



MONASH University

**Representing Penelope:
An Exemplar of Marital Chastity
from Antiquity to the Renaissance**

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the fortunes of Homer's heroine Penelope as an exemplum of wifely and female virtue in the philosophical, educational and literary texts of the Latin West, from Republican Rome to Renaissance Italy. Tracing Penelope's representations reveals both her use as a paradigm, stripped of character, and also as a complex figure. This complexity offers new ways of imagining female chastity, beyond being the responsibility of men, or as the antithesis of love and sex. It is not often realised that although derived from Greek literature, the adoption of Penelope by Classical Roman writers saw her reputation for chastity extend well into the medieval period thus reinforcing Christian values. As the defining feature of the female ideal, chastity remained an important element in women's social roles, and underpinned female literary roles. Penelope became a convenient figure for contemplating the ideal of chastity, especially in the married woman. Her use in texts was largely limited to those educated in Latin - poets, clerics, humanists and monks - who had little or no experience of marriage. These men were the ones who predominantly perpetuated her reputation.

Penelope naturally falls within the rubric of literary and textual studies, but also as a paradigm of the feminine, her representation contributes to an understanding of shifting cultural values. This is achieved by a close reading of texts, in Latin and early vernaculars, comparing the descriptions of Penelope, both to herself in other texts, and to other women. Noting both vocabulary shifts and the use of metaphorical language, which change to reflect social and literary approaches to gender, contributes to a more nuanced approach to the representation of chastity as an ideal. The complexity of images of Penelope throughout these centuries as a chaste woman, skilled in warding off suitors, adds further evidence for the insufficiency of the Eve/Mary dichotomy as the infallible template for understanding how women were perceived in medieval and Renaissance Europe.

Publications during enrolment

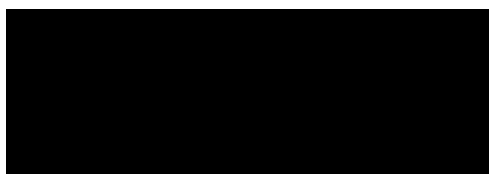
Book chapters

- “Weaving Virtue: Laura Cereta as a new Penelope,” *Virtue Ethics for Women 1250-1550*, edited by Karen Green and Constant Mews (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 133-43.]

Journal Articles

- “Praise for Female Deceptiveness: Boccaccio’s Penelope”, *Eras* 15(2014): 1-20. [<http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/eras/edition-fifteen-march-2014/>]
- “Weaving Boccaccian Women,” *Spunti e Ricerchi: Renaissance Studies* 22 (2007) (published 2008): 63-73.
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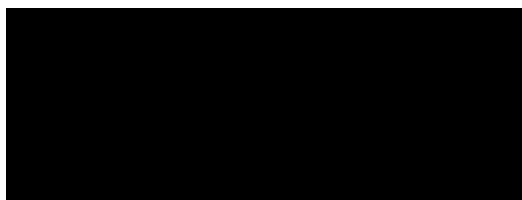


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Introduction

Penelope, Homer's heroine from the *Odyssey*, has long been considered an example of the ideal married woman, mainly because of her dogged resistance to remarrying during the twenty-year absence of her husband Odysseus during the Trojan War.¹ According to Homer's narrative, as the return of Odysseus looked ever more unlikely, the more than one hundred suitors, who camped in Penelope's household, grew more confident and helped themselves to food and drink as they wooed her. To hold them at bay, Penelope devised various strategies by which she could defer having to select one of them as husband, the most famous of which was her excuse that she had to finish weaving a funeral cloth for her elderly father-in-law.² She secretly undid her work by night until, after three years, her ruse was discovered. Penelope then promised to marry the man who succeeded in bending and shooting Odysseus's bow.³ Odysseus's arrival at this time, combined with his disguise as a beggar, offered him the opportunity to go along with his wife's plan and to prove his strength in front of the suitors. At the end of Homer's story, the couple are reunited and the goddess Athena lengthens the night so they can become reacquainted, so endorsing the importance of marital intimacy for a successful relationship.⁴

Penelope becomes one of several fictional women from antiquity who reappear in various medieval and renaissance texts representing the ideal of chastity, the most important virtue for women.⁵ Among the women who

¹ Whether or not Homer was the 'author' of the text in its written form, or a bard whose words were recorded by another, is not an issue for this thesis. Therefore, I will refer to the Penelope in the *Odyssey* as Homeric. See the discussion regarding origins of the epic, Bernard Knox, "Introduction," in *The Odyssey* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 5-10.

² Penelope's ruse of weaving and unravelling her work is mentioned three times in the text. First, a suitor complains to her son, Telemachus (2.97-115), then Penelope explains to her disguised husband how she has delayed remarriage (19. 123-175) and finally, one of the slaughtered suitors relates to his friend, also in the Underworld, how he was deceived by the wife of Odysseus (24.139-161); Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1996), 96, 394-95, 472.

³ *The Odyssey* 21. 79-92; trans. Fagles, 46.

⁴ *Ibid.* 23. 275-280; trans. Fagles, 463.

⁵ Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 138. "Public life offers men various paths for the exercise of virtues - but chastity

exemplify marital chastity, Penelope is unique in that, unlike other classical heroines, her marital loyalty is not dependent on her death. Consider the difference from the Greek Alcestis who displays her willingness to die in her husband's stead, or the Roman Lucretia who bravely stabs herself to defend her husband's honour after she is raped through no fault of her own.⁶ Indeed, even Virgil's memorable character Dido, the Queen of Carthage, kills herself after being abandoned by Aeneas (or in another version, kills herself to avoid remarriage when widowed).⁷ Penelope is also unusual because of Homer's creation of a complex character, focussing on her intellect, an attribute characteristically associated with men in ancient thought.⁸

A close reading of the representations of Penelope offers an opportunity to look at shifts and tensions in ideas about the nature of woman over the "longue durée," within a discourse on female virtue, exploring the

is the singular virtue for women." Kathleen Kelly Coyne and Marina Leslie, eds., *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press 1999), 20. "[I]n the Renaissance, as in the Middle Ages, a woman's chastity remains her greatest prize, her ultimate value - indeed, her only value." Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr., "The Old Voice and the Other Voice: Introduction to the Series," 'The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe', in *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist*, ed. Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 22. "[C]hastity was perceived as woman's quintessential virtue."

⁶ Both of these women are recognised in medieval literature as representing ideals. Alcestis is significant in Chaucer's Legend of Good women, and virtue of Lucretia is implicated in Italian political debates on republicanism. For Alcestis, see Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley University of California Press 1994); Katharina M. Wilson and Elizabeth M. Makowski, *Wykked Wyves and the Woes of Marriage: Misogamous Literature from Juvenal to Chaucer*, SUNY series in medieval studies (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 50. For the representations of Lucretia in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, see: Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); Stephanie H. Jed, *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism*, Theories of representation and difference (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Melissa M. Matthes, *The Rape of Lucretia and the Founding of Republics: Readings in Livy, Machiavelli, and Rousseau* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000). On the role of death in the idealisation of Lucretia and Dido in Roman society, see Barbara K. Gold, "'But Ariadne Was Never There in the First Place': Finding the Female in Roman Poetry," in *Feminist Theory and the Classics*, ed. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 89.

⁷ There are various versions of the story of Dido. To represent the ideal of chastity, she is the widowed queen urged to remarry. She agrees to join her husband, but stabs herself and falls into the prepared funeral pyre to escape another marriage. Marilyn Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval "Aeneid"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 24-8.

⁸ The figure of Odysseus/Ulysses has long been considered a figure 'good to think with', from philosophers to modern novelists. Silvio Montiglio, *From Villain to Hero: Odysseus in Ancient Thought* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 2. As this thesis will show, so too is his wife, Penelope.

continuities and discontinuities over time has particular salience for cultural history.⁹ Arguing for the *longue durée*, Fernand Braudel discusses the importance of the framework which sustained Latin literature, particularly for the educated elite. Praising the work of Ernst Robert Curtius, he agrees that the repetition of “themes, comparisons, maxims, and hackneyed tales”, reflects the Latin inheritance, but also offers a means to assess the cultural shifts.¹⁰ As Curtius argues:

Just as European literature can only be seen as a whole, so the study of it can only proceed historically. Not in the form of literary history! A narrative and enumerative history never yields anything by a catalogue-like knowledge of facts. The material itself has to unravel it and penetrate it. It has to develop analytical methods, that is, methods which will 'decompose' the material and make its structures visible.¹¹

Curtius offers several historical and mythological figures (all male) with the potential to “decompose” the structures within the literary and social framework, noting how ancient models take on new forms in later literature. Similarly, the ‘long history’ (a term adopted from Mary Beard by Gerda Lerner) is regarded as essential for the history of women, as it depends upon comparing and contrasting the cultural and social experiences of men and women.¹² Instead of focussing on the experiences of different people over the *longue durée*, I will be analysing the changes in representations of one figure, Penelope, seeking to unravel assumptions around gender, as a reflection of the changing social, cultural and religious values. It contributes to studies aimed at disrupting the perceived fixity and timeless permanence of the binary definitions of gender.¹³

⁹ Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein, “History and the Social Sciences: The *Longue Durée*,” *Review Fernand Braudel Center* 32, no. 2 (2009), 171-203: 173. Braudel refers to the “dialectics of continuities” obtained over “the multiple and contradictory temporalities.”

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹¹ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), 15.

¹² Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 15.

¹³ Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press 1999), 43.

A close reading of Penelope's representation in Latin and early vernacular texts, from antiquity until the fifteenth century, noting similarities and differences to other women in these same texts, exposes tension in the underlying constructions of gender, each work will be considered as a product of a community or social group whose need for a figure like Penelope, married woman, ideal woman or, more specifically the wife of Odysseus, varied. As a figure who used strategy, not death, to maintain her reputation, two aspects contribute to Penelope's utility as a tool for exploring variations in gender construction. First, her ability to think strategically in Homer's text points to the potential for her to be read as 'man-like.' Second, as her actions contributed to her reputation for chastity, not from the protection of the men around her, her representations offer the potential to read female agency, a characteristic not traditionally associated with women within the Greco-Roman tradition.¹⁴ An essential element for this thesis is appreciation of the importance of Homer's work as foundational, not only to Western (European) literature, but also to its culture.¹⁵ Again, quoting Curtius,

[T]he Greeks found their past, their essential nature, and their world of deities ideally reflected in a poet. They had no priestly books and no priestly caste. Homer, for them, was the 'tradition.' From the sixth century onwards he was a schoolbook. Since that time literature has been a school subject, and the continuity of European literature is bound up with the schools. ...the dignity, the independence, and the pedagogical function of poetry owe their existence to Homer and his influence.¹⁶

The absorption of Homeric literary models and figures into Roman culture provided a framework for the continuing presence of one of his most significant characters, Penelope.

¹⁴ Several scholars note the imposition of passivity as a characteristic of woman. For example, Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, 1977), 26; Toril Moi, *Sexual/textual politics: feminist literary theory*, New accents (London ; New York: Methuen, 1985), 24.

¹⁵ Laura M. Slatkin, "Homer's *Odyssey*," in *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, ed. John Miles Foley, (Maldon, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 315.

¹⁶ Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 36.

Penelope's reputation for marital fidelity can be attributed to her behaviour in Homer's *Odyssey*. After all, the words of Agamemnon foretell her fame:

Happy Odysseus....Son of old Laertes – mastermind – what a fine, faithful wife you won! What good sense resided in your Penelope – how well Icarius' daughter remembered you, Odysseus, the man she married once! The fame of her great virtue will never die. The immortal gods will lift a song for all mankind, a glorious song in praise of self-possessed Penelope.¹⁷

The words expressed by Agamemnon have greater poignancy when it is recognised that he says this from the Underworld, having been murdered by his wife on his return from Troy. Klytemnestra was Penelope's cousin, as was Helen, the wife of Agamemnon's brother Menelaus, whose infidelity had led to the Trojan War. The positive comparison to her two cousins and Agamemnon's declaration lend credence to suggestions that Homer created the ideal wife in Penelope, but the ambiguities and complexity of her character offer the potential for seeing her as much more.¹⁸

Homer's Penelope is certainly celebrated as loyal to her absent husband, but she is not merely a victim, at the mercy of many men, sitting at the loom all day fulfilling domestic chores. The ambiguity of Penelope's representation in *The Odyssey* has elicited a variety of responses from scholars, based on the vocabulary used to describe her, and on alternate interpretations of key events. Some emphasise her chastity, others her indeterminacy, or her cunning.¹⁹ As Nancy Felson-Ruben notes, Homer

¹⁷ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 24. 210-223, trans. Fagles, 474.

¹⁸ Helen P. Foley, "Penelope as Moral Agent," in *The Distaff Side: Female Representation in Homer's Odyssey*, ed. Beth Cohen (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 99.

¹⁹ The lack of stability in Homer's characterisation of Penelope is discussed in Marilyn A. Katz, *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the Odyssey* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991). Descriptions of her cunning are included in Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, European philosophy and the human sciences; (Hassocks [Eng.]: Harvester Press and Humanities Press, 1978); Richard Heitman, *Taking Her Seriously: Penelope and the Plot of Homer's Odyssey* (University of Michigan Press, 2005); Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Vintage 1996 repr., Vintage), 95.

presents Penelope as “self-fashioning [and] self-reflexive”, suggesting that what can be seen of her from without can never account for all that is within.²⁰ Most of the tension in the Homeric plot, some argue, is dependent on the possibility that Penelope may not remain faithful to her absent husband.²¹ She is accused of sending notes to some of the suitors and encouraging their attentions;²² she is observed collecting bride presents by a disguised Ulysses,²³ and when her weaving ruse is discovered, sets a competition for the suitors to win her hand.²⁴ The suitors have good reason to complain about her treatment of them. Although Penelope is remembered by many for her fidelity in the *Odyssey*, it can be seen as almost an accident of circumstance. If her husband did not return, she had set in play circumstances in which she might have to remarry. These actions presuppose agency, a characteristic of Penelope often overlooked in later descriptions in which her exemplarity is emphasised.²⁵

Penelope’s choice of weaving, as the task to deceive the suitors offers its own ambiguities. As an activity generally associated with acquiescence to patriarchal demands for appropriate domestic behaviour, it was praiseworthy.²⁶ However, as her marital fidelity depended on continually unravelling this work, an antithesis of the domestic ideal, her virtue could be

²⁰ Nancy Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3, 16.

²¹ This assessment is based on her setting tasks for the suitors in order to win her hand, sending secret notes to them and in collecting bride gifts. Homer, *Odyssey*, 21. 79-92; 2.96-100; 18. 317-320.

²² Antinous complains to Penelope’s son Telemachus about how she both leads them on and deceives them all. “For three years now, getting onto to four, she’s played it fast and loose with all our hearts, building each man’s hopes – dangling promises, dropping hints to each – but all the while with something else in mind.” Homer, *The Odyssey* 2.96-100, trans. Fagles, 96. This passage is discussed by Patricia Marquardt, “Penelope 'Polutropos',” *The American Journal of Philology* 106, no. 1 (1985), 32-48: 33.

²³ Homer, *The Odyssey* 18. 309-16, trans. Fagles, 384.

²⁴ Ibid. 18. 317-320. Far from being upset at seeing his wife solicit gifts from the suitors, he was pleased at her cunning. “Staunch Odysseus glowed with joy to hear all this – his wife’s trickery luring gifts from her suitors now, enchanting their hearts with suave seductive words but all the while with something else in mind.”

²⁵ Patricia Marquardt has described Penelope’s intelligence as more elusive than her “celebrated loyalty.” She offers a footnote in support of this claim which includes several scholars who emphasise Penelope’s nobility, her conservatism, her cautiousness and her tenacity. Marquardt, “Penelope 'Polutropos',” 32.

²⁶ Karen K. Hersch, “The Woolworker Bride,” in *Ancient Marriage in Myth and Reality*, ed. Lena Larsson Lovén and Agneta Strömberg (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 122. The association of Penelope as domestic ideals is mentioned on p. 127.

called into question. Indeed, both the strategy to deceive the suitors and weaving itself suggested that Penelope had *mêtis*, an ancient Greek concept translated generally by the English word cunning.²⁷ Although generally considered a domestic task, weaving was also a skill directly related to intellect, as explained through mythology.²⁸ The Greek goddess responsible for weaving was Athena, born from the head of Zeus after he swallowed her mother, Metis. While Athena is well-known for her protection of Odysseus, representing his mental astuteness, Homer also discusses her role in inspiring Penelope to weave in order to deceive the suitors.²⁹ Traditionally, a bride would have woven a cloak as preparation for her marriage, but Penelope chose to weave a shroud for a member of her husband's household; instead of representing new beginnings, her cloth emphasised her commitment to her current marital circumstances.³⁰

Penelope's intellect is not just seen through the association with weaving and Athena. It is also manifest when she challenges the identity of the man who claims to be her husband. She provokes a reaction from him by subtly alluding to a shared secret.³¹ He falls into her trap, proving his identity in the meantime.³² She is the woman who can outwit the man who is 'polymêtis', the expert in tricks of all kinds.³³ Nancy Felson-Rubin, Richard Heitman, Barbara Clayton, Beth Cohen, and Sheila Murnaghan highlight,

²⁷ The importance of Penelope's intelligence as well as that of her husband, in the trajectory of the epic is noted by Slatkin, "Homer's *Odyssey*," 315. *Mêtis* is considered a fundamental aspect of Greek society, however, unlike other philosophic approaches like logic, there is no extant treatise on it. Nor is there a Latin cognate term. Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, 3.

²⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey* 7. 124-8, trans. Fagles, 183: "Just as the Phaeacian men excel the world at sailing, driving their swift ships on the open seas, so the women excel at all the arts of weaving. That is Athena's gift to them beyond all others – a genius for lovely work, and a fine mind too."

²⁹ Ibid. 19. 153-4, trans. Fagles, 394-5: "A god from the blue it was inspired me first to set up a great loom in our royal halls."

³⁰ John Scheid and Jesper Svenbro, *The Craft of Zeus: Myths of Weaving and Fabric*, trans. Carol Volk (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), 68-9.

³¹ Homer, *The Odyssey* 23.200-229, trans. Fagles, 461-2. Their shared secret is the construction of their bed. Penelope's request for the maid to move it for the sake of her husband suggested that it had been tampered with in his absence, and therefore its base, a rooted-tree, had been severed.

³² Beth Cohen, ed. *The Distaff Side: Representing the Female in Homer's Odyssey* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 22.

³³ Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, 18.

among other things, the importance of Penelope's relationship with her husband as an underlying theme of Homer's epic.³⁴ To emphasise this point, the adjectives used to describe her in the *Odyssey* are not explicit about her chastity or fidelity, but instead suggest her like-mindedness (*homophrosyne*) to her husband. Does this imply that Homer was presenting Penelope as man-like? Perhaps not, as Ulysses, himself, emphasises the importance of *homophrosyne* as the basis for a good marriage in his wish for Nausicaa's future, making the use of the term ambiguous in relation to gender differences.³⁵ Other words used to describe Penelope are *periphron*,³⁶ (circumspect) and *echephron* (heart-restraining or temperate).³⁷ Both of these terms are discussed by Adriaan Rademaker as descriptors for Penelope as markers of her sensible behaviour.³⁸ These characteristics, and Penelope's strategic resistance to the seductions of the suitors reflect ancient notions of passions controlled by reason (to be discussed further later in the introduction).

Later Greek representations of Penelope reflect the complexity and ambiguity of the Homeric original. As such, her representations can be read in a positive or negative light, as some writers reinterpreted the mythology of Troy. For example, in a Greek text attributed to Lycophron, the infidelity of all of the Greek soldiers' wives was a consequence of Poseidon's anger at the destruction of Troy.³⁹ Penelope is not named, although alluded to by

³⁴ Cohen, *The Distaff Side*, 22.

³⁵ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 174. (6.200-203) Nausicaa is the daughter of the king and queen of the Phaeacians who found Odysseus naked on the beach. Through the help of these people, he was able to find his way home. This passage and its relationship to his own marriage to Penelope is discussed by Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope*, vii.

³⁶ Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope*, 17.

³⁷ This word is used once for Odysseus, but seven times for Penelope. Heitman, *Taking Her Seriously*, 107.

³⁸ Adriaan Rademaker, *Sophrosyne and the Rhetoric of Self-Restraint: Polysemy and Persuasive use of an Ancient Greek Value Term* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 63. This is found in a subsection entitled "Models of Good Sense and Control."

³⁹ The work has various titles, including *Alexandra* and *Cassandra*. Although attributed to Lycophron, there is no certainty regarding this, nor when it was written. It may celebrate a victory of Alexander the Great, or be homage to the rise of Rome. The Greek and English translation of this text can be found at Callimachus et al., "Calimachus and Lycophron," (London: W. Heinemann, 1921). A later scholia by John Tzetze adds further detail to this description of Penelope, suggesting that she slept with all the suitors. Marie-Madeleine Mactoux, *Pénélope: légende et mythe* (Paris: Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon, 1975), 98.

association with her husband and family, but is described in the English translation as “the vixen, primly coquetting” who was killed by Odysseus for her indiscretion.⁴⁰ The various representations of Penelope in these later texts has been analysed by Marie-Madeleine Mactoux, who notes that descriptions of her range from virtuous to shameless.⁴¹ These later Greek texts do not play a significant part in this thesis, unless their representations assist in the explication of the Latin representations of Penelope. They do, however, indicate the potential for reinterpreting Penelope according to different social and literary needs.

The adoption of Greek myths and literary styles in ancient Rome provides a framework for the integration of Odysseus and Penelope into a new culture. Most scholarship focusses on the adoption of Penelope as a model for the Roman *matrona*, representing ideals for the married woman, especially marital chastity.⁴² Some scholars have articulated the continuing presence of Penelope’s ambiguity and complexity and how this reflects evolving cultural values. In discussing the Roman appropriation of Penelope, Miriam B. Peskowitz notes that she “comes to signify a stable and historic notion of womanhood,” yet there is also a multiplicity of representations that challenge this stability.”⁴³ This possibly reflects the transition of genres in which Penelope is read. From epic, she is moved to elegy, a genre particularly suited to the destabilising of gender assumptions.⁴⁴ The most extensive critique of Penelope’s adoption by Roman writers (while also analysing the ongoing Greek representations) is that of Madeleine Mactoux, tracing her representations to the early medieval period. Having traced her origins from the earlier oral tradition (pre-Homer), Mactoux notes that the Romans accepted her to reflect the ideals of the married woman, such as motherhood and happiness in domestic duty (in

⁴⁰ Lycophron, “Alexandra,” ed. Gilbert Robinson Mair, trans. Gilbert Robinson Mair, *Callimachus and Lycophron* (London: W. Heinemann, 1921). 559.

⁴¹ Mactoux, *Pénélope*, 47.

⁴² Richard Heitman suggests that Roman writers “essentially taught that Penelope was more or less preoccupied with her chastity.” Heitman, *Taking Her Seriously*, 106.

⁴³ Miriam B Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender, and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 5.

⁴⁴ Howard Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 6.

contrast to the male valour in war).⁴⁵ Despite presenting Penelope's reception into the Latin tradition as the ideal *matrona*, she does acknowledge that Ovid uses the theme of separated lovers to discuss the relationship between Ulysses (the Latin form of Odysseus) and Penelope. Similarly noting the exceptionality of Ovid in relation to representations of Penelope, Barbara Clayton discusses the importance of the shared roots of weaving and writing (based on the stem *tex-*) in the Latin language to demonstrate the cleverness of Ovid's Penelope.⁴⁶ So too, Katie Gilchrist, in her unpublished PhD dissertation, studies the different ways of representing Penelope in classical texts.⁴⁷ She argues that Penelope is largely understood through "male authors and sensibilities", creating a paradigm for the ideal woman according to male expectations of female behaviour. She reapproaches the classical representations "reading between the lines, in the gaps" to demonstrate that "something of the female might still slip through."⁴⁸ These Latin texts highlight the transition of Penelope from epic, stories on a grand scale, to elegy, which is characterised by explorations of gender relations. The transition of Penelope into literature of the medieval period, either as an exemplar of marital fidelity, or as a female figure of complexity, goes beyond the limits of scholarship on the classical representations.

The reception of Penelope into the Middle Ages is largely overlooked. One unpublished PhD traces Penelope's role in literature from the twelfth century. Dene Grigar's thesis rests upon the idea that the figure of Penelope was sensitive to societal ideals of womanhood.⁴⁹ While I certainly agree, and will show that Penelope as a figure is sensitive to societal, literary and cultural conceptions of gender, Grigar's engagement with the literature of the first few centuries of study (twelfth-fourteenth centuries) does not really engage with the social context of her texts. Nor is there any analysis of the influences of specific classical texts, the importance of which will become clearer through my

⁴⁵ Mactoux, *Pénélope*, 128, 29, 31.

⁴⁶ Barbara Clayton, *A Penelopean Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer's Odyssey* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 108.

⁴⁷ Katie E. Gilchrist, "Penelope: A study of the Manipulation of Myth" (Doctoral Thesis, Oxford University, 1997), 2.

⁴⁸ Gilchrist, "Penelope," 2.

⁴⁹ Dene Grigar, "Penelopeia: the making of Penelope in Homer's story and beyond" (Doctoral Thesis, University of Texas, 1995).

study. At a slight tangent to my own thesis, but with implications for some of my interpretations of Penelope, is the work of Wendy Helleman. She argues that early medieval scholars treated Penelope allegorically, as a manifestation or personification of Philosophy.⁵⁰ Although literary scholars might mention Penelope's representation in individual texts from later centuries, for example in the fourteenth-century Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* (*Famous Women*) and fifteenth-century Christine de Pizan's *La cité des dames* (*Book of the City of Ladies*),⁵¹ there has not been a focused study on the changing representations of Penelope as a consequence, and contributor, to changing societal attitudes to women.

One of the advantages of using Penelope to explore tensions around gender with a long view of history, is her temporal reach. There is growing recognition of the importance of ideological values regarding gender encoded in earlier texts, and in the formation of later values.⁵² Unlike many classical figures, Penelope's reputation was relatively continuous, even appearing in some texts in late antiquity and the early medieval period.⁵³ Also, as the wife of Odysseus, Penelope remained recognisable to members of the educated population because of the importance of Homer's works as foundational literature for western culture, even when she was known only through the

⁵⁰ Wendy Elgersma Helleman, "Penelope as Lady Philosophy," *Phoenix* 49, no. 4 (1995), 283-302; Wendy E. Helleman, "Homer's Penelope: A Tale of Feminine Arete," *Echos du Monde Classique / Classical Views* 39, no. n.s. 14 (1995), 227-50; Wendy Elgersma Helleman, *The Feminine Personification of Wisdom: A Study of Homer's Penelope, Cappadocian Macrina, Boethius' Philosophia, and Dante's Beatrice* (Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009).

⁵¹ Scholars who have recognised the potential for studying Penelope in these texts but without detailed analyses of variations in style include Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* and Stephen Kolsky, *The Genealogy of Women: Studies in Boccaccio's De mulieribus claris* (New York P. Lang, 2003).

⁵² Barbara K. Gold, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter, "Introduction," in *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts*, ed. Barbara K. Gold, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 1.

⁵³ This may also reflect historical practices as opposed to a discontinuity of primary source material. Similar classical figures, like Dido and Lucretia have generally been studied from a late starting point, generally around the fourteenth century. Take for example Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval "Aeneid."* Also Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia*; Jed, *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism*; Matthes, *The Rape of Lucretia and the Founding of Republics: Readings in Livy, Machiavelli, and Rousseau*.

writings of Latin authors.⁵⁴ Works by classical authors, like Virgil and Ovid, influenced Latin learning for many centuries.⁵⁵ Penelope's longstanding reputation into the medieval and early modern periods reflects the way she was accepted within the Latin literary tradition, as much as in Greek literature, as a suitable vehicle for discussing the idea of woman, especially in relationship to man. This thesis argues Penelope was never entirely forgotten and, therefore, was never reinserted into discourse about women. Rather, she maintained a literary presence linked to ideas of the feminine for the Latin-educated elite. The importance of her husband, Odysseus, as an archetype for 'everyman', and also as the 'wise man', offers the potential for various ways of reading Penelope and her historical reputation.⁵⁶ If he represents intelligence, an attribute consistent with ancient philosophical ideals of manhood, what does she represent?⁵⁷ Their marriage potentially

⁵⁴ The works of various Latin authors maintained aspects of Homer's epics, not necessarily translations, but the reworking of themes, genre and figures. Some examples of these are Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Statius' *Achilleid*, and the late-Latin works describing the Trojan War by Dares and Dictys. See Gildas Roberts, ed. *Joseph of Exeter: The Iliad of Dares Phrygius* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1970), 14.

⁵⁵ Virgil's texts dominated from late antiquity, and were reinterpreted in ways similar to earlier Neo-Platonic readings of Homer. Marco Formisano, "Late Antiquity, New Departures," in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin Literature*, ed. Ralph J. Hexter and David Townsend (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 510. On the continuing influence of writers like Virgil and Ovid, see Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 18. For a list of authors whose works continued to be read from late antiquity, see Jane Chance, *Medieval Mythography* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 44.

⁵⁶ This is a major theme in the influential book of Willam Bedell Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968). There is also an alternate tradition for Odysseus/Ulysses as the type of man not to be trusted, but this does not appear to impact on the reception of his wife. Diane Watt, "Literary Genealogy, Virile Rhetoric, and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *Philological Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (1999), 389-415.

⁵⁷ Ulysses was not always understood as a positive figure. Because of his devious ways and ability to sway people with honeyed words, he has also been judged negatively, both in antiquity and the Middle Ages. This can reflect his association with Greek intellect as untrustworthy, Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, 199. Also based on his ability to deceive with rhetoric, Piero Boitano, *The Shadow of Ulysses: Figures of a Myth*, trans. Anita Weston (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 5. Watt, "Literary Genealogy, Virile Rhetoric, and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," 389. This does not negate the idea that representations of Penelope may reflect the treatment of her husband as a literary figure. In fact, it opens more questions about the relationship between intellect and virtue. The debate on the differences between male and female is also recognised in the alternate values of culture versus nature. See Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in *Women, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 71.

represents the difference between the sexes which underpinned so much of European society, particularly in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Recognising Penelope as an intelligent and chaste woman in *The Odyssey* highlights her paradoxical status and potential to offer a model of agency for women within European culture. Tensions around gender in the European context reflect an oppositional relationship between the sexes, in which attributes for men were asymmetrically valued.⁵⁸ This reflected both Greco-Roman and Scriptural influences in the division of the sexes.⁵⁹ These ideas were embedded within medical and philosophic writings and absorbed into social institutions and contemporary literature. For example, the Greek philosopher Plato provided the framework from which later scholars could claim the ideal is a 'male woman'.⁶⁰ Aristotle's approach to gender was slightly different, as he considered women physically and mentally inferior to men and unable to reach male perfection.⁶¹ The approaches to gender of

⁵⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, " '...And Woman His Humanity': Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages," in *Gender and Religions: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 257.

⁵⁹ An example of a scholar recognising this influence in the twelfth century is Kimberly LoPrete, "The Gender of Lordly Women: the Case of Adela of Blois," in *Pawns or Players?*, ed. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless (Dublin ; Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2003), 105.

⁶⁰ Kirsten Aspegren, *The Male Woman: A Feminine Ideal in the Early Church*, ed. René Kieffer (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990), 14, 32. This might be overstating the situation. Aspegren is analysing what early philosophical approaches were adapted in the writings of early Christians. She explains that Plato's androcentric approach to woman was picked up by authors like Philo, who imagined perfection in the man Adam, who was damaged through the actions of woman. Lisa Pace Vetter claims that feminists have misjudged what can be seen as gender-neutral characteristics of Plato's work. The ongoing influence of a negative approach to women, attributed to Plato, can be associated with his linking of intellectual pursuits to men. Lisa Pace Vetter, "Women's Work" as Political Art: *Weaving and Dialectical Politics in Homer, Aristophanes, and Plato* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 19-21. A negative reading of Plato's attitude to women might reflect his attitude to marriage as a state inconsistent with the study of philosophy. R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 70. Alternatively, it might represent the idea attributed to him on the separation of body and mind, in which the superior mind, a characteristic of the male subjugates the body (female). Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge Classics, 1990), 124. Plato provided the hierarchy of mind over body, without attributing them to either gender, but later readers, particularly Philo, interpreted his material in this light, see Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC - AD 1250* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1985), 66.

⁶¹ Aspegren, *The Male Woman*, 49. Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "Aristotle and Woman," *Journal of the History of Biology* 9, no. 2 (1976), 183-213. As providers of 'matter' for procreation, Aristotle also believed female to be passive by nature. Jacqueline Murray, "Thinking about Gender: The Diversity of Medieval Perspectives," in *Power of the Weak:*

both of these philosophers influenced early Christian writers, who perpetuated the ideas of male superiority, aligned with reason, and female weakness, susceptible to carnal pleasures. Reason, one of the most fundamental aspects of man, according to these philosophers, was understood as an essential aspect of sexual restraint; the mind (higher faculties) needed to govern the body (lower faculties). As Caroline Walker Bynum notes, some “association of male with spiritual and rational, [and] female with fleshly and irrational, was seldom completely absent from medieval gender imagery.”⁶² Many attribute this to the imposition of patriarchal ideas; as male characteristics were valued favourably, the corresponding female attributes, representing the corresponding pole, were viewed negatively. The two genders were considered mutually exclusive and distinct: “intellect/body, active/passive, rational/irrational, reason/emotion, self control/lust, judgment/mercy, and order/disorder.”⁶³ While woman is considered to be passive, irrational, emotional, lustful and disorderly, female chastity, as a product of reason controlling the body, is difficult to imagine. This paradigm of polar opposites removes any notion of female agency in regards to chastity, thus undermining the possibility of female attempts to assert themselves, or to be seen as autonomous beings. These ideas contributed to two different approaches to female virtue, based upon the need to control her sexual impulses.

First, men were considered the custodians of female chastity. Hence, a woman was constantly in the care of a man, whether a father or husband, since she would never have the self control, derived from reason, to resist indulgence.⁶⁴ This role of male guardianship over women was at times

Studies on Medieval Women, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 14. Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 97-8.

⁶² Walker Bynum, “...And Woman his Humanity,” 261.

⁶³ Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman, *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 261. Other scholars have borrowed this binary schema to discuss medieval gender relations. Olivia Holmes, *Dante's Two Beloveds: Ethics and Erotics in the Divine Comedy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 2; Murray, “Thinking about Gender,” 2; “One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?,” in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe*, ed. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 39.

⁶⁴ Anne Carson, “Putting Her in Her Place: Woman, Dirt, and Desire,” in *Before Sexuality: The construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. David M. Halpern,

reversed in medieval literature. Woman, as an idea, not as a person, indicated the pathway for man to reach either salvation, wisdom or civility. It is the idea that through loving and pursuing woman, man is redeemed. The woman, usually an allegorical figure, or an unobtainable woman, such as the wife of a higher status man, remains passive in this role. She is the inspiration and object of his desire. Howard Bloch discusses this as one of several manifestations of misogyny in western literature, particularly in the development of courtly literature.⁶⁵ The woman at the centre of these works is not treated as an autonomous being. This treatment of the feminine maintains the dichotomy of active male and passive female, even while treating woman in a positive light; not only does it reinforce the notion of female virtue linked to passivity, it continues the mutually exclusive and oppositional nature of the relationship between the sexes.

Second, the chaste woman was seen as representing the ideal of the 'male woman', as reason was seen to prevail over female weakness. This provided a conundrum, as the virtuous woman had to transcend her own being:

[I]f chastity implies transcendence of the corporeal, and if the corporeal is inextricably linked to the feminine, then the fathers' insistent exhortations to feminine chastity can only be seen as a self-contradictory urging to the feminine to be something that it isn't. To urge a women to chastity is to urge her to deny her femininity, since to transcend the body is to escape that which is gendered feminine.⁶⁶

Therefore, a chaste woman cannot be a woman; being other than woman, requires being a man. This maintains a binary notion of the sexes often invoked to discuss medieval approaches to gender, but recent studies are

John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 142. Susan L' Engle, "Depictions of Chastity: Virtue Made Visible," in *Chastity: A Study in Perception, Ideals, Opposition*, ed. Nancy Van Deusen (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 88. This can be related back to Aristotle via *Politics*, 1260a20-4, as he describes the female inability to control themselves, thus requiring male control.

⁶⁵ Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 186.

⁶⁶ Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 106-7.

showing its insufficiencies.⁶⁷ For example, the focus on the passivity of women, either as a natural attribute (based on ancient medical/sexual approaches on the submissive role of women in sex)⁶⁸ or as an ideal (with obedience to a responsible male as a necessary element of female social roles),⁶⁹ contributes to seeing women as victims. As Bennett pointed out several years ago, however,

[T]he division between women as victims and women as agents is a false one: women have always been both victims and agents. Women have not been merely passive victims of patriarchy. But neither have women been free agents.⁷⁰

The desire to eschew women as victims has shaped more recent scholarship as examples of women as agents are discovered. This has led to wonderful book titles like *Victims or Viragos* and *Pawns or Players*,⁷¹ playing on the dichotomies of subject versus object and agency versus passivity. They challenge the gender binary paradigm by noting how reality and ideals do not always match.

Studies of exceptional women have developed out of concern for this limited approach to gender, with mixed success. Guided by feminist ideals, demonstrating that not all women were restricted by modern assumptions of historical gender norms, some exceptional women of the Middle Ages have been studied; these women are often seen as ‘exceptional’ and shown to

⁶⁷ For example, the work on women and medieval lordship, LoPrete, “The Gender of Lordly Women,” 105; “Women, gender and Lordship in France, c. 1050 - 1250,” *History Compass* 5/6 (2007), 1921-41: 1922. The importance of the works of Ovid in dismantling the strict binary of sex differences is also discussed by Kathryn L. McKinley, *Reading the Ovidian Heroine: Metamorphoses Commentaries, 1100-1618* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2001), xxii.

⁶⁸ Vern L. Bullough, “Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women,” *Viator* 4 (1973), 485: 487-500. Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Muriel Porter, *Sex, marriage and the church: patterns of change* (North Blackburn, Vic.: Dove, 1996), 17-8.

⁶⁹ Reflecting the Aristotelian notion that women needed male control due to their own deficiencies, twelfth-century canon laws were based on the principle that women were under the care of men. Jo Ann McNamara, “The *Herrenfrage*: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150,” in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 9.

⁷⁰ Judith M. Bennett, “Feminism and History,” *Gender & History* 1, no. 3 (1989), 251-72: 262.

⁷¹ Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless, *Pawns or players?* (Dublin ; Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2003); *Victims or viragos?*, Studies on medieval and early modern women 4 (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005).

display various characteristics associated with men.⁷² They are often perceived as having ‘transcended’ or gone ‘beyond’ their sex, as their actions are compared to those of their male peers. Unfortunately, the manner of giving praise in modern scholarship reflects our attitudes toward gender more than theirs, and tends to reinforce the exceptional status of these women. Modern celebration of these women’s abilities to cast off the shackles of their feminine nature reinforces the boundary between the sexes.⁷³ Kimberly Lo Prete also argues that reading modern interpretations of agency back onto these women without regard to how they were treated by their contemporaries, can skew the image.⁷⁴ Although several women can be found to have lived and managed affairs in a manner similar to their male contemporaries, this does not mean that their peers imagined them behaving beyond the parameters of their sex.⁷⁵ It is possible that the rules of status were more significant than the gender divide.⁷⁶

The transcendence of sex through the maintenance of chastity, is particularly associated with virginity, a manifestation of a new role which developed for women as Christianity developed; nuns did not live the

⁷² Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “Woman as Mediator in Medieval Depictions of Muslims: The Case of Floripas,” in *Medieval Constructions in Gender and Identity: Essays in Honor of Joan M. Ferrante*, ed. Teodolinda Barolini (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 152; Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, The Middle Ages series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 35; Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997), 15; Murray, “One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?,” 43 and Diana Robin, “Woman, Space, and Renaissance Discourse,” in *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts*, ed. Barbara K. Gold, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter, SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 1997), 68.

⁷³ Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 14.

⁷⁴ Kimberly LoPrete, “Gendering Viragos: Medieval Perception of Powerful Women,” in *Victims or Viragos*, ed. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless (Dublin: Four courts Press, 2005), 38.

⁷⁵ In a discussion on the merits of Adela of Blois, her femaleness, emphasised by her modesty and sexual fidelity to her husband, is believed to have not been challenged by her actions as lord. LoPrete, “The Gender of Lordly Women,” 103.

⁷⁶ This has been suggested for the early medieval period in Anglo Saxon England. The strict gender divide is speculated to reflect later philosophic constructions and modern perspectives on the question of ‘what is woman.’ Clare E. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, “The Clerics and the Critics: Misogyny and the Social Symbolic in Anglo-Saxon England,” in *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 25.

traditional life expected of women, based on the biological imperative.⁷⁷ This was a significant female social (or asocial) role for a significant period in post-classical Europe, and the combination of virginity (chastity) and femaleness, has led some to consider nuns (and also monks) as part of a third gender.⁷⁸ Male and female became similar, but in this process, the virgin woman was not only freed from the constraints of her female body but also from her gendered subordination.⁷⁹ In this model, those who lived in denial of their biological and social roles were neither male nor female. Nuns were recognised as having the strength to overrule their natural tendencies to maintain a state of life long continence, consistent with the Greek ideal of *apatheia*.⁸⁰ This approach took both biology and will into consideration. Because individual will prevailed over the female body, without making them biologically male, nuns were considered as beyond their natural sex. Construing these women as beyond the limits of other women, as something more, reinforces the connection of other women to their perceived female natures, and as being inferior in strength and/or will.

While the idealisation of virginity does not necessarily bear a direct relationship to the role of women in marriage, its emphasis in post-classical Europe reinforced aspects of gender construction that minimised the potential for female agency. It also impacted on the role of married women, as nuns or ‘brides of Christ’ were considered superior to women attached to mere mortals. The development of Christianity in a society that already had examples of female excellence (including the Sabine women, Lucretia and Penelope, all of them praised for behaviours linked to the integrity of their marriage bonds) invites questions regarding the impact of the glorification of

⁷⁷ Although the Vestal Virgins did require total continence, this was for a limited period of their lives, after which they could marry. Kathryn A. Smith, “Inventing Marital Chastity: The Iconography of Susanna and the Elders in Early Christian Art,” *Oxford Art Journal* 16, no. 1 (1993), 3-24: 4.

⁷⁸ Bitel and Lifshitz, *Gender and Christianity*, 35; Murray, “One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?,” 35; Barbara Newman, “Flaws in the Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation in the Twelfth Century,” in *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1995), 26.

⁷⁹ Murray, “One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?,” 49.

⁸⁰ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 49.

virginity on their continuing inclusion in a discourse on female virtue. The example of Penelope as an already accepted ideal, being both wife and mother, provides an opportunity to trace shifts in the construction of gender as social, religious and literary priorities change. By using just one figure who can be considered as much an originary figure as Eve or Dido, the long view of history can be taken.⁸¹ Her significance for any analysis lies in the fact that her social role as married woman was consistent with patriarchal values of the feminine, while at the same time offering a model of agency in the preservation of her chastity. She offers a challenge to the binary thinking which shaped the “structural misogyny” of value-laden gendered vocabulary of medieval Europe.⁸² She contributes to the study of female capacity, not as a manifestation of patriarchal submission of women, but as a potential manifestation of empowerment.⁸³ As such, she offers a more nuanced approach to the role of women in European literature as social factors impact on literary approaches to female virtue.

As Penelope is a figure taken from literature, the representations I discuss are textual, but my analysis treats her as having potential to engage with feminist and cultural values.⁸⁴ Homer’s importance in the philosophy, education and culture of Ancient Rome was such that many of his characters and motifs were adopted into the Latin literary tradition, inspiring other genres.⁸⁵ The importance of classical Latin texts in education in the post-classical period, maintains the link between Greek characters and potentially

⁸¹ As the first woman, Eve is considered the template for all of woman’s weakness, especially when contrasted to the virginity of Mary. See Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*, 8. Dido as an originary figure and model for female autonomy for women like Christine de Pizan is discussed by Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval “Aeneid”*, 224.

⁸² Helen J. Swift, *Gender, Writing, and Performance: Men Defending Women in Late Medieval France, 1440-1538*, Oxford Modern Languages and Literature Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2008), 223, discussing Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*, 236.

⁸³ Marilynn Desmond in her analysis of the writings of Christine de Pizan notes her conviction for the female capacity to be empowered through chastity. Desmond, *Reading Dido*, 221.

⁸⁴ Albrecht Classen, “Women Win the Day: The Female Heroine in Late Medieval German Mæren,” in *Maxculinities and Femininities in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Frederick Kiefer, Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Brepols, 2009), 45. “Literary documents, serving as perhaps the best mirrors of medieval mentality, allow us to gain remarkable insights into the various diminsions and forces of this gender debate.”

⁸⁵ Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 36.

Greek values, despite the loss of Homer's writings for much of this period. He maintained a reputation as poet and historian of the Trojan War, and is mentioned by early Christian writers like Augustine of Hippo,⁸⁶ and later by John of Salisbury⁸⁷ and Thomas Aquinas.⁸⁸ This continued reputation of Homer underpinned the ongoing knowledge of his most important characters, including Odysseus and Penelope. My aim is to analyse the later Latin (and some early vernacular) representations of Penelope within their social and literary contexts, to assess the authors' approach to the nature of woman. Based on the assumption that Penelope is a paradox, as the intelligent and chaste woman, her representations in different texts will vary depending on how each writer contemplated the female capacity to control her passions. Along with considering the different social circumstances over the many centuries to be studied, this will involve some "reading between the lines" and "reading the gaps."⁸⁹ Penelope's complexity as a character, ambiguity and paradoxical nature, while always celebrated in the quintessential female role as married woman, exposes the tensions within the discourse on women and excellence. As further demonstration of Penelope's potential as a model of female agency is the emergence of sixteenth-century of images of Penelope, generally attributed to the greater involvement of women in business affairs.⁹⁰ This thesis concludes before that moment, hoping to fill

⁸⁶ Augustine refers to Homer fifteen times, as an historian of the Trojan War, according to The Library of Latin Texts, Series A. [Accessed 28/07/2015]; "Homer, a poet who is said to have lived before the foundation of Rome," St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson, Second ed. (London: Penguin Classics, 1984), 90.

⁸⁷ John of Salisbury refers to Homer fourteen times in *Policraticus*.

⁸⁸ Thomas Aquinas refers to Homer forty-five times.

⁸⁹ Gilchrist, "Penelope: A study of the Manipulation of Myth," 2.

⁹⁰ Images of Penelope with the potential to reflect on the business concerns of women in the field of textiles are wall hanging commissioned by Bess of Hardwicke, discussed by Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England*, Material texts. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 61, and the ceiling tondo in the Palazzo Vecchio in one of the rooms belonging to Eleonora of Toledo, J. Pamela Benson, "Eleonora di Toledo among the Famous Women: Iconographic Innovation after the Conquest of Siena," in *The Cultural World of Eleonora of Toledo: Duchess of Florence and Siena*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 147-9. Other images from the early sixteenth century include Pintrichio's "Penelope with the Suitors" now housed in the National Gallery in London. A PhD thesis analysing the symbolism of the imagery in this painting is Maddalena Sanfilippo, "Coniunx semper Ulixis ero: Penelope nell' arte e nella letteratura dall' antichità all'età moderna" (Doctoral Thesis, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Università degli studi di Siena, 2005). This painting originated in Siena, as did another image of Penelope attributed to Domenico Beccafumi. See Piero Torriti, *Domenico Beccafumi e il suo Tempo* (Siena: Electa, 1990).

the gap between antiquity and the later Renaissance. This adds nuance to our understanding Penelope's engagement in an ongoing discourse of gender construction and female virtue.

The first chapter of this study considers how Penelope's acceptance as a domestic ideal or *matrona* in Roman literature has overshadowed the more subversive or complex roles she could play. Unlike Greek literature, most Latin references to Penelope invoke her name as an example of the woman who remained loyal despite the long absence of her husband. Sexual fidelity was a fundamental virtue for Roman women as it insured the legitimacy of children, and was reassuring for a martial society in which many husbands could not always remain at home.⁹¹ However, this role of Penelope as a domestic ideal in Roman literature, by writers like Catullus, Propertius and Horace, has overshadowed the more subversive role she could play in the hands of an author like Ovid, who was prepared to embrace the complexity of the woman immortalised by Homer. This is especially significant when compared to Virgil's epic, based on Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Penelope is not mentioned by Virgil (although Odysseus is) and the roles for women in the life of the *Aeneid*'s hero are as mere tools for male use.⁹²

Greater importance on intimacy within marital relationships developed in the post-Augustan age. This contributes to a little discussed characteristic of Penelope in the first few centuries of the Common Era, the focus in the second chapter. Marital intimacy is represented not just in images of crossed hands, highlighting the harmony of the couple, but can also be demonstrated by reference to sexual relations. Despite her reputation for chastity, Penelope's role as lover to Ulysses is emphasised by many post-Augustan poets. This contrasts with the way Penelope was integrated into a discourse on chastity by the early

⁹¹ Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: iusti coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1991), 61. The importance of marital loyalty not just as a personal issue but essential for the stability of society as a whole, see Rebecca Langlands, *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 50-1.

⁹² There are occasional references to the myth of Penelope's motherhood of Pan, through an association with Hermes, but extant materials do not suggest that this was commonly accepted as an alternate story about an unchaste Penelope.

Christian writers, Tertullian and Jerome. They do this without mentioning her marriage and the likely physical intimacy this involved. She is stripped of the narrative which gave support and credence to her reputation, and in the case of Jerome, he represents her among several other classical exemplars whose reputations are based on death. Her inclusion in this text will provide input to later literary appearances, as the Sabine women and Lucretia become her literary companions, women who prioritised loyalty to husbands over life.

The figure of Penelope has a limited and fragmented role in the educational literature of monasticism in the early medieval period. The third chapter shows how the changing use of literature in the early medieval period simplified the representations of Penelope to allegorical figure or literary trope. Her continuing presence in any literature at this time reflects continuing interest in Homeric figures, now more commonly accessed via Latin translations and interpretations.⁹³ The references to Penelope at this time, however, bear no relationship to the complexity of the original. Like other literature of the early medieval period, the texts that refer to her are ‘atomised’ or fragmented from original sources, using the content for new purposes, such as mythographies and grammatical texts. This provided for her ongoing reputation as an exemplum of chastity, even as the discourse moved away from a discussion on women and their social roles.

Greater awareness of the multi-faceted character of Penelope emerges as Ovid’s texts re-enter the classroom in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, as discussed in the fourth chapter. Penelope reappears in a discourse on women and their behaviour in medieval introductions to Ovid’s *Epistulae Heroides*. By analysing educational *accessus* which can be tentatively dated to the early twelfth century, I argue that some medieval teachers presented Penelope, in particular, as an appropriate model for the female student, supporting a literary subculture that welcomed women as

⁹³ There is no known translation of the *Odyssey* at this time, but most of the characters and tales had become part of the Latin literary cannon. There was a translation of the *Iliad*, *Ilias Latinas*, but Penelope was not a character in this text.

much as men.⁹⁴ Strict rules of propriety were required in the inter-gender social exchanges, and Penelope's role as loving but chaste woman contributed to a frame work for love to be considered ethically, and for relations between certain women and men to be considered, without risk to the woman's reputation. Within this setting, Penelope offers an appropriate model for female agency and self expression.

In the fifth chapter, I show how Penelope regressed to becoming a literary trope in works written by clerics. Ovid's poems were used to teach grammar in the medieval classroom of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Penelope's virtue was not challenged, but she was used largely in literature that challenges the female capacity for chastity. Her inclusion in so many of these texts, from secular clerics like Alain de Lille, Walter Map, Arnulf of Orléans, and Jean de Meun, all educated in France, shows how important Penelope was in relation to ideas of womanhood; but the rhetorical demands of these texts required that she be reconstructed in a way that reinforced the negative stereotypes of women. The way women were represented by some of these writers, especially Jean de Meun, would provoke Christine de Pizan in the fifteenth century to contribute to a celebrated literary debate, called the *querelle de la Rose*.⁹⁵ Female worth would be a pivotal issue in this debate, which developed into the *querelle des femmes*.

The city-states of Italy, especially Florence, produced a new class of writer. Three authors in particular, dubbed the three crowns of Italian literature, pulled the centre of literary gravity back to the environs in which the pre-eminence of Latin had developed. Their writings reflect concern for civic behaviour essential in the management of good society. Dante and Petrarch each deal with this demand through an androcentric approach. While

⁹⁴ C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*, The Middle Ages series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 82.

⁹⁵ The *querelle des femmes* is a debate which is thought to have developed Christine de Pizan's involvement in the fifteenth-century *querelle de la Rose*, based around Jean de Meun's representation of women in the *Roman de la Rose*. Thelma S. Fenster, "Introduction," in *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 2; Joan Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*," in *Women, History and Theory: Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), 5.

neither focus at any length on Penelope, their comments on her illustrate their contrasting approaches to the feminine and its influence on men. In contrast, Giovanni Boccaccio with his strong interests in classical literature, represented Penelope within a discourse on female worth considering her as an ethical being. This can be traced to two phases in his life. His earlier representations present an Ovidian Penelope whose chastity reflects her longstanding love for her husband, but with his later access to Homer, he created a version of Penelope in his *De mulieribus claris* who was an intelligent woman using similar skills as her husband. Whether or not this work was intended to be read by women, it contributed to continuing debates on female worth in the fifteenth-century *querelle des femmes* and their autonomy.

In the seventh chapter, I show how in early fifteenth-century France, Christine de Pizan added new elements to the figure of Penelope consistent with the social role of women in the court. Christine was reacting to the negative stereotyping of women by writers like Jean de Meun, contributing a sole female voice to the French *querelle de la Rose*. Influenced by Boccaccio, she writes Penelope into her *City of Ladies* and recasts her astuteness as prudence, but Christine contributed her own thoughts on virtue and women's social roles in her portrayal. She incorporated ideas both from written advice to women of the court, as well as her own experiences, to create a woman of good reputation, a *preude femme*, the female equivalent of the courtly *preudhomme*.

Opposing approaches to reading Penelope will underpin the final chapter in which the virtuous Greek woman is linked to young women, literate in Latin, in fifteenth-century Italy. My focus will be on Laura Cereta, the daughter of a lawyer, who is likened to a new Penelope by a Dominican friar writing to her father. In her own letters, Cereta blurs gender distinctions by likening her intellectual pursuits to Odysseus' passage past the sirens: through reason, she is able to traverse the path of classical literature safely. She also blurs the self expressive elements of writing and 'weaving', the two tasks of her night hours. Like another Italian woman writer, Isotta Nogarola,

her writing leaves her open to accusations of unchaste behaviour. In this situation, chastity is identified with maintenance of appropriately gendered behaviour, which does not include expressing one's views in writing. Brother Thomas, in comparing Cereta to Penelope, does not share Cereta's confidence in her capacity to steer a safe passage. His description of her as a "new Penelope" can be read as a directive to focus on pursuits he thought more fitting to her gender, such as reading scripture and weaving thread.

Penelope embodies so many feminine qualities that she becomes a significant figure in the literary construction of ideas about femininity. The importance of Homer as a foundational writer for western literature cemented the figure of Odysseus as 'everyman,' despite the absence of a Latin translation of the *Odyssey*. The marriage of Odysseus and Penelope can be likened to that of Adam and Eve; each couple represents an early literary division of the sexes which, in early European thought, is largely hierarchical and definitive in determining social roles. The role of Odysseus as 'everyman' also contributes to the metaphor for a journey as representing life itself. Man achieves this by leaving home, seeking adventures, while woman, as represented by Penelope, is left at home. However, within a 'journey as life metaphor', Penelope can also represent the beginning of the journey, or the end; she can also represent the type of love that provides direction and/or meaning to man, or from the perspective of a woman, she represents the strength of love required to remain faithful through many years of absence. Of course, she can also represent marital chastity, a virtue fundamental to women from antiquity until beyond the Renaissance. Her reputation for chastity based on strategy and deception, instead of self-sacrifice, gives her a unique role in the exploration of female ideals. According to the dominant discourse through most of this period, chastity is alien to female nature, and Penelope, being a chaste woman, is a paradox. Tracing her representations as she is received into the Latin literary canon, and thence into medieval and Renaissance texts offers an opportunity to explore the evolution of a variety of representations of Penelope's chastity, while questioning whether this ever required the transcendence of her sex. This allows us to consider changes in

gender construction over time, as changing societal and cultural values continued to reshape literary representations of one particular woman, remembered since the time of Homer.

Chapter One

Chaste Penelope in Republican and Augustan Rome

While a figure originally created within Greek tradition, Penelope was readily accepted as a literary figure in Rome, representing an ideal consistent with the values for a *matrona*, or married woman. Her marital fidelity, aligned with Roman ideals of chastity, was not challenged. Sexual loyalty was the fundamental to virtue for Roman women. Yet this role of Penelope as a domestic ideal in Roman literature, perpetuated by writers such as Catullus (84-54 BCE), Propertius (c. 45-15 BCE) and Horace (65-27 BCE), has overshadowed the more complex role she could play. Embracing the ambiguity of Homer's creation, Plautus (c. 254-184 BCE), for example, invokes Penelope to demonstrate the difficulties married women had of integrating competing social pressures. Much later, Ovid (43 BCE – 17/18 CE) recreates a Penelope who is chaste but also loving and cunning, two characteristics not necessarily implied in the domestic ideal. In contrast, and in arguably the most important Homer-derived text, *The Aeneid* by Virgil (70-19 BCE), Penelope is absent. Reading Aeneas as Virgil's Odysseus, the Penelope figure would be Creusa. Like Penelope, she is left behind as Aeneas journeys to fulfil his destiny, but unlike the Greek heroine, she is left in the burning streets of Troy, never to be seen again. Aeneas was destined to establish Rome without his wife. In this work, marriage is presented purely as a dynastic and political tool, essential for the hero's destiny. Thus, the shifts in approach to Penelope in classical Roman texts indicate her sensitivity as a tool for examining how writers articulate the quality of the relationship between husband and wife.

Roman acceptance of Homeric texts and figures

The development of Penelope as a domestic ideal in Rome was facilitated by Roman attachment to Greek culture. Homer in particular had a high standing

among the Roman elite and his works and characters were fundamental to education.¹ During the late Republic and early Empire, members of the elite knew Greek as well as Latin. Although the Romans had their own gods, many of them possessed the characteristics of their Greek counterparts, and images deriving from Greek mythology, and the Homeric tales, figured in domestic art in Rome and Pompeii. It is clear that Greek culture played a significant role in the development of Roman identity, and in the formation of the most basic social unit, the married couple.²

An example of the transition of a Greek text into Latin is the play *Stychus*, written by Plautus and probably performed in Rome around 200 BCE.³ It is believed to be a translation of a Greek play, *Adelphoi*, by Menander.⁴ The play articulates the roles of women in Roman society which were dependant on their relationships to men: fathers, husbands and sons. In particular, it encapsulates the conflicting social loyalties for the married woman.

Loyalty to an absent husband provides the context for the opening lines, in which Panegyris identifies with Penelope:

Ah, Penelope must have felt dreary, sister, living alone without her husband all that time. We know what her feelings (*animo*) were, all right, from what's happened to us, with our husbands gone, and we

¹ "The Homeric epics ... were part of the curriculum in all three stages of Greco-Roman education. Indeed, Homer's role in education was varied, continuous, and profound: names from Homer were some of the first words students ever learned, lines from Homer were some of the first sentences they ever read, lengthy passages from Homer were the first they ever memorized and interpreted, events and themes from Homer were the ones they often treated in compositional exercises, and lines and metaphors from Homer were often used to adorn their speeches and to express their self-presentation." Richard F. Hock, "Homer in Greco-Roman Education," in *Mimesis and Intertextuality in Antiquity and Christianity*, ed. Dennis Ronald MacDonald (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 77. Both pagan and Christian students read Homer until the fourth century CE. Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, 55.

² Katariina Mustakallio, "Creating Roman Identity: Exemplary Marriages. Roman Model Marriages in the Sacral and Historical Sphere," in *Ancient Marriage in Myth and Reality*, ed. Lena Larsson Lovén and Agneta Strömberg (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010).

³ Amanda N. Krauss, "Panegyris Channels Penelope: *Metis* and *Pietas* in Plautus's *Stichus*," *Helios* 35, no. 1 (2008), 29-47: 39.

⁴ A. G. Katsouris, "Plautus' 'Epidicus' = Menander's 'Homopatrioi?'," *Latomus* 36, no. 2 (1977), 316-24: 317.

forever anxious about their affairs while they're away – and so we should be sister, day and night.⁵

The parallel circumstances of the two sisters and Penelope are sufficient to warrant the comparison. Their husbands have been away for an extended period and they do not know when they will return. Their father, Antipho, is pressing them to forget their absent husbands and choose others. His pressure presents the daughters with a difficulty: how do they demonstrate their loyalty to both husband and father? To oppose their father's wishes by refusing to remarry would undermine their reputations as dutiful daughters.⁶ What unfolds is a sophisticated manipulation of Antipho by Panegyris, one of his daughters, demonstrating that her *pietas* (duty) is not just an emotion but a mode of action that allows both sisters to protect their reputations as chaste wives and oppose their father, without his losing face.⁷ Amanda Krauss suggests that instead of focusing on the identification with Penelope at an emotional level, Panegyris's use of the word *animus* reflects an association with Penelope's intellectual capacity. Thus, the allusion to Penelope can be read as more than just the identification of the two women to the loneliness of a deserted wife; it resonates strongly with the use of strategy to maintain a married woman's duty when faced with conflicting social pressures.

What distinguishes this version of Penelope from others over the next couple of centuries is the interpretation of events from a female perspective. Until Ovid wrote his *Epistulae Heroidum* (*Letters of Heroines*, hereafter called the *Heroides*) in the second decade BCE, subsequent representations of Penelope in the first century BCE, a period dominated by civil war, tended to reflect concerns for familial respect and tranquility.⁸

⁵ *Plautus*, trans. Paul Nixon, vol. 5 (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1968), 8-9. "Credo ego miseram fuisse Penelopam, soror, suo ex animo, quae tam diu uidua uiro suo caruit; nam nos eis animum de nostris factis noscimus, quarum uiri hinc apsunt, quorumque nos negotiis apsentum, ita ut aequom est, sollicitae noctes et dies, soror, sumus semper."

⁶ Krauss, "Panegyris Channels Penelope: *Metis* and *Pietas* in Plautus's *Stichus*," 30.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸ Mactoux, *Pénélope*, 128.

Matronal duties and Penelope

A subtle transition takes place in representations of Penelope in the first century BCE. Having been a significant figure in epic literature, she is reproduced in Latin elegy, a style recognised for offering new ways to consider lovers, male/female relationships and gender construction.⁹ While elegy itself challenges social realities, with Roman men handing over their self control under the influence of Eros,¹⁰ the figure of Penelope represents the social ideal of restraint. This changes the complexion of Penelope, as the quality of her relationship to her husband is foregrounded, promoting her as a suitable template for the ideal Roman married woman. Penelope evokes the characteristics of the ideal, against which the realities of Roman social life and intimate relationships can be measured.

One of the most important aspects of female duty in Roman society was childbearing, and Catullus provides one of the only references to Penelope in her role as mother.¹¹ Catullus is now renowned for his love poetry, but his reference to Penelope is in a poem written to celebrate the marriage between Junia and Manlius, as he hopes their union will be blessed with children: “May such praise, deriving from his virtuous mother, approve his descent, as for Telemachus, son of Penelope, remains unsurpassed the renown deriving from his noble mother.”¹² The bride, Junia, is thus compared to Penelope as she becomes a married woman. It is a laudatory poem, praising the bride and recognising the importance of her potential role in producing legitimate offspring. Mactoux notes that this is the first instance of Penelope being presented as worthy of childbearing because of her purity.¹³ It is a characteristically Roman approach to her as the ideal wife. The adjectives used to describe Penelope in this poem are *bona* and *optima*. Her role in this poem is patriotic, upholding the social importance of the married woman in Roman

⁹ Gold, “ ‘But Ariadne Was Never There in the First Place’ ” 85.

¹⁰ Walter Ralph Johnson, *A Latin Lover in Ancient Rome: Readings in Propertius and his Genre* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2009), 10.

¹¹ Mactoux, *Pénélope*, 128.

¹² Catullus 61.219, cited and trans. in Olive Sayce, *Exemplarity from Homer to Petrarch* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D S Brewer, 2008), 42-3, “talīs illius a bona / matre laus genus approbet, / qualis unica ab optima / matre Telemacho manet / fama Penelopeo.”

¹³ Mactoux, *Pénélope*, 128.

society. She is not celebrated for her passion for her husband, but for the tranquil vision of the worthy family.¹⁴ Such families were the building blocks of Roman social networks. The virtue of the woman is valued because it guarantees legitimacy and adds prestige to the family.

Sexual fidelity in marriage is another major duty of the Roman *matrona*. The martial aspect of Roman society reinforces the marriage of Ulysses and Penelope as a salient model. Propertius used a variety of adjectives to describe Penelope in his works: *digna*, *casta* and *pia* (worthy, chaste and dutiful), all consistent with the ideal *matrona*. Propertius used their model for marriage in various poems. In *Elegy* 3.12, Aelia Galla, the wife of Postumus, outshines Penelope: “Aelia Galla surpasses the fidelity of Penelope.”¹⁵ The parallel between the soldier’s wife and Penelope is strengthened by the likening of the soldier, Postumus, to Ulysses: “Postumus will be another Ulysses with a wife to marvel at.”¹⁶ Like Penelope, Aelia Galla will be a chaste wife who remains at home.¹⁷ Propertius recognises the benefit to the man’s honour in the public recognition of his wife’s domestic loyalty. It is a male perspective on appropriate female behavior.

Two more references to Penelope in the works of Propertius highlight the importance of the male perspective as a fundamental aspect of the representations of her character and chastity, *elegy* 2.6 in particular links Penelope to the Roman goddess Pudicitia.¹⁸ Propertius writes about his relationship with Cynthia, concerned that his mistress’s household has become too open to external influences, potentially undermining her loyalty to him.¹⁹

¹⁴ Mactoux, *Pénélope*, 129-30.

¹⁵ Propertius, *The Complete Elegies of Sextus Propertius*, 3.12. 8, trans. by Vincent Katz, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004.), 281, “uincit Penelopes Aelia Galla fidem”

¹⁶ Propertius, *Elegies*, 3.12.23, “Postumus alter erit miranda coniuge Ulixes,” trans. Katz, 281,

¹⁷ Propertius, *Elegies*, 3.12.37, “casta domi persederat uxor.” trans. Katz, 281,

¹⁸ Propertius, *Elegies*, 2.6. 23, trans. Katz, 101.

¹⁹ May be mistress, may be high class prostitute, as there is mention of fees. Johnson, *A Latin Lover in Ancient Rome: Readings in Propertius and his Genre*, 83. Cynthia is mentioned in many poems by Propertius and both writer and subject are identified with a variety of mythological figure, not just Ulysses and Penelope. It has been argued that this is a function of elegy, in which a multiplicity of qualities can be assigned to a person, problematizing and destabilising traditional roles. Gold, “ ‘But Ariadne Was Never There in the First Place,’ ” 89-90.

Despite not being married to Cynthia, Propertius parallels their relationship to the marriages of Admetus and Ulysses: “Admetus’s wife, Alcestis, was blessed, and Ulysses’s bed mate, Penelope, and every woman who loves her husband’s home! What use is it girls, building temples in honour of Pudicitia, if every bride’s allowed to do what she wants?”²⁰

Penelope’s loyalty to Ulysses is also discussed in another poem written to, and for, Cynthia. Propertius was afraid that Cynthia had been unfaithful and lists the various women who remained loyal to their lovers. This includes one of the few Latin references to Penelope’s ruse of weaving during the day and undoing her work at night.²¹

Penelope was able to survive untouched for twenty years, a worthy woman with so many suitors. She was able to put off a wedding with (the help of) deceptive Minerva, secretly unstitching at night what during the day she had woven: and although she never dreamed she’d see Ulysses again, she continued to wait for him, even as she grew old.²²

In each of these poems, Penelope is associated with a Roman woman, either Aelia Galla or Cynthia. Her behaviour is seen as consistent with the values of the Roman matrona, even in her comparison with the unmarried lover, Cynthia. She is used to represent the ideal of loyalty to her man. As Mactoux notes, Penelope was used in a variety of situations but the writers shared a common aspiration: she represented the peace and happiness of an ordered world.²³ She

²⁰ Propertius, *Elegies*, 2.6.23, “Felix Admeti coniunx et lectus Ulixis, ea quaecumque uiri femina limen amat! Temple Pudicitiae quid opus statuisset puellis, si cuius nuptae quidlibet esse licet?” trans. Katz, 111.

²¹ It will also be mentioned by Hyginus, maintained in a ninth-century manuscript which was discovered in the sixteenth century and possibly destroyed after the work was printed. Therefore it was unlikely to have had any direct influence on medieval writers. As this thesis will demonstrate, the details of the ruse were not of particular interest, if it was known, to medieval writers.

²² Propertius, *Elegies* 2.9.3-8, “Penelope poterat bis denos salva per annos / uiuere, tam multis femina digna procis; coniugium falsa poterat differre Minerva, / nocturne solvens texta diurna dolo; / uisvura et quamvis numquam speraret Vlixem, / illium exspectando facta remansit anus”; trans. Katz, 111, Although relying on Katz’s translation, I have inserted the bracketed words.

²³ Mactoux, *Pénélope*, 192.

was a useful figure for representing the social ideal, which might be undermined by the eroticism of elegy.

The strength of Penelope's association with Roman ideals of filial duty and chastity can also be seen in a poem written by Horace (65 – 8 BCE), in which he contrasts Roman values with Etruscan values. Horace approaches Penelope as an embodiment of Romanitas. Unlike other poets who reflect on Penelope from the perspective of Ulysses, Horace writes from the suitors' perspective; Penelope is identified with the potential mistress who rejects the narrator: "No Tuscan could ever have fathered a daughter as stiff and Penelope-cold as you."²⁴ If the woman in question was less Roman, he would have a chance, as he alludes to the reputation of Etruscan women for their lax morals. For the purposes of the narrator, the woman identified with Penelope frustrates his personal interests. It demonstrates a male approach to women as the objects of their desire and gatekeepers to male pleasure and, despite her Greek origins, Penelope is used to represent Roman (non-Etruscan) ideals.

Trojan ancestry and the displacement of Penelope

Penelope's absence from Virgil's *Aeneid* points to a shift in the foundational mythology of Rome from its Greek origins. It also highlights the extremity to which female loyalty can be taken, where their needs and feeling are not relevant when discussing marriage. The *Aeneid*, written between 29 to 19 BCE, legitimised the Julio-Claudian dynasty, represented by Augustus.²⁵ By reworking the story of the Trojan War through the tale of Aeneas' flight from Troy to establish Rome, Virgil celebrates Rome's cultural debt to Greece and Homer, while promoting Trojans as the true ancestors for the nation.²⁶

²⁴ Horace, "Odes 3.10," *Opera*, ed. J. R. Shackleton-Bailey (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1995), 85: "non te Penelopen difficilem procis Tyrrhenus genuit parens." in *Horace in English*, trans. James Michie, ed. D. S. Carne-Ross and Kevin Haynes (London: Penguin, 1996), 289-90; 1991

²⁵ "According to ancient grammarians, the purpose of the *Aeneid* was twofold: to imitate Homer and to praise Augustus, "beginning with his ancestors." Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature: A History*, trans. Joseph B. Sordolow, 2nd ed. (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 276.

²⁶ There is no evidence that Aeneas was recognised as founder of Rome by earlier Romans. The name of his son, Ascanius/Iulius provides an 'ancestral' link for the gens Iulia, the noble

The shift in origins reflects the rise of Augustus to *princeps* after several decades of civil war, and marked a new beginning for Rome. The desire for stable family values can be seen in later laws introduced by Augustus. These were hoped to counteract the declining birth rate among the wealthy: the *Lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* and *Lex Julia de adulteriis*, 18 BCE and *Lex Papia-Poppaea*, 9 CE. These laws consolidated marriage less as a private responsibility to a more public concern, and were maintained into late antiquity.²⁷ Underpinning the Augustan focus on family, the story of Aeneas and his dynastic marriage illustrates just one way in which family became central to the integrity of new Roman identity.²⁸

Familial duty (*pietas*) as a reflection of social need underpins the construction of Virgil's Trojan hero; the duty of Aeneas is reflected in his prioritisation of his father, son and the foundation of Rome. Although it is largely recognised as a reworking of Homer's *Iliad*, its trajectory of one hero traveling to find his destiny is more akin to the *Odyssey*. Unlike Homer's texts, which are a transcript of oral tradition, the *Aeneid* is a carefully constructed written text.²⁹ It is the story of Aeneas, son of Venus, who flees Troy and settles on the Italian peninsula to found Rome. In doing so, he leaves behind his wife in Troy and a love interest, Dido, in Carthage.³⁰ Augustus was written into this genealogy as a descendent of Aeneas and thus the goddess Venus, creating divine associations for the city of Rome.³¹

Roman family of Julius Caesar and Octavian Augustus. Conte, *Latin Literature*, trans. Sordow, 278-9.

²⁷ Judith Evans Grubbs, "'Pagan' and 'Christian' Marriage: The State of the Question," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994), 361-412: 378.; Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Lectures on the history of religions. New series ; no. 13. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 6.

²⁸ Mustakallio, "Creating Roman Identity," 21. The other early Roman marriage to fulfil this role was that of Romulus.

²⁹ See for example the discussion on the intertextuality and the dependence on Homer for reading the *Aeneid* in Charles Martindale, *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; repr., 2000), 56.

³⁰ There are other versions of the Dido story which emphasis her role as an exemplar of chastity, which is not consistent with the tale told in Virgil. For a longitudinal study of this aspect of Dido, see Mary Louise Lord, "Dido as an Example of Chastity: The Influence of Example Literature," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 17 (1969), 22-44, 216-32. The inclusion of Dido is also understood to represent Cleopatra, the exotic queen who had seduced Julius Caesar. Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval "Aeneid."* -3; Gilchrist, "Manipulation of a Myth," 297.

³¹ The mother of Aeneas was Venus and he grew up with his father in Troy.

There are certainly parallels between Virgil's *Aeneid* and Homer's *Odyssey*. They both follow the journey of a hero who is fulfilling his destiny. A key difference between the two epic heroes and their women is the role of marriage. Aeneas needed to turn his back on personal and intimate aspects of life, represented by the loss of his first wife, Creusa, and his desertion of Dido, to fulfil his political destiny. His later marriage to Lavinia, who was possibly in love with another man,³² was politically expedient as it legitimised his role in local politics. The public treaty between the people of Latium and the Trojan refugees was reflected in a private one: Aeneas married Latinus' daughter, Lavinia.³³ The desires of the women, Creusa, Dido and Lavinia, did not accommodate masculine ideals and the political nature of society. This contrasts to the role women play in the *Odyssey* which concludes with the successful return of Ulysses to his wife.³⁴ Both Virgil and Ovid relied heavily on Homer in their works, but the difference in their approach to women, and Penelope in particular, is striking.

Ovid and marital intimacy

It is in the works of Ovid that we can see the most fully developed explorations of Penelope's character. His works have been interpreted as a reaction to Virgil's Augustan propaganda.³⁵ Unlike Virgil, whose focus was on the importance of public duty over personal pleasure, Ovid presented tales of love, playing with issues of gender and identity. A striking example of Ovid's reaction to Virgil's representation of a woman is the letter he composed in Dido's voice

³² R. O. A. M. Lyne, "Lavinia's Blush: Vergil, 'Aeneid' 12.64-70," *Greece & Rome* 30, no. 1 (1983), 55-64.

³³ Mustakallio, "Creating Roman Identity," 17.

³⁴ "[T]he poem expresses his choice not as an existential reckoning in favor of a mortal destiny but as a preference to return to the human lineaments of his wife. Slatkin, "Homer's *Odyssey*," 320. "Odysseus kills all the suitors and is reunited with Penelope in a moving scene of middle-aged love," Peter Everard Coleman and Michael J. Langford, *Christian Attitudes to Marriage: From Ancient Times to the Third Millennium* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 53.

³⁵ Sara Myers, "The Metamorphosis of a Poet: Recent Work on Ovid," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999), 190-204: 192. "Ovid sets his own work in opposition to *arma*, associated with epic poetry, (most importantly Vergil...)" Augustus is recognised by some as using various means, including literature, to establish his image and authority, p. 197

to Aeneas. It incorporates new information about their relationship, and in the process, damns Aeneas for escaping paternal responsibility:

Perhaps, too, it is Dido soon to be mother, O evil-doer, whom you abandon now, and a part of your being lies hidden in myself. To the fate of the mother will be added that of the wretched babe, and you will be the cause of doom to your yet unborn child; with his own mother will Iulus' brother die, and one fate will bear us both away.³⁶

By introducing the possibility of pregnancy, the Virgilian hero is no longer a figure of *pietas*, but a footloose, carefree adolescent planting his seed with no regard for the consequences. Through the eyes of a woman, the actions of a hero driven by lust and destiny, not love, lose their lustre.

An alternate approach to gender is a recognised hallmark of Ovid's works, even if not writing directly about women, his style of writing when compared to contemporary literary genres, breaks the rules and contravenes the norms. This can be seen clearly in his masterpiece, the *Metamorphoses*, which reflects the fluidity of identity. Alison Sharrock describes it as "provoking a gendered reality."³⁷ Unlike Virgil's *Aeneid*, the *Metamorphoses* does not present a clear cut hero or any sense of linearity, being episodic and fluid. There are hundreds of characters and several dozen stories from different sources, told by different voices from different contexts, each story flows into the next without clear markers for beginning and end. It is complex and inventive, an intentionally problematic text.³⁸ The work also reflects what has been described

³⁶ Ovid, *Heroides* 7.133-138, "Forsitan et gravidam Dido, scelerate, relinquo, / parsque tui lateat corpore clausa meo. / accedet fati matris miserabilis infans, / et nondum nato funeris auctor eris, / cumque parente sua frater morietur Iuli, / poenaeque conexos auferet una duos." in *The Loeb Classical Library*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. Grant Showerman, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), 92-3.

³⁷ Alison Sharrock, "Gender and Sexuality," in *Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 95.

³⁸ Ralph Hexter, "Heroides: Narrative, segmentation, commentary, and interpretation," in *Latin Grammar and Rhetoric: From Classical Theory to Medieval Practice*, ed. Carol Dana Lanham (London: Continuum, 2002), 212. "[I]t offers no comparable [to the *Aeneid*] starting point for elementary narratological analysis."

as Ovid's concerted opposition to the male viewpoint glorified within Augustan (and Virgilian) society.³⁹

Women provide an important element within Ovid's works. In analysing the *Metamorphoses*, Kathryn McKinley notes that Ovid explores the "psychological quandaries and dilemmas" of his heroines.⁴⁰ Before writing the *Metamorphoses*, however, Ovid had already been experimenting outside of the standard structures of Latin literature. The *Heroides* was written around 19-17 BCE and deals directly with the issue of gender.⁴¹ The work consists of fifteen letters written by different mythological or historical women to their absent lovers.⁴² Ovid as writer takes on the persona of each woman placing all the importance on the individual. The big events which are normally in the spotlight become background as the "seemingly insignificant individual" is brought into the foreground.⁴³ Unlike previous representations, Ovid offers psychological portrayals of these women, each letter is written without any introductory framework, so the readers' knowledge of the writer and her situation is limited to her words.⁴⁴

Ovid modifies the representation of Penelope, introducing new elements to her story. Howard Jacobson suggests that Ovid attempted to free her from the shackles that Roman exemplarity had imposed on her.⁴⁵ As a figure that was very familiar and had become a "paradigmatic abstraction,"⁴⁶ the outpouring in her letter offers the reader some insight into what she may have been thinking and feeling. She was susceptible to "common human passions and feelings."⁴⁷

³⁹ Suzanne C. Hagedorn, *Abandoned Women: Rewriting the Classics in Dante, Boccaccio, and Chaucer* (The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 22; Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 7.

⁴⁰ McKinley, *Reading the Ovidian Heroine*, xiii.

⁴¹ Glenda McLeod, *Virtue and Venom: Catalogs of Women from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991), 29.

⁴² I am aware that there was a further series of letters, but as they have no direct bearing on my thesis they will not be discussed.

⁴³ Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 354. McLeod notes that Ovid shifts the focus from men to women, modifies the heroic situation as opposed to "heroicizing" the erotic and distances the poet from the speaker by writing in the first person. See McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 30.

⁴⁴ Marina Scordilis Brownlee, "Hermeneutic Transgressions in the *Heroides* and *Bursario*," *Stanford French Review* 14, no. 1-2 (1990), 95-115: 101.

⁴⁵ Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 249.

⁴⁶ Brownlee, "Hermeneutic Transgressions in the *Heroides* and *Bursario*," 95.

⁴⁷ I would not go as far as Jacobson and others to say that in the poem Penelope loses her dignity. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 260.

It is the aspect of feeling that is stressed in most assessments of Penelope's letter.⁴⁸

As well as creating a woman with feeling, however, Ovid manages to convey Penelope's cunning. This is consistent with Homer's Penelope who was able to manipulate her circumstances for her own benefit. These manipulations might even necessitate the use of her sex to exert power over the men who wish to control her.⁴⁹ Like her husband, she is shown as intellectually agile and able to read the situation to her advantage. The modifications to the Homeric model in Ovid's *Heroides* build and expand on the intellectual cunning as Penelope writes the story for her own purposes. This is not the figure of *fides* found in Propertius.

Although Penelope writes a private letter to her husband, Ovid has a larger audience in mind, one that had a deep knowledge of Homer's text. Ovid could deliberately exploit that knowledge to present Penelope's cunning. She does not necessarily write truth, even her truth. Instead she weaves words to entice Ulysses home by saying things that her husband would want to hear.⁵⁰ She does not mention that she weaves to put off choosing a suitor. Ovid has her weaving to deceive the night: "nor would the hanging web tire my widowed hands as I seek to deceive the spacious night."⁵¹ This follows from a complaint of lying cold in her bed, so the inference is that she weaves at night to avoid lying there alone. It is curious that she does not mention the suitors here, particularly as the deception of them through her weaving through the night and unravelling at night was the basis for her reputation for chastity. This deception was the proof of her fidelity but she chose to conceal it from her husband. Jacobson suggests that this vagueness about her chastity is intentional on the part of Penelope; she does not want to confirm her fidelity but hints that, out of

⁴⁸ Brownlee, "Hermeneutic Transgressions," 112; Albert R. Baca, "Ovid's Claim to Originality and *Heroides* 1," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 100 (1969), 1-10: 6; Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 7; Lawrence Lipking, *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 67.

⁴⁹ Hagedorn, *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition*, 213-8.

⁵⁰ Clayton, *A Penelopean Poetics*, 108.

⁵¹ Ovid, *Heroides* 1.8, "nec mihi quaerenti spatiosam fallere noctem/ lassaret viduas pendula tela manus," trans. Showerman, 10-11.

loneliness, she may be tempted to take a lover.⁵² In presenting an image of Penelope weaving at night, Ovid creates a paradoxical figure; by weaving, as opposed to unravelling her work, Ovid undoes the sign of her chastity, but still presents her as a lonely woman not wanting to go to bed where she sleeps alone and chaste.

Other moments in the poem show Ovid consciously not just playing with the Homeric text, but selecting phrases from other Latin poems to imply Penelope's cunning. An example of this is when Penelope describes Ulysses performing a trick in the night.⁵³ The phrase *nocturno... dolo* was used by two classical writers; in each case it was not used to describe Ulysses' actions, but her own.⁵⁴ It was the phrase used by Propertius and Ovid (in another text) to refer to Penelope's trick as discussed above.⁵⁵ It is quite clear that the idea of night-time deception was clearly linked to Penelope and her activities. As Penelope wrote nightly deceptions, she demonstrated her *metis*, alluding to her own deception while talking about her husband's actions. She reminds him of their *homophrosyne* or like-mindedness, as both of them engage in night-time deceptions.

The rhetorical intent behind a letter is also very different to the text of Homer. As a bard, Homer is telling a story to entertain and perhaps to teach. Penelope, however, is writing to a missing husband in an attempt to persuade him to return home. The content of the letter cannot be read without keeping this in mind. Duncan Kennedy notes that all the women write in anticipation of the reader's response, and thus in this act, they construct their identity.⁵⁶ When Penelope says: "I will always be Penelope, wife of Ulysses," she is writing what

⁵² Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 264-5.

⁵³ Ovid, *Heroides* 1.42, "Thracia nocturno tangere castra dolo," trans. Showerman, 12-13.

⁵⁴ 'dolos', with intention to deceive, Bernard Knox, "Introduction," to *The Odyssey*, 37.

⁵⁵ Propertius, *Elegies* 2.9.6: 'nocturno solvens texta diurna dolo,' *The Complete Elegies of Sextus Propertius*, 110 and Ovid, *Amores*, 3.9.29-30, '...Troiana fama laboris tarda que nocturne tela retexta dolo' trans. Showerman, 488. It could also be argued that Ovid's reference to "night-time deceptions" might be a suggestion that Penelope did not remain chaste. In this case, it could still be argued that he presents Penelope as cunning and as adept at deception as her husband. This was pointed out to me by Juanit Feros Ruys.

⁵⁶ Duncan Kennedy, "Epistolarity: The Heroides," in *Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 112.

is required of a loyal wife.⁵⁷ Having previously hinted at the possibility of taking a lover, she is now pleading her case as the deserving and loyal wife who should be treated better. By pointing out her undying loyalty, she also plays the guilt card. Not everyone agrees with this reading. Richard Heitman interprets Penelope's declaration that she will always be 'his' as a vulnerable woman completely dependent on her husband; he does not consider other psychological or strategic intentions behind Penelope's words.⁵⁸ Other factors within the poem, however, do suggest that it is carefully constructed to provide ambiguity and the sense of a woman with some control of her circumstances.

Penelope's intentions in writing to Ulysses might be to urge him home, or to deflect attention from possible indiscretion on her part. It is difficult to know how far to trust 'her' words, as there are lies. Kennedy argues that the lies in this letter are consistent with the ideals of *metis* and playing the situation to its full advantage.⁵⁹ The first lie occurs when she describes sending Telemachus off to find his father. In Homer, her son left without her knowledge.⁶⁰ It was this reference that suggested to the Loeb editors that Ovid did not remember his Homer. Kennedy continues that it is a "deliberate lie on her part to impress upon Ulysses that she has gone to all reasonable lengths to find him before succumbing to the overwhelming pressure to remarry."⁶¹ Later in the poem, Penelope is quite ingenuous when she declares that he might be in the arms of another woman, as an explanation for his delay. We as readers might nod at this point and say, "how true" because we know that there were liaisons on the journey home with both Circe and Calypso. By including this line, Penelope is indicating that she is aware of the possibility, and is seen from our perspective as being perceptive. In fact, as Telemachus has returned from his journey to the court of Nestor, a fact she has stated in her letter, Penelope has already been told that Ulysses is being held back by Calypso. Those familiar with Homer would

⁵⁷ Ovid, *Heroides* 1.84, "Penelope coniunx semper Ulixis," trans. Showerman, 16-7.

⁵⁸ Heitman, *Taking Her Seriously*.

⁵⁹ Duncan F. Kennedy, "The Epistolary Mode and the First of Ovid's *Heroides*," *The Classical Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1984), 413-22: 421.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 421.

know this and pick the lie and the strategy behind its use.⁶² Knowing that he is with another woman, she imagines how he might call her rustic or unsophisticated and minimize her skill as a wife,⁶³ as an excuse to remain with his lover. Here, Ovid has Penelope not weaving, the task of an accomplished woman, or even spinning, but only fit to work with unprepared wool. This would have been the duty of slaves or those unskilled in the more sophisticated arts. Thus, Ovid portrays Penelope as skilled in emotional manipulation, presenting her case to her absent husband to play upon his guilt.

These might all be considered aspects of Penelope's *metis*. Ovid creates Penelope as a woman who is able to present herself as an intellectual match to her husband, and, as clever a weaver as the poet himself; each of these 'lies' is dependent on a close knowledge of the *Odyssey*, so become less relevant while Homer was lost in later centuries. Without access to the original Greek text, Latin readers were unable to read the playful intricacies and intertextual references. What is important though is the idea that Penelope maintained a reputation for being *periphron* to this point in history, as embedded in the classical texts of Propertius (who mentions the deception), Plautus (reflecting the need for strategic thinking in relation to torn loyalties) and more subtly in the *Heroides*. This text especially, with its focus on emotion paired with cunning, can be read as subversive of the society in which it was created. It highlights the importance of marriage and intimacy in a world where the greater focus is on martial concerns and the utility of marital connections. This intimacy within marriage will be reinforced in Ovid's later works when he identifies his own wife with Penelope while separated from her.

The exilic poems were written late in Ovid's life once he had been banished from Rome to the northern coast of the Black Sea. He wrote two books of poems, the *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto*, which were a series of letters to friends, family and enemies in Rome. The poems of the *Tristia* are written to unnamed

⁶² Homer, *The Odyssey*. Telemachus is told at (4.559) and he relates the information to Penelope at (17.153-4).

⁶³ Ovid, *Heroides* 1.76-8, "esse peregrine captus amore potes./ forsitan et narres, quam sit tibi **rustica coniunx**,/ quae tantum **lanas** non sinat esse **rudes**" "You may be captive to a stranger love ... It may be you even tell how rustic a wife you have – one fit only to dress fine the wool." (one fit only to prepare unwashed wool), trans. Showerman, 16-7.

individuals, perhaps with the intention of protecting the recipients from repercussions back in Rome. A strong identification between Ovid in his exilic poetry and the *Heroides* has been noted; they highlight the roles of intimacy and separation.⁶⁴ This may be one reason why many medieval texts say that Ovid wrote the *Heroides* while in exile as part of his strategy to be recalled.⁶⁵ The *Heroides* was in fact one of his earlier works, so his presentation of the feelings of women abandoned and betrayed by men is not related to his own experience of exile. However, there are similarities between the groups of poems, perhaps suggesting a universality of feeling relating to loss and abandonment, independent of gender.

Penelope figures in several of the exilic poems, as Ovid casts himself as both a second Homer and as Ulysses. Penelope has a major role in relation to each of these men. To Homer, she is the woman created at the centre of the *Odyssey*, the one contrasted to her adulterous or murdering cousins.⁶⁶ To Ulysses, she is the mortal woman for whom it was worth giving up immortal life and attempting the difficult journey home. In the *Tristia*, Ovid describes how his wife, the recipient of the poem/letter, would be remembered as worthier than Penelope, had she married Homer. He also casts himself as a “much enduring” Ulysses, forcefully separated from his wife by circumstances.⁶⁷ The reference to Penelope follows the traditional use of simile to demonstrate exemplarity as he compares his wife to the Greek heroine:⁶⁸

If you'd had Homer/ to sing your praises, Penelope's renown/would
be second to yours, you'd stand first in the honoured roll-call/of

⁶⁴ Patricia A. Rosenmeyer, “Ovid's *Heroides* and *Tristia*: Voices from Exile,” *Ramus* 26, no. 1 (1997), 29-56: 29.

⁶⁵ Brownlee, “Hermeneutic Transgressions,” 104.

⁶⁶ Penelope's cousins were the sisters Helen and Klytemnestra. Helen's desertion of Menelaus to be with Paris had initiated the Trojan War and Klytemnestra murdered her husband Agamemnon on his return from the War.

⁶⁷ Ovid, *Tristia* 4.123: *Sorrows of an Exile: Tristia*, “Tu si Maeonium uatem sortita fuisses, Penelopes esset fama secunda tuae: siue tibi hoc debes, nullo pia facta magistro, cumque noua mores sunt tibi luce dati, femina seu princeps omnes tibi culta per annos/te docet exemplum coniugis esse bonae, adsimilemque sui longa adsuetudine fecit./grandia si paruis adsimilare licet,” ed. e. J. Kenny, trans. A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 16

⁶⁸ This use of simile in the classical period anticipated the medieval use of *exemplum*. Olive Sayce, *Exemplarity from Homer to Petrarch* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D S Brewer, 2008), 1.

heroines, pre-eminent for courage and faith – /whether this quality’s inborn, produced by your own nature,/devotion that owes nothing to a master’s words,/or whether that princely lady, for years your honoured patron,/has trained you to be a model wife, by long/inurement, assimilation to her own example (if great things/may properly be compared to small)⁶⁹

Penelope’s name is invoked while pondering notions of a good wife loyal to an absent husband. Ovid questions the source of virtue; is a person born virtuous or is it learned through example? This same issue will be raised by the Stoic writer Seneca several decades later, once again using Penelope as the figure to contemplate the roots of virtue. It is in a letter within which he questions the educational process, and the practice of debating two sides of an argument without considering the necessary values for good society:

Why go into the question whether or not Penelope completely took in her contemporaries and was far from being a model of wifely purity, any more than the question whether or not she had a feeling that the man she was looking at was Ulysses before she actually knew it? Teach me instead what purity is, how much value there is in it, whether it lies in the body or in the mind.⁷⁰

These references to Penelope by Ovid and Seneca demonstrate her association with virtue in Roman literature and education as a suitably vehicle to discuss female excellence, as judged by her marital fidelity. It demonstrates her

⁶⁹ *The Poems of Exile*, trans. Peter Green (London; New York: Penguin, 1994), 16.

⁷⁰ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/sen/seneca>. “Hoc me doce, quomodo patriam amem, quomodo uxorem, quomodo patrem, quomodo ad haec tam honesta vel naufragus navigem. Quid inquiris an Penelopa inpudica fuerit, an verba saeculo suo dederit? an Ulixem illum esse quem videbat, antequam sciret, suspicata sit? Doce me quid sit pudicitia et quantum in ea bonum, in corpore an in animo posita sit.” This was a letter to Lucilius in which Seneca argues that it is not enough to debate whether someone is or is not virtuous. The purpose of education is to teach the student how to be virtuous. The inclusion of Penelope in this passage, among others, has been interpreted as indicating the role various figures acquired in education. In this instance, two people would argue for and against Penelope’s chastity, or whether she recognised Ulysses, etc. “Letters from a Stoic,” ed. R Campbell (Harmondsworth 1969), 153.

acceptance into Roman society, both in educational practices and to discuss Roman moral values. This utility contributes to her ongoing use in Latin education and literature to discuss various issues, especially female worth.

Conclusion

Rome's attachment to all things Greek facilitated the use of Penelope as an example of the ideal Roman woman, full of dignity and piety, befitting the dutiful *matrona*. Despite this reputation, Penelope is absent in the most significant classical text for later Latin learning. She is not included in Virgil's reworking of the *The Odyssey* as he replaces Greek foundation myths with an epic about the foundation of Rome, in which Penelope had no place. This had the potential to remove Penelope from the literary canon, especially as a conduit for considering the role of women in marriage and society. Ovid's reaction to Virgil, however, resulted in him prioritising Penelope, as he identified with both her husband, while separated from his wife, and also with her creator, as a writer able to bestow fame and glory. These various treatments of Penelope reinforce traditional approaches to the Roman *matrona*, based on duty, while also offering a perspective on the conflicting pressures within the social network for the married woman, and an alternate vision of marriage based on intimacy. Ovid's Penelope, who remained loyal to her husband through love, foreshadows the importance of intimacy and harmony in later Roman society, a model overshadowed but not extinguished by the Christian image of chastity.

Chapter Two

Characterisations of Penelope in Imperial Rome and in Ascetic Christian tradition

Inspired by Ovid, later pagan authors represented Penelope as a sexualised, but chaste, woman who was loyal to her husband and remained his intimate companion. This characterisation reflected the changing social values of the late Roman Empire in which harmony became an important aspect of the marriage contract. In contrast, the acceptance of Penelope as a model of chastity by two early Christian writers, Tertullian and Jerome, marginalised the continuing pagan focus on her as a loving wife. Jerome's Penelope, linked in his list of female worthies with Dido and Lucretia who rejected second marriages through death, ensured her longevity in the Christian tradition as an exemplar, but reinforced the idea that self sacrifice was the sole basis for female excellence. Jerome's list of chaste pagan women is recognised as foundational in perpetuating chastity as an ideal in medieval Europe.¹

The representation of Penelope by pagans and some early Christian writers demonstrates the continuing importance of female chastity in European society. Ovid's focus on the intimate nature of Penelope's and Ulysses' relationship, although arguably subversive in the context of Augustan propaganda, was consistent with new ways of imagining marital relationships in the Roman world. Shifting public roles for men did nothing to decrease the emphasis on the need for female chastity. Indeed, a man's ability to manage the honour of his household demonstrated his appropriateness for office. However,

¹ McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 45. Other scholars who note the influence of Jerome on later representations of women include: Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*; Alcuin Blamires, C. William Marx, and Karen Pratt, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford [England], New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1992); Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*; Christopher N. L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Lord, "Dido as an Example of Chastity."

there was also an increased focus on the desirability of harmony between husband and wife, and the importance of marital intimacy expressed through a couple's sexual relationship. As long as sexuality was suitably harnessed within marriage, the wife's chastity could not be questioned. In contrast, the chastity epitomised by some early Christian writers, like Jerome, demonised sex. Extreme elements of the Christian fellowship celebrated virginity as the most perfect form of chastity and therefore undermined the family as the most important social institution, as professed virgins did not fulfil the social obligations of weaving together the fortunes of two families.² Much has been written on the celebration of virginity from this early period of Christianity as the ideal of chastity.³ The withdrawal from the social world which accompanied this form of chastity owed much to the Greek ideal of *apatheia*, or unfeeling.⁴ The contrast between representations of chastity by extreme ascetic Christians and the population of Rome (pagan and Christian), and the ways this is manifested in the figure of Penelope, has not been studied.

Development of the pagan Penelope

Penelope maintained her reputation for chastity as a married woman beyond the Augustan age. Marriage and the family unit continued to underpin the social and political fabric of Roman society, to the point where laws against celibacy were not relaxed until the fourth century.⁵ As Rome settled into its new imperial status, the political climate changed as did the roles of political men. High status men were pitted in competition with each other, and their expertise as governors

² Undermining the family structure by early Christians like Jerome and Augustine has also been interpreted as a function of education. "The arts could assist the displacement of love from carnal affinity (that is the family) to spiritual (as in the brotherhood of believers) and ultimately to God. Cultivation of the mind or soul, achieved by those who had the leisure to study, was prioritised over pursuing social advancement." Karl F Morrison, "The Incentives for Studying the Liberal Arts," in *The Seven Liberal Arts in the Middle Ages*, edited by David L. Wagner, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

³ Two books dedicated to this topic are Brown, *The Body and Society* and John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975).

⁴ The role of *apatheia* in the development of virginity as an ideal for women in early Christianity is discussed by Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others*, 49, and Smith, "Inventing Marital Chastity," 11.

⁵ Grubbs, "'Pagan' and 'Christian' Marriage," 381.

of households was the yardstick for comparison.⁶ This in turn influenced the way husbands and wives related to each other. Harmony or *Concordia* overshadowed obedience as a marker of marriage and the concord of the couple was seen as reflecting the changing nature of the political society.⁷ A *domus castus* (chaste household), far from representing ascetic ideals, was used to describe a fertile household.⁸ Marital concord played a vital part in discussing a man's worth in public/political life; it denoted a couple working with a common purpose. Managing his personal affairs appropriately enhanced his reputation for suitability in political life and, in turn, the husband's political achievements reflected back on his wife and family, assisting their mutual status within the community. The chaste wife implied marital harmony and reflected the ethical fitness of her husband in the rhetorical economy in which men competed with each other.⁹ Peter Brown, observing the importance of marital concord in a second-century Roman marriage, notes that a man's wife might be the only person with whom a Roman man could be truly honest, as she would be an outsider to political life.¹⁰ This is the context for analysing Penelope's inclusion in pagan poetry in the post-Augustan era, in which she was depicted as a loving and intimate companion to her husband, prior to what would happen to her memory in an ascetic Christian milieu.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how Propertius spoke to his lover as a wife and Ovid spoke of his wife as an emotional ally. Penelope was a figure used by both of them to reinforce aspects of these intimate relationships. The bilingual writer Statius (c. 50 - 90 CE), who would become a major influence on medieval authors, including Dante, similarly associates Penelope with his wife, suggesting that Claudia's behaviour would be even more exemplary than the Greek heroine's. This occurs in *Silvae* 3.5:

⁶ Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 3-4.

⁷ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 14; Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, 1-20.

⁸ *The Fall of the Roman Household*, 2011 ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁹ Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, 5-11.

¹⁰ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 15.

...untouched you would put a thousand suitors to flight – not devising to unravel an unfinished web, but frankly and forthrightly, refusing marriage sword in hand.¹¹

Although Penelope is not named, the reference to her through the deception of the suitors via weaving is clear. Statius asserts that his wife would not need to resort to secret deceptions to protect her honour. She would defend herself by arms. This might reflect the acknowledged Roman distrust of Greek cunning,¹² but this association of Penelope with his wife is characteristic of the use of a rhetorical exemplum to compare and describe a real person's behaviour. He positions his wife as even more morally upright than Penelope, which is a significant claim. When Statius refers to Penelope by name in another work, this time linking his own marital relationship to that of the Greek couple, he refers to the latter as lovers (*amantes*): "Penelope would gladly have gone to the dwellings of Illium (for what do lovers fear?), if Ulysses had suffered it."¹³

This suggests that Statius considered intimacy between himself and Claudia as like that of Ulysses and Penelope, and thus as an essential part of marriage. One could argue that Penelope is linked here to the love object, but that would overlook the aspect of reciprocity. Statius is talking about lovers, not the idealisation of woman by the speaker. Other Roman literature from the first and second century similarly refers to husband and wife as being joined in love. An essential element of this loving conjunction was sexual restraint, but it also accommodated the important role of physical intimacy within the relationship. This can be clearly seen in texts from the eastern part of the Empire, written in Greek.

An excellent example of this approach to marriage is in the work of the Greek philosopher and Roman citizen, Plutarch (46-120 CE). He believed that marriage was an important aspect of life and that a couple should be governed

¹¹ Statius, *Silvae* 3.5.6: "tu mille procos intacta fugares, non imperfactas commenta retexere telas sed sine fraude palam, thalamosque armata negasses." The Loeb Classical Library, trans. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 227.

¹² The Trojan Horse, mentioned in Virgil's *Aeneid* (Book 2.), represents the idea of Greek deceit, "timeo Danaos et dona ferentes" (Beware Greeks bearing gifts.)

¹³ Statius, *Silvae* 3.5.46: "isset ad Iliacas (quid enim deterret amantes?) Penelope gavis domos, si passus Ulixes," trans. Henderson, 229.

by reason, concord and philosophy.¹⁴ A woman should sympathise with her husband and a husband with his wife, and the two should work alongside each other like the threads in a rope, the joint contribution giving strength to the unit.¹⁵ In the following paragraph, excerpted from his letter about marriage, Plutarch describes the union of Odysseus and Penelope as the ideal, based on his wisdom (*phronimos*) and her virtue (*sophron*), and contrasts the couple to Helen and Paris.¹⁶ The actions of the latter pair had led to the Trojan War, upsetting the lives of both Greeks and barbarians. By this comparison, Plutarch presents marital harmony, represented by the relationship of Odysseus and Penelope, as important for social stability and the common good.

The concord of marriage in Plutarch was based on the notion of *sophrosyne*, soundness of mind. *Sophrosyne* related to the harnessing of desire to its legitimate expression and was thus often translated into the Latin *pudor*. For Plutarch, the greater emphasis was on the pleasure of the physical relationship in marriage and less on its procreative role; it was the union of *erontes* or passionate lovers.¹⁷ Expression of desire and passion, considered a normal aspect of life in antiquity, was appropriate and preferable within marriage. According to Stoic thought, which was popular in Rome, even the philosopher was supposed to live according to nature and to embrace married life.¹⁸ This was not just a non-Christian or pagan ideal. Plutarch's near contemporary, Paul, deals with marriage and desire in his first letter to the Corinthians, with a similar focus on the physical aspect of the union and with minimal discussion of the production of children.¹⁹ Robin Scroggs highlights

¹⁴ Plutarch, *Plutarch's Moralia in seventeen volumes*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb Classical Library Vol. 3, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1976), 301. Penelope has also been described as the template for the 'sophryne' wife. See Rademaker, *Sophrosyne and the Rhetoric of Self-Restraint: Polysemy and Persuasive use of an Ancient Greek Value Term*, 23.

¹⁵ Plutarch, *Plutarch's Moralia*, tans. Babbitt, Vol. 3, 313.

¹⁶ I have maintained Babbitt's translations of these words, but Penelope's *sophron* (virtue) might just as well have been translated as clever, cunning, prudent or wise. Ibid.

¹⁷ Grubbs, " 'Pagan' and 'Christian' Marriage: The State of the Question," 373.

¹⁸ James A. Francis, *Subversive Virtue: Asceticism and Authority in the Second-Century Pagan World* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 14. This might also explain why Plutarch suggested regular intercourse between spouses comparing the act to cities' renewal of treaties by libation. See Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, 7.

¹⁹ Grubbs, " 'Pagan' and 'Christian' Marriage," 373.

the lengths to which Paul went, in being even handed in his description of the rights of men and women to physical pleasure in marriage:

To the woman the man should give what is due her; likewise the wife should give the same to the husband. The wife does not hold the rights to her body; her husband does. Likewise also, the man does not hold the rights to his body; his wife does.²⁰

As noted by Scroggs, Paul may well have finished at the point where he had described the man having rights over the woman's body, but he does not. Reciprocity underpinned this approach to marriage without condemnation or coyness of the sexual union.

The idea of physical pleasure within marriage is also present in a late fourth-century manual of rhetoric, the *Progymnasmata* of Aphthonius of Antioch. In this work, marriage leads men to the cultivation of self control upon which the reliable conduct of the citizen is based:

And by way of paradox, marriage knows how to supply self-control, and moderation is mingled with the pursuit of the pleasures...since it adds convention to the pleasures, marriage supplies moderate pleasures in support of its convention, and the arraigning of the one with the other within marriage is to be marvelled at.²¹

The marriage of Ulysses and Penelope as the archetype of this type of union, the loving and pleasurable marriage, can be seen in some ancient Greek novels.²² The tale of *Chaereas and Callirhoe* (first or second century CE) presents a husband and wife troubled by long separation and various trials. They remain faithful to the end when "they fell into each other's arms and 'gladly turned to the pact of their bed as of old.'"²³ The final part of this quote derives directly

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 7. 3, cited in Robin Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40, no. 3 (1972), 283-303: 296. The discussion on pages 295-6 explicitly focuses on the positive role of sex and pleasure in marriage within Paul's letters to the Corinthians.

²¹ Aphthonius, "Progymnasmata," in *The Virgin and the Bride*, 95.

²² As there was still a strong bilingualism within the Roman Empire at this stage, the inclusion of these Greek texts, written within the bounds of the Empire, are representative of a particular approach to marriage.

²³ Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*, 31.

from the *Odyssey* in which the bed is not only the sign of the couple's intimacy but underpins the recognition of the long separated couple through its secret construction. Similarly, the third or fourth century *Ethiopica* of Heliodorus presents his heroine Charikleia as another Penelope. Odysseus appears to Charikleia in a dream before she commences a sea voyage, sending her blessings from Penelope. Like Penelope, Charikleia resists the suitors, and is rewarded for her loyalty by reunion with her husband.²⁴ The bond between Ulysses and Penelope, used by late antique Greek writers to represent the ideal marital bond, was paralleled in Latin literature.²⁵

Sexual intimacy was at the core of this marital concord. While chastity reflected sexual restraint, it did not necessarily mean sexual abstinence. There are a few examples from early Latin literature that suggest a more sexualised Penelope, challenging our modern notions of chastity. One example of this, I would argue, is a poem (*Epigrammata Bobiensia* 36) of unknown origin, copied from a manuscript housed for many centuries in Bobbio. There is dissent regarding the importance of Penelope to the poem: James Butrica suggests that the published title "De Penelope" is a late addition, reflecting the reference to her son Telemachus in the opening lines. He bases this argument partly on Penelope's reputation for chastity, which he feels is undermined by the poem's content.²⁶ However, the identification of Penelope with loving wives, and the importance of restrained sexual pleasure as an important part of harmonious marriage, suggests that there is a connection between this poem and its published title, "De Penelope."

The origins of *Epigrammata Bobiensia* 36 are obscure. It is found in manuscript Vat. Lat. 2836, a humanist copy of a now lost manuscript from Bobbio which contained several poems by the little known fourth-century poet,

²⁴ Ibid., 32. Lamberton also notes the Homeric themes in this work, but his focus is more on how it reflects a Neoplatonic outlook, with little regard for the relationship between the main protagonists and how this might be interpreted. Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 150-1.

²⁵ Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, 95. Grubbs, "'Pagan' and 'Christian' Marriage," 373. David Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry: Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genres* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²⁶ James L. P. Butrica, "Epigrammata Bobiensia 36," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 149, no. 3/4 (2006), 310-49: 312.

Nauceilius, considered to be one of the last pagans.²⁷ Originally ascribed by default to Nauceilius,²⁸ it may in fact be one of the poems collected by Nauceilius and sent to his friend, the Roman senator, in Symmachus, a collection to which the senator refers in one of his letters.²⁹ The world of Symmachus and Nauceilius has been described as small and seemingly unchallenged, dominated by the traditional forms of the ‘good life.’³⁰ They were financially secure, and had the leisure to read and enjoy literature. Butrica has suggested that the poem is more likely to be the product of an earlier era, but concedes that its presence in the fourth- (or early –fifth) century collection provides evidence for a continuing interest in the more erotic elements of marital relationships as Christianity was established in Rome in late antiquity.³¹ I argue that the subject matter of the poem reflects earlier treatments of Penelope, influenced by Ovid and others, both Latin and Greek, presenting her love and desire for her husband as the basis of her chastity.

Interpretations of the poem are complicated, however, by its ambiguity. The highly sexual nature of the poem has led some to argue that this is a poem about an unfaithful Penelope, consistent with some Greek versions and in keeping with Penelope’s virtue as an academic topic of debate.³² The use of the first-person voice in this poem has led several scholars to suggest that it is an excerpt from a larger work written in the form of a letter, much like Ovid’s *Heroides*.³³ The absence of vocabulary associated with this genre of writing,

²⁷ Franco Munari and A. Campana, eds., *Epigrammata Bobiensia*, vol. II, *Introduzione ed Edizione Critica* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e Letteratura, 1955), 17.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 36-40.

²⁹ J. L. Butrica, “The Fabella of Sulpicia (“Epigrammata Bobiensia” 37),” *Phoenix* 60, no. 1/2 (2006), 70-121: 70.

³⁰ P. R. L. Brown, “Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 51 (1961), 1-11: 1.

³¹ For the provenance of the manuscript and its possible connection to the Symmachi, see Butrica, “The Fabella of Sulpicia (“Epigrammata Bobiensia” 37),” 70-1. On the interest of these men on the maintenance of Flavian ideals of love in marriage beyond marital duty, see Butrica, “Epigrammata Bobiensia 36,” 347.

³² The discussions by both Butrica and Rampioni have highlighted aspects of the debates. “Epigrammata Bobiensia 36,” 334-6; Anna Giordano Rampioni, “Ep. Bob. 36: “De Penelope,”” *Siculorum Gymnasium* 42 (1989), 241-52: 241-3.

³³ See the discussion on whether the poem can really have been understood as an epigram or was part of a longer letter in Butrica, “Epigrammata Bobiensia 36,” 312, 34-6. He states that nearly all scholars other than Rampioni (and himself) read this poem as a letter from Penelope similar to Ovid’s *Heroides* on p. 334.

however, works against this hypothesis. Anna Giordano Rampioni who challenges Butrica's idea that Penelope is only relevant in the opening lines to the poem, suggests that the poem may have been written to accompany an image (or statue) of the couple; the addition of Penelope's words would have added life to an otherwise static image.³⁴ These two different approaches provide different translations of the Latin text and thus very different ways of reading Penelope's representation. I have chosen to translate from the Latin based on Rampioni's suggestion that this poem is in the words of Penelope as she speaks about the continuity of her love with her returned husband.

Concerning Penelope

Undeified by suitors and saved for so many years,
 Kisses have scarcely been known by Telemachus himself!
 Here (in this bed) with the wedding torches, my virginity, glowed for you,
 And true love continued to burn in me, a queen left alone.
 As this new woman, I have often trembled with false dreams (of you), (5)
 As words slipped from my lips with underserved sound.
 And even when wakened, I sensed unknown sorrows,
 As I checked the dry bedding with fearful hands.
 Now while panting and waging the final attack
 My resentment indulgently yields to you without voice; (10)
 I have not dared grind/violate anything with my teeth, or with my nails,
 For love has accomplished a silent treaty (between us) with peace.
 Finally, I have not called for my grandmother with fearful shouts,
 Nor did an old servant run up earlier, obediently.
 I myself have touched the young girls with modest pallor, (15)
 Having accepted the duty of love imposed by tender modesty.³⁵

³⁴ Rampioni, "Ep. Bob. 36: *De Penelope*," 244.

³⁵ Poem 36, *De Penelope*, "Intemerata procis et tot seruata per annos/ oscula uix ipsi cognita Telemacho/ Hinc me[a] uirginitas facibus tibi lusit adultis/ arsit et inuidia principe uerus amor/ Saepe ego mentitis tremui noua femina somnis/ lapsaque non merito (sint) sunt mihi uerba sono./ Et tamen ignotos sensi experrecta Dolores/ strataque temptauit sicca pauente manu/ nunc tibi anhelanti supremaque bella mouenti/ paruic indulgens et sine uoce dolor/ dente nihil (molare) uiolare fero nihil unguibus ausa/ foedera nam tacita pace peregit amor/ Denique

As already mentioned, Butrica casts doubt on the relevance of Penelope in this poem, arguing that the first female voice points to its composition by a woman, potentially the famous Roman poetess Sulpicia. This dismissal of Penelope is based on three main factors: first, the position of this poem in the manuscript immediately preceding another poem generally attributed to Sulpicia; second, Martial's reference to a poem by Sulpicia celebrating fifteen years of marriage, which may have been similar to this poem; and third, the reference to Telemachus in the opening lines. Butrica suggests this might indicate the author's identification with the 'chaste' Penelope as a marker of sexual naivety. The very sexual nature of the poem, Butrica argues, is sufficient reason to dismiss this being written from Penelope's perspective as it is not consistent with her reputation for chastity.³⁶ He also dismisses other scholarship on the tradition of a non-virtuous Penelope, maintained in some Greek sources, as having had any influence on the sexualised nature of the writing in this poem.

Rampioni similarly dismisses the idea of a non-virtuous Penelope being alluded to in this poem but without dismissing the possibility of the poem remaining linked to the Greek heroine. Rampioni cites Martial's poem about Sulpicia, as evidence that referring to erotic material within marriage was not a problem in later Roman literature. Both scholars, Butrica and Rampioni, recognise Martial and his description of Sulpicia as important in the analysis of this poem. However, neither scholar mentions another poem by Martial in which Penelope's sexuality is a factor. Before looking at the poem in detail, it is appropriate to consider the works of Martial and what he says about both Sulpicia and then Penelope.

non auiam trepido clamore uocauit / nec prior obsequio serua cucurrit anus / ipsa uerecundo tetigi pallore puellas/ impositum teneri fassa pudoris opus." There are variations in the text, as noted by James Butrica. I have presented the text as per Speyer, with the variations which I accept based on the manuscript of Vat. Lat. 2836 and via the discussion on the variations in Butrica, "Epigrammata Bobiensia 36," 315. Wolfgang Speyer, *Naucellius und sein Kreis; Studien zu den Epigrammata Bobiensia*, Zetemata Monographien zur klassischen Altertumswissenschaft (Munich: Beck, 1959), 40-41. Latin text also found in Munari and Campana, *Epigrammata Bobiensia*, 89-90.

³⁶ Butrica, "Epigrammata Bobiensia 36," 317.

Martial (ca. 40 CE– ca. 102 CE), describes the more erotic aspect of marriage by referencing the work of Sulpicia who celebrates the mutual pleasure of husband and wife:

Let all girls read Sulpicia if they want to please their husband alone. And let every husband read Sulpicia who wants to please his bride alone....she teaches chaste and honest loves, the games, the delights, the humour of love³⁷.

One of the surprising aspects of this poem is the acknowledgment of a reciprocity or mutuality in desire. There is an expectation that each partner finds exclusive delight in the other and that this is consistent with chastity. It also pairs the ideas of chastity and what has to be read as sexual play. It reinforces the legitimacy of sexual pleasure in the marital relationship.

Butrica and Rampioni both recognise this poem as potentially influencing the Bobbio poem. It is surprising therefore, that they do not refer to another poem by Martial, in which Penelope and Ulysses are linked sexually. They are one of the couples, along with Hector and Andromache, recognised for their nocturnal activities.

The Phrygian slaves used to masturbate behind the door whenever Hector's wife sat on her horse, and although the Ithacan was snoring, chaste Penelope always used to keep her hand there....If grave manners please you, you may be Lucretia all day, at night I want Lais.³⁸

Magdalena Öhrman suggests that this poem plays with Ovidian themes, highlighting the voyeuristic nature of sex, so where Penelope placed her hand is intentionally ambiguous.³⁹ As it follows from a description of servants masturbating as they listen to Andromache ride Hector, there is no doubt that

³⁷ Martial, *Epigrams* 10.35, vv. 1-9: "Omnes Sulpiciam legant puellae/ Uni quae cupiunt viro placere;/ Omnes Sulpiciam legant mariti,/ Uni qui cupiunt placere nuptae./ Non haec Colchidos adserit furorem/ Diri prandia nec refert Thyestae;/ Scyllam, Byblida nec fuisse credit:/ Sed castos docet et probos amores,/ Lusus, delicias facetiasque." trans. David Roy Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993; reprint, 2006), 357.

³⁸ Martial, *Epigrams*, 11.104, v. 11, "masturbabantur Phrygii post ostia serui,/ Hectoreo quotiens sederat uxor equo/ Et quamvis Ithaco stertente pudica solebat/ Illic Penelope semper habere manum/..... se te delectate grauitas, Lucretia toto/ sis licet usque die: Laida nocte." trans. Shackleton Bailey, 84-5

³⁹ Magdalena Öhrman, "Adding an Audience: Notes on Martial 11.104," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 56, no. 1 (2013), 117-21: 119.

this is a reference to Penelope's sexual nature. Martial does not see a sexualised Penelope as inconsistent with a chaste or modest Penelope. The context for the intimacy is within marriage, therefore the epithet *pudica* was still appropriate. Her attention to her husband's body does not undermine her reputation for modesty/chastity. The importance of keeping sexual expression within marriage is seen in another of Martial's *Epigrams* in which Penelope is contrasted to her adulterous cousin, Helen of Troy. Lavinia is compared to each of these women to demonstrate her changing status from chaste to wanton. It contains various classical allusions, demonstrating Martial's reliance on earlier rhetorical styles. To start with, Lavinia is "[c]haste, and not too inferior to the old-world Sabines, more strait-laced too than her husband in his sternest mood."⁴⁰ The poem continues, describing a change in Lavinia's behaviour by invoking Penelope's name: "She went after a youth, leaving a husband: she arrived a Penelope and departed a Helen!"⁴¹ Despite the differences of usage in these two examples from Martial, each presupposed Penelope as chaste. Her chastity or marital honour does not deny her role as a sexual being.

Martial was not the only Latin poet to acknowledge a sexual nature in Penelope. She is also mentioned in the collection of anonymous poems dedicated to the god Priapus. These were thought originally to have been composed by various authors around the time of Augustus, but many now believe they were written by a single poet in the second century.⁴² There are eighty-one poems in the collection. Poem 68 is addressed to Penelope, telling her that all the suitors had only one thing on their minds: "Penelope, the mind of every man was in your cunt."⁴³ It also refers to her remaining chaste (*casta manes*), so there is no suggestion of indiscretion on her part, but it is written

⁴⁰ Martial, *Epigrams* 1.62, v. 1: "Casta nec antiquis cedens Laevina Sabinis et quamvis tetrico tristior ipsa viro..." trans. Shackleton Bailey, 85. The Sabine women were regularly invoked for their marital chastity as they stood between their warring husbands and fathers. By preventing the war, their children were not deprived of either their fathers or grandfathers.

⁴¹ Martial, *Epigrams*, 1.62 v. 1 "iuvenemque secuta relicto / coniuge Penelope venit, abit Helene." transl. Shackleton Bailey, 85.

⁴² Anonymous, *Priapea*, in *Poetae Latini Minores*, ed. F. Vollmer, II.2 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1923), 43-70. My translation.

⁴³ *Priapea* 68.27, "et omnis mens erat in cunno, Penelopea, tuo," 65. My translation. The use of the word 'cunnus' in relation to a person could also indicate their lack of chastity, presumably, sexual propriety.

with an acceptance of her sexual nature. It is this sexual nature of Penelope that I believe is being hinted at in Ep. Bob. 36.

No one questions the allusions to Penelope and her chastity in the opening lines: "Undefined by suitors and saved for so many years, Kisses have scarcely been known by Telemachus himself!"⁴⁴ That kisses are barely known even by Telemachus has been interpreted as an instance of the writer comparing herself to Penelope. The word *intemerata* (unviolated/chaste) alludes to her earlier representations, especially in Ovid.⁴⁵ As mentioned previously, Butrica suggests this is the only reference to Penelope in the whole poem, as it represents the idea of a woman so chaste (with 'youthful purity') that kisses are reserved for family, that is, still virgin.⁴⁶ While it is certainly true that Penelope was a consistent example of chastity, I do not think that she is the most appropriate figure to suggest the ideal of virginity, which is argued by Butrica. Penelope was always understood as a mother, and the mention of Telemachus highlights this role. The poet's identification with a woman through invoking the name of her son seems a most unlikely manner to conjure images of complete sexual naivety. I believe this opening section should be interpreted in light of the consistency of references to Penelope as a chaste but sexual woman, who is remembering her wedding night and pining for her absent lover, Ulysses.

Lines three and four appear to relate to thoughts of the past, possibly as she lies in the marital bed. The use of the phrase *facibus... adultis* (adult torches or flames) could be allusions to the wedding night. It was a Roman tradition for the bride to be led to her husband's house in a procession lit by torches, and even into the Renaissance, lit torches were a sign of a wedding procession. Here, however, the sense might also be about true love burning in response to the loss of her virginity, also suggestive of the wedding night. This is consistent with the ideal of the woman remaining loyal to the bed in which she lost her virginity.

⁴⁴ F. Munari, ed, *Epigrammata Bobiensa* (Rome: Edizione di Storia e Letteratura, 1955), 89: "Intemerata procis et tot servata per annos / oscula vix ipsi cognita Telemacho."

⁴⁵ Ovid, *Amores*, 3.4.24: "Penelope mansit ...inter tot iuvenes intemerata procis." trans. Showerman, 461.

⁴⁶ Butrica, "Epigrammata Bobiensa 36," 317. I find it unlikely that a woman wanting to refer back to her age of virginity would identify with a married woman like Penelope, despite her reputation for chastity.

The use of the phrase *verus amor* (true love) is worthy of discussion. The ideal of *amor* was not generally associated with marriage. It is generally recognised that Roman society made “an absolute distinction between conjugal love, the quiet tenderness of which was full of gravity, and the sensuality of irregular attachments” and *amor*, understood as the passion experienced between lovers.⁴⁷ The use of *verus amor* in this context highlights an association between marital love and sexual passion characteristic of this later (imperial) stage in Roman social values. In presenting a woman who is pining for her absent husband, reminiscing about playing on their wedding night, this poem presents Penelope as maintaining loyalty and fidelity based on her memory of physical intimacy.

Penelope’s reference to the bed is also suggestive of the couple’s shared past, as discussed earlier. In the recognition scene in *The Odyssey*, where Homer makes much of the bed and the delights permissible within, this poet uses the bed and points to its emptiness/dryness, a likely reference to the lack of recent activity. This idea both alludes to the bed as a site of sexual activity, while at the same time reinforcing Penelope’s loyalty to her absent husband. It is her memory of the past and of pleasure that underpins her chastity. She was a woman pining for a relationship that was physically intimate, a permissible desire within the bounds of social propriety.

Like Rampioni, I think the latter half of the poem refers to the physical reconciliation of the couple. It refers to her putting aside her grievances as she indulges physically in his presence. This poem, potentially written in the voice of Penelope, indicates the role of legitimate physical intimacy in maintaining a loving bond with her husband. The Penelope in this poem is not a woman immersed in *apatheia*, disengaged from the world of feelings. The pagan Penelope of the later Roman Empire was fully immersed in the realities of married life.

⁴⁷ A Grenier, *The Roman Spirit* (New York, 1926), 228., cited in David Konstan, “Two Kinds of Love in Catullus,” *The Classical Journal* 68, no. 2 (1972-73), 102-06.

Early Christian representations of Penelope

Most early Christian writers avoided pagan literary illusions, and indeed, some had grave reservations regarding the continuing role of Roman texts in education.⁴⁸ Early Christian representations of Penelope are therefore, relatively limited. Augustine, for example, never mentions Penelope once in his vast output. Nonetheless, Penelope is sometimes mentioned, but always in relation to the paradigm of chastity, without acknowledgment of marital intimacy. In early Christian literature, virginity developed as an ideal, tending to replace notions of marital chastity, as the idea of chastity became linked to the need for the avoidance sexual contact altogether. There, the early Christian representations of Penelope contrast with those of the post-Augustan writers discussed in the previous section. They reflect her status as an exemplar, based on the paradigm of chastity, without acknowledgment of marital intimacy.

Penelope's earliest extant appearance in a Christian text occurs in *Ad Nationes* by Tertullian (c. 160 - 225 CE). It was written at a time when social rituals to goddesses of chastity were still recognisable. One of these goddesses was Bona Dea, and the rituals were women only affairs in honour of chastity. Records of the festivities continued to the fourth century. Tertullian invokes Penelope to question the merits of Bona Dea as an appropriate example of what constituted chaste behaviour. As Bona Dea is the daughter of the Roman god Faunus, who is associated with the wild, and is himself half animal, it is not surprising that someone would question her appropriateness to represent an ideal so fundamental (in ancient thought) to civil behaviour:

If the daughter of Faunus so excelled in modesty (pudicitia), that she would hold no conversation with men, it was perhaps from rudeness, or a consciousness of deformity, or shame for her father's insanity. How much worthier of divine honour than this Bona Dea was Penelope,

⁴⁸ Augustine and Jerome are two such Christians who are described as feeling torn between the erudition of classical text and the need for humility. Morrison, "The Incentives for Studying the Liberal Arts," 33. For Augustine, also see Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 280. Jerome describes a dream in which God accuses him of not being a Christian but a Cicero, as a reaction to his passion for literature. Conte, *Latin Literature*, 683. The angst of these two men over their dependence on Latin for grammar and erudition is also mentioned in other works regarding the continuing need for Latin education. For example, Ernst H. Alton and D. e. W. Wormell, "Ovid in the Medieval Schoolroom," *Hermathena* 94, no. July (1960), 21-38: 22.

who, although dwelling among so many suitors of the vilest character, preserved with delicate tact the purity (castitatem) which they assailed?⁴⁹

In this instance, the ideal or essence of *pudicitia* relates more specifically to Bona Dea and the noun *castitas* is used for Penelope. Tertullian has no difficulty thinking of chaste Penelope as worthy of renown since, in his view, chastity required effort. A woman untouched because no one is interested in her cannot be compared to one who is pursued and does not succumb. Despite this, it is still a passive way of characterising her chastity; it is something to be protected and preserved. The suitors are the aggressors attempting to break down Penelope's defences. There is no mention of her strategy or how she deceived them all. She held herself intact, reflecting the notion of marital chastity as akin to virginity. It is something to be maintained, and can be lost or broken with little acknowledgement of female agency. The other important aspect of this description is the lack of reference to the quality of the relationship with her husband. Love, harmony or concord are not associated with her chastity.

Tertullian's works were not well known in the medieval period, but his views on the condition of mankind, reflected in his treatment of Penelope, were accommodated in other Christian works. Tertullian ranked mankind according to three categories, the "spirituals," the "psychics," and the "materials."⁵⁰ Later Christian writers such as Augustine and Jerome, adapted these ranks to a ladder, illustrating the path to perfection: the higher the rung, the closer to the ideal of personal salvation. Despite the lack of an internally consistent and ideological uniformity in the definition of virginity by these fourth-century writers,⁵¹ those encouraging a more ascetic ideal agreed that the most perfect state for both men

⁴⁹ Tertullian, "Ad Nationes," 2.9.22 "Si Fauni filia pudicitia praecelebat, ut ne conuersaretur quidem inter uiros aut barbaria aut conscientia deformitatis aut rubore insaniae paternae, quanto dignior Bona Dea Penelopa, quae inter tot uilissimos amatores deuersata obsessam castitatem tenere protexit?" Coxe, A. Cleveland, ed., *The Ante-Nicene fathers. Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, The Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D., and James Donaldson, LL.D., editors. (Buffalo, The Christian literature publishing company, 1885-96. 10 volumes), Vol 3, http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-16.htmNo.P1759_631039 Accessed 21/08/2015.

⁵⁰ Bugge, *Virginitas*, 67.

⁵¹ Kathleen Kelly Coyne, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*, Routledge research in medieval studies (London ; New York: Routledge, 2000), 3.

and women was virginity (no sex), followed by chaste widowhood (no more sex) and lastly marriage.⁵² Virgins would receive a hundredfold reward, compared to the sixtyfold reward for widows and thirtyfold reward for married women.⁵³ The focus was on the spiritual need for chastity and not on the social aspect of its maintenance. The quality of the relationship between husband and wife was not significant in the progress toward salvation.

This neglect of the marital relationship can also be seen in Saint Jerome's letter to Jovinian, in which Penelope is named in a list of married pagan women who maintained their chastity. Jerome (337-420 CE) was a theologian and hermit who was also skilled in several languages. His Latin translation of the Bible, which would become known as the Vulgate, became the definitive text for Christian Europe;⁵⁴ this act alone would have secured his position as foundational to the broadening influence of the early Christian Church. He wrote many other texts, including letters to female patrons interested in dedicating themselves to imitating the life of Christ. Chastity, especially for women therefore, preoccupied him.⁵⁵ Because of his stance, he was regarded by some contemporaries for overly prioritising virgins, thus undermining the importance of marriage in Roman society. One of these contemporaries was Jovinian.

Jovinian (d. c. 405 CE), a fourth-century Roman monk, wrote in defence of marriage, although the contents of the work can only be surmised through Jerome's response. David Hunter has convincingly shown that Jovinian's argument was concerned with Jerome's celebration of virginity to the detriment of marriage. This celebration of virginity over marriage in some Christian circles is similar to the heretical ideals of Manichaeism.⁵⁶

⁵² Bugge, *Virginitas*, 68; McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 36; Newman, "Flaws in the Golden Bowl," 44.

⁵³ Jerome, "Comm. in Matthaeum 2" cited in Constant J. Mews, ed. *Listen, Daughter: The Speculum Virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 27.

⁵⁴ Conte, *Latin Literature*, 684.

⁵⁵ Jerome is reputed to have perpetuated the idea that salvation required the renunciation of the flesh. Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 9.

⁵⁶ David G. Hunter, "Resistance to the Virginal Ideal in Late-Fourth-Century Rome: The Case of Jovinian," *Theological Studies* 48, no. 1 (1987), 45-64: 56.

Jerome's response to Jovinian's allegation of extreme views was written around 393 CE.⁵⁷ Jerome certainly extolled the virtue of virginity, which in light of the continuing dependence on family as the building block of Roman society, was subtly subversive to ideals of a stable community. Virgins do not marry and link the financial and social interests of two families, a characteristic of Roman society. By urging and encouraging young women to seek and maintain a life of perpetual virginity, social cohesion and loyalty to family ties, were undermined. Jerome argued that his ascetic views, although shaped by Christian ideals, were not alien to Roman thought. In support of his contention, he cited many examples of chastity found within pagan literature by writing about the ways chastity was celebrated in non-Christian texts. Among these chaste, pagan women, is Penelope.

Jerome's approach to chastity is consistent with other supporters of the ascetic movement in Christianity. He presents the case for total detachment from ties and obligations in the world, as also seen in the works of John Chrysostom (347-407 CE). Chrysostom, a promoter of monastic life, believed that chastity required more than the absence of wicked and shameful desires; ideally one was left unsoiled by the cares of the world.⁵⁸ This required disengagement from society as a whole. Although this was never an expectation of married women, due to their importance within social networking, the importance of social disengagement was stressed for the widowed woman. Of course, Penelope did not really fit within this category, and so her representation among the other chaste married women reflects this difference. By looking at the rest of Jerome's text and the list of other female exemplar, we gain insight into the difficulty for Jerome of extolling marital chastity in the context of these new, more ascetic ideals.⁵⁹ One way was to discuss these women as prioritising chastity as more important than life itself.

⁵⁷ Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 34. Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, 17.

⁵⁸ This is consistent with idea introduced earlier of 'apatheia'.

⁵⁹ I use the term 'new' here as there is reason to think that this ascetic shift was recent. See David Hunter, "Helvidius, Jovinian, and the Virginity of Mary in the Late Fourth Century," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993), 47-71: 61.

Jerome's description of married women follows a list of numerous pagan women (and goddesses) renowned for their virginity. He describes them as "reluctant to survive the decease or violent death of their husbands for fear that they might be forced into a second marriage."⁶⁰ Death, not intimacy, is the characteristic that demonstrates their marital loyalty, especially when widowed. Almost all of his examples were prepared to die to avoid remarriage, providing Jerome with evidence that "second marriage was repudiated among the heathen."⁶¹ For example, the Carthaginian queen Dido preferred to "burn rather than to marry", as did the wife of Hasdrubal who, when seeing that she could not escape the burning of her city "took her little children in either hand and leaped into the burning ruins of her house."⁶² Another wife, Niceratus "inflicted death upon herself rather than subject herself to the lust of thirty tyrants."⁶³ Jerome also includes stories from other regions to demonstrate the general celebration of chastity beyond the Christian domain. "The Indians and almost all the Barbarians have a plurality of wives. It is law with them that the favourite wife must be burned with her dead husband. The wives therefore vie with one another for the husband's love, and the highest ambition of the rivals, and the proof of chastity, is to be considered worthy of death."⁶⁴ With death as a sign of a woman's chastity, the Roman Lucretia is also discussed for having taken her life in response to having her "chastity violated."⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Jerome, *Against Jovinian* 1.43, PL 23, 286: "ueniam ad maritatas, quae mortuis uel occisis uiris superuiuere noluerunt, ne cogerentur secundos nosse concubitus, et quae mire unicos amauerunt maritos; ut sciamus digamiam apud ethnicos etiam reprobari." In *The Principal Works of St Jerome*, trans. W. H. Fremantle, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 381.

⁶¹ Jerome, *Against Jovinian* 1.43, PL 23, trans. Fremantle, 286

⁶² Jerome, *Against Jovinian* 1.43, PL 23, "nam Hasdrubalis uxor, capta et incensa urbe, cum se cerneret a Romanis capiendam esse, apprehensis ab utroque latere paruulis filiis, in subiectum domus suae deuolauit incendium." trans. Fremantle, 286.

⁶³ Jerome, *Against Jovinian* 1.45, PL 23, "quid loquar Nicerati coniugem, quae, impatiens iniuriae uiri, mortem sibi ipsa consciuit, ne triginta tyrannorum, quos lysander uictis athenis imposuerat, libidinem sustineret?" trans. Fremantle, 286.

⁶⁴ Jerome, *Against Jovinian* 1.45, PL 23, "Indi, ut omnes pene barbari, uxores plurimas habent. Apud eos lex est, ut uxor charissima cum defuncto marito cremetur. Hae igitur contendunt inter se de amore uiri; et ambitio summa certantium est, ac testimonium castitatis, dignam morte decerni," trans. Fremantle, 286,

⁶⁵ Jerome, *Against Jovinian* ,1.45, PL 213, 287; trans. Fremantle, 382. It should be noted that not all early Church Fathers saw volitional death as an appropriate consequence of rape. Using the story of Lucretia, Saint Augustine, in his *City of God*, presents her death as misguided. See Dennis Trout, "Re-Textualizing Lucretia: Cultural Subveriosn in the City of God," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2, no. 1 (1993), 53-70: 64.

These examples demonstrate that for Jerome, the ideal of marital chastity related not specifically to the exclusion of lovers (although this was certainly assumed), but to prioritising loyalty to a husband over life itself. Wifely devotion was commendable, particularly when it was reflected in the ultimate sacrifice. After these rousing examples, Penelope's story seems rather bland: "Alcestis is related in a story to have voluntarily died for Admetus, and Penelope's chastity (*pudicitia*) is the theme of Homer's song."⁶⁶ The narrative in which Penelope uses her nous to outwit many men, managing the estate and raising a son alone for twenty years is summed up as "Penelope's chastity." Her strategy of weaving by day and undoing her work at night is overlooked and overshadowed by the drama of women dying to avoid physical contact with any other man. When one considers that reason was considered to be the highest faculty and the means for protecting the heart from passionate thoughts,⁶⁷ Jerome's neglect of Penelope's intellect, based on devising a strategy to delay remarriage, raises questions about how he understood female chastity. With such a focus on death for women, was chastity only possible in life while a woman was protected by a man? Was the use of reason to obtain self control only a male attribute? His reference to the woman who chooses not to have children as potentially worthy of being called a man indicates that chastity truly was an aspect of maleness for Jerome.⁶⁸

Later in the letter to Jovinian, Jerome discusses marriage in a way that would be cited frequently over the following centuries to warn about the dangers of this social institution. His ideas were not unique and aligned with extreme ideals such as those of the first-century Apollonius. He rejected both marriage and sex, and considered chastity as not only an abstention from desire but the mastering of the "madness."⁶⁹ Love, lust and madness are equated. In dealing

⁶⁶ Jerome, *Against Jovinian* 1.44, PL 23, "Alcestin fabulae ferunt pro admeto sponte defunctam: et Penelopes pudicitia Homeri carmen," trans. Fremantle, 382.

⁶⁷ Mary B. Cunningham, "Shutting the gates of the soul': spiritual treatises on resisting the passions," in *Desire and Denial in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-first Spring Symposium of Byzantine studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, March 1997.*, ed. Liz James (Aldershot: Ashgate:Variorum, 1999), 28-9; For the stoic background to this ideal, see Francis, *Subversive Virtue*, 17.

⁶⁸ Marina Warner, *Alone of all her Sex: the Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976), 73.

⁶⁹ Francis, *Subversive Virtue*, 101.

with the issues of love and lust Jerome draws on the writings of other earlier philosophers such as Aristotle, Plutarch and Seneca to support his case. He equates the love of beauty with forgetting reason, a near neighbour of madness and cites Xystus who said that loving a wife too ardently is to be as an adulterer. “It is disgraceful to love another man’s wife at all, or one’s own too much. A wise man ought to love his wife with judgement, not with passion.”⁷⁰ Jerome continues: “there is nothing blacker than to love a wife as if she were an adulteress” and those that do marry and have children should not “appear in the character of lovers, but of husbands.”⁷¹ The focus here is clearly on men, and how marriage to a woman affected a man’s moral equilibrium. It also dismisses love and desire as having any value in marriage.

Women are reintroduced by Jerome into the final part of Book One when the limited aspect of female virtue is contrasted to male virtue. A man can find renown and glory through political promotion and eloquence, and military triumph can immortalise his family. Whatever his particular ability, it can be used to seek noble virtue. This is different for women who have only one path to virtue, which is purity. He later adds that it is a “virtue rare among women.”⁷² Having said a woman’s chastity must be preserved at all costs, he considers it “to make up for a wife’s poverty, enhances her riches, redeems her deformity, gives grace to her beauty; it makes her act in a way worthy of her forefathers whose blood it does not taint with bastard offspring; of her children, who through it have no need to blush for their mother, or to be in doubt about their father; and above all, of herself, since it defends her against external violation.”⁷³ Sex, the physical aspect of love in Jerome’s view, is the loss of reason in man and provides for children within marriage. Jerome ignores any positive aspect to a physical bond for a married couple except the provision for

⁷⁰ Jerome, *Against Jovinian* 1.49, 293: “in aliena quippe uxore omnis amor turpis est, in sua nimius. Sapiens uir iudicio debet amare coniugem, non affectu,” trans. Fremantle, 386.

⁷¹ Jerome, *Against Jovinian* 1.49, 293: “nihil est foedius quam uxorem amare quasi adulteram. ... nec amatores uxoribus se exhibeant, sed maritos,” trans. Fremantle, 386.

⁷² Jerome, *Against Jovinian* 1.47, 290: “ut si bona fuerit et suavis uxor (quae tamen rara auiis est), cum parturiente gemimus, cum periclitante torquemur,” Trans. Fremantle, 386.

⁷³ Jerome, *Against Jovinian* 1.49, 294: “haec pauperem commendat, diuitem extollit, deformem redimit, exornat pulchram; bene meretur de maioribus, quorum sanguinem furtiua sobole non uitiat; bene de liberis, quibus nec de matre erubescendum, nec de patre dubitandum est; bene in primis de se, quam a contumelia externi corporis uindicat,” trans. Fremantle, 386.

children.⁷⁴ This is important when one considers that Jerome's text became the basis for many anti-marriage texts in later centuries.⁷⁵ The attitude toward sex as inherently evil except for the purposes of procreation becomes an important, if not the dominant Christian ideology for understanding sexuality in the Middle Ages.⁷⁶

Jerome's view of chastity in marriage borrows from the classical concept of *uniuira* a word whose meaning did not change, but whose significance underwent several transformations over the preceding centuries.⁷⁷ Meaning 'one-man woman,' the word was inherited from republican Rome, but by the fourth century, had developed a very different sense. As Marjorie Lightman explains, it is a linguistic term which helped maintain historical identity.⁷⁸ This is an important consideration in the light of Jerome's task to demonstrate his idealisation of female chastity as not merely a Christian ideal, but a perpetuation of traditional values.

By the Christian period, use of the word had spread to all social levels, and the epithet became a social commonplace. Christians adopted the word and expanded its use to include celibate widowhood, a condition to which the newly Christianised society gave an "almost religious significance."⁷⁹ With this immutability of meaning, both pagans and Christians discovered an element of commonality and continuity. Penelope, as far as I know, was not described as *uniuira*, but her behaviour was certainly consistent with the idea; even though all believed her husband was dead, she refused to remarry. This exemplified Jerome's ideal of marital loyalty until death, the majority of examples

⁷⁴ Coyne, *Performing Virginit*y, 4.

⁷⁵ An example of the figure of Penelope being used in misogynist texts inspired by Jerome's work include: Walter Map, *De nugis curialium* [Courtiers' Trifles], trans. M.R. James, Christopher Nugent Lawrence Brooke, and R. A. B. Mynors, Oxford medieval texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1983). See also D. S. Silva and Jr John P. Brennan, "Medieval Manuscripts of Jerome against Jovinian," *Manuscripta* 13 (1969), 161-66: 161. Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others*, 34.

⁷⁶ John W. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France around 1200*, The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), xiv-xv.

⁷⁷ Majorie Lightman and William Zeisel, "Univira: An Example of Continuity and Change in Roman Society," *Church History* 46, no. 1 (1977), 19-32.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁹ J. B. Frey, "Signification des termes 'monandros' et 'uniuirae,'" *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 20 (1930): 48-60, 58, cited in Lightman, "Univira," 32.

introduced to demonstrate this point. Unlike these other women, however, Penelope did not die for love of her husband. She maintained her chastity by use of intellect (through cunning) and did not succumb to the blandishments of the suitors. Jerome's lack of interest in the detail of Penelope's story suggests that this information was not relevant for the intended audience. Penelope was a well established example of the married woman and therefore could not be excluded, but the focus was not on what women should do to remain chaste while married, albeit separated from their husbands. Jerome wanted to show the longstanding importance of chastity among Christians and pagans alike to establish that Christianity was not too extreme in its approach.

Just as Jerome's inclusion of Penelope in his list of chaste women recognised Homer's celebration of her character, ("Penelope's chastity is the theme of Homer's song"), so too Claudian invokes Homer to justify his use of Penelope. Claudian wrote for the imperial courts of Theodosius and Honorius at a time when the maintenance of the Western Empire did not seem so precarious. Claudian's mother tongue was Greek, but he has been described as "one of the ablest of the poet rhetoricians that ever used the Latin tongue."⁸⁰ Classical motifs are common in many of his works, which has been taken to indicate that he was a pagan.⁸¹ His departure from Africa (still part of the Roman Empire) at a time when pagans were being persecuted suggests this is the case, but his works, despite their reliance on classical precedents, were written for a Christian court.⁸² His *Laus Serenae* (In Praise of Serena) was written in the early fifth century and was probably never completed.⁸³ Serena was the adopted daughter of the previous Emperor Theodosius, and the wife of the general Stilico, who had been regent for Honorius in his minority. The poem refers to

⁸⁰ Frederick James Edward Raby, *A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages*, Spec, ed., Two vols., vol. One (Oxford: Sandpiper Books, Ltd., 1997), 89.

⁸¹ See for example Eleanor Shipley Duckett, *Latin Writers of the Fifth Century* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), 17; Raby, *A History of Secular Latin Poetry*, 96.

⁸² Alan Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 199.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 415. Cameron speculates that Claudian was absent from the court between 400-402 CE, and returned but died sometime in 404 CE. Works such as the *Laus Serenae* would have been written to be performed for an audience at the court. Several other works being worked on around 403 CD are thought to be incomplete. For a construction of the last years of Claudian's life, see *ibid.*, 414-17.

Penelope in her capacity as loyal married woman, linking her to other chaste women, including Alcestis. The greater space is given to Penelope in his praise of her fidelity:

Does old Homer's soaring soul essay aught else throughout his song?
Dangers from Charybdis' gulf, from Scylla's dogs, from Circe's cup, the
escape of Ulysses from the greed of Antiphates, the passage of the ship
between the rocks where sat the Sirens to whose alluring voices the rowers
were deaf, the blinding of Cyclops, the desertion of Calypso – all these do
but redound to the glory of Penelope, and the whole scene is set to display
her chastity alone. Toils by land and sea, ten years of war, ten years of
wandering, all do but illustrate the fidelity of a wife...

Let Penelope by artful delays deceive the madness of the suitors and, ever
faithful to Ulysses, delude their solicitations, ever winding up again by
night the warp of her day spun web. Yet none of these heroines dare to vie
with Serena.⁸⁴

What is particularly striking about this praise of Penelope is the focus on her husband's actions. Her worth is judged by how much Ulysses went through to return home to her, even in the latter part in which the poet refers to her deception of the suitors, there is no indication of why she would reject the suitors, except perhaps to avoid their madness. This echoes the values found in Jerome's discussion of love and marriage. Chastity is the antithesis to madness of desire. There is no love mentioned here or recognition of intimacy, emotional or physical.

This poem was panegyric, written in praise of another married woman, but unlike the poems written by Propertius, Ovid and Statius this poem was not written to praise the wife/lover of the poet. She had been removed from the

⁸⁴ Claudian, *Carmina minora* 30. "Maeonii mens alta senis? quod stagna Charybdis/ armavit, quod Scylla canes, quod pocula Circe,/ Antiphatae vitata fames surdoque carina/ remige Sirenum cantus transvecta tenaces,/ lumine fraudatus Cyclops, contempta Calypso:/ Penelopae decus est atque uni tanta paratur/ scaena pudicitiae. terrae pelagique labores et saevi totidem bellis quot fluctibus anni /coniugii docuere fidem. Penelope trahat arte procos fallatque furentes /stamina nocturnae relegens Laertia telae:/non tamen audebunt titulis certare Serenae." *Claudius Claudianus*, trans. Maurice Platnauer, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), vol. 2, 249-50.

realm of elegiac poetry which spoke the language of love. Penelope had returned to her role as dutiful wife.

Conclusion

The figure of Penelope continued to be used in post-Augustan Rome to exemplify chastity, but the representations differed. Some voices, borrowing from earlier elegiac models, preserved and extended the sexual identity of Penelope, reflecting the importance of an intimate relationship between husband and wife. This chastity was premised on the need for social stability. As virginity was prioritised over marriage by some Christian writers, Penelope's role was limited to reflecting the ideals of *uniuira*, as her loyalty to her absent husband was comparable to the chaste widows on the ladder to salvation. Her idealisation was reinforced by pairing her with the abstract nouns *pudicitia* and *castitas*. The intimacy of the relationship was not as relevant in these representations. Jerome presented her within an array of women prepared to die to preserve their honour, a model of chastity that recurred in later centuries. Intimacy was not important in his ideation of chastity.

This does not mean that Christians did not celebrate the intimacy of the marital relationship. Scholars like Cooper have stressed the importance for the quality of the marital relationship within early Christian marriages, but we have no evidence of Penelope being used in this discourse. It is possible that other models, particularly biblical ones like Esther and Judith, were used instead of pagan ones. The use of the battle imagery in works written for women in late antiquity,⁸⁵ as discussed by Cooper, suggests that different models were required to that provided by Penelope.

As the Roman Empire was coming to a close in the West, Penelope maintained her role as a figure representing an ideal, her virtue representing different ideals for different communities, each of these models of chastity, the loving wife or the *uniuira* dedicated to one man until death, were discussed in relation to expectations of female behaviour. This pattern changed with the

⁸⁵ Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household*, 17.

dramatic shifts in social, religious and educational practices in the early medieval period (sixth-eleventh centuries) when Penelope and her virtue were removed from discourse on women and their behaviour. This will be the subject in the next chapter as Latin literature retreated behind monastic walls.

Chapter Three

Penelope in the Early Middle Ages: A Grammatical and Rhetorical Figure

The Christianisation of Rome, the absence of Penelope from Virgil's most influential text, and the increasing dominance of monasticism within early medieval education had the potential to eradicate the Greek heroine from early medieval literary memory.¹ While Homer could still be taught to pagan and Christian students in schools up to the fourth century, familiarity with Greek in the Latin West became very limited. Chastity, a virtue applied to Penelope by Tertullian and Jerome, tended to be invoked much more within an ascetic approach to life; it shifted its meaning from being a marital value to signifying the ascetic rejection of marriage. As life long virginity became the ideal for both men and women, young people were encouraged to turn their backs on traditional societal institutions like marriage to pursue a life of asceticism.² This ideal was reinforced by the development of the cult of the Virgin Mary which started to develop from the fifth century in both the Greek East and the Latin West.³ Of course people did still marry, but new models of behaviour, based on scripture and ascetic example, replaced pagan ones.⁴ Despite this, Penelope was

¹ The role of monasteries as sites of education in the early medieval period can be found in John J. Contreni, *Carolingian Learning, Masters, and Manuscripts*, Collected Studies Series (Hampshire: Variorum, 1992), 4; Rosamond McKitterick, "The Written Word and Oral Communication: Rome's Legacy to the Franks," in *The Frankish Kings and Culture in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), 104; David L. Wagner, *The Seven Liberal Arts in the Middle Ages* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 21.

² For a discussion of the shift from virginity as a premarital state to a life-long pattern, see Helen M. Jewell, *Women In Dark Age And Early Medieval Europe c.500-1200* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 29. Kate Cooper refers to the choice of sons and daughters to avoid marriage as a "social revolution" of the long fifth century. Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household*, ix. The controversy over prioritising virginity over married life is discussed in Hunter, "Helvidius, Jovinian, and the Virginity of Mary in the Late Fourth Century," 56-70. .

³ Averil Cameron, "The Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: Religious Development and Myth-Making," in *The Church and Mary*, ed. Robert Norman Swanson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Ecclesiastical History Society by the Boydell Press, 2004), 1.

⁴ The ideal wife from Proverbs 31: 10-31 is probably the most recognised of these. See Jewell, *Women In Dark Age*, 29. The good wife could also be equated with the Church. See McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 48, Esther and Judith are two biblical figures used to represent the virtuous woman. See Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household*, 1.

never completely forgotten and maintained a limited and fragmentary place within the Latin tradition from the fifth to ninth centuries, but she was removed from a discourse on female worth; instead, she was used as a personification of attributes associated with the female ideal, above all *castitas* and *pudicitia*. I argue that in this capacity, the figure of Penelope was a fundamental element in the development of female personification, characteristic of later medieval allegorical works.

Yet the survival of literary allusions to Penelope between the fifth and ninth centuries demonstrates that memories of this classical figure did not completely disappear in the Latin West, even if they were now grossly simplified. Previous studies on the medieval reception and interpretation of Penelope skip these centuries, instead assuming that the classical representation of Penelope as an exemplar of chastity was re-established in the twelfth century and beyond.⁵ Studying her image during the early medieval period offers a perspective on assumptions about appropriate female behaviour and the role of the feminine in literature, even as her name was disengaged from discourse on female behaviour. As might be expected within Christian monastic tradition, her attributes continued to contribute to an idealisation of the feminine. This is especially significant as the fifth century is recognised as pivotal to later medieval development of a literary use of the feminine as personification, arguably one of the most influential of rhetorical strategies.⁶ Barbara Newman argues that feminine personifications had religious import, filling a “niche” in divine mediation.⁷ According to Joan M. Ferrante, women as abstract concepts

⁵ This is particularly so in the case of one unpublished doctoral dissertation which did not even consider which aspects of the ‘classical’ version of Penelope were transmitted to the twelfth century. Grigar, “Penelopeia.” The idea of Penelope’s continuity of representation was perhaps less relevant to the symbolic analysis of a Renaissance painting by Pinturicchio, however the dissertation by Maddalena Sanfilippo at least did acknowledge the potential of the pagan poem considered in my previous chapter which might have been written in the fourth century. From there, she discusses the role of the *aetas ovidiana* in the twelfth century. Maddalena Sanfilippo, “Coniunx semper Ulixis ero: Penelope nell’ arte e nella letteratura dall’ antichità all’età moderna” (Doctoral Thesis, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Università degli studi di Siena, 2005).

⁶ Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household*, 69.

⁷ Newman continues, “beneath the remote masculine Godhead, the mediating figures had to be female,” Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ruth Mazo Karras and Edward Peters, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 35 and 37.

were considered “essential to man's moral and intellectual well-being.”⁸ I argue that the development of this literary role for women as moral compass for men was shaped by late antique and early medieval treatments of Penelope.

The continuing familiarity with Penelope through this early monastic age will be reinforced by a discussion of her inclusion in ninth-century copies of earlier grammatical texts. The grammars of Donatus and Priscian were arguably the most celebrated of the late antique grammarians used in the medieval classroom. Being mentioned in these textbooks, without reference to Ulysses or Homer as identifying markers, establishes Penelope's continuing recognition and relevance to the interpretation of classical texts in this period.

Penelope is one of several classical figures whose presence in literature from the early Middle Ages is largely overlooked. Studies on the medieval and Renaissance reception of Dido and Lucretia do not cover this period.⁹ On the other hand, there is growing recognition in the reception of attitudes to gender for the need to trace continuities within literature.¹⁰ In early medieval texts, literary allusions to women from the classical period tend to disengage them from their social roles as mothers, wives, daughters and lovers; they cannot really be read as women in their own right as their attributes are abstracted via allegory. Known female characters competed with abstract ideals personified as women. The figure of Penelope blurred this boundary between a specific figure and abstract ideals.

From the fifth century, intellectual pursuits tended to revolve more around the Word of God than around the study of pagan literature. This meant that there was limited use for pagan figures like Penelope.¹¹ The written word was used more as a means for maintaining the knowledge of previous generations than for creative expression, responding to the immediate needs of

⁸ Joan M. Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature* (Durham, N.C.: The Labyrinth Press, 1985), 2.

⁹ For Dido, see Desmond, *Reading Dido*, see Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia*; Jed, *Chaste Thinking*; Matthes, *The Rape of Lucretia and the Founding of Republics*.

¹⁰ Barbara Gold, *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts: The Latin Tradition*, SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 1997). See the introduction.

¹¹ R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 12.

the social environment. The production of treatises and manuals served to ensure that knowledge was passed on in writing, rather than through oral transmission. Although eloquence through oratory had been essential for the civic man of classical Rome, the study of written words and their meanings, including the various ways they can be read, became the hallmark of education in the early medieval period.¹² The use of allegory increased both as a means for recording and interpreting information. The recognition of the allegorical potential of language required skills in exegesis, whereby texts were stripped down to their bare elements and then reconstructed to find the true meaning.¹³ The Bible was the most important text to be read and analysed in this way, but it was not the only one. Both Virgil and Homer, despite their pagan origins, were understood to have had access to worldly truth, which was inscribed into their texts.¹⁴ Latin texts from the classical period were read through a Christian lens as monks and priests were taught Latin, which was to become the universal language of religion in the West.¹⁵ Without any Latin summary of the *Odyssey*, as there was for the *Iliad*, students had no direct access to knowledge of Homer's Penelope.

Married women continued to play an essential, if subordinate, role within the family and the notion of marriage as a life long commitment gained currency.¹⁶ No longer was a widow expected to remarry and participate in the construction of a new family unit, a development that might have provided the ideal environment for Penelope to transcend her pagan origins, as can be seen

¹² Marco Formisano, "Late Antiquity, New Departures," in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin Literature*, ed. Ralph J. Hexter and David Townsend (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 516.

¹³ Allegory assumes at least two levels of meaning in a text, where one is literal and the other is an alternate interpretation. See Jane Chance, *Medieval Mythography* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 5. Also, Wendy Elgersma Helleman, *The Feminine Personification of Wisdom: A Study of Homer's Penelope, Cappadocian Macrina, Boethius' Philosophia, and Dante's Beatrice* (Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 11. Max Laistner interprets the emphasis on allegory in the early medieval period as a reflection of the need for teaching materials which were not provided by Christian texts. Allegorical reading of the pagan texts offered a compromise position. Max Ludwig Wolfram Laistner, *Thought and letters in western Europe, A.D. 500 to 900*, New ed. (London: Methuen, 1957), 45.

¹⁴ Ann Astell describes the ancient epics as becoming "transparent coverings of the truths they simultaneously veiled and conveyed." Ann W. Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 6.

¹⁵ Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, 1 and 55.

¹⁶ Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household*, ix-x.

by her earlier inclusion in Jerome's *Against Jovinian*. Her constant loyalty to an absent and possibly dead husband would have been consistent with the new ideals of life long commitment, but new models of wifely devotion were established, based upon scripture, evidence is sparse, but Kate Cooper has convincingly argued that in texts for women from the fifth century, like *Ad Gregoriam in palatio*, manuals for Christian women focused on battle ideology.¹⁷ In this context, Penelope, who had never been associated with fighting, was no longer useful. Her association with the ideals of *castitas* and *pudicitia*, however, did provide a means for her continuing rhetorical presence in early medieval journey literature.

The potential for the figure of Penelope in providing a template for a feminine ideal who guides men is evident in the very influential *Consolation of Philosophy* written by Boethius in the early sixth century. Two personifications from this text, Fortune and Lady Philosophy, are recognised by Joan M. Ferrante as foundational to the twelfth-century development of literary allegory.¹⁸ Similarly, Barbara Newman in her study on the use of women in allegorical texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries argues that Boethius and the *Consolation* were foundational for this genre.¹⁹ One could argue, however, that in creating the image of Philosophy, Boethius was alluding not just to the figure of Wisdom, but to the figure of Penelope as the focus of the heroic journey of Ulysses, the archetypal pilgrim.

The role of the female in journey literature.

Boethius wrote the *Consolation* while in prison awaiting execution. He drew upon many classical sources, providing a skilful combination of varied literary forms.²⁰ As Boethius dramatises his own educational ascent to knowledge of

¹⁷ For a discussion of wife as *miles Christi*, see *ibid.*, 17. Authorship of the text is debated, some claiming author unknown, while others name Arnobius Jr. As it does not play a significant role in this thesis, I am not going to enter the debate.

¹⁸ Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature*, 49.

¹⁹ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 35.

²⁰ V E, Watts, "Introduction," in *Consolation of Philosophy* (London: The Folio Society, 1998), 24.

God through introspection and meditation,²¹ he provides a literary conduit for the continuation of the classical epic tradition. Scholars such as Ann Astell, Robert Lamberton, Jane Chance and Paul Olson, recognise Boethius's *Consolation* as refashioning Ulysses' journey with a Neoplatonist perspective, in which the narrator confronts shadowy figures who assist him on his journey to wisdom.²² In this context, wisdom was equated with the use of knowledge to contemplate God. As all things were created by God, one's personal journey reflected the desire for a return and reunion with the Divine. The *nostos* of Ulysses, from Ithaca and back again while experiencing various trials, offered an appropriate model. Among the shadowy figures in the *Consolation*, an early medieval reworking of the journey literature, the most significant is Lady Philosophy, a supernatural being. She provides guidance to the narrator, while also marking the goal of his journey. This created a pattern for allegorical women included within medieval texts. The figure of an ideal woman was no longer presented within the context of marriage, but as articulating a spiritual or intellectual goal.

The story commences with the narrator Boethius, inspired by the muses, bemoaning his fortune. Then a figure enters, not yet identified as Lady Philosophy: "Her clothes were made of imperishable material, of the finest thread woven with the most delicate skill. (Later she told me that she had made them with her own hands)."²³ The reference to the woman's weaving draws a parallel with Penelope who has been described in scholarship as the paradigmatic weaver.²⁴ The unknown woman then banishes the Muses, "the

²¹ Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*, 12; Watts, "Introduction," 32; Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 275; Paul A. Olson, *The Journey to Wisdom: Self-education in Patristic and Medieval Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 90.

²² Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*; Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, 111; Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 276-9; Olson, *The journey to wisdom*, 90. There is a tendency to conflate philosophy and wisdom in medieval writings, which Helleman suggests can be traced back to Augustine and even earlier. See Helleman, *The Feminine Personification of Wisdom*, 173-4 and 81-2.

²³ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, 1.1.3 *Vestes erant tenuissimis filis subtili artificio indissolubili materia perfectae, quas, uti post eadem prodente cognoui, suis manibus ipsa texuerat; quarum speciem, ueluti fumosas imagines solet, caligo quaedam neglectae uetustatis obduxerat,*" trans. V. E. Watts (London: The Folio Society, 1998; reprint, 2001), 38.

²⁴ Ann. L. T. Bergren, "Language and The Female in Early Greek Thought," *Arethusa* 16, no. 1/2 (1983), 69-95: 71. A discussion on the Homeric influence on the late antique metaphorical uses of weaving, see Helleman, *The Feminine Personification of Wisdom*, 150-1.

very women who kill the fruitful harvest of Reason” suggesting they might more appropriately be named Sirens.²⁵ The use of the term ‘Sirens’ draws attention to the story of Ulysses, who was able to resist the lure of the siren song in his journey home to Penelope. There are several other references to Homeric themes in the *Consolation*, all of them spoken by Lady Philosophy.²⁶ Robert Lamberton stresses the relationship between Lady Philosophy and Athena. Athena represents reason and the principles of philosophy that Boethius learned in his earlier education.²⁷ Athena was also an important figure in the *Odyssey*, looking out for the welfare of Ulysses, as well as assisting Penelope. It was Athena who had inspired the weaving ruse to deceive the suitors.²⁸ Paul Olson in his discussion of the text acknowledges Lamberton’s association of the Lady with Athena but then notes a further resemblance to Penelope: “Philosophy’s actions make her both the Athena who tells the traveller to go home and the Penelope who is the end of his journey.”²⁹ He reinforces this link by referring to her garments made of ‘the finely woven threads’ which, he explains, medieval commentators interpreted as Philosophy’s subtle reasoning.³⁰

Penelope was associated with reasoning in some early Greek literature. Like most educated men of the time, Boethius was bilingual, reading both Greek and Latin. He was clearly influenced by his reading of Homer, but there are other Greek writers who might have inspired his Lady Philosophy. W E Helleman identifies various Greek authors who interpreted Penelope as an image of Philosophy; Aristippus of Cyrene (ca 435-350 BCE),³¹ Pseudo-Plutarch (writing about Bion of Borysthenes ca 325-255 BCE)³² and Stobaeus,³³ (quoting Ariston of Chios, fl ca 250 BCE) in the fifth century CE, all wrote

²⁵ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Watts, 38.

²⁶ Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 276.

²⁷ Ibid. It is also worth recalling that Athena protected both Ulysses and Penelope and that her mother had been the swallowed Metis.

²⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 18:181, trans. Fagles 381. Helleman, *The Feminine Personification of Wisdom*, 50.

²⁹ Olson, *The journey to wisdom*, 96.

³⁰ Remigius “Commentary”, 316; Pseudo-Erigena, “Commentary” 14; William of Conches “Commentary,” fol.8v; Pseudo-Thomas, *Expositio Aurea*, 6; and Nicholas Trivet, “Commentary,” fol. 12r, listed in *ibid.*, 263, n. 73.

³¹ Helleman, “Penelope as Lady Philosophy,” 286.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 287.

about the study of philosophy using the *Odyssey* as an allegorical model. For these Greek writers, Penelope was the ideal of philosophy, while her maidservants were the inferior or preliminary studies within an educational programme, which led to philosophy.³⁴ These preliminary studies include Philo's subjects of grammar, poetry, geometry, astronomy and rhetoric, which all demand reasoning, but were considered inferior to philosophy.³⁵ In these descriptions, the suitors are represented not as single minded in their pursuit of philosophy, but as being distracted by, and settling for, the maidservants. Helleman notes that in this interpretation, the suitors were denigrated for not giving first priority to their study of philosophy, as represented by Penelope, and for being distracted by lesser pursuits. In presenting Philosophy as an ideal woman, Boethius was continuing this Greek tradition of reframing the figure of Penelope as the goal of any committed to the pursuit of philosophy.

Greek scholarship continued to maintain the identification of Penelope with philosophy in the twelfth century; Eustathius of Thessalonica wrote a collection of scholia on the *Odyssey*, providing numerous allegorical interpretations of the text. He interpreted Ulysses's stay with Calypso as a preoccupation with astronomy, while suggesting that he "especially longs for philosophy pursued according to method and rule.....It will be clear that Penelope is such (i.e. she represents philosophy) when we reflect on the loom on which she performed her weaving and unravelling."³⁶

The allusion of Boethius to the tearing of Lady Philosophy's garment by would-be philosophers also draws attention to an important element in Penelope's development. The violence of these men can be equated to that of Penelope's suitors, but, like the suitors, the pretenders do not acquire all they desire, but mere fragments.³⁷ True wisdom is not piecemeal. Like Penelope, Lady Philosophy rejects the advances of the false philosophers as she

³⁴ Ibid., 286-7.

³⁵ Philo offers similar allegorical reading to explain the differences between the preliminary subjects and true philosophy using the biblical story of Abraham siring legitimate children to his wife, Sarah (representing philosophy). The children to the servant, Hagar (preliminary subjects) are held to have no intrinsic value. Helleman, "Penelope as Lady Philosophy," 290.

³⁶ Helleman, *The Feminine Personification of Wisdom*, 45.

³⁷ Ibid., 162.

“struggle[s] and crie[s] out.”³⁸ Although there may be no single model for a figure like Lady Philosophy, who was more likely to be an amalgam of ideas, Penelope deserves to be considered as a significant influence in the development of this powerful personification.³⁹

Penelope’s role as a foundation figure who leads man to salvation or goodness is reinforced in mythographic texts of the early medieval period. Penelope is reconfigured as a moral ideal to be followed, as one moves away from material concerns (represented by lust) to the wisdom of bodily integrity. This poses what has been described as the “classic male dilemma” whereby man has to choose between two allegorical dichotomies.⁴⁰ Two women represent the opposing options, to be understood as aspects of a *psychomachia*, the internal struggle for control of opposing forces, as they each pull the man toward them.⁴¹ One of the characteristics which reinforces the potential for Penelope (with Ulysses as the man) as a model for this process is the importance of their intimate relationship. Newman argues that this model requires that the alternate relationships confronting the protagonist be forged if they do not already exist.⁴² In this situation, the representation of the two women is not for the benefit of female emulation: they represent abstract constructs, like chastity, which is presented as a necessary attribute for anyone seeking wisdom. The wise man is wedded to chastity, as represented by the marriage of Ulysses to Penelope. The opposing force could be any of the Homeric distractions in Ulysses’s journey home, like Circe, Calypso or the Sirens. In this instance, these relationships not only existed but were universally acknowledged, fulfilling Newman’s requirement that the intimate relationships already exist.

The earliest extant occurrence of this type of representation in the Latin tradition involving Ulysses and Penelope can be found in Fulgentius’s *Mythologies*, written in North African in the fifth to sixth centuries, during the

³⁸ Boethius, *The Consolation*, 1.3.7 trans. Watts, 42.

³⁹ Manuel Aguirre, “The Sovereignty of Wisdom: Boethius’ *Consolation* in the Light of Folklore,” *Mnemosyne* 65, no. 4-5 (2012), 674-94: 680.

⁴⁰ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 18.

⁴¹ Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature*, 43.

⁴² Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 25.

time of the Vandals.⁴³ The wisdom of Ulysses is presented as the result of his long term attachment (marriage) to chastity, represented by Penelope. Not a lot is known about this writer. Jane Chance suggests that Fulgentius and Boethius had much in common. As they wrote at a similar time, it is likely that they shared a common source, possibly a Neoplatonist interpretation of Virgil by Severus.⁴⁴ Interest in the *Mythologies* continued for several centuries; the earliest surviving manuscripts date from the eighth century and extracts are included in other texts. There are also six manuscripts from the ninth century recorded in monastic catalogues at Lorsch, Bobbio and Fulda, centres of Carolingian scholarship. The use of Fulgentius in this period has been described as extensive.⁴⁵ The material regarding Penelope was also included in the works of the anonymous second Vatican Mythographer of the ninth century.⁴⁶

The reference to Penelope in the *Mythographies* is embedded in a section dealing specifically with lust and the need to turn away or reject it. The text is an encyclopaedic work in which the author hopes to convey Greek mythology stripped of its 'lies' to expose truth, perhaps with a Christian orientation, requiring the removal of any eroticism.⁴⁷ Lust, in the mythographic tradition, was often associated with Scylla, one of the Homeric monsters, who was said by Fulgentius to have been deformed by one of Circe's potions so that her loins were filled with wolves and wild sea dogs: "For Scylla in Greek is said to be for *esquina*, which in Latin we call violence. And what is violence but lust?"⁴⁸ At the end of the paragraph, connecting Circe to the idea of the destructive forces of lust, Fulgentius writes: "Ulysses also sailed harmlessly past her [Circe], for wisdom scorns lust; he had a wife called Penelope the chaste, because all

⁴³ There was also a Bishop Fulgentius in North Africa at similar time in history, which has caused some confusion in the past. Fulgentius, *Fulgentius the Mythographer*, trans. Leslie George Whitbread (n.c.: Ohio State University, 1971), 3-4.

⁴⁴ Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, 111.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 59, 344. There is doubt over who wrote the second Vatican mythography. There is some suggestion that the author might have been Remigius of Auxerre. Kathleen O. Elliott and J. P. Elder, "A Critical Edition of the Vatican Mythographers," *Transactions of the American Philological Society* 78 (1947), 189-207: 202. Jane Chance argues for it having been written by a woman, Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, 300.

⁴⁷ Fulgentius, *Fulgentius the Mythographer*, 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

chastity is linked to wisdom.”⁴⁹ At a literal level, this is a story about a man, Ulysses, and his journey home from the Trojan War. Along the way he encounters many obstacles, such as Scylla and Circe, but he has a greater prize waiting at home for him, a chaste wife. The allegoric message is that wisdom can only be found by spurning lust and cleaving to chastity. The purpose of the text may be didactic, but Penelope’s presence is not to instruct women to be chaste, nor to admonish men to seek a chaste wife. This is emphasised by the use of words *castissimam* and *castitas*. The writer was not interested in her role as a married woman, for which the terms derived from *pudor* would have been more appropriate. *Pudor* and its cognates reflect the outward manifestations of chastity, including appropriate behaviours, while *castitas* reflects the state of being chaste. The lesson to be learned is that wisdom can only be found once worldly pleasures, such as lust, have been rejected through the use of reason/wisdom.

Penelope was used to represent chastity as a concept in mythography. The female gendered aspect of Latin abstract concepts, especially the virtues, reinforced this shift from using female figures merely to discuss female behaviour. Penelope aligned with other allegorical figures, whose influence could inspire a man toward wisdom by rejecting lust. It is possible that she was also an important element to the development of the feminine in this role. In reinterpretations of the *Odyssey* into pseudo-autobiographical accounts of the journey away from worldly and bodily concerns to Wisdom, understood as representing the path to God/salvation, medieval commentators allegorised Penelope.⁵⁰ The identification of Penelope with an abstraction is also apparent in texts even more fundamental to teaching: treatises on Latin grammar.

⁴⁹ Fulgentius, *Mythologies* 2.9: “Hanc etiam Ulixes innocuus transit, quia sapientia libidinem contemnit; unde et uxorem habere dicitur Penelopam castissimam, quod omnis castitas sapientiae coniungatur,” trans. Whitbread, 74.

⁵⁰ Olson, *The Journey to Wisdom*, xix. On further Neo-Platonist readings of Ulysses, this time as the dead soul finding his celestial home, see Pierre Courcelle, “Symboles funéraires du néo-Platonisme Latin: Le vol de Dédale - Ulysse et les Sirènes,” *Revue des Études Anciennes* 46 (1944), 65-93: 77.

Latin Grammars

Penelope as a recognisable literary figure had been used to discuss grammatical concerns from late antiquity.⁵¹ By the ninth century, the use of Latin was diminishing and vernacular languages were gaining momentum. Largely taught in monastic settings, Latin was still required for administrative purposes and to access scripture. Various treatises on grammar written in earlier centuries were available to assist Latin learning.⁵² Two of the most important, the *Ars Maior* of Donatus and Priscian's *Institutiones Grammaticae*, survived with modifications throughout the Middle Ages.⁵³ Through the ongoing processes of copying and amending manuscripts, the example of Penelope was inserted into the main body of text in some manuscripts, despite not being named in the earlier, original texts. Such modifications were a standard educational practice. Just as classical sources were 'corrected' and embellished over time, so too were the works of the grammarians.⁵⁴ Margaret Gibson notes that these texts were read, then re-read, thus increasing the explanatory apparatus, and creating a series of manuscripts with unique detailing.⁵⁵ At some stage in the ninth century, someone believed Penelope was a sufficiently well-known figure to be a descriptor for the proper name for the abstract concept of *pudicitia*. I am not arguing that her use was a major force in intellectual development, but her appearance in this context is surprising as it has been argued that the additions and modifications in these works tended away from pagan sources.⁵⁶ These representations assisted in the maintenance of Penelope's association with chastity, but in a form consistent with her status as a married woman; *pudicitia* was swapped for *castitas*.

It cannot be established when Penelope moved from the margins of grammatical textbooks into the main text, as the earlier manuscripts are not

⁵¹ Some grammarians noted who Penelope was, such as Severus and Pseudacronis. Severus also noted how to decline Greek names, using Penelope as an example. Aelius Festus Aphthonius was a fourth or fifth century grammarian who used Penelope to explain the metre of her name within poetry.

⁵² Keith Allan, *The Western Classical Tradition in Linguistics*, 2nd ed., Equinox textbooks and surveys in linguistics (Oakville, CT: Equinox Pub. Ltd, 2009), 93.

⁵³ Huntsman, "Grammar," 1983, 71

⁵⁴ Margaret Gibson, "Milestones in the Study of Priscian," *Viator* 23 (1992), 17-33: 27.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁶ Allan, *The Western Classical Tradition in Linguistics*, 131.

extant. Grammars had become the basis for Latin education in the early medieval period, even being used in Ireland by the seventh century.⁵⁷ The *Ars Maior* of Donatus, originally written in the fourth century, was used to teach fundamental Latin, describing the various classes of words and their functions.⁵⁸ Three copies of this text preserved in ninth-century manuscripts are associated with Irish scholarship, perhaps derived from a common model, but only two of these mention Penelope. The scribe of one of these manuscripts, the Lorsch commentary, *Expositio in Donatum Maiorem* is unknown.⁵⁹ The second and more detailed of the two works, *In Donati Artem Maiorem*, was written by Sedulius Scotus, a well-known Irish teacher who moved to the continent in the mid-ninth century.⁶⁰ Penelope's role in these texts is not complex, but the presence of her name is a sign of continuing recognition by an educated audience. There are no explanatory notes on who she was and why she was chaste.

Penelope's name was invoked to demonstrate how a proper noun could be used as an abstract concept. This grammatical function was not an aspect of the text written by Donatus in the fourth century, which focused more specifically on more basic Latin learning. The inclusion of the abstract concept as a function of word types is likely to have been the result of some scholars' familiarity with the sixth-century Byzantine grammar of Priscian, whose *Grammatical Institutes* offered a more sophisticated approach to Latin

⁵⁷ The importance of both of these texts in teaching Latin in the early medieval period is discussed in Max Ludwig Wolfram Laistner, *Thought and Letters in Western Europe, A.D. 500 to 900*, New ed. (London: Methuen, 1957), 39. No Irish manuscripts of the seventh century are extant. For information on the use of archaic Irish glosses that appear in the later continental manuscripts see Gibson, "Milestones in the Study of Priscian," 26. Rijcklof Hofman, "Glosses in a Ninth Century Priscian Ms. Probably Attributable to Heiric of Auxerre, (d. ca. 876) and Their Connections," *Studi Medioevali* 29 (1988), 805-39: 806.

⁵⁸ Gibson, "Milestones in the Study of Priscian," 18; Allan, *The Western Classical Tradition in Linguistics*, 93-100.

⁵⁹ *Ars Laureshamensis: Expositio in Donatum Maiorem*, ed. Bengt Löfstedt, CCCM 40A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977).

⁶⁰ Sedulius Scotus, *In Donati Artem Maiorem*, ed. Bengt Löfstedt, CCCM 40B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977). The third commentary, also based on the same lost Irish manuscript and often studied with these other two, does not contain any reference to Penelope. Murethach (Muridac), *In Donati Artem Maiorem*, ed. Louis Holtz, CCCM 40B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977). For the distribution of Irish commentaries on Donatus, see Louis Holtz, "Sur Trois Commentaires Irlandais de l' Art Majeur de Donat au IX^e Siecle," *Revue d'histoire des textes* 2 (1972), 45-72; *ibid.*

grammar. As in the case of the commentaries on Donatus, the figure of Penelope is not present in all copies of Priscian's text. Her inclusion, therefore, was probably an earlier gloss that was eventually written into Priscian's *Grammatical Institutes*, and then incorporated in some Donatus manuscripts. Priscian's text was a particularly useful text in the Carolingian monastic centres interested in the Greek language, as it included many Greek quotations.⁶¹

The Priscian manuscripts containing the additional reference to Penelope, like those of Donatus, were produced in the ninth century and are linked to the Carolingian interest in classical material.⁶² Manuscript G, now housed in St Gall, believed to have been written in Castledermot in Ireland, around 845 CE,⁶³ was being taken to the continent by Sedulius Scotus around 848 CE to the court of Charles the Bald, but it cannot be attributed to him.⁶⁴ L is another ninth-century manuscript dated to 838 CE in Irish miniscule. Unlike the previous manuscript, it is thought to have been written in an Irish centre on the continent, before the arrival of Johannes and Sedulius Scotus.⁶⁵ It was connected to Laon or Soissons in the mid ninth century. The Karlsruhe manuscript is similarly dated to the ninth century, written probably between 836 and 855 at Laon or Soisson.⁶⁶ The presence of all of these manuscripts on the continent responds to an increased interest in classical and Greek literature in Carolingian education.

Priscian's grammar involved the explanation of all the different word types, including noun, which are defined as either appellative or proper. The original Priscian text said: "There are certain concrete things that are

⁶¹ Laistner, *Thought and Letters in Western Europe, A.D. 500 to 900*, 39.

⁶² Some of these can be found as St Gall, Leiden and Karlsruhe. These manuscripts are respectively labelled G, L, and K by Keil See Heinrich Keil, *Grammatici latini*, 8 vols., vol. 2 (Hildesheim: G. Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1961), 59.

⁶³ These facts are a composite from Francis John Byrne, 'Introduction' in Timothy O'Neill, *The Irish Hand*, (Mountrath, 1984), xi, cited in Anders Alquist, 'Notes on the Greek Materials in the St.Gall Priscian(Codex 904) in Michael W. Herren, *The Sacred Nectar of the the Greeks: The Study of Greek on the West in the Early Middle Ages*, (London: Kings College, 1988), 196; and Rijcklof Hofman, "Glosses in a Ninth Century Priscian Ms. Probably Attributable to Heiric of Auxerre (†ca. 876) and Their Connections," in *Studi Medievali*, 3rd ser. 29 (1988), 805-839, 809-810.

⁶⁴ Hofman, "Glosses in a Ninth Century Priscian," 809-810.

⁶⁵ Hofman, "Glosses in a Ninth Century Priscian," 811.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

appellatives, such as ‘man’ and there are those with a proper name, such as ‘Terentius.’ Other abstract things are appellatives, such as ‘virtue,’ and proper such as ‘Marital honour (*Pudicitia*).’⁶⁷ *Pudicitia* is introduced as a proper noun, representing a more specific type of virtue. In the ninth-century manuscripts, some scribes have inserted the name of Penelope, certainly a proper noun in the sense that we would recognise.

There are two different factors that are interesting about the insertion of Penelope into the ninth-century versions of these grammars. Priscian had not felt the need to use the name of any woman to demonstrate the idea of *pudicitia*. The manuscripts that do not refer to Penelope do not refer to any other woman in her place. The reference to *pudicitia* as a proper noun by Priscian is ambiguous; it might have referred to the classical goddess venerated in Rome. Little is known about the rites and worship of the goddess, but her effigy is believed to have been dressed by young girls to represent their transition to womanhood and it is possible that only *uniuira*e were allowed to touch the statue.⁶⁸ As a Byzantine scholar of the sixth century, Priscian might have been aware of this pagan ritual dedicated to a goddess who bore the name *Pudicitia*. The need to provide a proper name for the abstract concept is suggestive that it was originally understood as a name but that knowledge of the goddess as such had diminished. *Pudicitia* remained the abstract concept, but the insertion of a name makes a more specific example. Penelope had been a consistent exemplum of chastity (*castitas* and *pudor*) throughout the classical period, but many centuries had passed. I argue that it was her presence in mythographic texts, and her acceptance by some early Christian writers as a representation of chastity, which maintained her reputation. Thus, she was able to be named to explain a concept in the grammars, without need for any explanatory apparatus.

⁶⁷ Keil, *Grammatici latini*, 2, 59. “Sunt enim quaedam corporalia in appellativis, ut ‘homo’, sunt etiam in propriis, ut ‘Terentius’ alia incorporalia in appellativis, ut ‘virtus’, in propriis, ut ‘Pudicitia.’” The term “propria” in these grammars can also refer to “natural” language as a comparison to “figurative” language. Nicolette Zeeman, “The Schools Give a Licence to Poets,” in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. Rita Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 158, 61. This example taken from Priscian’s original text demonstrates that in this instance, the term *propria* is being used in the sense of “particular” as a comparison to “general.”

⁶⁸ Marleen Boudreau Flory, “Sic exempla Parantur: Livia’s Shrine to Concordia and the Porticus Liviae,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 33, no. 3 (1984), 309-30: 314.

The use of Penelope's name to demonstrate an abstract noun might also reflect a desire to reinstate a 'natural' meaning for the word *pudicitia*. In the early medieval period, language was understood to be devolving from the original language of Adam. Words were losing their true meanings through constant use, dislocated from their truth through the use of rhetorical arts, especially pagan poetry. Classical writers had also been concerned about the ways that poetry and its constraints on language (meter) could contaminate words. Howard Bloch, in his study of language etymology and early medieval grammars, quotes Cicero, Quintilian and Augustine to discuss the importance of *propria* in the determination of a word's true meaning, the meaning uncorrupted by time and use. The importance of original meanings can be seen in Cicero as he states the "the proper and definite designations of things were born almost at the same time as the things themselves."⁶⁹ For Quintilian, "words are proper when they bear their original meaning."⁷⁰ Similarly, the inception of a word was essential for Augustine's determination of word meaning: "signs are proper when they are used to designate the objects for which they have been created."⁷¹ When regarded in this light, the inclusion of Penelope is striking; she is implicated in the original meaning of the word *pudicitia*. She and its nature are one.

As these ninth-century manuscripts are the earliest extant commentaries on Priscian, identifying when and how Penelope enters into them is a difficult task. The early days of the Holy Roman Empire certainly encouraged its own Renaissance in classical scholarship, which included a resurgence of interest in the works of Boethius and Fulgentius.⁷² Penelope represents the ongoing attachment to classical figures of both Latin and Greek origins.

⁶⁹ Cicero, *De Oratore*, ed, e. W. Sutton and H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), 2:118 cited in Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, 40. "Ergo utimur verbis aut eis quae propria sunt et certa quasi vocabula rerum paena una nata cum rebus ipsis..."

⁷⁰ Quintilian, *Instituto Oratorio*, ed H, e. Butler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 1:110 "Propria sunt verba, cum id significant, in quod primo denominata sunt," cited in Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, 40.

⁷¹ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 2.10, ed G. Combès and J Farges (Paris: Desclée de Brouer, 1949), p. 258 cited in Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, 40. "Sunt autem signa vel propria, vel translata. Propria dicuntur cum his rebus significandis adhibentur, propter quas sunt instituta..."

⁷² Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, 57.

Conclusion

The representations of Penelope in the grammars and mythographies bear little resemblance to the complex model of womanhood in Homer's *Odyssey* and in Ovid's *Heroides*. Nor do they relate to the social role of women. This Penelope is not associated with a real woman, but a personification of an ideal. Her association with chastity in mythographic texts linked her to philosophy or wisdom, in which the male reader identified with the male protagonist of the text. These ideals were incorporated into the literature of education in monastic settings, the custodians of literature and maintaining the Latin language for accessing sacred texts. By reading Penelope allegorically, or as a personification of chastity, her name was maintained in Christian educational texts suitable for male consumption. It is only in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as Ovid becomes a more important element in education, that Penelope's use in literature is linked back to the role of women in society, the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Chaste Love in the Early Twelfth Century

Penelope resurfaces with new vigour in the discourse on appropriate female behaviour in a small, but significant number of monastic classrooms of the late eleventh century. Her representation in several texts (*accessus* or introductions) designed to guide students' understanding of Ovid's *Heroides* offers new ways of considering female worth. Chastity remains an essential element, but instead of it reflecting the denial of love and its erotic overtones, it embraces the ideal of a spiritual love as an ongoing, life long attachment to one person. Barbara Newman has argued that this period saw a flowering of women's Latinate culture.¹ A limited number of descriptions of women by men, and letters by women, all composed in the early half of the twelfth century reflect this ideal of the woman who loves chastely, the signature characteristic of Penelope in these educational texts.

While attention has been given to the increased focus in this period on both the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, not as much has been accorded to the reawakening of interest in the figure of Penelope.² Not only did Ovid's *Heroides*, little known in the early medieval period, offer a fresh way of teaching Latin, but its use of the female voice offered a unique opportunity for students to identify with the letter writers.³ The arrival of Ovid's *Heroides* in a number of monastic classrooms of the Loire valley and of southern Germany in the late eleventh century

¹ Barbara Newman, "Liminalities: Literate Women in the Long Twelfth Century," in *European Transformations: The Long Twelfth Century*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble and John Van Engen (University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 401.

² Henry Mayr-Harting, "The idea of the Assumption of Mary in the West, 800-1200," in *Mary and the Church*, ed. Norman Robert Swanson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Ecclesiastical History Society by the Boydell Press, 2004), 99.; Marjorie M. Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth: The Magdalen's Origins and Metmorphoses* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), 71-2.

³ Constant J. Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard: Perceptions of Dialogue in Twelfth-Century France*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 92. "They show how an educated woman could invoke a literary fiction to express herself."

contributed to a literary subculture in which elite women, educated within a monastic or courtly environment, with monks as teachers, could participate.⁴ Although the influence of Ovid and the *Heroides* in the development of twelfth-century ideas of nobility and literature has attracted scholarly attention,⁵ the role of Penelope as an ideal of female behaviour in the educational prologues or introductions (*accessus*) to Ovid's *Heroides*, has been largely overlooked. These educational texts repatriate the Ovidian Penelope, who could be understood as devious and cunning (as discussed in chapter one), to create a woman who embodied the ideals of a literate and self defining medieval woman. Through a comparison of three historical women of the early twelfth century, Adela of Blois (c. 1067-1137), Constance of Le Ronceray, in Angers (c. 1090-1106), and Heloise of Argenteuil, just outside Paris (c. 1095-1164), with the descriptions of Penelope in educational material, I will demonstrate the importance of these educational texts in defining new ways of discussing female virtue, based on the unlikely pairing of love and chastity.

Without access to Homer, eleventh-century students of the *Heroides* were limited in their ability to interpret the complexity of Ovid's characterisation of Penelope, as it relied so heavily on intertextual readings.⁶ The medieval understanding of Penelope was subsequently muted, and interpreted via a Christian moralising lens.⁷ As all the poetic letters of the *Heroides* were maintained without any introduction or interpretation provided by the author himself, each letter had to be read on its own merits.⁸ Like most classical texts, the *Heroides* was introduced into the twelfth-century classroom with an introduction or *accessus*. The

⁴ Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, 82.

⁵ Gerald Bond, "Composing Yourself: Ovid's *Heroides*, Baudri of Bourgueil and the Problem of Persona," *Mediaevalia* 13 (1989), 83-117; Gerald A. Bond, *The Loving Subject: Desire, Eloquence, and Power in Romanesque France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1995); C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals 939-1210* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

⁶ On the absence of Greek generally, Alton and Wormell, "Ovid in the Medieval Schoolroom," 36.

⁷ Fausto Ghisalberti, "Medieval Biographies of Ovid," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 9 (1946), 10-59: 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

introductions provided advice about how students should read the text, offering a Christian interpretation of pagan material.⁹ Although there was a standard form for these educational introductions, their vocabulary and priorities changed over time, a factor only discussed in scholarship in recent years.¹⁰ I argue that the introductions to Ovid's *Heroides*, datable to the early twelfth century, reflect a more positive attitude to the figure of Penelope, and by implication, to the potential for women to be educated. For a short period of time in early twelfth century France, such texts suggested that women's worth was based not solely upon a chastity devoid of love, but on their ability to love one man enough to forego all other contenders for their heart, fuelled by increased interest in the works of Ovid.

Baudri of Bourgueil and the Ovidian revival in the late eleventh century

Several of Ovid's works had long been used to teach Latin grammar.¹¹ Research into the eleventh-century interest in Ovid and the novelty of his reception into literary practices centres around the role of Baudri of Bourgueil, monk and later Bishop of Dol (1046-1130 CE). Allusions to Penelope-like women in Baudri's writings deserve attention as providing a safe literary model of a male-female relationship.

The prioritisation of Penelope in the medieval classroom has not been a focus of past studies. For example, Stephen Jaeger discusses the twelfth-century welcoming of women into what had been a literary boys' club, based on the growth

⁹ The *accessus* could take several forms. The ones used for Ovid's *Heroides* are consistent with type C, derived from Boethius and his commentary of Porphyry's *Isagoge*. This style was particularly popular in the twelfth century. A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scolar Press, 1984), 12-13.

¹⁰ For a discussion on how little is known about medieval commentaries based on period and geography, see Marjorie Curry Woods, "What are the Real Differences between Medieval and Renaissance Commentaries?" in *The Classics in the Medieval and Renaissance Classroom: The Role of Ancient Texts in the Arts Curriculum as Revealed by Surviving Manuscripts and Early Printed Books*, ed. Juanita Feros Ruys, John O. Ward, and Melanie Hayworth, Disputatio (Turnhout Brepols, 2013).

¹¹ Ovid's texts are mentioned in five major sources of information on education written between 1180-1250. James H. McGregor, "Ovid at School: From the Ninth to the Fifteenth Century," *Classical Folia* 32 (1978), 28-51: 39.

of popularity of Ovidian texts into the classroom.¹² He notes the importance of women in the development of love as an ethical consideration, but from the perspective of the male lover. It is the man's love for the woman that motivates his self-improvement and ennoblement.¹³

The importance of Ovid's *Heroides* for the development of a literary subculture which included women is also stressed by Gerald Bond. This subculture not only welcomed a privileged group of elite women, but enabled these women to become subjects, not objects of desire. He credits the *accessus* as part of a medieval program of reworking erotic or carnal love into a spiritual value.¹⁴ He describes a shift in focus from the "dominant eleventh-century image of the moral soul and amoral body"¹⁵ to an ideal of virtue identified within human loving relationships, such as the 'chaste love' between patron and client, located within the Ovidian introductions. Bond sought to find the female perspective in medieval materials while recognising the limited evidence for female education from this period. Like Jaeger, however, Bond tends to overlook Penelope's prioritisation in the *accessus* as a model for the self-defining woman. As both these scholars recognise the importance of the *accessus* to the reinterpretation of worth (nobility), it is valid to look to these sources to understand what they offered, beyond Ovid's text alone, in relation to questions of gender. This can be seen in the interest Baudri displays in his engagement with women using Ovidian themes.

The context for the resurgence of Penelope as a model for women is the literary network which Baudri developed in the late eleventh century around Orléans. A copy of Ovid's texts had been preserved in his region probably since the time of Venantius Fortunatus in the sixth century. Letters from this period indicate the importance of Ovid in the development of a 'cult of friendship', a legacy of

¹² Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, 82.

¹³ Stephen Jaeger *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 319. Jaeger likens this process to the courtly ideal.

¹⁴ Gerald A. Bond, "Iocus Amoris': The Poetry of Baudri of Bourgueil and the Formation of the Ovidian Subculture," *Traditio* 42 (1986), 143-93: 182; *The Loving Subject*, 56.

¹⁵ Bond, "Composing Yourself," 104.

Roman urban civilisation.¹⁶ A friendship with Queen Radegunde developed and Fortunatus settled among her small society of cultured women in Poitiers until his death in c. 600 CE.¹⁷ Centuries later, Baudri was similarly attached to a female community, and found Ovid's texts of great interest. Baudri's writings contributed to the neo-Ovidian subgroup which hovered outside the borders of official ecclesiastical culture.¹⁸ Influenced by Ovid's reflections on love in verse, he wrote letters to both men and women, often rich in erotic overtones.¹⁹ This celebration of Ovid over Virgil among the pagan authors has been interpreted as "an optimistic depiction of a man-centred world," in which virtue was associated with literature.²⁰ One function of this neo-Ovidian style was the cultivation of patronage in the secular courts.²¹ Penelope would have been a suitable example of the virtuous woman to flatter and negotiate female patronage. One such example is a representation of Countess Adela of Blois as surrounded by suitors, but unmoved by their desires.

Baudri's poem for the Countess Adela has been recognised as representing an appeal for patronage by the poet.²² Adela was the daughter of William the Conqueror, born just after the Conquest, and was a notable woman in her time as the daughter, sister and mother of kings. She married count Stephen of Blois who travelled twice to the Crusades. Adela can be regarded as a major player in her contemporary socio-political affairs.²³ Adela's role as a wife whose husband went off crusading in the East provides a salient parallel to Penelope. Baudri's poem, written either around 1096, at the time when her husband was away at the First Crusade or around 1106, when she was widowed, capitalises on her being alone and

¹⁶ Raby, *A History of Secular Latin Poetry*, 138.

¹⁷ Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard*, 92-3.

¹⁸ Bond, *The Loving Subject*, 67.

¹⁹ Peter L. Allen, *The Art of Love: Amatory Fiction from Ovid to the Romance of the Rose* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 50.

²⁰ Bond, *The Loving Subject*, 69.

²¹ Bond, "Iocus Amoris," 186.

²² Kimberly A. LoPrete, *Adela of Blois: Countess and Lord (c.1067-1137)* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 201.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

responsible for decision making.²⁴ This closely parallels Penelope's twenty-year wait for her husband's return.

Baudri's alignment of Adela's virtue with that of Penelope is not limited to their parallel circumstances. His references to suitors all vying for her attention similarly invokes the idea of Penelope:

This uprightness of character ennobles this chaste breast:
Graced by her children's worth, and by her husband's love.
Many there are, it's true, who might well be pleasing to ladies
By their prowess and rank, not to mention good looks,
Who might have tried to seduce her; but what have they gained by trying?
Steadfast she holds to the vows guarding her marriage bed.²⁵

Baudri celebrates Adela's chastity, measured by her will to reject the many suitors pursuing her favour. This contrasts to the other model of chastity derived from classical and patristic sources; those women were renowned for their willingness to face death when their honour was compromised. This was a template developed by Jerome in the fourth century (discussed in chapter two) and repeated in the eleventh century in one of the earliest medieval texts to explicitly praise women. Marbod of Rennes in his *Book of Ten Chapters* extolled the chastity of pagan women who "scorned death."²⁶ Not surprisingly, Penelope was not included in Marbod's list of worthy *matronae*, as she did not qualify. Like Penelope, Adela's virtue was premised on her rejection of suitors which did not require a willingness to die.

The rejection of suitors can represent choice and agency on the part of the woman, but is open to interpretation. From the perspective of the male gaze, it might

²⁴ Ibid., 194.

²⁵ Baudri de Bourgueil, *Poèmes, Tome 2*, "Hanc morum probitas, hanc castum pectus honestat,/ Nobilis hanc soboles ornat amorque viri./Sunt tamen et multi, quos commendare puellis/ et decus et probitas et sua forma queat,/ Hanc qui temptassent. Sed quid temptasse iuaret?/ Seruat pacta sui non uiolanda thori." trans. Jean-Yves Tilliette, *Auteurs Latin du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2002), 4; 61-67; Monica Otter, "To Adela of Blois," *The Journal of Medieval Latin*, 11 (2001), 60-141: 67.

²⁶ Cited in Blamires, Marx, and Pratt, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, 231. The Latin text can be found in Marbod of Rennes, *Marbodi, Episcopi Redonensis, Liber decem capitulorum*, ed. Walther Bulst (Heidelberg: Heidelberg 1947).

look like female passivity. This is how the passage is assessed by Jaeger; Adela's role functions as a moral force with the power to enhance the nobility of her admirers.²⁷ He compares this love for a chaste woman as a parallel to the role of the teacher in the development of a young man's virtue and nobility.²⁸ Man's moral behaviour was built upon his capacity to love. In contrast to this, Bond argues for Adela's agency in Baudri's portrayal of her surrounded by young men.²⁹ I, too, believe agency for Adela can be read into this portrayal as a reflection of Penelope's actions while waiting for her husband.

Bond notices a change in the way Adela is represented over time, from the alluring courtly *domina* to the Christian *matrona*.³⁰ Adela is a *domina* in this passage, object of the male gaze, within a larger work which celebrates her dedication to learning. The Ovidian element is in some ways limited to a sly, framing fiction, cautiously playing on the salacious possibilities of Baudri's entering the Countess's bedchamber.³¹ It includes a detailed description of the tapestries, depicting Bible stories, classical mythology and her father's accomplishments. Her bed was decorated by numerous carvings of personified educational ideals, highlighting the association of the countess with good education. The description of tapestries and the reference to Adela's involvement in their production might be a subtle allusion to Penelope as weaver, but the mention of her surrounded by young men is the more apposite connection.³² Bond suggests this spurning of suitors was a strategy devised by Adela to distance herself from the example of another local, noble woman, the scandalous Bertrada. Bertrada had been married to the Count of Anjou, but after Philip the First's repudiation of his wife in 1092, she married him instead. Chroniclers comment that Philip was besotted with

²⁷ Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, 87.

²⁸ Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 317.

²⁹ Bond suggests that Adela exerted some control over her literary representations. Bond, *The Loving Subject*, 136-7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 151.

³¹ Otter, "To Adela of Blois," 61.

³² Monica Otter notes parallels between the roles of stylus and needle in two passages reflecting the relationship between textile and text in lines 560-568 and 1138-1146. In the *Heroides*, Penelope is both writer and weaver, so this could be read as a subtle allusion to her. *Ibid.*, 79.

this woman and their behaviour was met with widespread disapproval from reform minded churchmen.³³ Love as a disruptor to marriage vows was manifest in this example. The couple were excommunicated at the same time that the first Crusade was called.³⁴ The temporal and geographical proximity to the writing of Baudri's poem lends credence to the mention of Adela's chaste breast as an attempt to distance her from the "Bad Lady"³⁵ The discussion of suitors and the inviolable pact represented by the bed can both be interpreted as Baudri's identification of Adela with Penelope, the most praised of Ovid's heroines in the twelfth-century classroom.

An Ovidian approach to love can also be found in other works by Baudri, especially in his letters. These had erotic overtones, paired with declarations of the chaste nature of this love (*amor*). His concept of *amor* was blurred with that of *amicitia* (friendship) creating great ambiguity in his works.³⁶ His approach to love may have been playful with erotic overtones, but he wrote of love as a spiritual and ethical ideal. This can be seen most clearly in the letter exchange with Constance who resided in the abbey of Notre-Dame du Ronceray in Angers. This was a wealthy abbey which attracted noble widows and daughters.³⁷ Because the response written by Constance is identical in length to Baudri's, Tilliette has speculated that hers is a fiction created by the poet.³⁸ Others do treat her as a real woman and discuss her response as a clever reaction to the innuendo within Baudri's erotic letter.³⁹

³³ For example, Bond mentions Ivo of Chartres as an opponent of Philip and his actions. Bond, *The Loving Subject*, 151.

³⁴ David d'Avray, *Dissolving Royal Marriages: A Documentary History, 860–1600*, (Cambridge University Press, 2014). 47-9.

³⁵ Bond, *The Loving Subject*, 151.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁷ Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard*, 99.

³⁸ Jean-Yves Tilliette, "Hermès Amoureux, ou les Métamorphoses de la Chimère: Réflexions sur les Carmina 200 et 201 de Baudri de Bourgueil," *Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome. Moyen-Age, Temps modernes* 104, no.1 (1992): 121-161,

³⁹ See Bond, "Iocus Amoris" 168; Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages a Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (+203) to Marguerite Porete (+1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 86-90; Sylvain Piron, "Heloise's literary self-fashioning and the *Epistolae duorum amantium*," in *Strategies of Remembrance: From Pindar to Hölderlin*, ed. Lucie Doležalová (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 149; Belle Tuten, "Who was Lady Constance of Angers? Nuns as poets and correspondents at the monastery of Ronceray d'Angers in the early twelfth century," *Medieval Perspectives* 19 (2004), 255-68.

Unfortunately, little is known about her except what can be learned from her correspondence with Baudri. Their letters to each other demonstrate this ideal of a passionate and spiritual (as opposed to physical) love between a man and woman, with strikingly erotic overtones, but without the taint of sexual consummation.⁴⁰ In this and other ways, Constance evokes an image of being Penelope-like.

There is no doubting that Constance's epistolary voice is modelled on the female voices of the *Heroides*, as pointed out by Bond.⁴¹ She makes references to several of Ovid's heroines, including themes from Penelope's poem. These are the inability to sleep at night, the desire to have the loved one arrive in person and the fear that the lover's absence is out of choice, not necessity. Both male recipients of the letters, in the eyes of the women, are plunderers who use their wits to sack nations. Baudri sacks the Greeks as Ulysses had plundered the Trojans, but the spoils are different: the medieval plunderer is more interested in intellectual treasures, each letter writer, Constance and Penelope, speculates reasons for their lover's delay. Penelope suspects that Ulysses' delay is because of another woman: 'While I live on in foolish fear of things like these, you may be captive to a stranger love – such are the hearts of you men!'⁴² This theme is repeated by Constance as she speaks of her lover in the third person (although the letter is still addressed to Baudri):

So that he might disguise himself, his letters deceive me,
In order that his crafty letter might allay my fear.
Alas what should I not fear? I will never rest secure;
Nor will my love nor my trust ever be safe. ...
...I can never not be suspicious.
When I do not know (where he is),
I fear some wandering might snatch him away.⁴³

⁴⁰ Bond, "Composing Yourself," 100.

⁴¹ Ibid., 102.

⁴² Ovid, *Heroides*, 1. 74-5, trans. Showerman, 17.

⁴³ Constance, "Carmen," 201, cited in Bond, *The Loving Subject*, 186-7. "Ut se dissimulet, ut me sua littera fallat....Heu quid non timeam? Nunquam secura quiescam; Nex michi tutus amor, nec

Both women are unsure about the level of trust they can invest in their absent man. They see them as prey to distraction.

Another way that Constance's letter to Baudri reflects the Ovidian (Penelopean) model is through a focus on chastity. Penelope's chastity was assumed in Ovid's poem as she declares to Ulysses that she will always be his, wondering if he will be swayed by her faithful and chaste prayers to return. Constance's approach to love is partly a response to the way it was framed in Baudri's letter to her:

Believe me (and I want both you and the readers to believe): A filthy love (*amor*) has never driven me to you ... I swear by all that is: I do not want to be your husband... Let mouth and ear confirm our friendship. Let our hearts confirm our friendship; Let our hearts be joined, but our bodies remain apart.⁴⁴

Constance focusses on her chastity, but without denying the love:

I have been chaste (*casta*), I am chaste now, I want to be chaste. Oh would that I could live as a bride of God. Yet not for this do I detest your love (*amorem*); the bride of God should love God's servants....Therefore I respect you, I love you vigilantly. May law and rule always protect our love. May a modest (*pudica*) life grace our games. Let us therefore hold to simplicity as pure as a dove, and do not prefer any woman to me.⁴⁵

For men and women who exchanged intimate letters while living within monastic communities where celibacy was demanded, chastity needed to be emphasised.⁴⁶

This pairing of love and chastity is characteristic of the way Ovid's *Heroides* was

mihi plus ipsa fatigor; Nunquam non possum suspiciosa fore. Hunc timeo rapiat, dum nescio, quilibet error."

⁴⁴ Carmen 201, 37-45, cited in Bond, *The Loving Subject*, 172-73. "Crede mihi credasque uolo credantque laegentes:/ In te me nunquam foedus adegit amor... Iuro per omne, quod est: nolo uir esse tibi./ ...Os et cor nostrum firmet amicitiam. Pectora iungantur, sed corpora semoueantur; / Sit pudor in facto, sit iocus in calamo."

⁴⁵ Constance, *Carmen* 201 cited in Bond, *The Loving Subject*, 188-89 "Casta fui sum casta modo, uolo uiuere casta; O utinam possim uiuere sponsa dei. Non ob id ipsa tamen ustrum detestor amorem; seruos sponsa Dei debet amare sui....Ergo te ueneror, te uigilanter amo. Ius et lex nostrum semper tuetur amorem; Commendet nostros uita pudica iocos."

⁴⁶ Newman, "Liminalities: Literate Women in the Long Twelfth Century," 414.

introduced into the classroom. By pairing these normally contradictory concepts of love and chastity, a more spiritual ideal of intimacy could develop, reflecting a woman's will and agency.

The influence of the *Heroides* and of the role of the legitimate wife, based upon the ideal of Penelope, can also be traced to a little known poetic imitation of that work from the late eleventh century. A full copy is preserved in a manuscript now housed in Paris, and there are two fragments in Oxford and Stockholm.⁴⁷ It was published in the late nineteenth century, but recent scholarship appears to be limited to Jurgen Stohlmann and Suzanne Hagedorn. Like the letters of the *Heroides*, it is written in the female voice, that of Deidamia, and explores the pain of being deserted by a husband (as opposed to lover), possibly for another woman. By an unknown author (whose sex will be likely never known), *Deidamia Achilli* echoes the words of Penelope as she suggests that Achilles not just send word, but come home himself.

If it be proper for a lawful wife to be called a mistress, a chaste mistress sends this to you, her master. If, descendent of Aeacus, you read these words of your mistress's sending, read well the words that have been sent to you! Send me something to read! Send words to your son and your dear wife! Or, do not send words, but come yourself.⁴⁸

The final line echoes Penelope's opening lines:

These words your Penelope sends to you, O Ulysses, slow of return that you are; writing back is pointless: come yourself.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ The poem in Latin is published in Jurgen Stohlmann, "Deidamia Achilli: Eine Ovid-Imitation aus dem 11. Jahrhundert," in *Literatur und Sprache im europäischen Mittelalter. Festschrift für Karl Langosch zum 70.*, ed. Alf Önnersfors, Johannes Rathfer, and Fritz Wagner (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973). Manuscript details were found in Hagedorn, *Abandoned Women*, 38.

⁴⁸ "Deidamia Achilli", 224: "Legitimam nuptam si dici fas sit amicam, / Haec tibi casta suo mittit amica viro, / Si legis, Aeacide, mittentis verba puellae, / Perlege missa tibi! Mitte legenda michi, / Mitte legenda tuo cara cum coniuge nato! / Mittere vel noli verba, sed ipse veni!" The similarity to Penelope's position is noted by Hagedorn, *Abandoned Women*, 43.

⁴⁹ Ovid, *Heroides*, 1.1-2, trans. Showerman, 10. "Haec tua Penelope lento tibi mittit, Ulixee; / nil mihi rescribas attinet: ipse veni!"

Penelope, as represented in Ovid's *Heroides*, provided an appropriate model for this poet to explore the female perspective on love, marriage, and betrayal.

The figure of Penelope was a significant literary element in the increased interest in Ovid's works from the late eleventh century as the educational discourse on love moved from an exclusively male environment. Not everyone, however, was so comfortable with the use of Ovid in education and the acceptance of worldly, but spiritual, love as a guide to moral behaviour. This can be seen in attacks on the use of Ovid in the classroom, and in the unfortunate consequences for some who took the prioritisation of love too far.

The Dangers of Ovid

The use of love as guide in the classroom, clearly related to human relations and with erotic overtones, was not welcomed by all, challenging the role of Ovid as *praeceptor morum* (teacher of morals).⁵⁰ Conrad of Hirsau, whose guide to education, *Dialogus super Auctoris*, was published alongside the *Accessus ad Auctoris*, perceived Ovid's writings about love as having the potential to lead the young astray.⁵¹ He was concerned about excessive enthusiasm for Ovid's works, perhaps opposing the necessity of having to read allegorically.⁵² Conrad targets the letters of the *Heroides*, according to William Scovill Anderson, when he writes: "Who in his senses could stand the poet cooing (*croccitantem*) about love and misbehaving shamefully in divers epistles?"⁵³ This discomfort with Ovid is also

⁵⁰ R. J. Tarrant, "Ovid," in *Texts and Translation: A Survey of the Latin Classics*, ed. L. D. Reynolds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 259.

⁵¹ Conrad of Hirsau, "Dialogus supra Auctoris," in *Accessus Ad Auctores Bernard D' Utrecht, Conrad D' Hirsau, Dialogus Super Auctores* ed. R. B. C. Huygens (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 72-131.

⁵² Jean-Yves Tilliette, "La place d'Ovide dans la bibliothèque idéale de Conrad d'Hirsau (*Dialogus super auctores*, 1. 1325-1361)," in *Du Copiste au Collectionneur: Mélanges d'histoire des textes et des bibliothèques en l'honneur d'André Vernet*, ed. Donatella Nebbiai-Dalla Guarda and Jean-François Genest (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 149-50.

⁵³ Conrad of Hirsau, *Dialogus super Auctores*, 114. "etsi auctor Ovidius idem in quibusdam opusculis suis, id est Fastorum, de Ponto, de Nuce et in aliis utcumque tolerandus esset, quis eum de amore croccitantem, in diversis epistolis turpiter evagantem, si sanum sapiat, toleret?" William Scovill Anderson, ed. *Ovid: The Classical Heritage*, Classical Heritage (New York: Garland

apparent in the autobiography of the monk Guibert of Nogent (c. 1055 – c. 1125), a contemporary of Baudri. Reflecting on his childhood education, Guibert remembers with disdain his youthful fascination with Ovid and his attempts to replicate his poetic style:

Meanwhile, I had fully immersed my soul in the study of verse-making. Consequently I left aside all the seriousness of sacred Scripture for this vain and ludicrous activity. Sustained by my folly I had reached a point where I was competing with Ovid and the pastoral poets, and striving to achieve an amorous charm in my way of arranging images and in well-crafted letter. Forgetting the proper rigour of the monastic calling and casting away its modesty, my mind became so enraptured by the seduction of this contagious indulgence that I valued one thing only: that what I was saying in courtly terms might be attributed to some poet. I failed to realize how much harm my industrious pursuit was doing to my intention of taking sacred vows.⁵⁴

Ovid's works could be judged as dangerous to the young mind. Despite his disdain for the erotic elements in Ovid's works, however, Guibert's description of his mother's chastity and the behaviour of contemporary women is similar to Baudri's description of Adela.⁵⁵ He describes his mother as having been surrounded by young men in the early days of her marriage, when they heard that her marriage had

Publications, 1995), 30. Although Anderson translates "croccitantem" as cooing, I prefer croaking. This passage is also referred to and quoted in *Tarrant, Texts and Transmission*, 259.

⁵⁴ Guibert, *Autobiographie* 1.17, ed. E.-R. Labande (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1981) p. 134:

"Interea cum versificandi studio ultra omnem modum meum animum immersissem, ita ut universa divinae paginate seria pro tam ridicula vanitate seponerem, ad hoc imsum, duce mea levitate, jam veneram, ut ovidiana et bucolicorum dicta praesumerem, et lepores amatorios in specierum distributionibus epostolisque nexilibus affectarem. Oblita igitur mens debiti rigoris, et professionis monasticae pudore reject, talibus virulentae hujus licentiae lenociniis laetabatur, hoc solum trutinans, si poetae cuiquam comportari, poterat quod curialiter dicebatur, nullatenus vero pensitans quantopere sacri ordinis, de ea quae desiderabatur industria, propositum ledebatur." This discomfort of some twelfth-century scholars, including Conrad and Guibert, is discussed in James G. Clarke, "Introduction," in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, ed. James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, and Kathryn L. McKinley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 10.

⁵⁵ The Ovidian connection in Guibert's description of his mother's chastity and the comparison to contemporary women is noted by Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, 106.

not been consummated.⁵⁶ If the ideal of active chastity was to be sufficiently compelling, it had to be associated with a very desirable woman since alone and unseen, an individual woman may remain chaste for years. When surrounded by eligible men, however, she faces a more difficult task and her success is therefore all the more praiseworthy. Despite temptation, Guibert describes how “the maiden’s (his mother’s) heart was always under her control and never won from her by any allurements.”⁵⁷ This points to a society in which men and women relate to each other directly, a notion he found challenging. Guibert laments the fact that noble women “rest their claims to nobility and courtly pride” on their “crowds of suitors.”⁵⁸

Abelard and Heloise

The danger of intimate contact between the sexes under the influence of Ovidian ideals in the early twelfth century is also well demonstrated by the experiences of Heloise and her lover/husband Peter Abelard (1079-1142). Heloise, renowned for her brilliance, was educated in classics, including the works of Ovid. Although not directly connected to Baudri, there is certainly the possibility that she had access to his work and ideas. Their story is recorded in a letter of consolation written by Abelard to a friend many years after they each entered monastic communities.⁵⁹ Aspects of Heloise’s side of the story are revealed by a series of letters that she wrote in response to his *Historia Calamitatum*, from the Paraclete, a community established by Abelard.⁶⁰ She uses her letters to re-engage with Abelard at an

⁵⁶ Guibert, *Autobiographie* 1.12, ed. Labande, p. 78; John F. Benton, *Self and society in Medieval France; the memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent (1064?-c. 1125)*, (New York,: Harper & Row, 1970), 64.

⁵⁷ Nogent, *Autobiographie* 1.12, ed. Labande, 78: “motibus externa lenocinia adhibebentur; et tamen virgunculae animus, sui semper capax, nullis incentivis extra se ferebatur.” Benton, *Self and society*, 64.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.12, ed. Labande, 80: “et tanto sibi nobilitatis et curiae gloriam arrogat, quo hujusmodi procorum numero florentiore redundat.”; Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, 106.

⁵⁹ *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, ed. D. E. Luscombe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), pp. 1-121; *The Letters of Heloise and Abelard*, ed. Betty Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 109-271.

⁶⁰ Letters 2, 4, 6, with replies by Abelard; ed. Luscombe, 122-259; trans. Radice, *ibid.*

intimate level. Phillis Brown and John C. Peiffer II draw several parallels between Heloise and Penelope as married women forced to make sacrifices while their husbands dedicate their lives to a “larger good.”⁶¹ Both women also share a fear for their man’s life while away, and Heloise’s use of shipwreck as a metaphor for this potential danger highlights the parallels between the couples.⁶² Like Penelope, Heloise is a wife trying to recreate an intimate relationship with her absent husband. Unlike Baudri’s jocularly in love, Heloise is serious as she identifies with the moral seriousness of the Ovidian heroines.⁶³ The physical aspect of her marriage could not be re-established, but she believed that an intimate, spiritual dimension of the marital relationship was possible, a model of marriage consistent with the views of Augustine who valorised the spiritual over the physical.⁶⁴ Unlike the later twelfth-century conception of Ovidian love as purely sexual, this love was emotional and intense.⁶⁵ This aspect of Heloise’s approach to marriage reflects the debate in the late eleventh and early twelfth century around the relative importance in marriage of physical consummation and spiritual love.⁶⁶ It is also consistent with the “indissoluble loyalty of the wedded pair,” to characterise marriage in the twelfth century.⁶⁷ Penelope can easily be imagined as representing the long standing spiritual ideal.

⁶¹ Phillis R. Brown and John C. Peiffer II, “Heloise, Dialectic, and the Heroides,” in *Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 146. Also Michael Calabrese, “Ovid and the Female Voice in the *De Amore* and the *Letters* of Abelard and Heloise,” *Modern Philology* 95, no. 1 (1979), 1-26: 10.

⁶² Ibid., 148. It is interesting to note that in Abelard’s “Confession of Faith” sent to Heloise, he identifies with Ulysses as he “do[es] not fear the barking of Scylla, laughs at the whirlpool of Charybdis, and has no dread of the Siren’s deadly songs.” Radice, ed. *The Letters of Heloise and Abelard*, 271.

⁶³ Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard*, 114.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth A. Clark, “‘Adam’s Only Companion’: Augustine and the Early Christian Debate on Marriage,” in *The Olde Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex, and Marriage in the Medieval World*, ed. Jonathan Edwards and Stephen Spector (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 23-5.

⁶⁵ Tracy Adams, “‘Make me chaste and continent, but not yet’: A Model for Clerical Masculinity?,” in *Masculinities and Femininities in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Frederick Kiefer (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 12.

⁶⁶ Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 67.

⁶⁷ Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1995), 97.

A similar approach to love underpins the anonymous *Epistolae duorum amantium*, a series of Latin love letters. Both Jaeger and Constant Mews have argued that these are the lost love letters of Heloise and Abelard written prior to their marriage.⁶⁸ One of the metaphors shared by this woman writer and Heloise is the nautical motif: “To the imperilled boat not having the anchor of faith, she who is not moved by the winds which fan your faithlessness.”⁶⁹ The replication of this motif by this woman, and Heloise in a later letters, has been interpreted as reflecting identification with Penelope.⁷⁰ Another factor consistent with these letters from a female lover and those explicitly attributed to Heloise is the ideal of true love as unceasing.⁷¹ Even religious conversion should not erase a human affection that is indelible.⁷²

Each of these women, either in their descriptions by others, or in their own writing, celebrates a love that evokes intimacy, both physical and spiritual. It is a love that is long standing, even when the couple are separated. This love is also a marker of their chastity. Adela, with her husband absent, is surrounded by unsuccessful suitors because of her commitment to the marital bed. Constance fantasises about the exclusivity of her loving friendship with Baudri, holding the letter against her heart, wondering when they will next see each other. Heloise, despite the impossibility of re-establishing a physically intimate relationship with her husband at least sees the potential for an ongoing spiritual and emotional connection. All of these states reflect the ways Ovid’s *Heroides* was introduced into the twelfth-century classroom.

⁶⁸ The parallels between the *Epistolae duorum amantium* and Heloise and Abelard were first noted by Ewald Könsgen when he published their text in 1974. See also Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*; Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard*; Piron, “Heloise’s literary self-fashioning and the *Epistolae duorum amantium*.” C. Stephen Jaeger, “*Epistolae duorum amantium* and the Ascription to Heloise and Abelard,” in *Voices in Dialogue*, ed. Kristina M. Olson (2004).

⁶⁹ Woman, “Letter 95,” in *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard*, 274-5. “Nave periclitanti, et anchorum fidei non habenti, illa quam non movent ventosa que tue infidelitati sunt congrua.”

⁷⁰ John O. Ward and Neville Chiavaroli, “The Young Heloise and Latin Rhetoric,” in *Listening to Heloise*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2000), 96-7.

⁷¹ Piron, “Heloise’s literary self-fashioning and the *Epistolae duorum amantium*,” 144.

⁷² Ibid.

Introductions (*accessus*) to Ovid

Interest in the works of Ovid increased from the Carolingian period.⁷³ His magnum opus, the *Metamorphoses*, was encyclopaedic in its preservation of classical mythology, and became the most popular of Ovid's works in the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁷⁴ Imitations of the style of writing of the *Heroides*, poetic love letters, have been attested north of the Alps in the late eleventh century.⁷⁵ Although Birger Munk Olsen identifies at most seven manuscripts of the *Heroides* in the twelfth century,⁷⁶ thirteen distinct introductions to these poems have been found, sometimes several within a single manuscript. This alerts us to its importance as an educational tool.⁷⁷

Penelope is included in these educational introductions to the *Heroides* as part of a discourse on love. They emphasise that Ovid was the self proclaimed teacher of love (*praeceptor amoris*) in his *Ars Amatoria* and *Amores*, and introduce love as a focus of reflection within medieval education, although always with a view to developing moral behaviour. The learning of mores ranked next to the study of letters. "Literature" and "manners" became the formula of a new kind of study.⁷⁸ No longer was the dignity of man achieved only through supernatural means; the liberal arts could also be a means by which sin could be remediated.⁷⁹ Among the

⁷³ McGregor, "Ovid at School," 30.

⁷⁴ Ralph Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling. Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid's Ars Amatoria, Epistulae ex Ponto, and Epistulae Heroidum*, (Munich: Bei de Arbo-Gesellschaft, 1986), 3.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 4.; L. D. Reynolds, *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of Latin Classics*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 268-9.

⁷⁶ B. Munk Olsen, *La réception de la littérature classique au Moyen-Age (IXe - XIIIe siècle): choix d'articles publié par des collègues à l'occasion de son soixantième anniversaire* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1995), 74. Munk Olsen's table includes columns for combined eleventh and twelfth centuries, as well as combined twelfth and thirteenth. Seven is the sum of these three columns. He notes that the full acceptance of Ovid in the school curriculum can be dated by the inclusion of the *Heroides* with other recognised school texts in an eleventh-century Beneventan manuscript housed in Eton, (p.85)

⁷⁷ Wilken Engelbrecht, "Fulco, Arnulf, and William: Twelfth-Century Views on Ovid in Orléans," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 18 (2008), 52-73: 54.

⁷⁸ Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, 61.

⁷⁹ R. W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and other Studies* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1970), 40.

classical texts thought suitable for teaching morals, Ovid's poetry contributed to knowledge of the ethics of love and loving relationships.⁸⁰ Being written in a female as well as male voice (in the double series), the *Heroides* provided an apposite tool for teaching Latin and ethics of behaviour to women.

Medieval commentators read the Ovidian letters within the frame of the Trojan War, as several of the letter writers could be linked to Greek or Trojan men, including Penelope, Dido, Helen of Troy, and Briseis, the slave fought over by Achilles and Agamemnon outside the gates of Troy.⁸¹ During both the Crusades and the Trojan War, women were left at home and were expected to remain loyal to absent husbands. It is perhaps because Penelope waited for twenty years for her husband's return in similar circumstances that her presence among Ovid's heroines was prioritised in the educational materials provided in the medieval classroom.

The *Heroides* was a particularly useful text in the classroom as it consisted of a series of short works that could be studied conveniently in separate lessons.⁸² As well as this, unlike other Ovidian texts, such as the *Metamorphoses*, the *Heroides* resisted allegorical interpretation; each of the Ovidian letter writers is discussed as a woman within a social framework, not as personifications or as

⁸⁰ Judson Boyce Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages: a Decorum of Convenient Distinction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 37.

⁸¹ Several versions of the same *accessus* can be found in different manuscripts. To be clear about which *accessus* I am using, the numbering system provided by Coulson will provide a short-hand means of identification. Frank T. Coulson, "Addenda and Corrigenda to Incipitiarum Ovidianum," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 12 (2002), 154-80; Frank Thomas Coulson and Bruno Roy, *Incipitiarum Ovidianum: a Finding Guide for Texts in Latin Related to the Study of Ovid in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000). Further addenda and corrigenda were provided by Frank Coulson through private correspondence. Further details regarding publication, translations and the manuscripts in which they can be found will be provided in the footnotes when first mentioned. Details of the link between the letters and the *Heroides*: [*diuersae sunt epistolae in hoc uolumine, quae poterant mitti uel mittebantur grecis uiris in obsidione Troiae.*] "there are various epistles in this volume that might have been sent or were sent to the Greek men at, going to, or returning from the siege of Troy." No. 185 can be found in three manuscripts: Freiburg im Breisgau, Universitätsbibliothek, 381, saec. XIIex., fols. 49-63; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 19475, saec XII, fols. 13va-14vb; Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. Lat. 242, saec. XII, fol. 80v (fragment)

⁸² Ralph Hexter, "An Absolutely Fabulous Commentary of Ovid's *Heroides*," in *Latin Grammar and Rhetoric: From Classical Theory to Medieval Practice*, ed. Carol Dana Lanham (London: Continuum, 2001), 224.

representing abstract ideals.⁸³ This recognition of female social roles is also reflected in the *accessus*, in which each of the women named is discussed within the context of their role in history.

The earliest extant *accessus* for the *Heroides* are preserved in twelfth-century manuscripts from monastic libraries in southern Germany.⁸⁴ There is certain literary evidence for knowledge of Ovid's *Heroides* in France, but due to historical instability, educational manuscripts have been largely destroyed.⁸⁵ The absence of introductions for the *Heroides* in eleventh-century manuscripts hinders an absolute understanding of how that work might have been read in this early period.⁸⁶ There are three different introductions to Ovid's *Heroides*, however, preserved in the mid-twelfth-century manuscript connected to the monastery at Tegernsee; Clm 19475 housed in now in Munich, was published as a collection by Huygens as the *Accessus ad Auctores*.⁸⁷ The dating to the mid-twelfth century of a collection, suggests that they were copied from earlier examples.⁸⁸ They may reflect the earliest generation of texts related to the *aetas Ovidiana*.⁸⁹

⁸³ Ibid., 225.

⁸⁴ *Accessus Heroidum*, I, II, III, in *Accessus ad Auctores Bernard d' Utrecht, Conrad d' Hirsau, Dialogus super Auctores* ed. R.B.C. Huygens (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970). I am relying on those which have been published but with supplementary information obtained through personal investigation as necessary. Three of the *accessus* are found in the one manuscript, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, clm 19475. This suggests a South German provenance, but copies of one of these *accessus* are also in Paris and Rome.

⁸⁵ The library at Orléans was destroyed during religious wars in 1562. Wilken Engelbrecht, "Carmina Pieridum multo vigilata labore/ exponi, nulla certius urbe reor: Orléans and the reception of Ovid in the aetas Ovidiana in school commentaries," *Mittelateinisches Jahrbuch* 41 (2006), 206-26: 210.

⁸⁶ The *Heroides* is included in a tenth- or eleventh-century educational manual. See graph, McGregor, "Ovid at School," 50.

⁸⁷ Unknown, "Accessus Heroidum, I, II, III." Huygens numbered the *accessus* to Ovid's *Heroides* as I, II, and III and published them as a block. These correspond to No.206, No.438, and No.185 in the Bruno Roy taxonomy. In the manuscript, however, they are not placed together. See Stephen M. Wheeler, *Accessus ad auctores: Medieval Introductions to the Authors (Codex latinus manacensis 19475)*, ed. Robert E. Edwards and Michael J. Livingston, Secular Commentary Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Forthcoming), 16.

⁸⁸ The dating of this manuscript to around 1150 has been agreed upon by Munk Olson, Peter Dronke and Stephen M. Wheeler. See n. 3 in *Accessus ad auctores*, 18. Their collection into one manuscript suggests earlier composition of the individual *accessus*, although dating this is more difficult with no earlier manuscripts extant. See also Unknown, "Accessus Heroidum, I, II, III."

⁸⁹ This term was first coined by Ludwig Traube to represent the increased interest in Ovid's texts at the time of Baudri. Gerald Bond refers to this period as the earliest generation of Ovidian

Certain parts of the introductions contribute to our understanding of how they could be used by the classroom reader. A standard prologue of the type used to introduce Ovid's works included material that was considered important for reading an author.⁹⁰ Ranging from four to seven questions, the four essential elements were *materia*, *intentio*, *utilitas*, and *philosophie suppositio* (matter or material, intention of the author, utility and the part of philosophy it represented).⁹¹ The life of the poet was also an important consideration in many of these texts and was another means for contemplating an author's aims for the text.⁹² The utility, focusing as it does on the contemporary reader, is recognised as different to the author's motivation for writing. It gives insight into needs at the time of writing the introduction, as does the attribution to an aspect of philosophy.

The representation of Penelope among the other women in the introduction is coloured by the medieval scholars' interpretation of Ovid's life story. Thus, the *intentio* or intention, focussing as it does on the author's motives for writing the text, is a medieval interpretation of Ovid's motives. His intentions were derived from his other works, including the autobiographical information included in his letters from exile (*Tristia* and *Ex Ponto*). Although no one knew why he was exiled, it was known that the banishment was ordered by Augustus, who was trying to promulgate traditional family values in Roman society: "He himself was accused before Caesar of having instructed, in his writings, Roman matrons in illicit affairs; thus he wrote this book for them, giving them this example, so that they would

interest. Bond, *The Loving Subject*, 43. More recent scholarship is now suggesting earlier interest in Ovid, but as far as I am aware, there are no earlier *accessus* to determine how the texts were introduced into the classroom.

⁹⁰ For a study on the role of Boethius in the development of medieval *accessus*, see Edwin A. Quain, "The Medieval Accessus ad Auctores," *Traditio* 3 (1945), 215-64.

⁹¹ These elements could also be called *periochae*. By the twelfth century, fewer elements were itemised as they were perceived to represent old teaching models. This means that longer lists can be interpreted as indicating older texts. Birger Munk Olsen, "Accessus to Classical Poets in the Twelfth Century," in *The Classics in the Medieval and Renaissance Classroom: The Role of Ancient Texts in the Arts Curriculum as Revealed by Surviving Manuscripts and Early Printed Books*, ed. Juanita Feros Ruys, John O. Ward, and Melanie Heyworth (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 134-6.

⁹² On the relationship between *accessus* and biographies of the poet, see Ghisalberti, "Medieval Biographies of Ovid," 14-5.

know which women they ought to imitate in loving, which not.”⁹³ As the ideal of love underpinned so many of Ovid’s works, it was believed that the exile resulted from promoting values inconsistent with those of Augustus. As the *Heroides* were written by supposed lovers, starting with Penelope whose reputation derived from her marital loyalty, (“because she excelled the other [women] in her chastity, the author gave her the first place”),⁹⁴ this work was interpreted as representing a plea to Augustus, demonstrating his recognition of the legitimate purposes of love. All of the *accessus* to the *Heroides* reflect this focus on love (*amor*).

Penelope is used within the introductions to represent the appropriate expression of love. Love is mostly categorised as legitimate, illicit and foolish, as can be seen in No. 438: “his intention is to commend legitimate marriage or love, and accordingly, he treats of three kinds of love itself, that is, the legitimate, the illicit and the foolish.”⁹⁵ Sometimes impure (*incestus*) and wild (*furiosus*) love is included, as in No. 185.⁹⁶ Not surprisingly, marriage is seen as the legitimate or licit place for love. Four of the six published prologues from this period note Penelope’s role as an example of ‘legitimate love’ (No. 161, No. 183, No. 206, No. 438),⁹⁷ one

⁹³ “Accessus Heroidum, I, II, III,” 32. No. 185: “Ipse accusatus fuit apud Cesarem, quia scriptis suis Romanas matronas illicitos amores docuisset: unde librum scripsit eis, istum exemplum proponens, ut sciant amando quas debeant imitari, quas non.”

⁹⁴ Ibid., 33. No. 185 “quia ista per castitatem ceteras precellebat, auctor ei primum locum dat et quia fidem uiro suo seruat.”

⁹⁵ Ibid., 30. No. 438 “intentio sua est legitimum commendare conubium uel amorem, et secundum hoc triplici modo tractat de ipso amore, scilicet de legitimo, de illicito et stulto.” The English translation is based on that of Ralph Hexter: Ralph Hexter, “Medieval School Commentaries in Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, *Epistulae ex Ponto*, and *Epistulae Heroidum*” (PhD Thesis, Yale University, 1982), 300. This prologue has been published as *Accessus* II. It is found in Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, clm 19475 and clm 29208(20 (formerly clm 29007^b) in the same library. Coulson and Roy, *Incipitarium Ovidianum*, 131.

⁹⁶ *Accessus* Heroidum, I, II, III, No. 185 “Intentio eius est de triplici genere amoris, stulti, incesti, furiosi scribere.” This has been published as *Accessus* III. Ibid., 31. This *accessus* is also found in Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, clm 19475 and there is another complete copy (Freiburg im Breisgau, Universitätsbibliothek, 381) and a fragment (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. Lat. 242). Coulson and Roy, *Incipitarium Ovidianum*, 69.

⁹⁷ No. 161 is published in Ghisalberti, “Medieval Biographies of Ovid,” 45-6. and can be found in numerous manuscripts dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The prologue has been attributed to Fulco of Orléans (Abbot of Ste-Geneviève in 1170s or teacher at cathedral school of the Holy Cross. Variations to this prologue found in the German manuscript have also been published by Hexter, “Medieval School Commentaries in Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, *Epistulae ex Ponto*, and *Epistulae Heroidum*,” 194. The manuscripts are: Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, Gl. Kgl. Saml. 1095 4o, saec. XIII, fol. 5; Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, fabricius 29 20, saec. XIII,

as a model of ‘chaste love’ (No. 185) and the final one as a model of ‘licit love’ (No. 431).⁹⁸ While the focus is on how she represents a type of love, her importance as a model of chastity is not overlooked, as one commentator lauds her for the constancy of her chastity: “Indeed in this first letter he displayed the constancy of chastity in Penelope the wife of Ulysses who [was] an example of abstinence.”⁹⁹ The more common way of discussing her chastity, however, is to link it to her love for her husband. Thus it is not her chastity per se that is praised, but her ability to love chastely. For example, in #185, the scholar notes that Ovid had two intentions for each letter, one general followed by specific intentions. Penelope’s letter is identified as representing the specific aim of praising chaste love.¹⁰⁰

Penelope’s love is praised and recognised as an important part of her long term fidelity. She is not presented as deserving of love, which would have placed her within the role of object of desire, a role associated with women in the later

fol. 5v; Kiel, Universitätsbibliothek, K. B. 41, saec. XIII, fol. 1; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 631, saec. XII, fol. 148v; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 7994, saec. XIII, fol. 27; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 7996, saec. XII/XIII, fol. 1. Coulson and Roy, *Incipitarius Ovidianus*, 62. I am including No. 183 on the basis that Frank Coulson has suggested that this might be the work of the twelfth-century Ovidian scholar, Arnulf of Orléans. He wrote prologues for other Ovidian texts, but none have been identified as definitively his for the *Heroides*, reinforcing the likelihood of Coulson’s speculation. Only the beginning has been published but I have sighted and transcribed parts of the Bodleian manuscript. It can be found in three manuscripts; Oxford, Bodleian library, Canon. Class. Lat. 1, saec. XIII, fol. 1; London, British Library, Burney 219, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 8320, saec. XIII, fols. 28v-31: *Accessus Heroidum I, II, III*, 29-30 No. 206 and English translation, Hexter, “Medieval School Commentaries in Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, *Epistulae ex Ponto*, and *Epistulae Heroidum*,” 300. It is found in three manuscripts: Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 19474, saec. XII, fol. 75-76; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 19475, saec. XII, fol. 1; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 5137, saec. XII/Xiii, fols. 97-102. The three prologues which were studied by Huygens (No.185, No. 206, No. 438) have also been treated by Alistair Minnis, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c. 1100-c. 1375: the Commentary-Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 20-24.

⁹⁸ No. 431. This would be one of the most common prologues for the *Heroides* (known as the Bursari Ovidianorum) and has been attributed to William of Orléans. It is published in Ghisalberti, “Medieval Biographies of Ovid,” 44. It is found in thirteen manuscripts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but one which might be from the twelfth century: Bern, Burgerbibliothek, 411, saec. XII/XIII, fol. 143.

⁹⁹ No. 185 Unknown, “Accessus Heroidum, I, II, III.”-30 “In hac uero prima epistola constantia castitatis in Penelope Ulixis uxore, quam castimoniae exemplum proposuit.”

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 33. “specialem habet intentionem, sicut in singulis epistolis, aut laudando castum amorem, ut in hac: Hanc tua Penelope” (the opening words of Ovid’s poem).

courtly tradition.¹⁰¹ Without being explicit, the prologues also include some sense of passion, in the form of *desiderium*, as a part of conjugal relations: her rejection of the suitors was because of her love for her husband alone: *desiderio solius mariti*.¹⁰² This desire is longstanding (*perseverans*) and is associated with burning (*desiderio calebat*), a characteristic of love and desire more commonly associated with passion than the obedience of a wife for her husband.¹⁰³ Even when desire is not discussed as the basis of Penelope's chastity, she is recognised by teachers to be serving love as *amor*; *amor* is not always recognised as a valid emotion in medieval marriage which prioritised duty and obedience.¹⁰⁴ Of eight twelfth-century prologues which specifically mention the importance of *amor* in the *Heroides*, five specifically link Penelope as a model for the loving woman.¹⁰⁵ Although other women in the collection were married and might also have been considered as models of chaste loving in these prologues, none of them are mentioned in the various *accessus*.¹⁰⁶

This prioritisation of Penelope reflects the medieval perception that Ovid included her poem as the first in his collection due to her importance as a suitable role model: "but because this one excelled all other women through her chastity,

¹⁰¹ The role of women as patrons of courtly literature certainly complicates the idea of woman as mere object of desire, but there is merit to assessing women's roles in these later texts as "objects" as stated by Marjorie M. Malvern in her discussion on the repatriation of Mary Magdalene in the twelfth century. Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth: The Magdalen's Origins and Metamorphoses*, 73. Howard Bloch describes the role of women in courtly romances as "disfranchising objectification." Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 11. Bloch's identification of "the nostalgia of the lover for a distant ideal" with the development of courtly love is reminiscent of the letters of the *Heroides*, and the relationship of Ulysses and Penelope as the ideal. Ibid., 176.

¹⁰² No. 206, Unknown, "Accessus Heroidum, I, II, III," 30.

¹⁰³ No. 185 Unknown, "Accessus Heroidum, I, II, III," 33.

¹⁰⁴ Although *amor* might be recognised within some relationships, affectio and dilection were appropriate. See for example the discussion on this topic in Virginie Greene, "The Knight, the Woman, and the Historian: George Duby and Courtly Love," in *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature* ed. Albrecht Classen (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 54.

¹⁰⁵ Penelope is linked to amor in No. 98a (listed in unpublished corrigenda and addenda to Incipitiarum Ovidianum, supplied by the author, Frank Coulson), No. 183, No. 185, No. 206, and No. 379. Love as the essential element of the work, mentioned in the *intentio* or *utilitas* can be found in No. 139, No. 161, and No. 438.

¹⁰⁶ The other "chastely married" letter writers are Deianira (9), Medea (12), Laodamia (13) and Hypermetra (14).

the author put her in first place and because she maintained faith [in] her husband, she is commended in this letter.”¹⁰⁷ This same introduction also notes that Penelope maintained faith in her absent husband long beyond the example of other women who waited only two or three years. Although it might seem more fitting for the term *pudicitia* (sometimes translated as marital honour) to be used in the context of Penelope as a married woman, the idea of chastity with words using the stem “cast...” is a feature of the prologues. This can be seen quite forcefully in #185. Not once are the terms *pudor* or *pudicitia* used. In contrast to this, derivations using the stem “cast...” appear thirteen times.¹⁰⁸ Nine of these occurrences refer specifically to the case of Penelope. It is possible that the focus on her chastity reflects her total sexual integrity during her husband’s long absence, while *pudicitia* might have been appropriate to describe her if her husband was at home. What is being stressed is the spiritual or emotional nature of Penelope’s love. It persisted even without the physical expression of it.

The dominant motif used to demonstrate Penelope’s chastity in the introductions is the rejection of suitors. Prologues No. 185, No. 206, and No.438 all use the deponent verb *aspermor* to describe Penelope’s relationship to the suitors (*procos/procis*) or seekers (*petentes*). One introduction, No. 183, describes Penelope as conserving her ‘virginity’ from the many suitors who sought her.¹⁰⁹ Unlike other models of marital chastity, Penelope is lauded for her love of her absent husband, demonstrated through the rejection of suitors.

For a twelfth-century audience wishing to understand the ethical aspects of love, the utility [*utilitas*] was probably the most important part of the introduction. It provided a contemporary interpretation of how the text could be used. Some of

¹⁰⁷ No. 185 Unknown, “Accessus Heroidum, I, II, III,” 33. “Sed quia ista per castitatem ceteras precellebat, auctor ei primum locum dat et quia fidem uiro suo seruat, in hac epistola commendatur...”

¹⁰⁸ Counting up all the occurrences of castum, castitate, castitatis, caste, castos, castimoniae, castitatem in Accessus III, *ibid.*, 31-3.

¹⁰⁹ No.183 unpublished manuscript, Arnulf of Orléans, “Heroides,” Oxford University (Bodleian Library, Can. Lat. 1, fol. 1). “suam conservavit virginitatem et tamen a multis procis peteretur” (Lines 19-20)

the prologues to the *Heroides* can be read as relevant to a female readership by the use of the first-person plural in the utility (sometimes called the final cause [*causa finalis*]).¹¹⁰ For example, in *accessus* No. 438, the importance of legitimate love is stressed for the reader: “when the benefit is seen that comes of legitimate love and the disasters which result from foolish and illicit loves, we would flee the latter two and adhere only to the chaste.”¹¹¹ In Latin, the person of the verb is stressed by the repetition of their endings; *fugiamus* and *adhereamus*, implies that the reader may need to either flee or adhere to love. Also remember that the love being described in the prologues to the *Heroides* is associated with worldly attachment.¹¹² The use of the first-person plural, suggesting the identification of the reader to the letter writers, is limited to the *accessus* which can be dated to the earlier part of the twelfth century, for example, those in Clm 19745. This grammatical marker, recognising the inclusivity of the reader by the verb ending, is not found in *accessus* dated to the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as far as I have been able to establish.¹¹³

The Ovidian presence in twelfth-century literature

The renewal of interest in Ovid in the twelfth century left an impact on a wide range of literature of the period, both in Latin and in French. The idea of chastity paired with love also became evident in literature by the mid-twelfth century, demonstrating the influence of Ovid as *praeceptor morum*. It also reflected the increasing interest in the Trojan sagas, perhaps as a consequence of the continuing

¹¹⁰ Olsen, “Accessus to Classical Poets in the Twelfth Century,” 137.

¹¹¹ No. 438 Unknown, “Accessus Heroidum, I, II, III,” 30. “visa utilitate quae ex legitimo procedit et infortuniis quae ex stulto et illicito solent prosequi, hunc utrumque fugiamus et soli casto adhereamus.” English: Hexter, “Medieval School Commentaries in Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, *Epistulae ex Ponto*, and *Epistulae Heroidum*,” 301.

¹¹² I am aware that Marjorie Curry Woods has argued that it was common for boys to read and identify with female characters in the medieval classroom, but this practice would not have necessitated changes in the way the texts were discussed based on gender. See Marjorie Curry Woods, “Rape and the Pedagogic Rhetoric of Sexual Violence,” in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. Rita Copeland (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹¹³ As three examples of later *accessus* in which the first-person plural version of the verb is not present are those attributed to Fulco of Orléans (No.161), William of Orléans (called the Busarii Ovidii, No.431) and the one potentially by Arnulf of Orléans

Crusades in the East. The stories of the Trojan War in the twelfth century were written without the benefit of Homer's originals and were based on the Latin versions of the *Iliad* inherited from ancient Rome and late antiquity. Adding to information gleaned from classical sources, Trojan enthusiasts mined and adapted the words of Dares of Phrygia and Dictys of Crete who presented themselves as eyewitnesses to the events they described.¹¹⁴ Penelope was not a significant character in these earlier tales of the sack of Troy, except as the chaste wife of Ulysses and was only mentioned by Dictys.¹¹⁵ In his text, the king of the Phaeacians explains to Ulysses that "Penelope was being wooed by thirty handsome suitors who had come from different regions."¹¹⁶ It continues that "[a]s for Penelope, her reputation for virtue is famous."¹¹⁷ The quality of the relationship, beyond her sexual loyalty is not an issue.

In contrast, love was an essential element of Penelope's chastity in Benoît Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*. It was written in Anglo-Norman, c.1155-1160 AD, in the court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. The love which Sainte-Maure valorises was consistent with the medieval interpretations of Penelope's love for Ulysses. His understanding of love (*amor*) begins as a feeling that "flames up" (*esprendre*).¹¹⁸ This collocation of love and fire has very ancient roots, but can also be imagined as underpinning the idea that "Penelope burned in desire for her husband alone"¹¹⁹ as described in some medieval interpretations of Ovid's *Heroides*. For Benoît, foolish and illicit love affairs conclude in both personal and

¹¹⁴ Louise Ropes Loomis, "Medieval Hellenism" (Doctoral Dissertation, Columbia University 1906), 55. Both texts were believed to be first-hand witness accounts of the Trojan War, E. Bagby Atwood, "The "Excidium Troie" and Medieval Troy Literature," *Modern Philology* 35, no. 2 (1937), 128.

¹¹⁵ The most influential of these texts was that of Dares. These texts from late antiquity contributed to what has been recognised as "part of a consistent classical narrative." Atwood, "The "Excidium Troie," 125.

¹¹⁶ Dictys of Crete, *The Trojan War: The Chronicles of Dictys of Crete and Dares the Phrygian*, trans. R. M. Frazer Jnr. (Bloomington and London: Indiana university Press, 1966), 123.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹¹⁸ Barbara Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*, Cambridge studies in medieval literature (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 97.

¹¹⁹ No.185 "solius mariti desiderio calebat"

political disaster.¹²⁰ In this rubric, the love Penelope has for Ulysses provides the paradigm of *bon amor*.¹²¹ “With a perfect heart and good love she [Penelope] always loved her lord.”¹²² Similarly, “She desired him, both night and day.”¹²³ Penelope may be the object of male desire in relation to the suitors, but her rejection of them, the behaviour which demonstrates her chastity, is based on her love for her husband. She is not only the object but also the subject. Therefore, in Benoît de Sainte-Maure's reinterpretation of Dictys, the Ovidian aspect of Penelope is discerned. She reflects Barbara Nolan's contention that in the twelfth-century *romans antiques*, love is “rigorously studied in its temporal, social, moral, and/or political consequences.”¹²⁴

The consequences of illicit love, another theme from the medieval interpretations of Ovid's *Heroides*, is demonstrated by Sainte-Maure's treatment of the relationship between Ulysses and Circe. Unlike the mythographers who praised Ulysses for his wisdom in spurning Circe, Benoît de Saint-Maure recognises the illegitimate son of the union, Telegonus, and presents the consequences of the liaison; Ulysses dies at the unwitting hands of his unknown son. His son Telemachus, born of Penelope, whose love was genuine, lives, marries, and rules his kingdom for eighty years. Good, licit love as demonstrated through a figure like Penelope provided stability to the social order. This demonstrates the efficacy of a woman like Penelope as a model for the virtuous twelfth-century women.

Conclusion

The introduction of Ovid as both *praeceptor amoris* and *praeceptor morum* in the eleventh-century classroom offered new ways of representing female worth. This

¹²⁰ Nolan, *Chaucer and the tradition of the Roman antique*, 98.

¹²¹ Nolan, *ibid.*, 114.

¹²² Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Le Roman de Troie* (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et C^{ie}, 1908). “De fin cuer e de bone amor/ Ama toz jorz puis son segnior.” Lines 29037-8. This passage is discussed by Barbara Nolan as a reflection of appropriate love, contrasting it with the *aventure* of Ulysses's foolish love of Circe. Nolan, *Chaucer and the tradition of the Roman antique*, 115.

¹²³ Sainte-Maure, *Le Roman de Troie*, Line 28972, 316. “Lui desirot e nuit e jor.”

¹²⁴ Nolan, *Chaucer and the tradition of the Roman antique*, 78.

was a period ripe for a model like Penelope, a woman who by her will and love remained chaste while her husband was away, as the Crusades were a fitting parallel to the Trojan War, educated noble women could hold her up as a standard for their own behaviour, recognising a relationship between love and chastity which was framed within ethics in the classroom. Although none of the women discussed in this chapter is explicitly identified with Penelope by their contemporaries, their love reflects Ovidian ideals, as interpreted in the medieval classroom. Love was life long, erotic in spirit, but not necessarily physical, that could be demonstrated by the rejection of suitors. Baudri's description of Adela as surrounded by many men while maintaining faith to the marital bed draws upon their similar circumstances as married women. The intimate correspondence between Baudri and numerous women, including Constance of Ronceray, could not be tolerated unless the love that drove them to write to each other could be expressed chastely. Further, true love was for life for Heloise, and even separation (and religious enclosure) could not extinguish it. For the female letter writers, Ovid's *Heroides* was the ideal locus for identification. No other "female" letter writers were inherited from antiquity, so the Ovidian letters by separated lovers provided a suitable model for literate noble women who might have had to manage life without their husband or lover due to social circumstances. Opportunity for such educated women to study and imitate the *Heroides* was limited, however. The expansion of urban education in the second half of the twelfth century would lead to the *Heroides* being widely studied in all-male classrooms. In such a context Penelope would have a rather different meaning than it had for the women of Le Ronceray.

Chapter Five

Penelope and the Schoolmen 1150-1270

By the mid-twelfth century, classical texts like the *Heroides* were being studied in various cathedral schools across Europe, especially in centres like Orléans. Unlike those female monastic houses where privileged women could occasionally study Ovid, these urban classrooms were exclusively male. The students of these schools had different goals to those of monasteries; young men were being trained to fulfil administrative roles in society. Such an audience did not need a female model of virtue for emulation. Some women in a monastic setting could still be educated in Latin, but more in a spiritual than a literary context. I argue that this influenced the way Penelope was represented in these urban schools.¹ The continued use of the *Heroides* to teach Latin grammar contributed to an increased awareness of Penelope among those pursuing such studies.² School texts of the period, however, suggest an androcentric view, in which men and women were understood to reflect different social and intellectual capacities consistent with their biology.³ In this view, men were considered active and rational and women were associated with procreation, lust and passivity. Penelope as an active but chaste woman did not accommodate this view of female lustfulness and passivity. Her virtue, based on her chastity, was not challenged in clerical literature, but she was implicated in a discourse that denied, or diminished, the female capacity for chastity. Many of these texts in which her name was invoked, have been discussed as misogynist, or anti-marriage, in which the inclusion of women is generally discussed as *in malo*. Despite this,

¹ See for example the work by Julie Ann Smith, “‘The Hours that They Ought to direct to the Study of Letters’: Literate Practices in the Constitutions and Rule for the Dominican Sisters,” *Parergon* 31, no. 1 (2014), 73-94.

² Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling*, 5.

³ See Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*, 5. Also, Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 5. On the importance of the differences between the sexes as a basis for ‘misogyny’, see Walker Bynum, “.. And Woman his Humanity,” 257.

Penelope remained a positive example. This chapter argues that satirists like Hugh Primas, Walter Map, and Arnulf of Orléans, and allegorists such as Alan of Lille and Jean de Meun, needed to include Penelope as an iconic chaste woman as a tool for undermining that potential for other women.

Penelope was one of several classical women, like the Sabine wives and Lucretia, whose presence in school texts reflects clerical grappling with gender definitions in the twelfth century.⁴ Jo Ann McNamara argues that gender definitions were in flux as pressure mounted for clerics to remain celibate, especially during the twelfth century.⁵ Women were perceived as a source of temptation with the potential to disrupt the clerics' chastity. Penelope's identification with marital chastity was not directly relevant to a clerical audience. When referring to her, schoolmen educated in Paris or Orléans tended to diminish Penelope's complexity for more abstract representations disengaged from her social roles. They presented the female role as passive, tending to ignore her potential agency.

In each of the texts to be discussed, references to Penelope are almost inconsequential. Although various scholars have noted Penelope's presence in some of these texts, no one has explained how and why she is mentioned in a context where her chastity undermines the thrust of the clerics' arguments.⁶ Recognising an inherent misogyny underpinning the description of women in clerical texts, the inclusion of Penelope as a virtuous woman and ideal wife is puzzling.⁷ Even more so is the inclusion of an ideal wife in anti-marriage literature.⁸ Penelope did not fit

⁴ This struggle with gender is more apparent in the works of clerics than monks. See Newman, "Flaws in the Golden Bowl," 33. In some ways, this reflects the idea that monastics were outside the dominant gender structure. Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?" 36.

⁵ The rules for clerical celibacy were reinforced in 1148. McNamara, "The Herrenfrage," 21. They were finally ratified at the Fourth Lateran council, 1215.

⁶ Penelope is acknowledged as a stable example of chastity in the works of Walter Map and Jean de Meun in Blamires, Marx, and Pratt, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, 106 and 52.

⁷ The necessity of 'bad' women within clerical texts is pointed out in Wilson and Makowski, *Wykked Wyves*, 9. The idea of irony is one explanation offered. See McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 49.

⁸ On the role of anti-marriage literature on the works generally considered misogynist, see Gretchen V. Angelo, "Creating a Masculine Vernacular: The Strategy of Misogyny in Late Medieval French Texts," in *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity*, ed. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press,

in with the image of women as lustful. In her discussion of representations of the medieval Penelope in her PhD thesis on the ‘making’ of Penelope beyond Homer, Dene Grigar’s assessment of Penelope’s representations in the Middle Ages is largely shaped by Blamires’ *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*.⁹ She opens her chapter on the Middle Ages with a quotation from Walter Map, in which he declares that women like Penelope and Lucretia, renowned for their chastity, no longer exist. While Grigar notes that female virtue was paradoxical and not considered a standard mode of conduct for women, she does not discuss why Penelope would be included in a discussion ‘against marriage’.¹⁰

Other studies acknowledging the presence of Penelope in clerical discussions of gender also overlook the paradox of her inclusion. For example, Blamires’ collection of medieval texts on defending and blaming women mentions Penelope several times. Each of the texts in which she is named, Map’s *De Nugis Curialium* (*Courtly Trifles*) and Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la rose* (*Romance of the Rose*) was considered by Blamires to be in the blaming category of texts.¹¹ The irony that Penelope, the “good wife” is mentioned in these “misogynistic” texts is not discussed. This limited scholarly interest in the presence of Penelope in this medieval literature can also be seen in studies on Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose*,

2003), 85. A breakdown of different styles of misogynist works, general, ascetic, and philosophic is discussed in Wilson and Makowski, *Wykked Wyves*, 4-9. According to Wilson, some of the texts being discussed in this chapter would be considered “philosophic misogynist” as they are intended to steer men away from women as not appropriate companions for the educated and philosophically minded. It would be appropriate in this context for all women to be denigrated, so Penelope’s presence in them is paradoxical.

⁹ Blamires, Marx, and Pratt, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, 228 and 106.

¹⁰ The Walter Map quotation she describes correctly as being part of an excerpt entitled “The Letter of Valerius to Rufinus Against Marriage.” I will discuss the context and significance of this passage myself more fully later in this chapter. It is also worth noting that Grigar did not study which classical sources had influenced the medieval interest in Penelope and Ulysses. She pinpoints the *Roman de Troie* by Benoît de Sainte-Maure as the source of twelfth-century interest in these characters. Grigar, “Penelopeia,” 11-2. Her chapter on the medieval representations of Penelope encompasses the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, but with no individual works of the twelfth or thirteenth century analysed.

¹¹ Blamires, Marx, and Pratt, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*. As a significant influence on medieval literature, Ovid’s use of Penelope in the *Amores* and the *Art of Love* are cited on pp. 17 and 24; reference to her by Walter Map is on p. 106; and Jean de Meun, on p. 152. The exception to this pattern is the reference to Penelope by Christine de Pizan.

in which female autonomy, exemplified by Lucretia and Heloise, is analysed. Although Penelope is named alongside Lucretia in the text, she is not discussed as representing the possibility of female agency.¹² Her potential as a woman who was cunning or loving, and what this might say about understanding chastity as a measure of female agency, is largely overlooked. The lack of interest in Penelope within scholarship reflects the assumption that she is always used as an exemplar of the virtuous married woman, useful only in support of the 'patriarchal' ideal of the obedient and passive wife. Female figures who can be read as useful for supporting the gender hierarchy are sometimes considered less worthy of study.¹³

Penelope in the schools

Many clerical representations of Penelope ignore her potential for agency; this might have been alluded to by reference to masculine strength, or by describing her status as a manifestation of her devotion to her husband. She is stripped of the social circumstances which characterise her chastity, and is instead used as a literary or rhetorical marker devoid of complexity. I argue that by the twelfth century Penelope was so established as a gender marker that she needed to be included into the discourse so that her potential as a model of female agency could be erased. Changes in the representation of Penelope reflect the way expanding urban schools excluded women. These new schools provided a program of liberal arts with a focus on classical studies. No longer protected by monastic walls with strict rules of behaviour, the men of the schools found city life full of temptations. Literature reinforced the dangers of women for the male student.¹⁴ These warnings pertained

¹² Emmanuèle Baumgartner, "De Lucrèce a Héloïse, Remarques sur deux exemples du *Roman de la rose* de Jean de Meun," *Romania* 95 (1974), 433-42: 441; Sylvia Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and its Medieval Readers: interpretation, reception, manuscript transmission*, Cambridge studies in medieval literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 110-1.

¹³ This tendency was noted by Blamires, quoting Kate Millett from her discussion of stereotypes in gender politics. Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*, 5; Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 26.

¹⁴ C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, ed. The Medieval World, David Bates (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2011), 19.

not just to the curtailment of lust, stressing the importance of continence, but directed men away from marriage. This makes Penelope's inclusion in this literature all the more remarkable, as earlier representations had generally depended on her role as a married woman.

The need to include Penelope in this literature partly reflects the continuing use of Ovid's *Heroides* in education. This was particularly so in the French city of Orléans which offered extensive study of classical literature as part of its liberal arts programme. Competition between the two major centres of education in France, Paris and Orléans, focussed on the types of texts studied. While Paris focussed more on speculative grammar and logic, Orléans was famous for poetics and communication skills.¹⁵ Ovid's texts were pivotal, and various educational introductions to his works from three scholars of Orléans of the late twelfth century were copied and formed the basis of later educational manuscripts across Europe. Introductions to *The Heroides* were written by Fulco and William, and one is tentatively attributed to Arnulf.¹⁶ Their approaches to both love and Penelope are different to those of Baudri of Bourgueil and his circle, discussed in the previous chapter. The needs of a male student destined for a celibate life were not the same as those for privileged young women who were potentially destined for a dynastic marriage.

The utility of the *Heroides* described in introductions to that text provides insight into the different needs of male students. Love is discussed as something worth understanding, but without suggesting that it may be part of the students'

¹⁵ Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, eds., *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300 - 1475* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 706-9. In a twelfth-century poem by Henri d'Andeli, the poetic tradition was elevated to the highest and most prestigious level of study at Orléans.

¹⁶ There are six manuscripts containing *accessus* by Fulco. Coulson and Roy, *Incipitarius Ovidianum*, 62. William's treatment of the *Heroides* was part of a longer introduction which also discussed Ovid's other works. Thirteen manuscripts from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries are listed by Coulson and Roy. *Ibid.*, 128-9. The attribution to Arnulf of an introduction to the *Heroides* is tentative, based on the assessment of Frank Coulson and Bruno Roy. It appears in two manuscripts. *Ibid.*, 69. The likelihood that Arnulf wrote an introduction for the *Heroides* is also mentioned by William Donald Reynolds, "The *Ovidius Moralizatus* of Petrus Berchorius: An Introduction and Translation." (Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, 1971), 9.

personal experience. No longer was the first-person plural verb used to explain what should be adhered to or fled from. For example, # 183, possibly written by Arnulf says: [it is] “for us to know to adhere to legitimate and to spurn illegitimate.”¹⁷ There is still some inclusiveness here, but there is no mention of love or chastity. It is assumed. Knowing to adhere is not the same as adhering. The introduction is also much shorter and therefore the pressure on the reader is not as intense as our Tegernsee introductions to the *Heroides* discussed in the previous chapter.

The explanation for its utility in understanding chaste love, as removed from the potential experience of the reader is clearer in the example of Fulco of Orléans: “Or its utility is that if whenever it falls to us our abandoned young girls we have this work to recall them back to our love or the contrary.”¹⁸ This *accessus* does use the inclusive ‘we’ to discuss the utility of the Ovidian text, but the ‘we’ is not addressed to those having love affairs, but to those who may have to deal with the consequences of others’ affairs. This text tells male readers when to recall young women. There is an ‘us and them’ dichotomy not apparent in earlier presentations. The distancing of the reader from love as an aspect of their lives is also apparent in the third scholar’s treatment of *The Heroides*. William of Orléans in the early thirteenth century wrote an *accessus* which is contained in many manuscripts, found in libraries from Basel to the Vatican, dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, highlighting the continuing importance of this text as an educational resource. There is no reference to “we” as the love is treated not as a lived experience so much as a topic of interest: “the usefulness through reading a book of this sort (is) that knowledge of love might be gained.”¹⁹ Again, this contrasts with the earlier *accessus* in which they describe Ovid’s *Heroides* as useful to the

¹⁷ Arnulf of Orléans, Burney 219, BL and Bodleian library, Canon. Class. Lat. 1, C. 13 (Coulson 183) Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 8320, C. 13. “Utilitas nostra scire est legitmo adherere et illicitum spernere.”

¹⁸ No.161 “Vel utilitas est si quandoque contigerit nos a puellis nostris destitui hoc opus exemplar habeamus quomodo eas ad amorem nostrum revocamus vel e contrario.”

¹⁹ *Versus Bursarii Ouidii* (Berol. Lat. 4° 219; Leyden Lat. Lips. 39), Coulson, 431. Text found in Ernst H. Alton and D. E. W. Wormell, “Ovid in the Medieval Schoolroom (continued), *Hermathena* 95, no. July (1961), 67-82: 70-2. “Vtilitas, ut per libri lectionem huiusmodi amoris habeatur noticia.”

classroom reader as a model for ethical behaviour, reinforced through the use of the first-person plural. The shift in vocabulary reinforces a shift in focus from being inclusive of females to inclusive of males only and falls in a period in which gender definitions for men and women were in flux due to the increasing pressure on celibacy for clerics.²⁰

Penelope is also discussed differently in the later school introductions. For example, although Arnulf maintained that Penelope was commended for serving legitimate and chaste love,²¹ the context in which this occurred is ignored; the suitors, and the spurning of their advances are not noted. Similarly, Fulco mentions that Penelope was used by Ovid to commend legitimate love, but there is no mention of her husband or any of the suitors.²² The legitimacy of Penelope's love is also all that is discussed by William in the *Bursarii*.²³ By diminishing the utility of Ovid's instructions regarding love for the current readership and by limiting their discussion of Penelope and the context of her reputation, these schoolmen contributed to the lessening of her importance as a model of female agency.

In each of these introductions, Ovid's intention is still linked to love, and Penelope is named as representing chaste or licit love. The relationship of the readers to love has changed, from being relevant to themselves to having a greater relevance for others. The flexibility of the gender definitions celebrating the intimacy and reciprocity of the loving relationship read in Ovid's *Heroides* was replaced by more rigid boundaries between male and female. The failure to mention

²⁰ This redefinition of gender in which male superiority was measured by their distance from women in daily life has been argued to cover the period 1050-1150. McNamara, "The 'Herrenfrage'", 8. In 1139, the second Lateran Council prohibited clerical marriage. See Adams, "'Make me chaste and continent, but not yet,'" 1. Before this, there was the potential for a more equitable distribution of power between the sexes, an approach subscribed to by some. See pages 11-12. This theory is consistent with the aims and approaches to gender of the literary subculture discussed in the previous chapter. See Bond, "'Locus Amoris'" 192; *The Loving Subject*, 67. Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, 82.

²¹ No. 183, Coulson and Roy, *Incipitarium Ovidianum*, 69. "legitimum commendat per Penelopen que legitimum immutabiliter seruauit amorem."

²² No. 161, Coulson and Roy, *Incipitarium*, 62, "legitimus, quem commendat in Penelope."

²³ No. 431, Coulson and Roy, *Incipitarium*, 128-9. "Intentio sua commendare quasdam a licito amore sicut penelopem."

Penelope's circumstances and challenges, reinforcing a passive aspect to her virtue, also extended to clerical literature of the late twelfth century.

Penelope and the satirists

There were particular patterns in the discussion of Penelope by satirists of the twelfth century. Her example is used to demonstrate the exception to the rule, her rarity. This can be seen most clearly in a poem on Penelope by Hugh Primas, one of the Goliardic poets educated in Orléans. His poems, generally dealt with the issues of wine, women and song and attacks on society. Hugh's tone is generally satirical, and there is nothing to suggest that this poem is any different. He wrote a poem based on the popular Trojan theme in which Ulysses meets Tiresias in the Underworld before finding his way home.²⁴ What is of interest in this poem is the complexity of its characterisation of Penelope (over a third of its 80+ lines are used to describe her) and its hybrid nature in depicting her chastity. He incorporates both love and self sacrifice (classical and Christian ideas) as characteristics of female virtue, but also elements which have generally been attributed to the misogyny of later twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as education became more exclusively associated with men.

Penelope's love in Hugh's poem, is so strong that she would be prepared to die for it. Chastity as love and chastity as death, an approach found in Jerome and Marbod of Rennes, are paired:

If she were willing to be kind
her enemies would turn to friends, and they'd be kind in turn.
She'd rather be oppressed by want, and lose what she possessed,
than stoop to prostitution; but now she may, courageous woman,
die from cold and thirst and loyal love for you, her husband.²⁵

²⁴ Book 2, Verse 5 *Horace: Satires and Epistles*, ed, Edward Parmelee Morris (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968).

²⁵ "Poem 10" Lines 40-44, "Sed, qui hostis erat, foret equus/et blandis fieret, fieri si blanda valeret./ Paupertate premi sua malebat quia demi,/ quam sua cum scortis sors esset, femina fortis/

Using the framework of a poem by the Roman Horace (in which Ulysses meets with the seer Tiresias in the underworld) and the Ovidian ideal of love, Hugh presents a medieval Penelope with classical allusions, but with strong Christian overtones. The dwelling on the suffering and the humbling of her poverty creates a model of chastity that speaks as much of Christian values as classical virtue. It shows a transposition of the figure to represent a model more consistent with the Christian value of female humility. There are also echoes of the ideal wife of Proverbs 10:10-31. This parallel is particularly striking in the following passage:

A woman who rejects the tempting blandishments of sex
And can't be beaten down by harassment or lured by gain
Or sweet-talked into sin is worth more than King Cyrus's crown.
Don't give me precious stones, or gold, or a thousand coins:
True loyalty is better than Agamemnon's wealth could offer;
A holy mind's worth more to me than Africa's treasure store.²⁶

The influence of Ovid is clear in the description of Penelope's love for her husband as the motive behind her long standing chastity. Penelope is treated as an individual with her own motives and feelings. Hugh also discusses Penelope in a way that foreshadows the way she will be discussed by later authors of the twelfth century premised on the rarity of chastity among women. Additionally, he introduces a unique element, evident in relation to other chaste women referred to in literature of this era, but never replicated by other satirists: the association of chastity to virility. Both of these characteristics are discussed as typical in scholarship on

nunc algore, siti morietur, amore mariti," in *Hugh Primas and the Archpoet*, trans. Fleur Adcock, (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 22.

²⁶ *Hugh Primas and the Archpoet*, Lines 51-68, "Spernere iam Venerem nec posse capi mulierem/ aut irriri pretio dampnisve ferire/ vel prece molliri prius est dyademate Cyri./ Non aurum, lapides nec mille talenta michi des:/ vincit pura fides, quicquid dare posset Atrides;/ Plum animum sanctum probo quam gazas Garamantum," trans. Adcock, 25.

female chastity.²⁷ The attribution of male characteristics to Penelope has not been discussed in scholarship, as far as I know. This is the only case I have found in which Penelope's chastity is linked to manliness.

Penelope's rarity among women is apparent in the poem by Hugh. The *rara avis* (rare bird) topos, derived from the satires of Juvenal, is one tool in the arsenal used to undermine the female capacity for virtue.²⁸ By noting Penelope's rarity, she remains within a discourse on women, while at the same time undermining her potential as a model for contemporary women:

A woman without greed, although she's poor, is a rare bird.
A woman who rejects the tempting blandishments of sex
and can't be beaten down by harassment or lured by gain...²⁹

The rarity of such a woman is reinforced by the attribution of male characteristics. This factor places women like Penelope beyond the capacity of their female peers.

I wonder at her powers: ignoring all her suitors' prayers,
Although her sex is frail, alone she managed to prevail.
Resisting all compulsion, by force or intimidation,
Resolutely opposed to the wickedness these men proposed,
no flattery or force could move her from her noble course.
She fought with all her might – more than a man's, for what is right.³⁰

²⁷ The *rara avis* topos and its derivation from Juvenal is discussed by McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 46; Wilson and Makowski, *Wykked Wyves*, 13. The ideas of strength, manliness and virago as a term to describe manly men are discussed by several authors, including Ferrante, *To the Glory of her Sex*, 15; LoPrete, "The Gender of Lordly Women," 105; "Gendering Viragos: Medieval Perception of Powerful Women," 21-4; Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?," 43; Newman, "Flaws in the Golden Bowl," 26.

²⁸ For Juvenal, the rare woman was likened to a black swan. For others, including some to be discussed in this chapter, the phoenix represented the rare nature of the chaste woman. See Blamires, Marx, and Pratt, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*; McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 50, 54. Wilson and Makowski, *Wykked Wyves*, 27.

²⁹ *Hugh Primas and the Archpoet*, Lines 62-4, "Dum sit avis rara mulier pauper nec avara,/ Spernere iam Venerem nec posse capi mulierem/ Aut irretiri pretio dampnisve feiri," trans. Adcock. 24-5.

³⁰ *Hugh Primas and the Archpoet*, Lines 69-74, "Miror, quod tantum potuit, tot ut una precantum/ vitartit nexus, montis levis obvia sexus./ Nec commota minis neque vi nec fracta ruinis,/ nec, dum vicinis vicium negat, illa rapinis/ nec blandimentis ruit alta femina mentis: iusticie miles, vires transgressa viriles," trans. Adcock. 24-5,

Penelope is praised for holding off so many men, an ability dependant on strength more generally associated with men. There is a strong history of female chastity being associated with manliness.³¹ It depends upon the denial of the female state and highlights the paradox Penelope offered to these male writers. When women are linked with weakness and a natural inability to curb their lust, Penelope stands out as the exception. Hugh's representation of Penelope drew upon this literature, including both Ovidian and Trojan motifs, to create a novel Penelope with both classical and Christian attributes. Even if this was not written as a model for women, it does offer a description of female agency, even while noting its rarity. The uniqueness of this description of Penelope is evident from analysis of the subsequent texts, all later than this one. Although the rarity motif was repeated in other texts, the virility of Penelope is no longer mentioned. The later representations of Penelope were modified to accommodate the prevailing view of women as weak.

Penelope is one of several chaste classical women used by Walter Map in *De Nugis Curialium* (*On Courtly Trifles*). When he introduces them, however, he states that no contemporary women can now live up to their chaste standards: "The banner of chastity was won by Lucretia and Penelope and the Sabine women, and it was a very small troop that brought it home. Friend, there is no Lucretia, no Penelope, no Sabine left: mistrust all."³² The rarity of chastity among women is not limited to a discussion of Penelope, the Sabines and Lucretia. Like Juvenal and Hugh, Map inserts a bird motif to highlight their limited numbers: "The very best woman (who is rarer than a phoenix) cannot be loved without the bitterness of fear, anxiety, and frequent misfortune. Wicked women.....swarm abundantly."³³ The

³¹ For deep-seated origins of the male woman as the ideal, see Aspegren, *The Male Woman: A Feminine Ideal in the Early Church*.

³² Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), 162, "Vexilla pudicie tulerunt cum Sabinis Lucretia et Penelope, et paucissimo comatu trophea retulerunt. Amice, nulla est Lucretia, nulla Penelope, nulla Sabina, times omnes." trans. Montague R. James, (London: Cymmrodorion Society, 1923) 146

³³ Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, "Optima femina, quae rarior est fenice, amari non potest sine amaritudine metus et sollicitudinis et frequentis infortunii. Male vero, quarum tam copiosa sunt"

rarity of such women is emphasised by the comparison to the phoenix, a mythical bird; the very best of women were not only like rare birds, but even rarer than a mythical one.

Educated in Paris and familiar with classical Latin texts, Map became a member of the court of Henry II. His *Trifles* was written between the years of 1179-1190 and is maintained in one manuscript. It is heavily ironic, although this was/is not always recognised.³⁴ One section of it, *Dissuasio Valerii ad Ruffinum philosophum ne uxorem ducat* (Valerius to Ruffinus, against Marriage) was very popular and was copied and circulated separately from the whole text. There are 158 extant medieval copies of the *Dissuasio*, significantly more than the whole text. This excerpt in particular has contributed to the text being considered misogynist and misogynist. Yet, this approach to the text undermines recognition of its ironic nature. Reading the text ironically offers a purpose for Penelope's inclusion, as the author subtly contradicts himself in praising her rarity. Her inclusion in the *Dissuasio*, was clearly understood by its medieval readers to discuss the negative influence of women for educated men, and dismantle the possibility of finding a contemporary chaste woman.

Medieval readers assumed the *Dissuasio* was a classical text by the author Valerius, giving it a level of authority not necessarily given to contemporaneous works. Its wide circulation is associated with the spread of Jerome's *Against Jovinian*, which became popular in the twelfth century. In fact, this period is sometimes characterised by the circulation of these two texts: "misogynist literature ballooned, fuelled by manuscript compilations of misogynous extracts from Jerome's treatise defending virginity *Against Jovinian* and Walter Map's pseudo-

Map, *De Nugis Curialim*, trans. James, 146. Blamires, Marx, and Pratt, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, 106

³⁴ Neil Cartlidge suggests that one medieval commentator was embarrassed by the extreme approach to women taken by Map. "What he means to say is that the number of bad women is very much greater than that of the good. Indeed, morally speaking, this is just as true of men, which is something to be regretted." This comment was in the margin beside the passage in which Penelope was mentioned. See Neil Cartlidge, "Misogyny in a Medieval University? The 'Hoc contra malos' Commentary on Walter Map's *Dissuasio Valerii*," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 8 (1998), 156-91: 159.

Roman Letter of “Valerius to Ruffinus, against Marriage.”³⁵ M.R. James in his introduction to *Courtly Trifles* described it as part of “the medieval tradition of attacks upon the female sex.”³⁶

The denigration of women in some of these texts fulfilled a social function. Wilson suggests that the *Dissuasio* belongs to the class of “philosophic misogynistic” texts, explaining that the misogyny is part of a rhetorical device to deflect clerics from marriage by highlighting the incompatibility of marriage and the philosophic life.³⁷ Anti-marriage literature is constantly recognised as misogynistic because of the heavy handed way with which women are discussed. Wilson has suggested that the female exempla used in such texts were *in malo*, not *in bono*; in directing men away from women and marriage, there was no need for positive exemplar. This highlights why the text should be considered as a whole, and the ironic nature recognised. The use of irony and internal inconsistencies of Map’s text (when the excerpt is considered as part of the whole) suggest that the book was more likely to have been written as amusement for educated men of the court, not as advice on living.

The ironic aspect of Map’s text is demonstrated by Penelope being named in one situation, and her social circumstances referred to in another, without the two parts being acknowledged as dealing with the same material. Yet Map’s educated contemporaries would recognize the common theme of her rejection of the suitors as the unique marker of Penelope’s chastity. If this is how she was remembered in an educational setting, how are we to interpret this question posed by Map: “Finally, what woman, among so many thousand thousands, ever saddened the eager and consistent suitor by a permanent refusal?”³⁸ Having already named the one woman

³⁵ Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*, 8.

³⁶ M. R. James, “Introduction”, in *Walter Map, De Nugis Curialium: Courtier’s Trifles*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), xxi

³⁷ Wilson and Makowski, *Wykked Wyves*, 90.

³⁸ Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, 168; “Tandem que unquam inter tot milia milium sedulum sollicitumque precatorem perpetua constrisavit repulsa?” Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, trans. James, 154. “Blamires, Marx, and Pratt, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, 112.

whose reputation was for the long term refusal of many suitors, the question is designed to make us think of her.

The ironic nature of the text also challenges its designation as a misogynist text. The removal and circulation of the excerpt may point to the desire of readers for anti-marriage literature, but that does not mean it was written as advice on living without women. By ignoring Penelope's marriage, the suitors, love and any aspect of the original story, Map presents his readers with an abstraction, a figure not bound by the social relationships and manners. Her rarity distinguishes her from the contemporary women known by Map and his readers.

The rarity of the chaste woman is also a theme in the story of *Lidia*, written around 1175 by Arnulf of Orléans.³⁹ This has been described as the "most blatantly misogynistic of the Latin comedies."⁴⁰ The tale is one of several texts of the era, influenced by the classical works of Ovid and Terence, written to "titillate" a male audience.⁴¹ Arnulf, like Map, focuses on Penelope's role as a loyal wife, without mentioning her love for her husband. This is despite his familiarity with Ovidian texts, including the *Heroides*. The character Lidia is a married woman who desires one of her husband's men. The potential lover who, thinking it might be a test of loyalty from his lord, sets her three tasks which would demonstrate the strength of her desire: killing her husband's favourite hawk, removing five hairs from his chin and removing one of his teeth. When she accomplishes these, the two contrive to fool the husband so that he will have full faith in her fidelity and never suspect their affair. The text of *Lidia* is explicitly marked as a warning to men on the negative influence of women:

So that my *Adventures of Lidia*, imitated from works of old,
might find approval, I have here depicted

³⁹ When first published in the nineteenth century, it was believed that Matthew of Vendôme wrote *Lidia*, but it is now accepted as the work of his rival, Arnulf of Orléans. Bruno Roy, "Arnulf of Orleans and the Latin 'Comedy'," *Speculum* 49, no. 2 (1974), 258-66. An English translation can be found in *Seven Medieval Latin Comedies*, trans. Alison Goddard Elliott (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984), 126-46.

⁴⁰ Elliott, "Introduction," in *Seven Medieval Latin Comedies*, xlv.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xv-xvi.

all the feminine wiles worthy of note.
 I have shown all that a woman is capable of
 so you may flee forewarned: after all,
 you too may have a Lidia in your life.⁴²

Men are warned that all women are capable of wiles and thus to be wary of them. Although the Homeric Penelope might have been considered full of wiles, the Latin tradition had not maintained this perspective. Penelope's inclusion later in the text makes it clear that she is not included among the unworthies.

What is marriage now? What has become of the nuptial vow?
 What is the advantage of the shared marriage bed?
 Penelope is nowhere; nowhere is Lucretia of old to be found.
 No contemporary woman knows how to be either.
 Evil follows hard upon evil, and an illicit law
 seems to require Thais to follow on hard upon Thais.
 There's little enough loyalty today, still less among women.
 Conduct a survey of them all - you'll find nary a Sabine.
 A woman's fidelity to her husband lies only in her face;
 if you should look deeper you will find
 a gentle zephyr filled with poison.⁴³

Like Map, Arnulf focuses on the rarity of the chaste woman. Penelope is named with Lucretia who was prepared to die, shamed by her rape. This Penelope does not practice deceptive arts, deceiving the suitors with her weaving, nor is she the loving

⁴² Arnulf of Orléans, "Lydia," Lines 3-6, translated by Edmond Lackenbacher (into French), in Gustave Cohen (ed.) *La «Comédie» Latine en France au xii^e siècle* (Paris: Société d'Édition «Les Belles-Lettres» 1931), 131, "Ut nova Lidiades veteres imitata placeret, / Finxi femineis queque notanda dolis. / Cautius ut fugeres docui quid femina posset; / Esse potest una Lidia quoque tibi," trans. Elliott, 126.

⁴³ Arnulf, "Lydia" Lines 129-138, trans. Lachenbacher, 231, "Quid nunc coniugium, quid nunc sponsalia iura, / Quid confert socii gratia lege thori? / Nusquam Penelope, nusquam Lucretia dudum; / Utraque nunc neutra quelibet esse potest. / A simili subito omne malum, repetique videtur / Illicita Thydis altera lege Thays. / Parva fides hodie, minor est inde in muliere: / Omnes si numeres, nulla Sabina manet. / Sola viro fida frons est; si cetera queris, / Invenies zephyro blanda venena suo," trans. Elliott, 130.

wife, burning in desire for her husband. What makes this particularly striking is a reference to female arts of deception, referring to the loyalty of a married woman being only skin deep, but there is no allusion to Penelope here. Both deception and desire belong to the woman of ill-repute, like Lidia, who is explicitly described as typical of women. In the words of Lidia's maid:

All women are the same; what fear did Messalina have?
 No woman is afraid; no woman is unwilling;
 no, they do the soliciting. Not a one
 knows moderation, nor is modesty found in any.⁴⁴

There is no room for individuality here. This is consistent with Bloch's dictum on misogyny; statements starting with "Woman is..." or "Women are....," deny the possibility of difference and are clear markers of stereotyping, in this case on the negative and lustful nature of woman. The ideal woman waits, but most women, like Lidia, are happy to make the moves. In this context, Penelope's representations accord with positive female attributes; she represents passivity (not making a move toward seduction) without deceit or desire. Her rarity and status as exception to the rule demand this.

Penelope and allegory

Writers of allegory had a different approach to Penelope. In an earlier chapter I observed that scholars had noted the influence of the figure of Penelope in the development of Boethius' *Lady Philosophy*. The connection between the two figures relied on various similarities and included the role of the feminine leading a man to wisdom. The wise man's decision to cleave to chastity is also represented in Fulgentius' *Mythology*, in which Penelope as wife is contrasted to Circe as lust. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, this allegorical manifestation of a female figure leading man to salvation was echoed in romance or courtly literature; the

⁴⁴ Arnulf, "Lydia," Lines 103-5, "Omnes sunt tales, en Messalina veretur? / Nulla timet, nulla denaget, immo petit. / Non habet una modum, nec in omnibus una modesta," trans, Elliott, 129

potential for the woman succumbing to the lover's demands, which underpinned most courtly literature, perhaps precluded a woman with Penelope's reputation from playing a part in this genre. She did however maintain a limited role in allegorical writings which derived from the model established by Boethius; I use the word limited as Penelope was demoted from her role of leading the way. Instead she became a figure who represented the concept of chastity without any regard to its potential as a characteristic applicable to women and their agency, or as specific quality of the wise man. This can be seen in two texts, in which Penelope maintains ideals of constancy and chastity, Alan of Lille's *De Planctu Naturae* (*The Complaint of Nature*) and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* (*Romance of the Rose*), written in the thirteenth century.⁴⁵

The passivity of Penelope in the *Complaint of Nature* illustrates the passive role Alan attributes to women to discuss the sexual mores of the late twelfth century. His understanding of sex was premised on the notion of woman as passive receiver of male action, as a means to condemn sodomy;⁴⁶ Alan was reacting to men being corrupted into roles not suited to their sex. Penelope's role is a tangent to these concerns, although it is interesting to consider her inclusion in such a text. This passivity is highlighted by the description of her as image on a garment. She is truly an object of the (male) gaze. Written around 1160-1165, Alan used classical motifs to discuss what he saw as moral decay. The *Complaint* is an allegorical text in which personified Nature describes her disappointment as she comprehends how society, under the care of Venus, has disintegrated into vice. It is also a theological text but locates its concern for religious matters within the context of secular learning in the twelfth century.⁴⁷ Alan's allegorical figures resemble those of Boethius in his

⁴⁵ Both of these texts have been considered to represent *modus uiuendi*, matching religious and secular values. See Winthrop Wetherbee, "The Literal and the Allegorical: Jean de Meun and the *De Planctu Naturae*", *Mediaeval Studies* 33 (1971), 264-91: 264.

⁴⁶ Maureen Quilligan, "Words and Sex: The Language of Allegory in the *De Planctu Naturae*, the *Roman de la Rose*, and Book III of *The Fairy Queen*," *Allegorica* 1 (1977), 195-216: 196. David F. Hult, ed. *Debate of the Romance of the Rose*, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 55, n. 18.

⁴⁷ The greater pressure of religious values in secular society in the twelfth century, Gerald Bond suggests, was the result of the actions on Pope Urban in the late eleventh century. See Bond, *The*

Consolation of Philosophy. A basic premise of the work is the internal struggle between lust and reason.⁴⁸ Alan is not out to condemn the expression of basic desire, as long as it ‘restrains itself with the bridle of moderation’.⁴⁹ Many of the allegorical figures in the text are ‘female’, a factor consistent with the linguistic aspects of the Latin language, in which abstract concepts like chastity, virtue and power are all gendered female.⁵⁰ One of the issues discussed in the text is the procreative act where the two sexes in this discussion are seen to have different but complementary roles.⁵¹ Man is represented as a hammer, an active agent of strength while the female (or the passive sodomite) as an anvil. This is how Alan describes sex:

[Venus with] her husband Hymen and her son Cupid, by laboring at the various formation of the living things of earth, and regularly applying their productive hammers to their anvils, might weave together the line of the

Loving Subject: Desire, Eloquence, and Power in Romanesque France, 100. Winthrop Wetherbee notes that C. S. Lewis considered the *Complaint* as a *modus vivendi* between religious and secular life. Wetherbee, “The Literal and the Allegorical: Jean de Meun and the *De Planctu Naturae*,” 264.

⁴⁸ Allegorical figures each represent two sides of man’s internal struggle. In Boethius, the struggle is represented by Philosophy and Fortune while in the *Complaint*, Nature and Genius are in opposing corners. Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature*, 43.

⁴⁹ Alan of Lille, “The Plaint of Nature,” in *Mediaeval sources in translation*, trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), 154.

⁵⁰ For a discussion on the implications of the gender of personifications, see Helleman, *The Feminine Personification of Wisdom*, 27.

⁵¹ Joan Ferrante describes the importance of the sexual act in medieval cosmography for understanding creation: “The father is the sum of the ideas that have been in the divine mind from eternity; he is divine wisdom, analogous to the second person in the trinity. Christ the Word, the manifestation of God in time. The union of God’s ideas with matter is spoken of, figuratively, as a sexual act. Matter is the mother, the prime locus of all generation, the receptacle of all forms, which in itself forms nothing, ie., the passive female, the womb which must receive the male seed (in this case, divine ideas) before it can conceive. It may well be that such a metaphorical use of the sexual act as a figure of God’s creation, exalts the human sexual act, enabling Bernard Silvester and Alanus to justify sex in their poetry as an essential tool in the work of providence. And if creation can be described as a sexual act, it is not surprising that creating forces analogous to the trinity are personified as female figures.” Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature*, 41. A similar approach to sex was a part of Arnulf’s *Lidia*, Lines 121-5, “The dukes’ hall is large; because she is shameless/ she receives everyone; the doorman issues invitations,/ and entrance is easy for the door is wide open./ One after the other arrives and is admitted. / The hammer strikes the anvil three and four times;/ she endures the strokes and opens the furnace even wider,” trans. Elliott, *Seven Medieval Latin Comedies*, 130.

human race in unwearied continuation, to the end that it should not suffer violent sundering at the hands of the Fates.⁵²

This idea of the feminine as the passive aspect of a heterosexual pairing of the sexes underpins much of Alan's representation of women. Language represented this relationship of male actor and female recipient within the subject/verb/object paradigm.⁵³ The shifting of roles, from object to subject or vice versa, was considered a breach of nature. Women were the passive matter within which male ideas could take shape to create a new being; they are not moral actors but merely passive objects of male attention and the recipients of male action.

Penelope reflects this passivity of woman by being inserted into Alan's text as an image on the garment of personified Chastity. There is much detail about the different garments worn by the characters, reminiscent of the dress worn by Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation*. For example, pride in the workmanship of the wearer is seen, as "...muslin, with its white colour faded to green, which the maiden, as she herself later explained, had woven without seams, was not cheapened by common material but was gay with delicate workmanship."⁵⁴ Allusions to Lady Philosophy in Boethius are clear. Penelope is figured on a white dress, that of a personification of Chastity: "There in the mirror-like picture I could see the mirror of Penelope's chastity."⁵⁵ She is one figure of several who are

⁵² Alain of Lille, "The Complaint of Nature", *Yale Studies in English*, v. 36 (1908), "Venerem in fabрили scientia conpertam mee que operationis subuicariam in mundiali suburbio collocaui, ut ipsa sub mee preceptionis arbitrio, Ymenei coniugis filii que Cupidinis industria suffragante, in terrestrium animalium uaria effigiatione desudans, fabriles malleos suis regulariter adaptans incudibus, humani generis seriem indefessa continuatione contexeret, ne Parcarum manibus intercisa discidii iniurias sustineret," trans., Douglas M. Moffat Alan of Lille, "De planctu naturae," ed. N. M. Häring in: *Studi Medievali*, 19,2 (1978), p. 806-879, 866,

⁵³ A discussion on the importance of the gendering of the nouns for hammer and anvil and the implications of this can be found in Jan Ziolkowski, *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex and the Meaning of Grammar to a Twelfth-Century Intellectual* (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1985), 29-31.

⁵⁴ Lille, "De planctu naturae" ed. N. M. Häring, *Studi Medievali*, 19,2 (1978), p. 806-879: 866, "Vestes etiam suis niuibis predictorum albedini argumentis uerioribus conclusissent, nisi pictura uarios conmentata colores earum fefellisset albedinem," trans. Moffat, 94.

⁵⁵ Lille, "De planctu naturae" ed. N. M. Häring, 867, "Illic in speculo picturae, castitatis speculum Penelopem poteram speculari," trans. Moffat, 95.

represented on this garment, all examples of chastity, but hers is the only representation where the actions used to demonstrate this virtue are not mentioned/pictured. The previous examples are described with features which indicate their behaviour:

the chastity of Hippolytus, fortified by a wall of constancy, persisted in resisting the lascivious advances of his stepmother. There Daphne, to prevent the bolts and locks of her virginity being broken, by flight put to flight Phoebus with his enticements. There Lucretia rids herself of the effects of the loss of her violated chastity by a saving death.⁵⁶

Hippolytus is pictured as a strong wall but was able to persist, presumably calling on his manliness. Daphne is seen fleeing, withdrawing from potential contact; her transcendence from weak female is represented by her transformation into a tree. Lucretia is then shown killing herself as chastity is more important than life itself. Each of these representations reflect their mythological origins, but Penelope's does not. Penelope's femininity is negated, or more precisely, abstracted, by distancing her image from both her origins and the observer. She is doubly an image as it is only the image of her chastity displayed in a mirror on the garment of Chastity. Any semblance of agency for Penelope is removed.

One of the fascinating aspects of this representation of Penelope is her association with Chastity, rather than the god Hymen who represents marriage: "On these clothes tales, told in pictures, showed, as in a dream, the circumstances connected with marriage."⁵⁷ Unfortunately, these clothes have become so dark, no image can be clearly identified on them. The joy of marriage was still visible, but not the examples. Hymen has been described as "the peacemaking unity, the

⁵⁶ Lille, "De planctu naturae" ed. N. M. Häring, 867, "In his etenim sub conmento picture uidebatur intextum, qualiter Ypoliti castitas, muro uallata constantie, nouercalis luxurie oppositionibus institit refellendo, Illic Daphne, ne uirginalis sere fracturam pessula sustinerent, fuga Phebi fugabat illecebras. Illic Lucrecia fracti pudoris dispendium mortis excludebat compendio," trans. Moffat, 199-200.

⁵⁷ Lille, "De planctu naturae" ed. N. M. Häring, 867, trans. Moffat, 197.

inseparable yoke, the indissoluble bond of matrimony.”⁵⁸ If Alan had wanted to emphasise Penelope’s role as a married woman, he might have placed her on Hymen’s garments or on his train. Instead, he places her on the garment of Chastity, playing on the idea of images, distancing her further from an historical representation, emphasised by two references to mirrors.⁵⁹ This way Penelope becomes an image within an image. Ulysses is not mentioned, nor her love for him. The passivity of Penelope in this passage is consistent with Alan’s understanding of the female sexual role, but removes her from a discourse on female behaviour.

Passivity is also a characteristic of Penelope in a thirteenth-century *Romance of the Rose*, a vernacular text which was heavily influenced by the Latin tradition, including Boethius’ *Consolation*. It was written in two parts: the first section by Guillaume de Lorris (fl. 1230) and the second part forty years later by Jean de Meun, who is considered one of the most important medieval French writers in the Ovidian tradition.⁶⁰ This text is frequently described as reflecting Jerome’s representation of women, quoting the ancient work of Theophrastus which is now lost; the only parts known are summarised in the fourth-century *Against Jovinian*.⁶¹ The *Romance* was pivotal in the fifteenth century *querelle des femmes* to be discussed in a later chapter. It is also considered a marker for the development of French as a scholarly language, initiating a process of pushing Latin aside for literary texts.⁶² The audience for these works is unclear, as the vernacular was traditionally associated with the uneducated and women.⁶³ While the work might have been read by women, however, the intended audience was men; schoolmen

⁵⁸ Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature*, 60.

⁵⁹ I use the term historical here to draw attention to Bloch’s assertion that the allegorisation of the feminine in literature equates with removing woman from history.

⁶⁰ Allen, *The Art of Love*, 13.

⁶¹ For example, Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 13; McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 54; Wilson, *Wykked Wyves*, 4, 50, 58

⁶² Fenster, “Introduction,” 6. The significance of this will become apparent in the next chapter.

⁶³ The co-opting of vernacular for an all-male readership is discussed in Mary Frances Brown, “Critique and Complicity: Metapoetical Reflections on the Gendered Figures of Body and Text in the *Roman de la Rose*,” *Exemplaria* 21, no. 2 (2009), 129-59: 153.

could bond over the humour as they laughed at the depictions of sex and women.⁶⁴ Perhaps the possibility of its being read by women added to its salaciousness and popularity. It has also been suggested that the purpose of the text, with its dramatic ending of the rose being plucked, was to teach the social codes of manhood.⁶⁵ Once again, female passivity underpins the discourse on the feminine in this text, revealing the woman as the object of the male gaze. In this role, Penelope displays no agency, and her chastity is judged as a product of male behaviour. In a reversal of fortune, she has become one of the women with the potential to lead man astray.

Unlike Latin texts, both from antiquity and the medieval period, the vernacular as a vehicle for scholarly discussion was hampered by its lack of *auctoritas*, the authority derived by being an author, requiring strategies to consolidate the texts' credentials. The earliest vernacular works were largely translations of Latin texts, or commissioned by nobility, each factor contributing to substantiating authority.⁶⁶ By writing in the vernacular, scholars, and clerics distanced it from the province of women, children, and oral language, elevating it to a level similar to Latin. Various tropes from Latin texts were borrowed to scaffold this elevation, including anti-women and anti-marriage rhetoric, similar to what has been described as 'philosophic' misogyny.⁶⁷ Referring to these earlier Latin texts demonstrated the vernacular author's intellectual authority and inserted him, and the text, into the literary line of the authority. The adoption of anti-women rhetoric not only established this line of inheritance, its potential repulsion for a female readership helped delineate a clear literary and scholarly male reading community.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ This is one interpretation of the wit in the *Romance*. See Alistair Minnis, *Magister Amoris: The Roman de la Rose and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 178.

⁶⁵ Another interpretation of the *Romance*. Alistair Minnis, *Magister Amoris*, 199.

⁶⁶ Angelo, "The Vulgar Tongue," 86.

⁶⁷ Angelo discusses this in some depth, drawing upon the work of Wilson and Makowski, *Wykked Wyves*

⁶⁸ The importance of a male perspective in the reading of *The Romance* is discussed at some length by Minnis, *Magister Amoris*, 107-202.

This anti-woman stance is clearly articulated in many different ways in Jean de Meun's part of the *Romance of the Rose*. Although open to interpretation due to the layering of voices, its discussion on women has much in common with the excerpt circulated from Map's text (the *Disuassio*) as well as the *Complaint of Nature*. The *Romance* and *Complaint* have both been described as responding to the question, "how does a poet reveal the proper place of sexuality in human society within a divinely ordered cosmos, when the language of poetry has been corrupted by the abuse of irresponsible poets?"⁶⁹ While in the *Complaint of Nature* there is a legitimate role for sex within the laws of marriage, the *Romance*'s perspective is that woman is someone to be seduced and captured, but not necessarily to be held within a long term relationship. As Alistair Minnis notes, there is no room here for "contact between male and female of a kind which is reciprocally emotional, mental, human"⁷⁰ Women are summed up by one character thus:

I do not say these things on account of good women, who establish restraints through their virtues; but I have not yet found any, however many I have tested.And if you take the trouble to seek one and find her, take her; you will have the pick of sweethearts, one who will be wholly yours.⁷¹

The motif on the rarity of the worthy woman should now be familiar. The theme continues by drawing upon the words of others to reinforce the point:

Worthy women, as Valerius bears witness, are fewer than phoenixes. No man can love one but what she will pierce his heart with great fears and cares and other bitter misfortunes. Fewer than phoenixes? By my head, a more honest comparison would say fewer than white crows, however beautiful their bodies

⁶⁹ Quilligan, "Words and Sex," 196.

⁷⁰ Minnis, *Magister Amoris*, 197.

⁷¹ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose* [Roman de la Rose; de Lorris, Guillaume, and Jean de Meun. *Le Roman de la Rose - Tome II*], Gutenberg Publishers, 2005, 377, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/16816No.download>, Lines 10337-10348 "Je ne dis pas cela pour celles / Qui sont à la vertu fidèles / Et dont nulle encor ne trouvai; / En vain mille j'en éprouvai. / Salomon en est une preuve; / Souvent il les mit à l'épreuve[130], / Et jamais, du moins l'affirma, / Femme fidèle ne trouva. / Or, si jamais en trouvez une, / Prenez-la, louez la Fortune; / Car alors une amante aurez / Que toute à vous posséderez," trans. Harry W. Robbins (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 199-200,

may be. Nevertheless, whatever I say, and in order that those who are alive may not say that I attack all women with too great impunity, a worthy woman, if one wants to recognise her, either in the world or in the cloister, and if he wants to put in some toil in seeking her, is a rare bird on earth, so easily recognized that it is like the black swan, even Juvenal confirms this idea when he reiterates it is a positive statement: If you find a chaste wife, go kneel down in the temple, bow down to worship Jupiter, and put forth your effort....⁷²

Like Hugh Primas and Walter Map, Jean de Meun, in the guise of one of his characters, presents the chaste woman as novel. His reference to Penelope is in the company of Lucretia, but in this case, the meaning can be read as more than just a declaration of contemporary moral laxity. The allegorical structure of the *Roman de la Rose* has been described as the interaction between nature (gendered female) and culture represented by male Genius.⁷³ Penelope's inclusion alongside Lucretia allows the author to demonstrate the association of chaste women with great societies: "But no Lucretia in Rome today, And no Penelope in all of Greece; indeed if one should search the entire world, He'd hardly find a woman of this kind."⁷⁴

⁷² Lorrin and Meun, *The Romance of the Rose, Le Roman de la Rose - Tome II*, 300-301, Lines 9071-9089, "Valerius qui se doloit / De ce que Rufin se voloit / Voire moins que de blancs corbeaux, / Combien que fussent leurs corps beaux. / Et cependant, quoi que j'en die, / Afin que ceux qui sont en vie / Ne puissent répondre, qu'à tort / Toutes les loge en même bord: / C'est oiseau clair semé sur terre; / Qui veut, nonnain ou séculière, / Honnête femme dénicher, / Peut tout son temps perdre à chercher. / Cet oiseau bien reconnaissable / Et tout au cygne noir semblable / Voici, du reste, ce qu'écrit / Juvénal confirmant mon dit: / «Si jamais trouves femme honnête, / Cours au temple, courbe la tête, / Jupiter adore à genoux," trans. Robbins, 176;

⁷³ Sylvia Huot, "Bodily Peril: Sexuality and the Subversion of Order in Jean de Meun's 'Roman de la Rose,'" *The Modern Language Review* 95, no. 1 (2000), 41-61: 42. Also, in the same reference on page 57, "Genius's vision of history accords well with that of la Vieille; just as men established the sexual bondage of women through the institution of marriage, so also they maintain their control of culture through writing and forging and their dominance of the natural world, and their ownership of the land, through farming. In employing these metaphors, Genius presupposes the familiar equation of the female body with the earth (to be subdued, ploughed, planted, and harvested by men), with raw materials (to be shaped and forged and transformed into the implements of patriarchal culture), and with blank tablets (to be filled with masculine writing). Seemingly, this language would allow Genius to counteract the threat of feminine, bestial, and elemental rebellion evoked by la Vieille and Nature. As long as they forge properly and plough the appropriate fields, both the natural and the feminine will be under patriarchal control: all will be well."

⁷⁴ Lorrin and Meun, *The Romance of the Rose, Le Roman de la Rose - Tome II*, 296, Lines 9001-9006, "Si n'est-il mès nule Lucrece, / Ni Penelope nule en Grece, / Ne prodefame nule en terre, /

These two great cultures had produced women of value and these women are included to represent the best of (male) culture. In this context, these women are presented as controlled by the male gendered culture, with their female natures (lust) appropriately repressed to the male cultural ideal.⁷⁵ There is no room here for the women to demonstrate an agency that was not subservient to male values. They are presented as complying with the patriarchal ideal, confirming that woman's nature needs to be controlled by man/culture.

Despite this text's indebtedness to Ovid, the use of Penelope belies this influence. Her representation is more akin to the role of woman in courtly literature; she is merely the object of the male gaze, who does not have an independent will. She is like the rose in the garden, the metaphor which underpins the role of woman in the text, looking beautiful and waiting to catch the eye of the one who will take her. This idea is expressed in the representation of Penelope, contributed by the character Jaloux, as passive and limited by the will of men. Instead of describing how Penelope resisted the blandishments of so many men, her chastity reflects the importance of the suitors' actions: "Had she not been the best of wives in Greece,/ The suitors who besieged Penelope/ Had won their point and conquered even her..."⁷⁶ The words "besieged" and "conquered" highlight her passive role. The suitors' role is to act, to take her. They are knights, expressing their manliness by conquering and controlling woman.⁷⁷ She is represented as passive, having no say in the matter, other than being the best of wives.

S'il iert qui les séust requerre. / Ainsinc le dient li païen, / N'onques nus n'i trova moien;" trans. Robbins, 175

⁷⁵ This dichotomy of male culture and female nature has also been discussed in relation to the allegories in Alain of Lille's *Complaint*; nature is female and both Hymen and Genius are male. See Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature*, 60.

⁷⁶ Lorris and Meun, *The Romance of the Rose, Le Roman de la Rose - Tome II*, 295, Lines 8080-8085. "La meilleure femme de Grèce, / Hélas! avec un peu d'adresse, / Pénélope voire on prendrait; . Lucrèce, même on séduirait, / Malgré qu'elle se soit occise, / Parce qu'à force l'avait prise," trans. Robbins 174

⁷⁷ This connects nicely with Jo Anne McNamara's point that after 1150, "[m]en doomed themselves to support a construct of masculinity that defined them as those who fight, who dominate." McNamara, "The Herrenfrage" 22.

Jaloux continues with a description of Lucretia and her suicide. This section of the poem is referred to by Silvia Huot and Emmanuèle Baumgartner in their discussions of female will and agency, without mention of Penelope.⁷⁸ Lucretia's agency is discussed as the expression of her will. Her rape was against her will, so her decision to commit suicide after the event, in the company of her male relatives, was a sign of her acting according to her own wishes. Her relatives' pleading with her to live would not have satisfied her need to act according to her own desires and wishes. Being able to take one's own life might very well be an act of agency, but it is hardly a positive model of how to live chastely. Her body was violated against her will. She dies to regain control of her own body. Chastity is represented as negation of the feminine, either through death, or total passivity linked to male aggression, as is the situation with Penelope.

Conclusion

The representations of Penelope by literate schoolmen in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were shaped by the prevailing notions of women and the distrust of love (*amor*). They were written for an educated male audience in a context in which schoolmen were distancing themselves from female concerns. That Penelope was included in these texts demonstrates the strength of her association with a perceived 'unrealisable' ideal of womanhood. It has been noted by others that the writings of almost-contemporary women tended to down play the differences between the sexes, but men tended to think in binary systems.⁷⁹ These binary oppositions associated men with power, judgment, discipline and reason while women were linked to weakness, mercy, lust, and unreason.⁸⁰ This was a period in which some works of Aristotle were translated into Latin and reintroduced ideas about the

⁷⁸ Baumgartner, "De Lucrèce a Héloïse," 441; Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and its Medieval Readers*, 110, 26.

⁷⁹ Walker Bynum, "...And Woman his Humanity," 260-2.

⁸⁰ Murray, "Thinking about Gender," 3. Judith Butler discusses this as the mirroring of gender and sex in Butler, *Gender Trouble*. This idea of opposition of the sexes was consistent with Aristotelian thought and humoral medical theory. See Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?," 2.

natural weakness of women.⁸¹ Within Aristotle's theory of gender, men were naturally chaste due to their more developed capacity for reason, while women required the care of men.⁸² This division of association was extended to cultural phenomenon such as body and soul, letter and spirit, nature and culture, matter and form in which women were associated with the former aspects.⁸³ While many treat this gender binary system as the dominant or only model for gender relations in the Middle Ages, suggesting a "timeless permanence," there is a need to disrupt this notion of fixity.⁸⁴

Penelope, as she had been assessed within the earlier twelfth-century educational introductory texts, was a paradox within the binary paradigm used by clerics to distinguish the sexes. She was chaste but active, and loving but chaste. In this period, however, female agency and love were both characteristics of the non-virtuous woman. Penelope's representation as the woman whose chastity was based on her burning desire for her husband was transformed to both accommodate and reinforce the dominant paradigm of the passive, chaste woman. To create this change, Penelope tended to be presented as an ideal of chastity in which the Ovidian characteristics of her loving her husband and of spurning suitors were not essential to her recognition. She was made an exception among women. This can be seen in Hugh Primas' discussion of her manly strength, but is also recognised in the focus on her rarity among women, as recorded by Hugh Primas, Walter Map and Arnulf of Orléans. She could also be understood as representing the past, an age that was less corrupt, and in which women were controlled by (male) civilising principles. This is particularly the case when Penelope is paired with Lucretia; the two of them represented the Greek and Roman literary inheritance and the ideals of society embodied in them. Inheritors of classical literature within the classroom needed to

⁸¹ "Aristotle had an almost immeasurable influence on the western view of woman's biological and mental endowments and in consequence of that also on the ecclesiastical view of woman." Aspegren, *The Male Woman: A Feminine Ideal in the Early Church*, 49.

⁸² L' Engle, "Depictions of Chastity," 87.

⁸³ Huot, "Bodily Peril: Sexuality," 42.

⁸⁴ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986), 1053-75: 1068.

deal with the challenge of Penelope. Her love for her husband was not relevant, because it assumed female agency, nor was it required because most texts were designed to reject marriage as a favourable option for the celibate male audience, emphasis was placed on the rarity and virility of her chastity, as well as of her passivity. Penelope's inclusion in the text as a rarity strengthened the negative stereotypes of women prevalent in clerical texts, reinforcing passivity as an ideal for women. Her transformation reflects the change from a period of gender fluidity in the early twelfth century, when privileged women could sometimes be educated with Ovidian texts, to a period of greater differentiation between male and female roles in the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries. All of these texts demonstrate the importance of Penelope as a representative of women; classically educated men included her and simultaneously disempowered her to accommodate their need for defining themselves as separate from and superior to women. Only in the fourteenth century would this begin to change, and then more in Italy than in France.

Chapter Six

Invoking Penelope in Fourteenth-Century Italy

In the fourteenth century, three Italian writers achieved fame for the way they responded to the dominance of French as a literary language by composing in the Tuscan dialect. Reflecting the desire to incorporate classical knowledge while creating new literary genres, all three authors invoke Penelope in at least one vernacular work. She is not a major character for any of them, but she provides a consistent figure with which to analyse each writer's approach to the female sex. As discussed in the previous chapter, Jean de Meun's representation of Penelope upheld the idea of woman as the passive recipient of male sexual aggression. A comparison of the relatively brief references to Penelope by Dante Alighieri (1265-1361), Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) demonstrates the evolving complexity with which the figure of Penelope could be interpreted and consequently represented in fourteenth-century Italy.

The figure of Penelope, inherited from antiquity and maintained within the Latin tradition, throws light on how each of these three writers contemplated gender. Scholarship on their representations of women generally focus on their love for a real woman who is not their wife, or on a key figure who is a feature of their writing, with little regard for their images of Penelope. While both Dante and Petrarch have been hailed as promoting women to the role of redeemer and muse of the male poet, Boccaccio is generally considered to have perpetuated scholarly misogyny.¹ He is, however, the only one to truly engage with Penelope as more than a literary cipher. In my analysis of the works of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, I show her transition in the latter's *De mulieribus claris* to a figure who is still a paragon of chastity or marital fidelity, but is also loving and cunning.

¹ Nadia Margolis, *An Introduction to Christine De Pizan* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2011), 73, 124.

Dante

Ulysses and Penelope are classical figures mediated through a medieval lens in Dante's *Commedia*. A key aspect in the text is his exploration of the role of love. Dante's love of Beatrice leads him to wisdom and redemption in *Paradiso*, just as (according to Dante) Ulysses's love for Penelope should have led him to greater wisdom.² Love, contrasted with infatuation (*folle amore*), is a positive force. Dante develops a courtly motif, redolent of medieval values, in which man's love for woman contributes to spiritual or religious ends. The importance of love in Dante's text has contributed to some scholarly discussion of the role of Ovid as an authorial model.³

The Comedy was written while Dante was in exile from Florence. The various characters in the work demonstrate the range of influences available to the author. He provides stories based on real characters, some who lived in Florence, while others were prominent figures in recent Italian politics, as well as literary figures and authors, both classical and medieval. Although Dante was aware of Homer as a great writer (he is listed among other classical authors in *Inferno*), the Florentine poet did not have direct access to the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*.⁴ Dante's Ulysses is a significant figure in *The Comedy* as there are allusions to him in all three levels of the Afterlife. Dante's interpretation derived from various Latin sources, which would certainly have included Virgil's *Aeneid*, Boethius' *Consolation* and the works of Statius.⁵ The presence of Virgil as the narrator's guide through *Inferno* and *Purgatory*, is probably the strongest indication of Dante's admiration for him as an author, but many scholars also recognise a strong identification of Dante with the figure of Ulysses.⁶

² Barbara Reynolds, *Dante: The Poet, the Political Thinker, the Man* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 195-7.

³ Janet Levarie Smarr, "Poets of Love and Exile," in *Dante and Ovid: Essays in Intertextuality*, ed. Madison U. Sowell (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1991), 140

⁴ Alighieri, Dante, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno, Purgatory, Paradise*. translated by Robin Kirkpatrick, (London: Penguin, 2012), Lines 88.

⁵ The dependence on the Statius version of Ulysses is discussed by Suzanne C. Hagedorn, "A Statian Model for Dante's Ulysses," *Dante Studies* 115 (1997), 19-43.

⁶ For example: "Ulysses is the lightning rod Dante places in his poem to attract and defuse his own consciousness of the presumption involved in anointing oneself God's scribe."

Dante, the pilgrim and narrator, meets Ulysses in *Inferno*, and hears what happened to the Greek upon leaving the island of Circe:

I'd set my course from Circe (she had kept
me near Gaeta for a year or more,
before Aeneas, passing, named it that),
no tenderness for son, no duty owed
to ageing fatherhood, love that should
have brought my wife Penelope delight,
could overcome in me my long desire,
burning to understand how this world works,
and know of human vices, worth and valour.⁷

Dante's Ulysses does not return home. The rewriting of Ulysses has been described as Dante's most controversial creation.⁸ Penelope remains alone as her husband's 'burning desire' takes him on to other adventures in which he can learn even more about 'vices, worth and valour,' neglecting the familial *pietas* represented by the reference to Aeneas.⁹ Despite being aware of Penelope's likely delight at his return, it is not enough to recall him home. This reflects the medieval approach to Ovid's *Heroides*, in which Penelope is the deserted wife constantly waiting for, but never likely to be satisfied by, the return of her husband.

The mention of Penelope is remarkable if one considers the strongest classical allusion in the text is Virgil, the Augustan writer, whose story of Aeneas, was modelled on Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. Penelope is not mentioned by Virgil. His agenda was more inclined to masculine concerns in

Teodolinda Barolini, "Dante's Ulysses: Narrative and Transgression," in *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Amilcare A. Iannucci (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 116.

Other scholars who discuss this relationship between Dante and Ulysses are Theodore J. Cachey Jr, "Between Petrarch and Dante: Prolegomenon to a Critical Discourse," in *Between Petrarch and Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition*, ed. Theodore J. Cachey Jr and Zygmunt G. Baranski (Notre Dame, In.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009); Holmes, *Dante's Two Beloveds*; Smarr, "Poets of Love and Exile."

⁷ Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy* *Inferno*, 26. 91-99 .

⁸ Enrico Fenzi, cited in Cachey Jr, "Between Petrarch and Dante," 35.

⁹ Olivia Holmes, *Dante's Two Beloveds: Ethics and Erotics in the Divine Comedy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 110.

which women were incidental. Aeneas is a reworking of the Ulysses character, but he represents the Roman virtue of *pietas*, not cunning. This is demonstrated by his desire to rescue his father and son from the burning Troy. In the process he loses track of his wife who presumably died, and travels to the Italian peninsula to fulfil his destiny to found Rome. As discussed in the first chapter, the *Aeneid* celebrates masculine virtue. Women like Dido represent distractions from man's purpose or serve as an instrument for binding two peoples together, as in the case of the marriage of Aeneas to Lavinia. While she is absent in the works of Virgil, Dante reinstates Penelope, as he presents a less masculinised version of virtue which is tempered by the Christian desire for salvation. For Dante the writer, this desire is represented by a woman. This is demonstrated by the symbolic transfer of Dante the narrator into the care of his first love, Beatrice, as he travels through *Paradiso*. Virgil was not qualified to accompany him through this part of *The Comedy*.

Beatrice was essential for Dante's presentation of approaching the Divine. The role of Beatrice parallels the potential role for Penelope, who along with her son and father-in-law, lays out the path Ulysses should have taken. Fondness, reverence and pleasing others were all significant factors that might have influenced his reasoning and directed him home. Instead Ulysses continues his journey into unknown waters, seducing his compatriots with eloquent words into following him. It has been suggested that this recreation of the Greek hero reflects Dante's identification with him, insofar as he represents the path taken by Dante in his earlier years. When exiled, Dante left his wife in Florence to manage their affairs and family; like Ulysses, he was eloquent,¹⁰ and an adventurer with a desire for knowledge.¹¹ Ulysses, however, took a wrong turn;

¹⁰ Botteril discusses Ulysses' 'orazion', noting that this is Dante's "spiritual kinsman in the audacity of his (poetic) voyage. "Ulysses's eloquence, as presented by Dante, is clever and dramatic: "Oh brothers," I said, "who through a hundred/ thousand dangers have reached the western rim,/ deny not to your brief life/ experience of the unpeopled world beyond the sun./Consider your origins: you were not formed/ to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge." Steven Botterill, "Dante and the Authority of Poetic Language," in *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Amilcare A. Iannucci (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 174.

¹¹ Wilson describes Ulysses as "a figure of his [Dante's] own exile, spiritual and intellectual," A. N. Wilson, *Dante in Love* (London: Atlantic Books, 2011), 238.

stung by the desire to know more than any man before him, he had to go beyond the Pillars of Hercules, markers of the extremity of human knowledge. Arguably, Dante, seeing his first love Beatrice in Paradise, recognised the importance of love and gains a greater wisdom.¹² In this comparison, Penelope is a precursor for Beatrice, the first love who directs man to greater wisdom. An essential element in this pathway to salvation and wisdom is love. This role for a woman is not dissimilar to the courtly motif of a woman leading man to greater nobility of character.¹³

While the connection between Dante and Beatrice was love, not all loves are redemptive. Dante's love for Beatrice, his first love, which Ulysses should have pursued in returning to Penelope, is contrasted to the idea of "folle amore."¹⁴ Dante uses Dido to demonstrate the idea of foolish love. Her death in response to having her heart broken by Aeneas, arguably prefigures the destruction of Carthage by Rome. Carthage is the exotic other, contrasted to the civilised Rome that Aeneas would go on to establish. The love Dido bore for Virgil's hero was not the basis for stable society. This reading of a particular style of love capable of guiding man to truth and wisdom has been interpreted by Amilcare Iannucci and others as a Neoplatonic reading of the work by authors such as Fulgentius and Bernardus Silvestris.¹⁵ It was Fulgentius writing at a similar time to Boethius, who interpreted the rejection of Circe by Ulysses, as reflecting his loyalty to "the most chaste Penelope", and thus the joining of chastity to wisdom.

Dante's approach to Penelope was influenced by a variety of earlier sources but not necessarily classical ones. Her role as the woman who represents man's start and endpoint in the metaphorical journey through life is reflective

¹² Wilson, *Dante in Love*, 150-1

¹³ The courtly motif is more clearly articulated in Dante's earlier works, whereas his women in the *Divine Comedy* do not tend to be as passive. Teodolinda Barolini, "Lifting the Veil? Notes toward a Gendered History of Early Italian Literature," in *Medieval Constructions in Gender and Identity: Essays in Honor of Joan M. Ferrante*, ed. Teodolinda Barolini (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 170. Despite this difference, it is Dante's love for Beatrice which leads him to the divine.

¹⁴ Amilcare A. Iannucci, "Forbidden Love: Metaphor and History," in *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Amilcare A. Iannucci (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 101.

¹⁵ Iannucci, "Forbidden Love," 102; Holmes, *Dante's Two Beloveds*, 106.

of early medieval Neo-Platonist writings. The Ovidian influence is also mediated, and is more akin to a courtly motif, in which her husband's love for her has the potential to direct him to a higher/better place. This is, however, in stark contrast to the Ovidian influence seen in French clerical writings, especially as demonstrated in Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose*, in which women are passive objects to be plucked, thus perpetuating an androcentric reading of women. For Dante, women are not mere objects to be possessed by men to bolster their masculinity, nor are they to be despised as leading men from the path of wisdom. Dante's women, including Penelope, have a different role, certainly still illustrative of 'male' concerns, but not so objectifying. The distinction between Virgil and Beatrice as guides, and the representation of Ulysses in relation to the author, are each consistent with an overall interpretation of the work as a process from intellectual pursuits, represented by eloquence, toward reaching the Divine, through love.

Petrarch

Penelope's representation in Petrarch's text is possibly the most recognised of the three writers in the development of civic life in Italy. His series of poems called *Trionfi* (*Triumphs*), written around 1350, were regularly illustrated, especially on nuptial furniture destined for newly weds' bedrooms.¹⁶ While Penelope might seem to provide an apposite visual element in the celebration of marital love and fidelity, she does not represent the object of a man's love, nor a loving wife, but is part of a team, like his beloved Laura and Lucretia, who both disempower love. (See figure 1) Petrarch's celebration of Laura is read by many as part of the poet's redemption before God.¹⁷ Yet analysis of this

¹⁶ Petrarch's *Triumphs* as inspiration for domestic furniture was fashionable particularly in the fifteenth century. Some examples are that of Francesco de Giorgio Martini painted in Siena about 1463-1468, now housed in the Getty Museum, a salver by Apollonio de Giovanni, painted in the 1450s, and the panel by Luca Signorelli painted about 1509 for the Petrucci Palace in Siena. The latter painting is now housed in the National Gallery in London, as well as another painting from the Petrucci Palace, Penelope with the Suitors, by Pintorricchio. Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Vintage 1996 repr., Vintage), 243.

¹⁷ See for example, Margolis, *An Introduction to Christine de Pizan*, 19.

representation of Laura and Penelope demonstrates the ambiguity of the role of woman in the path to salvation or wisdom.

Petrarch is renowned for giving great importance to Virgil, Cicero and Seneca in his writing. He was also strongly influenced by Augustine of Hippo whose fourth-century *Confessions* is purported to be the basis of Petrarch's *Secretum*, a discussion about his inner struggle over the role of earthly concerns on the pathway to salvation. Penelope is not a significant figure in the works of any of these writers, nor did Petrarch demonstrate an particular interest in the subject of gender. Petrarch was also very interested in Homer. He was instrumental in organising Leontius Pilatus, a Greek-speaking Calabrian, to stay with Boccaccio (1360-1362) so that they could both obtain Latin copies of his epics. Petrarch did receive a copy of the *Odyssey*, but not until the 1360s, quite a long period after the writing of the *Triumphs*. There is nothing in Petrarch's later works to suggest that access to Homer and his representation of Penelope influenced the way he imagined the Greek heroine. Like Dante, most of his knowledge of the Homeric figures would have been through a medieval lens. He also had the Dantean model to draw upon, and this certainly did influence how he imagined Ulysses.

The story of Ulysses as a traveller provides an important subtext to Petrarch's work. Despite Petrarch's antagonism toward Dante, a characteristic written about by several modern scholars,¹⁸ he borrowed Dante's version of Ulysses: he was the man who journeyed through life until shipwrecked. Instead of celebrating Dante's ability to avoid the shipwreck himself, which can be interpreted from the *Commedia*, and reaching the security of God's protection via love, Theodore Cachey argues that Petrarch casts Dante as another who has failed to reach salvation.¹⁹ By contrast, through writing and the consequent contemplation of the self, Petrarch attempts to avoid or stave off the inevitable shipwreck. Writing in the *Itinerium ad sepulchrum domini nostrum*, a text that

¹⁸ This has been discussed by Cachey Jr, "Between Petrarch and Dante," 36-7. Also see Enrico Fenzi, "Petrarca, Dante, Ulisse: Note per una interpretazione della *Fam. XXO 15 a Giovanni Boccaccio*," in *La Bibliothèque de Pétrarque* ed. F La Brasca (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).

¹⁹ Cachey Jr, "Between Petrarch and Dante," 36-7.

substituted for a trip to Jerusalem with a colleague, he says “You have come this far by oars and by foot on sea and on land: I, plowing this paper with a swift pen.”²⁰ There is no room for a woman here. Literature and writing, not love, provide momentum toward salvation (delaying the shipwreck).

This minimisation of the role of women in determining man’s fate is similarly reflected in the representation of Penelope in one of his *Trionfi* series, *il Trionfo della castità* (Latin: *Triumphus Pudicitie* or *Triumph of Chastity*). Penelope is not a woman expressing her social roles, but represents an ideal, a symbolic abstraction, as seen in visions. Like the French *Romance of the Rose*, the *Divine Comedy* and Boccaccio’s *Amorosa Visione*, Petrarch’s *Triumphs*, a series of poems which includes the *Triumph of Chastity*, was based on a dream vision. Through this text, Petrarch “traces humankind’s journey from error to truth, from vanity to a promise of celestial bliss”²¹ through a series of six triumphs: love, chastity, death, fame, time and eternity. This series has been interpreted as Petrarch’s attempt to incorporate the best of classical epics and rhetorical style with a Christian perspective, as he attempted to reinvigorate Italy as the centre of literary culture.²² In this context, the *Triumph of Chastity* can be considered a response to the French *Romance of the Rose*, a work that Petrarch condemns in a letter to Guido Gonzaga as shabbily organised.²³ Petrarch, who spent much of his early career in Avignon, was proud of his Italian heritage and took umbrage at French claims to literary superiority.²⁴ Although Petrarch is generally considered the mentor and nurturer of Boccaccio’s talents, in this instance, Boccaccio’s *Amorosa Visione* is recognised as having inspired

²⁰ Cited in Christian Moevs, “Subjectivity and Conversion in Dante and Petrarch,” in *Between Petrarch and Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition*, ed. Zygmunt G. Baranski and Theodore Cachey Jr (Notre Dame, In.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 250.

²¹ Aldo S. Bernardo, “Triumphal Poetry: Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio,” in *Petrarch’s Triumphs: Spectacle and Allegory*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler and Amilcare A. Iannucci (Toronto: Dovehouse Editions Inc., 1990), 34.

²² Zygmunt G. Barański, “The Constraint of Form,” in *Petrarch’s Triumphs: Spectacle and Allegory*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler and Amilcare A. Iannucci (Toronto: Dovehouse Editions Inc., 1990), 72-3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁴ Petrarch did own a copy of the letters of Abelard and Heloise, that he may have acquired from Robert de Bardi in Paris; see Peter Dronke, *Abelard and Heloise in Medieval Testimonies*. (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1976), 55-60.

Petrarch.²⁵ Although inspired by his follower's work, Petrarch does not represent his women in the same way. What was important for Petrarch was what they symbolised:

The host of holy women were there;
But I will tell of some in the forefront
Of truest honor; and among them all
Lucretia and Penelope were first,
For they had broken all the shafts of Love
And torn away the quiver from his side,
And they had plucked the feathers from his wings.²⁶

Petrarch's Penelope, just one of his virtuous women, is seen on the chariot alongside his beloved Laura and the Roman Lucretia.²⁷ They are taking their trophies, won in a battle against Love, to Rome. Love, both in the text and in the images later based on it, is personified in the form of Eros or Cupid. These women disempower him through plucking his wings and breaking his arrows.

This representation of Penelope, tackling a personification of love, is disengaged from the Homeric tale; she is no longer a woman with social relationships, whose actions allow her the means to maintain her sexual fidelity to her husband. Her motives for remaining chaste within marriage, and the tasks by which she maintains this condition, are not acknowledged. More importantly, love, which was a key factor in Ovid's reception in the medieval classroom, and which underpinned Dante's approach to her, is not an aspect of Penelope's inclusion in the *Triumph of Chastity*. This is more consistent with clerical perceptions of love being an amoral deity. While Dante saw love as a rung in the ladder to God, and shaped his Penelope accordingly, Petrarch continues to

²⁵ Vittore Branca, "Introduction," in *Amorosa Visione*, ed. Robert Hollander (Hanover: University of New England Press, 1986), xxiii.

²⁶ Francesco Petrarca, *Trionfi*, "Il trionfo della castità," (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1996), 250; "ma d' alquante dirò che 'n su la cima / son de vera honestate, infra le quali / Lucretia da man destra era la prima, / l'altra Penelopè. Queste gli strali / avean spezzato, e la pharetra a lato / a quel protervo, e spennachiato l'ali," trans, Ernst Hatch Wilkins, (Chicago: Univeristy of Chicago Press, 1962), 44.

²⁷ Bergin notes that Petrarch's concept of chastity includes both virginity and marital chastity. Thomas G. Bergin, *Petrarch*, (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1970), 147.

see love as harmful to man.²⁸ Further, by having women disarm Love, he is showing that the destructive nature of love is a force for which women are held responsible.



Figure 1 Luca Signorelli, painted about 1509 for the Petrucci Palace in Siena. This painting is now housed in the National Gallery in London, Photo © The National Gallery, London. Scholarly Waiver for reproduction received 13/01/2016

Although love for Laura played an essential element in Petrarch's literary productions, the figure of Penelope reveals his conflation of earthly love with sin. This might underpin what Teodolinda Barolini describes as Petrarch's greater comfort in his love for Laura once she dies and when her physical beauty is no longer a temptation.²⁹ Associating women with love highlights Petrarch's androcentric approach. There is also some doubt about Laura's role in Petrarch's life based on the other meaning of her name. Was she perhaps a personification

²⁸ Erasmi, Petrarch's *Trionfi*, 166 and 163

²⁹ Barolini, 2009b, 205 cited in Martin Eisner, "In the Labyrinth of the Library: Petrarch's Cicero, Dante's Virgil, and the Historiography of the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2014), 755-90: 777.

of his love of classical literature? This would be consistent with the anxieties expressed in *Secretum*, in which his interests in classical literature clash with his belief in salvation through sacred literature.³⁰ Overall, Petrarch displays ambivalence toward Laura, which can also be seen in his manner of imagining Penelope. As a symbolic representation of virtue, in this case chastity, she loses her role in a discussion of agency and autonomy.

Boccaccio

The complexity of Boccaccio's Penelope is due to a careful reading of classical texts, especially Ovid and Homer, each of whom created a female figure who moved beyond being simply a foil for man's actions. An analysis of *Amorosa Visione* (1342/3), thought to be inspired by Dante's *Comedy*, and in turn, an influence on Petrarch's triumph series, reveals Boccaccio already demonstrating early in his career a different perspective in his representation of Penelope, one that was less dependent on medieval representations. This is the same perspective that also underpins his representation of Penelope in *Famous Women*, composed during his Latin phase, following exposure to Homer's text in the Greek. Continuing his interest in women, and their vices and virtues in relation to their contributions to stable society, he maintains and extends the potential for female agency, especially in relation to chastity. These two works offered representations of Penelope that were consistent with female agency, based on her love for Ulysses (not as the woman deserving of his love) and on intelligence. His representation of Penelope offers a new perspective in the historical debate on Boccaccio's approach to women.

³⁰ In *Secretum*, Petrarch also presents Reason as a personified female who has the capacity to govern man. See a discussion of this in William J. Bousma, "The Two Faces of Humanism: Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought," in *Itinerarium Italicum: the profile of the Italian Renaissance in the mirror of its European transformations: dedicated to Paul Oskar Kristeller on the occasion of his 70th birthday*, ed. Heiko A. Oberman, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 19. For a discussion on Laura as a pun for his poetic ambition, see Paul Allen Miller, "Laurel as the sign of Sin: Laura's Textual Body in Petrarch's *Secretum*," in *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts*, ed. Barbara K. Gold, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 139.

Boccaccio's relationship to his female characters provokes passion among scholars who variously describe him as a misogynist and as a man who empathised and understood the social role of women.³¹ A study of Boccaccio's representations of Penelope contributes to the ongoing debates about his role in the representation of women. One of the factors that contributes to the scholarly dilemma about his approach to women is his book, is that some of them offer the hallmarks of typical medieval misogyny. For example, it has been argued that *Il Corbaccio*, (generally translated as *The Crow*) demonstrates a more clerical approach to women, focusing on their bodies and the need for men to mistrust them. The scholarship, however, is not unanimous on how the text should be read. For some, the fact that he wrote such a book presents a clear reflection of his prevailing misogyny which is transferable to all of his other texts.³² Others, noting the range of genres in which Boccaccio wrote, suggest that the aim for this text was not so much the damning of women, but a demonstration of his ability to write invective.³³ It can also be read as a companion book to the *Elegy of Lady Fiammetta*, a book written in the female voice condemning the fickleness of men.

Not all scholars read Boccaccio as vilifying or undermining the worth of women. The importance of women in his dedications and forewords reveals that he engaged with a female readership; this includes some of his Latin texts, which anticipates the potential for an educated female.³⁴ Beyond dedications, issues

³¹ A negative approach to women as characteristic of Boccaccio's texts can be found in the following: Grigar, "Penelopeia," 14-18. This thesis in particular dismisses the representation of Penelope by Boccaccio because of his assumed misogynist approach to women.

Unfortunately, the perpetuation of this reputation is continued by its inclusion in an introduction to a series of academic books on Renaissance women's writers, which then flows into the specific introduction to some of the books, See King and Rabil Jr, "The Old Voice."; Robin, "Woman, Space, and Renaissance Discourse," 167-9. In contrast, Teodolinda Barolini characterises Boccaccio's approach to women as "shin[ing] a light on the disenfranchisement of women, using them to as emblematic for all those who are oppressed, disenfranchised, cloistered away from society, and stripped of agency." Teodolinda Barolini, ed. *Medieval Constructions in Gender and Identity: Essays in Honor of Joan M. Ferrante* (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance, 2005), 169.

³² Grigar, "Penelopeia." 18

³³ Letizia Panizza, "Rhetoric and Invective in Love's Labyrinth (*Il Corbaccio*)," in *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. Victoria Kirkham, Michael Sherberg, and Janet Levarie Smarr (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 183.

³⁴ Pamela J. Benson, "Transformations of the 'buona Gualdrada' legend from Boccaccio to Vasari: a study in the politics of Florentine narrative," in *Women in Italian Renaissance*

pertaining to women underpinned several of Boccaccio's earlier works; for example, the *Decameron* was written (according to the introduction) to help entertain women who were generally confined to the household, unlike their male peers.³⁵ This perhaps demonstrates an interest in finding empathy with his female characters early in his writing career.³⁶ It can be argued that he maintained an interest in women and their concerns. As Petrarch wrote about illustrious men, Boccaccio responded with a book which he describes as the first biography of historical women.

How Boccaccio represents his subjects in *Famous Women* is especially significant as it is considered a foundational text for the *querelle des femmes* (the debate about women), which developed in the following century.³⁷ This was possible because of the popularity of the text; it established a new genre, as later humanists modified and added to the collection.³⁸ It was soon translated into vernacular languages (French and Italian).³⁹ Although most scholars agree about Boccaccio's ongoing influence, there is little consensus about how women are treated in *Famous Women*. The text has been used both to support his misogynist approach and his pro-feminine stance.⁴⁰ Frequently, his approach is not always differentiated from that of other medieval writers, who were considered to be perpetuating misogyny or a hierarchical approach to gender. For example, Margaret Franklin in her book *Boccaccio's Heroines: Power and Virtue in Renaissance Society* interprets Boccaccio's aim as promoting

Culture and Society, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: Legenda, European Humanities Research, 2000), 415. Kolsky, *The Genealogy of Women: Studies in Boccaccio's De mulieribus claris*, 71. Margaret Franklin suggests it was written for the edification of men in Margaret Franklin, *Boccaccio's Heroines: Power and Virtue in Renaissance Society*, ed. Allyson Poska and Abby Zanger, *Women and Gender in the Early Modern World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 9.

³⁵ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Antonio Enzo Quaglio, 2 vols. (n.c.: Aldo Garzanti Editore, 1974; repr., 1980), 3.

³⁶ Hagedorn, *Abandoned Women*, 117.

³⁷ This is especially the case for scholars interested in Christine de Pizan's role in the debate.

³⁸ For the role of this text in the production of the works by Bisticci, Arienti, and Foresti see Stephen Kolsky, *The Ghost of Boccaccio: Writings on Famous Women in Renaissance Italy* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005).

³⁹ Donato degli Albanzani and Fra Antonio de S. Lupidio translated the text into Italian in the last decades of the fourteenth century and Laurent de Premierfait into French in the early years of the fifteenth century. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Brown, xxi. There is also an Italian translation not heretofore studied in Biblioteca Angelica in Rome. It was translated by a monk called Fr Ippolito d'Amera.

⁴⁰ James, "Margherita Cantelmo and the Worth of Women in Renaissance Italy," 148.

“traditional notions of sex-specific virtue and thereby work[ing] to sustain the social order which was believed to have derived ‘naturally’ from thence.”⁴¹ Renowned feminist Joan Kelly refers to one quotation by Boccaccio to demonstrate his attitude to women: “What can we think except that it was an error of nature to give female sex to a body which had been endowed by God with a magnificent virile spirit.”⁴² She continues that it was only by transcending their sex, or by being viragos, that women could approximate Renaissance man.⁴³ This maintained the medieval divide between the sexes as polar opposites.⁴⁴ Some scholars accuse Boccaccio of undermining his own apparent thesis on the grounds that he implies that, although women might aspire to virtue, they were doomed to fail because virtue is a mark of manhood.⁴⁵ Male superiority is so fully accepted, it is argued, that praising a women also denigrates her.⁴⁶ The prioritisation of manly attributes is also noted in his praise of women who put aside the gender appropriate tasks of spinning and weaving for intellectual pursuits.⁴⁷ Intellect, of course, represents another male characteristic, so female activity continues to be seen as being denigrated. The exchange of female implements for male tools like writing implements, however, cannot be so easily interpreted. *Famous Women* is ambiguous, as not only can it be read as the need for women to give up their gendered social roles as textile makers, but it can also make a claim to being the first text to encourage the development of female minds.⁴⁸ Constance Jordan, acknowledging the different ambiguous characteristics of the text, suggests that it should not be

⁴¹ Franklin, *Boccaccio's Heroines*, 8.

⁴² Giovanni Boccaccio, *Concerning Famous Women*, trans. Guido A. Guarino (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), 127. cited in Kelly, “Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*,” 8.

⁴³ “Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*,” 8.

⁴⁴ Valerie Wayne, “Zenobia in Medieval and Renaissance Literature,” in *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Carole Levine and Jeanie Watson (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1987), 52.

⁴⁵ See also Constance Jordan, “Boccaccio's Infamous Women: Gender and Civic Virtue in the *De claris mulieribus*,” in *Ambiguous Realities*, ed Levine and Watson, (Wayne State University Press), 27-9.

⁴⁶ Wayne, “Zenobia in Medieval and Renaissance Literature,” 55.

⁴⁷ Giovanna Angeli, “Encore sur Boccace e Christine de Pizan: Remarques sur le *De Claris Mulieribus* et *Le Livre de la Cite des Dames*,” *Le Moyen Francais* 50 (2002), 115-25: 117.

⁴⁸ Susan Groag Bell, “Christine de Pizan (1364-1430): Humanism and the Problem of a Studious Woman,” *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 3/4 (1976), 173-84: 174.

dismissed just as a “cunning vilification of women.”⁴⁹ Instead, she wonders whether *Famous Women* was written to be read as ironic.⁵⁰

These negative responses to Boccaccio often reflect the other interests of the scholars. For example, those interested in the works of the fifteenth-century female writer, Christine de Pizan, often read Boccaccio negatively because they judge him through her eyes. *Famous Women* was no doubt a source for much of her material, but as her intentions were different, so too are the stories she provides for her various women. (This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter).⁵¹ Boccaccio wrote about women, but was a man; Christine, as a woman, was arguably writing on the topic with firmer credentials.⁵²

On a positive note, *Famous Women* is recognised as introducing new elements in to the fourteenth-century approach to gender and women. Glenda McLeod suggests that Boccaccio was aware of the uniqueness of his approach, and although he drew extensively on misogynistic traditions, he also wrote about women whose fame was based on their deeds.⁵³ The idea of women being assessed for their deeds, and not just on their reputation for chastity, was a new development in gender discourse. Virginia Brown, who has published the most recent English translation of Boccaccio’s Latin text, writes that despite being influenced by medieval conceptions of women, his work provided a “striking foretaste of ideas that would find clearer expression in the Renaissance.”⁵⁴ Supporting this idea is the development of female literacy in fifteenth-century

⁴⁹ Jordan, “Boccaccio’s Infamous Women,” 26.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 27.

⁵¹ Kolsky, *The Genealogy of Women*, 7-8.

⁵² Kolsky describes this process as “[t]he female writer reconstruct[ing] the male text in order to provide a disambiguated reading of female achievement and potential.” Stephen. Kolsky, *The Genealogy of Women: Studies in Boccaccio’s De mulieribus claris* (New York P. Lang, 2003), 6 The negative approach to Boccaccio by Christine de Pizan scholars can be seen in the works of Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval ‘Aeneid’*,” Laura Rinaldi Dufresne, “Women Warriors: A special case from the fifteenth century: The city of ladies,” *Women’s Studies* 23, no. 2 (1994), 111-31; Margolis, *An Introduction to Christine de Pizan*. Related to this is the negative reading of Boccaccio from scholars of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century female writers. King and Rabil Jr, “The Old Voice,” Robin, “Woman, Space, and Renaissance Discourse.”

⁵³ McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 79.

⁵⁴ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, xvi.

Italy as a response to Boccaccio's representation and celebration of intellectual pursuits for women. Also focusing on a more positive reading and influence of the text in its discussion of gender, Pamela Benson describes the book as "the foundation text for Renaissance pro-feminism."⁵⁵

Scholarship on *Famous Women* rarely focuses on the representation of Penelope. Because Boccaccio extols her for her chastity, and praises her as being saint-like, she is considered to represent the status quo in relation women's social roles and capacity for virtue. This explains her absence among the group of loyal wives studied by Margaret Franklin, who show "unswerving fidelity to her husband or his memory."⁵⁶ Franklin was interested in those faithful wives who were "praised without reservation for their unconventional acts."⁵⁷ As Penelope was not named and discussed, it can be assumed that Franklin did not consider her actions to be unconventional; after all, weaving remained linked to the feminine symbolically, if not socially, in the fourteenth century. Similarly, Stephen Kolsky, while noting that Penelope is one of only three women within the one hundred or so biographies described explicitly as an *exemplum* for other women, focuses on the way Boccaccio integrated her into the ideal for Christian women.⁵⁸ Further, he notes that she is not only an *exemplum*, but that Boccaccio highlights her utility as a model for European women by describing her as "*exemplum sanctissimum et eternum*", (most sacred and lasting example), in other words, a "lay saint."⁵⁹ Kolsky recognises that Boccaccio's representation of Penelope is unique among medieval descriptions, reflecting a desire to show off his new-found knowledge of Greek;⁶⁰ in doing so, he "creates an authentic

⁵⁵ Pamela J. Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 9.

⁵⁶ Franklin, *Boccaccio's Heroines*, 63.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Kolsky, *The Genealogy of Women*, 91.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 132.

⁶⁰ Boccaccio's interest in Greek myths is another avenue for exploring his engagement with a figure like Penelope. His working with Leontius Pilatus at a similar time to working on *Famous Women* reinforces this link, but there has been little study of how this knowledge influenced his approach to Penelope. Beyond Kolsky, Cornelia Coulter notes that the Homeric influence in *Famous Women* is limited to the stories relevant to the Trojan cycle. She does not name Penelope as one of the women whose story was influenced by the recent contact with Homer.

character...one endowed with human emotions.”⁶¹ While noting the potential of Boccaccio’s text as a foundation text for Renaissance profeminism, Benson describes his representation of Penelope as a “conventionally heroic, chaste woman.”⁶² I am going to expand on this and show how Boccaccio’s particular interest in women as members of society, with their own agendas for good or bad, introduces enough difference to create a totally new model of woman. She is no longer an archetype of the model for man’s pathway to something better (which can be read into Dante’s representation of Beatrice via his identification with Ulysses, and in Petrarch with his linking of Penelope with Laura); she is a woman in her own right whose actions and feelings contribute to the establishment of social order. Not only this, but she is praised for being cunning and deceitful, characteristics normally associated with negative female exempla. In this way, Penelope is an important element in what Kolsky describes as Boccaccio’s desire to be both “subversive and conservative.”⁶³ Boccaccio’s Penelope is complex, demonstrating characteristics normally considered “in malo” for a woman, but maintaining her integrity as a chaste exemplum for women.

Reading Boccaccio’s Penelope

The most significant representation of Penelope by Boccaccio is Chapter XL in *Famous Women*. Before discussing this representation, I would like to return to the suggestion that Boccaccio’s perspective of Penelope as a woman is apparent in an earlier work. The *Amorosa Visione* composed early in Boccaccio’s writing career, was based on Dante’s *Comedy*.⁶⁴ It in turn, influenced Petrarch in the composition of his *Triumph* series.⁶⁵ The narrator is confronted with a series of

⁶¹ Kolsky, *The Ghost of Boccaccio*, 72.

⁶² Pamela J. Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 9.

⁶³ Kolsky, *The Ghost of Boccaccio*, 3.

⁶⁴ It has been dated to about 1342 or 1343 and is considered a bold move to have been written before the development of the cult of Dante. Jonathan Usher, “Mural Morality in Tableaux Vivants: (*Amorosa Visione*),” in *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. Victoria Kirkham, Michael Sherberg, and Janet Levarie Smarr (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 119.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

murals depicting various exempla; like his later works, cataloguing is an important element. One of the figures seen is Penelope:

And there...was Penelope. Awaiting her beloved Ulysses; she never desisted from her faithful loving. When I fixed my eyes on her, to myself I thought how great her love must have been for him who, I believe, would never return to her.⁶⁶

Unlike Petrarch, Boccaccio describes Penelope as a person; he discusses both her feelings and how she earned her reputation. In a simple reversal of the courtly motif, it is the woman who loves and the man who is beloved. This is far more reminiscent of the accessus to Ovid's *Heroides* of the twelfth century, in which Penelope is described as loving her husband, maintaining faith in his return.⁶⁷ Her representation reflects the possibility of a woman acting in her own interests, not merely as a figure deserving of love and respect from onlookers. As a moral actor she has the potential to be considered a model for other women; she moves beyond the representation of an ideal, and in demonstrating a behaviour (loving her husband) that is within the natural realm of behaviour for all women, she is discussed as a person. This is also very different from the way other medieval scholars, like Jean de Meun, Walter Map and Arnulf of Orleans invoked Penelope. For these men, she represented an ideal, but as the exception who proved the rule about female behaviour. Boccaccio modifies Penelope to accommodate new parameters of exemplarity, one which could include women as important elements in society.

This a different style of exemplarity to that of Petrarch. For example, the inspiration that Penelope offers Petrarch is not so much guidance for his behaviour. He is not expected to use strategy to outwit suitors, or maintain lifetime sexual loyalty to one woman. She is merely a personification of one

⁶⁶ Boccaccio, *Amorosa visione*, XXVII. 112-3 "Ov'era ancora verso lei rivolta Penelopè aspettante il caro Ulisse, che dal fidel suo amor mai non fu sciolta. Nella qual io le luci avendo fisse, fra me pensava quanto fu il disire di que' che mai non cre' ch'a lei redisse.." trans. Hollander, 80-84,

⁶⁷ There is a copy of Ovid's *Heroides* in Boccaccio's hand in the Biblioteca Riccardiana in Florence, MS 487.

side of the internal struggle for control of the passions, a signpost for the vacillating soul. Karlheinz Stierle argues that this style is typical of Petrarch but that Boccaccio introduced a new style of exemplarity.⁶⁸ This new style can be seen in *The Decameron*. The various tales offer opportunities to contemplate and discuss how others behave when confronted by chance and fortune.⁶⁹ The reader/listener is invited to think about the examples of behaviour in order to approach their own decision-making in rational terms, particularly in regards to civic behaviour.⁷⁰ Thus, the figures used within the narrative are not there to be emulated, but to make readers think about their own circumstances and how to respond. This depends upon the reader/listener recognising the figures as real people. Stierle demonstrates how *The Decameron*, written ten years or so before *Famous Women*, reinforces this form of engagement with exempla through the framing of the party;⁷¹ at the end of each day of telling and listening to stories, the group discusses and debates them. Hence, nurturing controversy might be a more positive way of thinking about Boccaccio's approach to his materials. Controversy can be encouraged through presenting both negative and positive aspects in conjunction with each other so that the reader has the opportunity to weigh up their own views on the matter. In support of this contention, the need for the extremes as a means of contemplating virtue can be seen in Boccaccio's assertion that he presents "those things that should be fled and that, likewise, should be followed", not only in the *Decameron*, but also in *Famous Women*.⁷²

⁶⁸ Karlheinz Stierle, "Three Moments in the Crisis of Exemplarity: Boccaccio-Petrarch, Montaigne, and Cervantes," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 59, no. 4 (1998), 581-95: 582.

⁶⁹ This has also been discussed as a debate between determinism and free will. Tobias Foster Gittes, *Boccaccio's Naked Muse. Eros, Culture, and the Mythopoetic Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

⁷⁰ The possibility that the *De claris mulieribus* was written with a view to developing civic virtue can be found in McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 73

⁷¹ Stierle, "Three Moments in the Crisis of Exemplarity: Boccaccio-Petrarch, Montaigne, and Cervantes," 582. Stierle describes Petrarch's approach as "paradigmatic" and Boccaccio's as "syntagmatic," proposing that their differing approaches created a "crisis in exemplarity" contributing to later philosophical and literary approaches to the human condition, p. 584

⁷² Boccaccio, *Proem to the Decameron*, 3 cited and discussed by Tobias Foster Gittes, *Boccaccio's Naked Muse, eros, Culture, and the Mythopoetic Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 223. "quello che sia de fuggire e che sia similmente da seguitare." It is also worth noting how similar this is to twelfth-century ethical readings of Ovid's *Heroides*.

To promote discussion, the stories need to be provocative, offering paradoxical, ambiguous or unexpected information. Women are the perfect tool for this, as in the fourteenth century they were considered to exemplify the two extremes on the virtue balance. They straddled the range from blessed to evil (the Eve/Mary or Eva/Ave dichotomy), so they were ideal subjects for discussing the limits of virtue in a civic environment. Unlike the *Decameron*, in which these extremes are placed at the limits of the novel,⁷³ in *Famous Women*, the extremes are embedded into individual biographies, creating paradoxes. As an example, Leanna, a prostitute is extolled for her virtue, even though her social role would normally provoke a negative response, Boccaccio decides to prioritise her loyalty to a friend.⁷⁴ Boccaccio engages with women in *Famous Women* as individuals, not as symbolic representations of abstract virtues. This characteristic of creating paradoxes within the biographies can be seen in the figure of Penelope.

Love is an important element in the description of Penelope in *Famous Women*. The earliest drafts were composed while Boccaccio retreated from the political life of Florence to his home in Certaldo between the summers of 1361 and 1362.⁷⁵ As its language of composition is Latin, scholars cannot claim with any certainty the intended audience for the work. Its subject matter is women and it is dedicated to a woman, Andrea Acciaiuoli, the Countess of Altavilla; yet few women were sufficiently educated in Latin in the mid-fourteenth century to read it. The opening lines of the *proemio* position the text within the field of humanism, as Boccaccio describes the compendium of famous men being written about by “his teacher” Petrarch: “What surprises me is how little attention women have attracted from writers of this genre, and the absence of any work devoted especially to their memory,” he writes.⁷⁶

⁷³ The opening tale presents a wastrel who at death is treated as a saint because of his death-bed lies, while the closing story is about patient Griselda, the saint-like, self-sacrificing woman who is consistently abused in this life.

⁷⁴ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 100-2. Chapter 50.

⁷⁵ Virginia Brown, “Introduction” in Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, xi.

⁷⁶ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, “Sane miratus sum plurimum adeo modicum apud huiusque viros potuisse mulieres, ut nuquam memorie gratiam in speciali aliqua descriptione consecute sint...” trans. Brown, 9.

Boccaccio wrote the earliest version of this text when Homer and his texts were especially important to him. He had had a pivotal role in finding an academic position for Leontius Pilatus to teach Greek in Florence around 1360.⁷⁷ For about three years, they worked together translating Homer's works into Latin. Writing a biography of women in this period gave Boccaccio the opportunity to display his Homeric knowledge, thus reinventing Penelope.

The various women display a variety of vices and virtues. In the *proemio*, Boccaccio discusses the importance of having both positive and negative models. The negative examples become "incentives for avoiding and detesting wickedness."⁷⁸ He includes each woman's family circumstances and experiences, providing a context for judging their behaviour. This supports the notion that these biographies were a part of a programme designed to provoke discussion, or at least rational contemplation of what might be learned from the lives. Chastity, unsurprisingly, is one of the most significant elements in favourable descriptions. This is foreshadowed in Boccaccio's preface, where he lists Penelope as one of the more positive examples of chaste matrons within his work, along with Lucretia and Sulpicia.⁷⁹

Without neglecting Penelope's love for her husband, Boccaccio introduces new elements to confront the reader with how far one can go to maintain a reputation for virtue. The love is described as a longing that is appeased upon Ulysses' homecoming: "she welcomed with great joy the husband she had longed for all that time."⁸⁰ Beyond love, and inspired by his access to Homer, Boccaccio discusses Penelope's intelligence, represented by a description of her ruse to deceive the suitors: "she devised a clever way to deceive her enemies" and later: "with feminine cunning secretly [she] undid at

⁷⁷ Agostino Pertusi, *Leonzio Pilato fra Petrarca e Boccaccio: Le sue versioni omeriche negli autografo de Venezia e la cultura greca del primo Umanismo* (Venice: Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, 1979).

⁷⁸ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Brown, 11.

⁷⁹ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Brown, 11.

⁸⁰ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Brown, 163.

night all that she had diligently woven during the day.”⁸¹ The terms he uses are *astutia* for the cleverness and *femineo astu* for the feminine cunning.

Boccaccio used the term “*astutia*” for several other women including Dido, Opis and Iole. The pairing of astuteness lends credence to the idea that Boccaccio was creating a figure of ambiguity and contemplation. It is one of the terms discussed by Alcuin Blamires in his chapter on medieval female thought, noting that the idea of women’s creative talent straddles important fault lines within medieval gender discourse.⁸² He associates the ideal of astuteness with Robert Hanning’s discussion of *engin* in twelfth-century romance, noting its similarity to the modern notion of “creative accountancy.”⁸³ In the romance *Enéas*, *engin* is described as “wit, readiness to take advantage of a situation, problem solving, manipulation of others...the shaping of the human environment to one’s advantage, not by force but by the gifts of the mind.”⁸⁴ This skill is associated with the idea of being able to “‘weave’ our own lives”, represented by the weaving damsels in the story. The creative intelligence of Blamires and Hanning, whether as *astutia* or *engin*, reflects the classical Greek ideal of *metis* (which is also associated with weaving).

Paradox can be read into the inclusion of *astutia* and saintly praise combined in the one woman, embedded in the use of the term *astutia* are all the negative associations with the deceptive and cunning woman. There is no doubting, however, the praise for the Greek heroine’s skill in deception. Her *astutia* allowed her to deceive the suitors but her intentions were morally commendable, especially according the Christian standards of marital fidelity. Her deception was used to maintain her chastity, whether her husband was dead or alive. Boccaccio presents deception as having the potential to be benign, more consistent with the ancient Greek ideal of *metis*. It presents her as a moral agent,

⁸¹ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Brown, 161.

⁸² Alcuin Blamires, “Women and Creative Intelligence in Medieval Thought,” in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2005), 215.

⁸³ Blamires, “Women and creative Intelligence,” 220; Robert W. Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

⁸⁴ Hanning, *The Individual*, 108.

dealing with circumstances out of her control (contingent), and responding in a way that could well be provocative within the medieval discussion of these events. There is reason to consider the use of *astutia* in the case of Penelope as ambiguous. The positive aspects of the usage are as follows.

First, the reference to Penelope's *astutia* is associated with a god: "It was surely by divine intervention that she devised a clever way to deceive her enemies."⁸⁵ While this might be seen as undermining Penelope's intelligence, it can also be seen as a reference to the Homeric original. Athena, the protector of Ulysses, also looked out for Penelope and gave her the plan (to deceive the suitors with undoing her day's work) while she slept. Boccaccio adopts the Greek notion of the gods influencing human activity, even though he deals with the gods within the text as glorified humans. There are several other pagans who are presented as inspired or protected by God or the Divine. The sibyl Erythrea was loved by God and so she was able to unveil the secret of divine thought.⁸⁶ Carmenta, the creator of the Latin alphabet, was so loved by God that other languages (Greek and Hebrew) lost their power within Europe.⁸⁷ Metabus needed to protect his baby daughter Camilla, and God inspired him to attach her to a lance and shoot her to safety.⁸⁸ In all three of these cases, a divine influence reflects positively on the person. In the case of Cassandra, another prophet or sibyl, the situation is not so benign. Boccaccio questions the source of her powers of prophecy: it might have been from God, reflect her own studious nature or have come from a devil. If it was from God, it would have been a positive reflection on Cassandra and her intentions. The divine influence within Boccaccio's text is seen as a positive attribute. Benson notes that Boccaccio was not so interested in the subjects' deeds, but the spiritual attitude that underpins the deeds.⁸⁹ This could account for the ambiguity in Dido's case. She did trick people out of land, but it was for the purposes of building a city for her people. In Penelope's case Boccaccio writes that she decided to maintain a chaste state

⁸⁵ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Brown, 161.

⁸⁶ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Brown, 87.

⁸⁷ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Brown, 111.

⁸⁸ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Brown, 155.

⁸⁹ Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman*, 14.

whether or not her husband was alive. Divine intervention came when “She saw no possibility of refusal and was afraid that the resolution she had taken within her chaste breast would be broken.”⁹⁰ Thus, I think it is clear that in the case of Boccaccio’s presentation of Penelope, divine inspiration, despite having the ability to undermine her skill, also contributes to the positive nature of her character. This is reinforced by the comment that the timeliness of Ulysses’ return was through divine mercy.⁹¹ In a context in which the pagan gods are treated as glorified humans, mention of divine intervention, needs to be understood as a positive judgment on the character of the individual.

Second, Boccaccio also uses the term *astutia* to describe Ulysses’ disguise as a beggar. The medieval Ulysses, maintained in many forms of literature, was a wise man.⁹² Through his reasoning skills, he resisted the Sirens’ call and avoided being made into a beast by Circe. Like Penelope’s weaving, Ulysses’ disguise, upon entering his household, is a deception, and like Penelope’s it is for a moral good. Was Boccaccio setting out to feminise or denigrate Ulysses’ wisdom by the use of *astutia* to describe his actions? Although there is some discomfort at times with Ulysses’ reputation as a trickster, there is no evidence in this text to suggest that Boccaccio was alluding to this. The disguise allowed Ulysses to re-enter his household and assess the circumstances without threat. This situation, referring to both husband and wife as astute, also reflects the Homeric original. As mentioned earlier, Homer described the couple as *homophrosyne*, or like-minded. By referring to both as astute, Boccaccio is reapplying ancient Greek ideals to the couple’s behaviour.

The ambiguous and paradoxical nature of the figure of Penelope is consistent with a contingent approach to exemplarity. To do this, Boccaccio needed to treat his subjects as real people, with thoughts and feelings of their own. To assist this process, he provided the narrative background so that her behaviour could be judged or assessed in relation to her circumstances. Unlike

⁹⁰ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Brown, 161.

⁹¹ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Brown, 161-3.

⁹² There are several books that deal with the use of Ulysses as the wise man. For a discussion this role in Fulgentius’ *Mythologies* and other medieval texts, see Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth*, 8; Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, 110; Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*., 42.

the representations of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, he presents Penelope as a moral agent, able to respond to potentially unfavourable circumstances. She is not merely offered as an exemplar of virtue, ready to inspire other women on the importance of maintaining faith in her absent husband. She is praised for deception and cunning, traits generally condemned as negative aspects of the female nature. Boccaccio describes her as “the most sacred and lasting example of untarnished honor and undefiled purity”⁹³ adding that, “the constancy of her virtue was sternly tested by fortune, but in vain.” Fortune, an image evoking the fall of events that were out her control, is a strong and essential element to her tale. Its presence meant that she had to be an ethical agent to prevail as an exemplum in her circumstances. The positive use of characteristics normally deemed negative, especially in relation to women, is provocative, providing the means for discussing what it is to be virtuous. Boccaccio’s Penelope is not the simple representation of the woman passively waiting at home for her husband to return. Nor is she manly, exerting the power of a virago, challenging gender stereotyping. She is a woman who is a moral agent, able to challenge fortune using her natural assets. She represents an ideal of the secular woman surviving in a challenging world.

Conclusion

All the three writers considered here invoke Penelope for different purposes, and represent different medieval and classical influences. For Dante and Petrarch, their knowledge of medieval texts coloured their representations of the classical heroine. Dante’s creation of ‘Dante the pilgrim’ as another Ulysses wandering too far from home in his quest for knowledge offers two alternate ways to read Penelope; like the fifth-century neo-Platonist readings of Penelope, she represents the true path for mankind, or as a woman who deserves to be loved, she is the courtly beloved. Dante’s rediscovery of Beatrice, and learning about the pathway to the divine through love, contrasts with Ulysses’s continuing pursuit of knowledge and the neglect of his deserving wife. Despite

⁹³ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Brown, 159.

reacting to French writers like Jean de Meun as inferior to Roman forebears, Petrarch similarly wrote of women in relation to their influence on male lives. His approach was partly shaped by the courtly motif in which the chaste and virtuous woman inspired man to pursue a virtuous, more spiritual life but it was tainted by the clerical distaste for women. Boccaccio's approach to women was ambiguous and paradoxical, but in relation to Penelope, he displayed a greater reliance on classical texts that offered the potential for recognising female agency. Although his discussions on female virtue blurred gender distinctions, proposing masculine aspirations for woman, his representation of Penelope was more consistent with exposing the potential similarity between the sexes. By highlighting Penelope's intellect and control of her passions, Boccaccio was engaging with the potential for woman to attain civic virtue. She was assessed on her own merits, not merely as an instrument for male learning. His representation of Penelope provided a basis for later writers to contemplate her potential not just to embody chastity, but to be an active member of society.

Chapter Seven

Penelope of good reputation

in the French Court of the Early Fifteenth Century

The first known woman author to represent Penelope was the French writer, Christine de Pizan. Christine was preoccupied with male depictions of women, evident from her participation in an intense literary debate during 1401-2 over the attitude towards women taken by Jean de Meun in the *Romance of the Rose*. Her own depictions of women were a reaction to the pattern of negativity she saw in works by men like Jean de Meun and Giovanni Boccaccio. The works of both men were popular in early fifteenth-century France. Like them, she included Penelope in some of her works. Penelope appears as one of the worthy women, recommended by the personified virtue of Rectitude for accommodation in her allegorical text of 1405, *Le Livre de la Cité des Dame* (*The Book of the City of Ladies*, hereafter called *The City*). Penelope is presented as demonstrating both prudence and chastity. As there are clear indications that Christine used the Boccaccian text to help her structure her own tribute to women, it is easy to believe that Christine's representation of Penelope was largely dependent on Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*. She had the capacity to read it in Latin or through a French translation, *Des cleres et nobles femmes*, made in 1401, the same year as she engaged in her critique of the misogyny of Jean de Meun.¹ Christine had invoked Penelope in a similar fashion in her earlier text, *Le Livre de la Mutacion de la Fortune* (*The Book on the Change of Fortune*) written in 1403.² Distancing herself from her male predecessors, Christine introduces new vocabulary to discuss Penelope, developing her as an

¹ Boccaccio, *Des cleres et nobles femmes*. Ms. Bibl. Nat. 12420, éd. Jeanne Baroin and Josiane Haffen, *Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon*, 498 et 556 (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1993-1995). For Christine's ability to read Latin, see Earl Jeffrey Richards, ed. *Christine de Pizan: The Book of the City of Ladies* (New York: Persea Books, Inc., 1998), xlii.

² Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*, 4 vols., vol. 3 (Paris: Éditions A. & Picard & C^{ie}, 1964), 163. Because the representation of Penelope in the two texts is so similar, my focus will be on the *City of Ladies* as it is the most well-known text.

ideal for female behaviour in a court environment. It merges Christian ethical behaviour for the courtly lady with the humanist ideal of civic virtue, contributing to a new appraisal of the figure of Penelope in the debate on gender.

Christine's experience as a woman living on the proceeds of her writing skills benefitted from the literary interests within her social environment. Late fourteenth-century Paris embraced literature. Charles V, who died in 1380, had expanded the royal library significantly. Under the rule of his son, Charles VI, there was increased interest in French literature, especially on the topics of romance and chivalry, with the initiation of a new order (Order of the White Lady with the Green Shield) in 1400 and a re-founding of a Court of Love a year later.³ Gift giving, especially of beautifully illustrated manuscripts was an important ritual for the elite.⁴ These nobles were potentially Christine's customers, whose tastes and needs for vernacular literature could be indulged. Several of Christine's texts were given to members of the court, including to the king's uncles and wife. Her talents were so respected that she was commissioned to write a biography of Charles V.⁵

Reinforcing the importance of literature for turn of the century France, various clerics, educated in local universities, returned to Paris from Avignon. While in Avignon, the French heard about the Italian authors and were particularly interested in them, especially Boccaccio. Among these men was Laurent de Premierfait, who had moved from Avignon to Paris by 1400, and around 1401 translated Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum* as *Des cas des nobles hommes et femmes*.⁶ In 1401, an anonymous French translation of *De mulieribus claris* appeared.⁷ Two beautifully illustrated copies were given to

³ Hult, *Debate of the Romance of the Rose*, 7; Margolis, *An Introduction to Christine de Pizan*, 11-13; Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea Books, 1984), 42.

⁴ Gift-giving was a New Year's Day tradition. R. C. Famiglietti, "Laurent de Premierfait: the career of a humanist in early fifteenth-century Paris," *Journal of Medieval History* 9, no. 1 (1983), 25-42: 33.

⁵ Willard, *Christine de Pizan*, 113.

⁶ Famiglietti, "Laurent de Premierfait," 46, 31. Translation of *De casibus* was completed in November, 1400, and *The Decameron* in c. 1414.

⁷ See n. 1. Some have claimed that this translation was also the work of Laurent de Premierfait, but this has been largely discounted. See Patricia M. Gathercole, "The Manuscripts of Laurent de Premierfait's Works," *Modern Language Quarterly* 19, no. 3

the king's uncles in around 1404, one of these manuscripts providing the date of translation.⁸ Italian literature, translated into French, was finding an accepting audience among the French royalty. The court had other reasons to be interested in the writings from Italy. The House of Valois had close connections to the ruling Visconti family in Milan.⁹

It was in this literary environment in which an influential debate of morality and the representation of women ignited. Despite their “vast learning and astuteness”¹⁰ many clerics of Paris saw no harm in the literary denigration of women; they inherited the values of the late twelfth- and thirteenth-century schoolmen. Perhaps in an attempt to re-exert French supremacy in literature, Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose*, possibly having been used consistently in education, regained popularity.¹¹ Despite having been written about a century earlier, French humanists continued to praise its virtues as a piece of poetry. Whether or not it was good poetry, its representations of women were scrutinised and assessed as not reflecting reality by Christine de Pizan. Spurred by the constant repetition of misogynist tropes by men, she engaged in an exchange of letters, now called the *querelle de la Rose* (*Debate of the Rose*), with government officials, who had been educated at the university. Laurent de Premierfait is known to have contacts within this circle of men, underlining the potential importance of Boccaccio's texts in underpinning ideas in this debate.¹²

(1958), 262-70: 269. Translation by Premierfait also dismissed by Marie-Hélène Tesnière, “I codici illustrati de Boccaccio francese e latino nelle Francia e nelle Fiandre de XV secolo,” in *Boccaccio Visualizzato: Narrare per parole e per immagini fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, ed. Vittore Branca (Giulio Einaudi editore, 1999), 11.

⁸ One of these manuscripts can be seen on the BnF Gallica website. MS 598, *Livres des femmes nobles et renommées*. The catalogue states that the translator is anonymous. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84521932.r=MS+598.langEN> [accessed 12/08/2015]

⁹ Valentina Visconti was the wife of Louis of Orléans, uncle of Charles VI, and was one of Christine's patrons. Karen Green, “Christine de Pizan: Isolated Individual or Member of a Feminine Community of Learning?” in *Communities of Learning: Networks and the Shaping of Intellectual Identity in Europe, 1100-1500*, ed. Constant J. Mews and John N. Crossley, Europa Sacra (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), 245.

¹⁰ Margolis, *An Introduction to Christine de Pizan*, 12.

¹¹ Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and its medieval readers*, 11.

¹² Laurent de Premierfait was known to Jean de Montreuil who write a letter about Christine comparing her to “the Greek whore, Leontium.” Hult, *Debate of the Romance of the Rose*, 103. That these two men knew each other is acknowledged in Famiglietti, “Laurent de Premierfait,” 30.

Christine challenged literary authority as a means to assess a woman's worth.¹³ Both issues of morality and the depiction of women were raised in the debate, the latter issue giving rise to the later *querelle des femmes*. The debate about women turned around ideas of gender presented by both Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan.

Christine's reputation as the first woman of letters to challenge male representations of women, has contributed to a burgeoning of scholarship in the last few decades, as historians grapple with the complexity of her approach to women's roles in society. Although her lifestyle might be considered ground breaking in her day, Christine presented a rather conservative attitude to the role of women in her society by modern standards. Her qualification as a woman to write about women has unfortunately skewed some studies, argues Helen Swift. All men, even those trying to defend the social role of women, in comparison to Christine, become insincere products of patriarchy.¹⁴ Swift continues by suggesting that, unlike Boccaccio, Christine was attempting to find new ways of defining female virtue. For Boccaccio, the virtuous woman rose above her sex, putting aside the traditional tools and tasks that marked her social role as woman; she needed to take on markers of virility.¹⁵ The twentieth-century perspective on women is not the ideal lens through which to view Christine's stance as her views are shaped by the customs and morality of her time.¹⁶ By looking at the representation of Penelope in relation to the sources available to her, I hope to show that although Christine may not have been the proto-feminist that many would have liked, she certainly was innovative in her approach to this particular woman, not merely accepting male representations of the ideal for the married woman, but contributing her own perspective and experiences.

¹³ Ferrante, *To the Glory of her Sex*, 205.

¹⁴ Swift, *Gender, Writing, and Performance*, 184.

¹⁵ This appraisal of Boccaccio's approach to women is not confined to Swift, as discussed in the previous chapter. *Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁶ Sheila Delaney, "Mothers to Think Back Through: Who are they? The Ambiguous Example of Christine de Pizan," in *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan: New Translations, Criticism*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997).

The relationship between *Famous Women* and *The City of Ladies*

Boccaccio's *Famous Women* is universally recognised as influencing Christine's work, both as a source for her own work and as a text to rebut.¹⁷ As Laura Rinaldi Dufresne says, "Christine is intentionally *un-faithful* to her source."¹⁸ Recent scholarship has touched upon two different aspects of Christine's appropriation of Boccaccio's text that impact on her treatment of Penelope: the relationship between women and textile production, and the shift in terminology from 'astute' to 'prudent,' a more positive term for discussing female intellect.

Unlike Boccaccio, Christine did not prioritise writing and intellectual pursuits over the household needs for textiles. This reframing by Christine is apparent in her appraisal of Cornificia, of whom Boccaccio said that she "rejecting the distaff, wrote many notable epigrams..... How glorious is it for a woman to scorn womanish concerns and to turn her mind to the study of the great poets."¹⁹ This idea presented a challenge to Christine as, although she wanted to praise the skill of women as writers, and Boccaccio's authority as a male added credence to her assessments, her own aim was not to denigrate the important role women played in providing thread and fabric. So, Christine does not challenge Boccaccio's assessment of female nature as intellectually lazy. As Susan Groag Bell notes, Christine is able to rework Boccaccio's words to celebrate the remarkable achievements of women, but without praising their neglect of traditional tasks.²⁰

The potential for Penelope as a tool to analyse Christine's engagement with gender is generally overlooked. Despite their focus on textile workers, neither Bell, nor Giovanna Angeli mention Christine's reworking of Penelope, although her representation in Boccaccio's *Famous Women* is clearly as a

¹⁷ As noted in the previous chapter, a negative assessment of Boccaccio's approach to women is a characteristic of scholars who approach him through the lens of Christine. See Kolsky, *The Genealogy of Women*, 7-8.

¹⁸ Dufresne, "Women Warriors," 114.

¹⁹ ⁵ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Brown, 352-255, "colo reiecto, et plurima ac insignia descripsit epygramata."

²⁰ Bell, "Christine de Pizan (1364-1430)," 177.

weaver. Patricia Phillippy draws similar conclusions to these scholars, noting how Christine is able to praise the accomplishments of women who turned their minds to more scholarly pursuits without having to denigrate the traditional tasks of women. Phillippy mentions Penelope toward the end of her article as she sums up the overriding goal of Christine's text as the provision of examples for women within a courtly society: "[Christine de Pizan] establishes 'woman's work' as the thread which keeps society intact, presenting, for example, the model of Penelope as a woman who is both beautiful and chaste, especially in the context of the court, a model of particular relevance in the light of intrigues of the French court which threatened, in Christine's view, the stability of the state."²¹ The mention of 'thread' alongside the idea of 'woman's work' draws attention to women as textile producers, but Phillippy does not discuss how (or if) the weaving motif is used specifically in Christine's discussion of Penelope. While noting how she creates a model suited to court life, an environment within which Christine is experienced, she does not discuss how and in what way this is done in relation to the representation of Penelope.

As well as the issue of textiles, the other area in which there is some discussion on Christine's Penelope is the shift from Boccaccio's Latin term *astutia* to the French *prudence*. Unfortunately, like Phillippy's discussion, the inclusion of Penelope is more as an afterthought. Describing prudence as the "worldly exercise of intellection," Alcuin Blamires notes that Boccaccio used the term 'womanly astuteness' for several of his women, including Opis, Iole, Flora, with the most telling (according to Blamires) being the story of Dido. Dido's astuteness was exercised at two points in her life: when she pretended to throw her dead husband's treasure overboard by throwing sacks of sand into the sea, and when she bought a block of land that could be covered by an ox-hide. By cutting the hide into thin strips, she was able to encircle a piece of land much greater than the area of an untreated hide. While Boccaccio had used the Latin

²¹ Patricia A. Phillippy, "Establishing Authority: Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus* and Christine de Pizan's *Le livre de la cité des dames*," in *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), 359-60.

term *astutia* to describe Dido's approach to her problem; the same story told in a twelfth-century vernacular text had used the term *engin*.²² Both of these terms are believed to have had negative connotations, especially when used in conjunction with female action. It is for this reason that Blamires suggests that Christine resisted the Boccaccian model of womanly astuteness with a "systematic campaign" to upgrade the relevant heroines described by Boccaccio as 'astute' to 'prudent.' It is only at the end of this discussion that he mentions that Penelope was among the women whose description shifted when discussed by Christine: "Penelope was 'wise and prudent,' rather than astute, in her handling of the unwanted suitors."²³ This discussion of a shift from the Latin *astutia* to a French *prudence* is dependent on Christine having read Boccaccio in the Latin, or the French translation having a similar negative quality in the discussion of its crafty/cunning women.

Reading Christine's Penelope

The *City of Ladies* is an allegorical text which borrows themes from other well known texts, highlighting Christine's conscious decision to place her work within a genre not generally attempted by women. There are twenty-five manuscripts of Christine's book, many of them illustrated and probably completed under her supervision. They were owned by illustrious personages, such as John, Duke of Berry (brother of Charles V) and Isabella of Bavaria, the wife of Charles VI of France. The title indirectly alludes to St Augustine's *City of God* and the closing paragraph is also suggestive of the city in which all the deserving virtuous may reign eternally with God.²⁴ The arrival of three Virtues, who appear in order to assist the author in her task, is reminiscent both of the

²² In the *Roman d'Enéas*, discussed by Blamires, *Voices in Dialogue*, 220.

²³ *Ibid.*, 221.

²⁴ Rosalind Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading Beyond Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 134; Sandra L. Hindman, "With Ink and Mortar: Christine De Pizan's 'Cite des Dames'", *Feminist Studies* 10, no. 3 (1984), 457-83: 471-2.

Annunciation of Mary and the opening of the *Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius.²⁵

The *City of Women* is based on a dream vision. Christine, the dreamer and narrator, is visited by three female personifications who guide the process of reimagining women and their worth. The three women, representing virtues and around whom the book is structured, are Reason, Rectitude and Justice (*Raison*, *Droiture*, and *Justice*), pointing to the seriousness of the matter to be discussed. Reason assists by providing stories of women who have used their skills to construct a better society and thus symbolically provides the bricks and mortar for the walls of the city. Rectitude assists in building the houses and suggesting worthy inhabitants, Penelope being one of the worthy women who qualify for inclusion. Justice builds the towers that reach to heaven and brings with her Mary and the various martyrs who have attained heavenly glory. Although challenging the way women were depicted in literature, the Christian idealisation of virginity and personal sacrifice was a continuing characteristic of Christine's approach to women and their virtue.²⁶

The women drawn from Boccaccio's *Famous Women*, including Penelope, populate the first two books. The passage regarding Penelope is in Book Two and corresponds with the building of homes, and each of the women discussed is to be the residents of the city. Penelope is among the "many valiant and chaste ladies;" she is the first of the pagan women to be named after the biblical women Susanna, Sarah, Rebecca and Ruth. Rectitude (the second of the Virtues) presents these women to show Christine that the male accusation of the difficulty in finding a chaste wife is false. Rectitude explains that in Holy

²⁵ For the parallels between the City of Ladies and Augustine's City of God, Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading Beyond Gender*, 39; Hindman, "With Ink and Mortar: Christine De Pizan's *Cite des Dames*"; Christine Reno, "Virginity as an Ideal in Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dame*," in *Ideals for Women in the Works of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Diane Bornstein (Detroit, MI: Michigan Consortium for Medieval and early Modern Studies, 1981); Earl Jeffrey Richards, ed. *Christine de Pizan: The Book of the City of Ladies* (New York: Persea Books, Inc., 1998). For references to the association with the Annunciation, see Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading Beyond Gender*, 141; Reno, "Virginity as an Ideal in Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dame*."; Richards, *City of Ladies*, xxxiii.

²⁶ Reno, "Virginity as an Ideal"

Scripture there were those who “chose death rather than transgress against the chastity and purity of their bodies.” This approach to chastity reflects that discussed in previous chapters, especially as it is represented in the work of Jerome in the fourth century and Marbod of Rennes in the eleventh. It prioritises chastity over life for women. Penelope does not fit comfortably within this paradigm.

The inclusion of Penelope in the *City* no doubt reflects her presence in Boccaccio’s *Famous Women*. It is probably no coincidence that Christine’s *City of Ladies* was written not long after Boccaccio’s *Famous Women* had been translated into French in 1401.²⁷ Although not considered a good translation of the text, the manuscript production was beautiful.²⁸ The first beautifully illustrated manuscripts of *Des Cleres et Nobles Renomées* arrived into the noble families around 1404.²⁹ These were given to the two uncles of King Charles VI of France (Philip the Bold and John, Duke of Berry), so it is possible that Christine had access to at least one of them.³⁰ The wives and/or daughters of both of these men are discussed in Christine’s *City*.³¹ The translation follows the Latin text fairly faithfully, but a shift in focus by the French translator is apparent in the title of the individual chapter (*La belle Penelope, filles de roy*). Nobility was important, potentially reflecting the status of the early recipients of the translations. By describing Penelope as the daughter of a king, nobility

²⁷ Richards, *City of Ladies*, xliv.

²⁸ The text has been described as heavy and literal. Marie-Hélène Tesnière, “I codici illustrati de Boccaccio francese e latino nelle Francia e nelle Fiandre de XV secolo,” in *Boccaccio Visualizzato: Narrare per parole e per immagini fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, ed. Vittore Branca (Giulio Einaudi editore, 1999), 11. Gathercole, “The Manuscripts of Laurent de Premierfait’s Works,” 269.

²⁹ The date of translation is noted in the older of the two manuscripts. These early decorated works have been implicated in a system of patronage in which textile merchants offered these beautiful manuscripts to potential customers. See Brigitte Buettner, *Boccaccio’s Des cleres et nobles femmes: Systems of Signification in an Illuminated Manuscript* (Seattle and London: College Art Association in Association with University of Washington Press, 1996); “Il commercio di Immagini: i Mercanti, i Rapondi e il Boccaccio in Francia,” in *Boccaccio Visualizzato: Narrare per Parole e per Immagini fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, ed. Vittore Branca (Giulio Einaudi editore, 1999).

³⁰ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Fr. 12420 belonged to Philip the Bold and Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Fr. 598 belonged to Jean, Duke of Berry. Although completed by different hands, they are believed to have been derived from the same original. These are the earliest extant copies of the 1401 translation.

³¹ Gathercole, “The Manuscripts of Laurent de Premierfait’s Works.”

through birth was given greater importance than that of her marriage to Ulysses or her actions.

Christine was able to read both Latin and French, so it is not clear if she was dependent on the recent translation of Boccaccio's work for her description of Penelope. Nadia Margolis notes that both the Latin and French versions of Boccaccio's text were used by Christine to describe one of her heroines.³² Despite the opportunity and potential to use these texts for describing Penelope, based on Christine's word choices, I suggest that, while familiar with Boccaccio, she introduced her own vocabulary to create an ideal courtly lady, much like herself. One of the concepts in Boccaccio's description of Penelope, eschewed by Christine, is the idea of astuteness. This concept is offered in the French translation of Boccaccio's text, so the absence of the idea or concept cannot be blamed on her working from the translation. The words used to convey the idea, however, do not derive from the Latin *astutia*, nor do they reflect the idea of prudence, the term commonly recognised as Christine's manner of repatriating Boccaccio's women.³³ Instead, the translator introduces new terms to describe Penelope's ruse for deceiving the suitors: "*par la caute et grant avis defaissoit et destruisoit par nuit secretement ce que par iour elle avoit fait*" (by cunning and great intention she secretly undid and destroyed by night that which, by day, she had made).³⁴ By applying the ruse of weaving by day and undoing her work at night, Penelope is described as having managed to mock her suitors "by great zeal and diligence, in this manner of deception" (*par estude et grant diligence et con par ceste manier de decepcion*).³⁵ When we look closer at Christine's text, we will find that she used none of these phrases to describe Penelope. The French translation of Boccaccio's text also presented her as a noble woman.

³² Margolis, *An Introduction to Christine de Pizan*, 130. This is based on the study of the representation of the queen, Semiramis. As noted in a previous footnote, likely access to texts in both languages is also recognised by Richards, *City of Ladies*, xlii.

³³ Blamires, *Voices in Dialogue*, 221.

³⁴ Giovanni Boccaccio, "Des cleres et nobles femmes," ed. Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1403). "Caut(e)": thoughtful, cautious, cunning, wily, crafty. p. 105. "par avis:" is given as "intentionally", p. 61. As it is a characteristic of this translation to provide pairs of synonyms, this might also be translated as "by caution and great intention." *Ibid.*, f. 59r.

³⁵ *Ibid.* "par estu(i)de" is given as diligently.

Penelope is pictured in a blue dress with ermine-lined red cloak, reflecting the ideal of nobility. She sits at a loom with possibly a distaff balanced on her lap.



Figure 2 *Livre des femmes nobles et renommées*, MS Fr 598, f. 58r, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Manuscript presented to Jean, Duke of Berry, 1404. In the public domain, available through Gallica. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/>

As she weaves, Penelope is pictured showing no reaction to the suitors around her being slaughtered. She represents a queen studiously attending to her domestic responsibilities while the men deal with the troubles surrounding her. None of these elements, the weaving or slaughter, is discussed by Christine.

Although Boccaccio's text and its reception into the French Court may have contributed to Penelope's inclusion in her *City*, there are few similarities in the

representation of Penelope. The words used by Christine to describe Penelope are consistent with the ideal of a noble woman of the courts. To do this, Christine introduces a new vocabulary to discuss the Greek heroine. I made these words bold in the following extract to highlight their distinctiveness.

Des dame payennes assez des chaste et de bonnes **preudes femmes** treuve l'en es escriptures. Penelope la femmes du prince Ulixes fu dame moult vertueuse, et entre les autres grace qu'elle ot, moult fu louee de la vertu de chasteté, et d'elle font grant mencion plusieurs histoire, car ceste dame, tant que son mari fu au siege devant Troye, qui dura .x. ans, **se governa moult sagement**, et nonobstant que moult fust requise de plusieurs roys et princes pour sa grant beauté, nul ne volt ouyr ne escouter, elle estoit **sage, prudent**, devote aux dieux et de belle vie, et mesmement après la destruccion de Troye attendi son dit mari

autres .x. ans, et cuidoit on que il fust peri en mer ou il ot maintes pestilences, et quant il fu retournez, il la trouva assegee d'un roy qui a force la vouloit avoir in mariage pour sa grant chasteté et bonté. Son mari vint en guise d'un pellerin et enquist d'ell, si fu moult joyeux des bonnes nouvelles que il en ouy dire, et grant joye ot de son filz Thelemacus que il avoit lasissié petit et le trouva parcreus.³⁶

The ideas used to describe Penelope here do not reflect a Boccaccian model. She is praised for being able to govern herself, of being wise, prudent and devoted to the gods. If Christine's portrait of Penelope was dependent on the Boccaccian model, I believe there would have been more consistency in the vocabulary, even keeping in mind the translation from Latin into French. It would have been legitimate for words derived from the Latin term *astutia* to be incorporated. The terms used by Christine relate to a different genre of writing and work to further integrate Penelope in a suitable role model for the Christian woman. For example, the term *preudes femmes* used by Christine to describe the group of women among whom Penelope can be counted, is found in the *Miroir des Bonnes Femmes* written before 1300.³⁷ The text can be found in MS fr. 213 in the Bibliothèque Municipale in Dijon on ff. 86-139 and is believed to have been written by a Franciscan friar.³⁸ This book introduces new concepts into the genre of female conduct literature; unlike others, there is a shift in focus for the female reader from a purely internal or spiritual journey, to the appropriate manners for social advancement.³⁹ It is a collection of exempla, listing both good and bad women mainly taken from the Bible. Although the

³⁶ Christine de Pizan, *La città delle dame*, Patrizia Caraffi and Earl Jeffrey Richards, eds (Milan: Luni, 1998), 322.

³⁷ This is a terminus ad quem, as the exempla are believed to have been compiled in the late thirteenth century. John Grigsby, "Miroir des Bonne femmes: A New Fragment of the Somme le Roi and a Miroir des Bonnes Femmes, a hitherto unnoticed text.," *Romania* 82 (1961), 458-89: 463. This article, as well as another by Grigsby published the following year, contain summaries of the text. "Miroir des Bonnes Femmes (Suite)," *Romania* 83 (1962), 30-51.

³⁸ "Miroir des Bonne femmes," *ibid.* 82 (1961), 458-89: 462.

³⁹ Kathleen Ashley, "The *Miroir des bonnes femmes*: Not for Women Only?," in *Medieval Conduct*, ed. Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark, Medieval Cultures (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 101.

Miroir des Bonnes Femmes includes various exempla, including some pagan (for example, Dido and Tullia), Penelope is not mentioned.

The idea of *preudes femmes* and its male counterpart, *preud'homme* were longstanding ideals in French history. The male form incorporates the idea of prudence or bravery,⁴⁰ and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, came to mean “a man of integrity.”⁴¹ Leo Spitzer has argued that the inclusion of the “d”, creating ‘preudome’ from ‘preu home,’ can be understood as adding the additional quality of Christian morality to the ideal of knightly bravery; the *preudome* or *preud'homme* is favoured by God.⁴² Also at a much later date, Rabelais associated the phrase *preudes femmes* with women who had lived chastely and without blame, having restrained their animal nature by reason.⁴³

The term prudence, as an important element in the courtly lady, is both a classical and medieval concept. It is discussed in another Franciscan *speculum* for women, Durand of Champagne's *Miroir des Dames*. Durand originally wrote this book in Latin (*Speculum Dominarum*) around 1300.⁴⁴ It was later translated, perhaps by Durand himself, for Jeanne of France, who died in 1305. Women within Christine's circle were known to possess this book.⁴⁵ Karen Green argues that Christine used and extended Durand's concept of prudence in her works, particularly in the *Trois Vertus*, the sequel to the *City*. In Durand's work, prudence is one of the cardinal virtues, along with temperance, fortitude and justice, alongside the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. For

⁴⁰ Jean-Baptiste de La Curne de Sainte-Palaye, “preudhomme,” in *Dictionnaire historique de l'ancien langage françois ou Glossaire de la langue françoise depuis son origine jusque'au siècle de Louis XIV* (Prostiege, 1995), Vol. 8, 348.

⁴¹ Maryanne Cline Horowitz, *Seeds of Virtue and Knowledge* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 227.

⁴² Leo Spitzer, “Joinville Étymologiste,” *Modern Language Notes* 62, no. 8 (1947), 505-14: 509. “C'est ce d 'divin' qui incarne la différence entre le *preu home (qui n'est que 'preu de corp') et prodome qui est un preux selon Dieu.”

⁴³ Jerry C. Nash, “Stoicism and the Stoic Theme of “Honestum” in Early French Renaissance Literature,” *Studies in Philology* 76, no. 3 (1979), 203-17: 214, n. 11. Seulement vous diraay que petite ne est la louange des preudes femmes, les quelle ont vescu pudiquement et sans blame et ont eu la vertu de ranger cestuy effrené animale à l'obeissance de raison.

⁴⁴ Durand of Champagne, *Speculum dominarum*, ed. Anne Dubrulle, “Le Speculum Dominarum de Durand de Champagne,” 2 vols. Thèse présentée pour l'obtention du diplôme d'archiviste-paleographe, Ecole nationale des chartes 1987-1988.

⁴⁵ Karen Green, “From *Le Miroir des dames* to *Le Livre des trois vertus*,” in *Virtue Ethics for Women 1250-1500*, ed. Karen Green and Constant Mews (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 100.

Christine, prudence became an organising principle. Durand's text might also be the source for the phrase 'she governed herself most wisely'. Discussing the ideal behaviour of the queen, Christine instructs her to govern herself (*gouvernement de sa personne*); prudence and self-governance were important for the woman of the court as it helped in establishing and maintaining a good reputation (*bonne renommée*):

First of all prudence teaches the princess or great lady how above all things in this lower world she ought to love honour and good reputation. She will say to her that it does not displease God for a person to live in this world morally, and if she lives morally she will love the blessing of a good reputation, which is honour.⁴⁶

The idea of honour and good reputation underpins one of the fundamental and unique aspects of Christine's depiction of Penelope. Unlike Boccaccio who celebrated the joy with which Penelope welcomed her husband home from his wandering: "Though barely able to recognise him, she welcomed with great joy the husband she had longed for all that time."⁴⁷ No such sentimentality is present in Christine's approach. Reputation was the important factor. Penelope's feelings are not considered, unlike her husband's:

Her husband arrived disguised as a pilgrim and inquired after her, and he was very happy with the good reports her heard and took great joy in his son Telemachus whom he had left as a little child and whom he found grown up.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Christine de Pizan, *The Treasury of the City of Ladies*, 90; Christine de Pizan, *Les trois vertus*, 41. "Si nous convient d'ores en avant parler de la leçon et des enseignemens que Prudence Mondaine lui amonnest, lesquels enseignemens et amoicions ne se different be departent de ceulx de Dieu, ains en viennent et dependent. Si dirons et parlerons du sage gouvernement et manière de vivre qui lui aduisent selon Prudence. Prudence tout premierement enseignera a la princepsse ou haulte dame comment sur toutes les choses de ce bas monde doit aimer honneur et bonne renommee, et lui dira qu'il ne desplaist mie a Dieu que creature vive au monde moralment, et se elle vit moralment elle aimera le bien de renommee, qui est honneur."

⁴⁷ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 163.

⁴⁸ Richards, *City of Ladies*, 158.

Ulysses was overjoyed to hear of Penelope's good name. Penelope had behaved in a manner worthy of acknowledgment, governing herself, restraining her animal nature with reason (according to the principals of the *preude femme*) to live honourably and without blame. In this way she was able to maintain her reputation. She had also managed to raise a child to adulthood without the assistance of the other parent, just as Christine was required to do as a widow. I think this portrait of Penelope reflects aspects of Christine's view of her own life as a single mother having raised children alone, and having to look out for her own reputation.

Another aspect of Christine's Penelope that diverges from Boccaccio's approach is the failure to mention the ruse to put off the suitors. Use of Latin *astutia* or the French *avise* or *caute* might have alerted the reader to the Boccaccian description of Penelope's deception of the suitors. Their absence and the failure to mention weaving at all, suggest that Christine did not want to highlight Penelope's capacity for deception. The idea that women could be deceptive and remain virtuous, however, is not a problem for Christine. The idea of deception can be found embedded within Christine's use of prudence, as she links this quality to dissimulation or *juste ypocrise* in other situations. Within a court setting, a woman needed to be on her guard and able to use her wits to look after herself. In the *Trois Vertus*, she states:

But despite all these things and great dissimulations, she will be on the lookout for them, as much as possible, and will be on her guard from that moment on. Thus, the wise lady will use this sort of discreet dissimulation and caution (*prudent cautelle*), something that no one believes to be a vice, but a great virtue, when it is carried out for a good cause and for peace and without hurting anyone.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre Des Trois Vertus* (Paris: Librairie Honore Champion, 1989), 64, cited in Tracy Adams, "Appearing Virtuous: Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre des trois vertus* and Anne de France's *Les Enseignements d' Anne de France*," in *Virtue Ethics for Women 1250-1500*, ed. Karen Green and Constant Mews (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 122: "Mais nonobstant toutes ces choses et ces grans dissimulacions, elle se gaitera d'eulx de tout ce que elle pourra, et serra adés sur sa garde. Ainsi la sage dame usera des cest discrete dissimulacion

The French text combines the ideas of prudence and cunning (*prudente cautelle*). *Cautelle* is related to *caute*, the word used to describe Penelope's actions in the French translation of Boccaccio, but in her text, Christine just hints at this aspect of Penelope's character, avoiding words like *astu* and *cautelle*. It must be noted that Christine's observation on the use of dissimulation is specifically in the pursuit of virtue, and not just as a cynical excuse for power.⁵⁰

Not only does Christine fail to mention the deceptions, she also neglects to mention Penelope's reputation as a weaver. Her experience as a woman who lived by the pen perhaps inspired this absence. It might reflect Christine's own ambivalence with regard to needle and pen.⁵¹ This could in part be attributed to Boccaccio as he associated women's engagement with distaff and needles as signs of women's 'sloth'. For Boccaccio, however, weaving was the marker of Penelope's virtue as it signified her ruse to deceive the suitors and was thus fundamental to her chastity and subsequent reputation. The early translators of his text for a noble French audience did acknowledge her weaving and it was a distinguishing feature of her representation, especially in images.

Christine herself refers to her own experiences with textile work and learning to read and write. The latter skills she learned from her father but her mother would have preferred that she dedicated her time to spinning like other young girls.⁵² Even with her own ambivalence, however, Christine in the *Livre de trois vertus* makes it very clear that fine embroidery or making useful things, were "worthy occupations [to] prevent idle thoughts," but they were not essential to the pursuit of feminine worth.⁵³ What is clear is that Christine did not see 'weaving' as essential to a woman's worth and it was certainly not essential to her representation of the worth of Penelope. Christine does not

et prudent cautelle, laquelle chose ne croye nul que ce soit vice, mais grant vertue quant faicte est a cause de bien et de paix et sans a nul nuire."

⁵⁰ Adams, "Appearing Virtuous," 127.

⁵¹ Although Christine replaced textile tools for the pen, she did not recommend this for other women. Bell, "Christine de Pizan (1364-1430)," 182.

⁵² Christine de Pizan, *City of Ladies*, trans. Richards, 154-5.

⁵³ Christine de Pizan, *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honor: The Treasury of the City of Ladies*, trans. Charity Cannon Willard, (New York: Persea Books, 1989), 144.

present textile skills as either a sign of female worth or as a task that needs to be relinquished to obtain virtue.

Conclusion

Although there is no doubt that Christine used the Boccaccian text as part of her structuring of the city, there are good reasons to believe that for the portrait of Penelope, other issues were at play. Her use of prudence, self-governance and the idea of the *preudes femmes*, as well as the neglect of the weaving, suggest we need to look elsewhere for the input into her representation. I think that Christine's role as a married and widowed woman responsible for raising her children without the input of a husband, shaped the way Christine pictured Penelope. She was certainly influenced in some way by Boccaccio's earlier representation, but as has been already discussed by others, it was modified to accommodate her own needs of presenting unambiguously virtuous women. I would suggest that Christine incorporated other materials from didactic literature on the appropriate behaviour of noble women as well as her own ideas on good reputation to create a woman of *bonne renommée*.

Chapter Eight

“...this new Penelope”: Italian humanism of the fifteenth century

Laura Cereta, (1469-1499), daughter of a Brescian lawyer and one of the few Italian women of the fifteenth century who was educated in Latin, was described by a contemporary as “this new Penelope”, a characterisation that perhaps was inspired by Giovanni Boccaccio’s biography of the Homeric figure in *Famous Women*. Boccaccio’s Penelope is virtuous, but also shrewdly intelligent. He also emphasised her weaving, a task more generally associated with traditional female activities. Penelope’s role in Boccaccio’s discussion of female virtue is therefore ambiguous. Is she a model of chastity, especially in relation to the married woman, or is she the weaver who represents the conventional female social role? Those who defended women in the fifteenth-century debates about the nature and capacities of the female sex focused on individuals who spurned the spindle and distaff (consistent with Boccaccio’s argument) to pick up the pen.¹ Laura Cereta challenged the notion that she needed to put aside female tools in order to be virtuous. Like Ovid’s Penelope, she wove and wrote.

Cereta was unusual in equating writing and weaving as equally worthy means of self-expression. This approach challenged the hierarchy that favoured letters at the expense of domestic responsibilities. In presenting herself in her letters as both weaver and writer, she implicitly linked her actions to those of Penelope aiming to shore up her reputation as a chaste, but literate, woman and to establish a less gendered approach to virtue.

The intellectual community within which Cereta wrote was not courtly, and thus very different to that of Christine de Pizan; nor did Cereta and the other educated women of Italy expect financial gain for their writing. While some women were educated to fulfil a supportive role to their politically powerful husbands, others wrote to display their intellectual prowess. Thus, they did not

¹ The role of Boccaccio’s text as forerunner to this trend of educating women is discussed in Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400-1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 18.

write in the vernacular to find a large audience, but in Latin. They were attempting to find a place within the literary intelligentsia of the day through the media of letter books, dialogues, orations and letters of consolation. These women were educated within “household academies” or in convents. The first generation of Italian female scholars, such as Maddalena Scrovegni of Padua (1356-1429), Cecilia Gonzaga of Mantua (1425-51), Battista Montefeltro Malatesta of Urbino (1383-1450), Caterina Caldiera (d. 1463), Ippolita Sforza of Milan (1445- 1488) and Costanza Varano of Pesaro (1428-47) were for the most part members of powerful families, and their talents have been described as advancing the interests of their families, not their own.²

Female erudition and chastity

Education in Latin was available to some women from less powerful families, especially if encouraged by their fathers. As there was not a clear cut social role for these literate prodigies, they could potentially challenge the cultural expectations for women. Fifteenth-century standards of behaviour for women, however, were largely shaped by the Christian ideals of humility and obedience, which limited their ability to demonstrate their learning. This is reflected in the recommendations on education for young women as described by Leonardo Bruni. His *De studiis et litteris ad dominam Baptistam de Malatestis* (ca. 1423-6) was dedicated to a woman, Battista Malatestis, and is considered the first work by a man arguing for the humanist education of women. He recommended the study of subjects consistent with those recommended for boys, excepting oratory and military training.³ Oratory was not appropriate, as the verbal expression and gestures associated with persuading an audience were not in keeping with the humility required of women:

² Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, 29; Robin, “Introduction,” *Laura Cereta*, 7.

³ Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, 33.

For if a woman throws her arms around whilst speaking, or if she increases the volume of her speech with greater forcefulness, she will appear threateningly insane and requiring restraint.⁴

Speech itself was considered dangerous by some; universal punishment of women as the daughters of Eve, who had used speech to seduce Adam, provided a religious rationale for maintaining pressure on women to remain silent.⁵ Education in Latin, using classical and Christian literature, allowed women a medium for engagement with men on a more equal footing.⁶ What they could do with this training, once they were skilled in rhetoric, was another issue. The role of the woman able to read and write Latin was to be seen as a prodigy, bringing glory to her family and community, but it did not necessarily involve any sense of active participation in society, which was the goal of education for young men. This raised a difficulty for the women who desired recognition for their intellectual and rhetorical skill. Letters had become a standard means of demonstrating rhetorical skill, based on the Petrarchan model of the letter book.⁷ Attempts by women to contact an audience beyond the limits of family and friends, however, were still considered a breach of chastity. This situation can be seen in the example of Isotta Nogarola (1418-1466) who dared to write to the humanist, Guarino Veronese (1347-1460). Isotta and her sister Ginevra had been tutored by Martino Rizzoni, Guarino's student. In 1436, Jacopo Foscari sent Guarino some of the sisters' letters, as examples of female erudition. Guarino responded with great praise for their skills, which he equated with a sign of their virtuousness.⁸ The feedback to Isotta was indirect. This raises the question of whose skills were being judged, those of the sisters, or their teacher.

⁴ "De studiis et litteris ad dominam Baptistam de Malatestis" from Bruni Aretino, *Humanistische-Philosophische Schriften mit einer Chronologie, Seiner Werke und Briefe*, ed. H. Baron, (Leipzig, 1928), 11-12, cited in Jardine, "Isotta Nogarola: Women humanists - Education for what?," 233.

⁵ King and Rabil Jnr, "The Old Voice," xxiii.

⁶ Ibid., xxiv.

⁷ Following the example of Petrarch, letter books became a means of defining oneself as a humanist. See Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁸ Jardine, "Isotta Nogarola," 236.

Aware of Guarino's praise, Isotta transgressed the bounds of social decorum by writing directly to Guarino Veronese. Isotta was conscious that she was breaching protocol in writing directly to him:

Do not hold it against me, if I have transgressed those rules of silence especially imposed on women, and seem scarcely to have read that precept of Vergerio's, which warns against encouraging articulateness in the young, since in plentiful speech there is always that which may be censured. And Sophocles too called silence a woman's greatest ornament.⁹

Guarino did not reply, reinforcing the idea she had broken a taboo. His neglect exposed as illusory the notional 'equality' and 'free scholarly exchange' that was a part of the humanist rhetoric on the benefits of education.¹⁰ Isotta felt exposed to public ridicule and this ridicule was affirmed later in 1438, when she was named in a pamphlet that attacked female scholars for their lack of propriety. Nogarola's virginity was questioned and she was accused of having selected her brother as the means of her defloration.¹¹ The attack prompted her withdrawal from Verona and she did not return for three years. At this point, determined to live as a recluse within the house of her brother, she continued¹² her study but turned to sacred letters, leaving behind her more secular and humanist pursuits. Her dedication to virginity as the essential prerequisite for her studiousness was highlighted by her refusal at the age of thirty-five of a proposal of marriage.¹³

⁹ Ibid., 238.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 240.

¹² For discussion on Isotta's religious retreat into the book-lined cell, see Margaret Leah King, "Thwarted Ambitions: Six Learned Women of the Italian Renaissance," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 59 (1976), 280-304: 286; Margaret L. King, "The Religious Retreat of Isotta Nogarola (1418-1466): Sexism and Its Consequences in the Fifteenth Century," *Signs* 3, no. 4 (1978), 807-22.

¹³ Isotta wrote to her friend Ludovico saying that a proposal had been made. He responded that it was not proper for a virgin to contemplate such worldly matters. King, "The Religious Retreat of Isotta Nogarola," 816.

The importance of virginity as fundamental to women's erudition is clearly articulated by Guarino himself. In his letter of praise for the sisters' writing, he states:

Oh how rare a bird upon earth, like nothing so much as a black swan! If earlier ages had borne these proven virgins, with how many verses would their praises have been sung, how many deserved praises by truly unstinting authors would have consigned them to immortality!¹⁴

The rare bird topos is a motif seen in previous chapters and reflects an approach to women that highlights the exceptionality of one (or in this case two women). For Guarino, the letters reflected the transcendence of their undoubted virginity. As Lisa Jardine notes, Guarino's praise does not relate to a civic notion of virtue, an aspect traditionally attributed to humanism, but to the more Christian ideal of virginity as the ultimate state for women. It is the purity that shines through the written word, not the skill of the individual.¹⁵ This exceptionality is reinforced further by Guarino's urge to Isotta to "create the man within the woman."¹⁶

Virginity assumed a potency which reinforced the hierarchy of learned virtue over traditional social norms for women. When Ginevra Nogarola married, she discontinued writing and lost her transcendent beauty.¹⁷ Virginity was responsible for both her loveliness and her erudition. Jardine notes that even the twentieth-century philologist, Remigio Sabbadini, focused on the virginity of the two sisters, ("the intellects of these two proven virgins").¹⁸ Sabbadini continued that this was only maintained by Isotta whose manifestation of this glory was "unsurpassed."¹⁹ In the case of Ginevra, marriage destroyed her virginity and therefore her chance for true erudition as a female writer. Margaret King associates this strong association of chastity with

¹⁴ "Letter to Francesco Foscari from Guarino," cited in Jardine, "Isotta Nogarola," 236.

¹⁵ Ibid., 237.

¹⁶ Remigio Sabbadini, *Epistolario de Guarino Veronese*, B.307.19-22, cited in King, "The Religious Retreat of Isotta" 808.

¹⁷ Jardine, "Isotta Nogarola," 237. n. 20.

¹⁸ Sabbadini, cited in Jardine, "Isotta Nogarola", 241.

¹⁹ Ibid.

learning to two different impulses. For a literate woman, chastity represented a defiance of the natural order and a source of pride and independence, whereas men encouraged chastity as an instrument of repression.²⁰ It is perhaps for this reason that the second generation of fifteenth-century female scholars, which included Cereta, has been described as being relentless in their pairing of female eloquence with chastity.²¹

Pen and spindle

In Boccaccio's discussion of textile implements and pens, the spindle and distaff represent women's domestic duties but they are also associated with intellectual laziness. As spinning was often done in groups, he might have associated it with gossiping, an activity that had a negative connotation, especially when it involved women. The longevity of the attitudes underlying Boccaccio's text can be seen in the writings of the humanist Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536). Despite not agreeing with Boccaccio's negative assessment of textiles as a suitable activity for women, he did consider reading and writing as more virtuous:

The distaff and spindle are in truth the tools of all woman and suitable for avoiding idleness...even people of wealth and birth train their daughters to weave tapestries or silken cloths...It would be better if they taught them to study, for study busies the whole soul...It is not only a weapon against idleness but also a means of impressing the best precepts upon a girl's mind and of leading her to virtue.²²

Application to fabric arts kept women physically occupied but study contributed to the development of the mind and thus to virtue. For these two scholars, female

²⁰ Margaret L. King, "Book-Lined Cells: Women and Humanism in the Early Italian Renaissance," in *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. Patricia H. Labalme (New York and London: New York University Press, 1980), 78.

²¹ Diana Robin, ed. *Cassandra Fedele, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 7.

²² *Christiani matrimonii institutio* (Basle, 1526), ch. 17, unpaginated, cited in Jardine, "Isotta Nogarola," 233, n 9. This is also discussed in Julia O'Faolain, *Not in God's Image: Women in History*, ed. Lauro Martines (London: London: Fontana, 1974), 194.

virtue required the transcendence of female concerns, consistent with the ideal of moving “beyond their sex.”²³

The development of a hierarchy of virtue for women based on relinquishing one set of tools for another was not just a male concern. It could be used as a strategy by women to assert their dedication to literary pursuits. For example, Cereta’s peer, Cassandra Fedele (1465-1558), assumed the superiority of letters over other feminine pursuits in a letter to Francesco Gonzaga. She explained to him that she has put aside feminine concerns to take up “manly work.”²⁴ The pursuit of virtue through study of letters was understood as a process of leaving behind womanly, and seemingly less important tasks, to cultivate the mind. The pen was seen to confer greater virtue than the traditional female tasks of textile creation.

Penelope was usually the archetypal weaver, rather than an exemplum of chastity within contemporary discussions of the hierarchy of virtues. There is a hint of this in Guarino’s praise for the two sisters: “We single out Penelope because she wove so well, Arachne because she spun a most fine thread.”²⁵ The assumption is that these two girls and their excellent Latin skills are like Penelope and Arachne, exceptions to the rule because of their skill, consistent with the rare bird *topos*. The comparison of female humanists to these classical figures has little or nothing to do with the ideal of chastity. Guarino’s use of two textile producers as comparisons does not endorse the hierarchy of intellectual pursuits as superior to the creation of textiles. In his comparison textile and text are equated, to the detriment of the sisters’ writing skill. Jardine suggests that the use of classical figures as a literary ploy detracts from the merits of real women of the fifteenth century by negating any discussion of their moral or ethical engagement within their own society. They were admired for skills that

²³ Patricia Labalme, *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 4-5. It is also worthwhile considering Christine de Pizan’s approach to this topic. Despite her own dependence on the pen for her livelihood, she did not praise it as a higher pursuit than the provision of thread and household linens.

²⁴ Robin, “Woman, Space, and Renaissance Discourse,” 170; *Cassandra Fedele*, 9; For the role of Boccaccio in the way women approached the issue of female concerns and letters, see Gold, *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts*, 9.

²⁵ Jardine, “Isotta Nogarola,” 236. “Penelopen quia optime texuit.”

distinguished them from their contemporaries, but this only served to reinforce the general incapacity of other women. Nor did the allusion to women of antiquity provide any sense of comparison to their male contemporaries. Their exceptionality did not offer them a role in society like their male counterparts. Their exemplarity was based purely on their ability to perform beyond the commonly recognised limits of their sex.

Cereta's self-representation played heavily on paralleling textile and writing arts, a characteristic that was certainly not a feature of male humanist writings.²⁶ Cereta purposefully linked the two tasks in her work, challenging the Boccaccian notion that cultivation of the mind necessitated putting aside female concerns. She asserted the complementarity of the skills, the memory of which remained in the similar etymology of the words, text and textile.²⁷ Perhaps Ovid was aware of this when he commenced his *Heroides* with Penelope, presenting her as much as a writer as a weaver. Like Ovid's Penelope, Cereta both wove and wrote, both arts being aspects of her self expression. I would go so far as to suggest that Cereta stripped virtue of its gendered aspect by identifying more with Ulysses than Penelope, and that the reference to her as "this new Penelope" by a male correspondent keen to shift her focus from humanist studies, was part of a strategy to push her back into a more standard societal model for female behaviour.

The letters of Laura Cereta

Cereta was educated in a convent in her youth (sent at the age of seven) and then by her father on her return at about nine years of age. It was a relatively standard practice to send daughters to monastic institutions for some of their education in the latter half of the fifteenth century. Brescia boasted ten monasteries housing around eight hundred nuns.²⁸ It was also in one of these convents that she was taught the gender specific textile arts, a fact she alludes to in several

²⁶ Robin, *Laura Cereta*, 95, n.24.

²⁷ Scheid and Svenbro, *The Craft of Zeus*.

²⁸ Diana Maury Robin, ed. *Laura Cereta: Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist*, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 5.

letters. Textiles were such an integral aspect of her letters, this was the likely prompt for the Dominican friar, Thomas of Milan, to refer to her as “this new Penelope.” Following decorum, his letter, including this phrase, was addressed to her father; subsequently he became Cereta’s spiritual advisor, permitting him to write to her directly.

Like other female writers of fifteenth-century Italy, Cereta maintained much of her work in the form of letters, her autobiographical intent following the earlier example of Petrarch, who is considered a major influence in Cereta’s motivation to write.²⁹ Although possibly genuinely addressed to family and friends, the names of Cereta’s addressees are at times fanciful.³⁰ Her letters are known to have circulated among scholars in Brescia, Verona, and Venice between 1488 and 1492, and were printed by Philipppo Tomasino in 1640.³¹ Their contents relate to moral ideals, but they are grounded in domestic and familial matters.³² Some of these letters include Cereta’s aspirations for fame and immortality, which she believed could be achieved honourably through writing.³³

Cereta held both intellectual pursuits and creating beautiful textiles as worthwhile activities; each necessitated separation from daily domestic responsibilities. This can be seen clearly in the letter addressed to Sigismondo de Bucci, doctor of laws, the letter to which Thomas of Milan referred when he described Cereta as “this new Penelope.”³⁴ It opened by discussing her torment as she felt pulled by conflicting responsibilities: as a daughter helping to settle her father’s affairs, and as a wife:

²⁹ Gold, *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts*, 4.

³⁰ See Diana Robin’s discussion on the choice of “Europa” as a correspondent’s name, in Robin, *Laura Cereta*, 123. Cereta, like other female Latin writers, followed the Petrarchan ideal of the letter book. Albert Rabil, ed. *Laura Cereta, Quattrocento Humanist* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1981), 5.

³¹ Laura Cereta, *Laurae Ceretae ..., epistolae* (Patavii: Typis Sebastiani Sardi, 1640).

³² Robin, *Laura Cereta*, 9.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Rabil, *Laura Cereta, Quattrocento Humanist*, 145. “Ceterum industriam ad Sigismundum epistolam congruis valeat praeconiis coaequare.” Moreover, who can measure the appropriate worth of the painstaking letter to Sigismondo? My translation.

Though I came down to my father's magistracy so that I could have some leisure time, I still have not had even the time to catch my breath. It's as though I am being pulled in opposite directions – I'm torn between my desire to help settle my father's affairs and my responsibilities as a wife. The way things are here, opportunity beckons me to stay, but worry tugs at me to return home. And so I am troubled because I want, alternatively, to be in both places.³⁵

The bulk of the letter, however, continues with little discussion of either of these roles. She focuses her attention instead on the time devoted to her own interests, when she was able to both write her letters and work on a shawl. The discussion of the shawl is not so much about its construction ("lest I be said to be the Greek weaver Pamphile resurrected, or Arachne of Colophon") but involves a detailed description of the image being created.³⁶ Her design includes a leopard, a dragon, a lion, and an eagle. She describes the landscape, the position of the sun, mountains, rocks, plains, flowers, and herbs, as well as the colours and types of stitches used. Unlike my description of what she wrote, however, hers is full of life and emotion: "A writhing, crested dragon dominates the left side of the shawl, its quivering forked tongue, its fiery eyes, and its painted scales ennobling the creature and suggesting its cruelty."³⁷ She uses her words and sounds to recreate the image worked on the shawl, just as she uses words to create an image of her life, each one, the letter and shawl, is an expression of her individual *ingenium*. Both writing and needlework, however, are relegated to the night, away from domestic demands.

³⁵ Cereta, *Laurae Ceretae ... epistolae*, 12-3. "Quanquam in praetura hanc patris oculi gratia devenerim, nulla tamen unquam, vel patua respiratio, vacuum mihi tempus exhibuit; velit quae peterne rei familiaris indulgentia non minus, quam maritali cura dstringar. Illa nanque iugiter, pro existentium opportunitate me inuocat haec avocat. Alterno utrinque studio sollicitor." "To Sigismundo de Bucci, doctor of laws," in *Laura Cereta: Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist*, ed. Diana Robin (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 32.

³⁶ *Laurae Ceretae ... epistolae*, 16. "ne altera forte Pamphile Graeca, vel Arachne Colophonica...dicar insurgere" "To Sigismundo de Bucci, doctor of laws," trans. Robin, 33.

³⁷ *Laurae Ceretae ... epistolae*, 14, "At leuam tenet intortus, cristatusque; draco, quem lingua diuisim tremula, et picturatae squammae, radiantesque; oculi, parata crudelitate nobilitant." "To Sigismundo de Bucci, doctor of laws," trans. Robin, 32.

Cereta's segregation of the night hours created a space for her work. *Vigiliae* is the word used by Cereta to describe this time. It was not unusual for writers of Latin since antiquity to work at night, in the dim light of a *lucubrum*. Jerome, Augustine and Boethius had all claimed to work in this manner, so, in keeping with humanist ideals of recycling classical styles, Cereta might well have adopted the "Latin writerly self-presentation" witnessed in other fifteenth- and sixteenth-century texts.³⁸ She was writing her way into a community of like minded scholars.

But by staying up all night, I become a thief of time, sequestering a space from the rest of the day, so that after working by lamplight for much of the night, I can go back to work in the morning. My point is that the first shadows of the waning day don't ever deprive me of the time to read and write.³⁹

She then proceeds to describe her shawl, worked on in the first hours after dawn. Its execution was possible because of her firm rule to save the night for forbidden work. Although this suggests that the reading and writing might be the forbidden work of the night, and the post dawn shawl the acceptable work, she alerts us to the fact that the shawl has taken three months of nocturnal work to complete.⁴⁰ She finishes her letter by equating her shawl to her writing: "These then are the things I have made with my own hands before the first rays of dawn."⁴¹ Expecting that she was referring to the shawl so painstakingly described, the reader is surprised by the next sentence: "This grand volume of epistles, for which the final draft is now being copied out bears witness, letter

³⁸ Mark Vessey, "Erasmus's *Lucubrationes*: Genesis of a Literary Oeuvre," in *Author, Reader, Book: Medieval Authorship in Theory and Practice*, ed. Stephen Partridge and Erik Kwakkel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 236-7.

³⁹ Cereta, *Laurae Ceretae ..., epistolae*, 13. "Sed furatrix horarum vigilantia diuisum die toto spatium inuenit, in quo, post noctis multae lucernam, rursus matutina me agam; Nunquam enim primae labentis diei tenebar litteras fallunt." "To Sigismundo de Bucci, doctor of laws," 32.

⁴⁰ *Laurae Ceretae ..., epistolae*, 13. "Opus trimestris lucubrationis hoc fuit." "To Sigismundo de Bucci, doctor of laws," trans. Robin, 32.

⁴¹ *Laurae Ceretae ..., epistolae*, 16. "Haec ea sunt, quae ante illucescentes diei radios meis manibus feci," "To Sigismundo de Bucci, doctor of laws," trans. Robin, 34.

by letter, to whatever muses I have managed to muster in the dead of night.”⁴² Both her needlework and literature are the forbidden tasks of the night, partitioned off from the day when her responsibilities to others dominate. By using the night as a space apart, Cereta has created her own “book-lined cell” by finding the space in time, allowing for the use of her *ingenium* for traditional female tasks as well as writing.⁴³

The equating of textile and text is not limited to this letter. Her correspondence with Nazaria Olympica plays on the parallel as she talks about her life as “history, how simply **woven**.”⁴⁴ Cereta uses the Latin word *texta*, highlighting the parallels between text and textile. A similar example of Cereta’s description of her own writing as weaving is in her letter to the physician Michel da Carrara; the letter itself is woven: “this letter **woven** of rather tiny pieces.”⁴⁵ It is a conscious use of a textile term that also had relevance to the world of writing, finding a distinct parallel between the two tasks. Not only does she use textile terms when talking about her writing, but when discussing her textile work she includes terms normally associated with writing. For example in her biographical letter to Olympica: “There was in fact no embroidery stitch so elegant or difficult that I could not master it, once I discerned its fine points through delicate and gentle probings.”⁴⁶ The intricacies of her work are “*difficilis textu polities*”, using a form of the noun *textus* (associated, like *textum*,

⁴² *Laurae Ceretae ... epistolae*. “Quas autem ante primam quietem recensuerim Musas, testis est Epistolarum grande volumen, quod libraria nunc elementatim format impressio,” “Letter to Sigismundo de Bucci,” trans. Robin, 34.

⁴³ The “book-lined cell” was initially used to describe Isotta Nogarola’s seclusion in the later phase of her life. See King, “The Religious Retreat of Isotta Nogarola,” 812.

⁴⁴ Cereta, *Laurae Ceretae ... epistolae*. “historia, quam simplicissime **texta**” Alan Crosier has demonstrated to me that other renderings are at least as plausible as Diana Robin’s. Taking Cereta’s orthography at face value, quam simplicissime must mean “most simply [candidly, artlessly]”, with *texta* then construed as a feminine participle agreeing with *historia* and suggesting linguistic composition rather more directly). The resulting translation: “[my] history, articulated as plainly as possible.” Cereta’s choice to write *texta*, and later *textu*, at least strongly hints at a deliberate association of linguistic composition and her work with textiles that is an explicit theme of this letter. “To Nazaria Olympica,” trans. Robin, 24.

⁴⁵ Laura Cereta, *Laurae Ceretae ... Epistolae* (Patavii: Typis Sebastiani Sardi, 1640), 57., “To Michel da Carrara, physician,” “hac **textam** minutioribus membris epistolam,” trans. Robin, 95.

⁴⁶ *Laurae Ceretae ... epistolae*, 148.. “nec fuit ulla tam difficilis **textu** polities, quae tenuius, molliusque; discreta me sugeret,” “To Nazaria Olympica,” trans. 25-6

with the verb *texere*). These stitches are then described as “*tenuius molliusque*” (more delicate and gentle), terms that Robin notes are used in Latin literature.⁴⁷ Textile terms can be used to describing writing, and vice versa, even the reading and interpretation of texts can be referred to using the textile metaphor. In her letter to Cassandra Fedele she wrote: “you will rouse that brilliant and seasoned mind of yours for unravelling the enigmas of causes in nature”, referring back to the content of her letter.⁴⁸ Undoing a knot is comparable to undoing some weaving. Unravelling demonstrates the structure of the material, thereby making it easier to comprehend. By the use of these terms, applied appropriately in both a textile and text situation, Cereta highlights the similarities in their production and true comprehension. Both writing and embroidery can reflect her delicate and gentle probing, and thus her individual *ingenium*.

By equating weaving and writing, Laura presents herself as like the Ovidian Penelope who was both weaver and writer. Her idea of the nightly “thief of time” is also reminiscent of Ovid’s portrayal of Penelope, as she too describes herself as deceiving the night “*spatiosam fallere noctem*.”⁴⁹ In Ovid’s letter, Penelope deceives the night by weaving (a reversal of the Homeric version) and writing a letter that she hopes will find her absent husband. According to medieval educational texts, Penelope was an ideal model for the secular woman; she was married but remained chaste/sexually loyal to her absent husband. Visual images of Penelope in the fifteenth century might depict her as either a weaver or a writer.⁵⁰ Cereta, like Penelope, weaves and writes letters in the spacious night. Is this a subtle self-representation consciously used to shore up her reputation in an environment where this could easily be challenged? It is

⁴⁷ Robin, *Laura Cereta*, p. 26, n. 18.

⁴⁸ Cereta, *Laurae Ceretae . . . epistolae*, 80. “excitabis tamen clarius tuum illud et antiquius ingenium ad naturalium causarum enodia,” “To Cassandra Fedele,” trans. Robin, 144.

⁴⁹ Ovid, *Heroides*, , Line 1.9, *spatiosam fallere noctem*, “to deceive the spacious night,” trans. Showerman, 10-11.

⁵⁰ The fifteenth-century images of Penelope are mainly French, so Cereta would not necessarily have seen them. They appear in manuscripts so would have had limited circulation among the French elite. The images from the translation of Boccaccio’s book show Penelope seated at a loom, as shown in the previous chapter. In contrast, illustrated versions of Ovid’s *Heroides* represent Penelope foremost as a writer, occasionally placing a loom behind her.

tempting to consider an implicit identification with Penelope, but there was another way to consider the problem of virtue for the literate woman.

The idea of virtue regularly features in Cereta's writing. Especially in her early letters, Cereta implies that virtue reflects the individual's will or choice, using the natural gifts bestowed by God. She believed this could be achieved through the study of literature, including the pagan classics. In her first letter to Thomas of Milan, she explains that it is not her ambition to be like the theologians: "I do not want to engage in the laborious task of contemplating God, I want simply to believe in him; nor have I been entrusted with the task of approaching this more profound province of the mind."⁵¹ For her, spirituality and religiosity were based in faith and did not need to be analysed by the rational mind. Nonetheless, the capacity to use reason, derived from the cultivation of intellect, allowed her to choose wisely; it gave her the ability to subvert passion. This aspect of Cereta's approach to virtue has been discussed as reflecting the Stoic notion that everyone is born with the seeds of virtue, but each person needs to cultivate them.⁵² In one of her letters to Thomas of Milan, Cereta compares her virtue to that of Ulysses, who was able to steer clear of the bewitching song of the sirens, implying that virtue is not tied to gender, but reflects one's behaviour and choices.⁵³ Temptations must be perceived and resisted, which is more easily accomplished in daily life in society than by withdrawal from it. This theme is repeated in a letter to Europa Solitaria in which she discusses two choices for finding wisdom: seclusion, or facing the turmoil of daily life. She grants that the solitary life may grant peace of mind, but might not be sufficient for the quest for eternal life:

Only the woman who does not give in to the power of Fortune is a sage.
But I also consider that woman wise who does not remove herself from
participation in the commonwealth for the sake of the pleasures of solitude

⁵¹ Cereta, *Laurae Ceretae ... epistolae*, 114-5. "Nolo in deum laboriosum aliquid contemplando moliri, sed credere: neque enim id mihi negotii creditum est, ut profundiorum ingenio prouinciam aggrediar," "To Brother Thomas 1," trans. Robin, 105.

⁵² For the relationship between learning, education and virtue and its applicability to both sexes, see Horowitz, *Seeds of virtue and knowledge*, 27.

⁵³ Robin, *Laura Cereta*, 109.

but who struggles for the reward of eternal life in the midst of cyclones of evil with a steadfastness that will prevail.⁵⁴

Cereta concludes the letter to her friend worrying that the “desolate wilds” that might quiet her wounded mind in the short-term would allow bitterness and tribulation to enter her soul later in life. A better path provides “counsel and aid in response to the complaints of the suffering poor.”⁵⁵ Laura’s virtue required a rational mind to avoid seduction away from worthy deeds.

Thomas of Milan’s comparison of Cereta to Penelope could refer to various aspects of her personality and life: her exceptionality among women, (paralleling Guarino’s comparison of the Nogarola sisters to Penelope), her concern for virtue (as a married woman), and her associations with the Ovidian Penelope, who wove and wrote in the dead of night. It is surely the Ovidian ideal of Penelope which Thomas had in mind, as with just a few words he acknowledges the aspects of both weaving and nightly activity in his description of her. He manages this through his discussion on the happiness of the shawl that took three months to weave (*contexuit*), clearly a reference to the letter to Sigismondo de Bucci, discussed earlier in this chapter, and the one which had been forwarded to Thomas. It indicates that Brother Thomas was aware of Cereta’s nocturnal writing and weaving.⁵⁶ The letters of Brother Thomas are the only ones we have that are addressed to Cereta, and therefore a limited source for possible accusations of inappropriate behaviour. Far from condemning her, however, Brother Thomas extols her chastity, praising her virtue as she lives a virtuous widowhood, continuing her studies and maintaining the duties of domestic life.⁵⁷ His guidance and assistance are offered, not because of a perceived lack of chastity, but due to her focus on intellect and fame. The main

⁵⁴ Cereta, *Epistolae*, 215-6 “To Europa solitaria,” “sola Sapiens juribus Fortnuae non parit: Eam autem Sapientem existimo, non quae se pro solitudinis oblectamento à consortio Ciuitatis exemit: sed quae proaeternae vitae mercede in medios malorum turbines vicetici constantiam luctatur,” trans. Robin, 124.

⁵⁵ Robin, *Laura Cereta*, 127.

⁵⁶ It is probably worth noting that Cereta’s textile work might be more clearly defined as embroidery, but do to her repeated use of the text/textile paradigm, weaving is the way she presents her actions.

⁵⁷ Rabil, *Laura Cereta*, 97.

criticism in Brother Thomas's letters relates to her lack of humility, through seeking renown.⁵⁸ Brother Thomas equates her behaviour with a form of hypocrisy, which is similar to a description of Penelope's actions in a fourteenth-century treatment of another work by Ovid.

In a reworking of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the Benedictine scholar Pierre Bersuire (1290–1362) had commented on the chaste Penelope's actions, weaving during the day and undoing her work at night. This text written in Latin and not to be confused with the *Ovide Moralisé*, is an allegorical interpretation of Ovid's masterpiece. After describing Penelope's nightly practice of undoing the day's work, Bersuire notes the similarity to hypocrites; they weave virtue in the public eye during the day and secretly destroy it all in the shadows of the night.⁵⁹ Although writing about Penelope as an allegorical figure, Bersuire maintains the description of her as "chaste." Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus* was popular in Italy, and there are several extant manuscripts.⁶⁰ Whether either correspondent was familiar with that work cannot be known; but Cereta's reply to the letter accusing her of hypocrisy does maintain the nexus between weaving, virtue and hypocrisy. Turning the table on her adviser, she accuses him of weaving too intricately, implying he is the hypocrite: "The hallmark of my speech is not contentiousness but grace. Whatever your web weaves too intricately will give me an excuse to maintain silence, and patience will be my beatitude."⁶¹ Was she trying to deflect the idea of deceptive weaving back onto

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.96.

⁵⁹ William Donald Reynolds, "The *Ovidius Moralizatus* of Petrus Berchorius: An Introduction and Translation." PhD. Thesis submitted to the Department of Modern Language and Literature, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1971, 403-4. "Penelope was the daughter of Icarius and the wife of Ulysses. This chaste woman deceived those who asked for her: she promised to marry them when she was able to finish the web she was weaving, but she unwove by night what she had woven by day and destroyed in the darkness of night what she made by day. Allegorize this against hypocrites who destroy in secret the web of virtues which they make in public. Whatever good works they perform in the sight of men they destroy in their absence by committing evils."

⁶⁰ Some of the current copies in Italy are housed in the following libraries: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan, MS D 66 inf; Biblioteca Nazionale, Naples, V.D. 37, and several in the Vatican Library, Vat. Lat. 6303; Vat. Pal. 159; Vat. Ottob. Lat. 18; Vat. Chig. H. v.168 and vat. Ross, 1136. All of these were written in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries.

⁶¹ Cereta, *Laurae Ceretae . . . epistolae*, 132; "To Brother Thomas 2," trans. Robin, 109. "Non est professionis meae disceptatio, sed gratia: quicquid implexiùs orditura tua tesuerit, erit in illo mea excusatio silentium, & mea mihi beatitudine patientia."

Brother Thomas? It is at this point that she argues that armed with reason (*ratio*) which subverts passion, and using virtue and not pleasure as her guide, she would pass “the bewitching song of the Sirens, with Ulysses unharmed.”⁶² Ulysses’s wisdom as the means of avoiding the lure of the Sirens was a motif in medieval mythographical texts. The phrase “with Ulysses” might proclaim her own intellect as equal to that of the Greek hero, or perhaps that of his wife, either way, male and female intellects are equated.

When Cereta wrote what is thought to be her final letter to Thomas of Milan, her attitude had changed. As she recognises the importance of conscience, she claims to have abandoned her “plan to seek fame through human letters.” As a consequence, her all night sessions of solitary study were to be discontinued, reflecting her recognition that the purpose of the earthly existence is to prepare for death and the eternal life beyond it. Whether or not she wrote any later letters is unknown. It would appear that the charge of hypocrisy, was what underpinned her withdrawal from intellectual life. Identification with Penelope might have offered a level of protection for the writing women as far as chastity was concerned, but it left her defenceless against accusations of undoing at night the virtues she wove during the day as a devout and loving family member.

Conclusion

The example of Laura Cereta provides a unique opportunity to explore one woman’s attempt to safeguard her reputation while trying to operate within the pervasively male domain of Italian humanism. Following the example of other women, she believed virtue was achievable through the expression of reason via the written word. Her learned virtue offered an alternative to chastity as the primary female virtue. It did not protect her from accusations of hypocrisy, betraying her Christian values, pride over humility and classical writings over scripture. Unlike her contemporaries, she drew parallels between the tasks

⁶² *Laurae Ceretae ... epistolae*, 132. “Sanè ea sum, que possim cum sospire Ulyxe venenatos Syrenarum cantus securo navigatione transire,” “To Brother Thomas 2,” trans. Robin, 109.

normally considered to represent the gender divide: textiles and text. She drew on a linguistic association of the two arts, in which both threads and words can be woven. This connection is also apparent in the figure of Penelope inherited from the Latin tradition, particularly via the use of Ovid's *Heroides* in the teaching of Latin. Invoking Penelope in this context, however, was ambiguous, as the complexity of Penelope's nature, and the varied aspects of the feminine she could represent, defied clear definition. Penelope remained a consistent figure in the discussion of women and the feminine, but without a clear definition of what she represented.

Conclusion

I have argued that the figure of Penelope provides an enduring but complex exemplar of chastity in the literary tradition stretching from Latin antiquity to the fifteenth century, despite the lack of direct access to Homer's text through most of this period. Her presence as the wife of Ulysses in Homer's *Odyssey* has guaranteed a continuity of recognition, such that her inclusion in any literary text anticipates discussion of gender roles and expectations. However she was continually reinvented to reflect changing social and cultural values. The transition of Penelope into Roman literature as an exemplar for the married woman, but more especially as a figure used by Ovid to reflect on the role of women and the feminine in society, established a foundation for her ongoing representations. Furthermore, there is a symbolic aspect to her figure, over and above that of exemplar in which she represents the role of the feminine, perhaps rather like Eve, who, within Christian discourse, became the overarching template for all women. Unlike Eve, however, Penelope is not a tarnished image of womanhood. Yet, she is also unlike the Virgin Mary, in that she does not evoke the expectation of virginity; for while both Mary and Penelope were chaste, Penelope's status depended on a pre-Christian definition of chastity where such strict limits on sexual activity did not obtain.

The absorption of Homer's Penelope into Roman literary society foregrounds three different ways of considering chastity for the married woman; she is dutiful, she is intelligent enough to protect herself, and she is loyal out of love. The most recognisable is that of the dutiful wife, which underpins her status as an exemplar, and demonstrates her use as a model against which other women are measured. Penelope is invoked by Catullus to represent the ideal mother whose virtue is reflected in a son; for Propertius, she is a woman who remains loyal, either to husband or to a lover. Horace casts her as the unforthcoming lover. Most scholars imagine Penelope upholding patriarchal values for women in which their sexual restraint ensures the legitimacy of heirs. In this role, she is paradigmatic; she represents an ideal, yet offers little for the

contemplation of how her representation can impact or influence the women of Roman society, except by setting a standard.

The other two factors found in the Roman Penelope reflect her inheritance from Homer, and offer the potential of reading Penelope as a more complex being. Homer's focus on her ability to manipulate circumstances to her advantage, rather than her chastity, foregrounds her intellect. In this manner, Penelope is read as a suitable partner to her husband, able to outwit even him, the archetype of the wise and cunning man. This version of Penelope, using her wits to remain loyal to her absent husband can be read in the play by Plautus, in which Panegyris identifies with Penelope as she develops a strategy to remain loyal to her husband, while being seen to maintain faith with her father. A careful reading of the opening poem in the *Heroides*, "Penelope's letter to Ulysses", shows Ovid similarly emphasising the intelligent woman. He creates a Penelope who is able to use the rhetoric of a letter to shame and manipulate her husband.

The third factor is Penelope's love for her husband. Ovid's focus on pleasure and love in several of his works, including the *Heroides*, provides another way of reading Penelope. Part of this is embedded in the whole structure of the text. All of the letters are presented as written by women (except for the double letters, which have a separate literary history) to absent husbands and lovers in elegiac verse, the style for love poems. Penelope's letter, written in this verse-style, along with its declamation of her exclusivity ("I am and will always be Ulysses' Penelope") highlights the importance of love and intimacy in their relationship, even if this can be read as a rhetorical flourish, using intimacy as a means of manipulating Ulysses. Ovid replicates the Homeric complexity of their relationship, pairing intimacy with intellect, to create a Penelope who can be imagined to have her own will.

Duty, shared intellect, and exclusive love were all used to describe the relationship between Penelope and Ulysses in antiquity, and are invoked at various times over the subsequent centuries. Depending on the social environment, perceived audience, literary influences and communicative intent,

different factors are favoured and emphasised. For example, while Ovid was still widely read in late antiquity, love and intimacy became characteristic of the representation of Penelope. This was also the period, however, in which more ascetic ideals were being encouraged by early Christian writers, and the Stoic ideal of total control of the passions found further expression. Of course, Christian writers did not need to introduce characters like Penelope; they had their own source of worthy women in scripture and the era of martyrs contributed even more women to populate their writings. The desire to stress the importance of female chastity, not as a unique manifestation of Christianity, but as continuing from Roman society provides a context for Penelope's name to be invoked. Within a Christian context, her model of chastity, based on reason and love, required fresh consideration. In one of Jerome's letters, she is included within a discussion of various pagan women who mostly died as a means of saving their honour. No reason is given for Penelope's chastity; all we are told is that Homer sang about it. This is one way to reconcile Penelope in a discourse on female chastity, thus perpetuating her reputation, but undermining her potential as an image of female agency.

The use of Penelope within a discourse about the social roles of women diminished with the focus on women as martyrs or soldiers of Christ around the fifth century. The development of allegory, however, maintained a role for the feminine in literature, and this shift contributed to the maintenance of Penelope's reputation among the educated elite. Not only can it be argued that Penelope provided the template for Neo-Platonist readings of classical texts, in which a female figure assists man's journey to wisdom, but her marriage to Ulysses is interpreted as man's need for chastity in this journey. The continuity of her association with chastity is highlighted by her inclusion in various grammatical manuscripts of the ninth century in which she represents the abstract ideal; despite the loss of access to Homer for several centuries, teachers felt able to invoke her name to explain a concept without reference to either her husband or creator.

Ovid's return to the classroom during the twelfth century reignited interest in the figure of Penelope as a potential model for women. As may be expected, Penelope's love for her husband underpins her chastity, as the *Heroides* are introduced to students. Not only does love provide reason for her loyalty, but within the early twelfth century, a period in which we have records for female education in classical texts, there is an eroticisation of this love. This is consistent with the experimentation with intimacy in letters by women, like Constance of Ronceray and Heloise, in this period.

In the later twelfth century, as education became more consistently a male prerogative, Ovidian materials maintain an influence, but the female perspective for Penelope is lost. Marital fidelity may be a woman's duty, but this does not reflect the literary reality of the sexual woman who is a danger to male rationality. Penelope is included in texts in which men write for other men, and women are written out of entitlement to this community. Their association with love as objects of the male gaze imply they do not possess the rationality to mingle with men. Penelope's exemplarity is stressed, as she becomes the exception who proves the rule. There is no love here, and her representations become infected by the philosophic model of female passivity, particularly in sexual relations. In these texts by writers like Walter Map, Alan of Lille and Jean de Meun, Penelope's inclusion reflects more on their discussion about men and their behaviour, than it is about women, and yet remarkably, Penelope still retains her untarnished reputation.

A reappraisal of classical texts in fourteenth-century Italy reintroduces themes of love and intellect into the discussion of Penelope and her chastity. Although both Dante and Petrarch mention her, their approaches are still largely shaped by their medieval readings of texts by Boethius and Jean de Meun. Boccaccio, on the other hand, influenced by Ovid, writes about Penelope's love for her husband, and after access to Homer in the original Greek, he recreates Penelope as not only loving, but also astute. He also attributes the same style of intelligence to husband and wife, perhaps attempting to recreate the Greek ideal of *homophrosyne* or like-mindedness.

The first woman to represent Penelope, as far as we know, was Christine de Pizan, writing in the French court in the early fifteenth century. She had read Boccaccio's portrait of Penelope, possibly both in Latin and French, and she was certainly familiar with the thirteenth-century representation by Jean de Meun. Christine took issue with male representations of women, and Penelope was just one woman in her arsenal to dispute their assumptions. To reframe Penelope from a woman's perspective, she modified the vocabulary to reflect a French courtly ideal. This incorporated terms adopted from conduct literature for courtly women that perpetuated the ideal of chastity maintained through reason overcoming passion. The re-introduction of intellect in representations of Penelope by Boccaccio and Christine, reflect a Stoic approach to virtue, in which each sex has the potential to be chaste if reason is nourished.

The ideal of reason sustained through literature (representing intellect and reason) underpins the works of Laura Cereta, a fifteenth-century Italian woman skilled in Latin letters. This is made clear by her identification with Ulysses, as she argues that her focus on literature assists her passage past the temptations offered by sirens. Her spiritual confidant, Thomas of Milan, did not have such faith in her abilities, as can be judged by his various letters to her. In this context, his reference to her as 'this new Penelope' is loaded with gendered assumptions. As a woman, he implies, she does not have the virility to truly defend herself, thus, she should refocus on tasks more appropriate to her sex.

Penelope, arguably the first heroine of Western literature, challenges the established traditions of gender construction. Her complexity, appreciated largely through Ovid, allowed her to be read in a variety of ways, each one responding to the pragmatic needs of author and audience. As an exemplar of chastity, she marks the standard by which other women should be measured. As a loving woman, she offers insight into marital or loving relationships, highlighting periods in European history in which intimacy was valued. As a representation of intellect, she underpins a more Stoic approach to virtue, in which both sexes have equal access. As women become allegorical manifestations of influences in man's life, Penelope can also be recognised

among the feminine ideals. Penelope has been a consistent figure in the discourse on gender throughout the period from antiquity to the Renaissance, when access to Greek facilitated fresh reading of Homer's epic. Studying her representations contributes greater nuance to the discussion of female ideals, especially marital chastity, demonstrating the potential of seeing it not always as a matter of a man (or virility) taking control. The complexity of diverse renderings of Penelope throughout these centuries as a chaste woman, skilled in warding off suitors, adds further evidence for the insufficiency of the Eve/Mary dichotomy as the infallible template for understanding how women were perceived in medieval and renaissance Europe.

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