

Penelope Differently: Feminist Re-visions of Myth



Victoria Reuter

St. Cross College, University of Oxford
Hilary Term 2014

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
In the Department of Modern Languages and Literature
Approximate Word Count: 80,000 including text and footnotes,
Excluding abstracts & bibliography

—*What has poetry taught you?*

—*That there's such a thing as truth and it can be told—slant; that subjectivity is not to be theorized away and is worth defending; that poetry itself has virtue, in the first sense of possessing a quality of moral excellence and in the sense also of possessing inherent strength by reason of its sheer made-upness, its integritas, consonantia and claritas.*

—O'Driscoll interview with Seamus Heaney (O'Driscoll 2008: 467)

Victoria Reuter
St. Cross College
DPhil Medieval and Modern Languages
Penelope Differently: Feminist Re-visions of Myth

SHORT ABSTRACT

This thesis examines feminist rewritings of the Penelope myth and the intersections between poetry, myth, and feminist theory. The theoretical framework develops from Rosi Braidotti's theory of memory and subjectivity, which has its roots in the work of Michel Foucault. In Braidotti's understanding, subjectivity is constructed through narratives of the past including myth. In order to support new, minority, and dissident subjectivities, a re-remembering of mythical narratives needs to happen. This process is linked to Judith Butler's recent work on narrating the self and to Adrienne Rich's idea of "Re-vision". What Butler's theory adds to Braidotti's is the notion of dispossession: that as subjects we do not own our identities. We are, instead, dependent on others for recognition. This co-dependence based notion of subjectivity has ethical implications for how we interact with one another and what kind of narratives we iterate and reiterate.

The writers discussed in this thesis, namely, Francisca Aguirre, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, Gail Holst-Warhaft, and Margaret Atwood, not only rewrite Penelope, but perform Re-visions of the myth. They look back at it with a critical eye and remake it. This thesis further contends that Re-vision provides contemporary feminist writers with a reading and writing strategy that allows them to engage with myth in a way that parallels feminist theory's efforts to construct new forms of subjectivity. Chapter 1 frames feminist appropriations of

myth in a contemporary context and discusses Adrienne Rich's theory of Revision. The next four chapters focus on specific writers who carry out a sustained dialogue with Penelope; they each take an element of the myth and tease it out towards a modern relevance. In looking at how Penelope is revised, this thesis demonstrates that women writers are engaged in a process of remaking canonical, mythic texts in such a way that speaks to contemporary issues of ethical subjectivity and self-making.

Victoria Reuter
St. Cross College
DPhil Medieval and Modern Languages
Penelope Differently: Feminist Re-visions of Myth

LONG ABSTRACT

This thesis participates in the recent critical discussion within comparative literature and literary theory regarding classical texts and their reception. Revolving around the figure of Penelope this thesis focuses on the ways in which contemporary feminist writers return to the mythical narrative of Penelope, the endlessly weaving and waiting wife of Odysseus. Feminists have spent decades revisiting classical myths and deconstructing them, revealing their patriarchy and oppression. Yet feminist writers have also re-invigorated myth and given voices to the silenced and the silent.

This thesis aims to give an account of the alternative narratives offered by contemporary authors as they critique old models of subjectivity and relationships and, most importantly, to articulate new ones. As is argued, their subject is Penelope and their strategy is Re-vision. Re-vision provides a way of looking at old texts from a “new critical direction” (Rich 1972: 18) and seeing the mechanisms of how these discourses shape social norms. Chapter 1 discusses the politics of discourse as they relate to the appropriation of myth focusing on theories of Jack Zipes and Judith Butler. It will then move on to Adrienne Rich’s notion of Re-vision and present the historical and theoretical foundations of her work. The next four chapters each focus on the poetry of a single writer and

explore the metamorphoses of Penelope in their work. The authors examined are: Spanish poet Francisca Aguirre, Greek poet Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, Australian scholar/poet Gail Holst-Warhaft, and Canadian writer Margaret Atwood. Their renditions of Penelope highlight certain aspects of the myth including: storytelling, the making of the self, the self in making, woman as other, recognition, waiting, and time. Even though all of these elements are present in all the case studies, my readings tend to foreground the key themes of each author and text. Francisca Aguirre's collection *Ítaca* is about a crisis of subjectivity and the making and unmaking of the self, while Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke's work is more concerned with the creative potential of Penelope's weaving and Penelope as an Odyssean other. Gail Holst-Warhaft and Margaret Atwood focus more closely on the politics involved in storytelling. Holst-Warhaft explores desire, recognition, and memory as they relate to narration and inevitably hinge on the agenda of a narrator. Atwood's more emphatically postmodern text adds to these themes while also highlighting the notions of belatedness and haunting as elemental to both textual Re-vision and to a feminist theory of ethics.

Why would a feminist poet choose to write about Penelope, the faithful housewife? This is a question that keeps returning in this thesis, mirroring the persistence with which literature itself returns to myth. This going back is often baffling, especially for those who want to radically change the current social norms and structures. Following Michel Foucault, this thesis analyzes the role of myth as a truth claim that is supported by the network of power/knowledge in modern society and further considers how this impacts narratives of self and identity. As Rosi Braidotti and Judith Butler have expressed, what we consider to

be a normative, recognizable self is limited by social constructs, which are themselves strengthened by reiteration and repetition. These accounts of self and their normative reiteration define our notions of gender, personhood, accountability, and responsibility. They shape the very core of our relationships to ourselves and to others. The poets examined in this thesis turn to Greek myths which—in their countless reincarnations—have become a cornerstone of Western societies. Thus, Re-visions of these narratives (in this case the Penelope myth) represent a gesture toward altering how these stories are repeated, and the morals, values, ethics, and norms that they reinforce. The significance of poetic Re-visions and their contributions to this larger feminist effort can be seen in light of Braidotti and Butler's theories. Namely, the work of re-creating the subject through poetic Re-vision answers Braidotti's call for re-imagining the past and parallels Butler's theory of "giving an account of oneself". The poets examined in this thesis offer mediated accounts of the self that attempt to show the ways in which "we have been led to imagine ourselves", are no longer sufficient (Rich 1972: 18). Their re-envisioning of myth reveals how stagnant pictures of subjectivity have become and they invite us to reinvent them.

Chapter 1 of this thesis provides a contextual background for myth as a discourse and the significance of its appropriation following the theories of Jack Zipes. Next, it will discuss Judith Butler's theory of the subject and the notion of "giving an account of self". As this thesis argues, the writers to be discussed recognize the power dynamic inherent in mythical narrative and therefore chose to re-write it. In doing so they also give mediated accounts of self through their Re-visions of

Penelope. Finally, this chapter will discuss Adrienne Rich and the specific strategy of Re-vision providing historical and theoretical background.

Chapter 2 analyzes Francisca Aguirre's *Ítaca* [*Ithaca*] (1972) as a Re-vision of the myth that reads silence and entrapment into Penelope's story. *Ítaca* presents a narrator who feels imprisoned in a place partially of her own making. Yet it also represents the stifling nature of dominant discourses and their narrow interpretations of poetics and subjectivity. In discussing the multiplicity of entrapment and isolation, the chapter begins by explaining Aguirre's exclusion from the canon of Spanish poetry. The chapter then moves on to discuss *Ítaca* alongside poetic intertexts by C.P. Cavafy and Adrienne Rich. Aguirre's Penelopian narrator explores the geography of her Ithacan Prison in a manner that connects it not so much to Cavafy's "Ἰθάκη" ["Ithaca"] (the obvious intertext of Aguirre's poem), but to the earlier poem "Τείχη" ["Walls"]. Cavafy's expression of entrapment clearly resonated with Aguirre; however, there is more to *Ítaca* than the probing of the imprisoned, often schizophrenic, subject. *Ítaca* is also an attempt to give an account of this self. In doing so, the narrator/poet is eventually able to recognize the constructedness of Ithaca and come to terms with her split self (a device also used by Adrienne Rich). In the last poem of Aguirre's collection, the Janus-faced narrator performatively announces a new self into being.

Not unlike Aguirre, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke begins her work with Penelope in the 1970s. However, despite the dictatorship in Greece at the time, Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope poems are not about entrapment. Rather, they are interested in

exploring the relationship between the body, desire, and poetry. Thus, Chapter 3 focuses on the idea of Penelope as an Odyssean other. In a myth where female characters are wicked enchantresses, monstrous sirens, meek wives, or naive virgins, the Odyssean adventurer usually comes across as a clear protagonist. However, as Edith Hall has pointed out, “arguably the most important symbol in the *Odyssey* is neither Odysseus’ bow nor Phemius’s lyre but Penelope’s huge loom” (Hall 2008: 115). Moreover, it is Penelope’s weaving and unweaving of her father-in-law’s shroud that is also “the primary image of the oral poet’s endless re-creation of his song” (Hall 2008: 115). In her work, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke interprets Penelope as a symbol for the female writer and casts her Penelope as a poet. Set in the context of an oeuvre that is largely about “writing the body”, Anghelaki-Rooke’s Penelope poems offer a unique exploration of the female poet’s awareness of her body, its desires, and the power dynamics that come into play in the context of love. This Penelope feels the absence of Odysseus acutely, yet there is a deeper existentiality to this melancholy: it is linked to her struggle to create her own account of self, to define who she is without casting herself as the mere shadow of Odysseus’ tangible absence. This chapter looks at Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke’s evolving poetics beginning with the body in poetry and then moves on to discuss two of her Penelope poems from the 1977 Greek collection *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης* [*The Scattered Papers of Penelope*]. The chapter will then turn to Anghelaki-Rooke’s recent English language compilation *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* (2008) in which her poem “Η άλλη Πηνελόπη” [“The Other Penelope”] takes a second look at her earlier Penelope-poet-narrator as she attempts to define a self that is something other than an Odyssean other.

Gail Holst-Warhaft's poetry collection *Penelope's Confession* (2007) has a unique link to Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke and her Penelope figure. Gail Holst-Warhaft has translated Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry into English and in this collection Anghelaki-Rooke translates Holst-Warhaft's poems into Greek. *Penelope's Confession* is published in a bilingual format; the poems are first presented in English and the facing pages provide Modern Greek translations. Set in the context of English and Modern Greek poetry, Holst-Warhaft's collection addresses the notion of fidelity involved in translation and combines this with the traditional narrative of Penelope's fidelity in the *Odyssey*. Indeed, Holst-Warhaft's Re-vision of Penelope reveals a self-conscious woman who is not the traditional, faithful Homeric Penelope. She is simultaneously ancient and modern; she recalls the events of the Trojan War while sitting in a café sipping ouzo. It is this contemporary perspective that allows for Re-vision. Holst-Warhaft's narrator looks back at the story spun by others and thinks:

Penelope –fidelity–
two seeds in a dry pod.
She becomes an antidote
for adultery, Helen's counterpoise.

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 38)

Holst-Warhaft presents a Penelope that is unhappy with and rebels against her own archetype. She uses the Homeric trope of recognition to explore the boundaries of identity asking herself whether the narratives that exist actually reflect her narrative of self. This line of questioning also offers a parallel to Judith Butler's theory of subjectivity and the power dynamics inherent in what constitutes a recognizable subject.

The final author chapter, Chapter 5, discusses Margaret Atwood's epic parody *The Penelopiad*, which features Penelope as a narrator who speaks from the underworld and tells the tale of Homer's *Odyssey* from a vastly different perspective. The very structure of Atwood's work parodies not only the *Odyssey*, but other forms of classical texts, as well as the discourses that surround them. For example, at varying intervals there are interludes by a chorus, which references classical tragedy. However, Atwood's "chorus" is comprised of Penelope's (now deceased) maids who, in one instance, sing about their own deaths while performing a burlesque. Like much of her other writing, Atwood's Re-vision of Penelope is interested in the power dynamics inherent in storytelling. With its dual narration, *The Penelopiad* reveals how the story shifts as the narrative perspective changes, and points to what is excluded from, and what escapes certain narratives. Atwood's Penelope gives an account of self that is not reciprocal and certainly not representative of the ethical collaboration that Butler advocates. However, the maids' narrative tells what Penelope's hides. The maids' tale reveals the subversive power of minority discourse/minority memory (Braidotti) as they "speak truth to power". But more importantly, the silencing and murder of the maids highlights the "limits of recognition" within society (Butler & Athanasiou 2013: 65). If the maids must be murdered for the sake of justice, to restore order on Ithaca, than what definitions of "justice" and "order" might allow them to live? It is this haunting question that connects *The Penelopiad* to recent feminist theory.

The thread that connects these four writers is the figure of Penelope, but it is also the nature of the texts themselves; they dismantle discourse in order to re-make it. It is a Penelopean motion. In *A Penelopean Poetics*, an investigation of Penelope's

role in the *Odyssey*, Barbara Clayton claims that “Penelopean texts” either name Penelope or “allow us to identify a Penelope figure on the basis of an Odyssean context” (Clayton 2004: 122). Yet, oddly, she ends her book by quoting Adrienne Rich’s poem “When We Dead Awaken” which does not mention Penelope, though it does discuss weaving:

even you, fellow-creature, sister,
sitting across from me, dark with love
working like me to pick apart
working like me to remake
this trailing knitted thing, this cloth of darkness
this woman’s garment, trying to save the skein.

(Rich 1973: 5)

Although Clayton’s work can be placed in the category of feminist classical scholarship, her final page signals the implications that re-writing myth may have in a broader context. Indeed, it is the broader context that this thesis aims to survey.

There has not yet been a sustained, in-depth, broad comparison of the feminist appropriation of the Penelope myth and this thesis is an attempt to address this gap. Using an interdisciplinary approach that engages with feminist theory, classics, and poetry, this project brings together a number of writers from different cultural backgrounds in order to facilitate a conversation between their Re-visions of Penelope. By highlighting the intertextuality between the chosen writers as they converge on the figure of Penelope this thesis underlines some important points of overlap. One of these points is their method of Re-vision and its ethical implications for narration and subjectivity. The main writers discussed do not inherit and then imitate the classical figure of Penelope but rather, they

purposefully look back at the myth with a critical eye in order to repeat it differently. They are not just producing variations on a theme they are participating in a cross cultural discussion on what it means to be a subject defined by patriarchal parameters. Often times this subject is the poetic self (Anghelaki-Rooke) or a self that one is trying to reconnect with (Aguirre). In either case, when it is the self that is at stake, the work of deconstruction is not easy. The mere act of seeing the threads of dominant discourses is difficult let alone identifying how power dynamics function to limit what is considered an acceptable self. Then there is the work of reconstruction, of “trying to save the skein” (and by implication trying to save the *skin*); trying to save the narrative and the skin that wears the narrative. This renovation and reinvention is being attempted by feminist writers through the use of Re-vision. Re-vision as a strategy aims to construct new ways of narrating texts and by extension, new ways of narrating our selves.

As a snapshot of a larger interdisciplinary movement which requires further investigation, this thesis foregrounds the juncture between myth, literature, ethics, and recent feminist theory. One of the main findings of this thesis is that myth is useful to the work of Re-vision both in poetry and in the larger frame of subjectivity. In the strengthening relationship between theories of subjectivity and literature, classical archetypes like Penelope are not only still relevant, but provide an important nexus point from which writers can look back and move forward. Finally, this thesis concludes that this interdisciplinary work has already begun. Feminist poets and philosophers seem to be “sitting across from” each other, working together to “pick apart” and “remake” the very narratives that structure

our ideas of subjectivity. It is an epic attempt to shift perspectives and it is an attempt that is worth continuing.

Acknowledgements

There's something odd about concluding an Oxford D.Phil. about the reception of the *Odyssey* in an Athens library. I would like to say there is an imposing one-eyed librarian, but there isn't. It does make one wonder though, how many years it has taken to arrive here. I don't dare try and make metaphors (me as Odysseus attempting to thank a faithful crew), but it has, indeed, been an adventure and there are a few people heartily responsible for that.

Firstly, Mom, Dad, Rich, and Emily—my family—you are my home and always will be. I carry you with me everywhere, along with your loving encouragement.

Veritably, life away from home has its trials. Indeed, Oxford had many. I am lucky and grateful to have shared those early years with Sanda, Brian, Shweta, and Annie you made me want to stay. Then, in the last, and perhaps most trying year I was fortunate to have the support, heart, and laughter of a small group of great friends. Morgan, Kim, Matei, Abi, and the Venniet bunch: that grassy patch was another island, another safe harbour, complete with its bon fires, sing-alongs, and shooting stars. To John and Jamie: simply, I would not have survived without Sunday Brunches.

I want to thank Dimitris Papanikolaou for his dedicated supervision and for challenging me always. I would also like to thank Kostas Skordyles and Eleni Papargyriou for their support over the years. Finally, I would not have been able to undertake this project without the help of the Clarendon Fund Scholarship and the Oxford University Press.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	19
FINDING THE THREAD	19
Chapter 1	37
Myth and Re-Vision.....	37
MYTH.....	37
RECOGNITION AND ACCOUNTS OF SELF.....	42
A LITERATURE OF RE-VISION	51
POSTMODERN REVISION AND MINORITY MEMORY	53
ADRIENNE RICH AND RE-VISION	57
DIVING INTO THE WRECK.....	68
WOMEN WEAVERS: THE DEBATE	82
RE-VISIONS OF PENELOPE IN CONTEMPORARY WOMEN’S POETRY	90
PENELOPE AND TRADITION	91
PENELOPE AND STORYTELLING	97
Chapter 2.....	106
Francisca Aguirre: Silence in Ithaca	106
FINDING ITHACA: FRANCISCA AGUIRRE.....	108
GENERATION GAP: CATEGORIZING AGUIRRE	114
PENELOPE IN SPAIN	119
THE ITHACAS OF C.P. CAVAFY & FRANCISCA AGUIRRE.....	127
THE GEOGRAPHY OF ITHACA	133
LETTERS TO YOU (/ ME).....	152
Chapter 3	162
Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke: Penelope Writes	162
KATERINA ANGHELAKEE-ROOKE & THE BODY IN POETRY.....	165
WRITING PENELOPE	181
PENLEOPEAN AND ODYSSEAN OTHERS	199
THE LANGUAGE OF PENELOPE.....	208

Chapter 4	213
Gail Holst-Warhaft: Translating Penelope	213
POETRY OF/IN TRANSLATION: ANGHELAKEE-ROOKE & HOLST-WARHAFT	216
UNRAVELLING PENELOPE'S CONFESSION	222
PENELOPE'S CONFESSION: THE FIDELITY POEMS	225
PENELOPE'S JOURNEY HOME	239
OTHER SCENES OF RECOGNITION	250
Chapter 5	258
Margaret Atwood: The Shade of Penelope	258
A TRIP TO THE UNDERWORLD: METAPOETICS	262
ATWOOD'S TRIP TO THE UNDERWORLD	267
ATWOOD'S RE-VISIONS	269
"NOT THE SAME STORY": CIRCE AND HELEN IN ATWOOD'S POETRY ..	272
"TRUE STORIES" AND UNFAITHFUL NARRATORS	286
PENELOPE AND THE MAIDS IN <i>THE PENELOPIAD</i>	291
DOUBTING PENELOPE	302
A LIVING DEATH, ALREADY DYING	310
Conclusion: Endings and Palimpsests	316
PENELOPEAN PALIMPSESTS	321
Works Cited	325

Introduction

FINDING THE THREAD

It was never my intention to write about Penelope, or indeed the *Odyssey*. The preliminary idea was to investigate the use of Greek myth more broadly within contemporary feminist poetry. The problem was Penelope kept cropping up. Her weaving was like a siren-song for feminists and I wanted to know why.

Initially I went back to feminist theory. There was Luce Irigaray's Demeter and Persephone, Hélène Cixous's fierce Medusa, and Judith Butler's unrelenting Antigone. But for all the philosophical vigour they inspired, the mythical figures themselves seemed to dissolve back into their archetypes. This appeared to be true for poetry as well. In *The World's Wife* (1999) Carol Ann Duffy allows many Mrs.'s of mythology to vent their rage: Medusa, Circe, Eurydice. Yet her Penelope remained like all the other Penelopes: still weaving because she was tired of waiting or because she was now middle-aged and just enjoyed exercising her aching joints. Even the laudable "The World as Meditation" by Wallace Stevens struck me as yet another description of a placid, dreamy woman lost in her own domesticity. Penelope did not rail against her cage and this annoyed me.

Why was a housewife's only outlet a pitiable shroud? The insubordination of her weaving was so tame. By the time I came across Yannis Ritsos's poem "Penelope's Despair", I myself had started to despair. Myth was no longer interesting, novel, or complex. Its women were still just monsters, whores and

wives. I read the first few lines of the poem absently until the repeated negatives began tugging like a thread caught on a nail. Here is the poem in full:

It wasn't that she didn't recognize him in the light from
the hearth: it wasn't
the beggar's rags, the disguise—no. The signs were clear:
the scar on his knee, the pluck, the cunning in his eye.
Frightened,
her back against the wall, she searched for an excuse,
a little time, so she wouldn't have to answer,
give herself away. Was it for him, then, that she'd used
up twenty years,
twenty years of waiting and dreaming, for this miserable
blood-soaked, white-bearded man? She collapsed
voiceless into a chair,
slowly studied the slaughtered suitors on the floor as
though seeing
her own desires dead there. And she said "Welcome,"
hearing her own voice sound foreign, distant. In the corner,
her loom
covered the ceiling with a trellis of shadows; and all the
birds she'd woven
with bright red thread in green foliage, now,
on this night of the return, suddenly turned ashen and
black,
flying low on the flat sky of her final enduring.

(Ritsos 1991: 91)

This was a subversive poem, a revision, a Re-vision. It propelled me back to Homer. I looked again to the *Odyssey* for clues of a Penelope who was just as shrewd as her wandering counterpart.

And I did indeed find them. I found hints in what was said about Penelope and in what Penelope said herself, but it was her silences that spoke most clearly. For much of the *Odyssey*, the reader sees Penelope in mourning. She is convinced that Odysseus is dead. However, we do not see her for large parts of the epic and after reading poetic Re-visions of Penelope I could not help but think she was up to

something. I kept seeing sly nods and winks everywhere. She must be more clever than she is given credit for. Indeed, I found support for this in scholarly works that discussed Penelope's recognition of Odysseus, her idea for the bow contest, and her testing of Odysseus with the bed trick. Shelia Murnaghan's book *Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey* was particularly influential. Murnaghan devotes an entire chapter of her book to Penelope and highlights the importance of recognition for her as a character:

Just as Odysseus undergoes a series of preliminary, clandestine recognitions that lead up to his open self-disclosure and general acknowledgement, so Penelope undergoes a series of experiences that in important ways resemble recognition scenes, in which she somehow acknowledges Odysseus' presence and is recognized by him and through which important steps are taken towards securing Odysseus' reinstatement.

(Murnaghan 1987a: 46)

On the next page Murnaghan clarifies that Penelope's recognition scenes are "recognition scenes only at the level of their thematic and structural affinities" (1987a: 47). However, this idea of Penelope having her own series of recognition scenes resonated with the poetic Re-Visions I was reading. It appeared that many writers recognized something in the myth that could amount to a kind of transformative journey for Penelope. From this point on, recognition became a key word for this project. There was not only the notion of recognition in the Homeric sense and for the poets that re-wrote the myth but, both of these connected to Adrienne Rich's notion of Re-vision and to the philosophical concept of recognition in Judith Butler's theories.

In going back to the Homeric text, I soon realized that others had not or, if they had, they recalled only a vague outline of Penelope. For example, renowned feminist theorist Adriana Cavarero in her book *In Spite of Plato* mis-remembers the myth.¹ Cavarero claims that Penelope never finishes weaving her web, that she continues weaving and unweaving. Cavarero then uses this as a metaphor for women's defiance of patriarchy (Cavarero 1995: 12). It is a common misconception, but in Homer's epic, Penelope does indeed finish the web. After three years the infamous ruse is discovered. The suitors demand that Penelope complete her work and choose a new husband. However, Cavarero's point still stands: Penelope is a liminal figure and as such possesses a certain power. She does not have to re-marry as long as the web remains unfinished. She is confined to the women's quarters along with her maids but, as Cavarero imagines, they are not unhappy. They are doing the work of feminist philosophy weaving and unweaving discourses (Cavarero 1995: 30).

Aside from the relatively mundane aspect of textual accuracy, the advantage of going back is re-discovery. Looking at the *Odyssey* again I noticed that although Penelope finishes her web there is a dispute within the epic itself as to when this happens. Two suitors give two different accounts: Antinous suggests that the web "has been finished for some time, while Amphimedon speaking a month later, says that it was completed just before Odysseus's return" (Lowenstam 2000: 334). Perhaps Penelope is slipperier than we thought. Even the suitors misremember.

¹ Barbara Clayton points out Cavarero's oversight in Clayton 2004: 124.

There is also the question of what exactly it is that Penelope is making at her loom. In 1985 Carol Heilbrun asked precisely this question: “What was Penelope Unweaving?”² Although the *Odyssey* states that Penelope weaves a shroud for her father-in-law many authors, poets, and scholars imagine her weaving a colourful tapestry, a narrative textile, or even a bridal dress. In the poem “Rereading the Odyssey in Middle Age” Linda Pastan addresses this idea of mis-remembering mythic facts. The poem begins:

Why was she weaving a shroud for Laertes,
and why have I thought for years
it was a shawl she made, something warm
a man might wrap around her shoulders
windy nights-one of the suitors, perhaps,
much younger than she and surely,
younger than Odysseus.

(Pastan 1988: 23)

Penelope has been remembered wrongly over and over again, but feminists still find her interesting enough to go back to. Moreover, some, like Pastan, are unapologetic regarding their mis-rememberings:

We make our myths from whole cloth anyway
and make ourselves the heroines
of others’ imaginings...

(Pastan 1988: 23)

From all of this disparate research there began to emerge a persistent connection between Penelope, feminist philosophy, and poetry that would become the basis for this thesis.

² Heilbrun’s conference paper was reworked and included in her book Heilbrun, C. G. 1990.

Although both Cavarero and Pastan remember the myth wrongly, their misremembering has important theoretical implications. One of the foremost iterations of this link between poetry and a theory of imperfect replication is Karen Van Dyck's *The Rehearsal of Misunderstanding*. Here, Van Dyck discusses "misunderstanding" as a strategy in Modern Greek Women's Poetry and the repeated rehearsal of misunderstandings becomes a way of challenging "authorship, authority, and authoritativeness" (Van Dyck 1998: xxiv). Misremembering and misunderstanding are akin to creative re-remembering and in this way are not unlike Adrienne Rich's idea of Re-vision. For Rich, Re-vision is a way of looking at old texts in new ways; it is about changing the way we see literature, discourse, and society. But between Cavarero, Pastan, Ritsos, Rich, and Van Dyck the question that kept surfacing was: Why? Why *these* stories? Why Penelope? These questions soon coalesced and implicated broader, more ominous questions: How and why have we come to agree on such ideologies that subjugate and silence women? And why do we repeat them? Though I realized some of these inquiries were beyond the scope of a doctoral thesis, I knew that contemporary feminist writers had already begun their own investigation and Penelope was center stage.

The main writers discussed in this thesis, Francisca Aguirre, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, Gail Holst-Warhaft, and Margaret Atwood have been chosen as representative of a trend in women's poetry that rewrites Penelope's story from a feminist perspective following Adrienne Rich's notion of Re-vision. These writers re-envision Penelope, but they do not inherit and then imitate the classical figure passed down from Homer. They appropriate this archetype and repeat it dissonantly over and over again in the hope of opening up a more creative space

for the future of (feminist) subjectivity. None are afraid to look back, of turning into a pillar of salt because they have already seen what it means to be a Eurydice, an Iphigenia, an Echo. Nor do they turn to Clytemnestra, Medea, or Antigone. They refuse to be silenced, demonized, murdered. Cunningly, they choose the housewife.

There were many other texts considered for inclusion in the thesis; however, most were excluded on the basis that they were not considered Re-visions. Among those omitted, two works that stood out were Linda Pastan's "On Re-reading the *Odyssey* in Middle Age" and Louise Glück's *Meadowlands*. In the article, "Penelope's Song: The Lyric Odysseys of Linda Pastan and Louise Glück", Deborah Roberts and Sheila Murnaghan discuss these two significant "poetic revisions" through the lens of Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (Roberts & Murnaghan 2002: 2). They examine the strategy of "partial knowledge", in this case, partial knowledge of Homeric epic. The example given is Walcott's own poet-narrator who, when encountering Homer, admits, "I never read it... not all the way through" (Walcott 1990: 283). I find this "partial knowledge" of the *Odyssey* that categorizes Pastan's and Glück's collections to be more akin to Van Dyck's notion of rehearsing misunderstanding than to Re-Vision. As a strategy it requires something like a heedless disregard or, more mildly, a casual indifference towards tradition that absolves one from referring back to an 'original'. The movement of this strategy is chiefly forward, away from past texts. Re-vision, on the other hand, is characterized by the opposite compulsion; it is defined by constantly looking back. While the willful nonchalance and infidelity of partial knowledge is an equally interesting strategy, it did not fit the mold for my particular project.

Aside from the criteria of having a sustained engagement with Penelope that could be categorized as a Re-vision, the writers in this thesis were chosen because of the ways in which their respective works moved. That is, within each work there is a movement towards creating a different Penelope and the path each writer takes varies according to the themes they choose to highlight. For example, Aguirre moves from the imaginary space of “Ithaca’s Circle” to an attic and then further into the self in order to find a place from which to speak. Aguirre’s poems accumulate as a memoir of entrapment until the final poem “Telar” [Loom] breaks free from this pattern. The poem acts as a rupture in her narrative of isolation as the narrator finally claims an identity that is beyond a disembodied, powerless voice.

In addition to their value and movement as individual works, the texts chosen also create a particular motion when placed together; as a collective they enrich the relationship between Re-vision and Butler’s theory of giving an account of the self. The progression from Aguirre to Anghelaki-Rooke to Holst-Warhaft and finally to Atwood is also a progression from the Voice to the Body to the Public Penelope to Dystopia. In *Ítaca* [*Ithaca*] Aguirre shows us step by step what it is like coming to Re-vision. At first her narrator sees only entrapment; within archetypes, within gender norms. In “Desde fuera” [From Without] the narrator says:

Desde fuera
las aguas son caminos
—desde la playa son solo frontera—.

(Aguirre 2004: 22)

From without
the waters are pathways
—from the beach they are only borders—

(Aguirre 2004: 23)

She knows it is a matter of vision, she must see differently in order to escape. However, in order to do so she must first move inwards and claim her self as she does in the final poem. From Aguirre we move to Anghelaki-Rooke who looks at Penelope as an embodied woman with all of the desires and fears that go along with this kind of subjectivity. Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope is a woman who writes the body in her poetry and, as she does so, begins to shed her former Penelopean identity. Again, we see the method of Re-vision in progress as the narrator becomes the "other Penelope" (in the poem "Η άλλη Πηνελόπη" ["The Other Penelope"]). She eventually refuses to be defined by the traditional myth and its consequences; she slams the door on both that most exquisite suitor, Pain, as well as on the Penelopean archetype (Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 94).

From the limits of a single body follow the collective, the body of an archetype. Holst-Warhaft's *Penelope's Confession* is narrated by a singular Penelope; however, unlike both Aguirre and Anghelaki-Rooke's narrators, this Penelope is aware of her confinement from the beginning. Holst-Warhaft's narrator is already tired of playing her role as the faithful wife, as "Helen's counterpoise" (Holst-Warhaft 2004: 38). This is an example of the disorientation that Re-vision can

produce both on an individual level and on a wider scale. As a woman, this Penelope disinherits her archetype because it no longer reflects her current reality. In the larger frame of storytelling (and subjectivity), this represents the dissonance between what is said to be the case, a fixed story, and what can be read as something far more nuanced. As will be explored, the recognition of this dissonance is also what makes Holst-Warhaft's collection particularly receptive to aspects of Butler's theory.

Finally, with *The Penelopiad*, the forward movement of the other three texts spins back on itself. Atwood's work is still a Re-vision, it looks both backwards and forwards; however, instead of an exploration that leads a narrator to a redemptive kind of self-awareness, Atwood's Penelope is an utter failure. Atwood does what she does best and presents us with a dystopia. This Penelope is as blind as Odysseus in the crimes she commits in the service of self-preservation and posterity. In other words, Atwood's text shows us what happens when Re-vision is denounced and when one refuses an ethical relationship to others. The maids and the suitors are excluded, they are refused recognition, their humanity is denied. These are the very same consequences that Butler describes through her treatment of Antigone; it is the result of individual and collective blindness which limits the horizons of recognizability and excludes possibilities of being. Thus, the particular ways in which these writers re-write Penelope resonates with the larger feminist project of changing how we see our relationships to others and to our selves in order to strive for a more ethical future.

For a bard, creative re-remembering is useful and necessary. Myth is a mixed bag, a kaleidoscope of possibilities and depending on the audience the clever bard will choose the most provocative version. Strange that History and collective memory would turn myth into a singular, linear narrative with easily recognizable binaries. Strange perhaps but not coincidental and this is what feminist theory is working to make clear. Stories do not happen without storytellers and storytellers are not without agendas. To this end, feminist writers have started to tell different tales, to complicate the linear stories, so that the contemporary subject is not faced with an either/or choice of identity: Penelope or Circe or Helen, wife or witch or whore. Our choices should, instead, be multiple.

In going back and choosing Penelope, women writers elect a more subtle form of subversion. Penelope uses the system against itself. In Homer's epic, common custom says that a shroud must be made for her father-in-law before she is allowed to remarry. Her duty to Odysseus's family must be complete before she moves on. So, dutifully, she follows this law to the letter and the law does not give a time limit. If cleverness is a virtue classically ascribed to Penelope, then why not use it against stereotypes that would highlight only chastity, submission, and patience. Feminist Re-visions of Penelope do precisely this. They shift the lens and problematize canonical, linear stories in order to articulate a process of continual re-drafting. This movement also parallels the work being done in contemporary feminist theory that re-imagines subjectivity as something that is continually revised and re-narrated. Indeed, Rosi Braidotti and Judith Butler call for a Re-vision of subjectivity. Not only must we look again at how we narrate, but they argue that stories must be re-remembered and retold in a way that injects

them with a more positive, ethical, and forward-looking intention. This includes the stories we narrate about our selves. Re-imagining and re-writing Penelope, then, is not a self-indulgent creative gesture. Like Penelope's weaving, feminist writers have a pressing purpose. They are working to re-define what it means to be a storyteller as well as an ethical subject.

SEEING DIFFERENTLY

Myth remains alive only when it retains its capacity to provoke, at a deep level, the 'shock of recognition' and a sense of personal relevance. For it to affect the reader, it must in some degree have 'happened' to the poet.

Levertov, *The Poet in the World* (Levertov 1973: 84)

In Muriel Rukeyser's poem "The Poem as Mask"³ (1968) the narrator exclaims, "No more masks! No more mythologies!" (Rukeyser 435). Since then, this phrase has been appropriated by feminists as a call to break free of traditional stories and myths.⁴ This raises the question then: why do so many feminist poets write about myth? Though this is undoubtedly a complex question, one reason is that myth is a powerful form of discourse. Rukeyser herself acknowledged this and indeed, did not cease using mythology in her poetry.⁵ Perhaps one of her most famous Revisions is that of the Oedipus myth, simply entitled "Myth":

Long afterward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the
roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It was
the Sphinx. Oedipus said, "I want to ask you one question.
Why didn't I recognize my mother?" "You gave the
wrong answer," said the Sphinx. "But that was what
made everything possible," said Oedipus. "No," she said.
"When I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning,
two at noon, and three in the evening, you answered,
Man. You didn't say anything about woman."
"When you say Man," said Oedipus, "you include women
too. Everyone knows that." She said, "That's what
you think."⁶

(Rukeyser 1978: 498)

³ Originally from the collection *The Speed of Darkness* (1968) but is also found in Rukeyser 1978.

⁴ The phrase is also used as a title for the second edition of the anthology *No More Masks! An Anthology of Twentieth-Century American Women Poets* (Howe 1993).

⁵ Hers was not a rallying cry against the use of myth but merely specific reference to her earlier use of the Orpheus myth (Rukeyser 1978: 291–297). In fact, she continued to use myth in her later poems such as "Niobe Now", "Waiting for Icarus," and "Myth". See Rukeyser 1978.

⁶ The spacing here replicates that of the original.

Like the character of Oedipus in this poem, feminists claim that we too have been suffering from blindness. We throw ourselves headlong into a plot that has already been written; we are socialized to accept rigid gender norms and forms of subjectivity. In the case of Rukeyser's poem, we allow the assumption of a universal genderless norm to exist and to stand for everyone's experience. Decreed by the gods, fate, or cultural precedence, we accept that this is the "way it is".

Rukeyser's poem addresses the convention of using the word "man" to refer to the whole of humanity: "When you say Man... you include women / too. Everyone knows that". It is a convention that is present in English as well as other languages (including Modern Greek); however, it is a practice that has been challenged by feminists. The Sphinx's response: "That's what / you think", prompts one look again.

Published in 1978 Rukeyser's poem is addressing a society and its sexist assumptions. Like Oedipus, our blindness results from a failure of recognition, a failure see that perhaps when you say "Man", many are left out. Her reference to classical tragedy in particular, illustrates the gravity of what is at stake. We must recognize the presumptions that have been made by language and society in order to avoid a doomed cycle of perpetual inequality for women and minorities. Traditionally, the tragic device in Oedipus's story is inescapability; in precisely trying to avoid his predicted fate, he makes it come to pass. This is the definitive style of a tragedy. What Rukeyser's poem does is to question this very notion of inevitability. Tragedy could have been avoided had Oedipus answered the

Sphinx's question correctly. Oedipus was wrong and this is what initiated the tragic events. Contrary to the traditional story, Oedipus's failing was not that he ignored the prophecies of doom, or that he murdered his father and married his mother, it was his assumption. Assuming that he solved the Sphinx's riddle blinded him to the possibility that he might have been wrong. In this way, Rukeyser brilliantly plays on the inevitability of tragedy and the truth of myth. What Rukeyser's poem questions is this very idea of looking back and seeing again differently asking ourselves: "have we been wrong?"

In the preface to Giles Deleuze's *Anti-Oedipus* published six years before Rukeyser's poem, Eugene W. Holland wrote:

Historically short-sighted as it may be to do so, people are all the more likely to become enamoured of power and everyday fascism when these forces seem to have won the day and to represent the only game in town.

(Deleuze & Guattari 1999: ix)

When Holland says "short-sighted", he is not only playing with Oedipus's own self-inflicted punishment, but to our own as well. We keep the old stories and we play the same parts. Often, we cannot see that there may have been, and still may be, a different answer.

Seeing differently is precisely what feminist poets have attempted to do with myth. Though the poets examined in this thesis come from such diverse backgrounds as Spain, Greece, Australia, and North America, they are all part of a movement in which looking at the past must be done with a critical eye. They have not discarded myth, but attempted to reuse it. These women writers look at

Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, from Homer's *Odyssey* and re-imagine her outside of her traditional characterization as the faithful, patient wife. In their respective works, Francisca Aguirre, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, Gail Holst-Warhaft, and Margaret Atwood present Penelope's story told from Penelope's perspective, which turns out to be quite different from Odysseus's or Homer's. In the process of reinterpreting the classical figure of Penelope, these poets explore notions of subjectivity and gender. In the myth, they find both dissonance and resonance with their present situations. Some, like Aguirre, recognize something familiar in Penelope's entrapment on the island of Ithaca, while others, like Atwood, render a Penelope who is just as cunning and deceitful as Odysseus himself. What these feminist Re-visions have in common is their attempt to show how myths can speak to our present realities. They can be a useful agent in asserting that patriarchy is not the only "game in town" and it seems that Rukeyser's Sphinx would agree.

This thesis is a response to the persistence of myth in contemporary feminist poetry. It aims show how poets from various backgrounds engage with the Penelope myth in order to make sense of and narrate their own situations. They have acknowledged that the person they are, their self as it exists now or as they wish it to be, is incompatible with those selves that society deems appropriate. Many writers have attempted to express this tension through the medium of poetry. This thesis combines close readings of contemporary poetry focusing on four such writers whose works span the 1970s to the 2000s. There is a political thread that links their poetry with contemporary feminist theories of ethics and subjectivity. From an interdisciplinary perspective this thesis provides a sample of

how classical figures and myths, in this case, Penelope, have been appropriated and implicated in a number of other discourses including contemporary theories of power relations, storytelling, and feminism.

In Chapter 1, I will discuss theorists Jack Zipes and Judith Butler in order to frame the feminist appropriation of myth in a contemporary context. I will then discuss Adrienne Rich and her concept of “Re-vision”, which developed out of the American feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s, and which provides a reading and writing strategy for women poets who want to reinvent myth.

The following four chapters will look at individual writers that revise Penelope. Chapter 2 will examine Francisca Aguirre’s long poem *Ítaca* which expresses the ineffability and entrapment of the self. It is an image of a self that has become nearly schizophrenic; the narrator creates a second Penelopean persona to describe her maddening situation on Ithaca. There will also be a comparison here with the Greek poet C.P. Cavafy who has likewise written about despair, entrapment, and escape. The next two chapters work together, as do their authors. Both Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke and Gail Holst-Warhaft translate each other’s poetry. It is perhaps no surprise therefore, that their poetry collections overlap. Anghelaki-Rooke’s *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* focuses on desire and how to write about an embodied self. She endeavours to express the body in writing and in doing so tests the very limitations of language. Holst-Warhaft continues this thread in *Penelope’s Confession* by discussing language and translation. She addresses desire as well as notions of fidelity and recognition as they function both in Homeric myth and in the process of self-making. In contrast to Aguirre’s

very isolated Penelope who seems to speak only to her own split personality, Anghelaki-Rooke and Holst-Warhaft depict Penelopes who are more outward-looking. These Penelopes write and question their very status as a mythical archetype.

In Chapter 5, Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* brings us to the self-referential realm of postmodernism, parody, and the politics of narrative. Her Penelopean narrator offers the untold story, the one that was omitted from Homer's account of the *Odyssey*, albeit this work is itself not above suspicion. Indeed, Atwood's Penelope is not to be trusted. Her story is belated, an after-the-fact work, but this does not make it any truer than other versions. By the final chapter, this thesis aims to convey Penelope's multiplicity and the implications of this multiplicity for feminist discourse. Firstly, the Penelope myth has been used in a variety of ways by diverse feminist writers in order to challenge tradition notions of storytelling, female creativity, and stereotypes of femininity. Secondly, the multiplicity of these narratives implies a trend in feminist poetry that aims to present a spectrum of imaginative possibilities that encourages different kinds of modern subjectivities.

Myth and Re-Vision

The question isn't why we keep going back, after so many years, but how we could do anything else.

Mendelsohn, "J.F.K., Tragedy, Myth" (Mendelsohn 2013)

MYTH

Why would feminists bother to re-animate myth? Indeed, the word "myth" questions its own truthfulness and in some cases has become synonymous with legend, fairy tale, and even lie. However, "story" and indeed, "discourse" are not necessarily the opposite of truth. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* Michel Foucault famously explored the notion of truth in relation to discourse and Western civilization's pursuit of the "will to knowledge". In his view, discourses are based on power and desire from which some notion of truth is then manufactured. As Foucault asserts: "this will to truth, like the other systems of exclusion, relies on institutional support: it is both reinforced and accompanied by whole strata of practices such as pedagogy [...] the book-system, publishing, [and] libraries" (Foucault 1972: 219). In other words, the discourses that structure societies are based on constructed notions of truth/knowledge and what is considered truth is historically subjective. Literature is an integral part of this system.

Myths and their appropriations contribute to this same process of forming cultural narratives, norms, and power structures. From early on in human civilization myths have served many functions in society from explaining the creation of the world to setting examples for human behaviour.⁷ As Jack Zipes, one of the foremost scholars on myths and fairy tales explains:

Myths and fairy tales seem to know something that we do not know. They also appear to hold our attention, to keep us in their sway, to enchant our lives. We keep returning to them for answers. We use them in diverse ways as private sacred myths or as public commercial advertisements to sell something. We refer to myths and fairy tales as lies by saying, “oh, that’s just a fairy tale” or “that’s just myth.” But these lies are often the lies that govern our lives.

(Zipes 1994: 3–4)

Myths are both a product of and a producer (or at least a transmitter) of culture since one of myth’s main functions is to facilitate the “civilizing process” (Zipes 2012: 10), to outline and explain how one acts in a particular cultural context.⁸ If this is the case, then like other aspects of culture myths are “historically and culturally coded” (Zipes 1994: 4). In other words, they have origins and agendas no matter how obfuscated they may be. Furthermore, because of their role in cultural transmission, production, and truth-making, myths have a vast ideological impact: “they have become codified, authoritative, and canonical” (4).

⁷ It has even been argued that storytelling is an evolutionary trait and that humans require stories, myths and tales to make sense of lived experience. This is discussed at length in Boyd 2009 and also in Zipes 2006 and Zipes 2012.

⁸ Also see Zipes 1994.

Zipes also compares myths to selfish memes⁹ in the way that they enchant readers and listeners and engender their own propagation (Zipes 2012: 17–20).¹⁰ Because, eventually, myth denies even history: transforming “history into nature” (DuPlessis 1985: 106) myth becomes a very powerful discursive tool. The ideological implications of this have not been lost on feminist writers who have recognized that in its refusal to acknowledge its own historicity, myth can attain the status of universality (DuPlessis 1985: 106). For example, what if a seemingly core truth about women—that they are maternal, domestic, and caring—is nothing but a smoke screen, a “mother nature” myth disguised as an ahistorical truth about the nature of all women and their role in society? The consequences of such discourses could be, and have been, staggering. If feminist theory is about questioning traditional ideologies and perspectives then approaching myth—the very foundation for some of our most ingrained beliefs—is critical. Rachel Blau DuPlessis explains:

To face myth as a woman writer is, putting things at their most extreme, to stand at the impact point of a strong system of interpretation masked as representation, and to rehearse one’s own colonization or “iconization” through the materials one’s culture considers powerful or primary.

(DuPlessis 1985: 106)

In this way, the re-imagining and rewriting of myths call attention to this crucial connection between myth, especially Homeric myth, and the construction of Western civilization. Rewriting myths then can be a subversive act that calls into

⁹ A meme is defined as: “A cultural element or behavioural trait whose transmission and consequent persistence in a population, although occurring by non-genetic means (esp. imitation), is considered as analogous to the inheritance of a gene.” (OED Online. <http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2277/view/Entry/239909?redirectedFrom=meme#eid>.)

¹⁰ Here Zipes explains how he applies Richard Dawkins’s theory to storytelling. See also Dawkins 1976.

question the system of patriarchal values which presents itself as ahistorical and is responsible for defining such concepts as heroism, leadership, honour, fidelity, masculinity, femininity, and so on.

Perhaps, it is also the case that women writers find myth particularly suitable for their poetics because “myth is a story that, regardless of its loose ends, states cultural agreement and coherence” (DuPlessis 1985:106). In this sense, myths are not just the remnants of ancient stories and beliefs, they represent forms of consensus. It is because we have agreed that they should exist; that they are worth retelling. Therein lies the crux of what feminism has attempted to unravel: *how and why have we come to agree on such ideologies that subjugate and silence women? And why do we repeat them?* This thesis will examine the works of feminist poets in order to see how their Re-visions of myth address such questions and how they pose new possibilities for a feminist poetics that challenges existing ideologies.

If myths promote ideologies then they can be used intentionally or unintentionally as propaganda, to perpetuate certain ways of being. For example, what morals do we pass on when we recount the story of Sleeping Beauty or Bluebeard?¹¹ What do we learn about human relationships from Odysseus and Penelope or from Agamemnon and Achilles? Jack Zipes adds a final disturbing question: “Do we tell fictional stories and maintain illusory traditions that foster intolerance, ignorance, racism, sexism and wars?” (Zipes 2006: 226). These are questions that

¹¹ “Bluebeard” is a fairytale by Charles Perrault in which the wealthy and mysterious Bluebeard has a habit of murdering his young wives. Jack Zipes describes how this tale of a serial killer became famous shortly after its publication in 1697 and is still repeated and appropriated today (Zipes 2012: 42–43).

need to be addressed if we want to seriously change what kind of societies we live in. Once we begin to see differently, the task becomes re-making and as will be shown, feminist philosophers like Judith Butler and Rosi Braidotti are already exploring ways in which we can tell different stories, create different selves, and form more ethical relationships with one another.

This notion of re-making is key because even classical myths and fairy tales were never intended to be static and retold in the same way. They are part of a genre that is constituted by variation. Myth is meant to change *with* society. In our modern(ist) obsession with preserving the past, we have petrified stories that are toxic to our cultural and imaginary development. In doing so, we are no longer engaging with myth, but casting it in gold and making it a relic. But what exactly is at stake here? Jack Zipes poignantly explains:

If we do not question and undo dominant traditional storytelling, we risk not only losing the imaginative vision, but we also place our children at risk, as we already have. Their survival depends on our continual engagement with cultural traditions, opening them up, and opening ourselves in the process.

(Zipes 2006: 242)

Zipes is concerned with our cultural future which involves the next generation; the children who we foster with myths and fairy tales. He asserts that nothing less than our present and future imaginative visions are at stake. Our survival depends on opening up tradition and seeing differently. Indeed, as will be explored in detail later on in this chapter, this is also precisely what Adrienne Rich described in 1971. Her idea of Re-vision is “more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival” (Rich 1972:18).

RECOGNITION AND ACCOUNTS OF SELF

*...life might be understood as precisely that which exceeds any account
we may try to give of it.*

Butler, "Giving an Account of Oneself" (Butler 2001: 28)

In a sense, what Judith Butler provides in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, is an answer to Adrienne Rich's desire for Re-vision, but hers is a Re-vision of the self. In her recent work on subjectivity Judith Butler discusses the importance of re-assessing the stories we tell and re-tell.¹² Like Muriel Rukeyser's poem "Myth", Judith Butler revisits the Oedipus myth in her theories of subjectivity and ethics; she "return[s] to Greek myths to understand the present" and this "means that those myths are animated in new ways" (Butler & Athanasiou 2013: x). In *Antigone's Claim* (2000), Butler revisits the Oedipus myth in order to revise the canonical interpretations¹³ of Sophocles's play *Antigone*. One of Butler's aims is to point out the blind spots of the previous readings:

When I reread Sophocles's play, I was impressed in a perverse way by the blindnesses that afflict these very interpretations. Indeed, the blindnesses in the text—of the sentry, of Teiresias—seem invariably repeated in the partially blind readings of the text.

(Butler 2000: 5)

Butler is interested in how the text has been read previously and what has been overlooked. In particular, Butler is concerned with the figure of Antigone and her role as a potential model for political representation wherein,

¹² See Butler 2005 and Butler and Athanasiou 2013.

¹³ The canonical interpretations that Butler discusses are by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Jacques Lacan. See Butler 2000: 46–47.

as a figure for politics, she points to somewhere else, not to politics as a question of representation but to that political possibility that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed.

(Butler 2000: 2)

This involves exploring the limitations of kinship and the state within the horizon of social norms. In the example of Antigone, the normative familial identifiers of “father” and “brother” are complicated because of incest: Oedipus, her father, is also her brother. Additionally, she speaks against the authority of the state when she illegally buries her brother. Not only does Antigone represent kinship in its “deformation”, but her very situation:

puts the reigning regimes of representation into crisis and raises the question of what the conditions of intelligibility could have been that would have made her life possible...What new schemes of intelligibility make our loves legitimate and recognizable, our losses true losses?

(Butler 2000: 24)

Butler offers a reading of Antigone as a political/ethical subject that throws into question the “standards of recognition” (Butler 2000: 81). She challenges the processes of how society acknowledges an individual as legitimate (and lawful) and gestures towards a solution that requires recognizing our blindnesses.

In light of Butler’s theory, these blind spots are not negative limitations. In “Giving an Account of Oneself”, published one year later, Butler revisits this notion of blindness as an integral part of subjectivity and which implies a more ethical relationship with others. Her article, (and later, her book of the same name) goes against the grain of traditional moral philosophy which is based on the self

knowing, and often possessing itself. In this work, Butler explores an “ethics based on our shared, and invariable, partial blindness about ourselves” (Butler 2001: 27). If a subject cannot fully know itself then the notion of responsibility is radically altered. This opacity forms the basis of a different, ethical relationship with the other:

If the subject is opaque to itself, it is not therefore licensed to do what it wants or to ignore its relations to others. Indeed, if it is precisely by virtue of its relations to others that it is opaque to itself, and if those relations to others are precisely the venue for its ethical responsibility, then it may well follow that it is precisely by virtue of the subject’s opacity to itself that it sustains some of its most important ethical bonds.

(Butler 2001: 22)

In this way, Butler alters the dynamic between the self and the other, shifting it from a push and pull of power *over* towards an axis of vulnerability and opacity. We are dependent on others for our very sense of self. Because the self is always blind to parts of itself, any narrative account of self is always partial. There are things that will always escape one’s account of self (for example, one’s own birth). This also undermines any notion of a singular, complete, closed, and whole subject:

If the identity we say we are cannot possibly capture us, and marks immediately an excess and opacity that falls outside the terms of identity, then any effort made “to give an account of oneself” will have to fail in order to approach being true.

(Butler 2001: 28)

Yet, like Butler’s notion of blindness, this kind of failure is not necessarily negative. In fact, this failure means that as subjects we must continually be exposed to others in our iterations of self. What is more, the “I” can only be

located in this failure: “the ‘I’ is the moment of failure in every narrative effort to give an account of oneself” (Butler 2001: 37). In Butler’s view, every account of self will fail not just those that are as radical as Antigone’s. This is because the self is exactly what escapes this narrative of the self. Or, in a more Penelopean metaphor:

We as subjects who narrate ourselves in the first person, encounter in common something of a predicament. Since I cannot tell the story in a straight line, and I lose my thread, and I start again, and I forget something crucial, and it is to [*sic*] hard to think about how to weave it in, and I start thinking, thinking, there must be some conceptual thread that will provide a narrative here, some lost link, some possibility for chronology, and the ‘I’ becomes increasingly conceptual, increasingly awake, focused, determined, it is at this point that the thread must fall apart. The ‘I’ who narrates finds that it cannot direct its narration, finds that it cannot give an account of instability to narrate, why its narration breaks down, and so it comes to experience itself, or rather, reexperience itself, as radically, if not irretrievably, unknowingly about who it is.

(Butler 2001: 35)

In this framework, the feminist poets examined in this thesis can be seen as attempting to give accounts of self through revising the Penelope myth. Because Homer’s description of Penelope was not compatible with feminist poets’ notions of “woman”, they decided to re-narrate her story, and in the process, re-narrate their own stories as well. These poets can be said to *stage* accounts of self in their poetry by creating a Penelope persona as to not entirely jeopardize the self. Butler explains:

Self-questioning of this sort involves putting oneself at risk, imperilling the very possibility of being recognized by others, since to question the norms of recognition that govern what I might be, to ask what they leave out, what they might be compelled to accommodate, is, in relation to the present regime, to risk unrecognizability as a subject or at least to become an occasion for posing the question of who one is (one can be) and whether or not one is recognizable.

(Butler 2005: 23)

This risk seems quite hazardous and this may be one of the main reasons why poets have decided to use a Penelopean narrator as the subject of/for their exploration. That being said, Penelope is not a mask for the poet, but is at moments interchangeable with the poet's self (as in the case of Francisca Aguirre in Chapter 2). Penelope acts as a surrogate self through which the poet can explore the perimeter of these "norms of recognition" and perhaps even challenge the boundaries within which an acceptable form of identity (or narrative) can be constructed.

The risk that the self may not be recognized by the other is a substantial one; however, Antigone, among others does not shy away. In *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (2013), Butler and Athanasiou discuss the political subject and the limits of recognition and action. In Chapter 6, they consider a recent Re-vision of the Oedipus myth; the film *Strella* (dir. Panos Koutras, Greece, 2009) wherein a transsexual sex worker has an affair with a man who turns out to be her father. This is not simply a modern rendition of the myth, but a Re-vision. It is also an example of what happens when a self is labelled as unrecognizable and aberrant. In *Strella* the father/child/lover relationship is more complex than the one that exists in the traditional Oedipus myth. It is not

normative vs. taboo and therefore life vs. death. And the film does not end in mutilation, exile, or death for either party. Indeed, *Strella* “could be read as a tear in the fabric of Oedipal-Antigonean genealogy vis-à-vis the epistemological matrix of ownership and (dis)possession” (Butler & Athanasiou 2013: 56). The film challenges the normative structures of kinship and in an interview, the actress herself challenges the very limits of recognition that Butler is theorizing about:

The amateur actress who played the transgendered protagonist of *Strella* [Mina Orfanou], responded to a journalist’s question “what is the most extreme thing you have ever done?”: “My self!” In this performative proclamation of a self that has been undone and redone, the self is not created from scratch in the way of an alternative liberalist ‘anything goes,’ but rather opens up melancholically to the multiple and non-reducible singularity of the other (self), the one that is left over and, at the same time, exceeds the onto-epistemological typologies of the recognizable, heteronormatively gendered self.

(Butler & Athanasiou 2013: 65)

This example highlights the dangers involved in giving an account of self. It reveals that even after giving an account there is the very real possibility that the self can still be labeled as unrecognizable. However, for Butler, this can be a productive, political moment:

In redistributing the norms defining the terms of a recognizable self (and a livable life), *this* “self authoring” self potentially challenges the narcissism of normative selfhood and institutes a different sociality. The normative discourse of abjected and adjudicated exception is performatively recast into exceptional self-poietics.

(Butler & Athanasiou 2013: 65)

The unrecognizable or misrecognized self authors itself. Moreover, because this kind of self is a failure in the system (and it announces to be such) it destabilizes the very limits of recognition and the system as a construct.

The writers examined in this thesis, Francisca Aguirre, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, Gail Holst-Warhaft, and Margaret Atwood, are perhaps not as radical as Mina Orfanou or *Strella*; however, they do attempt to give accounts of self that are prompted by unrecognizability. They do not fully recognize themselves and this is played out through the figure of Penelope. Although Penelope as a mythical character is not as radical as Antigone, this is perhaps, precisely why poets are inclined to re-imagine her. Classics scholar Edith Hall suggests that:

no modern reader can find [Penelope] emotionally plausible. She is not angry at being abandoned or deprived of more children, sexually frustrated, suspicious of her husband's fidelity, satisfied at being in charge of the household, or resentful of having to relinquish space when Odysseus returns. She does not even complain when, on their first night together, he says that he will leave again (23.266–87). The reader must make a guess to “fill in” the gaps in Penelope's psychological profile, thus giving her a strange extra-textual status of her own.

(Hall 2008: 120)

Penelope is like Virginia Woolf's “angel of the house”, an ideal, and archetype, to which women have been confined.¹⁴ Yet, if archetypes are supposed to be universal, why have women not recognized the self here? Like Oedipus, the universal signifier “man”, or in this case “woman” will not suffice. The traditional figure of Penelope is not feasible as an example of what “woman” is; she is found to be lacking. Thus, feminist poets have decided to re-imagine and re-make her

¹⁴ For more on this see Woolf 1966 and Showalter 1992.

while they try to re-imagine and re-make themselves. That being said, one would not bother to rewrite Penelope unless there was also something alluring about the myth. Indeed, the writers to be examined each find in it something that resonates with their own account of self.

Aguirre, Anghelaki-Rooke, Holst-Warhaft, and Atwood each carry on a sustained dialogue with the Penelope myth in a way that both exemplifies Adrienne Rich's Re-vision and risks the Penelopean persona in a Butleresque fashion in order to explore the limits of self narration. The gesture towards Penelope made by each of these poets highlights certain aspects of the myth. To some degree, many of these elements are present in each text; however, my reading will focus on one or two of these key themes per chapter partly because the texts themselves focus on some aspects more than others. For example, Francisca Aguirre's collection *Ítaca* is more about a crisis of subjectivity, and the making and unmaking of the self, while Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke's use of Penelope is more concerned with the creative potential of Penelope's weaving and Penelope as an Odyssean other. Likewise, Gail Holst-Warhaft focuses on recognition while Atwood's text is more about questioning notions of storytelling. Many of these Penelopean themes also overlap with Judith Butler's work, and this will be a thread that continues throughout the thesis.

Like the aged Oedipus of Rukeyser's poem we are multiply blinded. Blind because the story goes that way; because woman is not Man and Oedipus cannot see differently. And like Rukeyser's Oedipus, we are doomed to remain blind if we cannot also see our way out of this tragic discourse. Re-vision offers a new

way of looking at texts and Butler offers a new way of articulating the self and relating to others. Both offer new possibilities. Yet, we must be content that we will not see everything. There will always be blind spots in a narrative. However, what Rich, Butler, and Zipes all emphasize is that looking is not enough: we must also act. We must read, write, perform, recognize, and give account over and over again. Although the writings of Aguirre, Anghelaki-Rooke, Holst-Warhaft, and Atwood are perhaps not all “accounts of self” in the precise philosophical sense that Butler imagines, they are Re-visions that stage accounts of self.

Adrienne Rich’s notion of Re-vision is a strategy of reading and writing that facilitates recognition—and recognition is the first act, the first step towards change. Recognizing that by repeating the same stories in the same ways, we risk being trapped in the same narratives, trapped in narrow definitions of subjectivity and what constitutes a liveable life. The next step is altering these limitations. Once we have “looked back” at old texts from a “new critical direction” (Rich 1972: 18) we must rewrite them. Indeed, through the use of Re-vision many writers have articulated accounts of self that are exposed, partial, and incomplete. The following is an attempt to examine the work of contemporary women writers as they endeavour to do just that, to perform Re-visions and stage accounts of self through poetry.

A LITERATURE OF RE-VISION

*You who think I find words for everything,
and you for whom I write this,
how can I show you what I'm barely
coming in possession of...*

Rich, *Your Native Land, Your Life: Poems* (Rich 1986a: 97)

In one of her most famous collections, *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (1963), Adrienne Rich references the *Odyssey* in the seventh poem entitled “Eurycleia’s Tale”. This poem focuses on vision and revises classical myth, though it is not necessarily what Rich would later describe as a Re-vision.¹⁵ It is, however, a crucial intertext and starting point for a discussion on what Re-vision is and why some contemporary women writers chose to perform Re-visions of the Penelope myth with a feminist agenda in mind. Taking a cue from Rich’s reference to the *Odyssey*, this chapter argues that Penelope’s process of weaving and unweaving is a movement that actually performs Rich’s idea of Re-vision and this is one reason why women writers have chosen to appropriate her. The back and forth motion mimics what some women writers do in their own Re-visions of the Penelope myth; they unravel the myth with all its ideological implications and re-write it from a new (feminist) perspective.¹⁶ Thus, Re-vision provides women writers with a strategy to approach myth and other canonical texts. The aim of the remainder of this chapter is to outline Adrienne Rich’s idea of Re-vision and demonstrate how it relates to the broader field of Penelope scholarship. It will look at the

¹⁵ When referring to Adrienne Rich’s particular strategy I will use “Re-vision” and when referring to the more general re-writing of myths I shall use “revision”.

¹⁶ Adrienne Rich is a self-professed feminist and her idea of Re-vision is explicitly a feminist strategy. However, although I may read them as such, not all of the poets that are discussed in this thesis are explicitly feminist in their identifications.

development of Rich's concept of Re-vision as poetic and political strategy that grew out of her activism in the 1960s. Then the chapter will move on to discuss how subsequent feminist theorists have used Penelope as a figurehead for their own politics/poetics and provide some examples of the kinds of poetic Re-visions that have been performed with the Penelope myth.

POSTMODERN REVISION AND MINORITY MEMORY

In general use, the term revision implies the act of going back and correcting. In terms of postmodern literary theory, Linda Hutcheon explains that a postmodern revision is one which “incorporate[s] that which [it] aim[s] to contest” (Hutcheon 1987: 16–17). If this is the case, then the postmodern revisionist text does more than re-imagine traditional stories; it re-positions them. As Cristina Bacchilega puts it, “postmodern re-visions of traditional narratives do more than alter our reading of those narratives... They constitute an ideological test for previous interpretations” (Bacchilega 1997: 22). This kind of revision internalizes the tale and then throws it back in the face of the original, usually undermining the ideological structures the original set out to reinforce. Adrienne Rich’s definition of Re-vision is one of the most well-known:

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.

(Rich 1972:18)

By hyphenating the generic term “revision” to create “Re-vision” Rich creates a new term that emphasizes the importance of seeing and for Rich this vision is as much political as it is creative. But why is such a concept concerned with *survival*? Because, as Rich has explained, if we want to change the current structures that govern our lives we must firstly examine:

How we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see—and therefore live—afresh.

(Rich 1972: 18)

Put simply, if we want to change our lives we must also aim to change the forces, institutions and ideologies that structure them, beginning with the discourses that reinforce and empower them. In the quotation above, I would emphasize Rich's phrase: "how we have been led to imagine ourselves". It is this capacity for imagination that is paramount because it allows for the possibility of action.

Theorist Rosi Braidotti explores the idea of imagination in a late capitalist Western society. Taking cues from Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Braidotti argues that the failure of postmodern society is a result of a failure of the imagination; a failure of the social imaginary to create something better (Braidotti 2006: 85).¹⁷ Braidotti questions the idea of collective memory as a solid shape and argues that there also exists "minority memory" which posits a different view, often, of the same story. In this way, minority memory is to collective memory as Re-vision is to myth. Minority memory functions to revolt against the larger narrative, and indeed in both cases, the seamless grand narrative (of myth and memory) is artificial. Moreover, neither myth nor memory is a static concept and both thrive on the continual Re-vision of their previous forms.

¹⁷ See Deleuze and Guattari 1988. In addition to being influenced by Deleuze and Guattari, Braidotti is also by extension, influenced by Michel Foucault and particularly Deleuze's writings on Foucault. For example, Deleuze 2006. The theories of Braidotti that I refer to can be found in her book: (Braidotti 2006) however; to trace the development of her theory on nomadic subjectivity see her earlier works: Braidotti 1994 and Braidotti 2002.

Braidotti also takes this idea of multiplicity and applies it to subjectivity, arguing that it too is a non-unitary structure. It is within the discussion of subjectivity that the connection between myth, memory, and the modern Re-vision of Penelope becomes clear. Memory is a key element in shaping subjectivity. According to Simon Malpas, “Through memory, the modern subject is capable of constructing a personal narrative of identity, grasping the present and judging how to respond to the future” (Malpas 2005: 64). Thus, myth and its Re-vision are tools through which memory can be reshaped and which, in turn, allow for the subject (the poet/narrator) to respond creatively to their present circumstance (i.e. for a feminist to act with agency within the confines of a patriarchal society). In other words, as individuals living within societies, our lives, our stories, are what will create future communities and this is where Rich’s poetry is exemplary; Rich is not only concerned with aesthetics but, with the very real political project of feminism. Because myth is so integral to collective memory, its Re-vision is part of “the imaginative affective force of remembrance, “[that] destabilizes the sanctity of the past and the authority of experience” (Braidotti 2006: 168–69). Thus, remembering differently or forcing misreadings of canonical works can be a political strategy.

Re-vision is also analogous to Judith Butler’s notion of giving an account of self. Re-vision is a textual strategy, a way to look again at the fixed canon of texts (including myth) and see them differently. The next step is to then re-write these myths. Similarly, Butler takes the idea of a whole, fixed, singular, subject and argues that if we look again we will notice that we cannot see everything, there are

dark spaces that cannot be seen by the self, and therefore, we cannot give a complete narrative of the self. This partially-opaque subject will attempt to give an account, a narrative of the self. Moreover this account of self must be staged as an address; directed at someone. For Butler, this addressee is the other, who offers you recognition in return for your narrative and is essential to this process. For Adrienne Rich, the other is also necessary, “in order to write I have to believe that there is someone willing to collaborate subjectively” (Rich 1979: 180). The other’s presence is a catalyst for giving an account of self and creating poetry.

What both Braidotti and Butler do for Adrienne Rich’s Re-vision is to highlight the importance of storytelling and what narratives can *do* for the subject and society. They underline the importance of narrative production and iteration. In this light, Re-vision works towards an engagement with texts that *look* from many perspectives and by extension, promises multiple versions of subjectivity which are valid. It is a textual strategy that works towards the same goal as Braidotti’s minority memory, and Butler’s account of self. This theoretical lens allows one to see Adrienne Rich’s poetic project of Re-vision (and others that follow her) as a way to read, write, and re-write texts, and thus navigate the dominant discourses that structure our lives.

ADRIENNE RICH AND RE-VISION

Adrienne Rich was one of the leading visionary poets of the women's movement in the United States in the 1960s and 70s, and has continued to be revolutionary in her articulation of women's experiences since. Her concept of "writing as Re-vision" was delivered in the essay *When We Dead Awaken* (1971)¹⁸ and became a crucial moment for women's writing. Rich's essay is remembered as a rallying cry for a "radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse" (Rich 1972: 18). The title of Rich's essay refers to Henrik Ibsen's eponymous play (1899) which inspired a number of writers at the time including Bernard Shaw and a young James Joyce (*cf.* Ochshorn 2005). The line in the play from which the title is derived comes at the end of the second act from an exchange between Professor Rubeck, an artist, and his model/muse, Irene:

¹⁸ Rich's essay, *When We Dead Awaken*, was originally presented in 1971 at a forum on "The Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century". It was later published with other presentation from this forum in an issue of *College English* edited by Elaine Hedges called "Women Writing and Teaching" vol. 34 no.1 October 1972. It was then edited by Rich in 1976 with an altered ending. The earlier version is inclusive of men and positive about their role in Rich's new vision of the future; however in the latter version Rich omits the last paragraph referring to men's potential for change (Friedman 1984). Despite her sudden lack of faith, by changing the text, Rich is actually performing Re-vision; indeed, the later copy undermines to a certain degree, the conclusions of the original. As Alan Shima points out, one should judge Rich upon her *actions* which speak more hopefully than her words: by re-reading her past she was able to re-write it (Shima 1993:50). For a comparison of the two endings see Shima 1993: 49–50. The 1971 version can be found in: Rich 1972 or in Gelpi and Gelpi 1993. And the 1976 version can be found in: Rich 1979: 33–50.

Irene:

We see the irretrievable only when—

Professor Rubeck:

When—?

Irene:

When we dead awaken.

Professor Rubeck:

What do we really see then?

Irene:

We see that we have never lived.

(Ibsen 2010)

In his essay on Ibsen's play, Shaw writes that Ibsen opens a discussion about "the wasting of the modern woman's soul to gratify the imagination and stimulate the genius of the modern artist, poet, and philosopher" (Shaw and Wisenthal 1979: 189). However:

men and women are becoming conscious of this; and that what remains to be seen is perhaps the most interesting of all imminent social developments is what will happen 'when we dead awaken'.

(Shaw and Wisenthal 1979: 189)

Rich draws from this idea and at the same time uses it as an opportunity to do what could not be done in the play; to not only *see* the "irretrievable" but to begin to get some of the pieces back.¹⁹ As an activist, Rich refused to linger in the poetic despair that "we have never lived". Instead, she appropriates the text for an essay

¹⁹ Retrieving pieces of the irretrievable is also the theme of Rich's poem "When We Dead Awaken" in her collection *Diving into the Wreck* (1973) which will be discussed shortly.

that attempts to show how we *can* live better lives if we begin to awaken and *see* differently; or as Rich herself suggests, a Re-vision. Although Shaw cast Ibsen as a feminist for questioning the gender dynamics at the turn of the century (Ochshorn 2005: 98), this brand of feminism was well out of date by the 1970s. By this time, questioning was no longer enough; Adrienne Rich wanted to rally the “dead” not just acknowledge them. Thus, Rich appropriated Ibsen’s play for an essay that attempted to show how men and women can live better lives (i.e. ones that resist imposed definitions of gender roles), if we begin to awaken and see differently.

With someone like Adrienne Rich it becomes difficult to draw a definitive line between her poetics, her activism, and her identity. In fact, Rich’s changing poetic style mirrored her life changes: she moved from a dutiful daughter and mother, to a restless daughter-in-law, an androgyne, and finally, to a radical lesbian feminist with a strong, often autobiographical, poetic voice (Kang 2008: 23).²⁰ The language of Rich’s early poetry was formal, aloof, and “observational” (Kang 2008: 23). However, as her poetry matured, Rich became more than just a witness; she became an active subject in her poems. She became the knitting woman (“When We Dead Awaken”), the one who quests (“Diving into the Wreck”), and later, even the one who explores her own pain in order to also understand the pain of others (“Contradictions: Tracking Poems”). Not only did Rich become the narrator in an autobiographical sense, but she also began to identify with figures that before had only a metaphorical connection to her. She became more sensitive

²⁰ Adrienne Rich (1929–2012) was born in Baltimore, Maryland. In addition to marrying and having children, she was active in the anti-war protests and the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s, and then in the women’s movement in the 1970s. Later in life Rich came to identify herself as a lesbian and her poetry reflects these changes in her personal life.

to the links between her personal experiences and those of the wider community, so much so, that it eventually became impossible to re-inhabit the distracted gaze of the observer. In her later poetry as well as her theoretical works, Rich developed a writing strategy that was more fluid and at the same time more political. Finally, as I will argue in this thesis, her idea of Re-vision radically alters the lens through which her poetry is read, and also exemplifies a positive reading and writing strategy for a postmodern feminist poetics.

A good example of Rich's early poetry is "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" from *A Change of World* (1951). It involves an unknown narrator who observes their Aunt Jennifer weaving:

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.
They do not fear the men beneath the tree;
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid

(Rich 1951: 19)

The poem has been interpreted as *Ars longa vita brevis* (i.e. the tigers she weaves on her tapestry go on dancing long after she is dead); however, it is more likely that the tapestry depicts the typical marital situation in a patriarchal society (Kang 2008: 47). "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" also illustrates the skill of a young poet who used her writing as the tool with which to distance herself from the social realities

of the time in order to ignore its implications for her own future. Indeed, in a later commentary about this poem, Rich says:

Writing this poem, composed and apparently cool as it is, I thought I was creating a portrait of an imaginary woman. But this woman suffers from the opposition of her imagination worked out on tapestry, and her life-style, “ringed with ordeals she was mastered by”. It was important to me that Aunt Jennifer was a person as distinct from myself as possible- distanced by the formalism of the poem, by its objective, observant tone—even by putting the woman in a different generation.

(Gelpi and Gelpi 1993: 94)

As a weaver, Aunt Jennifer could be seen as a Penelopean figure, her tapestry allowing her some measure of freedom.

Though the connection with Penelope is tenuous in “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers”, in Rich’s later collection, *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (1963), there is a more concrete connection to the *Odyssey*. The seventh poem entitled “Eurycleia’s Tale” is narrated by Eurycleia who is Odysseus’s nurse. As is characteristic of Rich’s early poetry, she identifies with the observer (Eurycleia) rather than the abandoned woman (Penelope). Eurycleia holds a privileged position in the myth; she is one of the first to know that the Cretan stranger who arrives in Ithaca in Book 13 is Odysseus.²¹ She discovers this while bathing him —she recognizing the tell-tale scar just above his knee. However, Eurycleia is forbidden by Odysseus to reveal his true identity to anyone, not even Penelope. Perhaps, as a woman who was encouraged to write poetry at an early age and became successful, Rich could relate to being one of the few privileged women (poets) among men. Looking at

²¹ Odysseus reveals himself to Telemachus first in Book 14. In Book 19 Eurycleia discovers the scar and is sworn to secrecy. Thus, she knows his identity even before Penelope.

the poem as a “snapshot” its imagery is visually complex and provides an intriguing view of the *Odyssey*; it is a cross section of the epic. The poem focuses on the eyes; on vision, seeing, and weeping, and is narrated in the first person by Eurycleia. In the poem, Eurycleia says:

I have to weep when I see it, the grown boy fretting
for a father dawdling among the isles,
and the seascape hollowed out by that boy’s edged gaze.

(Rich 1963: 18)

Eurycleia is looking at the boy who is looking at the sea and both of their gazes *do* things; Eurycleia’s makes her weep while Telemachus’s hollows out the seascape, like a boy idly but fervently whittling a piece of drift wood. The metaphor is telling. The third and final stanza is less straightforward and is a collage of images:

But all time and everywhere
lies in ambush for the distracted eyeball
light: light on the ship racked up in port,
the chimney-stones, the scar whiter than smoke,
than her flanks, her hair, that true but ageing bride.

(Rich 1963: 18)

Here, the reader is not quite sure whether the “distracted eyeball” is Eurycleia’s or Telemachus’s. It is also possible that it references Odysseus. Eurycleia then continues and describes a series of images that are metonymically strung together in her mind which could very well sum up the tale of Odysseus’s return. Also, it cannot go unsaid that the only reference here to Penelope is “her flanks, her hair, that true but ageing bride”. Like a stabled horse, Penelope remains at home waiting for her Ithacan master. She is objectified and her humanity is effectively

denied. This in particular may tell us something of Rich's perspective at the time as a detached observer and as aforementioned, the fact that she identifies with Eurycleia is characteristic of her early poetry as one who can observe, yet can do little more than gaze.

As Rich's poetry evolved, she began to adopt a more confessional, openly-autobiographical style of poetry. However, Rich, unlike many confessional poets, was also deeply involved in social movements, particularly the Women's Movements of the 1960s and 70s which gave her poetry a context for the "I" as part of a "We". Therefore, hers is a poetry of rebellion and confession, but it is also inclusive and collective. In trying to define her self the female poet must confront mythology, male myths, and her own sense of self. As Sandra Gilbert suggests, this inevitably leads to the positing of "two (or more) selves, making her task of self-definition bewilderingly complex" (Gilbert 1977: 451). According to Gilbert, the self-defining woman poet has two selves, the first of which is public, social, and defined by circumstance (wife, mother, daughter) whereas the second is private, even secret. This second self is described as the doppelgänger, it harbours her anxieties, her rage, her desires— it is this self which fosters her uneasiness with male myths of femininity (Gilbert 1977: 451). Since Gilbert's article, feminist literary criticism has analyzed women's strategies of discovering and fashioning the self. This female self has been dissolved, doubled, fragmented, resurrected, and haunted. Nonetheless, many of Gilbert's points remain relevant especially the implicit question: What kind of self-definition is possible for

someone who feels herself imprisoned (within her self)?²² Answers to this question manifest themselves in varying forms: some poets identify wholly with the second self, the monstrous side like Sylvia Plath and Hélène Cixous, while others deny the very monstrosity of it and reinvent it as a goddess. Rich's poetry refuses to compromise one self or the other and indeed, this second self is not a shadow or "second" at all, but can exist synchronically with other selves. For Rich, it is simple evolution; these multiple selves exist because they have to, for the sake of survival. Indeed, as will be shown, women poets use the Penelope figure to work through ideas about the kind of self society expects versus the kind of self they wish to create.

Despite her activism, many critics often overlook the fact that Rich's poetry is a political project. However, M. S. Strine, who approaches Rich through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic and discursive strategies, is insightful in her reading of Rich's poetry. Strine explains Rich's Re-vision in the context of cultural economy; as a discourse poetry has the ability to affect other discourses which in turn help to construct the cultural production system. Thus, if poetry can affect the cultural economy, Rich's goal as a poet/activist is to "'de-naturalize' the patriarchal hierarchy of values," by imagining and working towards a "reconfiguration of social values so compelling as to displace patterns of patriarchal discourse altogether" (Strine 1989: 27 & 39) and it is on this point in particular where Adrienne Rich and Rosi Braidotti overlap. While Braidotti's approach is more theoretical, Rich attempts to "reconfigure" social values and create new patterns with her poetic voice (which is feminist and political). By narrating her own

²² Chapter 2, which focuses on Spanish poet Francisca Aguirre and C.P. Cavafy, will examine this question in greater detail as both poets express notions of the self as a prison.

experiences and therefore representing a variety of suppressed conflicts and contradictions inherent in women's lives she is able to promote cultural alternatives that are more enlightened to feminist principles and imaginative possibilities (28). Strine also explains that Rich places an emphasis on the text as interactive which is supported by Rich's own remark:

Instead of poems *about* experiences I am getting poems that *are* experiences... In the more recent poems something is happening, something has happened to me and, if I have been a good parent to the poem, something will happen to you who read it.

(Strine 1989: 28)

In this light, Rich's poetry can be read as a "collaborative" text which facilitates an interaction between poet and reader (Rich 1979: 180). Like a performance or like Judith Butler's account of self, Rich's poetic process *requires* an other. Thus, this notion of her text necessitating an active reader is consistent with a politically involved poetics; a poetics whose goal is rooted in activism rather than pure aesthetics.

It must also be explained that Adrienne Rich's *definition* of poetry differs greatly from her peers and critics. Her poetry is largely personal, but even her most intimate poems do not escape politics. In other words, for Rich, "[w]riting is more than a process of self-discovery; it is taking a stance as one absorbs a life into linguistic forms and imagines the social roles those forms can play" (Altieri 1993: 346). Much of her poetry involves self-discovery, perception, and emotion; however, as Charles Altieri points out, in his review of Rich's more recent poetry, for Rich poetry is also a "challenge to fence-sitting and in large part a redefinition

of aesthetic ideals” (Altieri 1993: 343). Rich requires that the self she defines in her poetry be one that takes on *responsibility* for that identity. This is also Judith Butler’s project: to create a more ethical relationship between the self and the other, and for each to see their ethical responsibility in this relationship. As a poet, Adrienne Rich finds it her responsibility to explore such relationships and to write them.

Clearly, Rich’s project is an ambitious one and the difficulty of her project is evident in the criticism she receives. She has been said to dramatize emotion to the edge of melodrama and many of her poems do indeed fail in their attempt to create a position from which the self can mobilize. She falls victim to anger, frustration, idealism, escapism, passivity and, at times, silence. Even the generally well received poems in her collection *Diving into the Wreck*²³, are criticized for being “emotionally at odds with the powers they would generate”(Altieri 1993: 350). However, she does not structure the backbone of her poetics on diatribes, lectures or laments. For Rich, speech itself is a “radical political act” and she refuses the victimhood that silence or conforming to traditional aesthetic ideals would encourage (Altieri 1993: 346).

Reconciling a political identity with questions of aesthetics is no easy task. Yet, the *process* of self-reflection is paramount for the purposes of promoting a

²³ By the 1970s Rich’s poetry was identifiably feminist. Rich’s collection *Diving into the Wreck* (1972), was part of this process of self-discovery as the poet struggled to find ways in which to reconcile her sense of self with the proposed societal models. In this collection, Rich explores androgyny as a possible solution to gender inequality. However, this soon proves inadequate. In the poems written between 1974 and 1976, *Twenty-One Love Poems*, there is a palpable turn towards radical lesbian feminism. Today many literary anthologies and histories categorize Rich as a “radical lesbian feminist” along with Mary Daly, Charlotte Bunch, and Audre Lorde (Madsen 2000: 152–56).

feminist ideology. Altieri praises Rich for her attempts, and claims that Rich triumphs over questions of aesthetics when she writes dialectically and attempts to understand “exactly what her assertions commit her to and the emotional price she must pay in remaining faithful to them” (Altieri 1993: 347). In an almost Penelopean sense, Rich is faithful to her vision. Like Judith Butler the notion of responsibility is essential to Rich’s work in facilitating an ethically and politically involved poetics. The next section will discuss the new perspective Rich gains through writing *Diving into the Wreck* (arguably her first overtly feminist collection) and which coincides chronologically with her theoretical work on Revision.

DIVING INTO THE WRECK

*I must drown completely and come out on the other side,
or rise to the surface after the third time down,
not dead to this life but with a new set of values,
my treasure dredged from the depth.
I must be born again or break utterly.*

H.D. *Tribute to Freud* (Doolittle 1974: 54)²⁴

Adrienne Rich's concept of Re-vision comes from her seminal essay, *When We Dead Awaken*; however, "When We Dead Awaken" is also the title of the second poem in Rich's seventh collection, *Diving into the Wreck* (1973). The poems were written in 1971 and 1972, and correspond with Rich's theoretical views expressed in the 1971 essay (Friedman 1983: 229). *Diving into the Wreck* illustrates Rich's journey to identify the strategies of patriarchal oppression that are inherent in language, images, and myths. There is also an emphasis on vision which is informed by the poet's new "radical feminine awareness" (cf. Madsen 2000). Critics tend to agree that *Diving into the Wreck* is Rich's first poetic project directed towards an explicitly feminist vision (Templeton 1994: 33).²⁵ The collection's eponymous poem is number eleven of the twenty four and sits firmly as the heart of the work. It negotiates the spaces between lyric and epic, between the personal and the collective (cf. Templeton 1994: 34–37). In "Tryin' to Talk with a Man", the first words of the collection prepare the reader for what will follow:

²⁴ I am unsure if there is any kind of "influence" happening here, but it seems that H.D. does talk about diving, drowning, and surfacing in a way that could be called "intertextuality" with Rich's "Diving into the Wreck".

²⁵ For a concise survey of criticism regarding *Diving into the Wreck* see Templeton 1994.

Out in this desert we are testing bombs,
that's why we came here.

(Rich 1973: 3)

This is a new frontier to be explored and it is a dangerous one.

The early poems represent a personal investigation and re-evaluation of gendered relationships. They probe for causes, but also simply investigate the narrator's complex and often conflicting field of emotions. The poems are siphoned towards the center in a movement that describes the individual's struggle becoming a collective one. It is the personal accumulating to form the political.

"Diving into the Wreck" is followed by "The Phenomenology of Anger", which is a longer poem that is divided into numbered sections and explores precisely what it describes; the narrator confesses, "fantasies of murder" admitting, "I suddenly see the world / as no longer viable" (Rich 1973: 28–29). The collection continues with two more sections both of which address the broader political implications of the struggle for power and the roles of sexual antagonism and dominance.²⁶ Examples include poems that address rape, victimization, and the Vietnam War, while the fourth and final section speaks to the civilizing process via the story of the wild boy of Aveyron entitled "Meditations for a Savage Child" (Templeton 1994: 34).

²⁶ Section 3 of the collection is untitled except for the epigraph: "I saw a beggar leaning on his crutch, / He said to me: Why do you ask for so much? / I saw a woman leaning in a door / She said, Why not, why not, why not ask for more?" —Leonard Cohen's "Bird on a Wire (as sung by Judy Collins).

Structurally, the collection rejects the use of formal rhyme schemes, regular rhyme patterns, and formal stanzas. Rich employs free association, free verse forms, strategic fragmentary style, collage, and juxtaposition, as well as a reclaiming of symbols, images, and myths that have been devalued by patriarchy (Madsen 2000: 170). These poetic devices work to expose the gender biases of poetic conventions such as symbolism and formalism which, as you will recall, she herself used in her earlier poetry.

The collection's epigraphs have been mentioned by several critics as an important frame for the poetry that follows. The first epigraph is from André Breton's novel *Nadja* originally published in 1928:

Perhaps my life is nothing but an image of this kind; perhaps I am doomed to retrace my steps under the illusion that I am exploring, doomed to try and learn what I should simply recognize, learning a mere fraction of what I have forgotten.

(Breton 1960: 12)

This quote lucidly expresses the anxieties that Rich must have felt in writing *Diving into the Wreck*; that her "exploring" was really just an aimless wandering and that her learning was not so profound, merely a simple self-evident truth. Fittingly, Breton's novel opens with the question: "*Who am I?*". It is a question that recurs throughout Rich's poetry collection and throughout her career.

The second epigraph is written by George Eliot, also known as Mary Anne Evans, a nineteenth-century writer whose male pen name afforded her the luxury of writing deeply psychological and subtly political novels. Rich uses a quotation

from the novel *Felix Holt, the Radical* as her second epigraph: “There is no private life which is not determined by a wider public life”. It is concise and direct and brings to mind the slogan used by the women’s movements of the 1970s, “the personal is political”.²⁷ The juxtaposition of these two epigraphs is telling; the second quotation both underplays and exaggerates the prior. It exacerbates the hopelessness and lack of control over one’s life that the first exudes but also allows for a deferral of responsibility. This aimless private life that attempts to recover what it has carelessly forgotten is determined by the public life. However, this can also be read differently; the second quotation makes the possibilities for action and activism real, and implicates the self in a wider socio-political context. The private journey of diving into the wreck, of finding what has been (systematically) forgotten, is not just a personal question. It is political. Thus, these two epigraphs encase the core of what Rich is trying to express in this collection

Before moving to the poetry, it is of further relevance to address the specific criticism that *Diving into the Wreck* has received namely, that the collection fails aesthetically. I would argue that this is, in part, due to a misunderstanding of the project’s context. *Diving into the Wreck* and Rich’s wider political project via poetry is better understood as an experiment to test various hypotheses with regards to her own feminist vision (Templeton 1994: 34). For example, Helen Vendler criticizes *Diving into the Wreck* by saying that “aesthetic failures” occur at moments when the poet is too personal and explicit with her pain indicating that the poetry becomes too much like a documentary (Vendler 1993). However,

²⁷ The quote is taken from Carol Hanisch’s 1969 speech of the same name. This Hanisch’s speech was published a year later in Firestone and Koedt 1970.

reading Rich's poetry simply as feminist propaganda or an intimate documentary does a disservice to her work. Her poems raise much more complex questions about individual pain, feminist awareness, political action, and the difficulty of negotiating the space between the personal and collective. In fact, I find Vendler's criticism exemplary for pointing out precisely what Rich does well. Rich's irreverence to the distancing of the author paradigm in traditional lyric poetry disrupts one's expectations. The core of Rich's work here is an exploration of the boundaries of gender; she tests the androgyne as a possibility which she later abandons. Thus, criticism of her "oversimplification" of gender (Nelson 1981: 156) through the use of androgyny forces too literal a reading and misses the point of Rich's poetics as (Re-)visionary and indeed exploratory. Her movement between genres or rather, her impertinence towards them, is part of her poetic process. In fact Templeton rightly points out that: "It is significant that Rich turns to poetry, even if outworn poetic figuration, to describe a possible future" (Templeton 1994: 41). Although Templeton finds the poem "When We Dead Awaken" too conventional and simplistic to match Rich's political intentions for the collection, she nonetheless admits that it is crucial that Rich "turns to poetry" as a way to move forward.

Indeed, it is no coincidence that Rich names the second poem of the collection after her 1971 essay *When We Dead Awaken*; it is absolutely relevant to her theoretical views at the time and interpreting it through this lens adds further insight into her project of Re-vision. "When We Dead Awaken" is separated into three numbered sections, each ranging from fourteen to twenty-three lines. The

first section, written in first person, is the longest and contains a weaving/knitting²⁸ reference in its closing lines:

even you, fellow-creature, sister,
sitting across from me, dark with love
working like me to pick apart
working like me to remake
this trailing knitted thing, this cloth of darkness
this woman's garment, trying to save the skein.

(Rich 1973: 5)

In the context of the poem, this excerpt portrays the despair the narrator feels about her inability to understand the world around her. She “tr[ies] to tell you” that “everything outside our skins is an image / of this affliction” (Rich 1973: 5). There is even a hint of bitterness and betrayal:

I trusted
souvenirs of what I once described
as happiness
everything outside my skin
speaks of the fault that sends me limping.

(Rich 1973: 5)

Rich paints a picture that is hauntingly familiar. The ineffability of this affliction makes the cure elusive. The poem speaks of the emotive anguish of not being able to give an account of ones self, yet it equally portrays the corporeal barriers of communication and betrayal: the skin is what separates her, what binds her, what labels her as *her*. It is what limits her, she is recognized only by this label. Her pain and confusion are both personal and shared. Her “fellow-creature, sister” shares in this experience, but also becomes an emblem of her lack, her faults that

²⁸ Although Rich's poem uses the word “knitting” while Penelope traditionally “weaves,” in this case, the metaphor still holds as both crafts involve a making and unmaking. Barbara Clayton's use of Rich's poem supports this idea (Clayton 2004: 122).

“send her limping”. However, there is also the element of hope. Indeed, one of the reasons Rich’s poetry is so fitting for a model of feminist poetics is that there is always hope, a small opening for possibilities. In this poem, she cleverly plays on “skin” and “skein” making the creation process of a textile a matter of life and death, connecting the myth to her present reality. These “sisters” are not creating a funeral shroud or a wedding dress, they are knitting for their lives; knitting to remake their very selves. These women/poets are un-weaving and re-weaving in order to form different patterns; yet this is not just an aesthetic metaphor, it is a political one as well. In these few lines Rich is able to describe precisely what her project of Re-vision is doing and what is at stake. She will use pieces of the past and remake them in a way that better serves a feminist and hopefully, a more humanist agenda. In this way, Rich’s poetics of Re-visions can be seen as a reading and writing strategy that contributes to the discussion in feminist theory of creating new narrative of self (Butler) and new affective memories (Braidotti). In this poem Rich attempts to show that we have a responsibility to others to confer recognition and that we are equally vulnerable in this scene. In other words, this “skein”, this narrative, is always communal, we always need an other, a “fellow-creature sister,” to perform this account of self. Like the other poets that will be examined in this thesis, Rich, (who is perhaps the most conscious of her political agenda as a poet), carefully and passionately moulds her poetics into a tool for activism.

Realizing what is at stake, Rich dives in. “Diving into the Wreck” is one of her most anthologized poems and the collection’s namesake. The poem has been interpreted as a quest for woman’s feminist consciousness, a solitary psychic

adventure, a descent into the collective past to uncover the strategies of oppression and the wreck that has become human relations, an exploration of androgyny as a possible resolution to sexual oppression, and conversely, the beginning of Rich's journey towards radical lesbian feminism. The allegory is clear: this is a quest. However, the specifics of the quest have been debated by critics. As a collection, *Diving into the Wreck* represents Rich's newfound willingness to plunge into the unknown, into the darker corners of her memories and experiences as well as the very depths of her self. This time she will not keep herself at a distance (as she did in *Snapshots* and earlier collections), yet she will not go unprepared. She arms herself: she makes sure she has read "the book of myths", loads her camera, and then checks the edge of her knife-blade. The diver, the first person narrator, begins by describing the precautions and preparations necessary to begin the dive. Here I will quote the poem in its entirety:

"Diving into the Wreck"

First having read the book of myths,
and loaded the camera,
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,
I put on
the body-armor of black rubber
the absurd flippers

the grave and awkward mask.
I am having to do this
not like Cousteau with his
assiduous team
aboard the sun-flooded schooner
but here alone.
There is a ladder
The ladder is always there
hanging innocently
close to the side of the schooner.
We know what it is for,
we who have used it.
Otherwise

it's a piece of maritime floss
some sundry equipment.

I go down.
Rung after rung and still
the oxygen immerses me
the blue light
the clear atoms
of our human air.
I go down.
My flippers cripple me,
I crawl like an insect down the ladder
and there is no one
to tell me when the ocean
will begin.

First the air is blue and then
it is bluer and then green and then
black I am blacking out and yet
my mask is powerful
it pumps my blood with power
the sea is another story
the sea is not a question of power
I have to learn alone
to turn my body without force
in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget
what I came for
among so many who have always
lived here
swaying their crenellated fans
between the reefs
and besides
you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail.
I stroke the beam of my lamp
slowly along the flank
of something more permanent
than fish or weed

the thing I came for:
the wreck and not the story of the wreck
the thing itself and not the myth
the drowned face always staring

toward the sun
the evidence of damage
worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty
the ribs of the disaster
curving their assertion
among the tentative haunters.

This is the place.
and I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair
streams black, the merman in his armored body
We circle silently
about the wreck
we dive into the hold.
I am she: I am he
whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes
whose breasts still bear the stress
whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies
Obscurely inside barrels
half-wedged and left to rot
we are the half-destroyed instruments
that once held to a course
the water-eaten log
the fouled compass

We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the one who find our way [sic]
back to the scene
carrying a knife, a camera
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear.

(Rich 1973: 22–24)

Looking at the structure of the poem one notices that the form mimics a ladder with short lines and the uneven albeit regular spacing between the short stanzas. There is also the repetition and “drumlike emphasis” on the word “down” (Gilbert 1997:146) and, in the fifth stanza repetition of the word “power” along with the bubbling sounds of the alliteration signal the diver’s descent. It is a sensory description of the diver’s plunge and a metaphor for poetry as the instrument which allows Rich to find the wreck.

As aforementioned, the poem's most obvious device is allegory; and the diver's descent into the sea is likened to a journey to the underworld. Indeed, Roger Gilbert asserts that the sea is the medium through which Rich comes to know the wreck (Gilbert 1997:148). Gilbert approaches Rich's poem through the lens of memory and historical knowledge and argues that Rich portrays the sea as a wilderness that cannot be "cultivated" or "tamed" and "like memory, the sea preserves traces of past trauma that can only be inspected, acknowledged and laboriously brought to light, never revised or effaced" (Gilbert 1997:145). Although I agree, that in this poem the sea represents the ill explored territory of enculturation, I find it antithetical that either history or memory are things that cannot be erased, and even less likely that they can be likened to the sea in such a way. If there can be any parallel here it must surely be that the sea is a changeable medium—one which erodes boundaries, abruptly creates them, and which shows and hides its treasures and traumas. The sea does "preserve" ruins, but indiscriminately and usually only partially and in *this* I would liken it to memory. Furthermore, memory must certainly have the capacity to be "revised". Indeed, if it did not have the ability to change, Rich's strategy of Re-vision would be meaningless and the future as a whole would be a bleak one.

A Freudian analysis would argue that the sea is her own unconscious: she plunges into what has always been a repressed part of her own self. In fact, if one recalls Rich's older poetry it becomes obvious that Rich could *see* the wreck (i.e. Aunt Jennifer's Tigers) but she did not yet perhaps have the tools or the courage to explore it; she refrained from diving and merely described the wreck in a detached

manner. This is not to say that I agree with a strictly Freudian reading. I would argue that the medium for exploration is the poetry itself which would be more consistent with someone like Rich whose poetry is an act of resistance and an attempt to advocate social change.

Whether the wreck stands for the self or the collective state of society, Rich uses poetry to explore it. In looking at Rich's struggle with what she finds, Gilbert brings up a good point explaining in Rich's own metaphorical terms: "it's not nearly as hard to dive into the wreck as to bring the wreck back up to the surface" (1997: 152). Though this is a valid point, it is not entirely relevant to the poem nor is it Rich's goal. Hauling centuries' worth of patriarchal baggage up to the surface is not the diver's intention and it is not Rich's intention either. Her poetry aims to bring to the surface the *knowledge* of the wreck, to show others its location, and in the process bring to light the personal and political experiences entangled in this wreck. She means to uncover some of the ways in which it was produced, sunk, ruined, so that it is not to be repeated. The wreck in itself has the potential to be more than an underwater graveyard: after exploring the wreck, sifting through its horrors and treasures, what strength must the diver have to come back? She herself must bring a part of the wreck back with her, at least in memory, and at worst, she herself could potentially become a living "wreck" as many who have dared to explore this realm have not come back from it. Indeed, the poem's own loss of punctuation mimics the loss of control the diver feels as s/he plunges into the water. This is the risk one must take: the risk of never again being able to see the world in quite the same way. However, this is also the reward. Having seen the wreck, and seen the book of myths in which our names do not appear, what is one

to do? Adrienne Rich would write a Re-vision, and this is exactly what other feminist poets have done. The remainder of this chapter will discuss why Penelope rather than other mythical characters has been chosen for feminist appropriations.

A PENELOPEAN POETICS

Despite the fact that in the poem “When We Dead Awaken,” the reference to Penelope is at best, vague, Barbara Clayton, author of *A Penelopean Poetics*, chooses Adrienne Rich’s poem to conclude her final chapter. In doing so, she not only names Rich’s poem as a “Penelopean text” but also says that it “confirms the equation between a Penelopean poetics and a feminine poetics” (Clayton 2004: 122). This lends a great deal of importance to a poem that is not even nominally about Penelope. Thus, one must ask: what is it that makes Rich’s poem *Penelopean*? According to Clayton, Rich’s poem illustrates the process of unweaving and reweaving; it is “two women, metaphorically unravelling and re-knitting some vital part of themselves” (Clayton 2004: 122). Weaving as a process then, is integral to Clayton’s idea of “Penelopean Poetics.” It has become a pervasive metaphor for women writers and for Rich’s idea of Re-vision. This section will outline the debate over why Penelope, rather than other mythical weavers, has been a useful figure for women writers and then will move on to discuss particular Re-visions of Penelope in poetry.

WOMEN WEAVERS: THE DEBATE

In the context of Ancient Greek Myth, there are several famous figures related to the task of weaving. Arachne is arguably the most famous, followed by Penelope²⁹, Helen of Troy³⁰, Philomela³¹, Medea³², and Clytemnestra.³³ The tale of Arachne, as related by Ovid, is one of pride and rebellion.³⁴ A girl from a modest home who possesses an extraordinary talent for weaving boasts that she is better than even Athena, the goddess of weaving. After appearing to Arache as an old woman in an attempt to warn the girl that such arrogance is not well tolerated, the goddess sheds her disguise and a weaving contest ensues. Athena weaves a cloth that depicts mortals being punished for their blasphemy while Arachne weaves images of the gods' transgressions and cruelties towards humans. Athena is enraged by both the girl's boldness and by her talent; the goddess tears Arachne's tapestry to shreds and assaults her with a shuttle. Stricken and overwhelmed, Arachne attempts to hang herself. Athena then takes pity on the girl

²⁹ Penelope weaves a "web" on a loom which is to eventually become the shroud for Odysseus's father Laertes. It is interesting that in revisions of the myth, writers take creative liberties with what kind of textile Penelope weaves. Some refer to it generally as a web, while others call it a tapestry. The first mention of Penelope's web is in *Od.* 2: 84–122. In the original Greek, the phrase "ἱστὸν ὑφαίνε" refers to the actual textile produced by weaving and is translated into English as "web". According to Liddell and Scott, ἱστός literally means "anything set upright." The first definition is "mast" and the second is "beam of a loom, which stood upright instead of lying horizontal in our looms" (Liddell, Scott, et al. 1996: 842).

³⁰ In Helen's first appearance in the *Iliad* (*Il.* 3: 120–145) she is weaving a tapestry that depicts the Trojan War. For Helen as a weaver see (Kruger, 2001). See also: (Suzuki 1989).

³¹ Philomela, the daughter of Pandion I (king of Athens) weaves a web in order to send an encoded message to her sister, Procne, about her abduction, rape, mutilation, and imprisonment at the hands of Procne's new husband. According to Ovid, Philomela's textile is: "a web upon a crude—Thracian—loom/ and, on a white background, [she] weaves purple signs: / the letters that denounce the savage crime." (Ovid 1993: 200). See also Joplin 1993.

³² Medea's textile, a garment, is dipped in dragon's blood and is used to kill her rival Kreusa (also known as Glauce). See Euripides's *Medea*.

³³ Just after Agamemnon's return from the Trojan War his wife, Clytemnestra, murders him. When Agamemnon goes to bathe, Clytemnestra entangles him in a web and murders him. In some variants of the myth it is Clytemnestra alone who kills him (*cf.* Pindar Pythian XI) in others, Clytemnestra is aided by her love Aegisthus. See Aeschylus's *Oresteia*.

³⁴ See Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 6: 1–145.

and turns her into a spider so that she and her descendents can continue to weave yet pose no threat to the goddesses' superiority.

Arachne's bold defiance of power makes her an alluring character for writers and critics. Indeed, within the circle of critics who use weaving as a metaphor for poetics, the main contention (as to who is a model feminist weaver), is usually between Penelope and Arachne. Penelope is the more modest weaver while Arachne challenges the power of the gods outright. In looking at Penelope and Arachne side by side there are several differences which contribute to this debate. One of the most obvious differences between them is that Penelope is married. This is significant insofar as she is already a commodity in the patriarchal system of exchange; she has passed from her father's house to her husband's. This is also important because in delaying her remarriage to one of the suitors, Penelope essentially creates chaos within this same system. Penelope remains relatively autonomous in her position as not-yet-but-soon-to-be-declared widow. However, by remaining in social limbo, she creates problems within the community. Firstly, Telemachus's inheritance of the estate depends on Penelope *not* remarrying until he has reached manhood which automatically places him at odds with the suitors.³⁵ Secondly, her delay of marriage keeps the one-hundred and eight³⁶ suitors in suspense, which means all of these men remain single when they could be marrying other women leaving many Ithacan families with unmarried

³⁵ So far, Penelope has done all that she can to protect her son's claim to inheritance (had she remarried when Telemachus was young or bore new children his claim would have been contended). However, at this moment in the *Odyssey* the suitors are becoming restless and have even formed a pact to kill Telemachus and divide up the estate (*Od.*16: 360–390). Penelope, therefore, is in a difficult situation. If Telemachus is indeed now a man (a fact which is debatable throughout the epic), then she can remarry and move to her new husband's estate leaving her son to tend to Odysseus's household. There is, however, a debate about when exactly Telemachus reaches maturity. For an overview on this debate see Heitman chapter three "How Old is Telemachus" (Heitman 2005: 50–62).

³⁶ *Od.* 16: 277–281.

daughters.³⁷ Penelope's liminal status within the system of patriarchy creates confusion and it is this confusion that helps her to maintain some degree of power and agency. It is this working within the system that mirrors the struggle of women poets.

Penelope's marital status sets her apart from Arachne, yet hardly makes her unique among other mythical weavers, many of whom are married.³⁸ The most important distinction between Penelope and Arachne (as well as the other mythical figures) is their weaving techniques. As Kathryn Sullivan Kruger points out, most of these weaving tales are "product-oriented" and the plot hinges on the woman finishing her weaving so that she can use the finished textile for some plan of action. Philomela divulges Tereus's crimes, Clytemnestra ensnares her husband, and Arachne uses her web to prove herself a more skilful weaver than Athena (Kruger 2001: 58). However, for Helen and Penelope the task of weaving is not goal oriented in the same way. Their weaving is "process-oriented". This distinction is critical. Although creating a "rebel text" (as Kruger calls Arachne's tapestry) is a way of protesting patriarchal order, it still partakes in the practice of an economy based on competition and production.³⁹ On the other hand, by deferring the finished product, Helen and Penelope effectively deny patriarchy the ability to label and consume their work. Indeed, Helen is worth considering and remains a particularly alluring character in Modern Greek Literature. As Efi Spenzou argues, Helen is also characterized by "undecidability" (Spenzou 2006: 358). However, Penelope is the only one who both weaves and unweaves. Barbara

³⁷ Cf. Kruger 2001: 26–7 and Gregory 1996: 16–19.

³⁸ Helen, Medea, and Clytemnestra are married however; they are not in the same social predicament as Penelope.

³⁹ For a more on Arachne see Miller 1986 and Kruger 2001.

Clayton argues that this process has been interpreted as cyclical⁴⁰ and defiant of an ending. Kruger also emphasizes the open-endedness of Penelope's weaving and by applying Julia Kristeva's idea of the semiotic, she explains that Penelope's web suspends the suitors' demand (that she remarry) and so suspends the Symbolic Order.⁴¹ However, she concludes that:

Penelope's weaving is a tool that guarantees her freedom, or, rather, her status as Odysseus's property. In her hands weaving constitutes an instrument of resistance; although, what she opposed is also what she endorses —the system of marriage... Her resistance is a form of heroism endorsed by the patriarchy within which she operates.

(Kruger 2001: 80)

For Kruger, Arachne's defiance of the patriarchal system is preferable to Penelope's working within it.

⁴⁰ Clayton reads this process as cyclical and connects it to women's bodies and the menstrual cycle (Clayton 2004: 86)

⁴¹ The Symbolic Order is a term used by Julia Kristeva, taken from Jacques Lacan, which is used to describe the structured set of imaginaries that construct "reality." Women in particular are seen as "other" because of the patriarchal nature of this symbolic system. For an overview on this see Kristeva and Moi 1986.

Nancy K. Miller's essay, *Arachnologies*, is another participant in the debate over classical weavers and she looks to weaving in order to explore "possible tropes of feminist literary agency" (Miller 1986: 77). Miller's weaver of choice is Arachne and she uses Roland Barthes's model of the subject to justify this. In describing the process of producing a text, Barthes uses a spider metaphor which Miller then quotes and connects to Arachne. This is Miller quoting Barthes, "the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of [her] web" [(Miller 1986: 79); originally from (Barthes 1975: 64)]. The problem I find with this parallel is that Barthes chooses the spider's web *over* the spider; the product is privileged over the artist. This idea of "text production" is similar to the notion of "product-oriented" weaving and thus, it too seems to fall short of exemplifying a model for a contemporary feminist poetics.

Still other critics debate the value of Penelope's web (even metaphorically) claiming that it is not a creative "text" but simply a utility. For example, Kruger devalues Penelope's weaving explaining:

The shroud she weaves, as far as the audience is concerned, is blank. Her weaving does not attempt to tell a story, for she is not a story-teller. By weaving and then unravelling what has been woven, Penelope's work does not represent Homer's voice, for the very activity it suggests (the poet's voice as it composes a story) is cancelled out by the opposite activity of unravelling. All that remains, then is silence, that stillness of the loom at dawn, when Penelope must begin her task all over again.

(Kruger 2001: 82)

There are several points here that must be addressed. Firstly, how can one argue that Penelope is *not* a story-teller? Is there only one kind of story that is told linearly from beginning to end? Are there not tales that go back upon themselves?⁴² Moreover, this is precisely *why* feminists have appropriated Penelope: because she does *not* speak with Homer's voice and she is not a morality lesson like Arachne or Philomela⁴³ (who are punished for their insolence by being turned into animals⁴⁴ and therefore essentially silenced). Although Penelope's goal is to *not* finish the web⁴⁵ (and she does indeed unravel it nightly) this does not mean that her work at the loom is rendered non-existent. This kind of value judgment would in fact exemplify the view of the patriarchal economy, the idea that "one must produce something, an object for consumption, in order to be of value to society" and Penelope refuses this.⁴⁶ Indeed, if all works of art were weighed against the scale of the phallogocentric economy, oral poetry would also be measured as "a zero" (Clayton 2004: 94). It is this refusal that feminists find alluring. It is also precisely because Penelope works *within* patriarchy that women writers can relate to her. Women writers must enter language and by doing so

⁴² Certainly in the age of hypertext it would be difficult to even argue that daily encounters are rendered linearly *c.f.* Tsagalis 2008 especially the introduction. Alternatives to linear narration range from frame tales like Scheherazade's in *One Thousand and One Nights* (which are arguably linear with varying divergences) to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and even the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series of by Edward Packard Bantam Books from 1979–1998. For more on non-linear narrative and Feminism see Homans 1994.

⁴³ Philomela is also appropriated by feminist theory as one who was silenced yet finds a way to speak through art. The most famous example is Joplin-Kleindienst's "The Voice of the Shuttle Is Ours" which was originally published in *The Stanford Literature Review* 1 (1984): 25–53, and can now be found in Joplin 1993.

⁴⁴ Arachne is turned into a spider and Philomela into a nightingale. See Ov. *Met.* 16.

⁴⁵ As mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis Penelope does eventually complete the textile; however there is confusion within the epic as to *when* Penelope finishes the shroud. In Book 24 Antinous suggests that the web "has been finished for some time, while Amphimedon speaking a month later, says that it was completed just before Odysseus's return" (Lowenstam 2000: 334).

⁴⁶ I realize that it may be anachronistic to cast a capitalist view on weaving in ancient times, however, because I am looking at contemporary revisions it seems appropriate and inevitable.

must act to some degree within the confines of the dominant ideology or the Symbolic Order. Thus, Penelope expresses the dilemma of the woman writer.

So, why is Penelope a better model for a feminist poetics? Penelope is preferable because Penelope's process of weaving and unweaving exemplifies Adrienne Rich's Re-vision. It provides women writers with a strategy of approaching canonical texts and even creating a new kind of "Penelopean" text which can be seen as a specific type of Re-vision. Perhaps the best description of a "Penelopean text" is by Peggy Kamuf, who Clayton quotes:

The work (or play) of the Penelopean text implies a mutual interruption of fiction and history, feminine and masculine space. Its back and forth movement makes/unmakes, ravel/unravels logic or "natural oppositions... It is the subject that is written into the text, and thus into the play of differences with itself".

(Kamuf 1988; Clayton 2004: 87)

Indeed, based on this description, Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck" could be categorized as a Penelopean text.

The Penelope figure appears to have two vital connections to feminist poetics. The first is that Penelope, as a weaver, creates a work or a piece of art much like the poet. Yet in writing about Penelope, the poet begins to realize that this image of Penelope, ever-faithful wife to Odysseus is merely a construct. Like the famous recognition scene in the *Odyssey*, the woman poet slowly comes to recognize those hands, those scars, as her own and in recognizing her self in Penelope (a spectre of "woman" created by patriarchal ideologies and myths) she can begin to

un-weave this image. The second reason that Penelope is preferable for a Revisionist model of poetics is because of her re-weaving; her art does not stop with the recognition, but continues on to then imagine a new self that is not prescribed. This movement from recognition to a new narrative mirrors Butler's call for giving an account of self offering a link between feminist theory and feminist poetics.

RE-VISIONS OF PENELOPE IN CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S POETRY

For some women poets Penelope acts as a substitute for their own voice, to narrate their suffering and despair, while others use Penelope's weaving and unweaving to represent not only the creative processes involved in writing, but also the process of self-making. Many of the writers that will be discussed in this section recognize that in taking on a mythical character as their narrator, they also address the Western canon of literature more broadly. This strategy is particularly alluring to feminist poets because it acknowledges that there is a process of exclusion here: in creating a canon derived from an idealized Western heritage in which Penelope has come to represent the ideal woman, they exclude other possibilities for women's representation. Once this kind of storytelling is revealed as ideologically bound, one can begin to question its agenda and this is precisely what these poets do in their Re-visions.

PENELOPE AND TRADITION

To begin, let us look at a few poems which use Penelope as a symbol for women's traditional place in myth. Such poems usually involve a narrator who expresses feelings of entrapment within the frame of a traditional plot. For example, in Linda Pastan's poem "You Are Odysseus" the narrator likens herself to Penelope, with a husband that "return[s] home each evening / tentative, a little angry" (Pastan 1982: 46–47). The narrator says that at first she thought of herself as one of the Sirens, "cast up / on strewn sheets / at dawn", but then comes to realize that she cannot be a siren because: "[I] hide my song / under my tongue— / merely Penelope after all." Her poem concludes with "only my weaving is real." The poem's title is the key. The narrator is silenced. She is not the bold temptress, but "merely Penelope"; however, we still do not know *who* she is. As Clayton points out, she is "almost a nonentity" (Clayton 2004: 99) whose identity depends upon her husband. If *you* are Odysseus then I must be Penelope. Yet without Odysseus, this "I" has no identity.

Pastan then revisits Penelope twice more in the poems "At the Loom"⁴⁷ and "To Penelope after reading Cavafy's Ithaca"⁴⁸. C.P. Cavafy's poem is famous for privileging the journey over the homecoming. Instead of hoping to arrive home quickly, his Odyssean narrator hopes the journey is a long one. Pastan's version responds to the question left lingering after Cavafy's poem; if Odysseus hopes for a long journey, rather than a homecoming, then what does Penelope hope for?

⁴⁷ "At the Loom" is part of a series of poems entitled "Rereading the Odyssey in Middle Age" from (Pastan 1988). See also Pastan's essay Pastan 1988: 273–85.

⁴⁸ From Pastan: 2002.

Pastan's answer is that Penelope too wishes that Odysseus's journey is long because she has come to enjoy solitude. Pastan's poem follows the rhythm and diction of Cavafy's closely; however, she revises the metaphors of her poem to reflect Penelope's situation. For example, where Cavafy describes arriving in a new harbour, Pastan describes staying in an idealized Ithaca. The second stanza of Cavafy's poem begins:

May there be many a summer morning when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you come into harbours seen for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind—
as many sensual perfumes as you can.

(Cavafy 1983: 66–67)

Pastan begins her poem with a similarly sensual description. However, instead of foreign places and exotic goods, Pastan describes a more domestic scene:

Let the days pass slowly, in Ithaca.
Let there be many summer days
with their lingering, lemony scents,
with all the perfumes of the sea
pricking your fine nostrils.
Your stuccoed walls, so cool to the touch.

(Pastan 2002: 39)

Though Pastan's poem is very similar to Cavafy's in style, the change of title also indicates a change in causality; the catalyst for Pastan's narrator is not Ithaca. In her poem, Odysseus takes the place of Ithaca in functioning as a causal entity and this may be a hint that Pastan is being ironic. In Cavafy's poem the narrator says: "Ithaca gave you the marvellous journey / Without her you would not have set

out.” Pastan parallels this twice in her poem. The first instance is almost midway through the poem:

But never forget Odysseus.
without him and his journey
the olive trees wouldn’t seem bent
in a passion of longing; your loom
would have stayed unstrung.

(Pastan 2002: 39)

The second instance is in the closing lines:

without Odysseus and his journey
there would be no tapestried story.

(Pastan 2002: 39)

Instead of an elusive homeland, Pastan’s Penelope deals with an elusive husband who functions as the cause of her creative odyssey. Pastan’s narrator tells Penelope to be grateful for the time she had alone with her weaving and, unlike Aguirre’s Penelope, Pastan’s Penelope relishes her solitude.

Although Pastan’s poem may appear indicative of a more independent Penelope, neither Odysseus nor Penelope escapes gender norms: “he must come back at last” and “[she] must open [her] arms.” In ironically mimicking Cavafy’s prescriptive style, Pastan attempts to show the absurdity of such expectations. By comparing Penelope to a “fine actress” and saying “Let others applaud you / for what they call patience” Pastan further questions traditional interpretations of Penelope as the wife who waits, pointing out that this is only one way to read the myth. Furthermore, when the narrator tells Penelope to be thankful for her “tapestried story,” Pastan’s ironic tone gives the reader pause to ask: should she be grateful?

And what is the price one is willing to pay for this tapestry, this story?⁴⁹ Pastan's poem can be read as a Re-vision because even by the end of the poem the reader is unsure how they should interpret Penelope's situation. Is she lucky to have been able to create this tapestry? Or, is the narrator being ironic since Penelope is only allowed to be creative while her husband away? By questioning the value of Penelope's "tapestryed story" Pastan implicitly asks the reader to question not only the traditional construction of the Penelope figure and Cavafy's version of the poem, but her own version as well.

Comparably, Annemarie Austin's⁵⁰ Penelope feels constrained in her role as woman and weaver; however, Austin's Penelope refuses to return to the traditional role. In "Penelope" the narrator speaks out against tradition. There is a nod to Arachne as the Penelopean narrator says: "History has me in this scene as the trapped fly... Really I am the spider". In the creative process of weaving, "everything is potential"⁵¹ and in the end, the narrator purposefully, "chooses not to choose." Here the narrator is Penelope, refusing to choose a suitor, but she is also a woman who refuses to choose between the traditionally imposed roles of women in myth as either virgin or whore/monster. Marilyn Hacker portrays a slightly edgier Penelope and her poem addresses the mythical tradition more generally as a genre that maintains rigid gender stereotypes. Hacker's poem

⁴⁹ This last line about Penelope's "tapestryed story" is similar to Yannis Ritsos's poem "Philomela" in which references the eponymous mythical weaver: "Still, we say: without all the rest, those things now contemptible, would this brilliant robe and the nightingale exist?" (Ritsos 1991: 91). In both cases the waiting and suffering of woman is rendered insignificant in light of the creation of the art.

⁵⁰ Annemarie Austin has three Penelope poems in her collection *The Flaying of Marsyas*: "Back and Forth," "She," "Penelope" (Austin 1995:13, 52, and 55).

⁵¹ Kathleen Raine's poem "The Clue" references several female mythological figures but at the end seems disenchanted with myth because it can do nothing for the future: "at the end of a spent myth/ Remembering the past, but not the future, / (she) Has lost her clue, like an old spider, / For time undoes us, darkness defaces/ The figures of Penelope's night loom." From Raine 2000.

“Mythology” places Penelope in a modern context and questions the relationship between contemporary women (poets) and women of classical myth. It begins with:

Penelope as a *garçon manqué*
weaves sonnets on a barstool among sailors,
tapping her iambs out on the brass rail.

(Hacker 1986: 104)

This is not a Homeric portrait of Penelope, yet its engagement with myth reveals some of the absurdities inherent in societal expectations of femininity. The poem ends with the narrator questioning the role of a woman or a “girl” in society:

(“What Does a Girl Do?”) What *does* a girl do
but walk across the world, her kid in tow,
stopping at stations on the way, with friends
to tie her to the mast when she gets too
close to the edge? And when the voyage ends,
what does a girl do? Girl, that’s up to you.

(Hacker 1986: 104)

By reframing mythical references, such as having “Penelope” be “tie[d] to the mast when she gets too close to the edge,” Hacker highlights how restrictive and absurd traditional notions of gender can be. When Odysseus is tied to the mast it is because he is cunning; he wants to listen to the Sirens’ song without falling victim to them. We know that Odysseus’s voyage is about adventure, but Hacker’s poem repositions the question and asks: what is Penelope’s voyage like? Or, in the context of the poem: What does a *girl* do? Her answer is disturbing: Penelope “walk[s] across the world, her kid in tow,” and when she “gets too close to the edge,” her friends “tie her to the mast.” The Penelope/Girl has no agency. She did not ask to be tied to the mast for the sake of adventure; she is tied to the mast to

keep her from jumping overboard, to keep her bound to her role as wife and mother. However, despite such ominous implications, the poem does end on a more positive note: “what does a girl do? Girl, that’s up to you.” The final line indicates that this kind of voyage is not the only one available to a “Girl.”

PENELOPE AND STORYTELLING

As Marilyn Hacker indicates, there are many ways to tell Penelope's tale, and for some poets Penelope's weaving is used as a metaphor for storytelling itself. Carolyn G. Heilbrun claims that Penelope is "without a story"; however, she qualifies:

Because all women, having been restricted to only one plot, are without a story. In literature and out, through all recorded history, women have lived by a script they did not write... that, indeed is the chief source of patriarchal power: that it is embodied in unquestioned narratives.

(Heilbrun 1990: 108–9)

For Heilbrun then, Penelope's web is not blank it just mimics the hackneyed plot that women have been restricted to and, as shown, this is something that poets like Marilyn Hackler address. Indeed, women writers in particular tend to focus on Penelope's weaving as her only outlet in an essentially powerless situation and one which reveals the inner creativity of woman. Many women poets then go a step further and address not only the restrictive nature of mythical plots, but also the process of storytelling itself. Contemporary renderings of the Penelope myth cast her as the storyteller and serve to point out that storytelling has traditionally been used as a way to reinforce societal norms. Such poems attempt to defy normative modes of storytelling by using various narrative techniques. One such strategy is by delaying or defying ending which is consistent with Penelope's postponement of completing her textile.

The next few poems to be discussed represent a type of Re-vision that deals with the power of storytelling and also how storytelling has been restricted to conventions of linearity. For example, Jorie Graham's poem "Self-Portrait as Hurry and Delay [Penelope at her Loom]",⁵² figures weaving and storytelling as a place of potentiality, as well as a place of healing:

3
to see what was healed under there by the story when it lifts,
by color and progress and motive when they lift,

4
the bandage the history gone into thin air,

5
to have them for an instant in her hands both at once,
the story and its undoing

(Graham 1987: 67)

Like Austin's poem, the mention of history here is telling. History is what roots experiences in time; it takes *events* and makes them *things*, often boiling life down to mere lists and dates. There is also a destructiveness inherent here which is a necessary part of the process of Re-vision, to undo the traditional story in order to create a new one.

The tension between the story *telling* and the *ending* can be felt as the poem continues:

⁵² This is her third poetry collection *The End of Beauty* and is considered one of her most original pieces. See Jarman 1992: 252.

...wanting to be narrowed, rescued, into a story again, a
transparence we
can't see through, a lover

15

approaching ever approaching the unmade beneath him,
knotting and clasping it within his motions,
wrapping himself plot plot and denouement over the roiling
openness....⁵³

(Graham 1987: 67)

Like Wallace Steven's poem "The World as Meditation", the lover draws near but never arrives (Kossman 2001: 271).⁵⁴ However, in this case the "ever approaching" is what creates the story, it is the push and pull of defying a linear plot, "her fingers dart like his hurry darts over this openness he can't / find the edge of...". He tries to pin down the tale, find its edges, wrap himself in it, while she perpetually creates and changes it. Here, Graham also plays with desire (for an ending) and the idea of homecoming, which in the *Odyssey* marks the end of Odysseus's adventures. The narrator asks:

16

Yet what would she have if he were to arrive?
Sitting enthroned what would either have?
It is his wanting in the threads she has to keep alive for him,
scissoring and spinning and pulling the long minutes free, it is

17

the shapely and mournful delay she keeps alive for him the
breathing

(Graham 1987: 67)

⁵³ Ellipsis is from the original.

⁵⁴ Interestingly enough, in Jarman's review of Graham's collection he refers to Steven's as well: "Graham's desire is to locate beauty not in the finished product but in the process of composition, which includes the nervous and at times anxious mind in the act of finding not only what will suffice, in Wallace Stevens's terms, but what it will create" (Jarman 1992: 255).

Against tradition, which claims that Penelope longs for Odysseus's arrival, the narrator asks, "what would she have if he were to arrive?" Right now, she has her creativity, and his arrival would end that. In the poem, he is concerned only with the capturing of the plot, the goal; he is the hero, while she is "Homer". In Graham's poem, the Penelope/narrator is figured as the poet and the Fates; she is that power which keeps him "breathing" because there would be no story without his delay and the poem's conclusion reaffirms this by its refusal to "end":

22

under the kissing of the minutes under the wanting to go on living

23

beginning always beginning the ending as they go to sleep beneath
her.

(Graham 1987: 67)

Thus, there is never a final ending; she is "always beginning" the ending. The narrator keeps her text in constant motion because finishing it would constitute the end of the storytelling process.

Rebelling against linear notions of time and endings are part of the theme of Graham's collection, *The End of Beauty*. She continues to explore these concepts in the poem "Ravel and Unravel" which begins with a Penelope reference:

So that it's right, isn't it, that she should come to love it best,
the unravelling, every night,
the hills and cypresses turning back
into thread, then patience again, then...
is it emptiness?
All the work of the eyes and breath and fingertips that forces
the three dimensions down
into each other going now, all of an instant, back
to what other
place?

(Graham 1987: 68)

In the *Odyssey*, Penelope's web trick is repeated three times,⁵⁵ and is interpreted as a ruse; she is weaving and unweaving so that she will not be forced to marry one of the suitors. However, building on the ideas from the earlier poem, "Self-Portrait as Hurry and Delay [Penelope at her Loom]", Graham envisions a Penelope who is not unpicking her weaving as part of a race against time to delays a remarriage. She does it because she enjoys it. This Penelope enjoys the unravelling best because it defies the entire idea of time as a part of a structured, linear reality. She does not want life to be squashed into moments that are numbered (this is perhaps why her earlier poem "Self Portrait..." is broken up into numbered fragments). Moreover, once the weaving has stopped, the possibilities end and the weaving becomes another tick of the clock, each stitch is an interval that can be quantified. The poem concludes:

⁵⁵ The web trick is repeated in *Od.* 2: 93–110, 19: 137–56, 24: 129–48. For more on this see Lowenstam 2000.

Then the beautiful, the view all round us, with that crimp of use in
it,
then the husband minutes bearing down, bearing down—

(Graham 1987: 68)

The landscape that the narrator experiences is seen by her companion as something of use, to be noted, catalogued, filed away, and this kind of structuring is oppressive. However, although the poem ends with the words “bearing down,” it actually refuses this pressure. The poem ends like this, with a dash, hanging defying ending and refusing to quantify experience within the patriarchal economy. In fact, the entire collection is about defying endings, and how crushing reality into minutes and intervals somehow damages it, causing “the end of beauty”.

In addition to defying the normative nature of storytelling as linear, many feminist Re-visions disrupt ideas about storytelling through questioning its truthfulness and by making the reader doubt whether or not the narrator is trustworthy.⁵⁶ A prime

⁵⁶ It is worth mentioning Alicia Ostriker’s poem “Homecoming” from *A Woman Under the Surface: Poems and Prose Poems*. The poem begins by questioning the truthfulness of storytelling and myth: “We know that nothing / It says is true, necessarily. When the man / Returned, he was still attractive / And strong, after a decade of war and a decade / Of adventure, according to the story.” The poem goes on to provide an overview of Odysseus’s return having Penelope demand the suitors be killed, “In terror and tears/ Kill the sonofabitches! Kill them / She said”. The final stanzas comment not only on Homeric myth, but also on classical scholarship surrounding them:

A man is a fool who
Questions his weeping wife too curiously
(While the carcasses pile up) and a woman is a fool
Who thinks this life
can ever offer safety,

My husband says that, and he happens to be
The man who wrote the brutal but idealistic

example of such a Re-vision is A.E. Stallings's poem "The Wife of the Man of Many Wiles," which I will quote in its entirety:

Believe what you want to. Believe that I wove,
If you wish, twenty years, and waited, while you
Were knee-deep in blood, hip-deep in goddesses.
I've not much to show for twenty years weaving—
I have but one half-finished cloth at the loom.
Perhaps it's the lengthy, meticulous grieving.
Explain how you want to. Believe I unravelled
At night what I stitched in the slow siesta,
How I kept them all waiting for me to finish,
The suitors, you call them. Believe what you want to.
Believe that they waited for me to finish,
Believe I beguiled them with nightly un-doings.
Believe what you want to. That they never touched me.
Believe your own stories, as you would have me do,
How you only survived by the wise infidelities.
Believe that each day you wrote me a letter
That never arrived. Kill all the damn suitors
If you think it will make you feel better.

(Stallings 1999: 36)

Characteristic of many contemporary feminist Re-vision poems, the language of Stallings's poem is blunt and ironic. Clearly, this poem is not only addressed to Odysseus, but also to Homer and the wider discourse of patriarchal narratives: "Believe your own stories, as you would have me do". In doing so, Stallings convincingly and effectively points out the constructedness of myth and the politics involved in their repetition and interpretation. Odysseus does not *know* if Penelope has remained faithful and that she grieved for him daily; however, to preserve his own sense of superiority he convinces himself that she does.

Iliad, while I am the woman who wrote
The romantic, domestic *Odyssey*, filled
With goddesses, mortal women, pigs, and homecoming.

(Ostriker 1982: 49–50).

Stallings's Penelope recognizes this insecurity and says, "Kill all the damn suitors / If you think it will make you feel better". In this way, the poem most adeptly highlights how the system of patriarchy functions through a power dynamic that is propelled by underlying anxieties of powerlessness.

As Stallings and other feminist poets have illustrated, Penelope's situation still speaks to the contemporary. A large part of this is due to the power of narrative, as Jack Zipes explains:

Relevance may have little to do with the intrinsic value of a work of art. What relevance reveals is that at a certain point in time, relevant information necessary for cognition can be considered crucial for understanding social relations, for adaptation to changing conditions, and for changing the environment. The choices that we make when we seek to transform the world are intertwined with ethics, aesthetics, and politics. As we continue to form and re-form fairy tales in the twenty-first century, there is still a glimmer of utopian hope that a better past lies ahead, but more practically, a fairy tale like 'Cinderella' replicated as a meme reveals what we have not been able to resolve and how much more we need to know about the world and ourselves.

(Zipes 2006: 127)

Storytelling is an inescapable part of human society. Even stories that appear to be antiquated—useful only in their nostalgia—can acquire new relevance as the social and political climate changes. And this appears to be the case in the field of feminist poetry. The tale of the poor step-daughter who is saved by a prince and launched into a life of royalty is decidedly not the model that feminists like Adrienne Rich want to cultivate and neither is the image of a weaving wife waiting at home for twenty years. Thus, Rich's theory of Re-vision attempts to strike a balance between replication and reform, to use old stories in new ways and this may be why it is such an appealing strategy for contemporary poets.

As this chapter has shown, the reading and writing strategy called Re-vision is part of a larger attempt made by feminism to understand gender outside the patriarchal model. Yet this is no easy task. The construction of social norms and discourses is a slippery slope. As the quotation from Rich on page forty-two asks, “how can I show you what I’m barely coming in possession of?” Even Adrienne Rich is not quite certain how to explain it, yet certainly one of the ways poets have begun to move forward is through the process of Re-vision. In the next few chapters, this thesis will look at specific works by contemporary women poets who have created a sustained dialogue with the Penelope figure and which perform this idea of a Re-visionary Penelopean poetics in order to articulate a different kind of subject.

Francisca Aguirre: Silence in Ithaca

You'll have understood by then what these Ithacas mean...

C.P. Cavafy, "Ithaca" (Cavafy 1983: 51)

She is outside the terms of the polis, but she is, as it were, an outside without which the polis could not be.

Butler, *Antigone's Claim* (Butler 2000: 3)

The island of Ithaca has been highly mythologized since the *Odyssey* and has come to symbolize the ideal of home, while the voyage to Ithaca has become synonymous with the quest story and the journey of life itself. But where is Ithaca? And what is it like? In one of its most famous renderings, Constantine P. Cavafy suggests that there are many "Ithacas" and that they are, perhaps, different for different travellers. In her long poem *Ítaca*,⁵⁷ Spanish poet Francisca Aguirre reinterprets Cavafy's idea through a feminist lens using Penelope as her protagonist. She finds Ithaca to be the last island in a sea of madness. Her Ithaca is a nineteenth-century asylum; it is the attic that has now forcibly become home. It is a place of silence. But it is also a place of discovery.

Although Aguirre describes "Ithaca", it is neither Homer's nor Cavafy's Ithaca. As will be shown, when reading Aguirre's *Ítaca* it becomes clear that Aguirre does not navigate her journey with Homer's directions. Her quest is different. As a

⁵⁷ Francisca Aguirre's *Ítaca* is categorized as a long poem. In order to simplify my analysis I will refer to the entirety of the long poem as *Ítaca*, the cantos as cantos, and the titled subdivision of the cantos as poems or by their individual titles.

Spanish woman born in 1930, Aguirre's poetic and political freedoms were restricted under the Franco regime (1936–1975) and this is reflected in her construction of *Ítaca*. In a similar way, Aguirre also found previous narratives of "Ithaca" either confining or unrelated to her experiences and so she decided to write her Re-vision. In order to understand why Aguirre would choose Ithaca and a Penelopean narrator, this chapter will discuss Aguirre's place in the canon of Spanish poetry and briefly examine the use of Penelope in the work of her predecessors. The rest of the chapter will then be dedicated to an analysis of *Ítaca* and examine selected poems alongside those of C.P. Cavafy and Adrienne Rich. All three writers attempt to describe the unrecognizable or silenced self in their poetry yet they do so in varying ways. In some instances the poet attempts this through an imaginary *topos* (Cavafy & Aguirre) while other examples include imaginary selves and split selves (Rich & Aguirre). The aim of this intertextual approach is to trace the common threads of their Re-visions to see how they traverse these various Ithacas, these places where the self endlessly travels to, the places where the self is walled-in, trapped, dismantled, and then, eventually, rebuilt.

FINDING ITHACA: FRANCISCA AGUIRRE

Despite having been an avid writer for most of her life, *Ítaca* was Aguirre's first publication.⁵⁸ The reason: in her early thirties, after reading C.P. Cavafy's poem "Περιμένοντας τους βαρβάρους" ["Waiting for the Barbarians"]⁵⁹ (in one of the first available translations in Spain)⁶⁰ she burnt five folders of her written work and began anew with *Ítaca* (Aguirre 2004: 11). One is tempted to ask: what was it about Cavafy's poem that provoked such a dramatic reaction? In *On Late Style*, Edward Said claims that "Περιμένοντας τους βαρβάρους" ["Waiting for the Barbarians"] performs "a form of exile" as the speaker is tangential to any action. Said also notes that in Cavafy's poems, "the future does not occur or if it does, it has in a sense already happened" (Said 2006: 145–46). Cavafy's themes of silence, isolation, and exile resonated with Aguirre's own experiences of entrapment. In a recent interview, Aguirre describes precisely this moment of coming to Cavafy's poem: Aguirre recalls reading the poem, turning to her mother, and saying: "yo quiero ir por ahí" ["I want to be out there"]⁶¹ (Caballero 2011). Like the townspeople in "Περιμένοντας τους βαρβάρους" ["Waiting for the

⁵⁸ Moreover, Francisca Aguirre published only three books of poetry in the 1970s: *Ítaca* (1972) [Ithaca], *Los trescientos escalones* (1977) [*The three hundred steps*], and *La otra música* (1978) [*The other music*] which was followed by a silence that lasted for almost two decades.

⁵⁹ Cavafy's poem "Περιμένοντας τους βαρβάρους" ["Waiting for the Barbarians"] describes the unusual state of an unnamed city; there is civic unrest because the citizens expect a barbarian invasion to be imminent. However, at the end of the day, the barbarians fail to arrive leaving the citizens bewildered and uneasy. "Those barbarians, after all, were a kind of solution" says the anonymous speaker of the poem, providing the poem with its most memorable line (Cavafy 1981: 7–8). Most interpretations of Cavafy's poem find in it a critique of the dichotomy civilization/barbarism and indeed the poem poses the question: how would civilization define itself if there were no barbarians? It is, of course, the quintessential example of the politics of exclusion and of defining oneself through the difference lying outside.

⁶⁰ Aguirre most likely read the 1962 Barcelona publication: Cavafis, C. P. *Poemes de Kavafis*. Trans. Carles Riba. Illustration Josep Maria Subirachs. Barcelona: Teide, 1962. See Dascalopoulos 2003: 218.

⁶¹ My translation.

Barbarians”], she perhaps felt that the limitations of civilization (or in her case, the domestic sphere) were too confining; she did not want to be limited and defined by negation, by the existence of the other. So, she began again.

In this way, *Ítaca* approaches Judith Butler’s notion of giving an account of the self. Finding her self exiled, unrecognized (and unrecognizable) by others, Aguirre decides to construct a new self and stage her own scene (or topos) for recognition. As Judith Butler explains:

We might be understood to be involved in a mode of self-making or self-poiesis that involves risking intelligibility, posing a problem for cultural translation and living in a critical relation to the norms of the intelligible.

(Butler & Athanasiou 2013: 67).

In other words, in the making of the self one must always risk being unintelligible, unrecognized, and this situation not only problematizes cultural norms of who is a valid subject, but is also quite traumatic for the subject that is deemed “unrecognizable”. Through this lens, it seems that in writing *Ítaca*, Aguirre takes this risk and her Penelopean narrator is the other to whom Francisca Aguirre is giving an account of herself. In her introduction to *Ítaca*, Ana Valverde Osan says that throughout the collection:

The line between the poet and her poetic persona fades. The result is a poetry that conveys passion, characterized by honesty and urgency. This long poem is the author’s close examination of such moments of crisis.

(Aguirre 2004:11)

In this way, *Ítaca* can be read as a topos where Aguirre, after destroying her former identity (by burning her previous work), explores a liminal identity through Penelope and then—through this process— calls into existence a new “Francisca Aguirre”. It is an attempt to give an account of her self, mediated through the use of the Penelope figure.

Francisca Aguirre’s *Ítaca* is a long poem divided into two cantos and then subdivided into individual “poems” written in free verse. Ana Valverde Osan suggests that Aguirre subverts the genre of the long poem by breaching conventions of linearity, lyrical prose, and closure (Aguirre 2004: 11). She intersperses everyday moments with poetic revelations and creates a fragmentary narrative of self. As a genre, the long poem has its roots in traditional epic and is often directed at representing collective experience and the public sphere from which women were traditionally excluded (Frye 1971; Dickie 1986: 8). Perhaps one of the most appealing traits of the long poem is that it facilitates a “dialogic interplay” between the creation of meaning and its destruction; hence, the long poem allows a writer to use tradition in order to subvert it (*cf.* Ugalde 1995). By employing a genre that has been conventionally used to silence minority discourses, women writers are able to use strategies of subversion and Re-vision in order to incorporate their experiences into the recognized currents of literature. Thus, not only does Penelope as a mythical character offer a number of creative opportunities, but the genre and context of the long poem allow Aguirre ample reason to begin her mythic Re-vision with Penelope.

The first canto, “El círculo de Ítaca” “[Ithaca’s Circle], offers fourteen poems, six of which have mythical references in their titles⁶² and throughout the poems. This first canto is more explicitly a response to the Homeric tradition and serves as a starting point for a journey of self-discovery. The second canto, “El desván de Penélope” [“Penelope’s Attic”], is comprised of thirty-three poems, none of which have mythical references in their titles, but which do include mythical references within the bodies. “El desván de Penélope” has more obvious autobiographical undertones, some of which refer to the hardships of living in Spain in the 1940s (Miró 2007: 10). Although I do not wish to use psychoanalysis as a reading strategy for Aguirre’s poetry, it cannot go unsaid that the poet’s tumultuous childhood must have shaped her need for writing. At the end of the Spanish Civil War (1939) her family, like many, fled to France. However, in 1942, when Aguirre was twelve years old, the German occupation of France forced her family to return to Spain where her father, Lorenzo Aguirre, a painter, was murdered by the Franco regime for his loyalty to the Republican government. From this perspective, *Ítaca* can be seen as a mechanism for coping with a deep trauma that affected her notions of freedom and self.

In *Ítaca*, it is clear that Aguirre’s Penelope is not free. She is tired of waiting, yet at the same time she can see no other option. The tone of the collection is characterized by pessimism and despair caused by the narrator’s feelings of entrapment and an anxious desire to escape. As John C. Wilcox explains, “the poems in *Ítaca* are narrated by a depressed and disillusioned Penelope” and:

⁶² The poems with mythical titles are: “Ithaca”, “Sisyphus of the Cliffs”, “The Oracle”, “Mirage: Penelope and Lot’s Wife”, “Penelope Unravels”, and “The Wind of Ithaca”.

[The] barren isle [of Ithaca] reflects the hollowness and pointlessness of life sensed by a woman in the mid-twentieth century, a woman who is oppressed by the image Spanish bourgeois society holds up to her eyes. In reaction, Penelope/Francisca strips away all the certainties and so-called Truths her culture has implanted in her mind.

(Wilcox 1997: 234)

Recognizing this “pointlessness” and then dismantling her previous notions of identity is no easy task. Indeed, it is not just Spanish bourgeois society’s image of women, but also the traditional image of women in myth that Aguirre struggles against. *Ítaca* addresses not only a singular women’s plight but also the idea of myth itself as a cornerstone for the institution of Western civilization and patriarchy. Wilcox adds to this:

Ulysses’s odyssey surely symbolizes, on one level, Western civilization’s belief in ultimate goals, grand schemes, great causes, the search for Truth, Beauty for an all-encompassing view of life, a vision of totality. By describing the negative impact of such a quest Aguirre is deflating the quest itself.

(Wilcox 1997: 239)

Thus, Aguirre attempts to undermine the “masculine visions of control, totality and analytic rationality” (Wilcox 1997: 240). In other words, what Wilcox calls Aguirre’s “gynocritical vision” subverts the “teleological (male) view of life. Life is not a race to the finish line; it is an experience to be enjoyed the best ‘we’ can” (247). Perhaps it is not wholly coincidence that this is exactly the same message derived from dominant readings of Cavafy’s poem “Ithaca”, first published in Alexandria in 1911 (Keeley 1996a: 22).⁶³ As will be shown, there are many

⁶³ In Cavafy scholarship, Timos Malanos has suggested that Cavafy may have gotten his idea for this poem from “Petronious’s Exhortatio ad Ulysseum”, although Stratis Tsirkas finds this connection dubious (Tsirkas 1958: 434). See Malanos 1957 and Tsirkas 1958.

parallels to be drawn between Aguirre and Cavafy. However, before looking at these links, it is important first to discuss Aguirre in the context of Spanish poetry. The next two sections will look at the construction of the canon of Spanish poetry—and Aguirre's omission from it—as well as provide a sample genealogy of Spanish women poets who appropriate Penelope.

GENERATION GAP: CATEGORIZING AGUIRRE

Y vuelve a sus poemas con el mismo silencio con el que abrió la puerta, con la misma necesidad.

Lucas, "Si el artista no acepta un principio de realidad está perdido" (Lucas 2000)

*And she returned to her poems in the same silence with which she opened the door, with the same necessity.*⁶⁴

One of the main themes in Francisca Aguirre's collection *Ítaca* is silence. It is also a relevant theme for her as a writer. Critics of Spanish poetry have generally ignored Aguirre because like many women writers she does not fit neatly within the categories of specific poetic generations. Spanish women poets like Aguirre who were born between 1924 and 1938 have been overlooked mostly because their poetry was not overtly critical of Francisco Franco's regime and of the Church, as was the case with slightly younger poets (*cf.* Ugalde 2003). As a result, there is some debate as to how to categorize Aguirre within the scheme of Spanish poets. The debate in itself is interesting as a historical project because it attempts to impose a retrograde structure onto an evolving and complex literary movement, silencing those that do not conform. It is also relevant in explaining Aguirre's unique style, which, in many ways, confounded any attempt to label her work.

Employing a strict, chronological sense of the word generation⁶⁵ Aguirre's date of birth would categorize her as a poet of the "second post-Civil War generation" or

⁶⁴ My translation. The quotation is from an interview with Francisca Aguirre in 2000. See (Lucas 2000).

the “*Segunda generación*” [second generation] (Wilcox 1997: 274). Key members of this generation include: Angel Gonzáles, Jaime Gil e Biedma, José Angel Valente, Francisco Brines, Claudio Rodríguez and Félix Grande, husband of Francisca Aguirre. These poets were central to the literary scene of the 1970s and were dubbed by Andrew Debicki as “Poets of Discovery”. Such poets began a trend that broke away from their predecessors. They rejected the early modern notions of “pure poetry” and surrealism, as well as the idea of poetry as “communication” that arose in the 1950s (Debicki 218: 1994). This poetry of discovery utilized ordinary language in new ways and is marked by ambiguity and tension simultaneously affirming and rebelling against preceding models of poetry.

One of the key texts that facilitated the movement towards this new kind of poetics was Carlos Barral’s essay entitled “Poesía no es comunicación” [“Poetry Is Not Communication”]. Published in 1953, it was written to counter the notion of poetry as a vehicle for social and political messages. Through various formulations of his argument, a new view of poetry developed: poetry as a process of self-discovery. Over the years this grew into a recognizable “poetics of discovery” in which the poet comes to know the self through the poem, and, like the reader, finds new meanings in the process. José Angel Valente’s article “Conocimiento y Comunicación” [“Discovery and Communication”] published in 1963 and then again in 1971, contributed to the articulation of this new poetics

⁶⁵ In this section I will discuss the categories of “poetic generations”. This is not to be confused with the normative use of generation in a strictly chronological sense. For example, Amparo Moreno Sardiá divides postwar generations of women into two categories according to date of birth: 1910–1930 and 1930–1950. Having been born in 1930, Aguirre did not experience the Civil War in the same way as earlier women. Being on the older end of the spectrum, by the time she was a teenager social reforms were already in full swing. See Davies 1998: 178 and also Folguera 1988.

and asserted that every poem is an exploration of experience, concluding that all poetry is “a knowledge in the process of ‘becoming’ ” (Debicki 1994: 100). Despite the Deleuzian echoes, Debicki is wary to categorize this group as postmodern. Yet, as Debicki lists some characteristics of this generation’s poetry, there seems to be definitive overlap with the postmodern: the indeterminacy of the poetic text, parody, self-reflexivity, poems not as independent units but as part of a process of the “ ‘textualization’ of reality”, reading and writing being considered a constant process of creation and re-creation, and the poem as a source of creative influence rather than the end result (Debicki 1994: 99–102). As a poetics of discovery, this approach privileged the role of the reader and, in a sense, saw the poet as reader as well because within the creative process the poet also discovered meaning along the way.

One can see how this kind of poetry would appeal to women writers of the time and the temptation perhaps to categorize Aguirre as such. However, the dispute as to where to situate Aguirre in the generations of Spanish poets offers another possibility. Despite her date of birth, other critics find Aguirre’s poetry more akin to the next generation: the “Novísimos” (the generation of poets born 1939–1960, also called the generation of “culturalismo” [culturalism], or the “postmoderns”) (Wilcox 1997: 274). The Novísimos emphasized the creative power of language and the independence of linguistic form (Debicki 1994: 38). Like some poets of the previous generation, the Novísimos grew disillusioned with the trend of self-discovery and began a more self-conscious, intertextual, and metapoetic style. The Novísimos went back to former literary texts and canonical works. In this way Aguirre can be likened to this younger generation since her first publication, *Ítaca*

(1972), revisits Homer's *Odyssey*, albeit in a free style prose version of the long poem. Aguirre's feminist rereading of this Homeric text artfully uses straightforward language, and her narrative style is used to destabilize traditional philosophical attitudes such as the need to organize life around the androcentric model of the hero: the adventurer (Debicki 1994: 171). Furthermore, her work portends the emergence of subversive women's poetry that would arise in Spain in the 1980s. On the other hand, David R. Thompson explains that *Ítaca* "contrasts sharply with the dominant poetics of the late 1960s and early 1970s"—that is the Novísimos—and unlike her contemporaries who employed either complex language or hermetic references to pop culture, Aguirre "focuses on a single mythological figure, Penelope, and employs a narrative, confessional style" (Thompson 2008: 321).⁶⁶

So, in which poetic generation does one categorize Francisca Aguirre? As shown, this question has proved difficult to answer. Wilcox contends that Aguirre and other female poets of the same generation do not share the same poetic ideals as their male counterparts and therefore cannot even be categorized within the same generational model. He claims that their "gynocentric visions" are less concerned with "existential, philosophical and aesthetic matters" (Wilcox 1997: 234). Still other critics such as Miró disagree and categorize her poetry as "philosophical-literature" (Miró 2007: 10). I would agree with Miró on the later point; Aguirre's *Ítaca* is deeply existential and explores the very peripheries of sanity, selfhood, and subjectivity. As for her categorization, I agree with Wilcox in the sense that the generational model is insufficient in many ways especially considering the

⁶⁶ For a broader comparison of Penelope in Spanish Literature see Thompson 2008: 32–30 which includes a discussion of Aguirre's *Ítaca*, along with works by Carmen Resino and Ángela Vallvey.

radical social changes of the time. Because Aguirre approaches a canonical text by way of self-discovery and employs various postmodern elements, I would conclude that her poetics cannot be confined to either generation but rather combines poetic strategies of both.

This discussion of poetic generations highlights the constraining nature of the historical narrative and the artistic genealogy. In this way there is more here than an anxiety of influence or the process of exclusion; there is also the notion of recognition. Because Aguirre was not easily categorized within the generational model she was considered a bothersome anomaly and was therefore omitted. This refusal to be recognized due to non-compliance with existing norms of literature/subjectivity is a key theme in the poetry of Aguirre and also in the poetry of C.P. Cavafy and Adrienne Rich. As Gregory Jusdanis says in *The Poetics of Cavafy*:

The authority emanating from tradition does not necessarily inspire as much as it threatens the future poet. However, the modern poet does not submit passively to this exercise of power, but reacts against it.

(Jusdanis 1987: 147)

As will be explored in this chapter and indeed the rest of the thesis, the same is true for the feminist poet. As a woman writer with seemingly no generation or genealogy, Aguirre had to create her own place, and in *Ítaca* she produces her own topos: her own space for recognition. The next section will discuss a Penelopean “genealogy”, that is, a sample of Penelope in Spanish women’s poetry that may have been influential for Aguirre’s writing of *Ítaca*.

PENELOPE IN SPAIN

Whether through a process of discovery or a postmodern lens, Aguirre envisions a different kind of Penelope and a very different Ithaca. As has been discussed in Chapter 1, the Penelope myth lends itself to multiple interpretations and many writers find in it useful for metaphors for self-making. Moreover, in times of political tension, myth is often used as a metaphor for authority, as the existing model against which the revolutionary is acting. In the case of Spanish women writers, there are several who appropriate the Penelope myth in order to work against multiple existing narratives.

In the nineteenth century, one of the more famous Spanish female poets to use the Penelope figure is Rosalía de Castro (1837–1885). She was one of the few women who was included in the canon of nineteenth-century Spanish literature and was therefore accessible to the public (Kirkpatrick 1989: 350). Even more surprising, Rosalía de Castro was able to work within the canon against a framework that imposed strict bourgeois notions of ideal womanhood. From the very beginning of her career she worked to inscribe herself in a feminine and feminist tradition (Kirkpatrick 1989: 350–51). Although speaking about a feminist tradition may seem slightly anachronistic, her work constantly questioned religion, woman's place in the world, and the process of writing. Today, critics have acknowledged that her reworking of Romanticism not only anticipated modernist poetics (López-Casanova 1985; Kirkpatrick 1989), but that she is also a forerunner of the later movement in which Spanish women writers began revising myth

(López 1999: 335).⁶⁷ For these reasons, it is possible that Rosalía de Castro was influential for Aguirre and other Spanish women writers in their use of the Penelope figure.

Rosalía de Castro's poem "Desde los cuatro puntos cardinales"⁶⁸ published in the collection *En las orillas del Sar* [*Beside the River Sar*] (1884) employs the idea of Penelope at her loom. The image of weaving and unweaving serves to express the helplessness and even the static nature of human existence:

¡Esperad y cree!: "crea" el que cree,
y ama con doble ardor aquel que espera.

Pero yo en el rincón más escondido
y también más hermoso de la Tierra,
sin esperar a Ulises
(que el nuestro ha naufragado en la tormenta)
semejante a Penélope,
tejo y destejo sin cesar mi tela,
pensando que ésta es del destino humano
la incesante tarea;
y que hora subiendo, ahora bajando,
unas veces con luz, otras a ciegas,
cumplimos nuestros días y llegamos
más tarde o más temprano a la ribera.

(De Castro 1937: 128).

⁶⁷ See also Quance 1998.

⁶⁸ In Spanish, the title of the poem is the first line of the poem. However, in the English translation the first line of the poem does not match the exact line in Spanish. The first three lines of the English translation are:

Despite her wrinkles our Mother Earth is young.
She sends from West and East and South and North
A thousand powerful and active minds..."

(De Castro 1937: 129).

The second line, "She sends..." correlates to the first line in Spanish: "Desde los cuatro..." (De Castro 1937).

Wait and believe!: he who believes, “creates”
And those who wait, love with twofold zeal.

Whereas I, in the most sequestered
but most beautiful corner of the Earth,
like Penelope,
but not waiting for Ulysses,
(for ours was shipwrecked in the storm),
ceaselessly weave and unweave my cloth,
thinking that human destiny is
this never-ending task;
that by climbing up and heading down,
sometimes with a light, sometimes blindly groping,
we serve out our allotted time and reach
sooner or later the other shore.

(De Castro 1937: 129).

Rosalía de Castro depicts a narrator who identifies with Penelope not because she waits for Odysseus, but because she weaves and unweaves thinking that human destiny is a similarly unending task. Her “covert feminist impulse” is evident in the first line which can be read as a biblical adage or a command from god (Wilcox 1997: 76).⁶⁹ Despite the command “wait and believe”, she clearly does not believe or wait for those things that we would assume Penelope would (i.e. Odysseus’s return). This is perhaps because she is not included in this address. Note that the first line of the poem in Spanish uses the unmarked/masculine pronoun “el”. It is possible that “she” may be included in the universal term; however the “Pero yo” [“Whereas I”] that follows indicates that the narrator is not. The narrator is “like Penelope” she weaves to unweave, her work at the loom does not produce anything and in the world of patriarchy a woman who does not produce (or reproduce, for that matter) is useless to society. As will be shown, in her poetry, Aguirre’s Penelope also feels this uselessness acutely.

⁶⁹ As Wilcox points out, throughout her poetry Castro comments on patriarchal religion and the hollowness of the male God.

Moving to more recent influences, Aguirre's choice of Penelope may have also been affected by the social situation in Spain following the Civil War. Called "niñas de la guerra" ["girls of the war"], women born between 1924 and 1938 experienced a "repressive normative femininity" which undoubtedly affected their literary endeavours (Ugalde 2003: 90). These years were dominated by strict social and political conditions and thus the regulation and production of a normative femininity was essential to this agenda (Ugalde 2003: 87). The features of this post-war femininity included sexual purity, infantile mentality, motherhood, and domesticity (Ugalde 2003: 88) some of which recall the traditional image of Penelope interpreted from the *Odyssey*. The following decades were equally as difficult for women and indeed the 1940s and 50s were referred to as "the silent era" (Levine 1983: 293), and with good reason. Spain was under the rule of a dictatorship which imposed strict social and political controls on its people including stringent censorship laws.

Years later, as Western modernization swept through the country in the 1960s and 70s, the government relaxed its grip on Spanish society. The generation⁷⁰ of women born between 1930 and 1950 came of age amidst the influx of modernization in the form of Hollywood films, magazines, and tourists (*cf.* Davies 1998: 173–197). This female demographic demanded that the political structure reflect the growing social liberation, and a great deal of legislation granted women more mobility within society (equal opportunity, equal pay, co-education) and within the family (women had more rights over childcare and re-marriage)

⁷⁰ Not to be confused with the aforementioned "poetic generation" categories. In this case, I mean only the normative, chronological sense of generation following Amparo Moreno Sardiá. (See footnote 3).

(Davies 1998: 180).⁷¹ Feminist literature, including *The Feminine Mystique*, was published in Spain in the 1960s and political reform continued into the 1980s when women finally secured equal rights in divorce law and sexual health (contraception was no longer illegal).

Undoubtedly, these waves of liberation and modernization had an effect on women of all ages. However, some were affected differently than others. Despite their similarities, women of this generation (1930–1950) experienced modernization differently. Those born in the earlier years did not experience the social and political changes until they were already at school or university and as a result, women born in the 1930s felt more acutely the disparity between the oppressive authoritarianism under the dictatorship and the new-found liberalism of the later years (Davies 1998: 178–180).

Predictably, this shift in politics and women's liberation had a ripple effect on literature: for the first time in their lives many women found themselves able to freely explore ideas of selfhood and gendered identity. The most frequent use of the Penelope figure occurs in post-Civil War literature in Spain, particularly in women's writing (Gordenstein 1997: 242).⁷² In most uses of the myth, Penelope's archetypal status of the faithful wife remains intact. However, in her novel *El Desconocido* (1956) Carmen Kurtz (b. 1911) recasts the *Odyssey* in a modern context. Unlike Aguirre's poem, Kurtz's protagonist (a Penelope figure) remains trapped; the only way out of her desolation is suicide. In Kurtz's case, she rejects the idea of a happy ending in order to criticize the ideals of war and to undermine

⁷¹ For a good overview of the shift to modernization see (Graham and Labanyi 1995).

⁷² For the broader use of Penelope in Spanish literature and theatre see Morán and Montiel. Eds. 1999.

the role of women encouraged by the Francoist dictatorship (Gordenstein 1997: 243). Although her Re-vision is subversive, it ultimately does not provide a strategy for female subjectivity because it ends with the obliteration of the self in death. Like many of her contemporaries, Kurtz has had a difficult relationship with feminism. Many Spanish women writers, Kurtz included, deny that they are feminist and as Roberta D. Gordenstein points out, this is a result of the longstanding social and political structures in Spain, which have stigmatized dissident femininities (Gordenstein 1997: 249). In this light, the rejection of the feminist label, the feminist self, is mirrored in the rejection of Penelope. However, I would argue that despite an author's silence or even denial of the feminist label this does not preclude the possibility of reading her works of Re-vision as feminist in nature. Such texts are important because although they do not provide a solution, they recognize and announce that there is a problem.

In the later decades of the twentieth century the appropriation of myth and Hellenic culture became more popular. Cano Ballesta suggests that the use of myth marked a change in the poetic current: poets began revising earlier literary themes (such as classical myth) and injecting them with new vitality. This Re-vision of Greek myth is discussed mostly in the context of poetry in the 1980s (Cano Ballesta 2007: 83). However, despite chronology (and the poetic generation model) Aguirre has much in common with these later poets. Part of this revisiting of myth involved the appropriation of form as well as theme. Thus, like Aguirre, many Spanish women writers in the 1980s use the long poem. Sharon Keefe Ugalde explains that women writing in the post-Franco era recognized the dialogic possibilities that the use of the long poem offered for modernists (the manipulation

of authoritative discourse) which they then adapted to their own poetic needs (Ugalde 1995: 367).⁷³ By appropriating the long poem (with its doubtless connection to epic) women writers attempt to subvert the patriarchal ideals that the genre generally reinforces.⁷⁴ One example is Luisa Castro's (b. 1966) long poem *Odisea definitiva: Libro póstumo* which explores notions of heterosexual love and problematizes traditional notions of Eros including the model found in the *Odyssey*, that is, the feminine mode of waiting and the masculine mode of questing (Ugalde 1995: 371).

The poet María Sanz (b. 1956) provides another example of a woman writer using the long poem in the 1980s. Cano Ballesta describes Sanz's long poems as "exquisite" and "postmodern" (Cano Ballesta 2007: 87) and despite the fact that there is more than a generation chronologically separating the two, it seems that the same can be said for Aguirre's *Ítaca*. Both Aguirre and Sanz engage with the theme of myth in postmodern ways; however, they remain quite different in their application of myth. Sanz's poetry is intimate and erotic. She uses the exoticism of ancient Greece to heighten the sensual tone of the poems. Conversely, the tone of Aguirre's *Ítaca* is melancholic, desperate, and despondent. As will be explored in the next section, Aguirre's involvement with Classical Greek literary culture is more complex. She neither echoes the modernists' nostalgia nor indulges in the exotic artifices of the *Novísimos*; rather, she explores the darker side of life as a woman facing particular socio-cultural pressures *through* a mythical exercise. Far from a mere commentary on archetypes, Aguirre's use of Penelope is a negotiation between the self that she wishes to construct and that which society

⁷³ See also Stanford 1997.

⁷⁴ Well-known modernist adaptations of the epic and the long poem include Ezra Pound's *The Cantos*, H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* and Derek Walcott's *Omeros*.

will allow her. It is the account of someone testing the boundaries of what is considered a recognizable self. Like many women of her generation, Aguirre was struggling to break free of censorship (also in the form of self-censorship) in order to come to terms with a newly found sense of freedom in both her writing and her daily life and this is reflected in *Ítaca*. This struggle to build a recognizable self can be compared to that of C.P. Cavafy and his use of imaginary topoi in order to work through ideas of the self. As the next section will examine, there are many parallels to be drawn between the poetry of Aguirre and Cavafy and their constructions of a (poetic) self.

THE ITHACAS OF C.P. CAVAFY & FRANCISCA AGUIRRE

C. P. Cavafy's "Ιθάκη" ["Ithaca"] is easily one of the most famous Modern Greek poems known to English speakers, and the poem's most memorable lines are from the final stanza:

Κι αν πτωχική την βρεις, η Ιθάκη δεν σε γέλασε.
Έτσι σοφός που έγινες, με τόση πείρα,
ήδη θα το κατάλαβες η Ιθάκες τι σημαίνουν.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you will have understood by then what these Ithacas mean.

(Cavafy 1983: 68–69)

In Cavafy's poem, the island of Ithaca becomes a symbol not only of a homeland, but of a goal to strive for and one that should take time to reach. The idea of an imaginary homeland is also relevant to Cavafy's situation as a Greek born in Alexandria; many of his poems deal with feelings of exile and marginality. The poem begins:

Σα βγεις στον πηγαιμό για την Ιθάκη,
να εύχεται νάναι μακρύς ο δρόμος,
γεμάτος περιπέτειες, γεμάτος γνώσεις.
Τους Λαιστρυγόνες και τους Κύκλωπας,
τον θυμωμένο Ποσειδώνα μη φοβάσαι,
τέτοια στον δρόμο σου ποτέ σου δεν θα βρεις,
αν μέν' η σκέψις σου υψηλή...

As you set out for Ithaca
hope the voyage is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:
you'll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high...

(Cavafy 1983: 66–67)

The poem is memorable for its sensuous description of the “pleasure” and “joy” of “harbours seen for the first time”, and the “mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony, / sensual perfume of every kind” that one encounters as in “many Egyptian cities.” Traditionally, the poem “Ithaca” has been read as universal and neither the speaker nor the listener in Cavafy’s poem is gendered. Despite this, Re-visions of Cavafy’s poem including Aguirre’s, suggest that the poem has been read and received as a gendered text. This is, in part, due to the canonization of Cavafy as a central poet of Modern Greek letters, which included a systematic denial of the fact that Cavafy himself was homosexual. Indeed, it is only in recent years that scholars have begun to explore Cavafy’s queer poetics.⁷⁵

On one level, as a woman poet writing during the Spanish dictatorship, Aguirre seems to have read Cavafy’s poem as one that speaks to those (men) who quest, while *Ítaca* [*Ithaca*] speaks to those (women) who wait. In other words, Aguirre’s work effectively points out that women have been denied access to this kind of Odyssean journey. “Ítaca” [“Ithaca”], the title poem of *Ítaca* (the entire long poem), gives voice to Penelope’s plight and could be read as a response to Cavafy’s poem. In the first half of “Ítaca” [“Ithaca”] the speaker and the audience are united by the pronoun “us”. In the second half the speaker becomes more isolated as the poem shifts to the first person singular. I will quote the poem in its entirety:

⁷⁵ For more on Cavafy’s (homo)erotic poetics see Papanikolaou 2014 and 2005. See also Syrimis 2003.

“Ítaca” [“Ithaca”]

¿Y quién alguna vez no estuvo en Ítaca?
¿Quién no conoce su áspero panorama,
el anillo de mar que la comprime,
la austera intimidad que nos impone,
el silencio de suma que nos traza?
Ítaca nos resume como un libro,
nos acompaña hacia nosotros mismos,
nos descubre el sonido de la espera.
Porque la espera suena:
mantiene el eco de voces que se han ido.
Ítaca nos denuncia el latido de la vida,
nos hace cómplices de la distancia,
ciegos vigías de una senda
que se va hacienda sin nosotros,
que no podremos olvidar porque
no existe olvido para la ignorancia.
Es doloroso despertar un día
y contemplar el mar que nos abraza,
que nos unge de sal y nos bautiza como nuevos hijos.
Recordamos los días del vino compartido,
las palabras, no el eco;
las manos, no el diluido gesto.
Veo el mar que me cerca,
el vago azul por el que te has perdido,
compruebo el horizonte con avidez extenuada,
dejo a los ojos un momento
cumplir su hermoso oficio;
luego, vuelvo la espalda
y encamino mis pasos hacia Ítaca.

(Aguirre 2004: 20).

“Ithaca”

And who has never been to Ithaca?
Who is not familiar with her rugged environment,
the sea ring that oppresses her,
the austere intimacy she impose on us,
the silence in adding she draws from us?
Ithaca summarizes us as a book,
she goes with us to our very selves,
she discovers for us the sound of waiting.
Because waiting has a ring:
it preserves the echo of departed voices.
Ithaca reveals to us life's heartbeat,
she makes us the accomplices of distance,

blind sentinels of a path
that is taking shape without us,
that we will be unable to forget because
ignorance does not know oblivion.
It is painful to wake up one day
and gaze at the sea that enfolds us,
that anoints us with salt and baptizes us like new children.
We remember the days of shared wine,
the words, not the echo;
the hands not the diluted gesture.
I see the sea that surrounds me,
the misty azure in which you became lost,
I check the horizon with exhausted eagerness,
I allow my eyes a moment
to perform their beautiful function;
then, I turn my back
and direct my footsteps towards Ithaca.

(Aguirre 2004: 21).

Aguirre begins the poem by asking: “And who has never been to Ithaca?”⁷⁶ This first line, along with the narrative voice of the poem, serves to underscore her point that surely everyone has been to an Ithaca at one time or another. However, this can be read as an ironic response to Cavafy’s “Ithaca” and its exclusion of female experience. Again, I am not talking about Cavafy’s poem *per se*, but rather the packaging and construction of his poem as canonical, as a poem that is supposed to be read as universal. Yet Aguirre finds that this is not the case. In Cavafy’s poem the speaker assumes that the listener is an Odyssean adventurer; he gives advice about what one should do when one enters harbours one is seeing for the first time whereas Aguirre’s speaker talks to those like her, who are trapped: they are the “blind sentinels of a path / that is taking shape without [them],” those who have not been able to construct a voyage of their own. Indeed, as will be discussed in the next section, this feeling of entrapment is pervasive in Aguirre’s

⁷⁶ The use of a rhetorical question here may also echo Cavafy’s “Waiting for the Barbarians” which opens with: “What are we waiting for, assembled in the forum?” and has similar questions throughout the poem.

construction of *Ítaca* and it is fitting that the title poem makes explicit the narrator's realization that she is stranded. She finds this awareness difficult: "It is painful to wake up one day / gaze at the sea that enfolds us," —that one has only lived within the confines of an island; within an ideology that restricts women to the private sphere. It is as if the narrative "I" is not even actively *living* any more. Her only *action* is looking and only for a moment—allowing her eyes some brief autonomy—until she must return to immobility and silence.⁷⁷ In the end she "turn-[s] [her] back" and returns to Ithaca. Although at this point in *Ítaca* it is too early to be certain, there is also the possibility that this "you" she is looking for is not Odysseus in the traditional sense: it is not an exterior other. This absent "Odysseus" could be a manifestation of the narrator's lost or other self.

In both Cavafy's and Aguirre's poems, Ithaca as a topography is not the location or direct cause of joy or pain, but rather, the thing that makes the narrator reflect upon their own situation making possible some revelation. Cavafy's idea of Ithaca very literally parallels Homer's *Odyssey* as a thing that has value because, in being elusive, it has provided him with an adventure, a story: "Ithaca gave you the marvellous journey / without her you wouldn't have set out / she has nothing left to give you now." Ithaca itself pales in comparison to the journey. However, Aguirre's narrator has a very different relationship to the island. Like Cavafy, Aguirre refers to it as a companion, likening her own oppression to that of the island itself: "Who is not familiar with her rugged environment / the sea ring that oppresses her." This relationship is even more apparent in the previous poem (and first in her collection) "Triste fiera" ["Sad Beast"] in which both the narrator and

⁷⁷ This feeling of having only the power to look is reminiscent of Adrienne Rich's poem "Eurycleia's Tale" in which both narrator and poet are primarily observational.

Ithaca go to the sea and ask for help. For Aguirre, the island is not to blame for the narrator's isolation and depression, rather the island is her comrade who provokes introspection: "she goes with us to our very selves / she discovers for us the sound of waiting."

To a reader who has read Cavafy's poem, Aguirre's comes across as a Re-vision. Instead of a prescriptive voice giving us advice for our journey, Aguirre's narrator offers a confession: she does not long for Ithaca at all; she longs to be free of Ithaca, the island, the destination, but also the symbolic topos, the literary certainty. However, this is only one level of Aguirre's interaction with Cavafy's poetry. As the next few sections will examine, later poems in *Ítaca* reveal a closer affinity between Aguirre and Cavafy and their explorations of (self-)entrapment and recognition.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF ITHACA

The intertextual links between Cavafy and Aguirre go beyond the Ithacan motif: their poetry is involved with the politics of exile, exclusion, and the self. I would also go so far as to say that there is a parallel in the movements of both Cavafy's and Aguirre's poetics that involve constructing imaginary topoi in order to explore the self. For example, the movement of Cavafy's poetics from his first draft of "Ἡ Πόλις" ["The City"] (1894), to "Τείχη" ["Walls"] (written two years later) and then finally to "Ἰθάκη" ["Ithaca"] (1910), can be compared to the poems in Aguirre's *Ítaca*: Aguirre's narrator shifts from "El círculo de Ítaca" ["Ithaca's Circle"] the island/city to "El desván de Penélope" ["Penelope's Attic"]. Aguirre's Penelope begins in the circle of Ithaca where she feels trapped and so she retreats to a smaller, less public space: the attic. Then, within the space of the attic are the poems "El muro" ["The Wall"] and "Telar" ["Loom"], which stand for the smallest space of confinement and her way out. Like Cavafy, Aguirre uses her poetry to explore these different levels of confinement in order eventually to leave Ithaca (with all its Laistrygonians and Cyclops) behind.

In his study on Cavafy, Edmund Keeley discusses both "Ἰθάκη" ["Ithaca"] and "Ἡ Πόλις" ["The City"] as two sides of the same coin where "Ἰθάκη" is a homeland to be longed for and "Ἡ Πόλις" is a place in which the inhabitant is trapped with no road to escape (Keeley 1996a: 39). To summarize, Keeley says:

The metaphoric city is still what you make of it in your soul: for those who can see around them only the black ruins of their lives, there is no escape from the small corner their psyches have created, while for those who keep their thoughts raised high and their spirit and body tuned for rare excitement, the city can become the impetus for a great voyage that will lead them through pleasure and knowledge.

(Keeley 1996a: 39)

In looking at “Ιθάκη” in light of “Η Πόλις” it seems that one can situate Aguirre’s text as a direct response to the idyllic homeland and quest story that “these Ithacas” invoke. Although it is unclear whether or not Aguirre read “Η Πόλις” as well, it is very likely that she read “Περιμένοντας τους βαρβάρους” [“Waiting for the Barbarians”] in the 1962 Barcelona publication which was a large anthology of Cavafy’s poems and included “Η Πόλις” (Dascalopoulos 2003: 218).⁷⁸

Cavafy began composing “Η Πόλις” in 1894. However, he would not publish it until some sixteen years later, the same year he began working on “Ιθάκη”. This early period in Cavafy’s life, up to 1910, often called the “crisis period”, was marked by: “a deepening sense of self-alienation and estrangement from his environment” (Anton 1995:118). The composition of “Ιθάκη” marks a change. As Anton explains:

Paradoxically enough, his keen perception of the imprisoning traps of the cosmopolis gave him the key to his freedom as a poet. Yet this prison had to be even more accurately defined, more truthfully understood. Its outer limits had to be set where they actually existed: the self-condemning mode of personal despair.

(Anton 1995: 38)

⁷⁸ This anthology, *Poemes de Kavafis*, was translated into Catalan in 1962 by Carles Riba. This reference is listed in the Bibliography under “Cavafy” with the rest of the Cavafy references.

For Cavafy, “Ἰθάκη” marked the recognition that a “way out” existed. In this light, the still unpublished “Ἡ Πόλις” could be seen as a kind of “internal recognition” (Anton 1995: 120) that the restriction and entrapment of the City and its Walls were neither wholly out of the poet’s control, nor wholly of his own doing. George Savidis explains:

By 1911 we see an ascetic poet understanding his real self, accepting his portion of responsibility for his exclusion from nature and society and devoting himself to the cultivation and recognition of his art.

(Anton 1995: 121–122 n5)

This is not dissimilar to the way *Ítaca* develops. Aguirre’s *Ítaca* took her a full six years to write⁷⁹ and it is not until the final poem of the collection, “Telar”, that she has this recognition, a glimpse of the way out. Like Cavafy, she examines and more acutely defines her prisons before she can be free of them.

Aguirre begins by exploring the geography of silence on Ithaca. As shown, the poems “Triste fierá” and “Ítaca” set up a landscape of silence which will reverberate throughout the collection. As *Ítaca* continues the aura of silence becomes pervasive. In the third poem, “Desde fuera” [“From Without”], the fourth stanza is filled with it:

¿Y quién querría descender al fondo
de un silencio más vasto que el océano?
Silencio son sus habitantes
silencio y ojos hacia el mar.

And who would want to descend to the bottom
of a silence greater than the ocean?
Its inhabitants are silence,
Silence and eyes toward the sea.

(Aguirre 2004: 22–23)

⁷⁹ See Caballero 2011.

And later in the seventh stanza: “los dioses son palabras; con el silencio, mueren” [“gods are words; with silence, they die”] (23). In “Los camaradas” [“The Comrades”], these silent inhabitants are compared to “animales buscando una salida” [“animals looking for a way out”]. The last stanza of the poem reads:

Unos pocos tan sólo permanecen tranquilos.
Pero se quedan mudos:
mucho antes de que irrumpen
avanza su silencio;
son un cortejo disgregado,
un arenal en marcha:
ellos podrían ir a cualquier parte:

porque donde ellos van allí comienza Ítaca.

(Aguirre 2004: 26–27)

Only a few remain quiet.
But they stay mute:
way before they burst in,
their silence moves on;
they are a broken-up cortege,
a sandy area in motion:
they could go anywhere:

because wherever they go, that’s where Ithaca begins.

(Aguirre 2004: 26–27)

This last line is ominous: not only is Ithaca a landscape of silence and despair, but it is everywhere; you carry it with you. Aguirre’s interpretation reveals just how different her Ithaca is from Cavafy’s “Ιθάκη”. It highlights the fact that a journey like the one Cavafy’s poem envisions is only accessible to men of power: the heroes. Everyone else is “only shipwrecked”.

On the other hand, if one examines the above poem (especially the last line) in relation to Cavafy's poem "Η Πόλις", we see an even stronger connection. Indeed, it appears that the construction of Aguirre's Ithaca has been influenced by Cavafy's City, rather than his Ithaca. The second stanza of Cavafy's "Η Πόλις" reads:

Καινούριους τόπους δεν θα βρεις, δεν θάβρεις άλλες θάλασσες.
Η πόλις θα σε ακολουθεί. Στους δρόμους θα γυρνάς
τους ίδιους. Και στες γειτονιές τες ίδιες θα γερνάς·
και μες στα ίδια σπίτια αυτά θ' ασπρίζεις.
Πάντα στην πόλι αυτή θα φθάνεις.

You won't find a new country, won't find another shore.
This city will always pursue you. You will walk
the same streets, grow old in the same neighbourhoods,
will turn gray in these same houses.
You will always end up in this city.

(Cavafy 1983: 50–51)

Not only does the inescapable nature of "this place" resonate in both Aguirre's and Cavafy's ideas of the city, but Cavafy's poem is also characterized by dual narration. The first stanza of Cavafy's poem is in quotation marks, as the narrator quotes someone else: "Είπες: «Θαπάγωσ' άλληγη, θαπάγωσ' άλληθάλασσα...»" ["You said: 'I'll go to another country, go to another shore...' "]. Much like Aguirre's *Ítaca* the two narrators in Cavafy's poem could very well represent an inner doubling: two sides of the self struggling to come to terms with an identity that does not fit the structural norms of their respective societies. This form of narration reinforces the idea that Ithaca is not a geographical place, but it is located within the self.

Taking a closer look at the poem “Desde fuera”, one can see that it further reiterates this notion of the city/Ithaca as an inescapable place. In juxtaposition to the title, the poem’s content makes it clear that Penelope’s perspective is from *within* the island of Ithaca. Here is the poem in its entirety:

“Desde fuera”

¿Quién sería el extraño que quisiera
Conocer un paisaje como éste?
Desde fuera, la isla es infinita:
una vida resultaría escasa
para cubrir su territorio

Desde fuera.

Pero Ítaca está dentro, o no se alcanza

¿Y quién querría descender al fondo
de un silencio más vasto que el océano?
Silencio son sus habitantes
silencio y ojos hacia el mar.

Desde fuera
las aguas son caminos
—desde la playa son solo frontera—.
¿Y quién sería el torpe navegante
que entraría en un puerto sin faro?

Desde fuera, los dioses no contemplan.

Desde aquí, no hay un pecho
capaz de cobijarlos:
los dioses son palabras; con el silencio, mueren.
¿Alguna vez la isla fue distinta?
Quién lo puede saber desde el aturdimiento.

Sin palabras, sin dioses, Ítaca es sólo el mar
y un cielo que la aplasta.

Penélope:
¿quién sería el extraño que quisiera
comprobar tu trabajo?

(Aguirre 2004: 22)

“From Without”

From without, the island is infinite:
one lifetime would not be enough
to cover its territories.

From without.

But Ithaca is within, or one may not reach it.

And who would want to descend to the bottom
of a silence greater than the ocean?
Its inhabitants are silence,
Silence and eyes toward the sea.

From without
the waters are pathways
—from the beach they are only borders—
And who might be the clumsy mariner
who would pull into a port with no lighthouse?

From without, the gods watch us.

From here, there isn't a single bosom
able to harbor them:
gods are words; with silence they die.
Was the island different at any other time?
Who might know it from this state of bewilderment?

Without words, without gods, Ithaca is only the sea
and the sky that crushes it.

Penelope:
Who might be the stranger who would want
to check on your work?

(Aguirre 2004: 23)

The first line of the poem questions why anyone would want to know such a landscape as Ithaca, yet this is Penelope's task. This Penelopean persona must “descender al fondo/ de un silencio más vasto que el océano” [“Descend to the bottom / of a silence greater than the ocean”] in order to explore, as Adrienne Rich

might put it, “the wreck”. She must explore the geography of this Ithaca. The poem highlights both her feelings of entrapment and her knowledge that this entrapment may be due to her own perspective of Ithaca: “Desde fuera / las aguas son caminos / —desde la playa son solo frontera—” [“From without / the waters are pathways / —from the beach they are only borders—”. Perhaps one of the most important lines in the poem is when the narrator asks is: “¿Alguna vez la isla fue distinta?” [Was the island different at any other time?]. The line is followed by another question: “Quién lo puede saber desde el aturdimiento” [“Who might know it from this state of bewilderment?”] ⁸⁰ This second question only makes sense if the answer to the first question is “yes”. Yes, the island used to be different, but who would be able to tell, now, in this state of confusion. It is this silent “yes” that marks the beginning of the process of recognition; this is the point at which the narrator realizes that Ithaca has not always been this way. Thus, there is some hope for it to be different. As we will see, both Aguirre and Cavafy must first move inwards to explore the trapped self before they can leave Ithaca and move on.

From the City, or in Aguirre’s case, Ithaca, the narrative persona retreats further inwards to the confines of another, narrower barrier: the walls. Indeed there is a crucial comparison to be made between Cavafy’s “Τείχη” [“Walls”] and Aguirre’s “El muro” [“The Wall”]. Within the framework of Homeric allusion, one normally considers walls part of a fortification, as a form of protection. However, as Anton explains:

⁸⁰ The Spanish lacks question marks but it is an interrogative sentence beginning with “Quién”. The translation adds a question mark to denote this.

Cavafy inverts the location and the function of physical walls to convey the psychic condition of the modern man in the cosmopolis. The walls for the defence of the cities have now become the limits of individual expression, and what once built to protect appears radically inverted into a trap and a prison.

(Anton 1995:169)

Here is Cavafy's poem in its entirety:

“Τείχη”

Χωρίς περίσκεψιν, χωρίς λύπην, χωρίς αιδώ
μεγάλα κ' υψηλά τριγύρω μου έκτισαν τείχη.

Και κάθομαι και απελπίζομαι τώρα εδώ.
Άλλο δεν σκέπτομαι: τον νουν μου τρώγει αυτή η τύχη·

διότι πράγματα πολλά έξω να κάμω είχαν.
Α όταν έκτιζαν τα τείχη πώς να μην προσέξω.

Αλλά δεν άκουσα ποτέ κρότον κτιστών ή ήχον.
Ανεπαισθήτως μ' έκλεισαν από τον κόσμον έξω.

(Cavafy 1983: 2–3)

“Walls”

With no consideration, no pity, no shame,
they have built walls around me, thick and high.
And now I sit here feeling hopeless.
I can't think of anything else: this fate gnaws my mind—
because I had so much to do outside.
When they were building the walls, how could I not have noticed!
But I never heard the builders, not a sound.
Imperceptibly they have closed me off from the outside world.

(Cavafy 1983: 2–3)

For one of the earlier Cavafy poems, “Τείχη” [“Walls”] has generated a large amount of criticism. Some critics believe that it is a callow and undeveloped poem, while others find its simplicity deceptive and subtle. As a member of the latter group, Alexander Nehamas believes that the grammar of the poem reveals its complexity and reflects an important stage in Cavafian poetics. Keeley agrees that “Walls” is part of the process of Cavafy’s movement from “small subjective worlds” to the “imaginary city” (as seen in “Waiting for the Barbarians”) (Keeley 1996a: 35). However, Keeley finds “Walls” “uncomplicated” and “two-dimensional”. Nehamas on the other hand, claims that the poem has a more subtle effect: “[there is] the growing sense that the walls are self-imposed, that the poet ‘himself has become the unspecified “they” that oppress him, the mason of his own confinement’ ” (Nehamas 1983: 296). In fact, in the original, the eight verses are divided into four couplets rhyming AB AB CD CD, mimicking the four walls that entrap the narrator. Nehamas also argues that the “grammatical imagery” is “stifling” and emphasizes the fact that the grammar itself performs a kind of imprisonment; the subject is walled in and placed “securely on the inside” of the sentence (Nehamas 1983: 297–98). The use of the middle voice in Greek, and the absence of possessive pronouns also add to the feeling of the subject’s imprisonment (Nehamas 1983: 298 & 300). To some degree the builders are like the barbarians in “Waiting for the Barbarians”: they are elusive yet the effects of them are all around. Nehamas explains: “The possibility of seeing the builders is not even envisaged, and the (unrealized) possibility of hearing them is at best indirect” (Nehamas 1983: 298). In fact, both poems could be described as “[a] meditation on the predicament of the subject writ large, taking the state as a metaphor for the self” (Nehamas 1983: 301).

Like Cavafy's "Τείχη" ["The Walls"], Francisca Aguirre's "El muro" ["The Wall"] has been interpreted too superficially. In her introduction to *Ítaca*, Ana Valverde Osan writes that the speaker of the poem becomes surrounded by a "'wall' of affection and love that will prevent her from committing suicide, the only autonomous act of freedom for the disenfranchised" (12). Although I can understand this interpretation of the poem, in light of the rest of the collection I would say that this wall is not as benevolent as it may seem. At best, it is an ambiguous figure that can be interpreted in several ways. In the preceding poem, "La felicidad" ["Happiness"], the underlying irony of the title seems to belie Valverde Osan's interpretation of "El Muro". The first stanza of "La felicidad" reads:

Adiós, para siempre adiós.
 No puedo confiar en vosotros,
 extraños que me habláis de la felicidad,
 que pronunciáis esa palabra sin temor,
 que la arrojáis sobre mi vida.
 Venís con vuestra palabra entre las manos
 y la empuñáis como se empuña un arma.
 Felicidad, decís, y al escucharos
 oigo el acento del que manda,
 el acento implacable del que cree,
 el acento voraz del la avaricia.

(Aguirre 2004:118)

Goodbye, forever goodbye.
 I cannot trust you,
 strangers who talk to me about happiness,
 who utter that word without fear
 who hurl it at my life.
 You come with your word in your hands
 and wield it as you would a weapon.
 Happiness, you say, and when I listen to you
 I hear the accent of one who commands,
 the implacable accent of the one who believes,
 the voracious accent of avarice.

(Aguirre 2004: 119)

All the people who want the speaker “to be happy” are “strangers” who talk to her about happiness and “hurl” it at her life, their words like weapons. The poem ends with the line “queries que sea feliz. Os tengo miedo.” [“How do you want me to be happy. I fear you.”] (119). It is clear that the “vosotros” or “you” (plural) are menacing figures. This poem in particular is reminiscent of women’s literature that revisits the topos of the madwoman in the attic and the conspiracy of those who “only want to make her happy”. In this light, it would appear that the narrator is beginning to catch on to the fact that those who tell her to be happy are not concerned about her welfare; this is a command that asserts their power over her.

This realization then sets the mood for the next poem “El muro” which I will quote in its entirety:

“El muro”

Pensó: qué espantoso vacío,
un desierto es la tierra;
si ahora echara a correr
podría salirme de ella totalmente.
Miraba a su alrededor
y miraba también dentro de sí
y no encontraba nada:
ni el más pequeño promontorio.
Comprendió que iba a ser muy fácil,
se trataba sencillamente de correr,
y en ella había, sin duda,
una necesidad de correr sin descanso.
Meditaba, aturdida:
tal vez llegue a algún sitio
o puede que por fin salga de todos.

Ingenuamente tomó una decisión
Y de pronto vio el muro.
Se alzaba ante ella a poca distancia;
lo contempló con estupor;
no era muy grande y, sin embargo, parecía rodearla;
más aún: parecía abrazarla.
Giró vertiginosamente la cabeza
mientras algo muy antiguo dentro de ella golpeaba
con un sonido hermoso.
Y muy despacio se sentó en el suelo
y comenzó a llorar con gratitud
aceptando con humildad los pañuelos
y las voces que amorosamente la protegían.

(Aguirre 2004: 120)

“The Wall”

She thought: what a frightening void,
the earth is a desert;
if I were to start running
I could get out of it completely.
She looked around her
and looked within herself as well
and couldn't find anything:
not even the tiniest hill.
She understood it was going to be very easy,
it simply meant running,
and within her, undoubtedly,
there was a need to run without stopping.
Confused, she kept wondering:
perhaps I will get somewhere
or maybe I will finally get out of everywhere.

Naively, she made a decision.
And all of a sudden, she saw the wall.
It went up in front of her, not too far;
she gazed at it with astonishment;
it was not very big and yet, it seemed to surround her;
moreover: it seemed to embrace her.
She turned her head dizzily
while something very old inside her was knocking
with a beautiful sound.
And very slowly she sat on the floor.
and started to cry with gratitude,
accepting with humility the handkerchiefs
and the voices that lovingly protected her.

(Aguirre 2004: 121)

Reading this poem just after “La felicidad” in which the speaker fears the illusive “you” that imposes happiness upon her, it is easy to read “El muro” with irony and to mistrust those bearing handkerchiefs. Suspiciously, the wall goes up just after she has made a decision and prevents her from “getting out”. As mentioned earlier, other interpretations of this poem refer to the wall as a protective force

from self-harm. Equally, the wall could represent the other half of the narrative self that stops her from giving into madness completely.⁸¹

In both Aguirre's and Cavafy's poems, the walls reveal a multiplicity of entrapment: the many possible walls that limit the self.⁸² For Aguirre, the walls are her exclusion from the canon of Spanish poetry, or the restrictive narrative of the quest wherein women wait and men wander. At the same time, these walls could also represent the very boundaries that define the self and, consequently, the building blocks for Aguirre's and Cavafy's construction of the self within their respective poetics. For Aguirre, the asphyxiation she experienced within these walls, despite their "loving" intentions, created the urgency to re-recognize herself as a subject with agency. For Cavafy, the walls serve as the first step in creating a series of imaginary spaces that would develop into his mythical Alexandria and would slowly form the foundations of his poetic self (Keeley 1996a).⁸³ In his commentary on Cavafy's "Τείχη", John P. Anton says:

By not noticing what was happening to him, he had passively accepted some degree of responsibility for his fate. The wailing started only after he saw the finished work. The next phase of the predicament follows with inexorable logic in "the Windows".

(Anton 1995: 170)

⁸¹ This will be discussed further in the context of the poem "Telar" ["Loom"].

⁸² It is worth noting that, if the Cavafian subject represents a queer subject then the comparison with Aguirre becomes even more striking: each subject is locked within the cage of itself forced into their respective closets or the attics by social conventions. As Nehamas observes, in "Τείχη": "Cavafy's subject is not simply powerless, but deeply fragmented" (Nehamas 1983: 302). Although this does very accurately describe Aguirre's subject throughout *Ítaca*, the final poem, "Telar", does not leave the subject entirely powerless.

⁸³ I realize that Cavafian poetics is a vast and complex subject in its own right and 'proving' that Cavafian poetics is also 'Penelopean' would require an exhaustive study. However, for the purposes of this thesis I merely want to pose this as a possibility.

Cavafy moves through a series of progressively more confined spaces: from the City to Walls and then to “The Windows” (*cf.* Anton 1995: 170).⁸⁴ Yet like Aguirre, there is a point where Cavafy recognizes this entrapment and is able then to break down these walls. For Cavafy, this moment is epitomized years later in “Ἰθάκη”:

Τους Λαιστρυγόνας και τους Κύκλωπας,
τον άγριο Ποσειδώνα δεν θα συναντήσεις,
αν δεν τους κουβανείς μες στην ψυχή σου,
αν η ψυχή σου δεν τους στήνει εμπρός σου.

(Cavafy 1983: 50)

Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
wild Poseidon—you won’t encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

(Cavafy 1983: 51)

If the self is, in part, to blame for this entrapment, then the self also has some agency to change this. Once this is acknowledged, a “way out” can, at least, be imagined.

Although it takes Cavafy many years to arrive at this point of recognition, one can see the beginnings of this in “Τείχη”: the builders of the wall are potentially representative of another part of the self: the part of the self that restricts itself. As Nehamas suggests, the self can be the ultimate prison: “[its] walls consist of itself, its cell is nowhere” (Nehamas 1983: 307). This quotation has the same ominous tone that flows through the entirety of Aguirre’s *Ítaca*: “because wherever they go,

⁸⁴ According to Anton, “Τα Παράθυρα” [“The Windows”] reveals a more severe sense of isolation: the persona in the poem is locked inside a mansion with no doors, windows, or exits (Anton 1995: 118).

that's where Ithaca begins" (Aguirre 2004: 26–27). In other words, looking at both Cavafy's and Aguirre's poems (respectively "Τείχη" and "El muro"; and "Ιθάκη" and "Ítaca") it may very well be the case that they represent the silenced self which both poets eventually move away from.

It is difficult to simplify either of the poems and it is especially difficult to say with certainty whether the walls in Aguirre's "El muro" are self-imposed or not. Indeed, part of what makes Aguirre's poem so compelling is this tension: the uncertainty about who is doing this to the narrator and why this is happening. Much like myths, events are circumstantial things that appear to happen by the will of the gods or fate rather than by an action of the narrator. The reader believes Aguirre's narrator when she says that there is no one responsible for what is happening to her; the reader believes her confusion and bewilderment. Yet, this should also be a clue to the fact that it may be the narrator's own self that is partly responsible. Aguirre hints at this in the poem "Asesinato" ["Murder"], which comes three poems before "El muro" [The Wall] when the narrator says:

Nadie podrá señalarme por esta tristeza,
ninguno habrá—me dicen—
que me pueda culpar por ir en sombras.

(Aguirre 2004: 114)

No one will be able to point at me for this sadness,
There will be no one —they tell me—
Who will be able to blame me for moving in the shadows.

(Aguirre 2004: 115)

The use of "no one" or "nobody" is reminiscent of the *Odyssey* Book 9 and the trick that Odysseus plays on the Cyclops, Polyphemus. Odysseus cleverly tells

Polyphemus that his name is “Nobody” so that when he blinds Polyphemus the Cyclops’s cries for help would go unanswered. Odysseus is right: upon hearing Polyphemus howl, the other Cyclops come running and ask who or what has caused his pain. Polyphemus replies: “Nobody.” The other Cyclops inquire no more and walk away thinking he has gone mad and probably inflicted the injury upon himself. The connection with Aguirre’s poem lies in the particular use of “nobody” and also its reference to harm and self-harm.⁸⁵ Aguirre use of “Nadie / ninguno” [no one] in the poem “Asesinato” is ambiguous. The reader is unsure whether the narrator means that “this sadness” is her own fault or if “they” are unfairly blaming her. Considering the reference to the *Odyssey*, the reader must be tentative in accepting the explanation that nobody is to blame. On the contrary, it may be a hint that there is some Odysseus behind this Nobody.

The question of “Nobody” continues as the first canto, “El Círculo de Ítaca” [“Ithaca’s Circle”], comes to a close. This first half ends with the poem “La bienvenida” [“Welcome”] which signals to the reader that this may be the moment of Odysseus’s homecoming. However, in the poem “Monólogo” [“Monologue”], which precedes “La bienvenida”, the speaker is Odysseus; he has already returned. In this way, the first canto ends with a question hanging in the air: is she really waiting for Odysseus? And if so, who *is* Odysseus? Is he this “Nobody”, this “stranger”? Perhaps “he” is also a manifestation of the narrator’s lost self that was posed as a possibility in Aguirre’s earlier poem “Ítaca”. Because the narrative voice of “Monólogo” is second person and addresses Penelope the reader has no way of knowing for sure if the speaker is Odysseus. In fact, if one looks at the

⁸⁵ This notion of self-harm is represented in Aguirre’s poem “Autofagia”, which retells the Prometheus myth. The metaphor of self-immolation is also used by her predecessors, Rosalía de Castro and Ernestina Champourcín (Wilcox 1997: 243).

poem preceding “Monólogo”, that is, “El espectáculo” [“The Show”], the narrative voice sounds very much like a schizophrenic-self disguising one half as Odysseus. The speaker taunts Penelope: “Contempla el espectáculo, Penélope” [“Watch the show, Penelope”] encouraging her to watch the “suitors”⁸⁶ fight over her, and then later says ominously: “Ninguno sabe bien quién eres” [“Nobody knows very well who you are”]. This line is brilliant in its ambiguity. Because “nobody” is the first word of the sentence it remains unclear whether or not the subject is the general “nobody” or the Odyssean “Nobody” and thus leaves the reader to wonder for whom Penelope is searching for and who this “Nobody” is that knows so much about her. Moving to the second canto we are offered one possible answer: she was searching for herself and her own identity. In this light, one can posit that “Nobody” was one part of her identity, the part of her that was trying to keep her other half censored, normative, and safe.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Here again it is ambiguous *who* is fighting. Although the order of the poems indicates that this is the time when Odysseus returns to Ithaca, kills the suitors and reunites with his wife, it may very well be that it is the various identities of “Penelope” that are fighting here rather than the suitors.

⁸⁷ An interesting comparison can be made here with Rhea Galanaki’s *Ελένη ή ο Κανένας* [*Eleni or Nobody*]. Like the narrator in *Ελένη ή ο Κανένας* Aguirre’s burning of all her previous poetry could be similarly categorized as symbolic suicide (Galanaki 1998); (Galanaki 2003). Angie Vola discusses *Ελένη ή ο Κανένας* alongside ideas of symbolic suicide and heterotopias in Voela 2011.

LETTERS TO YOU (/ ME)

The first canto of *Ítaca*, “El Círculo de Ítaca” [“Ithaca’s Circle”], continually brought Penelope back to the same place; she could not find solace in the sea, in the weaving, in the waiting, or in the welcome. Thus, she was forced to look inward. In the second canto, “El desván de Penélope” [“Penelope’s Attic”], she retreats from the mythical framework into the attic and often into the autobiography of Francisca Aguirre. With poems such as “Paisajes de papel” [“Paper Landscapes”], “El orden” [“Orderliness”] and “Autofagia” [“Autophagy”], the Penelope persona comes to see Ithaca as precisely this: a paper landscape of her own making. In “El orden” she addresses the Penelope persona:

Y ahora, del otro lado de silencio
yo contemplo también esa mirada,
ese ver que no pide sino asiste,
ese future sin future
y me pongo a llorar sobre la vida
diciéndome: Penélope,
deberíamos hacer algo que no fuera morir.

(Aguirre 2004: 66)

And now, from the other side of silence,
I also examine that look,
that gaze that does not ask but gives,
that future without a future
and I start crying about life
telling myself: Penelope,
we should do something other than dying.

(Aguirre 2004: 67)

The narrator begins to change her perspective: she addresses herself as Penelope, yet she also says that “we should do something”. She is beginning to realize that she has made herself multiple in order to examine these different parts of the self. Later, in the poem “Autofagia”, the narrator lists the various personas that she has used in this topos:

Yo soy la abandonada de este reino
el mendigo que mira tras el cristal.
Yo soy el triste buzo
que necesita su porción de oxígeno
para intentar llegar al fondo.

(Aguirre 2004: 84)

I am this kingdom’s abandoned women,
the beggar who looks behind the window.
I am the sad diver
Who needs her portion of oxygen
to try and reach the bottom.

(Aguirre 2004: 85)

The first metaphor quite obviously evokes Penelope (abandoned woman), and the second, Odysseus (beggar). This beggar also looks out from behind a window, which is reminiscent of Cavafy’s movement from ideas of the City, to Walls, and then to Windows. Finally, it must be noted that the image of the diver allows for an intertextual link with Adrienne Rich’s “Diving into the Wreck” a poem that also explores the self, its walls, and its ruins. This overlapping of metaphors between Aguirre, Cavafy, and Rich offers an interesting intertextuality and highlights the similarities in their respective projects of self-making.

The final poem of *Ítaca*, “Telar” [“Loom”], reflects the movement to a more personal space and also stages the narrator’s moment of recognition: “Telar” is the

first instance where the poet addresses herself by name. Even the form of the poem is strikingly different to any other in the collection. Each stanza ranges from one to three lines and is separated by an asterisk that functions visually to emphasize the patchy nature of the poem. In this way, the poem is both visually and figuratively an amalgamation; Aguirre will conclude her long poem by weaving together the fragments of wisdom she has learned on her inward journey. This difference is also marked by the third person narrator who acts as a mystic, addressing both Francisca and Penelope by name, asking them rhetorical questions and giving each sagacious advice:

Francisca, no debes olvidar
que la última recompense es la muerte

(Aguirre 2004: 122)

Francisca, you must not forget
the ultimate reward is death

(Aguirre 2004: 123)

It is also made clear that Penelope is the alter ego of Francisca (formerly Nobody?) since Penelope is addressed directly as well:

Penélope, ¿qué hacer con lo constante
en el reinado de la ambigüedad?

(Aguirre 2004: 122)

Penelope, what will you do with constancy
in the reign of ambiguity?

(Aguirre 2004: 123)

This is a challenge the narrator poses to the poet/Penelope: what will you do now? How will you live within the confines of such institutions and ideologies that rival everything you believe? At some point one is not sure who is being addressed —Francisca or Penelope— yet what does become clear is that there is some kind of recognition happening:

Tú lloras demasiado, demasiado:
¿no sera que sospechas de ti?

You cry too much, way too much:
Could it be that you suspect yourself?

(Aguirre 2004: 123)

And then later in the poem:

Esos que llamas otros son tu historia
divídete a ti misma y perderás.

(Aguirre 2004: 122)

Those you call others are your story:
Divide yourself and you will lose.

(Aguirre 2004: 123)

The narrator is now aware that these Penelopes, these Odysseuses, may be part of her own story, her own self.

In this way, the second half of the collection and this poem in particular, is reminiscent of Charlotte Perkins Gillman's short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, in which the protagonist is slowly stifled by patriarchy (masked as sympathy) which leads to a splitting of the subject as the protagonist goes mad. It is only at the very end of the story that the reader learns the narrator's/protagonists' name is Jane and

that the narrator had been referring to herself in the third person. By this point there has been a complete rupture of the self: Jane is not only the alter ego of the narrator who has gone mad, but Jane is completely separate. She is seen as just another conspirator against the narrator. However, Aguirre's text has a different ending: the last line of "Telar" demands that she rouse from this Ithacan stupor: "Francisca Aguirre, acompáñate" ["Francisca Aguirre, accompany yourself"] (124–125). The use of the author's own first and last names suggests a scolding tone, and silently asks the question: *Who is writing this? Penelope? Francisca Aguirre?* Although the self is split she refuses to abandon it. Here, Aguirre invokes the power of naming and performative speech to claim her identity (-ies). She is no longer a nameless narrator, a Nobody, or even Penelope; she is Francisca Aguirre because she declares it to be so and thus refuses to be defeated by patriarchy, silence, or her self.

John C. Wilcox calls Aguirre's poetry a form of "masochistic marginalization" in which the anger and frustration of living as a woman within a patriarchal society manifests itself in a poetics that "splits her poetic persona apart, and reduces her to silence" (Wilcox 1997: 235). Although the major themes in *Ítaca* include loss, loneliness, isolation, and helplessness (Oliván 2007: 5), and there is no doubt that the poetry expresses a division of the self, neither Francisca nor Penelope is reduced to silence. Yet Wilcox maintains that *Ítaca* "presents an image of a woman who has been reduced to a state of mental illness by the actions of a patriarch" (Wilcox 1997: 235). Throughout *Ítaca* Aguirre has explored madness as an option; however, the last line of her long poem announces her denial of madness as a viable solution. Indeed, Aguirre presents an interesting archetype to rival that of the madwoman in the attic: the madwoman that refuses to submit to

madness. The alter ego that she develops (caused by the violent severing of her “self” and her sense of autonomy) is the very entity that scolds her for turning to madness: “divídete a ti misma y perderás” [“divide yourself and you will lose”]. This descent into madness parallels the traditional quest myth in which the hero descends to the underworld. However, this parallel is only possible if the madwoman comes back from madness into the world of sanity and “accompanies herself”, which she does.

There is also a comparison to be made with Adrienne Rich regarding her use of the split self.⁸⁸ In Rich’s poetry the divided self or the double manifests in different ways: in “When We Dead Awaken” (from *Diving into the Wreck* (1973)) the double was kin, but still remarkably separate, a “fellow-creature, sister”. A latter poem in the same collection has the double becoming an androgyne with two gendered halves: “I am she: I am he”. In the collection *Your Native Land, Your Life* (1986), the third section is a sequence of poems that are numbered under the title: “Contradictions: Tracking Poems” and contains two poems in which the poet names herself.⁸⁹ Such poems (Aguirre’s included) represent the possibility of *the self in dialogue with the self* as a unique type of Re-vision. Rich’s poems take

⁸⁸ One can also compare Rich’s use of the long poem to Aguirre’s. According to Marilyn Hacker, “The long sequential poem necessitates a wider lens, which opens out from the lyrical or anecdotal, even if it began there” and in this way many of the poem cycles or sequences that Rich writes can be considered long poems. Hacker continues: “for this reader, the multi-focused, kaleidoscopic poems from ‘Snapshots’ [*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*] through ‘Tendril’ in the 2004 collection *The School Among the Ruins* are Rich’s most characteristic and powerful work...” (Hacker 2010: 29).

⁸⁹ *Your Native Land, Your Life* (1986) is about pain and responsibility; it relies on a deep introspection in order to understand pain and suffering on a larger scale. As Blackford suggests:

She makes her own pain a metaphor for the world’s accumulation of suffering and at the same time she refuses any easy equation of the two spheres. By “blurring” those boundaries, she brings us to a new responsibility for our actions, for the very act of reading itself.

(Blackford 1986: 17).

the form of letters that are both addressed to and signed by her self. Poem number six of the sequence begins:

Dear Adrienne:

I'm calling you up tonight
as I might call up a friend as I might call up a ghost
to ask what you intend to do
with the rest of your life.

(Rich 1986a: 88)

There is a tone of urgency in the narrator's voice and with an air of warning she says:

I hope you have some idea
about the rest of your life.

(Rich: 1986: 88)

The poem ends with the closing words: "In sisterhood, Adrienne". Here, the double is the self imagined as a sister or a friend, but one half is more conscious than the other. Although similar to Aguirre's "Telar", Rich's identities are not as separate; both are called Adrienne and it appears that one Adrienne is trying to advise the other. In Aguirre's poem, a third-person narrator advises both Penelope and Francisca indicating a more severe split. Moreover, it becomes clearer after reading the second poem that Rich's are less about her present state (of doubling) and more about her future; it seems that these letters are addressed to a future Adrienne who will re-read these poems. Rich second poem of this kind is presented as a reply to the first:

... You ask me how I'm going to live
the rest of my life
Well, nothing is predictable with pain
Did the old poets write of this?
—in its odd spaces, free
many have sung and battled—
But I'm already living the rest of my life
not under the conditions of my choosing
wired into pain

rider on the slow train

Yours Adrienne

(Rich 1986: 89)

In an almost Homeric moment Rich conjures “the old poets” of epic poetry and conflates the poet and the warrior: “many have sung and battled”. Much of epic poetry is full of despair, gore, and graphic battle scenes; however, it seems that this is not the kind of pain that Rich is talking about. She says that these “old poets” rarely explore the “odd spaces” and this may be a reference to the poet’s own state of being: at this stage in her life Rich is suffering from arthritis and writing/typing quite literally pains her.

This poem, like many in the collection is about a body in physical pain (Blackford 1986: 17) but it is also part of a strategy of coping with that pain. Rich does not want to lose her self in the immediacy of pain, yet it is perhaps also this immediacy that allows her to see differently yet again. Although she may not be able to answer the question of what she will do with the rest of her life, she still maintains that it is *her* life. She is still Adrienne even if she is a “rider on the slow train”. Like Aguirre, a narrative double allows Rich to have a conversation with her self and inhabit a different perspective. In this way these two poems acknowledge not only the temporality of subjectivity, but represent an “Adrienne”

who is fully committing to her project of Re-vision since she is in constant dialogue with her own work. Finally, the comparison with Aguirre reveals some of the possibilities that the self-reflective reading and writing strategies of Re-vision can offer.

Although Francisca Aguirre's (Penelope's) quest is not a worldly adventure of Odyssean proportions, it is equally as dangerous. On her journey to find her identity as a woman and as a poet, she had to face censorship, oppression, and the most elusive obstacle of them all, the two headed monster —the divided self— that she must not slaughter, but accept. As Aguirre has shown, this quest is long and often circuitous, but it is a journey worth making. In the end, she realizes that her failure to feel “at home” on Ithaca was due to her unhappiness with her entrapment, an entrapment which involved a complex web of walls, some of her own making, others constructed without her noticing. Through *Ítaca* Aguirre considered several avenues of escape, including the annihilation of the self, but ultimately ends up choosing to acknowledge the multiple parts of the self rather than destroying them.

Placed in the context of Judith Butler's theory of giving an account of oneself, one might say that there can be no true scene of recognition (or escape) for an account that ends in the obliteration of the self. Aguirre's *Ítaca* approaches this option but her Penelope realizes that the circle of Ithaca and Penelope's attic are only places if you carry them with you. Not feeling at home in these places only means leaving. Moreover, this leaving, this failure to narrate within these walls, highlights the limitations of the topos, or the normative structures of recognition,

and not necessarily the limitations of the self. In this way, it becomes clear that Aguirre's initial dramatic reaction to Cavafy's poetry was, in part, an acknowledgement that she was not alone in feeling trapped on an Ithaca and that by exploring the geography of this place she could begin to understand how she ended up there. In Cavafy's poems as well as Rich's, one can see how this strategy of the self in dialogue with the self can allow the poet to begin to give an account of the self. Finally, like Cavafy, Aguirre is also eventually able to find a way out through poetry. After writing *Ítaca* Aguirre realizes: "tenía que salir de esa puñetera isla" ["I had to get off of that damn island"]⁹⁰ (Caballero 2011), and she does. Her next poetry collection, *Los trescientos escalones* [*The Three Hundred Steps*] became her way of climbing out of Ithaca towards something better.⁹¹

As this chapter has explored, being nobody is not an option for women writers. But in the context of poets that use the *Odyssey* one must ask what other option is there for woman? Usually, she is restricted to being Penelope, Circe, or a Siren. It is a question that several women poets have attempted to answer. Indeed, the next two chapters will continue this thread as the poets Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke and Gail Holst-Warhaft endeavour to define Penelope as something other than a not-Odysseus or an Odyssean other.

⁹⁰ My translation.

⁹¹ Aguirre has since continued writing, and in 2011 won the Spanish National Poetry Prize for her most recent collection *Historia de una anatomía* ["The History of Anatomy"] in which she explores ideas of the embodied self (Díaz 2011).

Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke: Penelope Writes

It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction...

Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse* (Barthes 1978: 14)

According to the above quotation, when it comes to love and absence, woman is the one who tells the tale: “she weaves and she sings; the Spinning Songs”, because it is she who remains (Barthes 1978: 14).⁹² The Penelope figure is the one who waits, but she is also then the one who sings, or in this case, *writes* the lover's discourse. Barthes's notion of the lover and the beloved overlaps with Judith Butler's the self/other discussion and takes on a new light in the context of the Penelope myth; in a sense, Penelope has always been the other. She is the not-Helen, the not-Clytemnestra, the not-goddess, the not-Odysseus. Virtually all master narratives of Western culture with a quest theme revolve around an Odyssean hero, a man who voyages and the women/monsters/goddesses he encounters. What then does it mean for the woman writer to *be* Penelope and have an *Odyssean* other? And who is Penelope without Odysseus?⁹³

For the Greek poet Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke these questions are read through the context of the body; revising Penelope means re-inscribing the body and renegotiating its relationship to writing poetry. In this case, re-writing the

⁹² Interestingly, Roland Champagne contends that Barthes was being sarcastic here and that Barthes was attempting to illustrate how language conditions the reader (Champagne 1984: 34).

⁹³ The poem “You Are Odysseus” by Linda Pastan, discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis (page 25) also asks: Who Penelope is without Odysseus. See Pastan 1982: 46–47.

Penelope myth is less about entrapment (as it was for Aguirre) and more about the (bodily) experiences of woman's otherness. Anghelaki-Rooke's poetics "writes the body". It acknowledges the corporeality of lived experience and attempts to capture a sense of this in her writing. Thus, through her exploration of Penelope as a non-Odysseus, Anghelaki-Rooke can examine the otherness of being a woman, and more specifically, a woman poet and a woman in love. Her poetry also tries to understand what it means to write about absence in order to turn it into presence and to use writing as a way to affirm the self in the absence of the beloved. As will be shown, there is a great deal of overlap with feminist discourse on the body and the lover in Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry. Although the poet is far less political in her agenda than someone like Adrienne Rich, Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry has been categorized by many (especially those who read her in English) as feminist and this is certainly the case for the 2008 English language collection *The Scattered Papers of Penelope*.

This chapter will begin with an overview of the body in Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry and then turn to a close analysis of her Penelope poems including "Λέει η Πηνελόπη" ["Penelope Says"] and "Η άλλη Πηνελόπη" ["The Other Penelope"]. Despite having been written eighteen years apart, these poems form the thematic backbone of the 2008 collection. In "Λέει η Πηνελόπη" Anghelaki-Rooke re-imagines the Homeric Penelope as a writer who attempts to reconcile Odysseus's absence with her bodily desires. The latter poem, a Re-vision of her initial Penelope figure, looks deeper into the power dynamic between the waiting lover and the beloved. As this chapter will demonstrate, the discussion of the self as defined by another, especially with regards to a waiting lover and a beloved is

played out in Anghelaki-Rooke's poems as her Re-vision of Penelope attempts to redefine her self outside the confines of the Odyssean other.

KATERINA ANGHELAKEE-ROOKE & THE BODY IN POETRY

Similar to Francisca Aguirre, it is difficult to fit Anghelaki-Rooke (b. 1939) neatly into a poetic generation. Although she is often categorized as a poet of the seventies,⁹⁴ Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke is nearly ten years older than most of the poets in this group and her career as a poet began before the colonel's dictatorship (1967–1974). Her subversive use of myth was part of the literary trend of the time; however, as Roderick Beaton suggests, “the new strategy for handling hallowed myths, which dominates the poetry of the younger generation throughout the early 1970s, can be traced back to Anghelaki-Rooke's first collection” (Beaton 2004: 267), namely *Λύκοι και σύννεφα* [Wolves and Clouds] (1963).⁹⁵ Unlike her contemporaries, Anghelaki-Rooke did not incorporate pop culture references and technological metaphors into her poetry; she was more concerned with developing a personal poetics that struggled with notions of the female body (Beaton 2004: 267). According to Efrosini Camatsos, Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry can be categorized in three stages: the woman writer rewriting myths, gender roles and the body, and the gender inequality of women in society (Camatsos 2005: 2–4). In some collections there is arguably a blend of all three; the 2008 collection, for instance, takes poems from each of these stages. Before looking at *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* (2008) in detail, it is necessary to discuss the poet's work on gender and the body. Such a discussion provides an important lens for the later Penelope poems and demonstrates how precisely Anghelaki-Rooke creates a

⁹⁴ According to Beaton, the term “generation of the seventies” was coined by Maronitis 1987: 232–233. Members of this generation include Yannis Kondos (b. 1943), Jenny Mastoraki (b. 1949), Nasos Vayenas (b. 1945), and Rhea Galanaki (b. 1947).

⁹⁵ «Λύκοι και σύννεφα» [Wolves and Clouds] (1963) can be found in Anghelaki-Rooke 1971.

poetics that works to expose the power dynamics inherent in desire, love, and myth.

Anghelaki-Rooke's longstanding interest in the relationship between the body and text has made her relatively well known in Greece, and she has won several poetry prizes⁹⁶ —not an easy task considering that Greek women's poetry has remained virtually unknown outside of Greece until recent decades.⁹⁷ Some English speakers may have come across the Greek Nobel prize winners George Seferis and Odysseus Elytis. It is even more likely that they have read C.P. Cavafy or Yannis Ritsos. Yet Anghelaki-Rooke still has not received much attention in the Anglophone world. The publication of her 2008 English collection *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* can be seen as an attempt to break into the Anglophone market (and this viewpoint will be discussed later in the chapter when we look at the collection in detail). However, it would be remiss to imply that Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry is translated merely for marketing purposes. It is also an attempt by the translator, editor, and friend of the poet, Karen Van Dyck, to showcase Anghelaki-Rooke's unique poetics. Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry is in many ways both unmistakably Greek and incredibly international. The Greek landscape is a frequent setting and inspiration and the variety of linguistic forms she employs demonstrates a mastery of and playfulness with the Greek language. Her poetry also straddles the linguistic divide; as a professional translator,⁹⁸ Anghelaki-Rooke

⁹⁶ Anghelaki-Rooke won the Greek Nation Prize for Poetry in 1985 and the Greek Academy's Poetry Prize in 2000.

⁹⁷ Poets such as Kiki Dimoula (who won Greece's Grand National Prize for literature in 2011) have managed to cultivate a reputation outside Greece. She was interviewed by the *New York Times* about her poetry and the debt crisis. See Donadio 2013.

⁹⁸ She has translated English writers such as Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott, Sylvia Plath, and Alexander Pushkin into Greek and has translated Greek writers into English including Nikos Kazantzakis.

has been known to combine elements from different languages in order to express what she cannot find words for in either language.⁹⁹ As will be explored in later sections of this chapter, although her poetry is rooted in the Greek language, it very often works between languages. This adaptability within language and the willingness to take risks tie into the idea of Penelope as an Odyssean other. As Judith Butler says, language frames the encounter with the other and “embedded in that language is a set of norms concerning what will and will not constitute recognizability” (Butler 2001: 24). Anghelaki-Rooke’s Penelope tests those norms; she is ambiguous about her fidelity to Odysseus and questions the very notion of a desire that is attached to him. As will be shown, this Penelope ultimately claims her desire as her own, as something that has nothing to do with Odysseus.

Before moving on to discuss Anghelaki-Rooke’s treatment of the Penelope myth and the body, the legacy of myth in Modern Greek literature requires brief mention. First there is the “shadow of Homer”, the classical past, that lurks in every corner (*cf.* Ricks 1989), as well as the more recent spectres that haunt Greece’s contemporary literature such as the country’s Nobel laureates. It becomes difficult then, for contemporary poets to reference myth without some comparison, allusion, or anxiety of influence from either tradition (*cf.* Gourgouris 1996). Greek myth itself has played a crucial role in fostering a national identity and indeed, some of the very justifications for its coherence as a nation-state are

⁹⁹ A prime example of this is the word “Lipiu” which is a word coined by Anghelaki-Rooke, on the basis of the Greek *λύπη* plus the Romanian ending –u. She has written a number of poems using the concept (meaning something like absence). The poems “Lipiu” and “Lipiu Once Again” (a revisiting/continuation of the earlier poem) are included in the 2008 collection pages 98–102 and 107–110 respectively.

rooted in classical culture and language¹⁰⁰. Furthermore, as Christopher Robinson reminds us, Greek women writers are subject to a “doubly patriarchal tradition” (Robinson 1996:119). They are:

Unable to reject mythology if they want to lay claim to a truly Greek identity and explore ‘timeless’ abstract idea from a female perspective, and at the same time unable wholeheartedly to embrace it if they are to find a truly personal voice.

(Robinson 1996:119)

For a Greek woman then, modern discourses surrounding Greek identity complicate her use of myth.

Politics is also a component of writing *in* a language. Today what is now referred to as Standard Modern Greek (i.e. the language taught in schools and spoken officially in Greece) is actually a recent standardization made official in 1976.¹⁰¹ The history of what scholars now refer to as “the language question” is a complex issue and cannot be fully treated here. For the purposes of this discussion let us say simply that: the Greek language was a crucial element in the formation of Greece’s national identity and in forging a connection with Ancient Greece. Language was used to exact political and ideological agendas. Thus, the subversive use of Greek myth in Modern Greek poetry is not just a literary device; it addresses the history and the very identity of a nation and its people. For women writers, using myth to explore the personal realm of lived experience is to denationalize, and to some extent, de-mythologize myth.

¹⁰⁰ See Gourgouris 1996: 144–154.

¹⁰¹ After the abolishment of the Colonel’s dictatorship in 1974, the new constitution (which was written in *katharevousa*) stipulated that as of April 30, 1976 “Modern Greek” will be the language taught in schools (Mackridge 2009: 319).

Such a history lends some weight to the woman poet's task of revising myth. It is also perhaps what leads Anghelaki-Rooke to combine myth with her work on the body and to rethink the body's relationship with poetry. As Karen Van Dyck describes in her introduction to the 2008 collection, Anghelaki-Rooke's view of the body is very different from that of her godfather and famous writer, Nikos Kazantzakis, who for much of his life struggled with "the impossible meeting of body and soul" (Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 11). For Anghelaki-Rooke, there was never such a dichotomy; as the poet says herself, "I do not distinguish the soul from the body and from all the mystery of existence...everything I transform into poetry must first come through the body" (Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 11–12).¹⁰² Despite the fact that the poet does not align herself with a feminist agenda, she is aware of the power structures that operate through discourses of gender. For example, in her essay "Sex Roles in Modern Greek Poetry", Anghelaki-Rooke describes the poetic trend in Greece:

Modern Greek poetry as a whole is mainly inspired by death. Its general tone is elegiac, its central theme loss, its mythology resurrection. It is a poetry which also reflects the male totalitarianism of Greek society.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1983: 146)

This description is equally relevant to her own poetics, which shares a complex relationship with societal gender norms and the body; it exalts the erotic while also expressing anxieties about power, ageing, desire and death. Her poetry is an attempt to express lived experience, which includes the body and is specific to the kind of body one has. Anghelaki-Rooke communicates these theories by making

¹⁰² This statement was translated into English by Van Dyck and was originally from "A Conversation with Panos Stathogiannis and Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke" (Stathogiannis 2004: 13).

the body a central theme in her poetry and also in the particular way she uses language. As Rae Dalven suggests, Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry is:

Determined to free her feminine identity from the masculine sentimental and subordinate acceptance of women at the time, by using a feminine poetic language in her poetry to reflect faithfully the fundamental tensions in a woman's existence.

(Dalven 1994: 181)

Many of these "tensions" that surround woman's existence involve discourses of the body¹⁰³ and in this way Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry is a reaction to the "internalizations and expressions of traditional notions of gender and sexuality" (Bohandy 1994: 1). Looking at her early poems (1963–1977), one can see the beginning of a poetics that is deeply engaged in thinking through the body. In the poem "Ημερολόγο του Βυτού, Πρώτη μέρα" ["Diary of Vytos— First Day"] from her first collection, the narrator asserts: "Το σώμα μου έγινε η αρχή ενός ταξιδιού" ["My body became the beginning of a journey"] (Anghelaki-Rooke 1997: 15).¹⁰⁴

It is a prophetic line heralding a theme that continues through most of Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry: the body is the means by which one travels. It is also the terrain on which one explores sexuality. In other cases, the body is a kind of Ithaca (much in the same way it was for Aguirre and Cavafy); it is both home and a prison. For Anghelaki-Rooke, the body is a terrain that she explores and it is most certainly home, although it is a home that is not always comfortable to inhabit. Indeed, the

¹⁰³ Consistently, the body has been a topic of fascination in literature and has received special attention in recent years among postmodern and feminist theorists. For a good overview of feminist literature on the body see Brook 1999, Orbach 2009, and more generally Welton 1998.

¹⁰⁴ My translation

notion of being a stranger in one's own flesh is prevalent in her poetry and becomes most evident in the poems that discuss ageing.¹⁰⁵

Compared to Aguirre and Cavafy, Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry is less about entrapment and the limits of the self (and the body), and more about testing these limits in language and seeing how the body can (or cannot) be written. For example, the volume *Όταν Το Σώμα* [*When the Body*] (1988) is a collection of poems from 1963–1988 that focuses on the body and its expression in language. The collection's title poem¹⁰⁶ (also included in the 2008 English collection), can be read as an example of what the French school of feminist theory calls *écriture féminine*, or women's writing; that is, writing through the female body in order to re-appropriate language (Dokou and Sakelliou-Schultz 2000: 99). The poem contributes to the larger discussion and criticism of René Descartes's philosophy of the body and the dualisms it creates.¹⁰⁷ "Όταν Το Σώμα" ["When the Body"] is narrated by the body and the body exclaims "υπάρχω απόλυτα στο χάος" ["In chaos I exist absolutely"]¹⁰⁸ (Anghelaki-Rooke 1988: 137; Anghelaki-Rooke 1986: 42). The body speaks for itself and rejects the idea of an organized, neatly-packaged subject. Indeed, if the body is the "excess", the thing that cannot be fully captured by discourse (Cavallero 2003: 126), then this only affirms the futility and irony of language's attempts to control that which slips away from it.

¹⁰⁵ The English collection is (Anghelaki-Rooke 1986), translated by Jackie Willcox. It has a number of Anghelaki-Rooke's most interesting body poems. The collection includes many of the poems from the 1982 Greek collection *Ενάντιος Έρωτας* (which can be found in Anghelaki-Rooke 1998: 75–120).

¹⁰⁶ The poem "Όταν Το Σώμα" ["When the Body"] is also included in the English collection (Anghelaki-Rooke: 1986).

¹⁰⁷ One critic of René Descartes argues that, "Descartes objectification of the body reduces its capacity to sustain and generate meaning" (Judovitz 2001: 70).

¹⁰⁸ For this poem, "Όταν Το Σώμα" ["When the Body"] I find the Willcox translation from *Beings and Things on Their Own* preferable to the version in *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* (2008) as it better preserves this Cartesian echo.

Indeed, Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry picks out precisely this tension and attempts to articulate it. Anghelaki-Rooke expresses the *uncapturability* of the body and throws it in the face of Cartesian philosophy and its textual offspring: “έξαντληθεί το επιχείρημα / «ερωτεύομαι άρα ύπάρχω»” [“The argument / ‘I am in love therefore I am’ / is exhausted”] (Anghelaki-Rooke 1988: 138; Anghelaki-Rooke 1986: 42). Here Anghelaki-Rooke wants to assert that the self does not come into being because it is the *object* of love, it exists in its own right. Moreover, it is the body itself that is making this utterance and as soon as this declaration is made:

οι φωνές ξαναγυρίζουν στις ρίζες τών νεφρών
κι ενα πουλί κρυμμένο
άλώβητο στα τόσα σάλια και φιλιά
πετάει, φεύγει πάνω
άπ’ τον έρημότοπο

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1988: 138)

voices come back to the roots of the kidneys
and a bird hidden
untouched by all the saliva and kisses
flies away,
flies over the desert space

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1986: 43)

When existence is no longer dependent upon the gaze of the lover, the voice(s) return and the self asserts its existence as a subject. Again, a feminist reading of this would sound similar to the one Hélène Cixous expresses in her “Laugh of the Medusa”. Once a woman's body claims itself as a creative site, once she realizes that her fear of becoming Medusa stems from the system of patriarchy attempting

to discipline women and their bodies, only then she reclaim her body and her voice (she becomes the laughing Medusa).¹⁰⁹

This reclaiming also involves acknowledging that the self is not a complete, coherent entity, as the narrator exclaims, “υπάρχω απόλυτα στο χάος” [“I exist absolutely in chaos”]. The line in itself is ambiguous. Does she exist *in* a place of chaos or does she exist in a *state* of chaos? The body itself with all of its needs, desires, and functions could easily be called chaotic. The poem continues and the body:

Ανοίξει στα δύο...
για να χωθεί μισό
στο άλλο μισό του άλλου

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1988: 137)

splits in two...
so that one half can interlock
with the other half of the other

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1986: 42)

These lines could depict the split psyche of a woman and more specifically, a woman poet who must occupy both object and subject positions at the same time. According to Christina Dokou, this leads to “a kind of poetic schizophrenia [for] those women who wish to resist the canon while practicing in it” (Dokou and Sakelliou-Schultz 2000: 114). She is connected to man by her poetics, but is also forever separated by her body. This could also describe the self/other relationship. The body “interlocks” with the *other* half of the other — the half that cannot be seen by the other could describe the opaque part of the self (as Judith Butler would

¹⁰⁹ See Cixous 1976: 875–893.

say). Interestingly, these lines (translated by Jackie Willcox) are rendered differently in Karen Van Dyck's translation from 2008 collection. Van Dyck translates them as, "so that one half sinks into / the other half" (Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 51). In this phrasing, it seems that the two halves of the body merge. What is lost in this latter version is the echo of Butler's opaque self: "the other half of the other".

The body's attempt to interact with the other is always mediated by cultural and social discourses. The body is a surface that reflects socially constructed meanings and imposes them onto certain bodies. As the poem acknowledges, the female body is, in many ways, carefully measured and commodified:

όταν η μετρημένη επιφάνειά του
έχει μετρηθεί άπειρες φορές
με το μάτι, το στόμα
το φακό του χρόνου έξονυχιστικό
πάνω στο κάθε σπυρί, πόρο.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1988: 137)

when its measured surface
has been measured countless times
by the eye, the mouth
the scrutinizing lens of time
on every pimple and pore.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1986: 42)

The body is examined, quantified, and qualified by the male gaze, which measures her worth through the lens of time and allocates value based on her youthfulness and beauty. The poem continues:

όταν κουλουριαστούν ξέπνοες
οι ωραίες αναλογίες
κι έξαντληθεί το επιχείρημα
«ερωτεύομαι άρα ύπάρχω»

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1988: 137)

when, breathless, the beautiful proportions
curl up and the argument
'I fall in love, therefore I am'
is exhausted

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1986: 42)

After all this scrutiny, the body is fatigued. It wrinkles and curls up because according to the patriarchal gaze, love has an expiration date.¹¹⁰ Love in this case is not unmediated by the system of patriarchy and phallogocentrism. As feminist theory scholar Jane Gallop remarks, “ ‘Love’ is entangled with the question of woman’s complicity; it may be the bribe which has persuaded her to agree to her own exclusion” (Dokou and Sakelliou-Schultz 2000: 101). It appears that Anghelaki-Rooke is aware of this and much of the anxiety in the poem is a struggle with this complicity and the power dynamic surrounding it. As will be shown later in this chapter, this anxiety is at the heart of Anghelaki-Rooke’s Penelope poems and Penelope’s struggle to be in love without being an object or an Odyssean other.

It is at this point in “Όταν Το Σώμα” [“When the Body”] that a realization occurs: woman’s existence can no longer be relative to the love of a man, because she is beyond the point of being desirable. This is also the crucial moment when “οι φωνές ξαναγυρίζουν στις ρίζες τών νεφρών” [“voices return to the roots of the

¹¹⁰ This is also an example of how Anghelaki-Rooke addresses the ageing body in her poetics.

kidneys”] and the body’s voice is returned to itself. This realization, though painful, leads to a certain kind of freedom. Once the voices reach the kidneys:

ένα πουλί κρυμμένο
άλώβητο στα τόσα σάλια και φιλιά
πετάει

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1988: 137)

a hidden bird,
untouched amid all the saliva and kisses,
flies away

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1986: 43)

This “hidden bird” is the female body in writing. It remains unadulterated by the physical elements of love (the saliva and kisses) and by the measurements of “the eye”. This poetic body cannot be altered by the gaze and thus it is able to fly away:

φεύγει πάνω
άπ’ τον έρημότοπο
σπαρμένο δόντια καί μαλλιά,
που άφησε πίσω του το σώμα,
όταν το σώμα...

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1988: 137)

away over
the wasted land
sown with teeth and hair,
left behind by the body,
when the body...

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1986: 43)

The poem ends with an ellipsis. The bird, the poetic body, escapes the gaze, ageing, and death. The ellipsis provokes the reader to fill in the blank, and after this description of a wasteland of teeth and hair, it would make sense to say: “when the body...dies”. However, the poet omits this because it is precisely this poetics, this writing that, for her, omits the possibility of death. Thus, the poem is exemplary in presenting Anghelaki-Rooke’s poetics as, “μια σάρκα από λέξεις” [“flesh composed of words”] (Anghelaki-Rooke 2007).

In Anghelaki-Rooke’s more erotic poems, it becomes obvious that the body also serves as a place from which she can explore more corporeal notions of power and desire. For example, the poems “Παραβίαση” [“Violation”], “Το πλαστικό πράγμα” [“My Plastic Thing”], and “Όνειρο αράχνης” [“Spider’s Dream”]¹¹¹ play with the norms of how certain bodies are supposed to perform and which bodies have power over other bodies. “Παραβίαση” [“Violation”] begins with the female speaker violating the male body:

Αρσενικός είσαι
καί δεν εισχωρέσαι
όμως εγώ όλες σου τις θηλυκές τρύπες.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1986: 118)

You are male
You can’t be penetrated
and yet I force all of your female holes.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1988: 12)

¹¹¹ These poems are from the 1982 collection *Ενάντιος Έρωτας* and can be found in Anghelaki-Rooke 1988: 75–120.

Here the speaker penetrates the male body using her finger and her tongue, which are, she says mockingly, “Άπλά εξαρτήματα της ανημποριάς μου” [“simple accessories of my helplessness”]. In this instance, Anghelaki-Rooke reveals how a hierarchy of body parts is constructed to subvert the feminine and points out that phallus is not the only organ that can penetrate. In this way, the speaker in “Violation” [“Παραβίαση”] violates both the body of this masculine other as well as socio-sexual norms (Bohandy 1994: 13). As Bohandy argues, part of the poem’s triumph is Anghelaki-Rooke’s ability to obscure gender roles by making the male body penetrable and “other” (Bohandy 1994:10). However, Anghelaki-Rooke does not simply invert the traditional sexual roles of the masculine and the feminine; she makes them both equally penetrable. Her act is not one of subversion, but of exposure (as Butler might say). It reveals the vulnerability present in both the self and the other, which then allows for a different (more ethical) relationship.

The poem “Ονειρο αράχνης” [“Spider’s Dream”], which is included in *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* (2008), follows these same themes and uses the image of the “black widow”, the female lover who consumes her prey. The first person narrator tells us:

Το τέλος είναι γνωστό: εξαφάνιση του παγιδευμένου ερωτικού αντικείμενου και διαιώνιση της αχόρταγης αράχνης

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1988: 117)

The ending is familiar: the disappearance of the trapped erotic object and the eternal return of the insatiable spider

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 53)

It is an image of a consumptive desire—a desire that destroys the other. Yet there is a twist as the spider confesses her true need:

Μά εγώ μέσα στην τελεσίδικη φρίκη της νίκης μου, ονειρεύομαι τον άτρωτο αρσενικό που θα με γευματίσει

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1988: 117)

But in the irreversible horror of my victory, I dream of the invulnerable male who will eat me up

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 53)

By placing this poem in a collection about Penelope, Anghelaki-Rooke leaves open the possibility that Penelope could be the spider spinning a web that will entangle her suitors, and that would complicate traditional notions of Penelope's fidelity in the myth. Perhaps more importantly, the poem expresses the complexity of desire: the powerful enjoy victory yet they also crave to be conquered. In this way, the poem is not simply a kind of gender-reversed power play. There is no victor in this game; both love object and lover seem to follow desire to the point of obliteration.

Poems such as these are part of Anghelaki-Rooke's project to test the limits of desire, the self, and the self's relationship to others, and her rewriting of Penelope is very much a part of this exploration. Traditionally, Penelope is renowned for her marital fidelity and her weaving. In Anghelaki-Rooke's Re-vision, Penelope questions this fidelity; she tests the limits of her desires and with it, the limits of dominant discourse. As will be shown in the next section, like Francisca Aguirre, Anghelaki-Rooke finds something in the Penelope myth that resonates with her own situation. It is perhaps for this reason that Anghelaki-Rooke decides to make her Penelope a poet.¹¹²

¹¹² Although her adaptation is well-known, Anghelaki-Rooke is not the first to imagine Penelope as a writer. In *Heroides*, Ovid depicts several mythological figures, including Penelope, writing letters to their lovers. In Ovid's text, Penelope essentially recounts what she has heard of Odysseus's heroic deeds and intermittently complains about how such things remain more or less irrelevant to her because he is still absent. Ovid's Penelope is certainly not the most imaginative although it does provide an account of Penelope's inner thoughts. Other than the fact that she writes, Penelope's characterization remains fairly traditional. Her lament assures us that she remains unwaveringly faithful to Odysseus, yet she feels insecure about herself and the escalating situation with the suitors. For the most part the style is classic Ovid, poetic with elements of epic and a self-reflexive focus on the act of storytelling. In his treatment of Penelope, her weaving is mentioned only briefly as something that wearies her "widowed hands". Such an interpretation of Penelope essentially eliminates any possibility for female creativity. Not even her weaving is an outlet; instead it is just another dreary household chore. See Ov. *Her.* 1: 1–116 and can be found in Ovid 1914: 10–19.

WRITING PENELOPE

The Scattered Papers of Penelope (2008)¹¹³ is a compilation of Anghelaki-Rooke's poems from several previous collections as well as new poems. The title and three poems are taken from the poet's fourth collection *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης* (1977). In an interesting way, the myth of Penelope returns (from the 1977 collection) and re-emerges in English. This can be interpreted in a number of ways: as the shadow of myth over Modern Greek poetry (and Western literature); as the shadow of Penelope as dutiful, faithful wife over the images of woman that feminism attempts to construct; or simply as various (re)incarnations of a poet's voice. Because of this amalgamation, the narrative voice of the collection constantly shifts from mythic character, to illusive third person, to a definite "I". In this way, *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* is an interesting representation of Anghelaki-Rooke's meandering journey of poetic identity. The title also makes it clear that the subject of the collection is not one single, archetypical Penelope. Indeed, even the cover illustration gestures at a conflation of the writer and the character of Penelope.¹¹⁴ The poems are in chronological order and are grouped according to the collection in which they were originally published. Editor Karen Van Dyck includes translations by no fewer than eight different contributors,¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Although the 2008 collection does not contain the Greek versions of Anghelaki-Rooke's poems, I will continue to quote all of her poems with the original Greek first and I will note in which collection it can be found.

¹¹⁴ The cover illustration is a drawing by Alekos Fassianos that depicts Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke as Penelope.

¹¹⁵ The translators represented here include Karen Van Dyck with twenty-two poems, thirteen by Gale Holst-Warhaft, ten by Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke and Jackie Willcox, seven by Kimon Friar, three by Jane Assimakopoulos, two by Rae Dalven, and one by Edmund and Mary Keeley.

with her own translations comprising the majority. The variety of poems and their translations make *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* a fitting title.

Since the 2008 collection is meant to provide a sample of Anghelaki-Rooke's poetics that will appeal to English speakers, the poet's association with feminism is emphasized. Although Anghelaki-Rooke is tentative to the label her poems "women's writing", her work can be seen as an example of *écriture féminine*.¹¹⁶ According to Hélène Cixous, this type of "feminine writing will serve as a rupture or a site of transformation and change" (Cixous 1976: 881), that is similar to Rhea Galanaki's idea of Greek women's writing as "welling up".¹¹⁷ At a certain point, the connection between women's writing and Anghelaki-Rooke becomes difficult to avoid. Even Anghelaki-Rooke's friend and editor/translator Van Dyck compares Anghelaki-Rooke to Adrienne Rich, Anne Sexton, and the "best of American feminist poetry" in her introduction to the collection (Anghelaki-Rooke 2008:13).¹¹⁸ It is therefore, no coincidence that once the poetry is presented in the major language of English, both Classical Greek myth and feminism are strongly suggested as the dominant modes for reading the poems. The emphasis of the Penelope figure in the title, cover image, and introduction may appear somewhat excessive for a collection with only four poems that deal with the myth explicitly.

¹¹⁶ Cixous has been misunderstood and criticized for essentializing categories of "woman" however, like Derrida (and Anghelaki-Rooke to some extent), she is playing with language and is teasing us with signifiers in order to point out their very multiplicity and ultimately their escapeability (cf. Cixous 2010: 12). Cixous writes, "One can no more speak of 'woman' than of 'man' without being trapped within an ideological theatre where the proliferation of representation, images, reflections... invalidate in advance any conceptualization" (Cixous 1986: 83).

¹¹⁷ The Greek poet, Rhea Galanaki has reconceptualized women's writing and language as something like a spring of water that "wells up" as opposed to being "closed like a lake" (read "masculine poetry") (Van Dyck 1996: 128).

¹¹⁸ The 2008 English collection was generally well received in the United States although it was Anghelaki-Rooke's more erotic poems that drew most of the attention. Several reviewers commented on poems such as "My Plastic Thing" which is about a dildo and said little or nothing about the Penelope poems.

However, this can be seen as a strategy for positioning Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry within the wider discussion of gender politics. Here myth implies a dialogue with the Western literary canon and thus, a subversive use of myth makes the reader aware of how these traditional discourses shape ideas about identity, gender, and the body.

Indeed, even the reception of the collection suggests that the relationship between women writers and myth is still a complex one. *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* (2008) has been received positively by most critics, but in a review published in the *Feminist Review* in March of 2009, the commentator seems dissatisfied with the Penelope poems in particular:

The weakest poems in the collection are those that invoke Penelope, wife of Odysseus, as a feminist figure. Despite the existence of works like *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* and Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, the famously faithful wife still seems a poor choice for a strong, independent heroine. Anghelaki-Rooke's strongest poems are those that deal with feminism in her own day-to-day life, not her re-imagining of Penelope's long vigil.

(Ristow 1: 2009)

The above review is exemplary in revealing just how complicated relationships have become between gender, language, texts, bodies, and imaginaries even within a single ideology (if we can call feminism a single ideology). Poetry and myth are only a few of the fields where this struggle is being played out and the Penelope myth is a single snapshot of this. Reviews such as this one make it clear that there is still scepticism about the use of myth in contemporary women's poetry, especially in the context of feminism. In this case, however, I find the review superficial in its negative assessment, as Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope is

clearly *not* performing a “long vigil”. Such statements are unhelpful in their abrupt dismissal of mythic Re-vision as a feminist strategy and overlook Anghelaki-Rooke’s nuanced approach to the mythical figure. Although Anghelaki-Rooke’s reimagining of Penelope may not render her a “heroine”, she is certainly brave enough to reconsider her relationship to Odysseus and the role she plays in the traditional myth. Let us now look at how Anghelaki-Rooke revises Penelope. The following discussion will begin by looking at poems from the 1977 collection and will then move on to discuss the 2008 collection.

In *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης* [*The Scattered Papers of Penelope*] (1977), although there is the explicit connection to Penelope in the title, Penelope is only mentioned once, Odysseus is mentioned twice, and the suitors are referenced once in the eponymous poem “Οι Μνήστηρες” [“The Suitors”]. The poem “Η Ζήλεια” [“Jealousy”]¹¹⁹ makes thinly-veiled references to Odysseus and Circe leading the reader to assume that the narrator is Penelope. One might be compelled to ask why Anghelaki-Rooke uses the Penelope figure at all. As we have seen, Anghelaki-Rooke is interested in what it means to be a woman writer, to have a body that desires, and to write that body. In her Penelope poems, she continues to explore this notion of desire and how it can be complicated in the framework of a myth that rotates around the absent lover. Indeed, according to Rae Dalven, the collection *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης* [*The Scattered Papers of Penelope*] (1977), “reinterprets Penelope’s moral excellence in terms of love and death” and

¹¹⁹ “Η Ζήλεια” is the tenth poem in the collection. Although it appears to be narrated by Penelope, it is not directly relevant to the discussion of Penelope in this chapter and so I have chosen not to examine it. The poem is relatively straightforward as it describes an erotic encounter between a couple who we assume are Odysseus and Circe.

“the basic experience is on the absence of Odysseus who becomes a symbol for absence and nostalgia” (Dalven 1994: 182).

“Λέει η Πηνελόπη” [“Penelope Says”] is the first poem in *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης* (1977) but before we even hear what Penelope has to say, the poem’s epigraph makes it clear that absence is the theme of this poem and indeed the entire collection. The quotation is in English and reads:

And your absence teaches me what art could not
DANIEL WEISSBORT.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1997: 207)

Anghelaki-Rooke’s Penelope makes it clear that absence is a multifaceted experience. She is not just feeling the absence of Odysseus but a more existential form of absence:

...η απουσία είναι το θέμα της ζωής μου
—απουσία από τη ζωή—
κλάματα βγαίνουν στο χαρτί
κι η φυσική οδύνη του σώματος
που στερείται.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1997: 207)

...absence is the theme of my life
—absence from life—
tears and the natural suffering
of the deprived body
appear on the page.¹²⁰

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 25)

¹²⁰ In the analysis of *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης* (1977) all of the English translations are from the 2008 collection edited by Van Dyck unless stated otherwise.

Not only are things and people absent from her life but she herself is absent at times from life. In order to turn this absence into presence Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope decides to write. When she does, she finds that the "deprived body" appears. The narrator comes to a gradual realization that the body is an essential part of Penelope's experience. Anghelaki-Rooke's Re-vision of Penelope addresses the fact that the absence of Odysseus requires Penelope to reevaluate her own ideas about her body and its needs. She finds that not only is loss experienced as a visceral, corporeal emotion, but also (as described later in the poem) that despite her grief, her body still desires.

In order to make sense of this absence, Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope writes:

Δέν ύφαινα, δεν έπλεκα
ενα γραφτό άρχιζα

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1997: 207)

I wasn't weaving, I wasn't knitting
I was writing

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 25)

These first lines make it clear that this is a Re-vision. She announces that this is not the same Penelope you remember from the *Odyssey*. One of the things that stands out is the verb tense, the verbs are in the imperfect, but the first two verbs refer to the action itself (weaving and knitting). One would then expect *έγραφα* to follow, but instead the emphasis is placed on *άρχιζα*. This last phrase could be translated as "I was (constantly) beginning a text". The focus is not on the written product, the text, but rather on the process of beginning texts. In addition, instead of choosing *κείμενο*, Anghelaki-Rooke chooses the less frequently used *γραφτό* to

mean a written text. The significance of this derives from the word's etymology: *κείμενο* refers to a finished text and it is "the one that lies", whereas *γραφτό* is "the one that is written". For Anghelaki-Rooke, the text needs to be written and rewritten even as it is read. It needs to be, a *writerly* text (following Roland Barthes's term). In a similar move, Anghelaki-Rooke chooses *γραφτό* instead of *γραπτό*, of which the latter is much more commonly used. In fact, *γραφτό* is normally only used to refer to human fate in the sense of "what is written in the stars". In this way the poet transforms the traditional Penelope from weaver to writer, and also transforms the concept of fate. Instead of the Fates¹²¹ weaving the destinies of humans, Anghelaki-Rooke depicts Penelope constantly re-writing her own fate.

The poem, "Λέει η Πηνελόπη" ["Penelope Says"], continues to reinforce the idea of a writerly text in the next lines:

Σβήνω, σχίζω, πνίγω
τις ζωντανές κραυγές
«πού είσαι ελα σε περιμένω...

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1997: 207)

I erase, I tear up, I stifle
the living cries
"Where are you, come, I'm waiting for you...

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 25)

¹²¹ In classical Greek mythology, the Fates (Μοῖραι) are the personification of destiny, the goddesses of fate, and are usually depicted as three sisters. Each goddess was allocated a specific task that governed the life of a human: one sister spun the thread, one allotted the portion of thread, and one cut the thread corresponding to birth, the length of one's life, and death.

The verbs *σβήνω* and *σχίζω* normally refer to text and paper and can only be metaphorically applied to oral shouts. Both *σβήνω* and *σχίζω* refer to acts that destroy the text, but this would then allow for rewriting. In this way, not only is the text's materiality acknowledged, but it is conflated with the body. The verb *πνίγω* would make sense paired with *κραυγές* and together they would literally mean to choke back a cry or smother a shout. However, once coupled with *σβήνω* and *σχίζω*, they cause an interesting confusion between the creation of text and the body's role in this creation.

This same kind of double-layered meaning between the text and the body continues throughout the poem:

και ξαναρχίζω το πρωί
με νέα πουλιά και λευκά σεντόνια
να στεγνώνουν στον ήλιο

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1997: 207)

and I begin again in the morning
with new birds and white sheets
drying in the sun

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 25)

In *Odyssey* 19, Penelope has a dream about birds in which they are said to represent the suitors¹²². Here the reference to birds and bed sheets plays with the idea of Penelope's (in)fidelity (and indeed, in Greek *πουλί* can also be used as a

¹²² While Odysseus is still disguised as a beggar, Penelope recounts a dream. She dreams that she watches twenty geese feed and drink until an eagle with a crooked beak swoops down and kills them all. The eagle then flies back and tells Penelope that this is no dream but a premonition, and that the geese are the suitors that will soon be slaughtered by the eagle, Odysseus. (cf. *Od.* 19: 535–555).

slang term for penis).¹²³ This could be read as a purposeful misunderstanding of the myth and Penelope's typically faithful character. Yet there is another possibility in her word play here, taken in the singular, the term *λευκό σεντόνι* (white sheet) is used by actors when they want to convey the feeling of not being able to remember their lines, when they have forgotten the written text. This harks back to the earlier line when the "living cries" are stifled. The body itself is silenced when the writerly text is smothered. Not only does Anghelaki-Rooke express the pain and anxiety of this blocked expression, but while doing so performs the opposite. Indeed, both lines "Σβήνω, σχίζω, πνίγω / τις ζωντανές κραυγές / «πού είσαι ελα σε περιμένω»" and "και ξαναρχίζω το πρωί / με νέα πουλιά και λευκά σεντόνια / να στεγνώνουν στον ήλιο" are lexically ambiguous and provide ample room for interpretation. Moreover, the Penelopean narrator states that she *begins again* in the morning, signalling a repetition. Every night, Penelope returns to her loom and unpicks her tapestry. She destroys it in order to remake it differently in the morning. This repetition of beginnings is one aspect of the Penelope myth that feminists find useful to theorize. In this case, like Judith Butler's notion of the subject, Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope tapestry, her poem, and her self, are not complete; they are always in-the-making and often find themselves beginning again.

As the poem continues, it becomes more obvious that Penelope is struggling to become the writer of her own story, to create an identity that does not hinge upon Odysseus:

¹²³ In English "sheet" could be read as a sheet of paper, which again would reference the writerly dilemma of Penelope.

κι εγώ με λέξεις θα κόβω
τις κλωστές που με δένουν
με τον συγκεκριμένο άντρα
που νοσταλγώ
οσο να γίνει σύμβολο Νοσταλγίας ο Οδυσσέας.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1997: 208)

and I will cut
with words
the threads that bind me
to the particular man
I long for
until Odysseus become the symbol of Nostalgia.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 26)

Penelope refuses an identity defined by waiting and longing. Part of Anghelaki-Rooke's aim is to analyze and describe the ways in which we explain passion (πάθος) (Niarchos 1980: 25). In poems such as this one, Anghelaki-Rooke attempts to understand how desire and passion function in patriarchy and how to subvert or re-orient them. As the poem continues, Odysseus gradually becomes secondary to Penelope's writing and her passion is directed towards forgetting him:

Σε λησμονώ με πάθος
Κάθε μέρα
για να πλυθείς απο της αμαρτίες
της γλύκας και της μυρωδιάς
κι ολοκάθαρα πια να μπείς στην αθανασία.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1997: 208)

Each day
I passionately forget you
that you may be washed of the sins
of fragrance and sweetness
and finally all clean
enter immortality.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 26)

Tirelessly, she works at forgetting and remembering in order to immortalize precisely the image she intends —to write the poem she wants. Here, Anghelaki-Rooke also plays cleverly on Penelope’s traditional role in the *Odyssey* as the one person who never forgets Odysseus. In *Odyssey* 24: 192–202, Agamemnon praises Penelope saying, “how well Icarius’s daughter [Penelope] remembered you, / Odysseus, the man she married once!” (Homer 2001: 404). Memory plays a key role in the *Odyssey* and Penelope’s remembering of Odysseus serves to increase the hero’s own *kleos* (glory). By saying that Penelope deliberately and repeatedly attempts to forget Odysseus is in direct contradiction to the traditional image of Penelope and undermines the heroism of her husband.¹²⁴

So what does Anghelaki-Rooke’s Penelope learn from her struggle with absence and desire? She says:

¹²⁴ For more on Penelope and memory in the *Odyssey*, see Mueller 2007.

Μόνη μου πληρωμή αν καταλάβω
στο τέλος τι ανθρώπινη παρουσία
τι απουσία
ή πως λειτουργεί το εγώ
στην τόσην ερημιά, στον τόσο χρόνο
πως δε σταματάει με τίποτα το αύριο.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1997: 208)

My only reward is that I understand
in the end what human presence is
what absence is
or how the self functions
in such desolation, in so much time
how nothing can stop tomorrow.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 26)

The narrator attempts to make sense of her own human experience. According to Barthes, “Amorous absence functions in a single direction, expressed by the one who stays, never by the one who leaves: an always present *I* is constituted by confrontations with an always absent *you*” (Barthes 1978: 13). So, the reward for the Penelocean narrator is that in the midst of the absence of her lover she is able to understand more about the “I” that she speaks with. However, if viewed through the lens of gender theory, this construction of absence becomes slanted: “Man’s dream: I love her— absent, hence desirable, a dependent nonentity, hence adorable... she is no more than this shape made for him: a body caught in his gaze” (Cixous 1986:67). In this sense, love (where the love *object* is woman) exists ideally in the absence of the love object and thus, in the rejection of the love object *as subject*. Anghelaki-Rooke is not so blunt with her criticism of this kind of love relationship, yet her Penelope rejects the idea of being the waiting, abandoned, or beloved woman-object. She “cuts with words” the threads that bind her to that image.

In the end, Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope does not dream of her husband's homecoming; in fact, she does not wish for resolution at all. The poem's final lines reiterate her goal:

Το σώμα όλο ξαναφτιάχνει τον εαυτό του...
ελπίζοντας πως ό,τι χάνει σε αφή
κερδίζει σε ουσία.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1997: 208)

the body keeps remaking itself...
hoping that what it loses in touch
it gains in essence.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 27)

The poem does not offer closure in the form of a lover's reunion, a happy ending; Odysseus will not be coming home. Instead, she says that it is at least possible to understand human presence, absence, and to continually re-make the self (and the body) through narration.

This theme of self-making continues in “Οι Μνηστήρες” [“The Suitors”] which is the tenth poem in *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης* (1977) and the second Penelope poem to be discussed. “Οι Μνηστήρες” is split into two sections by a dotted line. The first half depicts Penelope musing while watching the suitors from her upstairs window and the second half is narrated while Odysseus slaughters the suitors. However, the focus of the poem is not the return of Odysseus. Like “Λέει η Πηνελόπη” [“Penelope Says”], this poem explores Penelope's transition from identifying with Odysseus to creating a new self:

Περιμένοντας φτάνω στην ουσία του εαυτού μου
Πως να περιγράψω το κουκούτσι
όταν πια δεν περιβάλλεται
είναι γυμνό και δεν φοβάται
χτυπά δεν σπαρταρά

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1997: 220–1)

I reach the essence of myself by waiting
How can I describe the kernel
when it is no longer surrounded by anything
when it is naked, but not scared
when it shakes, but doesn't flail

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 28–9)

Instead of being condemned to wait, Penelope uses this time to reflect on herself so that the waiting is eventually disassociated from Odysseus. Like many other Re-visions of Penelope it seems that waiting becomes a kind of meditation.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Many poets have pointed out this link between waiting and meditation; most notably Wallace Stevens in “The World as Meditation”. See Stevens 1954.

In the second half of the poem when Odysseus arrives and kills the suitors, she says:

είμουν κάποτε κι εγώ
με λάσπες στο κεφάλι
λεμονανθούς στ' αφτιά
φώναξα παθιασμένα
«λευτερωθείτ' απ τα δεσμά!»
μά τα δεσμά είναι βαθιά
μια συμπεριφορά
που παίζει ο εαυτός
τον εαυτό του

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1997: 221)

I too once had
mud in my hair
lemon blossoms behind my ears
and would cry passionately
'Free yourself of your bonds!'
but the bonds go deep:
a way of being
where the self plays itself

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 29)

The first person narrator is both the mythical Penelope and is not. Anghelaki-Rooke uses the metaphor of a mythical character trapped in the story's plot to describe the bonds of social constraint and the limits of experiential reality. This "way of being" where "the self plays itself" is a pantomime, a parody. Penelope plays her role as dutiful wife sitting by the window listening to the sounds of the suitors being slaughtered. She is indifferent not because she does not care, but because she has played this role time and time again. She sits outside herself and watches herself be Penelope again and again; it is as if Penelope is aware of and indeed, grows tired of her own archetype—something that Gail Holst-Warhaft addresses in the next chapter. One could argue that Anghelaki-Rooke uses myth to

highlight the inconsistencies and the uncanny aspects of lived reality.¹²⁶ Or, more simply, Penelope can be read as a woman who realizes that she is playing the role of a dutiful wife in a society that expects nothing more of her. In either case, it is Penelope's witnessing of her own entrapment (like Aguirre) that leads to an eventual rebellion against this cycle of expectation and compliance.

After the 1977 collection, in an almost Odyssean gesture, Anghelaki-Rooke appears to leave Penelope behind for nearly twenty years and in the interim she writes a poem about a journey by sea.¹²⁷ The poem “Η ζώη μου σάν ενα πλοίο” [“My Life is Like a Ship”] (1982),¹²⁸ falls into the genealogy of poems that follow C.P. Cavafy's “Ithaca” in that it is about “the journey”, literally and figuratively. For Anghelaki-Rooke, it continues the earlier metaphor of her body as a ship and signals a movement towards a more embodied poetics:

¹²⁶ In this she can be compared to Yannis Ritsos: in Yannis Ritsos's *The Fourth Dimension* he experiments with the notion of variable time and uses mythological characters to highlight anachronism and uncanniness. See Ritsos 1993 and Ritsos 1974.

¹²⁷ The collection *Οι Μνηστήρες* [*The Suitors*] is published in 1984 and includes eleven poems from *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης* (1977). However, aside from these poems, the rest of the collection does not have any strong connection to the Odysseus and Penelope myth.

¹²⁸ “Η ζώη μου σάν ενα πλοίο” [“My Life is Like a Ship”] is from the collection *Ενάντιος έρωτας* (1982) and was then published in English in *Beings and Things on Their Own* (Anghelaki-Rooke 1986).

Η ζωή μου σάν ενα πλοίο
στην κρύα κουβέρτα
ώρες κατάμονη
μες στο μυαλό μου
γλείφω τα μέλη σου
ως το πρωί που ξημερώνομαι
σε γνωστά λιμάνια:
«Το πρώτο φιλί»
«Η άπληστη αγάπη»
«Η ανία»
«Ο χωρισμός»
τοπωνύμια με τη λίγη πειστικότητα
πού έχει η πείρα όλη

(Anghelaki- Rooke 1998: 104)

My life is like a ship;
all alone on the cold deck
I lick your limbs
for hours
until daybreak finds me
in familiar ports: 'The first kiss'
'Avid love'
'Boredom'
'Parting' –
place-names as unconvincing
as all experience

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1986: 31)

The metaphor hinges on her fully committing to the idea of her body as a ship and this also allows for the more erotic moments in the poem:

Ω, μπές μέσα μου
και τράβα με
σ' όσα ναυάγια σχεδιάζεις εψές

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1998: 105)

Oh, enter me
and lure me on
towards the shipwreck
you planned for me last night

(Anghelaki- Rooke 1986: 31)

And the line:

Θε να με σχίζεις με τα δικά σου τα κουπιά

(Anghelaki- Rooke 1986: 31)

you will be cleaving me with your oars

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1998: 105)

The poem combines myth with the eroticism of her other collections in a way that shows the motion of Anghelaki-Rooke's poetics. At this point, the poet is not yet finished with the myth, and after this gap eventually returns to the Penelope figure. However, upon returning to Penelope in "Η άλλη Πηνελόπη" ["The Other Penelope"], one finds that this Penelope is not the same as she was in "Λέει η Πηνελόπη" ["Penelope Says"]. She is, indeed, other.

PENLEOPEAN AND ODYSSEAN OTHERS

...και να ξεπεραστώ, εγώ,
που τώρα μαθαίνομαι και πλήρως εγώ,
που τώρα μαθαίνομαι και πλήρως
μαθαίνω πως θέλω σ' εκείνον ν' αντισταθώ
και δεν θέλω από κείνον τίποτα
να δεχτώ και δε θέλω να περιμένω.

Δεν κλαίω, ούτε τραγούδι ψάλλω.
Μα γίνεται πιο οδυνηρό το δικό μου
ξέσκισμα που τοιμάζω,
για να γνωρίσω τον κόσμο δι' εμού...

...and to surpass myself, I and
again I,
who now in learning about myself,
learn completely that I want to
resist him,
that I want to accept nothing
from him, that I do not want to
wait.

I neither weep nor chant a song,
but my own violent separation,
which I am preparing, is becoming
more painful that I may know the
world through myself...

Karelli "Η άνθρωπος" (Karelli 1973: 123–4)

The above quotation is taken from the poem "Η άνθρωπος" by Zoe Karelli,¹²⁹ in which she describes her attempt to define her self outside of the male/female dichotomy; however, she finds that even language itself makes this difficult. In Greek, the word for mankind or human "ο άνθρωπος" is gendered male (as indicated by the article "ο" and the ending "ος"). In her title, Karelli changes the article to the feminine "η", a simple enough change in Greek. Yet when attempting to indicate this linguistic change, the English translation becomes cumbersome; the title has been translated as "Man, Feminine Gender". It is an excellent linguistic expression of the ideological question of subjectivity and how language is also bound up in the equation. In her 1983 article "Sex Roles in Modern Greek Poetry", Anghelaki-Rooke calls Karelli "probably the best living Greek woman poet" and "with Zoe Karelli we can say that a woman's voice

¹²⁹ Anghelaki-Rooke calls this poem "the first purely feminist poem in modern Greece" (Anghelaki-Rooke 1983:142).

begins to be clearly heard. Her quest is essentially a metaphysical one, without a determined faith, but with intense questioning and doubting” (Anghelaki-Rooke 1983: 142). The same could be said of Anghelaki-Rooke’s poetry and perhaps she takes a cue from Karelli in trying to “know the world” through the self—beginning with the body.

As this chapter has examined so far, Anghelaki-Rooke explores the idea of the self through the gendered body and her use of the Penelope figure can be seen as an extension of this exploration. This is, in part, because Odysseus has become synonymous with “man” and his odyssey, the journey of life. At first glance, there does not seem to be anything wrong with this universality until one looks again through the lens of gender theory. Like Karelli’s poem (and Muriel Rukeyser’s), feminist theory and poems written from Penelope’s perspective highlight how the universal is often gendered male. In terms of the myth of Penelope and Odysseus, “the self” is traditionally identified as Odysseus, and Penelope is one of the many others he encounters. However, feminist Re-visions of the myth have shifted this lens. Viewed from Penelope’s perspective, Odysseus seems a very different character. For example, Hélène Cixous describes Odysseus as:

The artist of flight. The Winner: the one who was saved, the
homecoming man! Always returning to himself—in spite of the
most fantastic detours. The Loaner: loaning himself to woman and
never giving himself except to the ideal image of Ulysses.

(Cixous 1986:74)

This is *his* subjectivity, a gendered Western subjectivity revolving around him alone. Odysseus (man) is already in existence and he always only ever returns to

himself.¹³⁰ On the other hand, Penelope (woman) is constantly attempting to create her self. In reaction to this, many Re-visionist poems focus on Penelope waiting for her self, and weaving her self (recall the imagery in Adrienne Rich's poem "When We Dead Awaken" of the two women knitting "trying to save the skein").

These parallel journeys of the self-returning and self-creating Odysseuses and Penelopes become further complicated when one brings love into the equation. One must ask, "So what happens when one wants to love the other? When Penelope wants to love Odysseus?" This is Penelope's dilemma. It is also Anghelaki-Rooke's:

The Greek woman poet has always desperately tried to combine her creativity with the ideal of the "real woman" as established by men. The "real woman" is concerned with only one thing, love, and has only one mission in this world: to attract and keep her man and have children by him. It is no wonder that love becomes the first vehicle for poetry or that women poets begin to assert themselves through verses of adoration and submission to man.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1983: 141)

It is the real life dilemma of the heterosexual woman: how can love exist between man and woman without either compromising their subjectivity, without woman becoming the love-object, and without falling into the power-over dynamic that Hegel imagines. This is a daunting question and one that Roland Barthes also looks at in *A Lover's Discourse*.

¹³⁰ I do not mean to essentialize man/woman, but rather this should be taken in the context of Cixous's discussion of gender.

Barthes complicates the question of love and subjectivity in his discussion of the waiting lover, a topic particularly relevant to the Penelope figure. According to Barthes, the one who waits risks their very self in the process of waiting: “The lover’s fatal identity is precisely: *I am the one who waits*” (Barthes 1978: 40). The waiting lover is usually identified as female (Penelope) and the absent one is typically male (Odysseus) (13–14). This is not merely a lover’s division of labour, this kind of love relationship reveals the power dynamic rooted within patriarchal ideology: “*To make someone wait*: the constant prerogative of all power, ‘age-old pastime of humanity’ ” (Barthes 1978: 40). Thus, although the waiting lover is the subject *per se* (they are the “I” who speaks to an absent “you”), the waiting lover is still under the control of the absent one who in their very absence maintains power-over them. One can see how women writers, specifically feminists, would find this relationship worth exploring.

Anghelaki-Rooke addresses precisely this dynamic in “Η άλλη Πηνελόπη” [“The Other Penelope”]¹³¹ which can be read as a Re-vision of her earlier presentation of Penelope in the poem “Λέει η Πηνελόπη” [“Penelope Says”] from *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης* (1977). In “Λέει η Πηνελόπη”, Penelope is haunted by the shadow of Odysseus; however, by the end of the poem she claims that she will sever her ties to him. Years later, when Anghelaki-Rooke returns to Penelope, one must ask whether her Penelope has severed these ties. Looking at the poem “Η άλλη Πηνελόπη” [“The Other Penelope”], it would seem that she has disconnected herself from him, but this now appears to be a less desirable solution than first

¹³¹ Originally published in *Ωραία έρημος η σάρκα* (1995) then in English in *Flesh is a Beautiful Desert* (1996) and also included in the 2008 collection. I will include both the Greek and English quotations. The Greek is from the 1995 collection and the English is from the 2008 collection.

anticipated. In the first stanza, the narrator appears aloof and indifferent to the matter of Odysseus:

Μας εξηγεί πως δεν ήταν απο προσήλωση
στην ιδέα «Οδυσσέας»
που άφηνε τους μνηστήρες χρόνια να περιμένουν στο προαύλιο
των μυστικών συνηθειών του κορμιού της.
Εκεί στο παλάτι του νησιού
με τους φτιαχτούς ορίζοντες
μιας γλυκερής αγάπης.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1999: 149)

She tells us it wasn't obsession
with the idea of 'Odysseus' that pressed her to let the suitors
wait for years in the forecourts
of her body's secret habits.
There in that island's palace-
with fake horizons
of a saccharine love.¹³²

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 93)

She denies that it was because of Odysseus that she waited and even denies Odysseus's own individuality. The Odysseus she was waiting for was not even *him*, her husband, the individual man but rather an *idea* of him. This will eventually lead her to question her own identity as "Penelope". The next stanza continues to discuss Odysseus:

...να βγαίνει ζεστός απ' τα πούπουλα του ύπνου.
Η σκιά του στον τοίχο
σημάδι από έπιπλο
που μόλις το σήκωσαν
αίμα από αρχαίο φόνο
μοναχική παράσταση του Καραγκιόζη
στο πανί, πίσω του πάντα ο πόνος.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1999: 149)

¹³² This poem is translated into English by Edmund and Mary Keeley.

...he emerges warm from the down of sleep.
His shadow on the wall:
trace of a piece of furniture just taken away
blood of an ancient murder
a lone performance of Karaghiozi
on the screen, pain always behind him.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 93)

The reader seems to be privy to a strange montage of Penelope's thoughts. Her description makes one uncertain as to whether or not Odysseus is really there. Is he a mere shadow of his former self or is she only conjuring him in her imagination? The choice of third person narrator(s) in the first stanza ("she tells us") is strategic and adds to this ambiguity. Despite the fact that the narration is not directly from the mouth of Penelope, her thoughts and emotions are still accessible to the reader. Anghelaki-Rooke plays with the theme of presence and absence: is Odysseus actually there or is he just part of her memories? If he is not physically there does this make him any less "present" for Penelope? Indeed, one is also bound to ask, was Odysseus ever actually present? In this poem Penelope is haunted by this Odyssean other. The feminist would say that he represents the fiction of what woman is supposed to want and what she is supposed to await.¹³³

Anghelaki-Rooke's other Penelope continues her musings in a series of metaphors:

¹³³ This has become a theme in revisions of the Penelope myth: questioning the reality of Odysseus himself. For example, see: "The World as Meditation" by Wallace Stevens and "Ithaca" by Louise Glück.

Αχώριστοι ο έρωτας κι ο πόνος
όπως το κουβαδάκι κι ο μικρός στην αμμουδιά
το αχ! κι ένα κρύσταλλο που γλίστρησε απ' τα χέρια
η πράσινη μύγα και το σκοτωμένο ζώο
το χώμα και το φτυάρι
το γυμνό σώμα και το σεντόνι τον Ιούλιο

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1999: 149–150)

Love and pain indivisible
like the pail and the child
on the sandy beach
The ah! And a crystal glass that slipped from one's hand
the green fly and the slaughtered animal
the soil and the shovel
the naked body and the single sheet in July

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 93–94)

The metaphors are visually stimulating and correspond to the relationship between love and pain; the pail and the child are an innocent playful pair in which love is simple and pain is experienced only afterwards as nostalgia and loss. The “ah!” and the crystal glass are pure reaction, instinct; it is the body's automatic response that enjoins both love and pain. The green fly and the slaughtered animal represent the consumption of the other and the psychological conundrum of simultaneously desiring to consume and be consumed by the love object. The soil and the shovel are straight-forward: death and necessity. Finally, the naked body and the sheet in July are purely erotic, where love and loss are mere extensions of the physicality of the body. They are all examples of the way in which love and pain are inextricably bound. The narrator quickly turns away from this contemplation. It too, is painful.

The poem is then ushered on to the final stanza:

Κι η Πηνελόπη που ακούει τώρα
την υποβλητική μουσική του φόβου
τα κρουστά της παραίτησης
το γλυκό άσμα μιας ήσυχης μέρας
χωρίς απότομες αλλαγές καιρού και τόνου
τις περίπλοκες συγχορδίες
μιας άπειρης ευγνωμοσύνης
για ο,τι δεν έγινε, δεν ειπώθηκε, δεν λέγεται
νεύει όχι, όχι, όχι άλλο έρωτα
όχι άλλο μιλίες και ψιθυρίσματα
αγγίγματα και δαγκώματα
φωνούλες στα σκοτάδια
μυρωδιά από σάρκα που καίγεται στο φως.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1999: 150)

And Penelope who now hears
the evocative music of fear
they cymbals of resignation
the sweet song of a quiet day
without sudden changes of weather and tone
the complex chords
of an infinite gratitude
for what did not happen, was not said, cannot be uttered
now signals no, no, no more loving
no more words and whispers
caresses and bites
small cries in the darkness
scent of flesh that burns in the light.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 94)

It is an inundation of sensory data including auditory, olfactory, and tactile sensations that climax in a rush of refusals. Like the affirmative crescendo of Molly Bloom's *Yeses*,¹³⁴ the near ecstatic refusals of Anghelaki-Rooke's narrator are essential; they are a denial of the traditional characterization of the Penelope.

¹³⁴ Molly Bloom is the "Penelope" figure in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The last chapter of the novel is narrated by Molly and is famous for ending with a rapturous series of *Yeses*.

This thread continues through to the final verse and addresses the entire cycle of love and pain:

Ο πόνος ήταν ο μνηστήρας ο πιο εκλεκτός
και του 'κλείσε την πόρτα.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1999: 150)

Pain was the most exquisite suitor
and she slammed the door on him.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 94)

In the end, this Penelopean narrator acknowledges that pain is connected to pleasure, but ultimately rejects the idea that love must be constituted by pain. In this way, Anghelaki-Rooke addresses the complexity of the relationship between love and pain, and also the relationship between the self and the other *in love*. Therefore, the question as to why Anghelaki-Rooke uses the Penelope myth is linked to the nexus between self and other, love and pain, absence and presence. Because Penelope has been modelled as the ideal wife in Western culture, a woman poet writing on the myth feels the pressure to identify with her and at the same time the (feminist) desire to reject this association. Anghelaki-Rooke explores this tricky dichotomy by identifying with Penelope as the one whose lover is absent, yet she problematizes this characterization by making Penelope a writer. This serves to transform the period of Penelope's waiting from a twenty-year stint of monotonous weaving and unwanted wooing into the creative process of producing poetry. Yet it is not just poetry that Penelope creates, it is also a new notion of her self and her relationship to desire. As the final section will discuss, this creation of a new self may require leaving Penelope behind.

THE LANGUAGE OF PENELOPE

And it is through this language, again, that a new woman will emerge, a complete being, containing and contained, acting and acted upon and not a half-entity where one half is desperately looking for its other half which is always situated somewhere outside herself.

Anghelaki-Rooke, "Sex Roles in Modern Greek Poetry" (Anghelaki-Rooke 1983: 146)

In Anghelaki-Rooke's more recent poems, she moves away from the Penelope figure as well as the body, and turns towards language instead.¹³⁵ As a professional translator fluent in Greek, English, French, and Russian it may not be surprising that much of Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry takes language as its theme. The poems that follow "Η άλλη Πηνελόπη" ["The Other Penelope"] in *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* (2008) reflect Anghelaki-Rooke's move away from myth and the body. Poems such as "Στη λυπιοῦ και πάλι" ["Lipiu Once Again"] (2000)¹³⁶ and "Μεταφράζοντας σε έρωτα της ζωής το τέλος" ["Translating Life's End into Love"] (2002) are about silence, the inability to touch the other, and the inadequacy of language to express the self and other. At times, Anghelaki-Rooke sees only ineffability and incompleteness in language rather than the freedom of undecidability; however, in the last poem of the 2008 collection, "Translating Life's End into Love", she says:

¹³⁵ In her article "Notes on Modern Greek Poetry", Anghelaki-Rooke discusses the connection between contemporary women's writing and language: "It seems that women poets are increasingly concerned with the examination and analysis of the tool of the poet, i.e. language. One could maintain that this is a general phenomenon, the difference being that women do this from within. Women place themselves at the core of this complex mechanism and ask themselves the archetypal questions of expression" (Anghelaki-Rooke 1991: 29). One could say that Anghelaki-Rooke's own poems are no exception.

¹³⁶ In the 2008 collection the poem is dated 2000. The poem is also published in the Greek collection *Η ύλη μόνη* (Anghelaki-Rooke 2001: 31–34).

Πώς απογυμνώνεσαι θέλω να μάθω
πώς ξανοίγεσαι

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2003: 9)

I want to learn how you bare yourself
how you open yourself up

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 111)

The poet wants to create a subject that “opens up” and “overflows”. To some extent she already has in the way that her erotic poems emphasize how the body transgresses linguistic and social boundaries. However, the poet is not satisfied with this. Poems such as “Lipiu Once Again” revisit the theme of language as something that is frustratingly limiting:

Δεν θα μπορέσεις ποτέ αυθόρμητα
να εκφραστείς σ’ αυτή τη γλώσσα
όμως θα σ’ αιφνιδιάζει πάντα η αλήθεια της.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2001: 31–32)

You will never be able
to express yourself freely in this language
but you will always be surprised by its truth.

(Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 107)

The act of writing *in language* is never free; to write in a language is to write within an ideology. This idea forms the crux of the 2008 collection; Anghelaki-Rooke tells her reader that acknowledging language as an embedded part of culture is a very important truth for writers, especially women writers. It is also what her Penelope has learned by the time she gets to “Η άλλη Πηνελόπη” [“The

Other Penelope”]. This Penelope is “other” not because she is not Odysseus, but because she is not the same. She is other because she can no longer be Penelope at all. The question now becomes, who does this poet become? And what will her relation to the other be? In an earlier essay on Modern Greek poetry Anghelaki-Rooke asks a similar question:

Recently, even love, this universal, this great instigator of poetry, seems to be canalized in extremely precise norms of expectation and behaviour. What is left then?

(Anghelaki-Rooke 1991: 30)

After love has been implicated in a power dynamic that oppresses more than it liberates what can be left?

Having looked at Anghelaki-Rooke’s Penelope poems and her more recent movement towards language in *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* (2008) I think Anghelaki-Rooke might answer, poetry is what is left. Indeed, I would argue that this is precisely why Anghelaki-Rooke makes her Penelope a writer. This Penelope attempts to define herself outside of the Odyssean frame of the waiting lover by writing. Roland Barthes explains it exactly:

To know that one does not write for the other, to know that these things I am going to write will never cause me to be loved by the one I love (the other), to know that writing compensates for nothing, sublimates nothing, that it is precisely *there where you are not*—this is the beginning of writing.

(Barthes 1978: 100)

Like weaving, writing will not help bring Odysseus back, but it will have presence. Moreover, even though writing does not mean “freedom” (insofar as it is

always rooted in existing ideological structures); writing will be present even if Odysseus is not. For Anghelaki-Rooke, writing not only has this material quality, but it is also an act of being. It is the way in which one asserts life and presence in the face of absence and death. Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope must be a writer because she is at this point that Barthes describes. She can no longer be "Penelope" because "Odysseus" has been gone for too long, or does not exist. She cannot be defined by him or his absence. Yet she does not substitute his absence with writing, nor does she "sublimate" her desire for his return. More simply, she reaches the realization that poetry is "there where you are not." Tentatively, yet finally, she rejects the idea of structuring "Penelope" around an "Odysseus".

Indeed, this is why Anghelaki-Rooke, like Francisca Aguirre, eventually moves away from Penelope. Perhaps, at first, Anghelaki-Rooke was able to see herself in this Penelope-poet; however, once she arrived at a place where Penelope's identity is no longer dependent on Odysseus, since Penelope became someone other than Penelope, she found that she no longer needed her. Although Anghelaki-Rooke's use of the Penelope figure falls short of announcing a new self in the same way that Francisca Aguirre does, she does make it clear that this subject is *not* defined as an Odyssean other and raises several important questions about the nature of the self and desire in the process. As Judith Butler emphasizes, part of giving an account of self that approaches truth requires failure (Butler 2001: 28). In this way, failing to find "a complete being" in Penelope means that the poet will continue to look for the self that is "always situated somewhere outside herself" (Anghelaki-Rooke 1983: 146) and will attempt to find the language with which to describe it.

Thus far, this thesis has looked at Re-visions of Penelope by Francisca Aguirre and Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke. Both poets have revised the Penelope myth in order to explore what it is like to be a woman, a writer, a lover/beloved, and an other. At this point it is necessary to look deeper into the relationship between the self and the other. Building on Anghelaki-Rooke's exploration of Penelope as a poet, the next chapter will look at Gail Holst-Warhaft's rendering of Penelope in which Penelope is both a poet and a translator. Holst-Warhaft's depiction reconsiders desire and faithfulness in a way that challenges traditional narratives of both marital and textual fidelity. It also explores one of the most crucial moments in the self/other relationship: the scene of recognition.

Gail Holst-Warhaft: Translating Penelope

...like women, the adage goes, translations should be either beautiful or faithful.

Chamberlain, "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation"
(Chamberlain 1988: 455; originally from Zuber 1968: 195)

Although most scholars would agree that the above quotation is an oversimplification, the same sentiment seems to echo within classical scholarship through the opposition of Helen and Penelope: beautiful women are unfaithful to their husbands just as beautiful translations are often unfaithful to the original text. In her article, "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation," Lori Chamberlain draws attention to how the language of paternity within a system of ownership is metaphorical for the author-text relationship. However, such a model of translation is not viable in the context of feminism because it is based on the assumption that the relationship between production and reproduction is gendered (male/female) and that translation as reproduction must be a more feminine activity than the original creative process of production. As an academic and translator herself, Gail Holst-Warhaft is certainly aware of this discussion and the fact that the language used to describe a good translation usually involves the notion of fidelity.

In her bilingual poetry collection *Penelope's Confession* (2007), Holst-Warhaft not only treats the theme of fidelity as it relates to the *Odyssey*, but also engages with the idea of fidelity on a number of levels including the inter- and intra-

linguistic. The poems suggest that this Penelope is unfaithful to her husband. One might also argue that this presentation of an unfaithful Penelope is equally unfaithful to the Homeric epic and the mythical tradition. Because the collection is bilingual, the reader can also assess the fidelity of the translations. As a Re-vision, the collection questions the meaning and importance of fidelity asking: What does it mean to be faithful? And how important is fidelity? As this chapter will show, both questions can be applied to the character of Penelope in Holst-Warhaft's poems and also to their translations.

This chapter will begin by addressing notions of translation and the poet/translator relationship with special focus on the case of Gail Holst-Warhaft and Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke. Having translated each other's poetry, it is perhaps not surprising that some of their Penelope poems overlap. Indeed, *Penelope's Confession* appears to continue a thread from Anghelaki-Rooke's discussion of Penelope's otherness and the difficulty of being the waiting lover. Holst-Warhaft's poems delve deeper into the concept of faithfulness, thus complicating traditional notions of Penelope's marital fidelity as well as exploring the notion of textual fidelity (with respect to a single narrative or translation). Like Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope, by the end of *Penelope's Confession* we find that the only things Holst-Warhaft's narrator remains faithful to are her own desires and her own narrative. In this way, Holst-Warhaft's Re-vision of Penelope reveals the intersections between translation theory and identity theory while also complicating our reading of the Homeric text. Finally, the last section of this chapter will discuss how *Penelope's Confession* is a Re-vision that revisits the relationship between the (Penelopean) self and (Odyssean) other through the lens of the Homeric

recognition scene. Holst-Warhaft offers Penelope her own *nostos* as well as her own recognition scene both of which resonate with Judith Butler's theory of subjectivity. In her "confession", Holst-Warhaft's Penelope realizes that although it may be impossible to give a seamless narrative of self, it *is* possible to give an account of self outside the confines of an outdated archetype.

POETRY OF/IN TRANSLATION: ANGHELAKEE-ROOKE & HOLST-WARHAFT

Having spent many years living in Greece, performing rembetika music, and later translating Greek texts into English it is not surprising that Gail Holst-Warhaft would use her experiences in and of Greece as inspiration for *Penelope's Confession*. In the 1970s Gail Holst-Warhaft was one of the first Anglophone students of rembetika music and collaborated with the famous composer Mikis Theodorakis. She worked with Theodorakis as a musician, interpreter, translator, and biographer. Today, she lives and works in Ithaca, New York as a professor in Classics, Comparative Literature, and Near Eastern Studies at Cornell University. She is also the director of the Mediterranean Studies Initiative at Cornell's Institute for European Studies and her most recent work is on the water crisis in the Mediterranean.¹³⁷ Published in 2007 as a bilingual edition, *Penelope's Confession* is Holst-Warhaft's first collection of poetry.

The poems of *Penelope's Confession* were composed in English and then translated into Modern Greek by a number of translators including Eleni Nika, Kyrikos Haralambidis, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, and Gail Holst-Warhaft. The volume contains a total of thirty-three poems. Twenty-three of these are either narrated by Penelope in the first or second person, or discuss Penelope and her situation in the third person. The remaining ten poems are collected under the title "Turning Back" and are relatively unrelated to the previous Penelope poems

¹³⁷ Holst-Warhaft has contributed to and edited the volume *Losing Paradise: The Water Crisis in the Mediterranean* (2010) and has a second poetry collection *Memories of Water* forthcoming.

except in their treatment of pain and loss. The Penelopean narrator is a combination of the Homeric Penelope and a modern woman. She describes in detail her experience of the events from the *Odyssey* as well as her lazy afternoons sitting in a Greek island café sipping ouzo and watching tourists. The collection combines elements of Ancient Greek Myth with Modern Greek culture yet it remains within the geographical boundaries of an “Ithaca” broadly interpreted (Odysseus’s Ithaca, modern Ithaca, or Ithaca, NY). Thus, although time is variable, space and location play an interesting role in anchoring the narrative of *Penelope’s Confession*.

Because the collection is framed as a confession, the notion of marital fidelity is implied, while the concept of fidelity in/of translation forms an important subtext. “Penelope Contemplates Infidelity” is the fifth poem in the collection and is followed by “Translation”, “The Recognition Scene”, “Fidelity”, and “Penelope’s Love of Poetry”. The poems “Translation” and “Penelope’s Love of Poetry”, which focus on translation and poetry, are both translated into Modern Greek by Holst-Warhaft while the main fidelity poems are translated by Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke. The collection’s construction highlights this unique relationship between the two poets/translators and poses an interesting case from a translation theory perspective. In his commentary on Walter Benjamin’s famous *The Task of the Translator*, Paul De Man says, “Any translation is always second in relation to the original, and the translator as such is lost from the very beginning” (De Man 1985: 33). Moreover, the translator will not be considered “an equal, unless he also happens to be a poet, but that is not always the case” (De Man 1985: 33).

However, this *is* the case with Anghelaki-Rooke and Holst-Warhaft as they are both poets and translators who translate each other.

The collection itself makes the text-as-translation highly visible: on the front cover underneath the title the collection is qualified as a “bilingual edition”; there is a preface about the translations; and the Greek and English are on facing pages with the names of the translators at the bottom of each poem. *Penelope’s Confession* appears to be informed by a translation theory following Walter Benjamin¹³⁸ (and later Jacques Derrida) in which both the original text and its translation are part of an incomplete whole allowing for the Greek and the English to enrich each other.¹³⁹ As Lori Chamberlain has suggested, Derrida subverts the concept of difference that creates the binary opposition between “original” and “reproduction” to the point that the difference between the two becomes undecidable (Chamberlain 1988: 468). This undecidability plays well with the figure of Penelope as a character whose intentions (and marital fidelity) are themselves polysemous.

With regards to translation, poetry, fidelity, and the self/other dynamic there appears to be a common thread between the collections of Anghelaki-Rooke and Holst-Warhaft. This connection certainly contributes to their characterizations of Penelope: both Penelopes are at once ancient and modern, their fidelity is suspect, and they are more concerned with their creativity than Odysseus’s return. However, Holst-Warhaft’s Penelope is more of a traveller, or wanderer; her Penelope moves while Anghelaki-Rooke’s Penelope remains. This mobility is

¹³⁸ See Benjamin 2004.

¹³⁹ See Derrida 1985.

perhaps also reflective of the poet's situation; in the preface to her collection, Holst-Warhaft claims that her own concept of home is not a simple one (she was born in Australia, lived in Greece, and now resides in the U.S.) and this contributes to her particular depiction of Penelope.

When it comes to writing and poetry the Penelopes of Anghelaki-Rooke and Holst-Warhaft have different opinions. Holst-Warhaft's Penelope admits that she translates and loves poetry. However, one is unsure whether this Penelopean narrator is actually a poet in the same sense that Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope is. While Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope sustains herself by writing poetry, Holst-Warhaft's narrator feels differently, almost betrayed by poetry; the poem "Penelope's Love of Poetry" begins, "Penelope's love of poetry / has left her" (Holst-Warhaft 2007: 40). It is an odd thing to have one's narrator say in a poetry collection. However, as will be shown, this love loss is bound up with the narrative of fidelity and translation in *Penelope's Confession*. It is also connected to the poet's own experience; perhaps, in translating the *Odyssey*, or more generally in translating myth into reality, Holst-Warhaft finds it difficult to remain faithful to the original story and its traditional interpretations. As the narrator explains, Penelope's love of poetry has left her because "she knows what men do / seduced by its coquetry" (Holst-Warhaft 2007: 40). Namely, men start wars that are then not only justified, but also glorified through poetry. Although this may seem to be Penelope's criticism of Homeric epic, it is also relevant to the poet's own sentiments about contemporary war.

In both of their recent collections, Holst-Warhaft and Anghelaki-Rooke include poems that reference contemporary conflicts. For example, in Anghelaki-Rooke's *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* there is a series of nine poems that compose the "War Diary". These poems reference the first Gulf War and are placed in a collection about a mythical figure whose life is affected by the Trojan War. Gail Holst-Warhaft also translated these poems into English. The parallel with *Penelope's Confession* cannot be ignored: in the preface Holst-Warhaft writes that the events of the second Gulf War inspired her collection. In a 2011 interview with the Holst-Warhaft, Paul Bennetch explains that:

...it was the advent of the 2003 Gulf War, in particular, that inspired her to put together a thematic collection. The war echoed geographically the Homeric account of the "Western" Greeks who brought their armies to the Trojan "East", with beautiful Helen merely as an excuse for profit-driven war.

(Bennetch 2011: 1)

Holst-Warhaft adds, "It seemed to me an age-old story, of war being fought for reasons that are not what they seem to be." (Bennetch 2011). In *Penelope's Confession* Holst-Warhaft's Penelope echoes this sentiment precisely: "Pretexts are always sought / for the wars men choose— / sufficient cause in afterthought" (Holst-Warhaft 2007: 40). Here we find a blurring of the poet and narrator who both find fidelity a fraught concept especially when it requires one to be faithful to an ideology that glorifies war. This is why Holst-Warhaft's Penelope is tempted to abandon poetry. She finds that her relationship to poetry is complicated by these notions of translation, fidelity, and the "uses" of poetry to facilitate an agenda. In the same way, the poet herself finds it difficult to remain faithful to previous characterizations of Penelope and romantic notions of war epics. Indeed, this is

what makes Holst-Warhaft's collection so interesting; she is willing to risk her collection's fidelity to Homer and tradition in order to explore what it means to be faithful. In the next section, we will take a closer look at the opening poems of *Penelope's Confession* in order to examine how Holst-Warhaft's theme of faithfulness is carefully unpacked and leads the reader to the main fidelity poems.

UNRAVELLING PENELOPE'S CONFESSION

By virtue of its title *Penelope's Confession* is framed as a confession although it is not "confessional" in same way that Adrienne Rich is often considered a "confessional poet". It is, after all, primarily *Penelope's* confession and not the poet's. So, what is it that Penelope will confess? The first two poems "Unravelling" and "Penelope's Confession" give us a hint. They disrupt the reader's expectation of the ever-faithful Homeric Penelope, and at the same time partly fulfil this same expectation. The confession Penelope is going to give is about her marital (in)fidelity. However, at this stage the reader is unsure as to whether she merely contemplates infidelity or acts upon her desires.

The first two poems in *Penelope's Confession* present an image of a Penelope that could very well be the Homeric Penelope, although she is growing discontent with her weaving and waiting. They also introduce the concept of fidelity, which will be a thread that continues throughout the collection. The first poem, "Unravelling", sets the tone and introduces the reader to the work that will be performed in *Penelope's Confession*—that is, an undoing of an archetype, a woman, and even a tradition. As the first poem suggests, it is more an unravelling of the character of Penelope and an exploration of what this process of un-doing can produce. Much like translation (and Re-vision for that matter), there must be an undoing, an unwrapping before one can remake. The poem "Unravelling" begins by undoing the reader's own expectation of the Homeric Penelope; in the very first stanza, Holst-Warhaft's narrator confesses that her weaving was "not a play for time," it was not to stall the suitors. It was supposed to be "her best

work”, but “she could not finish”. She goes on to describe the images she is presumably weaving into her tapestry, but then comes to a halt when she has to describe Odysseus:

but when its time came
she could no longer summon his face
than she could her own (for years
she’d avoided mirrors and still water).

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 16–18)

This is not Homer’s Penelope and neither is it Anghelaki-Rooke’s. This is a Penelope whose Homeric identity is slipping away. She can no longer recall the man for whom she is supposedly waiting, nor can she remember the image of who she had been. It is the beginning of a narrative that will lead Penelope towards the realization that she no longer fits her own archetype. Indeed, as we will see, once she disowns this narrative of the traditional Penelope, she is then able to move towards creating a new one.

The next poem, “Penelope’s Confession”, translated into Greek by Anghelaki-Rooke, builds upon the first poem as Penelope becomes increasingly more confident in moving away from her traditional characterization. Through the recollection of her years of waiting, she seems to gain more and more clarity as to why she remained faithful for so long. In “Penelope’s Confession” she explains:

I won’t say there wasn’t a night
when I didn’t long to let one in
but something held me back.
It wasn’t love of you
but what we made together:
this boy, this home, this Ithaca

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 20)

She goes on to describe what it was like for her when Odysseus left—how she hated the sea for taking him away and how she kept the estate intact despite the suitors. It was Ithaca that allowed her to be faithful because she loved the way of life she had, the daily tasks of planting “olive and vine”, and replenishing what the suitors used up. In a very material sense of place, Ithaca became home for Penelope in a way that perhaps Odysseus never understood:

You never loved Ithaca
as I do I dipped my hands
in this earth and watched it fall,
black through my fingers.
Nights, I felt it tremble
in the Earth-shaker's hands
like the boy asleep beside me
(calm, terrible when crossed)
and knew I could be faithful

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 22)

In contrast to Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope who cries, “Where are you, come I'm waiting for you...” (“Penelope Says” in Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 25), this Penelope asserts that her fidelity has nothing to do with Odysseus and the duties of being a good wife. Instead, Penelope begins to realize that it is more important to be faithful to her own construction of memory, place, and belonging and this becomes increasingly the case as the collection moves on.

PENELOPE'S CONFESSION: THE FIDELITY POEMS

The narrative of fidelity that begins in "Penelope's Confession" continues throughout the collection and is explicitly treated in the fifth poem "Penelope Contemplates Infidelity". As the collection progresses there is an increasing amount of anachronisms, clues that this narrator is not only the Homeric Penelope. "Penelope Contemplates Infidelity" is the second poem translated by Anghelaki-Rooke and is one of the key poems in the collection. The poem begins:

Memory has become ethereal
she thinks, sitting on the waterfront,
rain dripping from the awnings
of cafés where tourists cluster
to eat ice-cream at tables.
She sips her ouzo slowly,
gazes at the unforgiving sea,
wonders how she became
a symbol of fidelity– some
poet's fault no doubt

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 30)

Against the tradition of poets who use Penelope as a symbol for womanly virtue and fidelity, Holst-Warhaft brings Penelope down to earth. For a moment we forget that she is the mythical Penelope, and we see her as just a woman sitting in a café. Then Penelope addresses her own mythical status, revealing that she is tired of being a symbol of fidelity. Again, unlike Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope who says, "Each day / I passionately forget you" ("Penelope Says" Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 26) Holst-Warhaft's Penelope is more disillusioned than passionate and she treats memory not with the richness of nostalgia but with the flavourlessness of the present:

Penelope sips and waits.
Memory once had a bouquet;
now it needs flavoring
like the milky liquor in her glass.
To what, then is she faithful?
Memory's distilled spirit?

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 30)

As in the title poem, this poem complicates the notion of fidelity as Holst-Warhaft's narrator asks herself "to what am I faithful?" The fact that this Penelope is conscious of her own mythical reputation makes her situation all the more palpable; it creates a tension between what tradition dictates and what the narrator actually desires. Is she just being faithful to her own Homeric identity? The third stanza continues the narrative of Penelope's thoughts via a third person narrator:

Yet, that old hippie with
broken sandals was the first
who dared. Last night,
pretending to drop a spoon
he bent and kissed her knee
under the paper tablecloth

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 30)

The poem's final stanza brings Penelope back to her present surroundings:

Someone is playing a bouzouki,
singing a rebetiko song.
The stranger comes limping,
smelling slightly of salt.
Incarnate memory takes her
by the hand, leads her
to the house. Strange how
the dog wags its tail
as if it too is tired of waiting

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 30–31)

Looking at the poem in its entirety the opposition between the ancient and the modern is felt through a string of various images. The images of the ancient include Penelope as the symbol of fidelity, the limping¹⁴⁰ stranger, and the dog wagging its tail. Then the modern: the rebetiko song, the bouzouki playing in a café, the ouzo, the tourists eating ice cream, and the paper table cloth. The poem remains vague enough that the reader is unsure whether or not this is the mythical Penelope. But, if it is, is the stranger Odysseus? This is left open to interpretation. It could be the case that, like Penelope, the dog is tired of waiting and is happy to welcome anyone to the house or that the dog merely recognizes Penelope's own "recognition" (she wants him to be Odysseus). In both cases, Penelope's marital fidelity is at stake. On the other hand, a reader familiar with the *Odyssey* might recall that in Book 17 Odysseus's dog Argos wags his tail in recognition when the hero returns to Ithaca. Thus, one could read the reference in Holst-Warhaft's poem as an allusion to the scene from the *Odyssey*, which would indicate that this stranger from the café is indeed Odysseus. This interpretation then implies the questions: does Penelope, at this point, realize that the stranger is Odysseus? And if not, can she still be considered faithful if she brings him home?

The reader is left hanging on this question mark for the space of another poem as this narrative of marital fidelity is interrupted by the poem "Translation." This interruption serves to link the ideas of marital fidelity with fidelity in translation. Here is the poem in its entirety:

¹⁴⁰ The limp is another ambiguous detail that can be read as a reference to the *Odyssey*. While disguised as a beggar returning to Ithaca, Odysseus is described as "limping" into the city and "hobbling" up to his home (Newton 1987). His difficulty walking may be part of his disguise as an old beggar, but it may also be characteristic of Odysseus: recall that Odysseus also has a large scar on his thigh from a hunting incident (it is this scar that signals Eurycleia's recognition of him in Book 19).

I'm busy translating
your tongue into mine.
I parse you, enumerate
your parts of speech,
match them with my own,
change tense, future
into perfect: translate
'will come' to 'have come' –
past affecting
present, your coming
surveyed from here.

For years I walked
through the nettles, enjoying
the sting that tingled,
mating your name
with verbs of longing
but always that 'will'
came between us
pursing its lips
like a chaperone.
Now only the "ve"
of love lies
between you and my verbs
purring on my lips.

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 34)¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ ΜΕΤΑΦΡΑΣΗ

Παλεύω με τη μετάφραση
από τη δική σου γλώσσα στη δική μου.
σε αναλύω, απαριθμώ
τα μέρη του λόγια σου,
τα ταιριάζω με τα δικά μου,
αλλάζω τα χρόνο –μέλλον
στον παρακείμενο –
«Θα έρθει» στο «έχει έρθει»,
η επίδραση του παρελθόντος
στο παρόν, τον ερχομό σου
απ' αυτή την άποψη.

Χρόνια περπατούσα
στις τσουκνίδες, και χαιρόμουν
το τσούξιμο που έκαιγε
ζευγάρωνα τ' όνομά σου
με τα ρήματα της λαχτάρας
αλλά πάντοτε αυτό το «θα»
μας χώριζε, κηδεμόνας
με σφιγμένα χείλη.
Τώρα μόνο το «ρω»
του έρωτα κείται

At first it appears that Holst-Warhaft's narrator is merely using translation as a metaphor to address her relationship with her lover. However, as the poem continues it becomes clear that she is also discussing translation itself, and the translation of this particular poem. In the second stanza she says that for years she enjoyed, "mating your name / with verbs of longing / but always that "will" / came between us" (Holst-Warhaft 2007: 34). In creating the future tense in English with the word "will", the image of a chaperone fits well: the pursing of lips works with a "w" sound in English, but does not work as well with the "th" of "θα" in Greek. On the other hand, there is another reference that works better in Greek. This occurs in the last lines of the poem when the narrator says, "Now only the "ve" / of love lies / between you and my verbs, / purring on my lips". Because the Greek is on the facing page, the reader can easily glance over and see the action of the translator in moving from "the "ve" / of love" to "το «ρω» / του έρωτα," or perhaps more fittingly, the other way around. In Greek the phrase "το «ρω» / του έρωτα", is an easily accessible reference to Odysseus Elytis's poetry collection, *Τα Ρω Του Έρωτα*. Published in 1972, *Τα Ρω Του Έρωτα* is a collection of lyric poems that were intended to be set to music.¹⁴² Although the collection was never published in English, Holst-Warhaft, as both a translator of Greek and a Rembetika scholar, must have certainly come across it in Greek either in the form of poems or as songs. In this example then, not only does it appear that Greek

ανάμεσα σε σένα και τα ρήματά μου
γουργουρίζοντας στα χείλη μου.

¹⁴² Elytis began writing the poem-songs of "Μικρές Κυκλάδες" (a poem cycle within *Τα Ρω Του Έρωτα*) in 1962. At the same time, he was discussing collaboration with the famous composer Mikis Theodorakis to set these poems to music. The result was the album "Μικρές Κυκλάδες" (Cyclades Minor) with lyrics by Elytis and music composed by Theodorakis. A decade later, these poem-songs were included in the collection *Τα Ρω Του Έρωτα* together with other lyric poems. See Elytis 1972.

takes precedence, but also that writing in English becomes unfaithful, as it cannot render the full weight of the reference.

In her article “Taking Fidelity Philosophically” Barbara Johnson describes the translator as a:

faithful bigamist, with loyalties split between a native tongue and a foreign tongue. Each must accommodate the requirements of the other without their ever having the opportunity to meet. The bigamist is thus necessarily doubly unfaithful, but in such a way that he or she must push to its utmost limit the very capacity for faithfulness.

(Johnson 1985: 143)

And this is precisely what Holst-Warhaft does. She collaborates on many of her translations with a fellow poet/translator and appears to be very aware of the limitations of each language and even highlights these limitations. With respect to the rest of the collection, this poem also points out that Holst-Warhaft’s faithfulness to the Homeric text has its limits, as does Penelope’s marital fidelity.

In the next poem, “The Recognition Scene”, the narrative picks up where the previous poem, “Penelope Contemplates Infidelity”, left off in which the narrator is last seen taking home the man from the café. The title, “The Recognition Scene”, refers to one of the most famous moments in the *Odyssey*. In Book 23, Odysseus comes to Penelope still disguised as a beggar claiming to be her long-lost husband. In Homer’s version, Penelope tests the stranger with questions only Odysseus would know the answers to and Penelope eventually embraces Odysseus, welcoming him home. This is when Homer makes explicit Penelope’s

recognition of Odysseus. However, in classical scholarship there is debate surrounding when exactly recognition occurs and this has prompted a number of Re-visionist poems on the topic.¹⁴³ Holst-Warhaft is aware of this and plays with the reader's expectations that this will be the moment when Odysseus and Penelope are joyfully reunited. The poem begins:

That night he knew her and she knew him,
but was he her man or did she decide
he was hers but right of abstinence.
And did he know she didn't know
him by a puckered scar but sense
she was his by her own compliance?

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 36)

Holst-Warhaft presents the reader with a reunion of sorts, but it hardly seems Homeric. This Penelope admits that she did *not* know that the stranger was Odysseus when she made her decision to sleep with him. Then she wonders whether or not *he* realizes this. Although this may seem like a radical departure from Homer's recognition scene, many critics argue to the contrary. In her article "The Oxymoron of Fidelity," Keri Elizabeth Ames addresses the notion of desire and fidelity in the *Odyssey* and asks whether Penelope is "ambivalent, like Odysseus who forgets to return home for a year or a master schemer determined to salvage her home, like the returned, disguised Odysseus?" She then goes on to say:

¹⁴³ For an overview of the debate on Penelope's recognition of Odysseus see Murnaghan 1987a, Winkler 1990: 129–62, Katz 1991, Doherty 1995, and Felson 1987 and 1994. For more specific aspects of the reunion see Russo 1982 and Wohl 1993.

Homer not only leaves both possibilities open, he crafts his poem such that both possibilities can hold true. Neither husband nor wife are portrayed as perfect models of fidelity, but as ordinary, flawed, confused mortals with unusual capacities for weaving plots and schemes.

(Ames 2003: 157)

Not only do Penelope's intentions remain opaque, but critics have gone as far as to say that the unknowability of Penelope's desire is critical to the meaning and action of the epic (Ames 2003: 161–2). Thus, it could be argued that Holst-Warhaft's poem fleshes out the inconsistencies already inherent in the text. In this way, the process of Re-vision is similar to Derrida's act of translation as it brings about new meanings even in the "original" Homeric text.

Holst-Warhaft then takes this a step further and, in the poem's last stanza, implies that even Penelope's desire is not necessarily conditional upon Odysseus's return:

It's late. A wind stirs the leaves.
Already she's paid the price of knowing
another body: her body's greed
for further knowledge. Her right to him
can never be guaranteed;
her only surety is her body's need.

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 36)

This verse confirms that the poem's title "The Recognition Scene" is more than just a reference to a moment in Book 23 of Homer's *Odyssey*. The poet does play with the idea of "knowing" in the biblical sense: "That night he knew her and she knew him", but she also points to a different kind of recognition scene that has

nothing to do with Odysseus. This second recognition is Penelope's alone in which she recognizes that, "her only surety is her body's need." In a less romantic and perhaps more modern way, Penelope realizes that the only thing she can really be sure of is the knowledge of her own body and its desires. This "second recognition" will continue to unfold throughout the collection and will be treated in the last section of the chapter in further detail.

This kind of bodily recognition harks back to the narrative begun in Anghelaki-Rooke's collection particularly in the poems "Penelope Says" and "The Other Penelope". In "Penelope Says" the narrator claims that: "the body keeps remaking itself... hoping that what is loses in touch / it gains in essence" (Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 26).¹⁴⁴ Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope connects fidelity and creativity in a corporal way: "tears and the natural suffering / of the deprived body / appear on the page" (25). Her Penelopean narrator's writing is stifled as are her carnal passions. However, this Penelope does not wallow in despair for long. She soon begins again "in the morning / with new birds and white sheets" (25) indicating that she is perhaps not so faithful.¹⁴⁵ Holst-Warhaft uses this same ambivalence, keeping the reader always uncertain of Penelope's fidelity. However, unlike Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope, Holst-Warhaft's Penelope has contemplated abandoning poetry and in the poem "The Recognition Scene", Holst-Warhaft's Penelope sees no benefit in "losing touch" to "gain essence". Her "deprived body" does not "appear on the page". Where Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope moves from the body towards poetry, Holst-Warhaft's Penelope has her doubts about poetry;

¹⁴⁴ Because I am referencing the 2008 collection which is in English, I have not used the Greek titles: "Λεεί η Πηνελόπη" ["Penelope Says"] and "Η άλλη Πηνελόπη" ["The Other Penelope"].

¹⁴⁵ As discussed in the chapter on Anghelaki-Rooke, this line references Penelope's dream in the *Odyssey* in which the suitors are represented as geese. Thus, the act of beginning again every morning with new birds and new sheets is a subtle reference to Penelope's marital infidelity.

she comes to realize that the only thing worth being faithful to is the body and its passions.

In the poem “Fidelity”, her narrator is irritated and fed up with the concept. The poem begins with the death of the family dog Argos, who was referred to earlier in “Penelope Contemplates Fidelity”. According to the *Odyssey*, Argos manages to survive Odysseus’s twenty-year absence waiting loyally for his return. When Odysseus returns to Ithaca disguised as a beggar, he is led to the palace by the swineherd Eumaeus and on their way Odysseus sees his faithful hound lying neglected on a pile of manure. It is a touching moment in the epic. Argos lowers his ears and wags his tail, recognizing his master after all that time, but Odysseus cannot reciprocate for fear of being revealed, so he turns his head, sheds a tear, and without giving himself away merely inquires about the old hound. As Odysseus and Eumaeus enter the palace, Argos dies. In contrast to this emotive scene in the *Odyssey*, Holst-Warhaft’s poem sounds bitter and harsh as the Penelopean narrator recounts the death of Argos:

The dog died in the night;
one twitch of a mangy tail
was enough to loose its hold
on life. Years ago
she had tired of its fidelity.
Dogs try too hard, she thinks;
they wear their doggy hearts out
waiting for masters to return.

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 38)

Despite the harshness of her words, it is not difficult to sense that the anger behind them is directed towards her self. As in much of the collection this is a moment in

which Holst-Warhaft brings the mythological down to the level of the mundane; this is a portrait of a woman who is angry with herself for having waited for so long, confined to the image of her archetype. There is a further de-romanticization of the concept of Penelope's fidelity in the next stanza:

She drinks her coffee under the carob;
its pods clack in the wind.
She has begun to hate the way
her name rattles off the tongue:
Penelope —fidelity—
two seeds in a dry pod.
She becomes an antidote
for adultery, Helen's counterpoise.

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 38)

Penelope mocks her own mythological status and hints at how myth has been appropriated as a way to teach moral lessons about fidelity. It is also worth pointing out that Anghelaki-Rooke's translation of this poem is excellent as it retains the colloquial tone of the English. The phrase "her name rattles off the tongue" is rendered along with the light rhyme of Penelope and fidelity as: "πως ηχούσαν τα δυο Π – Πηνελόπη – πιστή". In English, the rhyme adds to the narrator's mockery of her situation and Anghelaki-Rooke retains this in the Greek by pointing out the repetition of sounds and the alliteration.

In looking at the kind of Penelope that Holst-Warhaft creates, "Fidelity" is a key poem and contains what is perhaps one of the most poignant phrases of the collection. The third stanza begins:

When all this becomes myth
what woman worth her lover's
salt will wish herself
Penelope?

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 38)

The Penelopean narrator explicitly questions her own archetype as well as its reception, expressing her frustration over the narratives spun about her. In many ways, Penelope's inquiry also represents one of the main questions this thesis is attempting to address. At first glance, it would seem that no modern woman would wish herself to be Penelope. Why wait twenty years for a man or a concept that has become hollow? The answers to such questions have grown more and more complex. In modern literature, what is at stake in using myth and what it means to be faithful, are themselves no longer easy questions, let alone what this means in the context of feminism. However, as has been suggested, what may be at stake is the very notion of a recognizable self. Like Francisca Aguirre and Anghelaki-Rooke, Holst-Warhaft's Penelopean narrator eventually sheds the traditional narrative of the archetypal Penelope in order to move on and give a new account of self. The poem "Fidelity" is a major step towards Holst-Warhaft's Penelope's new narrative of self. It is the point at which she acknowledges her utter unhappiness with the way she has been narrated and the way she has narrated her self.

The closing lines of “Fidelity” confirm Penelope’s weariness with her traditional image:

...For another’s
infidelity she has lived
her life on the threshold
slave to the harlot, Hope.
She’s led a dog’s life.

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 38)

The disillusionment and anger she feels are comparable to Anghelaki-Rooke’s Penelope in “The Suitors” when she refers to her situation as, “a way of being / where the self plays itself” (Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 29).¹⁴⁶ She plays the role of Penelope because of inertia. It is what she has always done. However, this apathy towards “performing Penelope” eventually turns to frustration and anger. In Anghelaki-Rooke’s later poem “The Other Penelope” she says, “Pain was the most exquisite suitor and she slammed the door on him” (Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 94). This rejection is mirrored in Holst-Warhaft’s poem but instead of Pain, Holst-Warhaft’s Penelope slams the door on Hope, which leads me to another text. Although one could not call it a reference, there is a nagging sense in the poem’s ending that refers back to writer Nikos Kazantzakis. Kazantzakis is famous for his novel *Zorba the Greek* and his lesser-known work *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* which reinterprets and modernizes Odysseus’s journey. The connection I find with Holst-Warhaft’s Penelope is from the quotation, “Δεν ελπίζω τίποτα. Δε φοβούμαι τίποτα. Είμαι λεύτερος” [“I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. I am free”]. This is the poet’s epitaph (and it is also printed on t-shirts in tourist shops all over Athens). Kazantzakis is known for his explorations of religion and philosophy and

¹⁴⁶ The original Greek title is “Οι Μνηστήρες”. See n153.

has even been called the “prophet of non-hope”,¹⁴⁷ a characterization that reflects his dealings with Nietzschean nihilism. However, although Holst-Warhaft’s Penelope renounces hope, there is no final sense of despair; in fact, she goes on for another fifteen poems to explore the Homeric figure. I am tempted then, to take a cue from Kazantzakis in my own interpretation of Holst-Warhaft’s poem and say that perhaps Penelope’s freedom lies in abandoning both her fear and her hope of becoming the *Homeric* Penelope. The creative struggle with Homeric figures is a safe and productive space for writers, but it seems that there also comes a point where the ancient and the modern are no longer compatible for the poet. Indeed, both Anghelaki-Rooke and Holst-Warhaft eventually end their journeys with Penelope and move on from her.¹⁴⁸

The realization that Penelope has during “The Recognition Scene”—that Odysseus’s homecoming did not fulfil her desire—is the beginning of a journey that leads her to reject this antiquated notion of self and then, eventually, to move on. Following her scene of recognition, Penelope’s begins to question her image as “Helen’s counterpoise”, an image that is still defined as a negation. She is said to be the not-Helen and the not-Odysseus. But who *is* Penelope? This is precisely the question that will be treated in the next two sections as they follow the line of *Penelope’s Confession* through her journey and homecoming.

¹⁴⁷ (Calian 1971).

¹⁴⁸ Anghelaki-Rooke does not write any more poems that are explicitly about Penelope after the collection *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* and Holst-Warhaft’s collection ends with a series of poems that are not about Penelope.

PENELOPE'S JOURNEY HOME

The next few poems in *Penelope's Confession* continue to follow the plot of the *Odyssey* and as before, they are told from Penelope's perspective. These poems represent a mnemonic journey for Penelope as she recalls the events of Odysseus's homecoming. As the poems accumulate, both Penelope and the reader continue to piece together an image of a woman who is unhappy with unhappy with ways in which she has been represented. She is unhappy with the accounts of her that have been reiterated over the centuries. Having looked at Holst-Warhaft's recognition scene and concluded that her Penelope is neither faithful to Odysseus, nor to the Homeric characterization of Penelope, one must then ask, to what *is* she faithful? The answer to this question may also provide insight as to who Penelope is, rather than just who she is not.

Recall, in the poem "Penelope Contemplates Infidelity", that the narrator asks precisely this question: "To what, then, is she faithful?". The narrator then answers it with the question: "Memory's distilled spirit?" The question is answered, but it is answered with another question. As the collection moves along, Penelope grows more confident in her ability to be faithful and it becomes clearer to the reader what exactly she is faithful to. In the poem "Your Name" she says, "Don't ask me to forgive you; / I won't be unfaithful to memory" (Holst-Warhaft 2007: 70). Finally, Penelope asserts the object of her fidelity: memory. Yet, as the poems suggests, Penelope's fidelity is to her own memory of the events of Odysseus's return as opposed to Odysseus's or Homer's. In this way, the entire collection is reframed as the confession of a witness whose story was previously

smothered by other versions of the tale and this becomes more evident as the collection progresses.

“Your Name” is part of a series of poems that deal with the aftermath of Odysseus’s homecoming and the slaughter of the suitors and maids. It is narrated by Penelope and is addressed to her son Telemachus (who at this stage of the epic has reached maturity¹⁴⁹). Penelope’s narration of the topic highlights the brutality and senselessness of the violence that characterizes Odysseus’s return and also how this violence is perpetuated in a heroic society. In the first four stanzas of the poem Penelope recalls Telemachus as a child:

When the men taught you games
you waved your wooden sword,
laughed a boy’s laugh,
ran me through – I died
obligingly on the kitchen floor.

You called the daisies Trojans,
beheaded them one by one,
got paid in kisses by the maids.
Even your tantrums pleased:
“His father’s son!” As if

temper were the measure
of a prince. No wonder
what I taught seemed tame.
Waiting is a dull art
compared to playing war

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 68)

It is not unusual among modern poets to elaborate on Penelope’s maternity; however, for Holst-Warhaft there is also a connection here with fidelity and memory. The poem is framed as Penelope’s personal memory and includes direct

¹⁴⁹ For a discussion on the age of Telemachus and issues surrounding his maturation see Chapter Three “How Old is Telemachus?” in Heitman 2005: 50–62.

quotations as she recalls Telemachus as a child and the ways in which he was socialized to value heroism in warfare. The fact that the reader is being presented with Penelope's side of the story (which is in opposition to Odysseus's) becomes more apparent as the poem continues:

Your father brought Troy
to my door and your green heart
was dazzled when Athena waved
her magic wand and he shone
like a god in the great hall.

Like all new recruits, you did
the dirty work for him.
The massacre of innocents,
outdoing him in cruelty
to prove yourself his son.

I tried to keep you true
to your name -Tele-machos,
'far-fighting', glossing it
as talisman to keep you safe
from the sin of war, and failed.

Don't ask me to forgive you.
I won't be unfaithful to memory
or let you plead a goddess
twisted your arm. No,
I can only love you.

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 68)

The poem's final stanza also reveals Penelope's difficult moral situation. Not only is her husband a terrifying spectacle, blood-spattered as he kills the suitors, but her son too becomes a part of this violence. By naming her son Telemachus, Penelope hoped to keep him away from the war and violence that had taken her husband far from home, yet in this, she fails. However, this failure leads to further reflection. Like Odysseus's journey back to Ithaca (which is, in actuality, a series of failed

attempts to return home), Penelope's failure is only a part of her journey. Indeed, her failure to recognize herself in her own archetype will be precisely what allows her to escape this restrictive narrative of self.

At this point in *Penelope's Confession* a reader familiar with the Homeric epic might notice that the chronology of events is jumbled. In the *Odyssey* the killing of the suitors and maids precedes the recognition scene between Odysseus and Penelope. Holst-Warhaft's reconfiguration of events is significant in framing her collection as a Penelopean *nostos*. It effectively downplays the recognition scene in order to build a narrative that takes the reader through Penelope's experience of return. The poems between "The Recognition Scene" and "Your Name" set the stage for Penelope's *nostos*. For example, in the poem "The Cost of Wandering" Penelope realizes for the first time that Odysseus's return (to her) might not be possible:

the "man of many turns"
couldn't make the last return

to himself, the inward spiral
that would lead him back to her

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 48)

Similar to Yannis Ritsos's poem "Return II"¹⁵⁰, Holst-Warhaft questions the possibility of a successful *nostos* of which the recognition scene is key. It must

¹⁵⁰ In Ritsos's poem he questions the idea of return by suggesting that Odysseus himself does not even recognize his home island of Ithaca when he arrives:

...What he'd most dreamed of
seemed, now that he'd arrived,
the most alien and unknown. Was it the fault of
the length of time or the fault of knowledge
outside of time? He struck his thighs
with his two palms to make sure he had woken.
"Where am I?" is all he said.

involve Odysseus returning and then Penelope confirming Odysseus's identity. By questioning Odysseus return to himself or to Penelope, the poem serves to foreshadow Penelope's own attempt to return to her self over the next few poems.

Penelope's *nostos* is not achieved without some degree of trauma. In fact, the way *Penelope's Confession* builds, it seems that the violence of Odysseus's own homecoming is precisely what allows Penelope to make the final turn to her own self. When Odysseus arrives in Ithaca he must reclaim his kingship, which involves disposing of the suitors. *Odyssey* Book 22 describes in lurid detail the battle between Odysseus (with help of Telemachus) and the suitors. Once all of the suitors are killed, Odysseus brings his ever-faithful nurse Eurycleia to the hall to ask her which of the maids have dishonoured him and which are blameless. In other words, which of the maids were unfaithful to Odysseus as the head of the household? According to the social structures of the time, the maids are part of Odysseus's property and therefore their chastity is of his concern; he can count their transgressions with the suitors as property damage (Pomeroy 1995: 27).¹⁵¹ Eurycleia reports that out of the fifty household servants twelve were faithless. Odysseus then orders for these twelve women to be brought down to the hall so that they can clean up after the massacre. They are instructed to remove the bodies of those men with whom they shared several years of company and companionship and scrub the hall clean of their blood. Then, heaping cruelty upon

(Ritsos 1991: 38)

¹⁵¹ In the Bronze Age, when the Homeric epic is set, there were stringent rules for slaves (which included household servants like the maids). Pomeroy explains this further: "A slave of either sex was actually the property of the master and was not permitted sexual relationships without the master's consent. This restriction was in force throughout antiquity. Thus it is not surprising that after Odysseus killed Penelope's suitors, he brutally executed twelve of his slave women who had been fornicating with them" (Pomeroy 1995).

cruelty Odysseus tells Telemachus to kill the maids. Thus, in addition to Penelope's fidelity there is also the issue of the maids' fidelity and the fact that the maids' infidelities are judged punishable by death. After this point in the *Odyssey* there is no further mention of the twelve hanged maids and even Penelope does not inquire about them. However, Holst-Warhaft picks up on this as do other poets (one of the most notable being Margaret Atwood), and questions this silence (*cf.* Atwood 2005).

The poems "The Wooden Horse" and "The Twelve Women" involve Penelope's coming to terms with the violence of Odysseus's homecoming and fill in the narrative gap left by the Homeric Penelope's silence. "The Wooden Horse" alludes to the night that the suitors and maids are killed. It begins:

Before that night the horse
was a high-point of minstrel's tales,
especially that part when the belly
splits and instead of entrails
the Greeks spew out
into the sleeping streets
and take Troy by stealth,
ending the nine-year siege.

The poets don't mention the sound
the city made as it died

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 50)

Here the night of Odysseus's homecoming is likened to the incident of the Trojan horse in its violence and stealth. It is also considered a "high point" in the story's retelling. The Penelopean narrator in this poem is aware of her own role as a storyteller and addresses the politics involved in storytelling (and its silences). In this way, Penelope's fidelity to memory is also bound up with her role as a

storyteller. Throughout the collection she accuses poets of many things, particularly, their infidelity to her version of the story. Recall her earlier accusation in “Penelope Contemplates Infidelity” when she wonders how she became a symbol of fidelity and concludes “some poet’s fault no doubt”. As was hinted at earlier in the poem “Your Name”, the poet at fault here may be Homer. Indeed, Holst-Warhaft quotes directly from the *Odyssey* in the poem “Twelve Women”, addressing the Homeric memory of the incident. However, these quotations are peppered with descriptions that personalize the event for Penelope. Most of the last two stanzas are direct quotations from the Homeric text (translated into English by Holst-Warhaft) and are italicized:

*And as when long-winged thrushes
or doves come to roost in a clump
of bushes and find instead a snare,
the women’s necks were placed in nooses
so their death would be most miserable.
Their feet twitched for a while reminding him
of how they’d seemed to tread the air
dancing to the flute on summer nights.*

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 54)

The last line offers the reader a brief glimpse of Telemachus’s thoughts as he strung up his childhood playmates and caregivers. In this context, the line in the poem “Your Name”, “Don’t ask me to forgive you. / I won’t be unfaithful to memory”, makes more sense; Penelope will not forgive and forget her son’s participation in the murder of the suitors and the maids and neither can she forgive “the poet(s)” for their unfaithful rendering of the events. Moreover, she will continue to narrate her version of the events so that the suitors and maids will not be forgotten; so she can stay faithful, at least, to her memory.

The consequence of Holst-Warhaft's appropriation of the Homeric text in the poem "Twelve Women" serves to highlight the ambiguity of textual fidelity more generally. Although Holst-Warhaft is quoting Homer, it is in fact her own translation of Homer into English. Moreover, Holst-Warhaft is manipulating the quotations in a way that proves Penelope's point and is thus perhaps unfaithful to Homer's "intention". By playing with the notion(s) of fidelity (both sexual and textual) Holst-Warhaft not only problematizes the role of the poet, but also that of the translator and scholar. In this way, both Penelope's *nostos* and the modern reader's attempt to return to the "original" text is complicated. By quoting the Homeric text, Holst-Warhaft asks the reader to take a backward glance as she attempts to point out the inconsistencies in the epic that allow for her own Re-vision.

In the poems that follow "Your Name", the narrator continues to treat the idea of Re-vision as she not only bears witness to the events in the Homeric epics, but also comments on their modern reception. In the poem "The Raised Hand", which directly follows "Your Name", the narrator discusses another wife whose husband left for Troy: Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon. In one of the most popular versions of the myth, Agamemnon murders his own daughter so that the gods will grant him favourable winds in order to sail to Troy. This then provokes a series of tragic events wherein Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon, and is then killed by her son Orestes. The third stanza of "The Raised Hand" addresses the first of these murders:

The daughter's death was quiet. She trusted
her father. Even when they bound her
she still believed it was a test
but no-one stopped the raised-hand.

The poets turned her mother into a monster.
What mattered was the wind, a wind of war...

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 72)

Likely referring to the Ancient Greek tragedians Aeschylus and Sophocles who infamously recount the House of Atreus myth, the narrator blames previous storytellers for demonizing Clytemnestra. Against the grain of popular sentiment—which views Orestes's matricide as retribution for her murder of Agamemnon (forgetting the murder of Iphigenia) Holst-Warhaft's Penelopean narrator sympathizes with Clytemnestra. As the poem continues, it is clear that not only does this Penelope commiserate with Clytemnestra's situation, but she reveals that she is supportive of Clytemnestra's action as someone who defends those who so innocently trust others. In this way, the poem goes on to reveal one of the main thrusts of her Re-vision:

Someone, thinks Penelope, has to speak
for those who look into a father's eye
trusting the raised hand to stop
in mid-air, arrested by some grace.

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 74)

Penelope's Confession is focused on giving voice to Penelope as a character, but it also attempts to reveal the consequences of placing too much trust in a single narrative. By presenting Penelope's perspective on the Trojan War and its

aftermath, Holst-Warhaft challenges the authority of grand narratives and original texts (and by extension the original as opposed to a translation).

Two poems later in “War Tales” the Penelopean narrator directs her questioning towards Odysseus’s version of the events and asks:

What did he carry
from the sack of Troy
but a bag of wind
and a nymph’s disease?

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 78)

The “bag of wind” is a double entendre that refers (literally) to the bag of wind that Aeolus, keeper of the winds, gives to Odysseus in order to help him get home in *Odyssey* Book 10. More figuratively, it mocks Odysseus as a storyteller (an old windbag) who has nothing but insubstantial, perhaps dubious, tales to tell. Despite their possible mendacity, Odysseus’s tales are the only ones that survive. His shipmates and comrades do not live to tell their version of the story:

The men in trust
to him littered
the seabed briefly
among harder debris

of metal and clay.
Not one lived
to tell another
version of the tale

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 78)

By looking at the events of Trojan War from Penelope’s point of view, Holst-Warhaft complicates the readings of the Homeric text while also making one

aware of how its Re-visions are packaged and presented. Additionally, this serves as a mirror to reflect the poet's views on contemporary warfare, its effects on communities, as well as the media's presentation of events. Whether one is talking about the Trojan War or the Second Gulf war, the way the story is told is crucial and this is what Holst-Warhaft points out. It seems that the trauma Penelope experiences by witnessing Odysseus's violent homecoming shocks her into a new awareness of her own life and the lives of others. This narrator is no longer the wife who waits, complicit in a society that values violent heroism. In fact, by the final poem in her narrative, Penelope realizes that she has had her own journey and *nostos*, and in her moment of recognition what she realizes is that she no longer wants to be this Penelope.

OTHER SCENES OF RECOGNITION

Like any good Re-vision, *Penelope's Confession* alters how one sees the Penelope figure. It also changes the way one reads the *Odyssey*. Having been offered a glimpse of Penelope's thoughts and memories, it is useful to go back to the Homeric text to see what has been dislodged or complicated. If we return to the recognition scene in the *Odyssey* it is now possible to read the scene in such a way that Penelope has her own *nostos*, her own homecoming. Homer describes the scene in detail with the use of a reverse simile that is famously analysed in classical scholarship.¹⁵² As the couple embraces, Penelope is likened to a shipwrecked sailor who upon seeing land is overwhelmed with joy:

Joy, warm as the joy that shipwrecked sailors feel
when they catch sight of land – Poseidon has struck
their well-rigged ship on the open sea with gale winds
and crushing walls of waves, and only a few escape, swimming,
struggling out of the frothing surf to reach the shore,
their bodies crusted with salt but buoyed up with joy
as they plant their feet on solid ground again,
spared a deadly fate. So joyous now to her
the sight of her husband, vivid in her gaze,
that her white arms, embracing his neck
would never for a moment let him go...

(Homer 2001: 392–3)

What most scholars find remarkable about this passage is the reversal of expectation (characteristic of a reverse simile): Penelope is cast as the sailor and Odysseus is the long sought-after homeland. Yet this description would support the idea that Penelope has had a journey of her own. This would also mean that

¹⁵² One of the most important articles discussing the use of the reverse simile, especially with regards to gender is Foley 1978.

her journey comes to an end when Odysseus returns, once she has reached “home”. However, as will be shown, this is not the case for Holst-Warhaft’s Penelope.

Although this moment of reunion is joyous, one may be tempted to question how much of a home it feels like for a man who has been away for two decades, and how disruptive this change might be for a woman who has gotten used to her autonomy. Yet regardless of the future trials of getting to know one another again, it would appear that at this point in the *Odyssey*, it is made quite clear that Penelope recognizes Odysseus. How then, could one challenge the idea of a *nostos* when Homer’s text clearly indicates that Odysseus returns and Penelope welcomes him? And why do modern writers want to problematize this return?

The answer to both questions lies in the fact that Odysseus’s return is *already* problematized in the *Odyssey*. Homer’s narrative cleverly fulfils the reader’s desire (the couple is reunited) but only momentarily. The reader’s wish is fulfilled, but the tale does not end there. Before Odysseus and Penelope go off to their bedchamber, Odysseus mentions Tiresias’s prophecy regarding a second journey. As the ellipsis in Robert Fagles’s translation (above) suggests, Penelope will indeed have to “let him go” once more. This raises the question of whether Penelope will wait around again. Holst-Warhaft’s poem “Homebound” addresses this bluntly:

Already there is talk of a new voyage—
some tale of unfinished business,
a sailor left unburied. She is not deceived.

She has seen him stare at the blurred horizon
and knows this hearth can no more hold him
than he can satisfy her need for longing

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 76)

Even though *Penelope's Confession* has presented a very different sort of Penelope thus far, some of the traditional structure remains:

There is a time when modes are set;
hers is to wait, his to wander.
He dreams of a ship, she of a man
who left...

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 76)

After their long separation “[b]oth are adept at anticipation” and Odysseus tells Penelope he is going for a walk and heads to the bar. The final stanza shows Penelope’s reaction:

Impatient, she waits for him to go
and takes her seat at the loom. Now she can finish
the work she spent her nights undoing

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 76)

Her impatience goes against the grain of her traditional characterization, yet the narrator in Holst-Warhaft’s poem maintains that both Odysseus and Penelope have not changed. After twenty years they have grown used to their “modes” of existence to the extent that their ways of life no longer depend on each other. Echoing Anghelaki-Rooke’s Penelope, this Penelope is no longer bound with

“threads” to this “particular man”, Odysseus. Like Anghelaki-Rooke’s Penelope, the question of Penelope’s desire also finds its end in her return to weaving, a symbolic return to herself, and to narrating her story. This is reiterated in the final poem of the collection, “Penelope’s Blues”,¹⁵³ which describes Penelope’s return to her loom:

into the shimmer she works
a single ship, the lone
figure in the prow a woman
hair streaming behind,
breasts bared, a touch
of carmine on the open lips
that seem to be singing
a siren’s song, the blues.

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 82)

Holst-Warhaft’s comparison of Penelope’s new found voice to that of a Siren echoes Linda Pastan’s poem “You Are Odysseus”:

And I who thought to be
one of the Sirens (cast up
on strewn sheets
at dawn)
hide my song
under my tongue---
merely Penelope after all.

(Pastan 1982: 46–47)

In Pastan’s poem the narrator deludes herself into thinking she is a Siren who, at the very least, has a voice and does not “hide her song”. However, as a Siren she is still “cast up / on strewn sheets”. For Pastan, neither mythological figure—that of the Siren or that of Penelope—proves particularly conducive to having any kind of

¹⁵³ Holst-Warhaft has worked extensively on the subject of music and dance in Greek tradition especially on Rembetika which has often been compared to Blues. She is also a musician. For more on this see Holst-Warhaft 2006.

agency. On the other hand, Holst-Warhaft's narrator ignores this either/or dichotomy. She can be both Penelope and a Siren. Instead of resigning herself to being "Penelope after all" (presumably a faithful, pious, Homeric Penelope), Holst-Warhaft's Penelopean narrator affirms that she *is* a Siren and that her song is the blues.

In this light, it appears that Holst-Warhaft's collection experiments with a Penelopean narrator that fails to be the traditional Penelope. However, this failure is not a negative thing especially with regards to Butler's theory of giving an account of self (as discussed in Chapter 1, pages 34–41). For Butler, this notion of failure holds the potential for productivity:

Sometimes the very unrecognizability of the other brings about a crisis in the norms that govern recognition. If and when, in an effort to confer or to receive a recognition that fails again and again, I call into question the normative horizon within which recognition takes place, this questioning is part of the desire for recognition, a desire that can find no satisfaction, and whose unsatisfiability establishes a critical point of departure for the interrogation of available norms.

(Butler 2005: 24)

If recognition fails, then one must question the very parameters of recognizability. It is this moment in Butler's work that the personal becomes explicitly political; it is the movement from revising one's narrative of self to changing the limits of social narratives. In the context of the Penelope myth, what usually happens is that the Penelopean narrator cannot find recognition with an Odyssean other (or the Homeric text) and therefore, come to the realization that they no longer fit the traditional role of "Penelope". Thus, they must find new ways to narrate the self. In this example, Holst-Warhaft's narrator becomes a Penelope-Siren and then

moves towards a different kind of narrative in the last part of the collection. In this way, *Penelope's Confession* stages an account of self that highlights the key concepts of recognition and failure present in Butler's theory.

At the end of *Penelope's Confession*, Penelope has her *nostos*, which is characterized by a return to creativity. She returns to her loom, yet she does not weave a shroud as Homer's Penelope does, she weaves an image of her own journey. In a similar motion, Holst-Warhaft returns to a more personal voice in the rest of the collection. The final section of *Penelope's Confession* is appropriately titled "Turning Back" and the poet removes the Penelope (and Siren) persona in order to speak more directly about her life experiences.¹⁵⁴

This "turning back" or turning inward that Holst-Warhaft performs is comparable to similar turnings by Francisca Aguirre and Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke; it is a movement from the Penelope myth towards a more personal account of self. Yet it is not a narcissistic turn, it is a recognition scene in which the woman writer must first acknowledge her entrapment and the seductive nature of this kind of narrative (of woman as a Siren or a Penelope) if she wants to then move beyond it. Indeed, this is precisely what Adrienne Rich advocates in the final pages of her essay "When We Dead Awaken":

¹⁵⁴ This is particularly obvious in the poems "Wild Turkey" and "In the End is the Body" which refer to the poet's relationship with her ailing mother. It is also worth pointing out the potential link between the final poem "In the End is the Body" and Anghelaki-Rooke's poem "When the Body" as both explore the body's relationship to poetry and death.

In closing I want to tell you about a dream I had last summer. I dreamed I was asked to read my poetry at a mass women's meeting, but when I began to read, what came out were the lyrics of a blues song. I share this dream with you because it seemed to me to say a lot about the problems and the future of the woman writer, and probably of women in general. The awakening of consciousness is not like the crossing of a frontier-one step, and you are in another country. Much of woman's poetry has been of the nature of the blues song: a cry of pain, of victimization, or a lyric of seduction...

(Rich 1972: 25)

Here, Rich recognizes that women poets have been characterized (and self-characterized) as (Odyssean) others. They are the victims or the monsters. Thus, much of their poetry is "charged with anger" (Rich 1972: 25), anger over the limited possibilities of subjectivity afforded to them. However, like Holst-Warhaft and other poets have done, Rich advocates for a turn to the self:

Both the victimization and the anger experienced by women are real, and have real sources, everywhere in the environment, built into society. They must go on being tapped and explored by poets, among others. We can neither deny them, nor can we rest there. They are our birth-pains, and we are bearing ourselves. We would be failing each other as writers and as women, if we neglected or denied what is negative, regressive, or Sisyphean in our inwardness. We all know that there is another story to be told.

(Rich 1972: 25)

The key to moving forward then is to first recognize the anger and pain as real. Then comes the difficult work of "bearing ourselves," of performing Re-visions, moving backwards as well as forwards in order to give accounts of the self that tell different stories.

Holst-Warhaft's Penelope does indeed tell a different story. She questions the concepts of fidelity and recognition in a way that throws into question the very tradition that dictates what Penelope is supposed to be like. Holst-Warhaft's Penelope poems serve to infiltrate myth, looking at it through the eyes of a (relatively) modern character and at the same time keeping the frame of the original myth. Her dialogue with the Homeric text, among others, casts *Penelope's Confession* as a Re-vision, but also presents it as a collection about the reception of the *Odyssey* and the power of narrative. She portrays Penelope as an archetype who questions not only her own mythical status, but also the presentation of it by other writers. Penelope's questioning in turn, opens up a broader discussion about myth, its translations, and its Re-visions.

In the next chapter, I will show that this is also what Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* attempts to do. Similar to *Penelope's Confession*, Atwood's text presents the events of the *Odyssey* from Penelope's perspective in a way that highlights the power of narration. However, where Holst-Warhaft's Penelope is reluctantly unfaithful to the Homeric text, Atwood's Penelope has no qualms about presenting her own biased view. As Holst-Warhaft's Penelope says:

Not one lived
to tell another
version of the tale...

(Holst-Warhaft 2007: 78)

In Atwood's version, this holds truer than one might imagine; her Penelopean narrator is dead. However, as we will see, not even death can silence this Penelope.

Margaret Atwood: The Shade of Penelope

*...all writing of the narrative kind, and perhaps all writing,
is motivated, deep down, by a fear of and a fascination with mortality
by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld,
and to bring something or someone back from the dead.*

Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead* (Atwood 2003: 140)

Death—the threat of it, its proximity to life, and our fascination with it—make it one of the most compelling literary devices. The *Odyssey* would not be the ultimate adventure story without the multifaceted and fatal dangers that the hero must face. Odysseus even sails to Hades itself and speaks to the dead souls of his mother and his comrades. But death is often not an ending. And the end of an epic may not necessarily be the end of the story.

As we have seen, there is something about the *Odyssey* that compels modern writers to re-write it, to explore the aspects of it that do not completely end. Yet one must remember that Homer's text does not simply end; the *Odyssey* foreshadows its own continuation. When Odysseus speaks to Tiresias, the prophet foretells another journey for the hero; Odysseus will venture so far inland that the native people will mistake his oar for a winnowing fan (*Od.* 11). Some scholars contend that the epic actually ends with Book 23: 296 when Odysseus and

Penelope go to bed together and that the whole of Book 24 is a later addition.¹⁵⁵

The question that must be asked then is: *Why is Odysseus's homecoming not enough of an ending?* Perhaps the answer lies in the epic's retellings. The *Odyssey* has had an incredible effect on the history of literature; the epic has compelled countless other stories. The *Odyssey* is a self-reflexive text with embedded stories and multiple narrators which comments on the process of storytelling as it narrates its own story. One could even call it a writerly text, as Roland Barthes would say, because it encourages one to ask: What is left when the story ends? Or perhaps more importantly: What escapes the story?

In this chapter, I will discuss one Re-vision of the epic that begins at the end. Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* begins in Hades where the dead Penelope narrates her side of the story.¹⁵⁶ Atwood's text is an after-the-fact work and as such, challenges the very concept of "ending". Moreover, in the same way that the *Odyssey* is a post-*Iliadic* text, *The Penelopiad* is a post-*Odyssey* text. In giving Penelope and the twelve hanged maids the narrative voice, Atwood's text addresses this question: What escapes the story? *The Penelopiad* asserts that what is left after Homer's telling and subsequent retellings is the story of the hanged maids. In this way, the text addresses the politics involved in storytelling and the silencing of certain versions. *The Penelopiad* also questions the credibility of its own narrator. Readers of *The Penelopiad* may assume they will hear Penelope's side of the story which, told by Atwood in the vein of feminism, one might assume would be the "untold story" behind Homer's text. However, what one

¹⁵⁵ For more on this argument see Tsagalis 2008, especially Chapter 2 pages 30–43 as well as Heubeck 1992: 353–354.

¹⁵⁶ The full title of the book in its initial publication was *The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus*.

actually gets is a monologue told by a neurotic, self-centered Penelope that is punctuated by the testimonies (or choral interludes) of the maids. The alternative point of view presented by the maids unabashedly undermines Penelope's retelling. The text becomes a retelling that is subverted by another retelling within the very same text. The result is a multi-layered, multi-genre work that questions the authority of storytelling and of Re-vision.

In comparison with the other treatments of Penelope in this thesis, Atwood's text engages with the *Odyssey* to a greater extent, mimicking the epic genre and drawing on several ancient sources for its background. In the case of Gail Holst-Warhaft's Penelope, the uncertainty is concentrated on narrator's fidelity and with her ambiguous identity. The reader is never sure that Holst-Warhaft's narrator is the Homeric Penelope. She could be a contemporary woman with an unusual attachment to myth. In *The Penelopiad*, there is no doubt as to who the narrator is but the reader must constantly question the narrator's reliability. In this way, Atwood's Re-vision is a classic mock-epic; it takes the self-referentiality of Homer's *Odyssey* and pushes it to the extreme. As will be shown, Atwood does not even leave us with the promise of a traditional ending. The story merely dissolves (as the maids fly away) and the reader is left trying to grapple with yet another version of the *Odyssey*.

Since Atwood's text begins in the underworld, this chapter will begin by addressing the role of the underworld in the last book of the *Odyssey* and in Atwood's text focusing especially on its meta-textual function. The next section "Not the same Story: Circe and Helen in Atwood's Poetry" will focus on

Atwood's strategy of Re-vision and her use of the *Odyssey* myth in earlier poems (the "Circe/Mud Poems" and "Helen of Troy Does a Counter Dance"). These earlier poems show Atwood's engagement with *Odyssey* apocrypha or narratives that escape the epic. Her previous interest in Circe and Helen who are both weavers and in the minds of many readers, considered untrustworthy women, prefigure Atwood's rewriting of Penelope. The final sections of this chapter will discuss *The Penelopiad*, focusing particularly on the unreliability of its narrator(s) and how Atwood's Re-vision, though perhaps the most radical of those examined in this thesis, ends up being the most faithful to the Homeric text.

A TRIP TO THE UNDERWORLD: METAPOETICS

In Homer's *Odyssey* the narrative takes the reader to the underworld twice. The first *nekylia* is in *Odyssey* 11 when Odysseus sails there to consult the spirit of the seer Tiresias. The second time the reader gets a glimpse of the underworld is in Book 24 when the souls of the suitors (whom Odysseus has just killed) enter Hades. For Christos Tsagalis, this is the point at which the two great epics by Homer are personified and converse with one another. This scene (*Od.* 24: 192–202) represents the meeting of traditions; it is a way for Achilles and Agamemnon (who represent the Iliadic tradition) to confront the Odyssean tradition which is represented by Amphimedon (Menelaus's son and one of the suitors) (Tsagalis 2008: 41).¹⁵⁷ In this way the underworld represents the metapoetic plain; it attempts to present the *Odyssey*'s perspective on the *Iliad* and in some cases its supremacy within the epic tradition. The underworld also serves as a setting from which one is able to look back on the tale of the *Odyssey* (which is still in motion) and comment on the still-living characters. This retrograde glance is often used as support for the idea that Book 24 was a later addition. Let us briefly look at this scene in detail.

The final book of the *Odyssey* opens with the god Hermes leading the souls of the recently deceased suitors to the underworld. This is a strange moment in the epic; Agamemnon approaches a crowd of souls who have gathered around the shade of Achilles, and then Achilles and Agamemnon proceed to discuss the manner of

¹⁵⁷ For detailed exploration of Agamemnon's speech in *Od.* 24 and its significance to the *Odyssey* see Tsagalis 2008: 30–43.

their own deaths. When the souls of the suitors encounter the two heroes, Amphimedon begins to recount the events of their own demise including Odysseus's return and Penelope's web trick. Amphimedon ends his summary of events by complaining to Agamemnon that their bodies have been left unburied and un-mourned. However, instead of sympathizing with Amphimedon Agamemnon somewhat surprisingly answers by addressing Odysseus (who is not present) and extolling Penelope as a virtuous woman and wife:

Agamemnon's ghost cried out. "Son of old Laertes—
mastermind—what a fine, faithful wife you won!
What good sense resided in your Penelope —
How well Icarius's 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.

(Homer 2001: 474)

This can be partly explained by Agamemnon's death at the hands of his wife, Clytemnestra, upon his homecoming. His downfall can be blamed on his treacherous wife whereas Odysseus's successful *nostos* can be attributed to Penelope's constancy. However, it is still an odd moment in the epic. We have two of the most renowned warriors of the Greek tradition, Achilles and Agamemnon, discussing the virtues of Penelope. Moreover, Penelope achieves a level of fame that is nearly equal with that of the warriors. Only moments before, while the two heroes were discussing their own deaths, Achilles commiserated with Agamemnon saying that Agamemnon was "fated to die a wretched death" (Homer 2001: 399). On the contrary, Agamemnon recalls how the entire world (and underworld) mourned Achilles's death: "so even in death your name will

never die... Great glory is yours, Achilles, for all time, in the eyes of all mankind!” (Homer 2001: 401). To be remembered forever, to have *kleos*, was one of the central goals of Ancient Greek warrior culture.¹⁵⁸ Agamemnon was robbed of his *kleos* and his *nostos*: he did not die gloriously in battle, nor was he able to return home and reclaim his kingdom. However, in his commentary Agamemnon makes it clear that Achilles has *kleos*. Achilles will be forever remembered. He also makes it clear that Penelope has it: “The fame of her great virtue will never die” (Homer 2001: 404). John Finley points out that Agamemnon’s gushing praise of Penelope “comes near making our *Odysseia* a *Penelopeia*”¹⁵⁹ (Finley 1978: 3). His homage nearly repositions the tale of the *Odyssey* as a story in which Penelope both as character and metaphor becomes the focal point of the narrative. Tsagalis uses this quotation from Finley to bolster his argument that Penelope is the “metapoetic cloth” that strings together the *Odyssey* and its concept of *kleos* based on memory and art-making (Tsagalis 2008: 40).

Penelope also becomes an important figure when we take into account the rival song traditions that existed synchronically with the *Odyssey*. There are two main traditions: the Thesprotian-Teleogonian and the Cyclic *Teleogony*. Unlike Homer’s version, these tale traditions are characterized by Odysseus making an inland journey and by his lack of fidelity (for example, he has sons by other women). Conversely, in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is constantly preoccupied with

¹⁵⁸ For a discussion on the ancient concept of *kleos* see Nagy 1999.

¹⁵⁹ In the poem “Ithaca” by Richard Howard which is partially narrated by Penelope and partially by Odysseus. Penelope says: “The loom’s my odyssey—/ dare I call it my penelopiad?” (Howard 1983: 17). Thus far, this is the only other use of the term aside from Atwood’s text is Howard 1983.

thoughts of Penelope and none of his extramarital affairs produce offspring.¹⁶⁰ The poet of the *Odyssey* indicates that he is aware of these rival mythic traditions by having Odysseus repeat Tiresias's prophesy to Penelope regarding this journey inland (*Od.* 23: 263–287). Furthermore, Tsagalis points out that “in a remarkable display of self-consciousness” Odysseus himself entertains “the thought of escaping from his own song-tradition, of testing the *Odyssey*'s very limits” by referring to the rival tradition *within* the *Odyssey* itself (71). In this way, the poet is playing a kind of intertextual game with the ancient audience who would have been aware of the post-Odyssey tales. It also serves to point out the arrogance of Homer's Odysseus. Yes, he is the hero of the *Odyssey*; however, it is *only* within the boundaries of the *Odyssey* that he remains so; in the Thesprotian-Telegonian tradition Odysseus is killed and Penelope remarries. Thus, it can be argued that she is the protagonist of the tale (*cf.* Tsagalis 66–75). In this vein of thought, Tsagalis contends that Penelope then becomes the mouthpiece of “Odyssean Poetics” when she responds ironically to Odysseus's dreams of a poetic life post-Odyssey. Penelope essentially points out that Odysseus is fooling himself if he thinks that he will always remain Odysseus the Hero, Man of the Sea, Man of Return. In fact, he is only these things in certain versions of the tale (Tsagalis 2008: xvi).

Margaret Atwood's text effectively does the same with Penelope; in Atwood's text the protagonist is Penelope and the maids are the ones undermining her narrative. In *The Penelopiad*, Penelope attempts to maintain her image as the ever-faithful wife. However, the various performances by the maids reveal that

¹⁶⁰ For more on “The Sailor and the Oar” tradition see Tsagalis 2008: 75–90, Hansen 1977, and Hansen 1990.

Penelope may also be fooling herself if she thinks that she will remain Penelope, the Faithful Good Wife, after the maids have told their tale. Thus, in *The Penelopiad*, Atwood combines elements of the *Odyssey*'s self-reflexive commentary with her own narrative strategy of escaping the very story that is being narrated. In this way, by using the underworld as her setting, Atwood cleverly extrapolates a Homeric precedent by including all levels of rival poetic and metapoetic traditions in her text.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ In her introduction to the text, Atwood says that she has drawn on other ancient sources for information about Penelope and in the Notes at the end of the text she lists some of these sources (which include Robert Graves, Heroditus, Pausanias etc. (Atwood 2005: 197). Atwood makes it clear that her text is a variant of the story and that the *Odyssey* is not her only reference.

ATWOOD'S TRIP TO THE UNDERWORLD

This discussion of metapoetics and the underworld as a setting is also related to Margaret Atwood's method of producing creative writing. Atwood herself takes a number of trips to the underworld. Two years before *The Penelopiad*, she published *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*. Her main argument can be summarized as follows:

All writers must go from now to once upon a time; all must go from here to there; all must descend to where the stories are kept; all must take care not to be captured and held immobile by the past. And all must commit acts of larceny, or else of reclamation, depending on how you look at it. The dead may guard the treasure, but it's useless treasure unless it can be brought back to the land of the living and allowed to enter time once more—which means to enter the realm of the audience, the realm of the readers, the realm of change.

(Atwood 2003: 160)

The idea of a *nekyia*, of travelling to Hades and back, is a common motif in folk tales and myth, but Atwood uses it as a metaphor for the writer's journey as well. This metaphor is rich with allusion to feminist re-appropriation of myth and echoes Alicia Ostriker's notion of "stealing the language" (*cf.* Ostriker: 1987). In this same book chapter, Atwood also quotes Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck"¹⁶² using an excerpt from Rich's poem (which describes the descent down into the wreck) in order to support her metaphor of the writer's descent into an underworld (Atwood 2003: 158–9). Finally, this metaphor also reaches towards what Jack Zipes, Rosi Braidotti, and Judith Butler have said about reanimating

¹⁶² This poem and others by Adrienne Rich are examined in Chapter 1.

myth so that it speaks to our present and how it can contribute to a “realm of change” (Atwood 2003: 160).

It would appear, then, that after her journey to the underworld, Atwood has returned with *The Penelopiad*. However, in returning from the underworld, these stories must undergo a transformation, a re-vivification. In her version of the *Odyssey*, Atwood certainly breathes new life into the character of Penelope yet she does not forget the old tales. She recognizes that re-iterations are often haunted by their predecessors and on a very basic level *The Penelopiad* is a haunted text; Atwood is haunted by the death of the maids and so is her narrator.

ATWOOD'S RE-VISIONS

Although her poetry has received a fair amount of attention, Margaret Atwood is most famous for her novels, which frequently employ strong female narrators who speak in an ironic monotone.¹⁶³ Atwood's work is often compared to, and even mistakenly categorized as part of, the American feminist tradition of rewriting, especially when it comes to revising myths. However, since Atwood herself is a critic in addition to being a writer (much like Gail Holst-Warhaft and Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke) she is very conscious of this label. Atwood has said that she is a feminist "in the broad sense of the term" (Sandler 2006: 33); however, she goes on to say that as a Canadian, she has not had the same experience as American women poets of her generation. In a 1978 interview, when asked if she could comment on the "double bind" of being a "woman poet" Atwood had this to say: "It's part of the American tradition. I can see why an American woman would say that, because I'm familiar with those university courses: Romantic writers, all men..." but it seems her experience has been different (Hammond 2006: 74). Although she does not identify as an American feminist writer, Atwood has maintained a dialogue with this tradition and with American culture in general. Historically, Atwood's novels and poetry have frequently addressed themes of gender and victimization (some of the very same issues that her American contemporaries were also concerned with in the 1970s and 80s).

¹⁶³ Atwood's novels include: *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Surfacing* (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976), *Life Before Man* (1979), *Bodily Harm* (1981), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Cat's Eye* (1988), *The Robber Bride* (1993), *Alias Grace* (1996), *The Blind Assassin* (2000), *Oryx and Crake: A Novel* (2003), *The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus* (2005), *The Year of the Flood* (2009).

With regards to Atwood's approach to myth, there is an unavoidable connection with Adrienne Rich. Critics have claimed that *The Penelopiad* can be read as "a kind of feminist revisionist mythmaking" (Howells 2006: 8) but the two writers also have a more concrete connection than their work with revisions. In 1973 Atwood was asked to write a review of Adrienne Rich's *Diving into the Wreck*.¹⁶⁴ She offers high praise of the collection calling it "extraordinary" and says that it is:

One of those rare books that forces you to decide not just what you think about it; but what you think about yourself. It is a book that takes risks, and it forces the reader to take them also.

(Atwood 1973: 161)

This kind of risk-taking becomes characteristic of Rich's later poetics and it is also something Atwood attempts in her own work.

Then, in a 1978 interview when asked if she felt a particular affinity with any poet Atwood answered: "Tends to be Adrienne Rich" (Hammond 1978: 70). Although Rich is ten years Atwood's senior, Atwood maintains that there is no "influence" operating here because she did not come across Rich until later in her writing career (McElroy 1993: 170). However, this idea of influence is still debatable. What both writers do have in common is their knack for anticipating public desires and trends and therefore, they often address similar issues in their works. Rich and Atwood are also alike in that their politics and their poetry are not kept separate. Indeed, it is part of their philosophies *as* writers to include their feminist

¹⁶⁴ The review was published December 30, 1973 in the *New York Times Book Review* and can be found in Cooper 1984: 238–241.

politics in their work. In this way, it would seem that Atwood is most conscious of Rich when she describes her personal process of writing and editing her work as “revision”. Atwood says: “What ‘revision’ really means is ‘Re-vision’—seeing something again. So it’s re-seeing the thing that you’ve written...” (Mendez-Engle 1987: 174). As someone who is familiar with the work of Adrienne Rich, it cannot be coincidental that Atwood uses the term “Re-vision” in precisely the same way that Rich used it in her 1971 essay “When We Dead Awaken”.

With this in mind, it is not such a presumption to call Atwood’s approach to the *Odyssey* a Re-vision. She has looked at the myth over and over again from varying perspectives including Circe’s (in “Circe/Mud Poems”) and the Sirens’s (“Siren Song” from the series “Songs of the Transformed”) which are both published in the collection *You Are Happy* (1974). Then in a later collection, *Morning in the Burned House* (1995), she offers Helen’s perspective in “Helen of Troy Does a Counter Dance”. Then, finally, Penelope’s and the maids’ points of view are presented in *The Penelopiad* (2005). Before discussing *The Penelopiad*, it is worth taking a look at these earlier poems in order to see how Atwood develops an approach to the *Odyssey* that is multi-layered, multi-vocal, and self-referential.

“NOT THE SAME STORY”: CIRCE AND HELEN IN ATWOOD’S POETRY

*She’s up to something, she’s weaving
histories, they are never right,
she has to do them over,
she is weaving her version.*

*the one you will believe in,
the only one you will hear.*

Atwood, “Circe/Mud Poems” (Atwood 1974: 65)

The above quotation could describe Penelope, narrator of Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad*, and yet it is from an entirely separate work. It is from Atwood’s 1974 collection of poems entitled *You Are Happy* and is an excerpt from the series of “Circe/Mud Poems”.¹⁶⁵ The poem’s narrator is Circe, the sorceress with whom Odysseus spends one year. Like most of the “Circe/Mud Poems” this excerpt is addressed to Odysseus. Here Circe is describing Penelope and Odysseus’s continual preoccupation with the wife he left on Ithaca. Despite the sorceress’ best efforts to convince him to stay and be her lover, Odysseus eventually leaves. In the context of Atwood’s work, the “Circe/Mud Poems” are important in framing her later approach to the *Odyssey*. Much like Circe’s criticism of Penelope in the above quotation, Atwood too is guilty of “weaving her own version”, yet she makes no presumptions that we should believe her. In fact, as this section will show, she presents her reader with many versions (Circe’s, Helen’s, and Penelope’s), and this multiplicity is the closest a reader can hope to get to the “truth” of an Atwoodian narrative. This prefigures our discussion of *The Penelopiad* signalling to the reader that s/he should be aware that Penelope “is

¹⁶⁵ The “Circe/Mud” poems are some of Atwood’s most well-known and anthologized feminist poems. They are included in such anthologies as: McAlpine 1997, Kizer 1995, and Adcock 1987.

weaving her own version” and perhaps that it should *not* be “the only one you... believe”.

After her most overtly political collection *Power Politics* (1971) which dealt with the darker side of gender politics, Atwood’s *You Are Happy* addresses the search for happiness in the midst of these same issues. She finds a narrator in Circe, who despite being immortal, is unhappy with how her story turned out: Odysseus eventually refuses Circe and returns to Ithaca. It is tempting to read the “Circe/Mud Poems” as self-contained series in the collection; they are framed by italicized introductory and closing poems and work like stage directions. However, the Circe poems are very much a part of the larger work, especially when looking at the collection’s title poem “You Are Happy”. The “Circe/Mud Poems” and “You Are Happy” seem to converse with one another on the theme, you *should be* happy (but as we are shown, the narrators are not). “You are Happy” opens with a picture of a couple walking separately in a semi-frozen landscape and ends with the collection’s title phrase:

The water turns
a long way down over the raw stone,
ice crusts around it

We walk separately
along the hill to the open
beach, unused
picnic tables, wind
shoving the brown waves, erosion, gravel
rasping on gravel.

In the ditch a deer
carcass, no head. Bird
running across the glaring
road against the low pink sun.

When you are this
cold you can think about
nothing but the cold, the images

hitting into your eyes
like needles, crystals, you are happy.

(Atwood 1974: 28)

The imagery here is very similar to the last poem (or ending stage directions) in the “Circe/Mud Poems” in which Circe imagines a different ending to the story told in the *Odyssey*, a version in which Odysseus does not leave her to go back to Penelope:

We lick the melted snow
from each other’s mouths,
we see birds, four of them, they are gone, and

a stream, not frozen yet, in the mud
beside it the track of a deer

(Atwood 1974: 70)

It appears that the lovers in “You Are Happy” could be Circe and Odysseus in a later time: once the stream has frozen and the deer has died. However, Atwood makes the connections vague enough that we are only able to linger on “could be”. Other than this daydream of Circe’s, the series of poems follow the events of the *Odyssey* with relative precision: Odysseus arrives, Circe turns his men to swine, he confronts her, they become lovers, and he leaves. Although the reader is presented with Circe’s perspective there is no point at which the events diverge from the *Odyssey*. In this way it is a more subtle Re-vision of the traditional text.

Indeed, Atwood’s Circe has more to say than merely lament over Odysseus; she comments on her own search for identity and her own need for storytelling. The first poem after the italicized introductory lines begins:

Men with the heads of eagles
no longer interest me
or pig-men, or those who can fly
with the aid of wax and feathers¹⁶⁶

(Atwood 1974: 47)

¹⁶⁶ The references in this stanza are to the *Odyssey* and to Greek myth in general. The “men with the heads of eagles” refer to Odysseus; in *Odyssey* Book 19 when Penelope has the dream of the twelve geese that are killed by an eagle. The eagle then speaks to her telling her that he is in fact Odysseus. The “pig-men” refer to Odysseus’s comrades who are turned into swine by Circe in Book 10. The third reference to “men who can fly with the aid of feathers and wax” refers to the mythical character Icarus who is the son of Daedalus, the Cretan master craftsman who was responsible for building the Labyrinth to imprison the Minotaur. Icarus attempts to use his father’s design of man-made wings to fly, but does not heed his father’s warning: that he should not fly too close to the sun. As a result the wax that holds his wings together melts and Icarus falls into the sea and drowns.

Circe is tired of the same old myths. She continues:

I search instead for the others,
the ones left over,
the ones who have escaped from these
mythologies with barely their lives

(Atwood 1974: 47)

Here Circe mirrors Atwood's own search for the ones that survived the *Odyssey*, the other voices. Yet, although she has "survived" both in the Homeric text, and here, given a voice in Atwood's text, does this Circean narrator count herself among those who have escaped "these mythologies"? In the second to last poem she says:

It's the story that counts. No use telling me this isn't a story,
or not the same story...

and then continues,

...Don't evade, don't
pretend you won't leave after all: you leave in the story and
the story is ruthless.

(Atwood 1974: 68)

No, Circe does not escape. For Circe, it is the "same story", a "ruthless" story that repeats and repeatedly leaves her unhappy. This entrapment (reminiscent of the Penelope figures examined earlier in this thesis) speaks to the power of narration and its merciless reiteration. Both the unrelenting story and the merciless storyteller are themes that pervade Atwood's work and here, despite all her sorcery and immortality, Circe is the one who is trapped.

Before concluding our discussion of the “Circe/Mud Poems”, it is important to address why they are called the “Circe/Mud Poems” and not just the Circe Poems. In poem number sixteen (out of the twenty-four¹⁶⁷ that make up the Circe/Mud series) Circe tells us a story that was told to her “by another traveller, just passing through. It took place in a foreign country, as everything does” (Atwood 1974: 61). The story is that of two boys who construct a woman out of mud: “She began at the neck and ended at the knees and elbows: they stuck to the essentials” (61) and then on sunny days they would go visit her. They would “make love to her, sinking with ecstasy into her soft moist belly... They would take turns, they were not jealous, she preferred them both” (61). The storyteller then confesses to Circe that “His love for her was perfect, he could say anything to her...” but one day she was swept away by a flood and “[h]e said no woman since then has equalled her” (61). After Circe relates this tale to the reader we hear her three line commentary: “Is this what you would like me to be, this mud woman? Is this what I would like to be? It would be so simple” (Atwood 1974: 61). The poem is structured in prose and is separated into four paragraphs which serve to indicate the change in narration: Circe begins by telling the reader the story of who she heard the tale of the two boys from, she tells the tale, then she tells us what the original narrator said about his mud-woman, and then Circe herself comments on it. Atwood is playing with narrative on a number of levels here. The framed tale about the two boys and their mud woman is about the “use” of women by men, though it is a strange kind of grey area because they are boys and “she” is not a real woman. However, the reader and Circe (and perhaps even the original tale teller) can see a parallel here with Circe and her relationship with Odysseus. In this way it is also

¹⁶⁷ Note that there are twenty-four books in Homer’s *Odyssey*.

commenting on the stories that we tell ourselves in the plotting of our lives. In the last two lines of the poem that precede this one Circe says “This is not what I want / but I want this also” (60). In these moments one cannot help but think of the collection’s title and that the Circe-narrator also hears a voice insisting “you are happy”.

Atwood revisits this theme of the use and exploitation of women in her later poem “Helen of Troy Does a Counter Dance” which is from Atwood’s collection *Morning in the Burned House* (1995) and it is narrated by Helen. In addition to allowing Helen to defend her mythical reputation as the quintessentially traitorous femme fatal, the poem also acts as a kind of precursor to *The Penelopiad* in the way that it prefigures Helen’s relationship with Penelope. The antagonistic relationship between the two women is very much in evidence in *The Penelopiad* and the poem “Helen Does a Counter Dance” gives us a better picture of Helen’s side of the story. Not only does Helen address her archetypal position in history but she also contends with contemporary feminist critics (MacPhearson 2010: 102). The poem begins with Helen addressing her female critics:

The world is full of women
who'd tell me I should be ashamed of myself
if they had the chance. Quit dancing.
Get some self-respect
and a day job.
Right. And minimum wage,
and varicose veins, just standing
in one place for eight hours
behind a glass counter
bundled up to the neck, instead of
naked as a meat sandwich.
Selling gloves, or something.
Instead of what I do sell.
You have to have talent
to peddle a thing so nebulous
and without material form.
Exploited, they'd say. Yes, any way
you cut it, but I've a choice
of how, and I'll take the money...

(Atwood 1995: 34)

As MacPhearson points out, “underlying this causal stance is a canny woman who exploits those who would exploit her” (109). Her tactics of seduction are smart. She even uses the narrative of her semi-divine lineage to ensnare suitors making them feel as if she confides in them alone, that they are special:

...I'll whisper:
My mother was raped by a holy swan.
You believe that? You can take me out to dinner.
That's what we tell all the husbands.
There sure are a lot of dangerous birds around.

Not that anyone here
but you would understand.
The rest of them would like to watch me
and feel nothing. Reduce me to components
as in a clock factory or abattoir.
Crush out the mystery.
Wall me up alive
in my own body.
They'd like to see through me,
but nothing is more opaque
than absolute transparency...

(Atwood 1995: 34)

Like a typical Atwoodian narrator, Helen is much sharper than we initially give her credit for and as MacPhearson points out, “[s]he offers up an image of transparency precisely to withhold that which appears to be offered: herself” (MacPhearson 2010: 109). This Helen is very conscious of her role in myth and the way in which she is complicit in a system that exploits women. In this light, the pun in the title becomes more obvious; it is a “counter dance”, a dance that contradicts expectation.

By providing multiple points of view on the *Odyssey*, Atwood is able to bring a complexity to mythical characters that have often been boiled down to mere stereotypes. In Atwood's *Circe* we see the scorned lover behind the immortal temptress and in her Helen we see the tough survival instincts developed by a woman who has been exploited all of her life. There is also a third voice from the

Odyssey that Atwood offers a different perspective on: the Sirens. The poem “Siren Song” adds to our discussion of Atwood’s early engagements with the *Odyssey* and her attempt to put peripheral characters in the narrative spotlight. It also addresses the assumptions that one brings to poems about familiar mythical figures, a theme which features prominently in *The Penelopiad*. Though it is placed in the same collection as the “Circe/Mud Poems”, *You Are Happy*, the narrative voice of “Siren Song” is more akin to “Helen of Troy Does A Counter Dance”. It begins in the same cunning, almost languorous tone:

“Siren Song”

This is the one song everyone
would like to learn: the song
that is irresistible:

the song that forces men
to leap overboard in squadrons
even though they see beached skulls

the song nobody knows
because anyone who had heard it
is dead, and the others can't remember.
Shall I tell you the secret
and if I do, will you get me
out of this bird suit?
I don't enjoy it here
squatting on this island
looking picturesque and mythical
with these two feathery maniacs,
I don't enjoy singing
this trio, fatal and valuable.

I will tell the secret to you,
to you, only to you.
Come closer. This song

is a cry for help: Help me!
Only you, only you can,
you are unique

at last. Alas
it is a boring song
but it works every time

(Atwood 1974: 38)

Much like Helen, the Siren tells the reader/Odysseus what they want to hear: that you/he are special and that you –and only you– are desirable and can save them. Recall the lines in the Helen poem that echo the Sirens:

There sure are a lot of dangerous birds around.

Not that anyone here
but you would understand.

(Atwood 1995: 34)

These lines are intended to make the listener feel as if they are the only one who would understand. In the case of both poems, the listener may also feel as if they are getting the exclusive version or the insider's edition of the story. However, this in itself is the epitome of siren songs because despite the claim to "tell you and only you", the siren song "works every time". By claiming to tell the truth both narrators attempt to fool their listeners with their "candidness". In the Helen poem, there is an additional layer; the reader feels as if they are getting a behind the scenes peek at the face that launched a thousand ships dancing on a counter and by the end the reader is called out on their own voyeurism and seduction at the hands of narrative.

In the closing lines of "Helen of Troy Does a Counter Dance", Helen's matter-of-fact tone leaves no doubt that she is playing a game with her listeners, oscillating between hiding and revealing:

They'd like to see through me,
but nothing is more opaque
than absolute transparency.
Look--my feet don't hit the marble!
Like breath or a balloon, I'm rising,
I hover six inches in the air
in my blazing swan-egg of light.
You think I'm not a goddess?
Try me.
This is a torch song.
Touch me and you'll burn

(Atwood 1995: 34)

Helen's "torch song" is another variation of Atwood's siren song that promises the "truth" only to lead the reader further astray. This promise of truth is the bait that the narrator dangles in front of their listener. This is also what leads the reader to (often mistakenly) believe the narrator's "truthful" version. In Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, Penelope uses a similar strategy to gain the trust of her listeners. However, as will be shown, the added component of the maids' version serves to complicate the truthfulness of Penelope's tale.

These earlier poems about Circe, Helen, and the Sirens almost anticipate Atwood's *The Penelopiad*. They explore the ways in which classical female characters have attempted to retell traditional narratives in order to "escape the story" in order to be able to have a different story. However, none of these characters are able to escape the original story frame. And this is precisely the point. The reader is forced to acknowledge the obstacles faced by these women and re-evaluate their agency.

Atwood's "Circe/Mud Poems" are a traditional rewriting of myth in the sense that the only thing that changes is the narrator (from Odysseus to Circe); the events of the *Odyssey* are the same and this is also true of the Siren poem. The Helen poem is slightly different in that a contemporary dimension is added. Similar to Holst-Warhaft's Penelope, Atwood's Helen seems to inhabit both ancient and modern worlds with ancient references to Helen's divine birth mixed with modern concerns with "minimum wage", "varicose veins", and insinuations that she dances for money. However, unlike the more candid narratives of Circe and Helen, *The Penelopiad* is more akin to a siren song (or Atwood's "Siren Song"). It implicitly promises the truth and the reader falls for it every time, despite the warnings. The next section will look at the kind of story Atwood's Penelope spins.

“TRUE STORIES” AND UNFAITHFUL NARRATORS

*The true story is vicious
and multiple and untrue*

*afterall. Why do you
need it? Don't ever*

ask for the true story.

Atwood, *True Stories* (Atwood 1982: 11)

If the story is “vicious” then why *do* we need it? Why do we ask for the *true* story? And perhaps more to the point, why does Atwood write one? The short answer is that she doesn’t. In her introduction to *The Penelopiad* Atwood says: “I’ve chosen to give the telling of the story to Penelope and to the twelve hanged maids” (xxi) leading the reader to believe that the text we are getting is the “real” story, behind the *Odyssey*. Yet this could not be further from the truth as her earlier poems imply. The inclusion of the maid’s chorus which alternates with Penelope’s virtual monologue serves to point out two very important questions that, for Atwood, are left lingering after a close reading of the *Odyssey*: “what led to the hanging of the maids, and what was Penelope really up to?” (Atwood 2005: xxi). In her introduction to the text, Atwood claims that: “The story as told in *The Odyssey* doesn’t hold water: there are too many inconsistencies. I’ve always been haunted by the hanged maids; and, in *The Penelopiad*, so is Penelope herself” (xxi). However, this claim does not mean that Penelope’s narrative is going to give us a seamless tale without inconsistencies; or if it does, we should not believe it. “Perhaps I will tell you lies,” says Grace, Atwood’s protagonist in *Alias Grace*

(46) (McWilliams 2009: 102) and this is essentially what Atwood's Penelope implies when she decides to do some "storymaking" of her own.

The narrator of *The Penelopiad* is just as untrustworthy as Grace although the reader is, at first, more inclined to trust Penelope's narrative. As Coral Ann Howells describes, Atwood's Penelope takes the reader into "her confidence", she "sets up the confessional dynamics, seducing us with her promise to tell us *"everything"* (2006:11). The reader is susceptible to this seduction in part, because of Penelope's authority; she is a mythical character and is speaking from the underworld. As readers we are led to believe that those in the underworld know more of the story than we do and in a text that is entitled *The Penelopiad* we expect to get Penelope's version of the *Odyssey*. However, in a rewriting of the *Odyssey*, itself full of guile and deception, the only thing we should expect is to be told lies.

Before delving into the text, let us first address the title of Atwood's work. In creating a Penelopean parody of Homeric epic it goes without saying that Atwood would have looked at the existent *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (*Odyssieia* as it is transliterated from Greek) as models. Oddly, Atwood chooses to title her mock epic *The Penelopiad* which is slightly awkward sounding in English. Using the formula of adding a Homeric suffix to the protagonist's name Atwood had two choices. The first would be to mirror "*Odyssieia*" and render it "Penelopeia" which, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, John Finley has done (Finley 1978: 3). Atwood chose the second option "Penelopiad" which appears in the poem "Ithaca" by Richard Howard: his Penelopean narrator says, "The loom's my

odyssey— / dare I call it my penelopiad?” (Howard 1983: 17). Why this second option? Looking closely at the Atwood’s work, it is more appropriate that the mock epic takes the Iliadic suffix rather than the Odyssean one because the text is more about Penelope’s rage than her journey. Indeed, Penelope begins by talking about Odysseus and this is where thinly veiled anger begins to show:

He was always so plausible. Many people have believed that his version of events was the true one, give or take a few murders, a few beautiful seductresses, a few one-eyed monsters. Even I believed him from time to time. I knew he was tricky and a liar, I just didn’t think he would play his tricks and try out his lies on me. Hadn’t I been faithful? Hadn’t I waited, and waited, and waited, despite the temptation—almost the compulsion—to do otherwise? And what did I amount to, once the official versions gained ground? An edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with.

(Atwood 2005: 2)

Though this is no Achillean rage, Penelope expresses bitterness and anger towards those who have told false tales and those who believe them. She is even angry about the image of her own archetype and how it has been used. Despite Penelope’s anger, the reader might assume that her subversive narrative is actually the truth; however from the very beginning of the text we have hints that this is not the case. Early on Atwood’s Penelopean narrator makes it clear that the reason behind her storytelling is revenge: “Now that all the others have run out of air, it’s my turn to do a little story-making” (Atwood 2005: 3). Though multiple, these hints are subtle and the reader does not fully distrust this Penelopean narrator until much later on in the text. The reader *wants* to be on Penelope’s side and Penelope does her best to gain the reader’s trust and sympathy.

At the beginning of *The Penelopiad* it is easy for the reader to commiserate with Penelope as she relates her difficult childhood years with her inattentive, negligent, and borderline murderous parents. She then spends most of her adolescent and early adult years in a bitter rivalry with her cousin Helen. Yet, as the narrative continues the reader becomes more suspicious of Penelope. It is the inclusion of the maid's chorus that casts the shadow of doubt across Penelope's version and by the end we begin to see the degree to which Penelope is implicated in the deaths of the suitors and maids. Hilde Staels explains concisely Atwood's construction of an unreliable Penelope:

Classical myths are merely narratives, of which many versions exist, and that the truth can never be known. Yet as a deceitful storyteller, Penelope paradoxically creates the illusion of a reliable first-person narrative, as when she says, "Now you've heard the plain truth".

(Staels 2009: 109; Atwood 2005: 139)

Her insistence on truth-telling indicates that Penelope is hiding something and like Helen in "Helen of Troy Does a Counter Dance" Penelope's transparency serves to hide her lies. Even the text's material form lends a kind of confusion; it is neither a novel nor a poetry collection. In fact, Atwood does a very good job of defying genre in this text as she includes everything from monologue and chorus to anthropological lecture and the transcript of a legal trial.¹⁶⁸ Scholars like Hilda Staels also point out that Atwood's text has much in common with the Greek Satyr play and the Menippean satire (*cf.* Staels 2009).

¹⁶⁸ Although Atwood goes to some length to defy the boundaries of genre, some critics have labelled the text as Gothic. See Howells 2006. *The Penelopiad* is framed as a haunted text: both the author and the narrator are haunted by the hanged maids (not to mention the spectres of Homer and other writers who have re-told the *Odyssey*).

In many ways, the entire *Penelopiad* is like the confession of a witness trying to hide something. If we compare Gail Holst-Warhaft's Penelope to Atwood's, both Penelopes are unfaithful but in very different ways. Holst-Warhaft's Penelope redefines fidelity: she is faithful to her story. As a narrator she gives us no reason to mistrust her tale and a reader of *Penelope's Confession* gets the feeling that this Penelope wants to set the record straight by telling the "truth" about her fidelity. Although Holst-Warhaft's Penelope is guilty of marital infidelity she appears to be innocent of murder. On the other hand, Atwood's Penelope has more to hide and she conceals it in plain sight. She begins her narrative by saying: "*Now that I'm dead I know everything*. This is what I wished would happen, but like so many of my wishes it failed to come true" (1). As the opening lines of a text, they are ambiguous at best. They function to undermine Penelope's knowledge of the story she is about to tell, but at the same time this bolsters her credibility, her honesty (she expected to know everything, but she confesses that this is not the case).

In *Penelope's Confession*, Holst-Warhaft presents the reader with an honest narrator who is *confessing*. Atwood's narrator is more dubious and as the tale progresses, one begins to suspect that Atwood's Penelope tells her story with the convincing authority of someone who is on trial for murder. It is the *tone* of Atwood's text that plays a large role in adding to the reader's doubts about Penelope's narrative. When Atwood's Penelope says: "I was not a maneater, I was not a Siren, I was not like cousin Helen..." (29) it is *less* believable, because she is trying so hard to differentiate herself from the "bad women" of myth. She is trying to reassert the faithful archetype that Penelope is supposed to be. However, as will be discussed in the next section, the narrative of the maids changes everything.

PENELOPE AND THE MAIDS IN *THE PENELOPIAD*

[The maids] transform The Penelopiad into a polyphonic narrative where their dissident voices counter the authenticity of Penelope's confession. Indeed, it is the maids and not Penelope who have the last word, defaming (to use De Man's terminology) the Homeric monument to male heroism and female fidelity.

Howells, "Five Ways of Looking at *The Penelopiad*" (Howells 2001:12)

Although the title, *The Penelopiad*, suggests we will hear a story about Penelope's rage, the work has two voices: Penelope's and the maids'. But what connections these two narrative voices and why are they so dissonant? In the *Odyssey*, the relationship between Penelope and the maids is complicated and vague. There is uncertainty as to how close Penelope is to the maids. One maid in particular, Melantho, who is famous for insulting Odysseus (still dressed as a beggar) in *Od.*18: 320–325 is described as being like one of Penelope's own children. Yet in *Od.*19: 90–95 Penelope calls her a "shameless bitch" (Homer 2001: 321). As cultural norms of the time mandated, Penelope was often in the women's quarters with her female servants (Lowenstam 2000: 337); however, there is no real indication of how much Penelope confided in them. On the contrary, in Atwood's Re-vision of the myth Penelope talks about having a close relationship with her maids. She includes the maids in her plan to dupe the suitors (via her web trick) and they even help her pick apart the web. However, a reader familiar with the *Odyssey* should read Penelope's version with some scepticism since she is ultimately betrayed by the maids; one of the maids reveals Penelope's web trick to the suitors (*Od.* 2: 85–110). This crucial detail is not even mentioned by Atwood's narrator, suggesting that this Penelope may be hiding something. If indeed

Penelope is “on trial” for murder then she would be wise to leave out this detail as it could be easily considered a motive.

In *The Penelopiad*, eleven of the twenty-nine chapters are narrated/sung by the maids and the remaining eighteen are narrated by Penelope. The text is essentially a contest of storytellers: Penelope maintains that she was faithful to Odysseus and is innocent of murder while the maids continue to cause doubt. As the narrative progresses, the reader’s suspicions regarding Penelope’s veracity continue to mount and the degree to which Penelope is involved in the murder of the maids becomes a persistent question. This is directly addressed in chapter twenty “Slandorous Gossip” which is narrated by Penelope as she defends herself against the accusations of infidelity. The language Penelope uses has a legal overtone and sounds as if she is on the stand pleading her case:

The charges concern my sexual conduct. It is alleged, for instance, that I slept with Amphinomus, the politest of Suitors. The songs say I found his conversation agreeable, or more agreeable than that of the others, and this is true, but it’s a long jump from there into bed. It’s also true that I led the Suitors on and made private promises to some of them, but this was a matter of policy. Among other things, I used my supposed encouragement to extract expensive gifts from them –scant return for everything they’d eaten and wasted– and I draw your attention to the fact that Odysseus himself witnessed and approved of my action.

(Atwood 2005: 143–44)

As compared to Gail Holst-Warhaft’s Penelope and her confession, this one sounds rehearsed at best, guilty at worst. Atwood’s Penelope then goes on to address the “more serious charge” of Odysseus not revealing himself to her right away because he did not trust her. She denies this and says that the real reason

Odysseus did not confide in her is because “he was afraid I would cry tears of joy and thus give him away” (145). Similarly, as she explains, she was locked in the women’s quarters during the massacre of the suitors and maids because of her “tender heart” and her “habit of dissolving into tears and falling down on thresholds... Surely that is the obvious explanation for his behaviour” (145). Penelope’s constant insistence of her innocence makes the reader begin to doubt her all the more.¹⁶⁹

In the chapter that immediately follows this, “The Chorus Line: The Perils of Penelope, A Drama,” the maids mock Penelope’s attempt to defend her character. The maids’ playful yet menacing tone indicates that the “confession” we have just heard from Penelope may be another one of her tall tales: “Let us just say: There is another story. Or several...” (147). The maids then proceed to tell their version in which Eurycleia and Penelope work together to hide Penelope’s infidelity and their plan to murder the maids in order to keep Penelope’s secret safe. It is presented as a drama and the opening scene reveals Penelope in bed with Amphinomus at the moment of Odysseus’s arrival:

¹⁶⁹ Penelope also cannily omits the detail that she slipped encouraging messages to the suitors throughout the four years of courtship. See Fulerson 2002: 33.

Penelope:

Amphinomus – quick! Down the hidden stairs!
And I'll sit here, and feign great woes and cares.
Do up my robe! Bind fast my wanton hairs!
Which of the maids is on my affairs?

Eurycleia:

Only the twelve, my lady, who assisted,
Know that the Suitors you have not resisted.
They smuggled lovers in and out all night;
They drew the drapes, and then they held the light
They're privy to your every lawless thrill -
They must be silenced, or the beans they'll spill!

(Atwood 2005: 149–50)

Evidently, the maids do not substantiate Penelope's earlier confession.

Two chapters later, Penelope continues with her version of the maids' murder in "Odysseus and Telemachus Snuff the Maids". Atwood's Penelope stays close to the plot of the *Odyssey* in that Penelope only hears about the events from Eurycleia (since she is locked in her room and not present in the hall where the murders occur). However, as mentioned before, one of Atwood's innovations in *The Penelopiad* is the relationship between Penelope and the maids and in this she diverges from the *Odyssey*. Atwood's Penelope says that the twelve maids were her "helpers during the long nights of the shroud" and she describes them as: "My snow-white geese. My thrushes, my doves." (160). In comparing the maids to birds she alludes to *Odyssey* 19 in which Penelope tells Odysseus (still disguised as a beggar) about a dream she has. In the dream her twelve pet geese are slaughtered by an eagle. Odysseus (as beggar) tells Penelope that it is an easy dream to interpret: the eagle represents her returning husband and the geese are the suitors he will dispose of. However, in Atwood's version Penelope tells the

reader that the twelve geese actually represent the twelve hanged maids. This is significant because: “[h]ere Atwood is claiming that not only was Odysseus wrong, but Homer was as well; through this palinode, she calls attention to the poem’s repression of the violence inflicted upon the maids” (Suzuki 2007: 271). Penelope then goes on to blame herself for the maids’ death because she did not tell Eurycleia that the maids were only acting under her direction; they mingled with the suitors because Penelope urged them to.

Despite these momentary guilt pangs, Penelope does not brood over this for very long: “Dead is dead, I told myself. I’ll say prayers and perform sacrifices for their souls. But I’ll have to do it in secret, or Odysseus will suspect me, as well” (160). Penelope moves very quickly from guilt back to concern for her own safety (and reputation). The chapter continues for another page in which Penelope goes a step further and muses that perhaps there is a “more sinister explanation”: that perhaps Eurycleia was aware of Penelope’s arrangement with the maids, but kept quiet and/or encouraged Odysseus to kill them. As Penelope tries to conjure shadows of doubt over Eurycleia’s character, it becomes quite obvious that Penelope is grasping at straws to prove her own innocence.

It is not only Penelope who glosses over the murder of the maids. In the next chapter, “The Chorus Line: An Anthropology Lecture,” the maids address the general trend of overlooking their death as merely incidental to the plot of the *Odyssey* or of explaining it away through symbolism. The maids begin their lecture on the symbolic nature of the number twelve and potential connections to a Goddess cult. There are questions asked by an unheard audience. The attendees of

the lecture are all addressed as “Sir” or on the whole as “dear educated minds”.

The last paragraph of the chapter is particularly scathing:

Never mind. Point being that you don't have to get too worked up about us, dear educated minds. You don't have to think of us as real girls, real flesh and blood, real pain, real injustice. That might be too upsetting. Just discard the sordid part. Consider us pure symbol. We're no more real than money.¹⁷⁰

(Atwood 2005: 168)

As a lecture, the form of this chapter addresses the ways in which academic discourse fictionalizes violence: because they were not “real” women, the violence inflicted upon them is excused. The maids also edge towards condescension here as they address the modern reception of the very text that they inhabit. They mock the process of literary analysis and point out the possible agendas of those who take part in this kind of theorizing. That being said, Atwood is perhaps being more subtle than it would appear. Aside from the fact that she too is taking part in this process of criticizing and interpreting the literary tradition by the very act of re-writing a classical text, the self-referentiality of her narrators may be a nod to the very same self-referentiality in Homer's *Odyssey* and its testing of narrative boundaries.

Many of these veritably postmodern tropes including, testing the boundaries of the text and language, are also present in one of the most famous *Odyssey*-inspired works, James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Indeed, one line of argument could see a connection between *The Penelopiad* and *Ulysses*. Joyce's text incorporates a

¹⁷⁰ Suzuki points out that the last line (money as symbol) refers to Levi-Strauss's *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Levi-Strauss 1969: 496), (Suzuki 2007: 274).

number of literary genres, has multiple narrators, includes a “Hades” episode, and his unfaithful Penelope figure, Molly, who is given a monologue to conclude the book. Doubtless, there are many more parallels. The reason I do not pursue this discussion is not that I do not find it worthy of having, but that it would risk pushing this chapter off topic.

Feminist theorist, Peggy Kamuf, defines what she calls a “Penelopean Text” by its very capacity to blur boundaries and test limits. In the chapter she dedicates to this idea, Kamuf compares Penelope’s experience to that of the narrator in Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. Woolf’s narrator zigzags as she traverses through fiction, history, and reality (on a university campus no less) experiencing at every turn roadblocks and do not enter signs. Her path is constantly diverted, re-routed and barred, yet Kamuf sees potential in these difficulties:

I take Penelope as a shuttling figure in power’s household, one whose movement between outside and inside, violence and poetry, the work of history and the unworking of fiction may allow us to frame one or two notions about the place of woman’s art... Finally, then, Penelope is the name I take in order to designate a conjunction of fiction in history in which a women’s text plots the place of its own undoing.

(Kamuf 1988: 148)

Kamuf sees Woolf’s narrator as a Penelopean figure because both her art and her daily experiences involve a negotiation of spaces (a doing, undoing, and re-doing). Thus, the Penelopean text also reveals the constructed nature of these boundaries:

Turning in the door of culture's most exclusive institution [history], Penelopean work blurs the line between historical prerogatives and fictional pretensions, always deferring the promised end of its labor, ravelling/unravelling clear historical patterns at its fictional border.

(Kamuf 1988: 152)

In this way, a Re-vision functions to unravel History itself and its power as an omniscient discourse is challenged.¹⁷¹ This is precisely what Atwood's *The Penelopiad* does. Throughout the work it is clear that Atwood takes pains to include a multitude of genres and the inclusion of typically non-fictional discourses such as lectures and court testimonies supports Kamuf's argument for a Penelopean Text as a discourse that serves to unsettle any clear separation between history and fiction. Although Atwood's Re-vision concentrates on this movement between history, fiction, and violence, her treatment is unlike Kamuf's in that she does not offer up Penelope as a solution. Far from it. Atwood's Penelope is part of the problem —and perhaps also part of the cover-up.

Penelope's role in the conspiracy to murder the maids is continued in chapter twenty-six which is staged as another non-fiction genre: the trial. There is a blatant play on words here: often the obstacles that a classic hero must face are called "trials" —the trials of Odysseus, but here Odysseus is *on* trial.¹⁷² "The Chorus Line: The Trial of Odysseus, as Videotaped by the Maids" opens with Odysseus being accused of murdering the suitors. The Attorney for the Defence and the

¹⁷¹ For example Annemarie Austin's poem "Penelope" when the narrator says, "History has me in this scene as the trapped fly... Really I am the spider" (Austin 1995: 52).

¹⁷² In her essay *Penelope the Sequel*, Linda Pastan also discusses the idea that "Woman's trial is one of patience" (Pastan 1989: 275).

Judge agree rather quickly that “Odysseus was merely acting in self-defence” against the suitors and so he is acquitted (177). However, there is a sudden interruption in the courtroom as the maids shout: “You’ve forgotten about us! What about *our* case? You can’t let him off! He hanged us in cold blood! Twelve of us! Twelve young girls! For Nothing!”(177). The judge then hears these new charges, leafs through the *Odyssey* as it is the “main authority on the subject” and says that Book 22 does say, “[t]he Suitors raped them. Nobody stopped them from doing so” (179). As if her modern rendition does not already ooze with irony, Atwood has the text of the *Odyssey* make a guest appearance in *The Penelopiad*.

Because the case is now complicated by the maids’ appearance, Penelope is called to the stand as a witness and she acts the part of a mild and meek wife answering in brief, vague sentences. She then begins to weep and says:

I felt sorry for them! But most maids got raped, sooner or later; a deplorable but common feature of palace life. It wasn’t the fact of their being raped that told against them, in the mind of Odysseus. It’s that they were raped without permission.

(Atwood 2005: 181)

The judge then “chuckles” and says to Penelope: “Excuse me, Madam, but isn’t that what rape is? Without permission?” The Attorney clarifies: “Without permission of their master, your Honour” (182). The judge’s laughter serves to belittle the maid’s case and presents a harsh image of the modern justice system. It is particularly telling when the judge comes to the conclusion:

Your client's times were not our times. Standards of behaviour were different then. It would be unfortunate if this regrettable but minor incident were allowed to stand as a blot on an otherwise exceedingly distinguished career. Also I do not wish to be guilty of anachronism. Therefore I must dismiss the case.

(Atwood 2005: 182)

The initial gravity of the judge's conclusion is undermined by his next utterance. The "regrettable and minor" incident of murdering twelve young women conjures the contemporary discourses of biopower and thanatopolitics and notions of whose life counts. Clearly, because of tradition, it would be "unfortunate" for such a "distinguished" character like Odysseus to be labelled a mass murderer. These serious allegations are trivialized: the judge claims that he does not want to be found guilty of anachronism (though he does not mind being guilty of letting a murderer off free of charge). Atwood on the other hand, refuses to let Odysseus, Penelope, Telemachus, and even Homer "get away with it" and unlike the judge, Atwood does not concern herself with the crime of anachronism.

The court proceedings end with Odysseus's murder charge being downgraded to a "minor incident" which is explained away by historical context and different "standards of behaviour". Unsatisfied with this, the maids call on the Furies¹⁷³ and vow to follow Odysseus wherever he goes "on earth or in Hades... in songs and in plays, in tomes and in theses, in marginal notes and in appendices!" (183). The Attorney for the Defence invokes Athena and Odysseus is spirited away in a cloud while the Judge is soon left calling for order in a near empty courtroom: "Order! Order! This is a twenty-first century court of justice" (184). The chaos and

¹⁷³ Also known as the Erinyes, the Furies are Greek deities of vengeance often depicted as gorgon-like women with the wings of a bat and the body of a dog.

absurdity of the trial is the final blow that ruptures Penelope's allegedly innocent narrative. From this chapter onwards a reader of *The Penelopiad* would find it difficult to take Penelope's story as anything but a desperate, posthumous cover-up.

DOUBTING PENELOPE

In 1954, Wolfgang Kayser warned that if we lose sight of the fact that the narrator is "someone" who "tells a story," the novel is dead: "The death of the narrator is the death of the novel" (34). As it would turn out, Kayser could not have been more wrong.

Richardson, *Unnatural Voices* (Richardson 2006: 1)

In *The Penelopiad*, death does not seem to have hindered the storytelling capacity of either Penelope or the maids. If anything, death allows them the opportunity to speak up. However, this does not mean that what they say should, in any way, be confused with the truth. Penelope is still very much concerned with her longstanding reputation as the faithful wife and as the text advances it becomes clear that Penelope attempts to preserve this reputation at all costs. After the maid's commentary in the "Anthropology Lecture" and the "Trial of Odysseus", the reader is left doubting Penelope's version of events. One may also begin to doubt Homer's version and perhaps even scholarly interpretations of the text as well. The degree to which Atwood unsettles the traditional story of the *Odyssey* is part of what makes her Re-vision stand out. The reader's distrust of Penelope is created slowly over the reading of the text and escalates in these last few chapters. In her analysis of Atwood's text, Kiley Kapuscinski points out how cleverly Penelope deludes the reader:

Penelope's use of a language of forgetfulness in *The Penelopiad*, and her seeming tendency to lose her narrative thread, leading her to casually state "Where was I? Oh yes," deludes the reader into believing that Penelope's memory is a tenuous one and obscures the fact that Penelope holds deeply resonant and discomfiting memories which trouble the unimpeachable and authoritative image she aims to uphold.

(Kapuscinski 2007: 10)

Penelope is a cunning storyteller and the chapter “Heart of Flint”, which is between the chapters “Anthropology Lecture” and the “Trial of Odysseus”, serves to underscore Penelope’s capacity for spinning tales. This chapter resumes the story of the *Odyssey*, allowing the reader to have the traditional story in mind while also thinking about the modern interpretation of the text (highlighted in the anthropology lecture and the trial). “Heart of Flint” begins with Penelope descending the staircase in disbelief; she has just been informed by Eurycleia that the suitors are dead and Odysseus has returned. It is called “Heart of Flint” because Penelope is criticized by Telemachus and then later Odysseus, for her tepid and reluctant reception of her returned husband. Penelope; however, explains that she maintained this image of hard heartedness as it served to bolster her reputation as a faithful wife.

In this chapter, Atwood follows the plot of the *Odyssey* closely; however, there is an additional dimension. In *The Penelopiad*, Penelope reveals that she is not only conscious of herself as a narrator (in the present moment), but she also indicates that the actual events of her life with Odysseus always involved storytelling and plot-spinning. For example, just after the massacre when Penelope claims that she does not recognize this brute as her long lost husband, Odysseus is pleased by her hesitation: “Odysseus grinned – he was looking forward to the big revelation scene...” (170). Penelope then teases Odysseus with the bed trick (asking a servant to move the bed which only Penelope and Odysseus know is immovable) and this time he becomes angry. Yet Penelope enjoys this game of recognition even at the expense of Odysseus. During the couple’s recognition scene and reunion, Penelope remains cold and calculating. It seems the only pleasure she

derives from these moments are in their re-telling, in her present moment of performance. As for her husband, she seems to gain more pleasure out of recounting the tricks she plays on him than actually being reunited with him.

Finally, the couple go to bed where they “took up [their] old habits of story-telling” (172). Odysseus tells Penelope “the nobler versions” of his adventures (172) and Penelope tells Odysseus “how tediously faithful [she’d] been, and how [she] would never have even so much as thought of betraying his gigantic bed with its wondrous bedpost by sleeping in it with any other man” (173). She then immediately says:

The two of us were—by our own admission—proficient and shameless liars of long standing. It’s a wonder either one of us believed a word the other said.

But we did.

Or so we told each other.

(Atwood 2005: 170)

Penelope then recounts how Odysseus says he must leave again and her only reaction is: “It was a likely story. But then, all of his stories were likely” (174). Despite her obvious enjoyment of tale-telling, here, we begin to get a glimpse of a Penelope who is perhaps sick of being told likely stories.

Similarly, in the last chapter narrated by Penelope (the third from the end) “Home Life in Hades” we are presented with a classic image of Penelope waiting (though this time in the underworld) while Odysseus constantly leaves in order to reincarnate. They do spend some time together, but Penelope is left unhappy:

...just when I'm starting to relax, when I'm feeling that I can forgive him for everything he put me through and accept him with all his faults, when I'm starting to believe that this time he really means it, off he goes again, making a beeline for the River Lethe to be born again.

He does mean it. He really does. He wants to be with me. He weeps when he says it. But then some force tears us apart.

It's the maids. He sees them in the distance, heading our way. They make him nervous. They make him restless. They cause his pain. They make him want to be anywhere and anyone else.

(Atwood 2005: 189)

Another likely story. We as readers are now fully sceptical of Penelope's view of events and here we begin to see Penelope as the "desperate housewife" who cannot bear to leave her husband despite his negligence. She even defends him and blames the maids for his departures: " 'Why can't you leave him alone?' I yell at the maids." (Atwood 2005: 190). A final, if somewhat pathetic, attempt to defend Odysseus is the last we see of Atwood's Penelopean narrator.

In a text whose title references the grand tradition of epic poetry, the protagonist and narrator is not exactly given a heroic finale. In fact, it is the maids who have the last word. The second to last chapter is entitled "The Chorus Line: We're Walking Behind You, A Love Song" in which the maids have their penultimate appearance and assert their continual haunting of Odysseus:

We're the serving girls, we're here to serve you. We're here to serve you right. We'll never leave you like your shadow, soft and relentless as glue. Pretty maids, all in a row.

(Atwood 2005: 193)

The final image the reader has of Penelope and Odysseus is a mirror image of the beginning of the *Odyssey*: Penelope continues to wait in the underworld while Odysseus is busy reincarnating (and running away from the maids).

The final chapter of *The Penelopiad*, “Envoi”, nods to the genre of poetry,¹⁷⁴ but offers no more of a resolution. Penelope and Odysseus are still separated and the maids have not been avenged. The maids do; however, lose their human form and turn into owls. Their metamorphosis is described in the stage directions but it is also reflected in the structure of the envoi, there is no punctuation as the maids’ human voices slowly turn into the sounds of owls:

we had no voice

we had no name
we had no choice
we had one face
one face the same

we took the blame
it was not fair
but now we’re here
we’re all here too
the same as you

and now we follow
you, we find you
now, we call
to you to you
too wit too woo
too wit too woo
too woo.

(Atwood 2005: 195)

Coral Ann Howells offers her interpretation of the ending of *The Penelopiad*:

¹⁷⁴ An envoi is a short stanza usually concluding a ballad or the concluding words of an author.

As Penelope's voice ceases and the Maids fly away Atwood's act of literary reclamation comes to an end, for Penelope and her Maids, like the mythic figures in Prospero's masque, "were all spirits and / Are melted into air, into thin air," perhaps ready once again to change costumes and as Atwood reminds us, "to take on other meanings."

(Howells 2006: 16)

Although I agree with Howells's interpretation, this "Ovidian gesture" (Howells 2006:16)—the maid's metamorphoses—seems to contain a hint of irony if we read it as a reference to T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland*. In *Wasteland* (lines 203-206) Philomela says:

Twit twit twit
Jug jug jug jug jug jug
So rudely forc'd.
Tereu

(Eliot 1954: 59)

Philomela is a character from Greek mythology who after a series of violent and tragic events (including her rape and cutting out of her tongue), the gods take pity on and turn into a nightingale. Her story is most famously recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹⁷⁵ In Atwood's text the twittering sounds from Eliot are turned into "too wit too woo" which serves to highlight the fact that like Odysseus (and Penelope), the maids are also witty (and have seduced, or wooed the reader with their tale). Thus, Atwood responds to Ovid's text and Eliot's appropriation of it in order to address the tradition of silencing narrators via metamorphoses.

¹⁷⁵ It is also the basis of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* with the character of Lavina based on Philomela. For more in this see Taylor 2000.

In *The Penelopiad*, the maids are silenced at every turn: by Penelope, Odysseus, Telemachus, the Suitors and the Judge. The narrative ends with no real sense of justice; even the maids seem to fall short of vengeance. Yet this kind of ending is typical of Atwood; there is no happy ending, no neat conclusion. Perhaps in an ironic nod to Ovid, Atwood is playing with the frivolity of ending such a tale with the characters just flying away as if all of the trauma and violence can be erased by a simple metamorphosis. This notion is effortlessly depicted in Yannis Ritsos's poem "Philomela": "Still we say: without all the rest, those things now contemptible, would this brilliant robe and the nightingale exist?" (Ritsos 1991: 83). The creation of art is supposed to trump violence and tragedy. Yet the fact that one finds Atwood's ending unsatisfying indicates otherwise.

Atwood's narrator promises to tell a good story, but she never promises to tell a truthful one. Equally, the book has an ending point and so does her story, but the reader may find that it is just as unsatisfying as other versions of the tale. This is not only characteristic of Atwoodian endings, but of the *Odyssey* as well (which promises another journey for Odysseus and alludes to many other related tales¹⁷⁶). Thus, *The Penelopiad* provides its readers with an Atwoodian moral: "Beware, dear readers, of tales that beget other tales. They always promise and never fulfil". This is perhaps what is at the root of all Re-visions: upon looking back on a text we find there is something unsatisfying and the Re-vision is an attempt to rectify this. If we take Atwood's tale as an example, we should expect to be unsatisfied at the end of the Re-vision as well.

¹⁷⁶ The *Odyssey* references the events of the *Iliad* and the fates of the other heroes who were at Troy such as Achilles, Agamemnon, Ajax, etc.

This is what makes *The Penelopiad* such an interesting Re-vision. It is not merely Penelope's side of the story, it is more complex, and in this way pays tribute to Homer's own epic with all its inconsistencies and silences. Although, at first, Atwood's Re-vision appears to be the most critical and divergent of the texts examined in this thesis, she is, in fact, mimicking Homer's epic. Homer collected divergent strands from oral traditions and myths, compiled them, and added some creative flair. As Christos Tsagalis's suggests in his book *Oral Palimpsest*, the story of Odysseus was, in ancient times, already continually being told and erased, and then retold. What Atwood does is to extrapolate this process through a postmodern lens (with self-conscious, untrustworthy, post-mortem narrators). Some writers attempt to rewrite texts in order to exorcise the demons of the past—and perhaps this is what we assume Atwood has set out to do at the beginning of *The Penelopiad*. However, by the end of the text it becomes abundantly clear that Atwood wants to make sure that we are still very much haunted by Homer's *Odyssey* and all of its silences.

A LIVING DEATH, ALREADY DYING

These are not lives that are being genocidally destroyed, but neither are they being entered into the life of the legitimate community in which standards of recognition permit for an attainment of humanness.

Butler, "Giving an Account of Oneself" (2001: 81)

Atwood's Re-vision also calls attention to death and endings by defying the boundaries of both. At the end of *The Penelopiad*, the reader is left wondering who to believe and who to blame. As Kapuscinski points out:

The persistent presence of the maids and their palimpsestic revisions of Penelope's story indicate an additional level of narrative justice at work in *The Penelopiad*, wherein Penelope, traditionally a figure of prudence and inculpability, is revealed as implicated in the violence of the past and the constructions of guilt that she attempts to assign to others.

(Kapuscinski 2007: 12)

For Kapuscinski, there is some level of "justice", Penelope's unblemished reputation is marked, indelibly. *The Penelopiad* presents Penelope's narrative as reprehensible, partial, and unfaithful. This notion of fidelity in Re-vision, as discussed in Chapter 4, is also relevant to translation since both question the power dynamic between "original" and "imitation". Re-visions, like translations are often considered secondary and imitative. This then raises the question of what a Re-vision does for the original text. Should it offer justice, clarity, or closure? Or is rewriting the story itself already blasphemous? Like bad translations, can Re-visions be murderous?

For some translation theorists the answer is yes; “aggressive” translation can harm the original (Chamberlain 1988:462). Lori Chamberlain has called this notion of damaging an original the “logic of violence” within the “politics of originality” (Chamberlain 1988:463). However, this relationship between the original, authoritative text, and the supposedly replicatory nature of the translation has been famously problematized by Walter Benjamin in “Task of the Translator”. When discussing classics like Homer’s *Odyssey* it is easy to see how one might argue that any translation or rewriting of such a masterpiece would be partial or insufficient. However, as Benjamin argues, translations (and I would add Revisions too) point out the inconsistencies in the original text. In Paul De Man’s meditations on Benjamin he similarly argues:

They [translations] *disarticulate*, they undo the original, they reveal that the original was always already disarticulated. They reveal that their failure, which seems to be due to the fact that they are secondary in relation to the original, reveals an essential failure, an essential disarticulation which was already there in the original. *They kill the original, by discovering that the original was already dead.*

(De Man 1985: 36)

The Penelopiad is not a translation, it is a retelling of the *Odyssey* from the perspectives of other characters; however, it very much performs what De Man describes above as “disarticulating” and murdering the original. Atwood’s text does this in a very self-conscious way; the subversive narrative of the maids undercuts Penelope’s story. Furthermore, it is not merely the Homeric narrative that is undermined, but contemporary discourses and institutions are also problematized. They are shown to be antiquated and unjust. As described earlier in this chapter, *The Penelopiad* criticizes both academia and the judicial system for

their habits of “explaining away” abuses of women. In this way, Atwood is tugging at the thread that threatens to unravel the traditional interpretation of the *Odyssey* while also challenging contemporary social institutions.

It could be argued then, that the ending of *The Penelopiad* is unsatisfying because it highlights the uneasy relationship between original and replica by pointing out the flaws in both. Indeed, it appears that Atwood’s engagement with the *Odyssey* myth has focused on the question: what escapes the story? And to this end she has looked at the alternative voices of Circe, Helen, the Sirens, Penelope, and the maids. However, this notion of discontent also reaches beyond the story and beyond other fictional narratives. By including contemporary anachronisms like the courtroom and the classroom, *The Penelopiad* connects to a larger question that is being asked in feminist theory about justice and ethics. The pressing question here is not only what escapes the story, but what escapes representation and personhood in society? Myths and stories play a role in determining these boundaries and both Rosi Braidotti and Judith Butler advocate strategies for new kinds of story-making that do not practice the same exclusions, commit the same murders.

In this way, Atwood’s *The Penelopiad* is not only about Re-vision, but also about Re-vision’s call to ethical responsibility. Atwood’s text foregrounds the voice of the maids who cry: “You’ve forgotten about us! What about *our* case?”, yet their case is left unanswered and unfulfilled. In *The Penelopiad* the maids (and suitors) are denied a fair trial because of the judge’s bias, but also because Athena appears and ushers Odysseus away from the chaos. Farcical as this may come across in

Atwood's text, this too has its precedent in the *Odyssey*. As discussed earlier in this chapter, *Odyssey* 24 depicts the suitors in the underworld complaining that they were wrongfully killed. Their souls clamour for justice and their surviving relatives hear their plea. There is about to be a full-out war on Ithaca between Odysseus and the rest of the island. How is this to be solved, judged? In Homer's text a *deus ex machina* is employed. As the fighting begins Athena speaks and the fear that only the voice of a god can induce seizes them all (*Od.* 24: 530–535). Men flee, the battle ends, and we are told that “a forgetting” will be cast upon the inhabitants so that there will be no further vengeance sought for the slain suitors (*Od.* 24: 485–490). Yet this seems terribly unsatisfying. It is this complete lack of ethical responsibility that Atwood mocks in her own unsatisfying ending.

Because Adrienne Rich's idea of Re-vision is rooted in politics, these problems cannot just fly away. The voices of those who have been silenced and murdered will continue to haunt even if they cannot speak. As a Re-vision, *The Penelopiad* forces the reader to consider why the maids and suitors were murdered and to ask why there is no room for them in this society. When Odysseus restores order it is at the cost of many lives and in this there is a parallel with feminist theory; to maintain a traditional, normative, patriarchal society everyone must have their place. On Ithaca there is no place for unfaithful maids and amorous suitors vying for another man's wife and so, they must be eliminated. Feminist theory contends that the same has been done to those who do not fit neatly into the fabric of society, those who are considered dissident subjectivities.

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Judith Butler discusses Antigone as her model for a dissident subject and in doing so, contributes to a long-standing conversation within Ethics. Though Butler herself does not discuss the *Odyssey*, there is an important link between the end of the epic and Sophocles's tragedy. In discussing Antigone's exclusion from society Butler says:

Indeed, how are we to grasp this dilemma of language that emerges when "human" takes on that doubled sense, the normative one based on radical exclusion and the one that emerges in the sphere of the excluded, not negated, not dead, perhaps slowly dying, yes, surely dying from a lack of recognition, dying, indeed, from the premature circumscription of the norms by which recognition as human can be conferred, a recognition without which the human cannot come into being but must remain on the far side of being, as what does not quite qualify as that which is and can be? Is this not a melancholy of the public sphere?

(Butler 2000: 81)

Atwood's text makes the same point; for her the maids (and to a lesser degree, the suitors) are those excluded from society. They are swiftly murdered in their first life. Then in their second life, in Hades, they are slowly dying, dissolving into birds for lack of recognition. Like Antigone, they are the excess which calls into question the order of society. In bringing together Rich, Butler, and feminist poetry this thesis aims to show that contemporary feminists refuse to accept a world where violence imposes order, limits who is considered human, and decides whose life is livable. There is a collective agreement among them that this Antigonean "living death" is unacceptable. Butler continues: "If she [Antigone] is human, then the human has entered into catachresis: we no longer know its proper usage" (Butler 2000: 82). The task that feminist theory now presents is nothing less than to revise the human. To admit that we do *not* know its "proper usage" and to attempt, over and over again, to narrate the human in a way that holds us

responsible to each other. To see differently is not enough, there must be continual reconsideration and re-drafting. We must re-vivify and reexamine the limits of livability to include Antigone, the maids, and the suitors.

Conclusion: Endings and Palimpsests

This is the end, isn't it?
And you are here with me, listening with me: *the sea*
no longer torments me;
the self I wished to be
is the self I am.

Glück, "Otis" (Glück 1998: 57)

The above quotation could have come from the mouth of Francisca Aguirre's Penelope at the end of *Ítaca*. Recall that in the final poem, she musters her narrative courage. Instead of continuing her tale of Ithaca circling the circumstances of her entrapment she makes the decision to change the story. With a vocative exclamation "Francisca" is conjured, commanded into being. There is a new account of self in motion and it is multiple.

Snapshots from Aguirre's "Ithaca" remind us of where her narrator began:

Ithaca summarizes us as a book,
she goes with us to our very selves...

she makes us the accomplices of distance,
blind sentinels of a path
that is taking shape without us...

It is painful to wake up one day
and gaze at the sea that enfolds us...

I see the sea that surrounds me,
the misty azure in which you became lost...

(Aguirre 2004: 21)

For Aguirre, the self that society wished her to be (Penelope) and the self she was (Francisca) were incompatible. *Ítaca* was a means of expressing her struggle with this image of “woman” (as dictated by social norms in Spain in the 1970s). It was Penelope versus Francisca and Penelope was winning. Yet by the end of her interaction with Penelope, in the final poem she writes:

Those you call others are your story:
Divide yourself and you will lose.

(Aguirre 2004: 123)

Dividing herself in half was not an answer. Her struggle revealed not her lack (because she could not be a pious, traditional woman like Penelope) but rather, the lack of diversity and the limitations of social discourse. In this way, for Aguirre and the other poets examined in this thesis, the struggle with the Penelope myth is a struggle with traditional notions of “woman” as an identity. It is the antagonism between the self one is and the self that society dictates it should be, expressed through the medium of poetry.

As this thesis has demonstrated, Francisca Aguirre, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, Gail Holst-Warhaft, and Margaret Atwood all use Penelope to vicariously explore the boundaries of subjectivity. I would say that what these poets find in their engagement with Penelope is recognition: they recognize that their narrative of self is not as limited as it was before, and that the self always requires Re-vision. Francisca Aguirre’s *Ítaca* presented an image of a subject trapped in a discourse that she could not escape. The other within the self, the internalization of social norms caused a rupture creating separate identities: Penelope and Francisca. Yet

by the end, she revises her account of self so that Penelope and Francisca are no longer separate and vying for control.

Though Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry addressed entrapment, her work focused more on grappling with language. She worked to write the body, to articulate lived experience as a woman and as a poet. For Anghelaki-Rooke Penelope was useful for exploring the relationship between self and other in the context of desire but, after her poem "Η άλλη Πηνελόπη" [The Other Penelope], she moves beyond the myth. Even as a mediated account of self, Penelope could no longer articulate the narrative that the poet wanted to express. Thus, like her Penelope who begins "again in the morning" (Anghelaki-Rooke 2008: 25) Anghelaki-Rooke moves on from Penelope; she attempts to find a different language with which to give an account of self (again and again) through poetry.

In Gail Holst-Warhaft's poetry there is a more palpable shift; her Penelopean narrator is aware that her archetype is outdated and constraining. Thus, her narrative is more about fidelity; fidelity to traditional narratives of what Penelope (and "woman") should be. Indeed, by the end of Holst-Warhaft's *Penelope's Confession*, her narrator realizes that fidelity to the restrictive notions of narratives and subjectivity are not worth it. She redirects her faithfulness towards poetry and towards the project of continual self-making.

Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* plays with the notions of ending, belatedness, truth, and storytelling. Atwood cleverly plays on the genre of myth as something inherently multiple, repetitive, even palimpsestic. In her version of the epic no one is spared mockery, not Homer, not even the reader. By the time the reader gets to

the end they realize that they have been lied to, told a tall tale, and this is precisely Atwood's point. Her Penelopean narrator tries to give the reader a seamless, complete, true narrative, yet as *The Penelopiad* explicitly reveals, this would require a refusal to recognise other renditions, it requires strategic omissions. With regards to feminist subjectivity, Atwood's text provides a narrative dystopia, an image of what happens when there is no reciprocity in recognition. The maids represent a minority voice that, if heard, would shift the perception of the other characters. Through the eyes of the maids Odysseus is a tricky, philandering murderer; Penelope is selfish and unfaithful; and Telemachus is a brute, a product of his father's violence. As this thesis has argued, Atwood's *The Penelopiad* is one of many texts that attempt to explore alternative narrative perspectives and their potential implications for feminist theory.

I started this DPhil exploring the ways in which these women writers engaged with the myth of Penelope. This project's aim was first and foremost to track the different challenges that these feminist writers bring to one of the major and most shaping narratives of "women's fidelity" in Western culture. Using the work of Adrienne Rich, Judith Butler, and Rosi Braidotti, this thesis has shown more clearly what links the work of these four women writers. They are dedicated to problematizing a static notion of narrative and subjectivity and their method of challenging such discourses is Re-vision. They advocate revising a text and revising one's account of self in ways that maintain an open-endedness. It has been one of the claims of this thesis that such a Re-vision of classical myth is attempted by many more feminist writers in the same period. Though my case studies were focused and limited, the validity of my conclusions extends, I

believe, much beyond these writers and the works I have discussed. Following the work of these writers I also realized something further: that their project was not simply to challenge the Penelopean stereotype but to also argue, in the process, a much bigger point about Re-vision, rewriting, and the intricacies of giving an account of the self as a woman, as a citizen, as a human being.

PENELOPEAN PALIMPSESTS

As a Re-vision, Atwood's *The Penelopiad* re-opens the *Odyssey*, she refuses to let the text (or the mythical characters) rest. Indeed, Atwood's Penelope does not begin her narrative until after death. It is a post-*Odyssey* text, and after-the-fact work. Indeed, the same is true of accounts of self: as Judith Butler might say, this belatedness is also a condition of self-narration. Although *The Penelopiad* is not an account of self in the sense that Butler discusses, it does echo one of the main points made by the theorist; that our narratives of self are always belated, because we cannot narrate otherwise:

My narrative begins *in media res*, when many things have already taken place to make me and my story in language possible. And it means that my story always arrives late. I am always recuperating, reconstructing, even as I produce myself differently in the very act of telling. My account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I have no definitive story. I cannot explain exactly why I have emerged in this way, and my efforts at narrative reconstruction are always undergoing revision. There is that in me and of me for which I can give no account.

(Butler 2001: 27)

Not only are our narratives belated, but they are haunted. They are haunted by previous narratives of self, by others' accounts of self, by expectations, and by social discourses of subjectivity. As living subjects we cannot narrate our own beginning or our end. And, as *The Penelopiad* suggests, even if one were to try and narrate after the end of life, the account provided would be no more complete or true. Being a living subject requires continual revision (and Re-vision) and giving revised accounts of self.

It is also important to note the difference between a haunted subject and a dead one. Haunting can be productive because it is unsettling. Death implies completion. Yet, in the case of narrative, the reverse is also true: completion and closure can mean death. This is perhaps one of the reasons that Adrienne Rich discusses Re-vision in an essay entitled *When We Dead Awaken*. In her essay, we are “the dead” that she tries to awaken. In what is perhaps an ironic pantomime of Homer, Rich gestures to us and tries to get us to see beyond the beggars rags; Odysseus and Homer are not the only storytellers. Recognition then, not only happens for the character Penelope. If the poem is a Re-vision, a sort of recognition will happen for the reader as well. It will be a recognition of “how we have been led to imagine ourselves” (Rich 1972: 18).

In a Re-visionist poem the reader, as well as the writer, engage in a mutual act of looking at the text from a new perspective. They see in the poem echoes of myth and the canon, but they also see reflections of themselves and the possibility of multiple re-readings. In this way, Rich’s poetics parallels Butler’s notion of subjectivity: both Rich’s writing and Butler’s subject require a reciprocal relationship with an other. However, the reader-writer relationship that Rich calls for is a “haltingly difficult project” (Blackford 1986: 17). Rich is not so naive to call this a solution. Indeed, as Joanne Fiet Diehl suggests:

There can be no “final solution” for a woman who faces the accumulative force of a tradition that has its origins in the Homeric voice and which echoes with renewed strength in our post-Milronic assumptions about the nature of language and the patriarchal perceptions of image-making itself.

(Diehl 1980: 531–2)

It is this need for a “solution” that the poets in this thesis respond to. And yet at the end of their respective engagements with the Penelope figure, they realize that this cannot be the end. Re-vision must be continually practiced.

The question then becomes: *what next?* What does a writer do post-Penelope? The poet Louise Glück devoted an entire collection to Penelope and Odysseus in her *Meadowlands* (1997) using the myth as a way to talk about contemporary marriage and relationships. In an interview five years later Glück was asked if she would return to the Penelope figure in her next collection. Her response was simple: “No, I left her behind—you have to.”¹⁷⁷

The same is true for Francisca Aguirre, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, Gail Holst-Warhaft, and Margaret Atwood. Their engagement with Penelope was a way of working through and addressing various aspects of the myth that resonated with their own experiences as women and as poets including entrapment, desire, fidelity, translation, recognition, storytelling, and belatedness. However, they eventually all moved away from Penelope towards different articulations of the self.

For contemporary women writers Penelope-as-narrator becomes like the web that Homer’s Penelope weaves: weaving their own Penelopes became the process through which they worked against the social realities reinforced by patriarchy and other dominant discourses – including the dominant discourses propagated by classical myth. Their time spent working with Penelope (like Penelope’s time

¹⁷⁷ From a telephone interview with Glück on August 9, 2002 in Doherty 2009.

spent weaving) meant a deferral of ending and a rejection of the discourse of production in favour of exploration and Re-vision. Though these writers move away from the figure of Penelope they do not finish her story. Their project of Re-vision continues. They continue to participate in the larger, constant process of revising and re-considering the self. Indeed, they very well may return to Penelope but if they do, she will and must be a different Penelope. As demonstrated, for these writers this perpetual Re-vision ends up being the only way to narrate and the only way to give an account of self. In a Cavafy-esque metaphor, the Penelope figure gave them this journey so that neither the poet nor the reader will end up stranded on an Ithaca. And indeed, for feminist writers the point is to never finish the web, the goal is to never reach Ithaca at all.

Works Cited

HOMERIC TEXTS

- Evelyn-White, Hugh G. (2008) "Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns, and Homerica". *Project Gutenberg*. Accessed 7 March 2014.
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/348/348-h/348-h.htm>.
- Homer. (2001). *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Viking Penguin.
- . (1997). *The Iliad*. New York: Viking Penguin.
- . (1990). *The Odyssey of Homer*. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. New York: Bantam Dell A Division of Random House, Inc.
- Finley, John H. (1978). *Homer's Odyssey*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Jones, P. V., Homer, et al. (1988). *Homer's Odyssey: A Companion to the English Translation of Richmond Lattimore*. Bristol: Bristol Classical Press.
- Lombardo, Stanley. (2000). *The Essential Homer: Selections from the Iliad and the Odyssey*. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aeschylus. (1979) *The Orestia*. Trans. Robert Fagles. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Adcock, Fleur. (1987). *The Faber Book of 20th Century Womens Poetry*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Anderson, Benedict. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Aguirre, Francisca. (2010). *Historia de una anatomía*. Madrid: Hiperión
- . (2004). *Ithaca*. Rochester, New York: BOA Editions, Ltd.
- . (1977). *Los trescientos escalones*. San Sebastián: Caja de Ahorros Provincial de Guipúzcoa.
- Alexopoulou, Marigo. (2009). *The Theme of Returning Home in Ancient Greek Literature: The Nostos of the Epic Heroes*. Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- . (2006). "Nostos and the Impossibility of 'A Return to the Same' ". *New Voices in Classical Reception Studies* 1: 1–9.
- Altieri, C. (1993). "Self-Reflection as Action: The Recent Work of Adrienne Rich". In Albert Gelpi and Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi. *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose: Poems, Prose, Reviews, and Criticism*. London: Norton.
- Alighieri, Dante. (2004). Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. *The Divine Comedy: A Verse Translation*. New York: ebrary Inc. (Original work published 1980).
- Ames, Keri. Elizabeth. (2003) "The Oxymoron of Fidelity in Homer's Odyssey and Joyce's Ulysses". *Joyce Studies Annual* 14: 132–174.
- Anghelaki-Rooke, Katerina. (2008). *The Scattered Papers of Penelope*. Translated and Edited by Karen Van Dyck. London: Anvil Press Poetry Ltd.

- . (2007). Interview by Ευτυχία Παναγιώτου. “Η Κατερίνα Αγγελάκη-Ρουκ μιλά...”. (δε)κατα 9.
- . (2003). *Μεταφράζοντας σε έρωτα της ζωής το τέλος*. Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Καστανιώτη.
- . (2001). *Η ύλη μόνη*. Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Καστανιώτη.
- . (1999). *Ποιήματα 1986–1996*. Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Καστανιώτη.
- . (1991). “Notes on Modern Greek Poetry”. *Gramma* (8)2: 25–31. Accessed 12 February 2013.
<http://genesis.ee.auth.gr/dimakis/Gramma/8/02-Anghelaki.htm>.
- . (1998). *Ποιήματα 1978–1985*. Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Καστανιώτη.
- . (1997). *Ποιήματα 1963–1977*. Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Καστανιώτη.
- . (1995). *Ωραία έρημος η σάρκα*. Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Καστανιώτη.
- . (1988). *Όταν Το Σώμα, Ποιήματα, Επιλογή 1963–1988*. Αθήνα: Ύψιλον.
- . (1986). *Beings and Things on Their Own*. Trans. Jackie Willcox. Brockport, New York: BOA Editions.
- . (1983). “Sex Roles in Modern Greek Poetry”. *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 1(1): 141–56.
- . (1971). *Ποιήματα 1963–1969*. Αθήνα: Ερμείας.
- Anton, John P. (1995). *The Poetry and Poetics of Constantine P. Cavafy*. Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers.
- Armitt, Lucie. (2000). *Contemporary Women’s Fiction and the Fantastic*. Basingstoke: Macmillan. (Original work published 1999).
- Attridge, Derek. (1989). “Molly’s Flow: The Writing of ‘Penelope’ and the Question of Women’s Language”. *Modern Fiction Studies*. 35(3).
- Atwood, Margaret. (2005). *The Penelopiad*. Edinburgh: Canongate.
- . (2003). *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*. London: Virago Press. (Original work published 2001).
- . (1995). “Helen of Troy Does Counter Dancing” in *Morning in the Burned House*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.
- . (1982) *True Stories*. London: Cape.
- . (1974). *You Are Happy*. New York: Harper & Row.
- . (1973). “Diving into the Wreck Poems 1971–1972 by Adrienne Rich” (A Review). *New York Times Book Review* December 30, 1973. In Cooper, Jane Roberta. (1984). *Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Revisions, 1951–81*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 238–24.
- Auerbach, Erich. (1953). *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Austin, Annemarie. (1995). *The Flaying of Marsyas*. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books.
- Bacchilega, Cristina. (1997). *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Barthes, Roland. (1993). *A Barthes Reader*. Trans. and Ed. by Susan Sontag. London: Vintage. (Original work published 1982).
- . (1991). *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Noonday Press. (Original work published 1957).
- . (1978). *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Penguin. (Original work published 1977).
- . (1975). *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Noonday Press. (Original work published 1973).

- Bassett, Samuel Eliot. (1933). "Achilles' Treatment of Hector's Body". *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 64, 41–65.
- Beaton, Roderick. (2004) *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (Original work published 1994).
- Beck, Deborah. (2005). "Odysseus: Narrator, Storyteller, Poet?" *Classical Philology*. 100(3): 213–227.
- Bennett, Andrew and Nicholas Royle. (2004). *Literature, Criticism and Theory*. London: Pearson Educations Limited. (Original work published 1995).
- Benjamin, Walter. (2004). "The Task of the Translator". Translated by Harry Zohn. In *The Translation Studies Reader*. 2nd Ed. Edited by Lawrence Venuti. London: Routledge, 75–83.
- Belsky, Scott A. (2007). "The Poet Who Sings through Us: Homer's Influence in Contemporary Western Culture." *College Literature* 34(2), 216–228
- Bennetch, Paul. (2011) June 22. Interview: "Poet Laureate Gail Holst-Warhaft's passions include the harpsichord, hiking and Greece". *Cornell Chronicle Online*. Cornell University. Accessed 7 April 2014. <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/2011/06/holst-warhaft-named-tompkins-county-poet-laureate>.
- Bien, Peter. (1983). *Three Generations of Greek Writers: Cavafy, Kazantzakis and Ritsos*. Athens: Efstathiadis.
- Bigwood, Carol. (1991). "Renaturalizing the Body (with the Help of Merleau-Ponty)". *Hypatia* 6(3): 54–73.
- Blackford, Anne. (1986). "Signified by Pain". *The Women's Review of Books* 4(3):16–17.
- Bloomberg, Kristen M. Mapel.(2001). *Tracing Arachne's Web: Myth and Feminist Fiction*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Bohandy, S. (1994)". Defining the Self through the Body in Four Poems by Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke and Sylvia Plath". *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*. 12(1).
- Boyd, Brian. (2009). *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition and Fiction*. London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Braidotti, Rosi. (2006). *Transpositions*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- . (2002). *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers.
- . (1994). *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Breton, Andre. (1960). *Nadja*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Grove Press Incorporated. (Original work published in 1928).
- Brook, Barbara. (1999) *Feminist Perspectives on the Body*. London: Longman.
- Brooks, Gwendolyn. (1945). *Annie Allen*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Broumas, Olga. (1999). *Rave: Poems 1975–1999*. Port Townsend, Washington: Canyon Press.
- . (1998). *Eros, Eros, Eros: Selected and Last Poems*. Port Townsend, Washington: Canyon Press.
- . (1977). *Beginning with O*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- Buchan, Mark. (2004). *The Limits of Heroism: Homer and the Ethics of Reading*.

- Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Burgess, Jonathan S. (2001). *The Tradition of the Trojan War in Homer and the Epic Cycle*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Butler, Judith. (2010). "Longing for Recognition" in Hutchings, Kimberly & Tuija Pulkkinen. *Hegel's Philosophy and Feminist Thought: Beyond Antigone?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- . (2005). *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- . (2001). "Giving an Account of Oneself". *Diacritics* 31(4): 22–40.
- . (2000) *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith and Athena Athanasiou. (2013). *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Polity.
- Caballero, Marta. (2011). "Francisca Aguirre: 'Historia de una anatomía es mi esqueleto'". *El Cultura*. Accessed 17 November 2011. http://www.elcultural.es/noticias/LETRAS/2386/Francisca_Aguirre_Historia_de_una_anatomia_es_mi_esqueleto.
- Calian, Carnegie Samuel. (1971) "Kazantzakis: Prophet of Non-Hope". *Theology Today*. 28 (1).
- Camatsos, Efrosini. (2005). "Defining the Female "I" in the Public Domain: The Narrators of Lilika Nakou's *Παραστρατημένοι* and Margarita Liberaki's *Τα ψάθινα καπέλα*". *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*. 23, 39–64.
- Campbell, Joseph. (1968). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. 2nd Ed. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. (original published in 1949)
- Cano Ballesta, J. (2007). *Nuevas voces y viejas escuelas en la poesía española (1970–2005)*. Granada: Atrio.
- Cavafy, C. P. (2010). "The Last Days of Odysseus" in *Selected Prose Works: C.P. Cavafy*. Trans. Peter Jeffreys. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 103–111.
- . Cavafy, C. P., T. C. Theoharis, et al. (2001). *Before Time Could Change Them: The Complete Poems of Constantine P. Cavafy*. New York: Harcourt.
- . (1993). *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα 1877–1923*. Ed. George P. Savidis. Αθήνα: Ίκαρος.
- . (1983). *C.P. Cavafy Collected Poems*. Ed. George P. Savidis. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1972).
- . (1981). "Ithaca" and "Waiting for the Barbarians" *Voices of Modern Greece*. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- . (1963). *Ποιήματα Α' (1896–1918)*. Αθήνα: Ίκαρος.
- . (1962). *Poemes de Kavafis*. Trans. Carles Riba. Illustration Josep Maria Subirachs. Barcelona: Teide. Cavallaro, Dani. (2003). *French Feminist Theory: An Introduction*. London: Continuum.
- Cavarero, Adriana (1995). *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy*. London: Routledge.
- Chamberlain, Lori. (1988). "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation". *Signs* 13(3): 454–472.

- Champagne, Roland. (1984). *Literary History in the Wake of Roland Barthes*. Birmingham, Alabama: Summa Publications Inc.
- Chow, Ray. (2006). "Poststructuralism: Theory as Critical Self-Consciousness". In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*. Ed. Ellen Rooney. 195–210.
- Cixous, Hélène (1986). "Sorties" in *The Newly Born Woman*. Ed. Catherine Clément. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1975).
- . (1976). "The Laugh of the Medusa". *Signs*. Translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. 1(4): 875–893. (Original work published 1975 in French).
- Cixous, Hélène and Marta Segarra. (2010). *The Portable Cixous*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Clayton, Barbara. (2004). *A Penelopean Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer's Odyssey*. Lanham, Maryland.; Oxford: Lexington Books. (Original work published 2003).
- Cole, Sarah. (2001). "Modernism, Male Intimacy and the Great War". *ELH* 68(2): 496–500.
- Connolly, David. (1999). "Greek Poetry: New Voices and Ancient Echoes". *Agenda*. 36 (3–4) Spring.
- Cooper, Jane Roberta. (1984). *Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Re-visions, 1951–81*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.
- Cousineau, Phil. (2001). *Once and Future Myths: The Power of Ancient Stories in Our Lives*. Boston, Massachusetts: Canari Press.
- Cowper, William. (1839). *The Poetical Works of William Cowper*. London: William Smith. Accessed 12 February 2014.
<https://archive.org/details/poeticalworks00cow>.
- Dalven, Rae. (1994). *Daughters of Sappho: Contemporary Greek Women Poets*. London: Associated University Presses.
- Daniel, Tiffany. (2009). *Infidel Poetics: Riddles, Nightlife, Substance*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press.
- Dascalopoulos, Dimitris. (2003). *Βιβλιογραφία Κ. Π. Καβάφη 1886–2000*. Θεσσαλονίκη: Κέντρο.
- Davies, Catherine. (1998). *Spanish Women's Writing 1849–1996*. London: Athlone Press.
- Dawkins, Richard. (1976). *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davidson, Michael. (2004). *Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Debicki, Andrew Peter. (1994). *Spanish Poetry of the Twentieth Century: Modernity and Beyond*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- De Castro, Rosalía. (1937). *Beside the River Sar: Selected Poems from En Las Orillas Del Sar*. Trans. S. Griswold Morley. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- De Man, Paul. (1985). "Conclusions" Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" Messenger Lecture, Cornell University, March 4, 1983. In *Yale French Studies*. No. 69, 25–46. Yale University Press.
- Deleuze, Giles. (2006). *Foucault*. Translated and Edited by Seán Hand. London: Continuum. (Original work published 1988).
- . (1983). *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson. New York: Columbia University Press. (Original work published 1982).

- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. (1999). *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Introductions To Schizoanalysis*. London: Routledge.
- . (1988). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Athlone Press. (Original work published 1987).
- Derrida, Jacques. (1985). "Les Tours De Babel". Trans. Joseph Graham. in. Joseph Graham, ed. *Difference in Translation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 142–148.
- DeNicola, Deborah. (1999). *Orpheus & Company: Contemporary Poems on Greek Mythology*. Hanover, New Hampshire.; London: University Press of New England.
- Díaz, Bernardo. (2011). "La poesía es el paño de lágrimas de las personas con sensibilidad" *El Mundo*. Accessed 17 November 2011. <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2011/11/17/cultura/1321529959.html>
- Dickenson, Emily. *Three Series, Complete*. Project Gutenberg. Accessed 15 April 2014. <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/12242/pg12242.txt>.
- Dickie, Margaret. (1986). *On the Modernist Long Poem*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press.
- Diehl, Joanne Feit. (1980). "Cartographies of Silence": Rich's 'Common Language' and the Woman Poet". *Feminist Studies*. 6(3): 530–546.
- Doherty, Lillian. E. (2009). "The Figure of Penelope in Twentieth-Century Poetry By American Women". *American Women and Classical Myths*. Ed. Gregory Allan Staley. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 181-206.
- . (1995). *Siren Songs: Gender, Audience, and Narrators in the Odyssey*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Dokou, C. and L. Sakelliou-Schultz (2000). "Drowning in White Ink: The Feminine in the Poetry of Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke and Eleni Vakalo". *Gamma* 8(7): 99–123.
- Donadio, Rachel. (2013). "Inside a Greek Poet's Work, a Reflection of Her Country's Hard Times". *New York Times*. January 12, 2013. Accessed 25 February 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/12/world/europe/work-of-greek-poet-kiki-dimoula-shows-reflection-of-countrys-hard-times.html>.
- Douka-Kabitoğlu, Ekaterini. (1991). "Fantasies of the Feminine in Contemporary Greek Women Poets". *Gamma* (8)2: 55–79.
- Doolittle, Hilda (1974). *Tribute to Freud*. Boston, Massachusetts: New Direction Books.
- Drew, Bernard. (1912). "Penelope Forsaken". *Helen and Other Poems*. London: A.C. Fifield.
- Dube, Janet. (1987). "Penelope". *Dancing the Tightrope: New Love Poems by Women*. Barbara Burford, Lindsay Macrae and Sylvia Paskin. London: Women's Press.
- Duffy, Carol Ann (2007). *The World's Wife*. Harlow: Longman. (Original work published 1999).
- . Ed. (2007). *Answering Back: Living Poets Reply to the Poetry of the Past*. London: Pacador.
- DuPlessis, Rachel. Blau. (1985). *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Eliot, T.S. (1954). *Selected Poems*. London: Faber and Faber Limited.
- Elytis, Odysseus. (1972). *Ta Pw Tou Epwta*. Αθήνα: Αστερίας.
- Evelyn-White, Hugh G. (2008) "Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns, and Homerica".

- Project Gutenberg. Accessed 7 March 2014.
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/348/348-h/348-h.htm>
- Faber, Sebastian. (2006). "Revis(it)ing the Past: Truth, Justice and Reconciliation in Post-Franco Spain", a review article second part. *Revista Hispánica Moderna*, Año 59, No. 1/2 (Jun– Dec) 141–154.
- Felson, Nancy. (1994). *Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Felson, Nancy and Laura. M. Slatkin (2004). "Gender and Homeric Epic". *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*. R. Fowler. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Finley, John H. (1978). *Homer's Odyssey*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Firestone, Shulamith and Ane Koedt. Eds. (1970). *Notes From the Second Year: Womens Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists*. New York: Radical Feminism.
- Foley, Helene. P. (1978). "Reverse Similes' and Sex Roles in the 'Odyssey'". *Arethusa* 11 (1/2): 7–25.
- Folguera, Pilar (1988). *El feminismo en España. Dos siglos de historia*. Madrid: Pablo Iglesias.
- Foucault, Michel. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Fowles, John. (1973). "During the Voyage". *Poems*. New York: Ecco.
- Freud, Sigmund. (1919). "The Uncanny". In *Pelican Freud Library* 14, Trans. James Strachey. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- . (1933). "Femininity": Lecture 33 of New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. In *On Freud's Femininity*. (2010) Ed. Leticia Glocer Fiorini & Graciela Abelin-Sas Rose. London: Karnac Books.
- Friedan, Betty. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell Pub.
- Friedman, Susan. Stanford. (1997). "When a 'Long' Poem is a 'Big' Poem: Self-Authorizing Strategies in Women's Twentieth-Century 'Long Poems'" in *Dwelling in Possibility: Women Poets and Critics on Poetry*. Ed. Yopie Prins & Maera Shreiber. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- . (1990). *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.'s Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . (1984). "Reply to Rich". *Signs* 9(4): 738–40.
- . (1983). "I Go Where I Love": An Intertextual Study of H.D. and Adrienne Rich". *Signs* 9(2): 228–45.
- Frye, Northrop. (1971). *The Narrative Tradition in English-Canadian Poetry. The Bush Garden: Essays on The Canadian Imagination*. Toronto: Anansi.
- Fulerson, Laurel. (2002). "Epic Ways of Killing Women". *The Classical Journal*. 97(4): 335–350.
- Galanaki, Rhea. (2003) *Eleni or Nobody*. Trans. David Connolly Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- . (1998) *Ελένη ή ο Κανένας*. Αθήνα: Άγρα.
- Galerstein, Carolyn L and Kathleen McNerney. (1986) *Women Writers of Spain: An Annotated Bibliographical Guide*. New York: Greenwood.
- Gallop, Jane. (1988). *Thinking Through the Body*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gelpi Albert and Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi. (1993). *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose: Poems, Prose, Reviews, and Criticism*. London: Norton.

- . (1975). "Three Conversations". In *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose: Poems, Prose, Reviews, and Criticism*. New York: Norton.
- Gerould Daniel Charles. (1963). "George Bernard Shaw's Criticism of Ibsen". *Comparative Literature* 15(2):130–145.
- Gilbert, Roger. (1997). "Framing Water: Historical Knowledge in Elizabeth Bishop and Adrienne Rich". *Twentieth Century Literature* 43(2):144–161
- Gilbert, Sandra M. (1977). "'My Name is Darkness': The Poetry of Self-Definition". *Contemporary Literature* 18(4): 443–57.
- Gilbert, Sandra M and Susan Gubar. (1979). *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. (1899). *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Boston, Massachusetts: Small & Maynard.
- Gordenstein, Roberta D. (1997). "From Social Realism to Proto-Feminism: Carmen Kurtz's *El Desconocido* as a Challenge to The Mores of Francoist Spain". *Monographic Review/ Revista Monográfica* 13: 245–51.
- Graham, Helen and Jo Labanyi. (1995). *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Glück, Louise. (1998). *Meadowlands*. Manchester: Carcanet.
- Gourgouris, Stathis. (1996). *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Graham, Jorie. (1987). *The End of Beauty*. New York: Ecco Press.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. (2002). "Feminist Futures?" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. 21(1): 13–20.
- Hacker, Marilyn. (2010) *Unauthorized Voice: Essays on Poets and Poetry, 1987–2009*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- . (1986). *Love, Death and the Changing of Seasons*. New York: Arbor House.
- Hadas, Rachael. (1985). *Form, Cycle, Infinity: Imagery in the Poetry of Robert Frost and George Seferis*. London: Associated University Presses, Inc.
- Hall, Edith. (2008). *The Return of Ulysses: A Cultural History of Homer's Odyssey*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.
- Hammond, Karla. (1979). "Articulating the Mute". In: *Waltzing Again: New and Selected Conversations with Margaret Atwood*. Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton, New Jersey: Ontario Review Press.
- Hansen, W.F. (1977). "Odysseus' Last Journey". *QUCC* (42):27–48.
- . (1990). "Odysseys and the Oar: A Folkloric Approach". *Approaches to Greek Myth*, ed. L. Edmunds, 239–272. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Harrison, S. J. (2009). *Living Classics: Greece and Rome in Contemporary Poetry in English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hausdoerffer, William Tyson. (2005). *Fantasies of Return in Greek Tragedy and Culture*. Dissertation. Berkeley: University of California.
- Hegel, G.W.F. (1977). *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn. G. (1990). "What was Penelope Unweaving?" *Hamlet's Mother and Other Women*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Heitman, Richard. (2005). *Taking Her Seriously: Penelope & the Plot of Homer's Odyssey*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Heubeck, Alfred. (1992). *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey: Books 17–24*

- Volume 3. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hirsh, Elizabeth. (1994) "Another Look at Genre: *Diving into the Wreck of Ethics* with Rich and Irigaray". In *Feminist Measures: Soundings in Poetry and Theory*. Eds. Lynn Keller and Christanne Miller. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Hogue, Cynthia. (1995). *Scheming Women: Poetry, Privilege, and the Politics of Subjectivity*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Holst-Warhaft, Gail. (2007). *Penelope's Confession*. River Vale, New Jersey: Cosmos Publishing.
- . (2006). *Road to Rembetika*. Limni, Evia, Greece: Denise Harvey.
- . (2000). *The Cue for Passion: Grief and its Political Uses*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . (1992). *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature*. London: Routledge.
- Holst-Warhaft, Gail and David R. McCann. (1999). *The Classical Moment: Views from Seven Literatures*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Holst-Warhaft, Gail and Tammo Steenhuis. (2010). *Losing Paradise: The Water Crisis in the Mediterranean*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Homans, Margaret. (1994). "Feminist Fictions and Feminist Theories of Narrative". *Narrative* 2 (1): 3–16.
- Homer. (2001). *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Viking Penguin.
- . (1997). *The Iliad*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Viking Penguin.
- . (1990). *The Odyssey of Homer*. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. New York: Bantam Dell A Division of Random House, Inc.
- Howard, Richard. (1983). "Ithaca". *Grand Street* 2 (4):15–17.
- Howe, Florence (Ed). (1993). *No More Masks! An Anthology of Twentieth-Century American Women Poets*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Howells, Coral Ann. (2006). "Five Ways of Looking at *The Penelopiad*". *Sydney Studies* 32. 5–18.
- Hurst, Isobel. (2009). "We'll all be Penelope's then": Art Domesticity in American Women's Poetry 1958–1996". In S.J. Harrison ed. *Living Classics: Greece and Rome in Contemporary Poetry in English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 275–294.
- Hutcheon, Linda. (1988). *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London: Routledge.
- . (1987). "Beginning to Theorize Postmodernism". *Textual Practice* 1(1): 10–3.
- Ibsen, Heinrich. (2010). *When We Dead Awaken*. Trans. William Archer. *Project Gutenberg*. Accessed 8 April 2014. (Original work published 1899). <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4782/4782-h/4782-h.htm>.
- Ilinskagia, S. (1993). *Κ.Π. Καβάφης: Οι δρόμοι προς το ρεαλισμό στην ποίηση του 20ου αιώνα*, Αθήνα: Κέδρος.
- Jarman, M. (1992). "The Grammar of Glamour: The Poetry of Jorie Graham (Book Review)". *New England Review* 14(4): 252.
- Joplin, Patricia Kleindienst. (1993) "The Voice of the Shuttle Is Ours". In *Rape and Representation*. Eds. Lynn A. Higgins, Brenda R. Silver. New York: Columbia University Press. (Original work published 1984).
- Johnson, Barbara. 1985. "Taking Fidelity Philosophically" in. Joseph Graham, Ed. *Difference in Translation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 142–148.
- Jones, P. V., Homer, et al. (1988). *Homer's Odyssey: A Companion to the English*

- Translation of Richmond Lattimore.* Bristol: Bristol Classical Press.
- Joyce, James. (1961). *Ulysses*. New York: Random House. (Original work published 1922).
- Jusdanis, Gregory. (1987). *The Poetics of Cavafy*. Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Kamuf, Peggy. (1988). *Signature Pieces: On the Institution of Authorship*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Kang, Manpreet. (2008). *Seeking a Female Identity: Adrienne Rich and Anne Sexton*. New Delhi: Prestige Books.
- Kapuscinski, Kiley. (2007). "Ways of Sentencing: Female Violence and Narrative Justice in Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*". Diss. Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.
- Karelli, Zoe. (1973). "Η άνθρωπος", *Τα ποιήματα*. τ. 2ος (1955–1973). Αθήνα: Οι εκδόσεις των Φίλων.
- Katz, Marylin. A. (1991). *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the Odyssey*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kauffman, Janet. (1977). "Penelope Unwinding". *Chicago Review* 28(3): 120–21.
- Kazantzakis, Nikos., F. Kimon, et al. (1958). *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Keeley, Edmund. (1996a). *Cavafy's Alexandria*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1976).
- . (1996b). "Nostos and the Poet's Vision in Seferis and Ritsos". in *Ancient Greek Texts in Modern Greek Poetry*, edited by P. Mackridge. 81–96. London: Frank Cass.
- . (1983). *Modern Greek Poetry: Voice and Myth*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Kirkpatrick, S. (1989). "The Female Tradition in Nineteenth-Century Spanish Literature". *Cultural and Historical Grounding for Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Feminist Literary Criticism. Hernán Vidal*. Minneapolis, The Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature.
- Kizer, C. (1995). *100 Great Poems by Women*. Hopwell, New Jersey: The Ecco Press.
- Kossmann, Nina. (2001). *Gods and Mortals: Modern Poems on Classical Myths*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kristeva, Julia and Toril. Moi (1986). *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Kröller, Eva-Marie. (2004). *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kruger, Kathryn. Sullivan. (2001). *Weaving the Word: The Metaphorics of Weaving and Female Textual Production*. Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania: Susquehanna University Press; Associated University Presses.
- Langer, Beryl. (1987). "There Are No Texts Without Life". In: *Waltzing Again: New and Selected Conversations with Margaret Atwood*. Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Ontario Review Press: Princeton, New Jersey. 125–135.
- Lacan, Jacques. (2001) *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Routledge.
- Lattimore, Richard. (1972). "Notes from the Odyssey: Penelope". *Poems from Three Decades*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Levertov, Denise. (1973). *The Poet in the World*. New York: New Directions.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. (1969) *Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Boston: Beacon.

- (Original work published 1949).
- Levin, Aaron. (2010). "Homer's War Experience Resonates with Today's Troops". *Psychiatric News*. 45(5): 8–9.
- Levine, L. G. (1983). "The Censored Sex: Woman as Author and Character in Franco's Spain". *Women in Hispanic Literature: Icons and Fallen Idols*. Beth Kurti Miller. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, et al. (1996). *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lipking, L. I. (1988). *Women and Poetic Tradition*. London Chicago; London, University of Chicago Press.
- Lombardo, Stanley. (2000). *The Essential Homer: Selections from the Iliad and the Odyssey*. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co.
- López, Aurora. (1999). "Interpretaciones de Penélope desde el mundo clásico al nuestro". *Contemporaneidad de los clásicos en el umbral del tercer milenio: actas del congreso internacional de los clásicos la tradición grecolatina ante el siglo XXI*. Ed. María Consuelo Álvarez Morán and Rosa María Iglesias. Murcia: Servicio de Publicaciones, Universidad, 329–338.
- López-Casanova, A. (1985). "'La palabra poética Rosalina: Claves de modernidad'". *Insula* 40(463): 1–10.
- Lowenstam, S. (2000). "The Shroud of Laertes and Penelope's Guile". *The Classical Journal* 95(4): 333–48.
- Lucas, Antonio. (2000) "Si el artista no acepta un principio de realidad está perdido". *El Mundo: Cultura*. Accessed 4 April 2009.
<http://www.elmundo.es/papel/hemeroteca/2000/06/26/cultura/854767.htm>.
- MacPherson, Heidi Slettedahl. (2010). *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mackridge, Peter. (2009). *Language and National Identity in Greece, 1766–1976*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . (1996). *Ancient Greek Myth in Modern Greek Poetry: Essays in Memory of C.A. Trypanis*. Ed. Peter Mackridge. London: Frank Cass.
- Madsen, Deborah. L. (2000). *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice*. London: Pluto Press.
- Malabou, Catherine and Judith Butler. (2011). "You Be My Body For Me: Body, Shape, and Plasticity in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*". In *A Companion to Hegel*. Ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michale Baur. Blackwell Companion to Philosophy Series. New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 611–640.
- Malanos, Timos. (1957). *Ο ποιητής Κ. Π. Καβάφης*. Αθήνα: Δίφρος.
- Malpas, Simon. (2005). *The Postmodern*. London: Routledge.
- Mandelbaum, Allen. (1990). *The Odyssey of Homer*. New York: Bantam Dell A Division of Random House, Inc.
- Martin, Wendy. (1984). *An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Maronitis, Dimitri (1987) *Μέτριά και μικρά: περιοδικά και εφημέρα*. Αθήνα: Κένδρος
- Mason, Zachary. (2011). *The Lost Books of the Odyssey*. London: Vintage.
- May, Adrian. (2011). *Myth and Creative Writing: The Self-Renewing Song*. Harlow: Longman.
- McAlpine, Katherine. (1997). *The Muse Strikes Back: A Poetic Response by Women to Men*. Brownsville, Oregon: Story Line Press.

- McDaniel, Judith. (1984). "Reconstituting the World" The Poetry and Vision of Adrienne Rich. *Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Re-visions, 1951–81*. Jane Roberta Cooper. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- McElroy, James. (1993). "The Ancient Mariner Experience of Writing, and Reading". In: *Waltzing Again: New and Selected Conversations with Margaret Atwood*. Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton, New Jersey: Ontario Review Press.
- Mc Williams, Ellen. (2009). *Margaret Atwood and the Female Bildungsroman*. Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Mendelsohn, Daniel. (2013) "J.F.K., Tragedy, Myth". 22 November 2013. *The New Yorker*. Accessed 25 February 2014.
<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2013/11/jfk-tragedy-myth.html>
- Mendez-Egle, B. (1987). "A Conversation with Margaret Atwood" in B. Mendez-Egle and J.M. Haule Eds. *Margaret Atwood: Reflection and Reality*. Edinburg, Texas: Pan American University Print Shop.
- Miller, Nancy. K. (1986). "Arachnologies: the Woman the Text the Critic". *The Poetics of Gender*. Nancy K. Miller. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Miró, Emilio. (2007). "Mester de Vida". *Poesía en el Campus: Francisca Aguirre Obra Social Y Cultural De Ibercaja En Colaboración Del Vicerrectorado De Proyección Social De La Universidad De Zaragoza*. Zaragoza: Octavio y Félez, S.A.
- . (1980) "Francisca Aguirre and Ana Mária Navales". *Insula* (Poesia). Núms: 404–405, Julio–Augusto, 12–13.
- Montgomery, R. M. (1925). *Ulysses Returns and Other Poems*. New York: Brentano's.
- Morán, María Consuelo Alvarez and Rosa María Iglesias Montiel. Eds. (1999). *Contemporaneidad de los clásicos en el umbral del tercer milenio: actas del congreso internacional de los clásicos. La tradición grecolatina ante el siglo XXI*. España: Universidad de Murcia, Servicio de Publicaciones.
- Morris, Daniel. (2007). *The Poetry of Louise Glück: A Thematic Introduction*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press.
- Mueller, Melissa (2007). "Penelope and the Poetics of Remembering". *Arethusa* 40: 337–362
- Murnaghan, Sheila. (2002). "The Trials of Telemachus: Who Was the Odyssey Meant For?" *Arethusa* 35(133–153).
- . (1987a). *Disguise and Recognition*. Princeton, New Jersey. Princeton University Press.
- . (1987b). "Penelope's *Agnoia*: Knowledge, Power and Gender in the *Odyssey*". *Helios* 13(2): 103–15.
- Myrsiades, Kostas. (1978). "The Classical Past in Yannis Ritsos' Dramatic Monologues". *Papers on Language and Literature* 14 (4): 450–458.
- Nagy, Gregory. (1999). *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press. (Original work published 1979).
- Nathan, Leonard. (1985). "Washing Socks". *Carrying On: New & Selected Poems*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Nehamas, Alexander. (1983). "Memory, Pleasure and Poetry: The Grammar of the Self in the Writing of Cavafy". *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 1(2):

295–319.

- Nelson, Cary. (1981). *Our Last First Poets: Vision and History in Contemporary American Poetry*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Newton, Rick M. (1987). “Odysseus and Hephaestus in the ‘Odyssey’”. *The Classical Journal* 83(1):12–20.
- Niarchos, Thanassis. (1980). *ΚΙΒΩΤΟΣ: Συνομιλίες με Κατερίνα Αγγελάκη-Ρουκ*. Αθήνα: Εγνατία.
- Ochshorn, Kathleen. (2005). “Who’s Modern Now? Shaw, Joyce, and Ibsen’s ‘When We Dead Awaken’”. *Shaw* 25: 96–104.
- O’Driscoll, Dennis. (2008) *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney*. London: Faber and Faber.
- OED Online. *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press. Accessed 18 September 2013. <http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2277/>.
- Oliván, L. (2007). Palabras verdaderas *Poésia en el Campus: Francisca Aguirre*. Obra Social Y Cultural De Ibercaja En Colaboración Del Vicerrectorado De Proyección Social De La Universidad De Zaragoza. Zaragoza: Octavio y Félez, S.A.
- Orbach, Susie. (2009). *Bodies*. London: Profile. (Original work published 2008).
- Ormand, Kirk. (2012). *A Companion to Sophocles*. (online edition). Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Ostriker, Alicia. (1987). *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women’s Poetry in America*. London: Women’s Press. (Original work published 1986).
- . (1982). *A Woman Under the Surface: Poems and Prose Poems*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Ovid. (1993). *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. London: A Harvest Book Harcourt, Inc.
- . (1914). *Heroides and Amores*. Trans. Grant Showerman. Loeb Classical Library Volume 41. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd.
- Papanikolaou, Dimitris. (2014). “Σαν κ’ εμένα καμωμένοι”: Ο ομοφυλόφιλος Καβάφης και η ποιητική της σεξουαλικότητας. Αθήνα: Πατάκη.
- . (2005). “‘Words that tell and hide’: Revisiting C.P. Cavafy’s Closets.” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 23(2): 235–60.
- Parker, Dorothy. (1936). *Not So Deep as a Well*. New York: Macmillan.
- Parisi, Joseph. (2008). *100 Essential Modern Poems by Women*. Chicago, Illinois: Ivan R. Dee.
- Pastan, Linda. (2002). *The Last Uncle*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- . (1989). “Penelope – The Sequel: Some Uses of Mythology in Contemporary Poetry”. *The Breadloaf Anthology of Contemporary American Essays*. R. Pack and J. Parini. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- . (1988). *Imperfect Paradise*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- . (1982). *PM/AM New and Selected Poems*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Pearce, Richard. (1994). *Molly Blooms: A Polylogue on “Penelope” and Cultural Studies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Pollock, Griselda. (2006). “Beyond Oedipus: Feminist Thought and Psychoanalysis”. In: *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*. Classical Presences. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 87–117.

- Pomeroy, Sarah. B. (1995). *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*. New York: Schocken Books. (Original work published 1975).
- Pound, Ezra. (1987). *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. London: Faber. (Original work published 1948).
- Quance, Roberta. (1998). "Breve historia de la literatura española". coord. por Iris M. Zavala, *La literatura escrita por mujer: desde el siglo XIX hasta la actualidad*. Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico and Anthropos Editorial 5: 185–210.
- Raine, Kathleen. (2000). *The Collected Poems of Kathleen Raine*. Ipswich: Golgonooza Press.
- Rich, Adrienne. C. (2007). *Poetry & Commitment: An Essay*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- . (2002). *The Fact of a Doorframe: Selected poem, 1950–2001*. New York: Norton.
- . (1993). *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*. New York: Norton.
- . (1991). *An Atlas of the Difficult World: Poems 1988–1991*. New York: Norton.
- . (1986a). *Your Native Land, Your Life: Poems*. New York: Norton.
- . (1986b). *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected prose 1979–1985*. New York: Norton.
- . (1981). *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far: Poems, 1978–1981*. New York: Norton.
- . (1979). *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected prose, 1966–1978*. New York: Norton.
- . (1978). *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems, 1974–1977*. New York: Norton.
- . (1973). *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971–1972*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- . (1972). "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision". *College English* 34(1): 18–30.
- . (1963). *Snapshots of a Daughter-In-Law: Poems, 1954–1962*. New York, Harper & Row.
- Richardson, Brian. (2006). *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Richardson, Scott. (2006). "The Devious Narrator of the Odyssey". *The Classical Journal*. 101 (4): 337–35.
- Ricks, David. (2008) "Penelope's Confession (A Review)". *Anglo-Hellenic Review*. 37: Spring
- Ristow, J. (2009). "The Scattered Papers of Penelope New and Selected Poems (A Review)". Accessed March 27, 2009.
<http://feministreview.blogspot.com/2009/03/scattered-papers-of-penelope-new.html>.
- Ritsos, Yiannis. (1993). *The Fourth Dimension*. Trans. Peter Green and Beverly Bardsley. London: Anvil Press Poetry Ltd. (First published in English in 1977).
- . (1991). Trans. Edmund. Keeley. *Repetitions, Testimonies, Parentheses*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- . (1974). *Τέταρτη Διάσταση*. Αθήνα: Κεδρός.

- Roberts, Deborah and Sheila Murnaghan (2002) "Penelope's Song: The Lyric Odysseys of Linda Pastan and Louise Glück", *Classical and Modern Literature* 22 1–33.
- Robbins, J. (2003). "Virile Femininity: Gender, Language and Knowledge". *The Discovery of Poetry: Essays in Honor of Andrew P. Debicki*. Roberta Johnson. Boulder, Colorado: U.S.A, Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies.
- Robinson, Christopher. (1996). "'Helen or Penelope?' Women Writers, Myth and the Problem of Gender Roles" in *Ancient Myth in Modern Greek Poetry*. Peter Mackridge. London: F. Cass, 109–119.
- . (1988). *C.P. Cavafy*. Bristol: Bristol Classical Press.
- Rousselot, Elodie. (2011). "Re-writing Myth Femininity and Violence in Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*". In: Sanja Bahun-Radunović and V.G. Julie Rajan. *Myth and Violence in the Contemporary Female Text: New Cassandras*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 131–144.
- Rukeyser, Muriel. (1997). "Orpheus". *Out of Silence: Selected Poems*. Ed. Kate Daniels. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- . (1978). *The Collected Poems*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Russo, J. (1982). "Interview and Aftermath: Dream, Fantasy, and Intuition in *Odyssey* 19 and 20". *AJP* 103: 4–18.
- Sandler, Linda. 2006. "A Question of Metamorphosis". In: *Waltzing Again: New and Selected Conversations with Margaret Atwood*. Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Ontario Review Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 18–36.
- Sexton, Anne. and Steven. E. Colburn (1985). *No Evil Star: Selected Essays, Interviews, and Prose*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Shaw, Bernard. and J. L. Wisenthal (1979). *Shaw and Ibsen: Bernard Shaw's The Quintessence Of Ibsenism and Related Writings*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Shay, Johathan. (2003). *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. New York: Scribner.
- . (2002.) *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*. New York: Scribner.
- Shima, Alan. (1993). *Skirting the Subject: Pursuing Language in the Works of Adrienne Rich, Susan Griffin, and Beverly Dahlen*. Dissertation. Uppsala: Uppsala University.
- Showalter, Elaine. (1992). "Killing the Angel in the House: The Autonomy of Women Writers". *The Antioch Review* 50 (1/2): 201–220. (50th Anniversary Issue).
- Simmons, J. Aaron. (2006). "Giving An Account of Oneself". *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*. 7(2): 85-90.
- Slapkauskaitė, Ruta. (2007). "Postmodern Voices from Beyond: Negotiating with the Dead in Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*". *Literatura* 49 (5): 138–146.
- Sökmen, M. G. and B. Ertür, Eds. (2008). *Waiting for the Barbarians: A Tribute to Edward W. Said*. London: Verso.
- Sophocles (2009). *The Theban Plays: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone*. (online edition). Trans. Ruth Fainlight and Robert Littman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Spenzou, Efi. (2006). "Defying History: The Legacy of Helen in Modern Greek

- Poetry". In Zajko, Vanda, and Miriam Leonard. *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*. Classical Presences. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 355–379.
- Staels, Hilde. (2009). "The *Penelopiad* and *Weight*: Contemporary Parodic and Burlesque Transformations of Classical Myths". *College Literature* 36.4 Fall.
- Stallings, A. E. (1999). "The Wife of the Man of Many Wiles". *Archaic Smile*. Indiana: University of Evansville Press.
- Stanford. William Bedell. (1954). *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Stamatis, Yona. (2004). 2 November 2004. Interview with Gail Holst-Warhaft. *Living Music*: University of Michigan School of Music American Music Institute. Accessed 10 April 2013.
<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/modgreek/windowtogreekculture/musicandart>.
- Stathogiannis, Panos. (2004). "A Conversation with Panos Stathogiannis and Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke". *Helios The Voice of Three Seas*, Special Issue on Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke. No. 6 June 2004, 13.
- Steiner, G. et al. (1996). *Homer in English*. London: Penguin Books.
- Stevens, Wallace. (1954). "The World as Meditation". *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Strine, M. S. (1989). "The Politics of Asking Women's Questions: Voice and value in the poetry of Adrienne Rich". *Text and Performance Quarterly* 9(1): 24–41.
- Sugars, Cynthia and Gerry Turcotte. (2009). *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press: Ontario.
- Suzuki, Mihoko. (2007). "Rewriting the Odyssey in the Twenty-First Century: Mary Zimmerman's *Odyssey* and Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*". *College Literature* 34(2), 263–278.
- . (1989). *Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Syrimis, G. (2003). "Promiscuous Texts and Abandoned Reading in the Poetry of C.P. Cavafy". *Modern Greek Literature: Critical Essay*. Gregory Nagy and Anna Stavrakopoulou. London, Routledge, 99–118.
- Taylor, A. B. (2000). *Shakespeare's Ovid: The Metamorphoses in the Plays and Poems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Templeton, Alice. (1994). *The Dream and the Dialogue: Adrienne Rich's Feminist Poetics*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
- Tennyson, Lord Alfred and Day, Aidan. (1991). *Lord Alfred Tennyson: Selected Poems*. Penguin Classics. London: Penguin Books.
- Thompson, D. R. (2008). "Return to Ithaca: Contemporary Revisions of Penelope in Spanish Women's Writing". *Hispania* 91(2): 320–30.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. (1973). Trans. Richard Howard. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University. (Original work published in French in 1970).
- Tsagalis, Christos. (2008). *The Oral Palimpsest: Exploring Intertextuality in the Homeric Epics*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, Trustees for Harvard University.
- Tsirakas, Stratis. (1958). *Ο Καβάφης και η εποχή του*. Αθήνα: Κεδρός.
- Ugalde, Sharon Keefe. (2003). "Poetics of Mid-Century Women Poets of Spain".

- In *The Discovery of Poetry: Essays in Honor of Andrew P. Debicki*. Ed. Roberta Johnson. Boulder, Colorado. Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies. 87.
- . (1995). "End-of-the-Century Spanish Women Poets Go Public: Gender and the Long Poem". *Revists de Estudios Hispánicos* 29(2): 365–81.
- Van Dyck, Karen. (1996). "Bruised Necks and Crumpled Petticoats: What's Left of Myth in Contemporary Greek Women's Poetry". *Ancient Greek Myth in Modern Greek Poetry*. Ed. Peter Mackridge. London: Frank Cass.
- . (1998a). *Kassandra and the Censors: Greek Poetry Since 1967*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- . (1998b). *The Rehearsal of Misunderstanding: Three Collections by Contemporary Greek Women Poets*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.
- Vendler, Helen. (1993). "Ghostlier Demarcations, Keener Sounds". *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose: Poems, Prose, Reviews, and Criticism*. Albert Gelpi and Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi. London: Norton: 299–309.
- . (1977). "Ulysses, Circe, Penelope". *Salmagundi* 37(Spring), Robert Lowell Issue: 16–24
- Venuti, Lawrence. (2008). *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London: Routledge. (Original work published 1994).
- Voela, Angie. (2011). "Heterotopia Revisited: Foucault and Lacan on Feminine Subjectivity". *Subjectivity*. 4(2): 168–182.
- Wadden, Paul. (2003). *The Rhetoric of Self in Robert Bly and Adrienne Rich: Doubling and the Holotropic Urge*. New York; Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Walcott, Derek. (1990). *Omeros*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux.
- Warner, Marina. (2002). *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wasserstein, B. (2007). *Barbarism and Civilization: A History of Europe in Our Time*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 2004).
- Welton, Don. (1998). *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*. Malden, Massachusets: Blackwell. (Original work published 1997).
- Winkler, J. (1990). "Penelope's Cunning and Homer's". *The Constraints of Desire*. New York: Routledge, 129–60.
- Wilcox, John. C. (1997). *Women Poets of Spain, 1860–1990: Toward a Gynocentric Vision*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Williams, Robert R. (1997). *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Williams, Ursula Vaughan. (1948) "Penelope". *Need for Speech*. London: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Wilson, Sharon Rose. (1993). *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics*. University Press of Mississippi.
- Wohl, V. J. (1993). "Standing by the Stathmos: The Creation of Sexual Ideology in the *Odyssey*". *Arethusa* 26: 19–50.
- Woolf, Virginia. (1966). "Professions for Women", *Collected Essays*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Wynne-Davies, Marion. (2010). *Margaret Atwood*. Tavistock: Northcote, British Council. (Original work published 2003).
- Zajko, Vanda, and Miriam Leonard. (2006). *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 2005).
- Zipes, Jack. (2012). *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*. Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton

- University Press.
- . (2009). *Relentless Progress: The Reconfiguration of Children's Literature, Fairy Tales, and Storytelling*. London: Routledge.
- . (2006). *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre*. New York: Routledge.
- . (1994). *Fairy Tale as Myth, Myth as Fairy Tale*. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky.
- . (1983). *Fairy tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*. London: Heinemann.
- Zizek, Slavoj. (1991). *Looking Awry*. London: The MIT Press.
- Zuber, R. (1968). *Les "Belles infidèles" et la formation du goût classique*. Paris: Librairie Armand Colin.