise, Section 5 established that the use of deceit in the *Odyssey* is, for the most part, intrinsically connected to household stability and prosperity.

In order to further support my proposal of a "morality of deceit", Section 6 primarily offered an assessment of Penelope's virtue through her engagement with the broader themes of hospitality and fidelity in the household. This enabled me to argue that Penelope's exemplary virtuous behaviour was only ameliorated by her ability to deceive for the benefit of the household. In view of

this, I also argued for an interpretation of Penelope as the moral representative of Odysseus' physical *oikos*.

In a challenge to contemporary scholarship, these discussions led to the character analysis of a unified Penelope who, I proposed, could be both the "good wife" and the "active schemer" when considered within the context of a "morality of deceit". Following on from this, I finalised the presentation of my research with an examination of the relationship between Penelope's deceit and her domestic power. This allowed me to deliver an assessment of Penelope's power based on her ability to deceive in order to maintain the status quo. It is by these means that I confidently argued how Penelope beguiles in order to maintain a position of power and independence within the *oikos*.

7.2 Concluding Remarks

My primary decision to consider Penelope in the context of her deceit stemmed from a personal desire to discover a constant unifying theme amongst the wealth of scholarly criticism that deals with the nuances of this character. Indeed, critics such as Winkler (1990), Foley (1995) and Murnaghan (1987) have all, as this study testifies, offered intriguing and accounts of Penelope. However, it is, I believe, in the often differing and wide ranging approaches to Penelope's penchant for trickery that the problem lays. The trick of the shroud (*Od.2.90-109*) is, as I have argued in Section 4, one of the most defining aspects of Penelope's intent. Consequently, scholarship on this ruse is vast and, in my mind, too conflicting to present a broadly representative portrayal of Penelope in the context of her deceit. It has thus been my intent that this study

would strive to offer a more refined and inclusive analysis of Penelope's character.

To achieve this, my focus has (in Sections 5 and 6 particularly) been rooted to a personal recognition of a "constant", a specific theme which is prevalent throughout scholarly opinion on Penelope. Originally, I self-identified this "constant" as the trick of the shroud as it is continually representative of Penelope's conscious decision to deceive (*Od.*19.137ff). Thus indicating that, from whatever angle critics decide to approach Penelope, a comment on her confirmed ability to deceive on this occasion would be difficult to avoid.

However, as my study progressed, so too did my "constant" from its symbolic interpretation of Penelope's ability to deceive to a more spiritual understanding of the broader concept of deceit in the *Odyssey* under the auspices of a "morality of deceit".

This change became relevant because it allowed me to incorporate yet another aspect of Penelope's personality into the "constant", that of virtue. Thus, by arguing that scholarly criticism of Penelope should be based on her ability, as argued in Section 5, to "virtuously deceive" it is my hope that my research has gone some of the way to recognising that these differing scholarly analyses may not be as mutually exclusive as I first thought.

I have argued throughout this study, though specifically in Section 6, that an understanding of the virtuous intent behind Penelope's deceit is central to any evaluation of her domestic status. From my discussions in Section 3 we may conclude that Penelope, as solely the guardian of Odysseus' *oikos*, is bereft of

any real domestic power but does have a moral responsibility to protect the integrity of a more spiritual concept of household and family.

One could argue that Penelope's tolerance of the suitors (*Od.*1.249-50) further emphasises that she holds no real power. However, my Section 6 discussion of Penelope's relationship with these "guests", indicates, as Russo (1982, p.9) does, that Penelope "enjoys being courted". Additionally, these findings enable me to conclude that the fact that Penelope has remained in the house with the suitors, and not returned to the house of her father (as is suggested by Athena *Od.*1.276 and Antinoös *Od.*2.113-4), derives from strength, and not weakness. Indeed, Penelope has found a way to turn a potential problem into an advantage, as it is by continuing to be hospitable to the suitors that she might win additional *kleos* for virtue. A continuation of this pattern can be seen in my analysis of Penelope's trickery in Sections 4 and 5, which enables me to support my broader thesis that Penelope "virtuously deceives" for the benefit of her *kleos* and status within the household.

In Section 6, I argued that my research discussions lead to an interpretation of a unified Penelope whose actions can be interpreted as simultaneously virtuous and deceitful when considered in the context of a "morality of deceit". This assertion represented a challenge to my Section 4 analysis of critical opinion which favours the notion that women, who weave to deceive, do not retain an element of virtue. This also allows me to also conclude that critics who may have previously set their analysis of Penelope in either the "deceitful" camp or the "virtuous" camp no longer have to make this initial decision if they also employ the idea of a "morality of deceit" as their own "constant".

My final comment is one on memory and its connection to Penelope's domestic status. I have argued throughout this study (particularly Section 6) that Penelope is, like Odysseus, a skilled manipulator who exerts and maintains a level of influence and control through her ability to deceive. However, what I haven't yet had the scope to consider is how Penelope's domestic status and deceitful activity might be affected by Odysseus' *nostos*.

A potential fear that Odysseus might have changed, or that he no longer cares for his wife, perhaps characterises Penelope's reluctance to readily welcome the stranger who identifies himself as her husband (23.85-110). Penelope's memory of Odysseus thus plays a crucial role in her acceptance of his homecoming because, in my mind, she would have only been willing to sacrifice the control that she has worked so hard to achieve on the assurance that Odysseus is still the man he once was.¹⁵³ Ensuring that her *kleos* is by no means compromised by the return of a familiar stranger, Penelope, through the trick of the marriage bed, seeks to confirm that this is, indeed, the Odysseus with whom she shares *homophrosunê* or "like-mindedness". The man who, I argue, she has never, spiritually, been apart from and who will thus cause the least disruption to the status quo of their *oikos*.¹⁵⁴

7.3 Recommendations

In view of the above, my recommendations on how this study might be progressed focus on a development of this theme of *nostos* and memory in

¹⁵³ Perhaps this is why Penelope emphasises that she remembers very well what Odysseus looked like when he left Ithaca (*Od.*23.175-6).

¹⁵⁴ Also noteworthy here is my Section 3 (p29-30) discussion of memory and the *oikos*.

order to gain further insight into Penelope's potential fears and concerns for Odysseus' return and thus her own domestic status post-*nostos*. This would also allow for a more detailed analysis of the later chapters of the *Odyssey* in light of Penelope's "morality of deceit".

In a broader sense, the concept of a "morality of deceit" could also be applied to other examples of character *mētis* in classical literature in order to determine whether its functions remain unique to the *Odyssey* or are wide ranging. My analysis of a Penelope who expresses the characteristics of both virtue and deceit may also lead to fresh interpretations of previously exhausted methods of approach.

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