

(i) Penelope - 2019

(a) Describe the character of Penelope as revealed in Homers Odyssey up to her reunion with Odysseus in book 23.

We learned a lot about Penelope's character in the Odyssey mostly from her interactions with the suitors and her son. We learn that she worries often for her son from book two when Telemachus asks Eurycleia not to tell her that he has gone searching for his father. Telemachus is aware of how much his mother cares for him and does not wish for her to freak out about his travels. Penelope is also a very emotional woman, most likely from her experiences and longing for Odysseus. She is often remarked as crying uncontrollably from grief to which Athena must grant her sleep so that she may rest. Another example of how fragile state can be seen from a disease is command that she not be informed of his return until after he has destroyed the suitors.

In terms of her interactions with the suitors, we learn of her cleverness from the tricks she plays on them. She first insists that she will choose a suitor after she finishes weaving Laertes' funeral shroud. She is however unweaving it every night to undo her progress. This delays her remarriage for almost three years. Her trick with the bow just before the battle with the Suitors also demonstrates this. Penelope announces and she will marry the suitor who can string Odysseus' bow and fire an arrow through 10 axe heads. This is impossible however for anyone but Odysseus which is exactly what Penelope wanted as she does not wish to marry any of them.

Penelope's resilience can also not be understated. Despite the hardship of her position, she remains strong for Odysseus and Ithaca. While it might be easier for her to just marry one of the suitors, she chooses not to and waits almost 20 years for her husband's return. She remains a kind woman as well, which is evident from her outrage at the suitors' mistreatment of the beggar and of Irus. She remains hopeful and offers any traveller with news of her husband with warmth. While Odysseus is disguised as a beggar, she welcomes him and offers her hospitality to him in exchange for news.

One of Penelope's defining traits is her loyalty. She is the ideal loyal Greek wife. She is faithful for 20 years waiting on her husband's return, unlike other disloyal wives. Clytemnestra the wife of Agamemnon conspired to murder him with her lover upon his return and Helen of Sparta, wife of

Menelaus fled to Troy with Paris. Agamemnon even remarks to Odysseus in the Underworld that Penelope is nothing like his wife or Helen but a woman of the highest virtues. Even when Telemachus [and Odysseus himself] say that he has returned, Penelope still tests him by moving their bed to ensure that it is her husband. She is so loyal that she doesn't want to betray him especially if she is being tricked by the gods.

(b) What do we learn from their reunion about the relationship between Odysseus and Penelope?

Their reunion firstly tells us how well matched they are. Penelope is very cunning just like her husband. She is cautious, suspicious of him and reluctant to embrace him. She waits until he falls for her trick with the bed and when he is infuriated that someone has moved their olive tree bed she's overjoyed as only Odysseus would know the intimacy of how it was constructed. She acts very much like the shrewd Odysseus. They complement each other well.

Her unwavering loyalty reveals how much respect and love she has for him. She wants to be sure that it is Odysseus before embracing him. Even when her son Telemachus scolds at her coldness towards him, she does not waver. Penelope does not wish to betray her husband by falling for a trick by the gods. Odysseus doesn't question her hesitance either which demonstrates that he wants her to be completely sure and satisfied that it is indeed him. There is a mutual trust and respect for one another in their relationship.