

Comment on the character and behaviour of Penelope.

Author: Emily Kramers, St Mary's Convent, Cambridge.

Penelope is the loyal and faithful wife of Odysseus. Odysseus has been absent for nineteen years. The war at Troy ended after ten years and since that time Odysseus has been lost. Penelope therefore has had to wait in doubt and uncertainty for nine years, and it is that faith despite the odds that is her most striking virtue.

Penelope is important as a character because she is the wife of the hero. The Greek heroic code included the opinion that a wife was a reflection on the husband. A hero could not have an ugly wife, for physical and moral perfection were regarded as synonymous. Therefore Penelope's beauty is important as it reflects favourably both on her own worth and on her husband's status as a hero. In fact she is most important as a display of Odysseus' heroic status. The fact that Clytemnestra was disloyal to Agamemnon reflected badly on Agamemnon himself, which proves the importance of Penelope's good reputation. Therefore Penelope's stock epithets are very important as they show the essential qualities that she has, and also the opinion the reader or audience is being asked to remember.

Penelope's most common epithet is "wise". This is an important characteristic as it shows that she has an individualistic mind. This again is important with respect to Odysseus because his epithets are normally "nimble-witted" or "quick-witted". He is renowned for his cunning mind, and it is appropriate therefore that his wife should have also that distinguishing feature. She is also however referred to as beautiful and faithful. Beauty is important in materialistic aspect of the society, where possessions added to honour, upon which the whole status was based. But despite this her mind is important. It is seen when Antinous, a suitor, relates how Penelope would set about weaving a funeral cloth for her father every day. She promised to marry one of the suitors when she had finished the cloth. However every night she would unravel the day's work to postpone the day when she would finish. Therefore this shows her as intelligent and almost crafty. These qualities are apt for the wife of Odysseus.

Her distinguishing feature is her devotion to the memory of her husband Odysseus. This faithfulness and devotion may be viewed in two lights. It could be seen as opposition to further marriage due to the fact that she does not want to be married to any of the suitors, and is more inclined to remain Queen of Ithaca. However the more acceptable and, I think, the intended opinion is that she has true devotion and love for her husband. She declines all offers of marriage repeatedly. She often weeps for her husband. Several times Homer ends an episode by saying that Penelope goes to her room and cries for Odysseus until sleep overtakes her. When the bard begins singing of the battle of Troy Penelope entreats him to stop because it rends her heart with grief. This evident devotion is also shown by her eagerness to entertain strangers in case they may have heard news of Odysseus. Indeed the suitors mock her constant efforts to discover news of him. This devotion may be seen as a little artificial and contrived after nineteen years, but it is important as Penelope

must be seen as representing the perfect wife and Odysseus himself, and therefore must possess such qualities worthy of that.

Penelope is seen as religious, as she often prays for the return of Odysseus. This again is a virtue for a woman. Also she is seen as superstitious. At one point Telemachus sneezes loudly and she sees it as a good omen. Such beliefs are not unusual and were quite virtuous. Also when Odysseus returns he does so in disguise of a beggar. Penelope is very hospitable to the beggar and therefore shows correct attitudes to the important and holy laws of hospitality. Another quality she possesses is that of the good daughter: she is seen weaving a funeral cloth for her father, which implies a suitable attitude to her parent (*Examiner's note - 'in-law'*). The relationship between children and parent, especially father, is seen as sanctified and extremely important as it includes ideas of honour and loyalty. Therefore, even in this respect, she is seen as virtuous. She is also seen as obedient. Telemachus, in Book 1, sends her upstairs because he wants to listen to the bard. She obeys. She seems to possess all the virtuous characteristics necessary to be the most perfect of wives.

Penelope is virtuous in all those things which can be considered appropriate for a wife. Her behaviour is strictly in accordance with accepted views of what a wife should do. Although she does seem to have her own individual opinions and act accordingly, as Alcinous (?) tells us, as he calls her 'clever'; her primary function within the *Odyssey* is to represent all that a wife should. Her role is in fact determined by these standards. She is seen as possessing virtues necessary for a wifely character. Indeed she is praised in book 4 when Helen and Menelaus are talking and she can be seen as direct contrast to Helen who caused a 10 year war because of her faithlessness. Therefore Penelope must embody both in her character and her behaviour those aspects that are likely to show Odysseus' own worth as the hero of the poem, because as his wife all her actions ultimately reflect upon him.

Examiner's comment: *Outstanding essay - thorough and perceptive. Very interesting analysis of female equivalent of 'heroic code'; good comments on epithets and on her relations with Telemachus, visitors, (suitors could be given more discussion). Good style.*

Mark 19+1 for style = 20/25

Section D, Q.4: *'It is generally accepted that after the fall of Troy the Greeks kept up hostilities against all the Trojans except Aeneas and Antenor. These two men had worked consistently for peace.'* (Livy I 1) *How does Virgil in Aeneid II justify the survival of Aeneas when his city was destroyed?*

Author: Helen Brannigan, Shena Simon College, Manchester.

In *Aeneid* book 2 Virgil tells of the deceit of the Greeks in detail and portrays a dying city. Although to a certain extent the *Aeneid* is an imitation of Homer's work, it differs in one significant respect and that is that Aeneas is forced to relinquish the role of the Homeric hero and to become the Roman hero Virgil is creating. This development is depicted in the character of Aeneas, and it is this which results in his survival.

When Aeneas is warned by the appearance of Hector in a dream the Troy and Priam have remained long enough and that he must take the Trojan gods and leave the city, he awakes and his only thought is to gather arms and join his men and try to defend his city. Even when Panthus appears, priest of Apollo, his only concern is to go to the point where the fighting is at its height. He does not think about his family, only of his city. This does not show a callousness but only that he is obeying the Homeric code of honour which is exemplified by the statement

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.

This means that it is right and proper to die for one's country. In this context Aeneas should fight and die in his city's defence.

As a reader Virgil has already revealed the fact that Aeneas is destined to survive the destruction of his city and is destined to go to Italy, fight a war in Latium and marry Lavinia and so mix Trojan and Italian blood and therefore found a new city. This has been revealed through Jupiter's prophecy at the beginning of Book 1. Virgil is therefore forced to allow Aeneas to follow his first instincts and join those fighting but also to allow him to remain unscathed. He joins with others and dresses in the uniforms of some Greeks and fights. Realising that the palace is in danger he goes there to give support. Aeneas is still acting as the Homeric hero.

This heroism is seen also in his irrational thoughts upon seeing the Spartan Helen crouching in the shadows of the temple. He immediately wants vengeance having seen Priam killed in a brutal way by Pyrrhus. He acknowledges that there is no fame in killing a woman but convinces himself that he would be praised for having rid the city of an abomination. At the point when it seems that Aeneas is about to follow his instinct Virgil introduces his mother Venus.

This appearance of Venus supplies justification for Aeneas' survival. It is she who reminds him of his father and his wife Creusa and his son Ascanius and "pietas" (duty) to one's family is placed as a greater priority than "pietas" towards one's city. Virgil however explains this since Venus points out that it is not Paris or Helen who are to blame for the destruction of Troy. The former because he was awarded Helen of Sparta by Venus

as his bribe for choosing her as opposed to Hera or Athene, as being the winner of the beauty competition, and Helen for deserting her husband. Venus reveals that it is the lack of mercy of the gods which has resulted in Troy's destiny. She allows Aeneas to see Neptune pulling apart the rocks with his trident. This confirmation that it is the intervention of the gods which is responsible for Troy's destiny, is the excuse Virgil provides for Aeneas to abandon his efforts in trying to save a fated city and instead to follow the advice of Hector and Panthus and leave. Panthus too has said quite emphatically that Troy had existed and that the Trojans had existed but that the city was to stand no longer.

Only after these revelations does Aeneas return to Anchises' house (his father) and his family. He then seeks his father and shows his "pietas" in wanting to take him to the mountains to safety first. His father's refusal breaks the logical conclusion. There is a tension between obeying the rational thought and leaving the city and showing loyalty and duty to one's father. Due to the Roman ideology Virgil is forced to stay with his father and therefore risk the lives of his whole family and go to fight even though Aeneas now knows that he will be unable to successfully defend his city.

In order that Aeneas might leave the city Virgil introduces divine intervention. Anchises, having refused to leave, changes his mind when the cap of Ascanius suddenly bursts into flames. These flames are however harmless and Anchises realising that it is a sign from the gods prays to Jupiter to give him further confirmation of this sign. A clap of thunder is then heard and a star falls from the sky giving a bright path and leaving a trail of sulphur. This star then disappears amidst the forest on Mount Ida. This convinces Anchises that he has been given divine approval to leave the city and so he consents to accompany his son.

Aeneas' party leave the burning Troy and after losing his way in his effort to escape the Greeks following him, he and his party reach the deserted shrine of Ceres. The only person missing is his wife Creusa. Creusa's disappearance is necessary since to fulfil the prophecies Aeneas is to marry a new woman, Lavinia. It is also necessary because when Aeneas goes back into Troy to search for her, she appears to him as a ghost-like figure. It is through her that Aeneas learns of his destiny and it is further confirmation that Aeneas is destined to survive the destruction of Troy. Creusa reveals to him that he must wander across the sea until he comes to a rich land in the West called Hesperia. Here there will be a city and a wife awaiting him.

Virgil in Book 2 illustrates the tension between the Homeric hero and the Roman hero by the conflict in Aeneas' priorities. These are resolved only by explanations involving the intervention of the gods and it is through this medium that Aeneas' survival is successfully justified.

(Examiner's comment - excellent. Mark ²²/₂₅)

Section A Q.8 a) *Discuss Homer's portrayal of the Phaeacians. Do you think they are real people or inhabitants of fairyland.*

Author: Jessica Tweedie, Old Palace School, Mayfield, Sussex.

The first Phaeacian we meet is Nausicaa who has a dream sent by Athene that she must go and wash her clothes to prepare for marriage. I find the scene where she goes to her father with "lowered eyes" to ask if she could go and wash his clothes as he deserves clean, fresh clothes, very touching and human. Especially as the father can see right through her little white lie (as most fathers tend to do) and realises that she wants to prepare for marriage. The scene is very homely with the mother sitting spinning "sea-purple" cloth which, though it evokes thought of wealth, is natural. Alcinous is about to go out for a meeting.

The actual scene of washing the clothes is just like young girls now, enjoying themselves and shouting and losing their ball. It is all very natural. When Odysseus emerges all grimy their natural instinct is to run; Nausicaa only doesn't do so because Athene gives her courage. She is shy of Odysseus, though she finds him attractive, which is also a natural reaction, and is willing to help, but is also aware of her image.

The very fact that Athene has to hide Odysseus from the fishermen indicates that these people are very human. In a fairyland one imagines people to be friendly, and also to have magic about them. There is no magic apparent in Phaeacia except maybe that fruit grows all the year round in the garden, though this can easily be explained by the tropical climate meaning that it is natural. The garden is beautiful and is almost idyllic, though it is not inconceivable with trees and irrigation. The only slight problem is that they did not know of citrus fruits then and if it was a tropical place they would have.

The actual house with its enormous metal doors and its two gold and silver dogs is slightly larger than life though is still possible if it was a rich state. The idea of no enemies coming out that far so no guard dogs needed is very believable as their ships were probably very good. This idea could have been derived from the Cretans who only had a navy.

As they are so far away from other people they would have excelled in seamanship for trade. Odysseus also praises their women for waving and dancing.

Another very human event is when Alcinous' son insults Odysseus by questioning his breeding; it is a very human fault for the young to be brash and rude.

The queen, described as very wise, is in fact so wise as to be able to dissolve men's quarrels. Arete was held in high praise, only it does not seem that Penelope was held in any less respect. Most of the women seem to have been considered as wise.

The atmosphere does seem very perfect, though hints of human feeling and thoughts do come in; for example Alcinous on first meeting Odysseus and finding him to have met his daughter is afraid she may have

compromised herself so offers her to Odysseus. Nausicaa is almost a fairytale princess only her fairytale prince does not act in the way he ought to, though unlike Dido she is not broken hearted.

The Phaeacians used to live by the Cyclops but had to move as they were bullied. This links them to the fairytale world as does the fact that they could dine with the Gods. However although these people do live what seems a happy carefree life even they could be struck down by the Gods, as Poseidon shows by sinking the ship which takes Odysseus back and having their harbour surrounded by mountains.

There is a strange mixture of the familiar in the love and caring shared by all and the unfamiliar in the almost perfection. This place is almost a bridge to bring Odysseus back to reality away from giants witches and goddesses. Nausicaa also denies being a nymph or a goddess, so they are human.

(Examiner's comment: An intelligent answer with good evidence and no waffle. Mark A+ ²²/₂₅)

Section A Q.7

*'There was a time when you were kind to me
in the days when we sons of the Achaeans were fighting in Troy land.
But after we had sacked the sheer citadel of Priam
and went away in our ships, and the god scattered the Achaeans,
I never saw you, daughter of Zeus, after that, nor did I
know of your visiting my ship, to beat off some trouble
from me.'*

Homer *Odyssey* XIII, 314 - 320 (Lattimore)

Consider Odysseus' relationship with Athene. Why did she help him at Troy, and after his return to Ithaca, but not during his sea adventures?

Author: Samantha Hawes, Sion Senior School, Worthing.

Athene's relationship with Odysseus seems to be as a result of the fact that Odysseus as a mortal embodies all that Athene as a goddess stands for. Athene is the goddess of wisdom and intelligence, Odysseus is crafty, wily and 'the arch deceiver'. A clue as to why Athene has such high regard for Odysseus is the moment when he lands in Ithaca. The goddess appears as a young shepherd; Odysseus proceeds to lie about his origins, and Athene appears to him as a tall and accomplished woman, 'smiles and caresses his face'. She goes on to say how 'cultivated', 'intelligent' and 'self-possessed' he is and this is why she loves him.

Athene's devotion to Odysseus is shown by the way she takes advantage of the absence of Poseidon to bring up the delicate question of Odysseus' return to Ithaca. "It is for Odysseus that my heart is urging".

Throughout the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* Athene is therefore a source of inspiration, protection and guidance for Odysseus and those that love him. However as Odysseus himself says, she was absent when he needed her most during his adventures from the attack on the Cicones until he is washed up on the island of Ogygia.

In the *Odyssey* there are many references to the incident at Troy when the conquering Greeks offended Athene. Nestor refers to the quarrel between Menelaus and Agamemnon and the faction in the Greek side as being a result of offending Athene. Perhaps therefore Athene's anger was such that it meant she didn't help her favourite Odysseus during his time of peril. (*Examiner's comment: 'Unconvincing - needs more development'*)

Athene could have refused to help Odysseus out of deference to Poseidon. Poseidon was angered with Odysseus when he blinded his son Polyphemus. Athene's deference to Poseidon is shown on two occasions. Firstly by the fact she waits for Poseidon's absence before she mentions Odysseus. Secondly when Odysseus is praying to Athene in the poplar wood which Nausicaa mentions is sacred to Athene, the goddess hears his prayers but refrains from appearing before him "in deference to Poseidon".

It could be seen that Athene's move to help Odysseus was prompted out of jealousy of Calypso 'who holds him in her clutches'. (*Examiner's comment - 'possibly, no evidence.'*)

Athene is a constant source of inspiration to Odysseus. At Troy when the troops mutinied following Agamemnon's fake dream, it is Athene who inspires 'to bring the troops to heel'. When Odysseus has been flung against the rock when trying to land at Phaeacia Athene inspires him to swim clear of the breakers and this enables him to swim up the river and to safety. During the prelude to the crisis Odysseus is lying in the great hall unable to sleep. Athene comes to him and encourages him: "Odysseus, if you and I together faced fifty companies of men you would be able to drive their sheep from under their noses." When Odysseus is fighting in the *Iliad* Athene helps him. During the funeral games Athene intervenes and causes Aias to trip into some dung so Odysseus can win the race.

Athene also protects Odysseus when he is in Phaeacia; she enshrouds him in mist so that the Phaeacians will not observe him. She also disguises herself as a young girl and warns him of the xenophobic attitude of the Phaeacians. When Odysseus is wounded in the *Iliad*, it is Athene who makes sure that the arrow does not penetrate a vital spot.

Changing Odysseus physically is another role of Athene. On arrival to Ithaca she changes him into an old man to prevent recognition. She also enables him to maintain his hidden identity by causing Penelope to look away, for example when Eurycleia has recognised Odysseus. Very often Athene enhances Odysseus' looks. When he appears to Nausicaa she makes his hair hang down 'like hyacinths in bloom'. She also endows him with magic charm before the Phaeacian assembly "making him taller and broader and to all appearances a god", in order that he may gain respect and admiration from the Phaeacians.

As well as directly intervening in the action in various disguises - which is a difference between Athene in the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* - Athene is constantly putting Odysseus to the test. Perhaps this is another reason why she did not help him during his adventures. For example during the battle in the hall Athene refrains from helping Odysseus at first. She is "constantly putting the skills of Odysseus and his son on trial." Another example of this is in the *Iliad*. Odysseus is wounded and surrounded by Trojans, suffering doubts of his capabilities. It is left to Menelaus and Aias to rescue Odysseus, not Athene.

Athene herself remarks to Telemachus "For am not I your father's friend?" This is in fact what Athene is to Odysseus, as well as inspiring him and saving him from danger despite her absence during his adventures. Athene is Odysseus champion as she "flashes down from Olympus".

Examiner's comment: Very good - full of information, well expressed. More needed on sea-adventures; her ideas are there. Good examples. Mark A+, ²¹/₂₅.