

The character of Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey* reflects the faithful wife who waits twenty years for the arrival of her husband. Only a strong woman could sustain the stress, anxiety and confusion resulting from the chaos of a palace with a missing king whose fate is unknown. Her responsibilities and commitments toward the man she loves are particularly difficult to keep, under the strain of the situation. Although she does not actively pursue an effort to find him, her participation in the success of Odysseus' homecoming can be seen in her efforts to defend and protect the heritage, reputation and the House of Odysseus in his absence.

As Odysseus withstands his trial, Penelope withstands her trials against temptations to give in to the many anxious suitors, to give up on her faith and respect for her religion, her husband and even her self. Penelope's strength in keeping the highest standards in her function as a wife, woman and mother contributes to the success of Odysseus' homecoming by keeping the home and family for him to come back to. Through many examples Homer indicates to us the standards of those times. Major examples about what is valued in a wife are encapsulated in book six where he talks about Nausicaa. Homer uses this short story to present a standard from which we can evaluate Penelope's performance. In making a comparison we see that Penelope never stood idle and helpless. She continued to perform the duties expected of her, while her husband was missing. Athena guides Nausicaa with a list of how to prepare herself for marriage. **Of major importance is the upkeep of the household as well as good personal hygiene** (starting as line 6- 25), and as a young woman must try to please her parents. In all the instances Penelope scores perfectly.

Penelope is always bathing, protects her beauty, and she respects her parents. Also in book six we have a reinforcement of the standard functions of the woman and the man. Nausicaa's mother is with her female attendants, weaving clothes. **Nausicaa's father is shown on his way to the council with other male officials (line 50).** This same distinction of roles is often referred to in the whole poem. Telemachus often tells his mother, to go back to her distaff, while he was to attend political councils: "**Go therefore back in the house and take up your own work, the loom and distaff, and see to it that your hand mates ply their work also; but the men must see a discussion, all men, but I most of all.**" (book 1 line 356) " Penelope as usual performs this duty of the household faithfully. All those duties however are a part of a larger goal, the goal keeping a good name for one-self in the eyes of others and the eyes of gods. We see finally in the Nausicaa's short episode, the most important factor a woman must realize. Nausicaa directs Odysseus to the city but recommends that he goes by himself to avoid the scandal that might arise if she were seen bringing in a male stranger. It is Precisely this the best reputation which is presented in the Odyssey as the most valued goal in life. Penelope's responsibility is to develop and maintain the best reputation. As wife she must preserve the reputation of her husband, her family, and must maintain the system of the household. As a woman she must arise above scandal and maintain a position in society. Her position in society is only revealed in relationship to the patriarchy. As a wife and family member, she preserves the heritage and foundation of her patriarchal lineage. Whenever she approaches the suitors she continually reminds them to their sense of history, their fathers, and the past. She further admonishes them for not behaving in a manner appropriate to their past: "You keep gathering here consuming

away much livelihood, the property of wise Telemachos, nor have you listened to what you heard from you fathers before you..." (Book IV 686-689) In direct relationship to her defense of her patriarchal heritage is the defense of her husband's reputation. She protects her husband's position by never compromising to marry the many suitors until the hour she finishes the web-when Telemachos grows up to govern: "Young men, my suitors now that the great Odysseus has perished, wait, though you are angry to marry me, until I finish this web..." (Book II line 96-98) She indirectly keeps Odysseus' power and authority alive since is not that powerful she is holding out. In public statements she repeatedly boasts her husband's fame: "*** so dear a head do I long whenever I am reminded of my husband, whose fame goes through Hellas and midmost Argos." (book I line 343-345) Also she says in book IV line 724 "... I lost a husband with a heart of a lion and who among Danaans surpassed in all virtues..." In this was Penelope reinforces the authority of Odysseus and keeps his reputation great. Penelope is able to keep the palace in order too. She still maintains the system of philoxenia, however is a response to the will of the gods which she respects and is faithful to. Her network of communication also remains strong and efficient under circumstances. Even though she is physically isolated from the outside activity she had reliable and faithful messenger service especially from Medon, Dolios and Eurykleia. They keep her informed on the conspiracies of the suitors and provide information about Telemachos and Odysseus. For example, she receives word from Medon: "... Now they are minded to kill Telemachos with sharp bronze on his way home." Book IV line 700 Right away Penelope directs another messenger to spread the word to the appropriate authorities. Before the eyes of the gods, Penelope never wishes to tarnish her reputation either. She honors them regularly in a ritual of bathing,

anointing herself and her handmaidens with olive oil, saying prayers and sometimes making sacrifices. From all the above we see that Penelope reflects successfully the faithful wife, the strong woman, the responsible woman the woman who cares about herself. She is loyal both to the principles of the palace and the principles of those times. During Odysseu's absence she continued to perform the duties expected of her very well and that is the reason, I believe that she managed to achieve the best reputation for Odysseus and herself, even though woman's role was restricted at that time. Like I always say behind every great man there stands a greater woman