

PENELOPE IN THE ODYSSEY

She's most upset about Odysseus's failure to return home:

She's perpetually crying and expressing her grief.

Upset by Phemius's song about the Greeks' sad homecomings (34) and by the beggar's story about his meeting with Odysseus (293)..

Wants to die (231, 305).

Inquisitive about stories of Odysseus:

Twice asks Telemachus for details of what he heard in Pylos and Sparta (261).

Insists on seeing the beggar to ask for his story (272-3, 290).

Loves Telemachus:

Very upset when she hears that he's sailed to Pylos and that suitors are plotting to kill him (85).

Telemachus knew she'd be worried sick (47).

Annoyed that maids didn't tell her about T's departure: she could have stopped it (84).

Wants to avert murder by getting Laertes to plead with suitors (84).

Overjoyed to see T. back from Sparta (260).

Twice (34 and 324-5) she is surprised but impressed by T's rebuking her for being a silly emotional woman and sending her back to her loom. (She's used to giving him orders - e.g. about not interfering with the maids (339)).

4 Compassionate to the beggar (attracted to a man "like" her husband?):

Shocked by Antinous's treatment of the beggar (272).

Chides Telemachus for letting Antinous hit the beggar (281-2).

Hospitable to beggar (296).

Telemachus says she tends to make much of beggars and ignore better men (suitors?) (307).

5 Sceptical of optimistic news:

Requires proof of beggar's claim to have met Odysseus (293).

Distrusts favourable interpretation of her dream (302).

Disbelieves Eurycleia's news of Odysseus's return (341).

Takes a long time to be convinced by Odysseus - deliberate setting of test (341 ff.).

6 Her attitude to the suitors

a) She wants Odysseus to return and hates the suitors:

Wants Odysseus to return and kill the suitors (273).

Athena tells Od. that P's real desire is for Od. to return (212).

Occasionally she tells suitors what she feels:

chides Antinous for dishonouring the bond between his father and Odysseus (256);

chides suitors for eating her possessions when they should be giving her presents (283-4) (they do, and she accepts them).

b) Her dilemma (stated by Telemachus (207) and Penelope (301)):

1. On the one hand she does not want to remarry:
 - (a) respect for Odysseus, who may just be alive;
 - (b) respect for public opinion - the public do disapprove when they think she has remarried (304);
 - (c) remarriage would be loathsome, she says (282-3).

2. On the other hand there are pressures on her to remarry:
 - (a) her parents are pushing her (292);
 - (b) Odysseus told her 19 years ago to feel free to remarry when Telemachus grew a beard - which is now happening (282-3);
 - (c) If she doesn't remarry soon, suitors will consume Telemachus's whole estate.

It is clear from what everyone says that she could simply go back to her father and be given away as a bride all over again; but Tel. can't make the decision to send her there without thereby insulting her powerful father (40-1).

NB Until now, she's been unable to decide, but now she's finally accepted the need to remarry (282-3, 292) and decides - or pretends to decide - to settle the issue with the bow.

c) Her ambiguous leading on of the suitors:

She sends private messages of encouragement to each suitor, say Antinous (39) and Athena (212).

She played the trick with the loom (39-40) which she admits (292).

So the suitors feel aggrieved at getting no satisfaction when they were led to expect it (39-40),