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Exit Penelope
Towards a Lyric of Her Own in a Post-68 World

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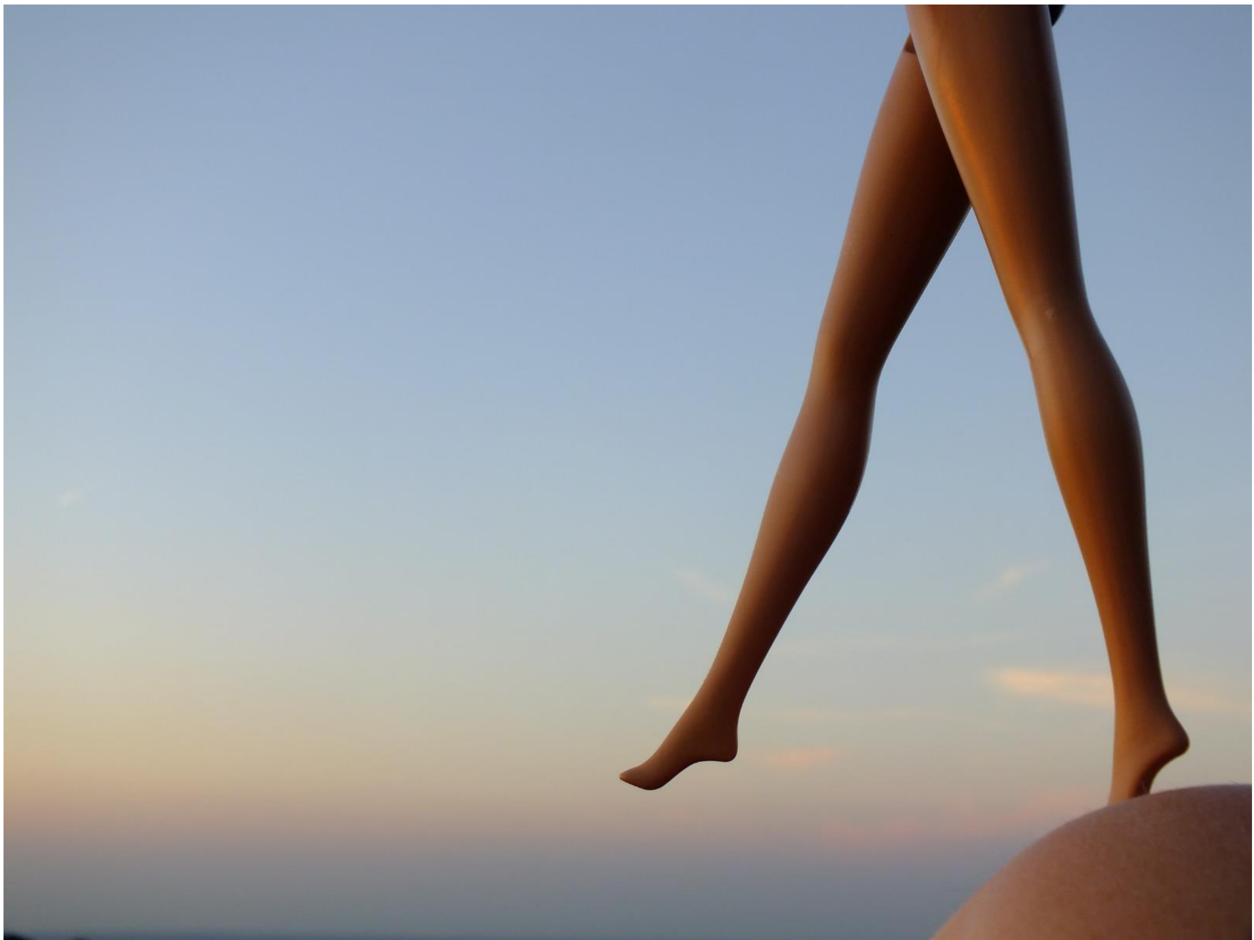
“It’s exhilarating to be alive in a time of awakening consciousness;
it can also be confusing, disorienting, and painful.”
Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision”



1. “Exit Penelope”: Project "Barbelope", by Marta Wanicka and Valerio Giuzio

Abstract

This dissertation, *Exit Penelope: Towards a Lyric of Her Own in a Post-68 World*, examines the literary rewritings of the Homeric character of Penelope produced in the long aftermath of the global revolutions of 1968. Situated at the intersections of genre theory, feminist criticism, and classical reception studies, this work engages the scholarly debate about how to responsibly reimagine classical women characters originating in Greek myth. While previous studies have focused on revisions of Penelope in various literary genres, this thesis scrutinizes a specific trend emerging from the 1970s to the present day that attributes to the heroine a book/length lyric of her own. Using a comparativist and multifocal socio-formalist approach, I take into consideration a corpus of long poetic texts that grant Penelope a protagonist role and deploy her themes as way to dramatize different facets of the experience of waiting, desiring, and grieving in the contemporary world. The findings of this thesis demonstrate that greater attention to the long poem sequence offers a balance between narrative development and lyrical meditation in ways that help us trouble a binary form of representing the heroine as a stand-in either for the Good Waiting Woman archetype or as an underrecognized feminist trailblazer, allowing a more nuanced exploration of the character's multivalent contradictions and its potential for dramatizing emerging configurations of subjectivity.

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Introduction

The reader might wonder what the word ‘exit’ is doing in the title of a dissertation on modern reconfigurations of Penelope,[1] as if indicating the stage directions of a play, or even the way out of a crowded theatre. What kind of scene is the Homeric heroine leaving? Where might she be headed, and who if anyone will she be bringing with her? Also, how might any of these decisions relate to the pre- and afterlives of 1968, a watershed moment in which the Ithacan queen might not be intuitively cast as a leading light of literary resistance to patriarchy and other systems of oppression? What I will suggest is that in contemporary revisions of Homer, Penelope has mostly left the epic scene and entered a new formal dimension, that of the lyric, which will grant her a new social and narratorial role, and, sometimes, even a degree of agency denied to her in antiquity. The term exit*,* therefore, also conveys a kind of dramatic hope, that Penelope leave behind imaginative constrictions and become a full subject in song, a crafter of her own literary universe.

This thesis is inspired by another act of epic Penelopean quitting coming to us from the European sphere of Homeric literary afterlives. The idea is drawn from a powerful scene in the first book of the *Odyssey* by Nikos Kazantzakis, a towering 20th century Greek thinker, writer, and translator.[2] Fruit of a twelve-year labor,[3] the poem gets finally published in 1938, having been “awaited with intense anticipation” and subsequently received “with confused bewilderment”.[4] An “eclectic revision” of the Homeric epic,[5] the new *Odyssey* retains the traditional genre of its forefather while re-envisioning its mythological hero in line with the horizon of expectations of a modern European subjectivity negotiating its own *zeitgeist*.

The new epic picks off almost from the end of the ancient one:

> Σαν πια ποθέρισε τους γαύρους νιους μες στις φαρδιές αυλές του,
> το καταχόρταστο ανακρέμασε δοξάρι του ο Δυσσέας

[1] On the term “reconfigurations” as applied to feminist revisionist mythmaking, see Ute Heidmann, ‘Tourner Les Figures Mythiques Vers “l’ouvert Inconnu”’, in *Figures Mythiques Féminines à l’époque Contemporaine: Reconfigurations et Décentrements*, ed. Sylvie Humbert-Mougin (Paris: Kimé, 2024), 251-271.
[2] Νίκος Καζαντζάκης, *Οδύσεια [1938]* (Αθήνα: Διόπτρα, 2022). Kazantzakis spells his *Odyssey* with one s, probably to differentiate it from the ancient one, something that his translator in English (or in French or Italian) cannot do, since it would change the pronunciation from [s] to [z].
[3] As we read in Kimon Friar’s introduction to his translation of the Kazantzakian *epos*, the composition of the epic lasted “twelve years since 1925 when he [Kazantzakis] had worked and reworked through seven complex versions of what he hoped would be the final and best summation of his life and thought”: Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, trans. Kimon Friar (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1958), 6.
[4] Kazantzakis, 6.
[5] Martha Klironomos, ‘Nikos Kazantzakis’ *Odysseia*: The Epic Sequel in Modern Greek Poetry and Classical Reception’, *Brill’s Companion to Prequels, Sequels, and Retellings of Classical Epic*, April 2018, 190.

και διάβη στο θερμό λουτρό, το μέγα του κορμί να πλύνει (1.1-3)

And when in his wide courtyards Odysseus had cut down
the insolent youths, he hung on high his sated bow
and strode to the warm bath to cleanse his bloodstained body (1.1-3)

Early on in the first book, loyalty to the Homeric source prevails: we catch our first glimpse of the ancient hero while he is still "bloodstained" (v. 3), having returned to Ithaca, and succeeded in taking revenge for his kingdom, killing all of "the insolent youths" (v. 2), his wife's suitors. It is only when Kazantzakis decides to alter the crucial scene of the long-awaited reencounter between Odysseus and his wife in *Odyssey* 23 – a Homeric moment usually considered "the most elaborate of a whole series" of recognitions –[6] that the poem announces its status as a sequel. Let us recall that Homer's Penelope, upon entering the hall

ἡ δ᾽ ἄνεω δὴν ἧστο, τάφος δέ οἱ ἦτορ ἵκανεν·
ὄψει δ᾽ ἄλλοτε μέν μιν ἐνωπαδίως ἐσίδεσκεν,
ἄλλοτε δ᾽ ἀγνώσασκε κακὰ χροῒ εἵματ᾽ ἔχοντα

She sat a long time in silence, and her heart was wondering.
Sometimes she would look at him, with her eyes full upon him,
and again would fail to know him in the foul clothing he wore (*Od.*23.93-95).[7]

Penelope beholds Odysseus while sitting (ἧστο) in silence ("ἄνεω") for the first few minutes; the emotional shock is palpable ("τάφος δέ οἱ ἦτορ ἵκανεν"),[8] and the dilemma is wrenching: will she recognize her husband?

Reimagining the scene, Kazantzakis will erase the suspense and ambiguity found in Homer. His Penelope sits "by the throne in pallid, speechless dread";[9] she turns "to look, and her knees shook with fright", and thinks: "[t]hat's not the man I've awaited year on year, O Gods, / this forty-footed dragon that stalks my quaking house!".[10] Her entire universe is shaken to the core by the vision of the man she has longed for so long, her terror transforming him into a ghastly monster, a "forty-footed dragon". Likewise, Odysseus, who "quickly sensed the obscure dread of his poor

[6] Chris Emlyn-Jones, 'The Reunion of Penelope and Odysseus', *Greece & Rome* 31, no. 1 (1984): 6.
[7] For the ancient Greek text, I always cite from the Loeb edition. In this case: Homer, *Odyssey. Books 13-24*, ed. Dimock, George E., trans. Murray, Augustus T., vol. II, Loeb Classical Library 105 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 390-391. For the English translation, I always cite from Richmond Lattimore's, if not differently specified: Richmond Lattimore, trans., *The Odyssey of Homer [1965]*, Adobe Digital Edition (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009).
[8] In the case of Penelope, the Homeric text is very precise as to the direction/destination of her amazement (τάφος): it reaches (ἵκανεν) her heart (ἦτορ), while in other occurrences (*Od.*21.122; 24.441), τάφος δ᾽ ἕλε πάντας: "amazement grasped them all" [who were present]", as a general feeling, scattered in the whole of the body.
[9] Kazantzakis, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, 66.
[10] *Ivi*, 67.

wife" tries to remind himself that the woman in front of him is the one he has been pining for through his endless voyaging, "but still his heart leapt *not* in his wild chest".[11] Not only is he not moved; watching her "still tangled" in the suitors' "naked forms", "his eyes glazed, / almost in slaughter's seething wrath he might have pierced her through"![12]

With this single brutal thought, this illustrious sequel eviscerates the canonical reunion scene between husband and wife before it even starts. There will be no cunning tests staged by the ever-skeptical Penelope; the man she has in front of her is Odysseus, there is no doubt about that, but a reign of disappointment is all that hangs over this famed re-encounter. In his translation of the work, Friar himself is shocked by the absence of reunion and reconciliation in the scene's outcome. When, in a letter of his to Kazantzakis, he objects to the complete ignorance the new hero demonstrates towards his wife, the author cheekily agrees with him on the matter and even proposes that the translator add "a scene between them".[13] Considering Kazantzakis' literary prototypes, it is not difficult to trace the origin of his Odysseus' disillusion with his *nostos*.[14] Drawing on the Ulysses penned by Dante (*Inf*. XXVI), and later echoed in Tennyson's "Ulysses", Kazantzakis portrays a hero who burns with the same "ardore" ("longing") for new adventures and knowledge, wanting to "drink life to the less".[15] As for the *Inferno*'s "love" that "would have made Penelope glad", we find it waning over time: if in Dante it is no longer enough to keep Odysseus at home, and in Tennyson it goes unmentioned, in Kazantzakis its ruthless snuffing out gives way to troubling forebodings of a possible femicide.

While this new Odysseus' abrasive reaction to the *nostos* is not entirely original, what is really astonishing about this re-writing, is Penelope's response to the sight of her husband. Her initial terror and repulsion do not at any point evolve into warm emotions of love and tenderness, as they do in the Homeric source. The couple never reaches the ὁμοφροσύνη, the unity of mind and feeling

[11] Kazantzakis, 67. My emphasis.
[12] *Ibidem*.
[13] Kimon Friar, 'A Unique Collaboration: Translating *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*', *Journal of Modern Literature* 2, no. 2 (October 1971): 232. It goes without saying that Friar never added the proposed scene.
[14] *Cf*. Emmanuel Hatzantonis, 'Captain Sole: Don Quijote's After-Image in Kazantzakis' *Odyssey*', *Hispania* 46, no. 2 (1963), 285: "This latest Odysseus is, in fact, closer to Dante's and Tennyson's Ulysses than to Homer's Ithacan"; C. N. Stavrou, 'The Limits of the Possible: Nikos Kazantzakis's Arduous Odyssey', *Southwest Review* 57, no. 1 (1972), 61: "More in line with the characterization of Dante and Tennyson, Kazantzakis, unlike Homer, makes his World-Wanderer scorn domestic pleasures and comforts of the hearth as one more temptation that must be undergone". I have not found any evidence that Kazantzakis had read Pascoli's Odyssean-themed poems, such as "Il sonno di Odisseo" and "L'ultimo viaggio di Ulisse" from the *Poemi Conviviali* (1904) and "Il ritorno" from *Odi e inni* (1906).
[15] *Inf*.XXVI.97; Alfred Tennyson, "Ulysses", v. 7, respectively. The entire *Divine Comedy* can also be found online, as well as all of Dante's works, in the site prepared by Società Dantesca: Dante Online, Commedia ed. Petrocchi.

that was characteristic of them in Homer. What is even more unsettling, however, is that Kazantzakis' revisionist hammer blows are not limited to the couple's reciprocal rejection of each other, for he also stages a novel and idiosyncratic triangle when, in Canto 3, Odysseus leaves Ithaca to embark on his new adventures in the Mediterranean of the twentieth century. No sooner has he set off that he dreams of another woman, Helen of Troy, envisioning her as a possible kindred soul who, in contrast to what he pictures Penelope as, "cannot bear this life" in Sparta, because she is not made "for solitude and household cares".[16] Imagining Helen in the grips of menial domestic tasks and dying of boredom, Odysseus decides to head to Menelaus' reign and abduct his wife. Notably, though, unlike Paris, he does not want Helen as a new wife:

> he had never longed to embrace lascivious Helen,
> for this seductress drew him far from carnal wars
> to the high valor of the mind, the peaks of passion.[17]

Penelope and Helen; Helen and Penelope: that the two women are seen as two sides of the same coin is as old as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.[18] So similar and yet so different, they have long been evoked to reinforce gender archetypes, particularly by being enlisted to give mythological justification to the virgin/whore binary sustaining the Western patriarchal imaginary. Indeed, due to the long endurance of the Helen-whore paradigm, it is arguably the knowledge of what can happen when a woman surrenders to one of her suitors that single-handedly saves not only the purity of Penelope's *kleos,* but also all of humanity from another catastrophic war.[19] The innovative element that Kazantzakis adds to the juxtaposition of the two women consists in turning Helen into a co-captain and the true ὁμόφρων of the new Odysseus. If for the Homeric hero-couple the goal of life is *nostos*, seen as comprising Ithaca, family, and kingdom, what drives its Kazantzakian counterpart is a notion of freedom configured as continuous voyage and resistance to whatever can keep a human captive, literally or metaphorically. Accordingly, if we stick to

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[16] Kazantzakis, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, 180.
[17] *Ivi*, 196.
[18] *Cf.* Rachel H. Lesser, 'Female Ethics and Epic Rivalry: Helen in the *Iliad* and Penelope in the *Odyssey*', *American Journal of Philology* 140, no. 2 (2019), 190: "Penelope and the Iliadic Helen are put into an intertextual dialogue as part of an epic rivalry between *Odyssey* and *Iliad* traditions, and as a female counterpart to the competing heroisms of Odysseus and Achilles. Through this intertextuality, the two heroines are constructed as ethical antitypes who are both key to their rival epic plots and ideologies: whereas Helen is an unfaithful, sight-endowed female agent who weaves war and indiscriminate suffering, Penelope is a faithful, thoughtful wife who more passively preserves Odysseus' family and authority". See also Giorgio Ieranò, *Elena e Penelope: Infedeltà e Matrimonio* (Torino: Einaudi, 2021).
[19] *Od*.23.218-224 has usually been read as Penelope's defence of her cousin. In the passage she claims that a god pushed Helen towards such an illogical act (ἔργον ἀεικές), sent her a folly (ἄτην); had she known what would have followed, not even Helen would have gone with a foreign man.

interpretations of Penelope as a stand-in for home, continuity and roots, and Helen as the symbol of change, movement, and border-crossing, we may begin to understand Kazantzakis' choice to direct his hero towards Sparta to team up with what a supposedly more congenial travelling and spiritual companion.

But while Odysseus and Helen continue their voyages on the high seas of the modern epic, the slighted Penelope *exits* the 'noble' genre, stumbling off-stage. I like to imagine this as the moment in which, perhaps a bit awkwardly at first, the heroine begins to search for a new literary vocation, possibly one that is better suited to her opaque sense of self, and more in tune with the changing expectation of her readers throughout the social upheavals to come. During the second half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, as we will have the chance to verify ahead in the *corpus* of texts assembled, Penelope will first timidly enter and then gradually consolidate her place on the lyric scene as an undeniable protagonist.

In current discourses on the reception of myths, it has become common practice to mine female literary characters born in the epic tradition for their potential to convey social messages resonating with the concern and sensibilities of readers in the present, especially in terms relating to the question of women's liberation. In the case of Penelope, this kind of gender-based reading usually begins by invoking a received notion of the archetype of the Good, Faithful woman in order to then stake out a revisionist claim that attempts to subvert or mitigate the encrustations of common sense attached to the Homeric figure. This re-imagination of the Ithacan queen can often be seen as proceeding through a twofold process: first, by making a case that Penelope either was or was not a symbol of silence and subordination in the epic tradition; and then, if the 'silencing argument' is confirmed, as it often is, finding a way to exceed the Homeric paradigm and imbue the character with newfound voice of empowerment. Nevertheless, inspired by Kazantzakis' representation of a vivid, recalcitrant Penelope that works *through* her archetypical figure, rather than simply *against* or *beyond* it, my engagement with the reception of the heroine starts from the premise that the tension between the source myth (which goes beyond its Homeric version) and the socio-formal innovation cannot simply be resolved or surpassed, or at least not at the cost of creating characters so flat – such as most of the "best-selling muses" currently trading as the hottest of commodities

on the global book market –[20] that the entire endeavor of appealing to myth in the first place is called into question on both aesthetic and ethical-political grounds.

To be sure, this dissertation is far from an attempt to reject or downplay feminist approaches of Homeric re-writings. My reading of Penelope in Kazantzakis as a disillusioned, caustic Odysseus-repudiator is obviously indebted to oppositional metanarratives that have long worked to re-world Greek antiquity by decentering the perspective of the 'wily man'. Likewise, my hope that our heroine's emergent lyric self will enrich our interpretative possibilities is at its core animated by ongoing projects of women's liberation. Yet while I draw and build upon writers and theorists taking a clear stance of resistance to patriarchal imaginaries, I also believe that *how* we decide to center female characters imagined on the threshold of myth and modernity matters a great deal, especially when considering that figures like Penelope and Helen, just to name two, cannot be so easily reappropriated towards progressive ends given the millennia of semantic baggage they carry, as I have also personally attested in informal interactions with both scholars and ordinary people responding off-the-cuff to my choice of topic.[21]

My work on contemporary representations of Penelope engages a scholarly dialogue that brings together classical reception studies, comparative literature, genre theory, and feminist criticism. This rich and growing body of research focuses *inter alia* on the question of what it means to reprise ancient myths as a way of illuminating the gender-related contradictions and possibilities of our time. It pays special attention to the affordances, but also the many pitfalls, of traversing vast temporal, geographic, and cultural distances in a bid to shed light on the continuities and discontinuities between the literary mediations of the present and those considered foundational to our understanding of the world and our place in it. Illuminated by our opening depiction of Penelope's spectacular failure at reuniting with Odysseus, I am particularly interested in the crucial moment of the *nostos* and in eliciting the question of what happens when its Homeric coordinates are troubled or short-circuited. What new plots are generated in this process, and what new

[20] "Best-selling Muses" was the name of an international conference organized in Rome on the 26th and 27th of October 2023, whose focus were precisely best-selling contemporary feminist and queer revisions of ancient Greek and Roman myth: Best-selling Muses Conference at KNIR.

[21] Walking around Bologna during winter 2022, I bumped into a middle-aged couple in via Santo Stefano. The man was saying out aloud "Penelope, Penelope" calling their dog. I was astonished: I had never heard of a dog named Penelope in none of the countries I have lived. For obvious reasons, I could not help but reach out to them and ask how come they had chosen this name for their dog. They both smiled and said "perché è silenziosa e obediente, non fa mai nulla di male" ("because she is silent and obedient, and she never does something wrong"). I loved this moment, because it was a small confirmation of the work that still needs to be done on the figure of Penelope.

alternate realities can be posited? What modes of character development can we expect, and, in turn, what kind of relational subjectivities do these bring into being?

The Penelopean figures I discuss all build upon the polysemous act of exiting evoked by our reading of Kazantzakis's *Odyssey*: they are all tales involving a significant reimagination of Penelope's most static behavioral and affective features (e.g. waiting, weaving, scheming); they all involve a self-reflexive formal engagement with the traditional epic genre as a precondition of innovation; they respond to changing relations between men and women in productive tension with feminist discourses; and, lastly, they open up significant new vistas on the reception of the Ithacan queen that enrich our grammar of critical engagement with Greek antiquity.

In mediating the connections between ancient past and modernity, *Exit Penelope* commits to a model of literary criticism understood as an approach to cultural texts whereby "the literary and social forms come into contact and affect one another, without presuming that one is the ground or cause of the other".[22] Using Caroline Levine's influential socio-formal framework as general guide, I will chart contemporary expressions of Penelopean forms, framing them as "*containing*, *plural*, *overlapping*, *portable* and *situated*".[23] Following this blueprint, I will begin by surveying the fields of Homeric criticism and classical reception studies that focus on Penelope, noting the significant strides that have been made over the past fifty years in addressing the imbalances of critical attention afforded to the afterlives of Homeric heroes at the expense of heroines, while also positing that these discrepancies have not been yet overcome.

Here I scrutinize how dominant strains of revisionist criticism have themselves operated as "*containing*" forms of Penelopean representation. I specifically identify a gap in the research with regard to book-length lyrical representations of the heroine, arguing that an inclusion of these extended poetic spaces of meditative development gives us a fuller mapping of current Penelopean universes. Secondly, I locate these productions as historically "*situated*" in the decades bookending the global social revolutions of 1968, showing how literary and critical revisions of the Ithacan queen took off at a time in which second wave feminism articulated itself in direct opposition to the Good Woman archetype. Lastly, in the rest of the introductory chapter I lay out the possibilities offered by a mode of lyric theory expanded through comparative and intermedial

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[22] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 44.
[23] *Ivi*, 24.

connections to instantiate "*plural*, *overlapping*, and *portable*" Penelopean forms of criticism, and introduce a *corpus* of texts that will illuminate a cluster of individual and collective challenges requiring our heroine to venture into uncharted waters of contemplative action.

I. Brief history of Penelopean Studies: Centripetal and Centrifugal

The poetic traditions of classical influence focused entirely on Odysseus and sidelining or ignoring Penelope (from Dante to Tennyson, Pascoli, and Kazantzakis, to name a few),[24] has not always escaped the vigil eye of literary critics. Indeed, when in 1954 William B. Stanford publishes *The Ulysses Theme: A Study on the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero*, he remarks on the sharp contrast between the protagonist of these post-classical versions and that of Homer's text:

> it can hardly be too much emphasized that figures like Dante's doomed seeker after forbidden knowledge and Tennyson's Byronic victim of wanderlust are fundamentally different from Homer's Odysseus. They are outward bound, centrifugal, while in the *Odyssey* the force of Odysseus's heart and mind is essentially homeward bound, centripetal, towards Ithaca and Penelope.[25]

Centrifugal and centripetal are two adjectives which also concisely describe the approaches to our heroine's place in the cosmos during the last quarter of the 20th century leading up to the present. She, too, we may say, has been blown in and out of "Odysseus's heart", and, consequently, from the heart of male-centric criticism. The first systematic, extensive work on Penelope's myth arrives in 1975, twenty years after Stanford's volume on Odysseus, and it is a thesis dissertation written by Marie-Madeleine Mactoux, entitled *Pénélope. Légende et mythe*.[26] During her research, Mactoux discovers pieces and variations of the Penelopean story found in ancient Greek and Roman works and art produced after Homer. Inspired by Pausanias, Mactoux starts her *periegesis* in Penelope's mythical 'prehistory' (if we consider Homer mythical history), to the origins in

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[24] Another important addition in this trend is that of Gerhart Hauptmann's theatre play *Der Bogen Des Odysseus* (*The bow of Odysseus*), where again Penelope is absent: Gerhart Hauptmann, *Der Bogen Des Odysseus* (Berlin: S. Ficher Verlag, 1914). For the English translation, see Gerhart Hauptmann, *The Dramatic Works of Gerhart Hauptmann*, vol. 7 (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1917). *Cf.* William B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* (Blackwell, 1954), 195.

[25] Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme*, 89.

[26] Marie-Madeleine Mactoux, 'Pénélope. Légende et mythe' (PhD, Université de Franche-Comté, 1975). A look in Mactoux's bibliography can confirm this point, which is also stated by the same author in her introduction. She cites another bachelor's thesis on Penelope, which she admits that she did not have the chance to consult: M. Th. Suttor, 'La Légende de Pénélope' (Bachelor's, Université de Liège, 1942). Mactoux did of course have at her disposition some important articles to consult regarding Penelope's role in the *Odyssey*: see Mactoux, 'Pénélope. Légende et mythe', 251.

Sparta and the sacred legends of her paternal family, providing the heroine with her own *nostos*.[27] It does not take long for the author to realize that Penelope's profile as handed down to the 20th century does not descend directly from archaic Greek legends, nor can it be traced directly to Homer (which already present substantial differences between them). Rather, it is the child of Roman tradition:

> grande a été notre surprise de nous apercevoir que, probablement sous l'influence d'une littérature postérieure, on avait fini par donner à l'héroïne, chez Homère, un visage qui n'était pas le sien. Sans les élégiaques latins le personnage de l'*Odyssée* ne serait pas devenu cette femme fidèle à la conduite proverbiale.
>
> we were really surprised to find out that, probably under the influence of a later literature, the heroine's portrait in Homer had been depicted in terms other than its own. Without the Latin elegiac poets, the character of the *Odyssey* would not have become that faithful woman of legendary behavior.[28]

Mactoux could also have avoided that "probablement": the Homeric text sees its *editio princeps* in Florence in 1488,[29] while the epics reach larger modern European audiences through translation only during the 16th century.[30] Thus, Homeric Penelope presents neither the very first, nor certainly the last model of reading the mythical heroine by translators, critics, and readers. She arrives filtered through the lens of Latin poets, transformed in "a Roman wife of the Augustan Age".[31]

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[27] Mactoux's starting point is, indeed, a passage from Pausanias' *Description of Greece*, where "à propos de Sparte, [il] raconte le mariage de Pénélope et d'Ulysse en des termes inconnus de l'*Odyssée*, et selon un schéma qui évoque un modèle mythique largement répandu dans la mythologie grecque" ("regarding Sparta, he narrates the marriage of Penelope and Ulysses in ways unknown from the *Odyssey*, and following a scheme that recalls a mythic model which was widespread in Greek mythology"): Mactoux, 'Pénélope. Légende et mythe', chap. Introduction, 1. All translations from Mactoux's text are mine. Penelope's prehistory will be frequently remembered in contemporary rewritings of her story, among which in Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad* (Edinburgh, U.K.: Canongate, 2005).

[28] *Ibidem*. Mactoux returns to the point of Penelope's fidelity: "Sa fidélité nous a paru au contraire un trait surajouté à l'œuvre homérique comme si on avait voulu faire entrer l'histoire de la reine d'Ithaque dans un schéma connu" ("on the contrary, her fidelity seemed an added trait in the Homeric text, as if we had wanted to place the story of the Ithacan queen in a known scheme"), *Ivi*, 197. Two decades later, Katie Gilchrist will reach very similar conclusions in her own thesis on the Penelopean reception in ancient Greek and Roman literature: Katie E. Gilchrist, 'Penelope: A Study in the Manipulation of Myth' (PhD Thesis, Oxford University, 1997).

[29] Alice Schreyer et al., eds., *Homer in Print: A Catalogue of the Bibliotheca Homerica Langiana at the University of Chicago Library* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Library, 2013).

[30] There are multiple digitalized projects on the first Homer in the vernacular in various European languages. See for instance: Translating Homer from papyri.

[31] William Young Sellar, *The Roman Poets of the Augustan Age: Horace and the Elegiac Poets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 335. Also cited in Albert R. Baca, 'Ovid's Claim to Originality and *Heroides* 1', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 100 (1969): 6.

Among her many discoveries, Mactoux emphasizes another Penelopean peculiarity, namely the ambiguity of the heroine's character *in* the Homeric text.[32] The motif of the 'ambiguous Penelope' will resurface fifteen years later. With Marilyn Katz's *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the* Odyssey,[33] where we get the first published book focused entirely on Penelope and specifically on her role in the *Odyssey*. Exploring Homer's inconsistencies through a neoanalytic lens, Katz discovers a multilayered heroine embedded in an indeterminate plot and perpetually at risk of becoming a Clytemnestra. According to the scholar, everything about Penelope is ambiguous: from her sociological status, to her *kleos* (linked to that of Odysseus), and her mysterious prayer to Artemis in Book 19 where she wishes her own death.[34] But – and Katz insists on this point – her ambiguity is "a narrative device analogous to the trope of disguise" employed by Odysseus, and as such it "*should be read not from a psychological point of view*, as

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[32] Mactoux, 'Pénélope. Légende et mythe', 197: "Homère n'a pu être le créateur d'une héroïne aussi complexe alors que la poésie épique, par nature, peint des caractères simples. Il l'a trouvée dans une tradition antérieure, chargée d'un passé si lourd qu'il n'a pu complètement l'éliminer. La genèse de l'*Odyssée* a été extrêmement longue et il est incontestable que s'y mêlent des traditions folkloriques dont la diversité peut expliquer certaines incohérences" ("Homer could not have been the creator of such a complex heroine since epic poetry, by nature, depicts simple personalities. He found her in an earlier tradition, charged with such a heavy pass that he was not able to eliminate it completely. The genesis of the *Odyssey* was extremely long, and it is unquestionable that it is mixed with folkloric traditions whose diversity can explain certain incoherences"). The concept of Homer's "simple characters" is already found in Bruno Snell's idea of Homer's world as primitive compared to the 5th century tragedy and philosophy: Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind: Greek Origins of the European Thought*, trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), chap. 1. For the original German version, see Bruno Snell, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes: Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denkens bei den Griechen [1946]*, 9th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).

[33] Marilyn A. Katz, *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the* Odyssey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991). By the time Katz publishes her book, apart from Mactoux's dissertation, she has at her disposition important works that shed light on the heroine's character in the epic. See *inter alia* John H. Jr. Finley, *Homer's* Odyssey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Helene P. Foley, '"Reverse Similes" and Sex Roles in the *Odyssey*', *Arethusa* 11, no. 1/2 (1978): 7-26; Emlyn-Jones, 'The Reunion of Penelope and Odysseus'; Sheila Murnaghan, *Disguise and Recognition in the* Odyssey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Sheila Murnaghan, 'Penelope's Agnoia: Knowledge, Power, and Gender in the *Odyssey* [1987]', in *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Homer's Odyssey*, ed. Lillian E. Doherty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 231-244; Nancy Felson-Rubin, 'Penelope's Perspective: From Character to Plot', in *Homer, Beyond Oral Poetry: Recent Trends in Homeric Interpretation*, ed. Jan Maarten Bremer, Irene J. F. de Jong, and J. Kalff (Amsterdam: B. R. Gruener, 1987), 61-83; John J. Winkler, 'Penelope's Cunning and Homer's', in *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece*, by John J. Winkler, The New Ancient World (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990).

[34] Katz, *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the* Odyssey, 149: "Even Penelope's striking prayer to Artemis for a quick and painless death (20.62-90) is ambiguous, since the wish to maintain virginity forever and the sorrow at its impending loss is a regular prelude to marriage for women in archaic poetry", citing James Redfield, 'Notes on the Greek Wedding', *Arethusa* 15, no. 1/2 (1982): 190-191. But the author quickly adds, "[h]ere, Penelope longs to assimilate herself to the daughters of Pandareus who, in a myth otherwise unknown to us, are snatched away by the storm winds on the eve of their marriage and given over to a life of immortality and sterility", *ibidem*. Thus, how much ambiguity is there in this prayer? Penelope's deployment of the Pandareids' mythical *exemplum* was later analyzed in Olga Levaniouk, 'Penelope and the Pandareids', *Phoenix* 62, no. 1/2 (2008): 5-38.

reflecting certain truths about Penelope's character*, but from a narratological one*, as embodying aspects of the poem's narrative structure".[35]

With these two works on Penelope, a first cycle of studies on the heroine is launched: Maxtoux's work could be defined as centrifugal, as she searches for a tradition outside of Homer, collecting such diverse material as fragments from tragedies to figurative art, while Katz's movement is centripetal, delving into deep into the fissures of the Odyssean plot. This double approach endures throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, a period which saw a prolific output in Penelopean studies. Only three years after Katz's volume, Nancy Felson-Rubin's *Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics* traces the figure of an 'enigmatic' Penelope.[36] Building out from her own work on the *Odyssey*'s narrative initiated during the previous decade,[37] Felson-Rubin emphasizes how the epic is a text constructed *from* and *in* performance, always conserving the traces of the singer's interaction with a live audience. She discerns general plot-types (ex. Returns) and more specific plots (ex. The Return of Odysseus), examining Penelope's position in each of these scenarios.[38] Most importantly for our case, Felson-Rubin is the first to gather all of Penelope's "character indicators", which has been laying "isolated and dispersed" in the Homeric text, organizing each of her chapters based on tropes, namely "Weaver" (chap. 2), "Wife" (chap. 3), "Mother" (chap. 4), "Heroine" (chap. 5) and "Siren" (chap. 6) .[39] It is here, then, that we glimpse

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[35] Katz, *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the* Odyssey, 159, 186-187. My emphasis. The comment on the psychological readings is apparently directed to the supporters of an intuitive Penelope: see *inter alia* Philip Whaley Harsh, 'Penelope and Odysseus in *Odyssey* XIX', *The American Journal of Philology* 71, no. 1 (1950): 1-21; George Devereux, 'Penelope's Character', *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (July 1957): 378-386; Anne Amory, 'The Reunion of Odysseus and Penelope', in *Essays on the* Odyssey, ed. Charles H. Taylor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 100-121.
[36] Nancy Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics [1994]*, Online (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2022). For the characterization of the heroine as 'enigmatic', see Felson-Rubin, 6, 53: "Penelope is the most enigmatic character in the *Odyssey*", "the enigmatic Penelope".
[37] I refer to the aforementioned chapter, which was later also included in a volume edited by Seth L. Schein: Felson-Rubin, 'Penelope's Perspective: From Character to Plot'; Nancy Felson-Rubin, 'Penelope's Perspective: Character from Plot', in *Reading the* Odyssey*: Selected Interpretive Essays*, ed. Seth L. Schein (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 163-183.
[38] Felson-Rubin reads 'plot' with Peter Brooks, as "occurring in the space between the text and the audience or reader": Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics [1994]*, 11. *Cf.* Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1984).
[39] Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics [1994]*, 296. Regarding the 'character indicators', the author follows Rimmon Kenan's analysis in Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1983).

the outlines of a truly systematic depiction of the heroine's multifaceted nature as represented in the *Odyssey*.[40]

In the same year but back in Europe, Homer's Penelope is granted another important publication: *Le chant de Penelope: Poétique du tissage féminin dans l'*Odyssée (*Penelope's Song: Poetics of the feminine weaving in the* Odyssey) by Ioanna Papadopoulou-Belmehdi, with an introduction written by Nicole Loraux, who had previously supervised the author's doctorate thesis.[41] As an expert in the anthropological functions of female weaving in ancient Greece,[42] the author offers a revolutionary reading of Penelope's most famous gambit, the continuous raveling and unraveling of Laertes' shroud. Contrary to traditional interpretations which see in the shroud the affirmation of Penelope's fidelity to her husband, Papadopoulou-Belmehdi connects the heroine's endeavor to the weaving activities of virgins protected by goddess Athena in preparation for their upcoming marriage.[43] Does this mean that Penelope is about to accept the marriage proposal of one of the suitors? For the author, Penelope's endless endeavor demonstrates a degree of female agency: "le mouvement du tissage et de l'analyse correspond au pouvoir de la femme, soit de bloquer tout échange, soit de promouvoir l'union familiale et sociale" ("the movement of weaving and of analysis correspond to the woman's power, whether it is to block an exchange from happening, or to promote family and social union").[44] Such is the symbolic power of Penelope's weaving that Papadopoulou-Belmehdi sets aside the heroine's mortality and assimilates her to female divinities: with her trick, Ithaca is transformed to an "île de l'oubli" ("island of

[40] Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics [1994]*, 297: "Like the ancient listeners, I attempt to make sense of Penelope's character by integrating all the 'character indicators' dispersed in the text into my *illusion* of her as a self. The sense I make *is* my illusion". In this specification, the author follows Roland Barthes and his distinction between 'figure' and 'person': Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974). For the original French version, see Roland Barthes, *S/Z: Essai*, Tel Quel (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970). In the decade to come, another important publication will contribute to the narratological readings of the heroine, inviting criticism and Homeric audience to reconsider, at last, the heroine's importance: Richard Heitman, *Taking Her Seriously: Penelope & the Plot of Homer's* Odyssey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).
[41] Ioanna Papadopoulou-Belmehdi, *Le chant de Pénélope: Poétique du tissage féminin dans l'*Odyssée (Paris: Belin, 1994).
[42] Ioanna Papadopoulou-Belmehdi, 'L'art de Pandora: La Mythologie Du Tissage En Grèce Ancienne' (PhD Thesis, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1992).
[43] Papadopoulou-Belmehdi, *Le chant de Pénélope*, 22.
[44] *Ivi*, 85. My translation. The author notes that in *Od*.2.105 ("νύκτας δ' *ἀλλύεσκεν*, ἐπεὶ δαΐδας παραθεῖτο", "but in the night she would have torches set by, and *undo* it", my emphasis) and again in v. 109 ("καὶ τήν γ' *ἀλλύουσαν* ἐφεύρομεν ἀγλαὸν ἱστόν", "and we found her in the act of *undoing* her glorious weaving", my emphasis) we have the first appearance of the verb 'ἀναλύω' (in Homer 'ἀλλύω'), 'to unloose', 'to undo', 'to dissolve', which later became the main term to explain the process of philosophical thinking as well as that of psychoanalysis. For the definition, see ἀναλύω.

forgetfulness"),[45] reminiscent of the atemporal, liminal places that are home to the Nymphs.[46] And though the island is stuck in Penelope's intentional limbo, on the verge of being forgotten by human memory, the heroine's own memory functions perfectly well thanks to her continuous exercise of the loom: she is like a female bard, only that her "chant" needs to conform to gendered social rules. Historical memory, alternative female song and atemporality: three key concepts of *Le chant de Pénélope* that will return in the rewritings included in this thesis.

Just a year after the important volumes on the Homeric Penelope by Felson-Rubin and Papadopoulou-Belmehdi, another work appears, this time on the figure of the heroine as manifested beyond the *Odyssey*. Following the centrifugal movement of Mactoux, Dene Grigar's doctorate thesis, *Penelopeia: The Making of Penelope in Homer's Story and Beyond*, is probably the first study on the reception of Penelope from the Middle Ages to the 20th century.[47] Both the time span and the range of aesthetic media taken into consideration are exceptionally vast: the scholar starts from Dante and Boccaccio, she then passes on to Claudio Monteverdi's opera and Angelica Kaufmann's paintings, eventually reaching the modernist works of James Joyce, Ezra Pound and Dorothy Parker, among many others. Grigar is well aware of the difficulties entailed in such an ambitious project, and warns the reader from the very beginning that her research does not include extensive close reading of the works treated; she instead maps out Penelopean pathways across the centuries, showing how particular historical moments either enabled a resurgence of emphasis on the heroine or, conversely, rendered her figurally dormant.[48] Despite the limitations

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[45] This is how Nicole Loraux calls Ithaca in the introduction of the book: Nicole Loraux, 'Préface', in *Le chant de Pénélope: Poétique du tissage féminin dans l'*Odyssée, by Ioanna Papadopoulou-Belmehdi (Paris: Belin, 1994), 13.

[46] We will see how throughout *Exit Penelope* the heroine resides in plenty new liminal places, where she can reflect, meditate, and express herself poetically.

[47] Dene Grigar, 'Penelopeia: The making of Penelope in Homer's story and beyond' (PhD, University of Texas at Dallas, 1995). The fact that the author does not use the term 'reception' should not come as a surprise, since it was not yet universally adopted for the popular field nowadays known 'classical reception studies'. Classics, classical traditions and Jauss' aesthetic of reception come to close contact with Charles Martindale's pioneering work in Charles Martindale, *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception* (Cambridge University Press, 1993). For an analysis of the change from 'classical traditions' to 'classical reception', see 'From the Classical Tradition to Reception Studies', in *Reception Studies*, by Lorna Hardwick and Lorna Hardwick, New Surveys in the Classics 33 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-11; as also the inauguration of the *Classical Receptions Journal* in 2009, which shows that the name begins to gain international recognition. On the vagueness of the term and of its application in this field, see Federico Condello, 'Dato un "classico", qualche conseguenza: appunti sulla paradossale diacronia della classical reception', in *Nuovi dialoghi sulle lingue e sul linguaggio*, ed. Nicola Grandi, Linguistica e Linguistiche 3 (Bologna: Patron Editore, 2013), 113-128.

[48] Grigar, 'Penelopeia', 8. A very similar approach will be the one of Aggela Kastrinaki in her new volume *Μίλα Πηνελόπη!* (*Speak Penelope!*), where the moments of attention or inattention to Penelope are linked to international waves of the feminist movement: Αγγέλα Καστρινάκη, *Μίλα, Πηνελόπη!* (Ηράκλειο: Πανεπιστημιακές Εκδόσεις Κρήτης, 2023).

of her analysis, Grigar provides us with a number of insights, particularly on Joyce, who is of particular importance for the writers included in this present thesis. About the most famous Irish Penelope of the 20th century, Grigar writes: “[w]hat is truly interesting about Joyce’s Molly is that we can see twenty-five hundred years’ worth of responses to Homer’s Penelope all come together simultaneously in this one episode”.[49] The claim may seem exaggerated, but, as the Penelopes of this thesis will prove, Molly did not simply gather all the previous commentaries on Homer within herself; she actually used them to create her own distinct Penelopean tradition.[50]

Throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium, important works on our heroine continued to be produced. In the multiauthor volume *The Distaff Side: Representing the Female in Homer’s* Odyssey,[51] Helene Foley returns to the heroine to examine her through Aristotle’s definition of a tragic character: Penelope has on her hands “[t]he central moral decision on which the action of the *Odyssey* turns”, and her “absence of critical knowledge of the circumstances” (that is, Odysseus’ whereabouts) puts her in a similar position as Oedipus in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannos*.[52] Foley notes that this is one of the few cases in Homer where a woman is saddled with such a momentous moral choice, and concludes that Penelope is granted this important role mainly because she “shares Odysseus’ values and is both constrained and willing in a situation of hopeless uncertainty to sacrifice her own needs for the benefit of others”; thus, “her female difference *contributes to rather than undermines* the social order”.[53] The couple’s shared values and their ὁμοφροσύνη (like-mindedness) are elaborated on in the next chapter of the volume, where Froma Zeitlin explores the issue of fidelity, the bed made out of the olive tree as σῆμα (sign) and Penelope’s agency in determining the terms of the ἀναγνώρισις (recognition).[54]

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[49] *Ivi*, 185.

[50] A comparative analysis between the Homeric and the Joycean Penelopes can be found in Lillian E. Doherty, ‘Joyce’s Penelope and Homer’s’, *Classical and Modern Literature*, 1990, 343-349. On the importance of Joyce’s Molly in the chain of Penelopean receptions, see also Lisa Kathleen Pike-Fiorindi, ‘Penelope Speaks: Making The Mythic Specific in The Works of Five Contemporary Caribbean and Italian Writers: Lorna Goodison, Juana Rosa Pita, Derek Walcott, Silvana La Spina and Luigi Malerba’ (PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, 2008), 2-6.

[51] Beth Cohen, ed., *The Distaff Side: Representing the Female in Homer’s* Odyssey (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[52] Helene P. Foley, ‘Penelope as a Moral Agent’, in *The Distaff Side: Representing the Female in Homer’s* Odyssey, ed. Beth Cohen (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 93-116.

[53] *Ivi*, 108. My emphasis.

[54] Froma I. Zeitlin, ‘Figuring Fidelity in Homer’s *Odyssey*’, in *The Distaff Side: Representing the Female in Homer’s Odyssey*, ed. Beth Cohen (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 117-152. The chapter was included also in Zeitlin’s own book, published some months after *The Distaff Side*: Froma I. Zeitlin, ‘Figuring Fidelity in Homer’s *Odyssey*’, in *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature*, by Froma I. Zeitlin, Women in Culture and Society (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 19-53.

The new millennium presents a special gift to our heroine: Barbara Clayton's *A Penelopean Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer's* Odyssey.[55] Like Papadopoulou-Belmehdi, Clayton also concentrates on Penelope's activity of weaving, but rather than emphasizing the hidden symbols behind it, the 'what(s)', she highlights the 'how': Penelope's weaving μῆτις is a poetic mode which shapes and authors the woman's creative identity and makes of her a potential female bard. As with most studies on Penelope from the 1970s and on, the author draws heavily on French feminism and especially on those writers who proposed a female *écriture de différence*, such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Though not evident from the title, in her last chapter the author departs from Homer – and from ancient literature in general – and presents some modern rewritings of Penelope. Clayton's preference for lyric poems among the variety of Penelopean material that she had at her disposition is of particular interest to this thesis: it is in this type of rewritings that Penelope can be mostly easily imagined as a bard, and where her discourse clashes most openly with phallogocentrist logics.

Clayton's simultaneous approach towards the Penelopean figure both *in* Homer and *beyond* ancient literature, in modern revisions (thus, both centripetal and centrifugal), is also adopted by Maria Raffaella Cornacchia, in *La traccia del modello: ricezione della figura di Penelope nella letteratura contemporanea* (*The Sign of the Model: Reception of Penelope's figure in contemporary literature*).[56] In what is probably the richest and most geo-temporally dialogic dissertation thesis on the Ithacan queen, Cornacchia begins by filling in the gaps in Penelopean criticism of the previous decades. In the first part of her work ("La Penelope dei filologi", "Penelope of the philologists"), the author returns to the German school of analysis to interface the incoherences of the Homeric text as we now know it, with the renowned ambivalences of the heroine's character, before shifting to oral studies to examine Penelope's formulaic epithets and her typical scenes. In the second part of the thesis, she focuses on the figure's translation *intra* and *inter artes*, in works of literature as well as paintings (eg. those of Alberto Savinio and Giorgio de Chirico) and films (eg. *Le Mépris* by Jean-Luc Godard).[57] Cornacchia agrees with Grigar on the

[55] Barbara Clayton, *A Penelopean Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer's* Odyssey (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).

[56] Maria Raffaella Cornacchia, 'La traccia del modello: ricezione della figura di Penelope nella letteratura contemporanea' (PhD Thesis, Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna, 2007).

[57] Godard's film of 1963, with a stunning Penelope played by Brigitte Bardot, is in itself a rewriting of Alberto Moravia's novel, *Il disprezzo* (*Contempt*): Alberto Moravia, *Contempt*, trans. Angus Davidson, Classics (New York: New York Review Books, 1999).For the original Italian , see Alberto Moravia, *Il disprezzo [1954]*, E-book (Milano:

vast archive of unstudied material, divvying it up into two broad 'categories' of rewritings: the first kind being defined by their engagement with a peculiar moment or element of the Penelopean myth (for example, her connection to ducks, through a probable etymology of her name), and the second by a specific focus on the gender dynamics of the figure. The author dedicates one part of her second chapter to address the entrance of Penelope's myth in mass literature. Here we find a heroine who, alongside a plethora of other mythical figures, is appropriated by cultural feminism within a contemporary literary market catering to popular and mid-cult tastes, a phenomenon lending credence to Francoise Heritier's suggestion that "le mythe ne parle pas de l'Histoire: il véhicule un message. Sa fonction est de *légitimer l'ordre social* existent" ("myth does not talk about History: it transfers a message. Its function is *to legitimize the* existent *social order*").[58] Though the books included in my *corpus* certainly bear a certain mix of ideologies – as all artistic works do, since they are created by situated subjects – the fact that they all belong to the genre of lyric poetry excludes them from the category of literature of mass consumption, though not necessarily evading the market logic underlying it.[59]

The boom of mythical revisions from the beginning of the 21st century to the present moment has naturally been accompanied by an exceptional amount of literary criticism focused on classical reception. However, contrary to the majority of other heroes and heroines who can boast multiple volumes of their transformations in prestigious publishing houses,[60] the majority of works on Penelope's reception are dissertations whose main focus are the 20th and 21st centuries. Among them, is one of my main interlocutors in this project: Victoria Reuter and her *Penelope Differently:*

Bompiani, 2017). The rather misogynistic aspect of the novel does not escape that of the Canadian classicist, translator and poet, Anne Carson. In her analysis of the novel and its cinematic adaptation, she notes how close is Moravia's depiction of women to that of the ancient Greeks: "by far the most convincingly antiquarian aspect of Moravia's novel is his idea of the female, as it is filtered to us through Riccardo – an idea that would have made sense to Homer and to Aristotle and to most Greek men in between: an idea of woman as a formless content that takes its form and activation from the male.[…] Woman is regarded here as *a creature whose boundaries are unstable, whose power to control them is inadequate*. Deformation attends her. She swells, she shrinks, she leaks, she is penetrated. Think of the female life cycle with its bloods, its pregnancies, its changes of shape. Think of the monsters of Greek myth, who are mostly women with deranged boundaries, like Skylla, Medusa, the Sirens, the Harpies, the Sphinx. Self-control is a virtue – physical, mental, and moral – that women do not possess", in Anne Carson, 'Contempts', *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 16, no. 3 (2009): 7.

[58] Françoise Héritier, *Masculin/Féminin* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1996), 218, cited in Cornacchia, 'La traccia del modello', 453.

[59] If anything, lyric poetry is nowadays considered *niche* literature, and, as such, it could be thought of as elitist.

[60] See, for example, the Routledge series on "Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World" (Routledge Series, Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World), or that of the Italian publishing house Marsilio, named "Variazioni sul mito" ("Variations on Myth", Marsilio, Grandi Classici, Variazioni sul mito).

Feminist Re-visions of the Myth.[61] With Reuter I share three authors in my corpus (Francisca Aguirre, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke and Gail Holst-Warhaft) besides drawing substantially on her analysis. This is why I have avoided returning to topics that have been more than sufficiently analyzed in *Penelope Differently*, such as the bond of reciprocal Penelopean translation that unites the friends and poets Anghelaki-Rooke and Holst-Warhaft.[62] As it is already obvious from her title, Reuter focuses on the feminist aspect of the rewritings, while my reading expands this approach to include a genre/gender focus with the aim of opening various unexplored vistas of creative adaptation.

The road I have taken for this thesis, following Penelope's exit from the epic and her emphatic entrance into the lyric genre, is a path already paved in broader terms by Mary Hartley Platt, in *Epic Reduction: Receptions of Homer and Virgil in Modern American Poetry*.[63] In her dissertation, Platt looks into an enormously vast corpus of North American poems who repropose Homeric and Virgilian characters, themes or scenes taken out of their traditional epic genre and re-located in a "space between genres": they are "not fully epic, nor wholly lyric; rather, they oscillate in a dynamic tension between the two poles, as expanded lyric, or distilled epic".[64] Building on this approach, I focus singularly on the character of Penelope. I believe that the corpus of lyric books that I propose reveals a heroine who is *both* a lyric 'I', "creating, clarifying or freeing the individual self", *as well as* an epic "self in the world",[65] "historically embedded, representative of [some of] the major concerns of the modern period".[66]

Last, but certainly not least in rounding up our survey, is the work of Aggela Kastrinaki's *Μίλα, Πηνελόπη! Λογοτεχνικές μεταμορφώσεις της μυθικής ηρωίδας στην Ελλάδα και τον Δυτικό κόσμο από τον 19ο αιώνα ως τις μέρες μας* (*Speak, Penelope! Literary metamorphoses of the mythical heroine in Greece and in the Western World from the 19th century to our times*).[67] At last, seventy years after Stanford's *The Ulysses Theme*, Penelope is granted a published volume dedicated to her reception in modern and contemporary literature. Kastrinaki, professor of modern Greek

[61] Victoria Reuter, 'Penelope Differently: Feminist Re-Visions of Myth' (PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 2014).
[62] See *Ivi*, chap. Poetry of/in Translation: Anghelaki-Rooke&Holst-Warhaft, 216-222.
[63] Mary Hartley Platt, 'Epic Reduction: Receptions of Homer and Virgil in Modern American Poetry' (PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 2014).
[64] *Ivi*, Platt, 20.
[65] I borrow the term from Platt (*ibidem*), who is borrowing it from Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Gender and Genre Anxiety: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and H. D. as Epic Poets', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5, no. 2 (1986): 207.
[66] Platt, 'Epic Reduction', 21.
[67] Καστρινάκη, *Μίλα, Πηνελόπη!*

literature at the University of Crete, embarks on a long voyage in the largely uncharted waters of Penelopean rewritings, a field which, as we saw in this brief history of Penelopean studies, had been mainly explored in individual dissertations rather than in encyclopedic compendium format. Starting from the end of the 19th century, the author follows the heroine's transformations reading them in parallel with the various waves of feminist movements, constructing what could be called a 'Penelopean history of western feminism'. It is to that history that we now turn.

II. Those "Dead Awaken": Second Wave Feminism, Classical Studies, and Revisionist Mythmaking

The fact that all of the major works of criticism focused on the figure of Penelope have been written from the 1970s and on is no coincidence. This scholarship arrives on the heels of the initially hodgepodge emergence of second wave feminism (at the time called "New Feminism") during the 1960s, and it is then sent with subsequent shockwaves through Western societies in the following decades in conjunction with major pacifist, antiracist, and anti-imperialist movements of the times.[68] Though often convening to espouse women's liberation, these mass social uprisings are mainly populated and organized by men. Legions of women *do* participate in them actively, yet they are not satisfied with the marginal role attributed to them:

> [sono] limitate a compiti "sussidiari" (dattilografare, fotocopiare, cucinare, pulire i locali, condividere il letto *ma non* le procedure di elaborazione e decisione politica, riservate ai "compagni" maschi).
>
> [they are] limited to "subsidiary" tasks (typing, making photocopies, cooking, cleaning the spaces, sharing the bed *but not* the elaborative procedures and the political decisions, which were reserved to the male "companions").[69]

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[68] It is on the 28th of August 1963, that Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his famous speech "I have a dream" in Washington. In the midst of the greater Cold War, The Vietnam war is ongoing, while one year before, in 1962, the world experiences the Cuban Missile Crisis as visceral threat of nuclear Armageddon.

[69] Franco Restaino, 'La differenza sessuale al centro della seconda ondata del femminismo', in *Le filosofie femministe: due secoli di battaglie teoriche e pratiche*, by Adriana Cavarero and Franco Restaino, Economica 113 (Milano: Mondadori, 2002), 32. My translation. *Cf.* Alix Kates Shulman, 'Sex and Power: Sexual Bases of Radical Feminism', *Signs* 5, no. 4 (1980), 592: "far from having felt freed by the so-called sexual revolution of the sixties, those young, dedicated women – many of whom had been politicized in the New Left – actually felt victimized by it. They complained that they were expected not only to type the speeches, stuff the envelopes, and prepare the food and coffee for the radical men they worked with, but to sleep with them besides, without making any demands in return. Their own feelings, their needs for affection, recognition, consideration, or commitment, did not count. If they did not comply, they were often made to feel like unattractive, unhip prudes who could readily be replaced. Sexual favors were often the price of political favor. Naturally, these women resented being used sexually, as they resented performing political labors without appreciation, and resented being relegated to doing what they called movement 'shitwork' – all by so-called radicals whose proclaimed purpose in life was to end oppression".

The women that participate in these movements are for the most part young, have access to higher education, or are gainfully employed. The major demands of the first wave of feminism – the right to vote and formal recognition of equal citizenship status – have been mostly satisfied, but women still feel that true gender equality is a mirage, even within progressive movements of the New Left. Thankfully, times are ripe for women to find companionship and solidarity among themselves. They also have the right books as guidance: Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe* (*The Second Sex*) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.[70] It is in these works that they find inspiration, through these pages that they understand the need to share private experiences and challenge sexual taboos.[71] As they transform the personal into political, they collectively go back and explore the roots of their bodies – many calling themselves radical feminists.

The notion of radicality is seen early on as being *embodied* not only as a site for reproductive and economic exploitation, but also through cultural expression. In the context of 1968 social revolutions, radical feminism aims to overturn the patriarchal system underpinning western civilization and its mythopoetic roots.[72] Hence, a renewed scrutiny of the field of classical studies. Within this and other fields of humanist education, women scholars use the tools at their disposition, including their knowledge of ancient Greek and Latin, to operate a *nostos* in their "mothers' gardens",[73] trying to understand their own historical moment through ancient and modern literature (intended in the broadest sense).

It is in this *zeitgeist* that influential works such as those of Marilyn Arthur and Sarah Pomeroy appear. In her article "Early Greece: The Origins of Western Attitude Toward Women", published in 1973, Arthur provides us a first panorama from Homer and Hesiod to 5th century Athens, with broad enough of a scope "to present an intelligible whole, and a picture which will not force us to choose whether women in ancient Greece were despised *or* revered, but will enable us to understand how they could seem to be *both* simultaneously".[74] Regarding Homer, the scholar goes as far as to claim that

[70] Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1949); Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963).
[71] Shulman, 'Sex and Power', 591-592.
[72] Exemplary to this regard will be the later book of the Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero, on the overturning of matriarchy in ancient Greece: Adriana Cavarero, *Il femminile negato: La radice greca della violenza occidentale [2007]* (Villa Verucchio (Rimini): Pazzini Editore, 2020).
[73] Alice Walker, 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens [1974]', in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, by Alice Walker (New York, NY: Open Road Integrated Media, 1983), 189-198.
[74] Marylin B. Arthur, 'Early Greece: The Origins of the Western Attitude Toward Women', *Arethusa* 6, no. 1 (1973): 7. My emphasis.

> *nowhere* in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* do we find any disparaging remarks about women's role, *nowhere* do we encounter the expressions of misogyny which appear so frequently in later Greek literature. […] The Homeric poet focuses *almost exclusively* on the positive side of the position of women; it emphasizes *women's inclusion in society as a whole*, rather than her exclusion from certain roles; it celebrates the importance of the functions that women do perform, instead of drawing attention to their handicaps or inabilities.[75]

After this seemingly romantic but adequately justified comment, the author does not fail to take note of some misogynistic undertones of the Homeric texts.[76] She also highlights the importance that the *Odyssey* attributes to the institution of marriage (especially in *Od*.6.182-185), remarking how well-known conservative positions against divorce and women's' emancipation, which were "glorified by the defenders of the traditional separation between the sexes" during the second half of the 20th century, make one of their first appearances in the Homeric text.[77] Still, Arthur insists, Homer is not like Hesiod: it is the latter who "makes a polar tension between male and female a primary fact of his cosmogony".[78] It is in Hesiod's *Works and Days* that Pandora enters the scene, with her ambiguous double nature, "both a great good and a great evil", simultaneously "a useful partner for men in the household" and potentially dangerous for the social order because of the "open or secret assertiveness of her own will".[79]

Most interestingly, Arthur notes that the difference in the depiction of women by Homer and Hesiod "continue[s] in evidence throughout the archaic and classical periods", crystallizing itself even more neat in lyric poetry travelling "between the aristocratic and the bourgeois poets".[80] While *eros* is a key theme for both groups, the aristocratic bards do *not* associate love with suffering and destruction;[81] even the famous Sapphic love is "*not* the stormy violence of that destructive *eros* which we encounter in other Greek poetry".[82] The centrality of romantic love may

[75] *Ivi*, Arthur, 13-14. My emphasis.
[76] The author mentions Hector's rebuke of Andromache in *Il*.6.431ff and Telemachus' of Penelope in *Od*.1.356-359, explaining that they are both moments where women "threaten to overstep the limits of their prerogatives as females": *Ibidem*. This awkward moment between mother and son in the *Odyssey* will be evoked by Mary Beard in more recent times as the "first recorded example of a man telling a woman to 'shut up'; telling her that her voice was not to be heard in public": Mary Beard, 'The Public Voice of Women [London Review of Books, 2013]', *Women's History Review* 24, no. 5 (2015): 809. Arthur misses *inter alia* what is considered to be the most misogynistic speech of the *Odyssey*, pronounced by Agamemnon in *Od*.11.432-434, 441-443), which is later taken up in: Murnaghan, 'Penelope's Agnoia: Knowledge, Power, and Gender in the *Odyssey* [1987]', 238-239.
[77] Arthur, 'Early Greece: The Origins of the Western Attitude Toward Women', 16.
[78] *Ivi*, 24.
[79] *Ivi*, 25.
[80] *Ivi*, 37.
[81] The author includes in this group "Alcaeus, Sappho, Ibycus and Anacreon" and later on she adds Alcman: *Ivi*, Arthur, 38, 41.
[82] *Ivi*, 40. My emphasis.

favor the aristocratic poets' depiction of women, but it does not come without political connotations: their poetry "is a kind of propaganda which associates peace and harmony between the classes and sexes with a period when the aristocratic monopoly of society assured the stability of values and customs".[83] On the other hand, the "bourgeois poets", who emerged co-extensively with the middle-class city-state, transfer to their poetry the anxieties of the political chaos and struggles in which they were immersed. While class struggles intensify, so do the sex ones: like Hesiod, "[b]ourgeois poetry both praises and condemns women".[84] Among this group of poets, Arthur cites a blatant example of misogynism, that of the iambic poet Semonides of Amorgos. In fr. 7, the poet proposes a long catalogue of women tracing their descendance to a series of animals, as well as the sea, or clay.[85] One woman is saved from denigration, namely the bee woman: "τὴν δ᾽ ἐκ μελίσσης· τήν τις εὐτυχεῖ λαβών" ("as for the one from the bee; happy the one who gets her", v. 83).[86]

The (ancient) Greek men's tendency to put women into fixed categories even when not animalizing them is clearly evoked in the title of Sarah Pomeroy's foundational book on the social history of classical antiquity, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves*.[87] In the first publication of the book in 1975 (note: same year as Mactoux's thesis on the myth of Penelope in ancient Greek and Roman literature and arts), the author explains her need to conduct such research with these words:

> This book was conceived when I asked myself what women were doing while men were active in all the areas traditionally emphasized by classical scholars. The overwhelming ancient and modern preference for political and military history, in addition to the current fascination with intellectual history, has obscured the record of those people who were excluded by sex or class from participation in the political and intellectual life of their societies. [...] My aim was to write a social history of women through the centuries in the Greek and Roman worlds. There is no comprehensive book on this subject in English.[88]

For the reader of 2024, Pomeroy's last sentence is astonishing and more than justifies her need to break the silence on women's condition during two of the most studied civilizations of human history. The absence of extensive research on the topic is also the reason why she takes into

[83] *Ivi*, 43.
[84] *Ivi*, 45.
[85] For an analysis of the fragment, see Teresa Morgan, 'The Wisdom of Semonides Fr. 7', *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 51 (2005): 72-85.
[86] My translation. The entire fragment can be found also online, in Simonides of Amorgos fr.7.
[87] Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity [Schocken Books: 1975]*, Digital (London: Pimlico, 1995).
[88] *Ivi*, 9-10.

consideration no less than fifteen centuries (!), constructing a huge panorama passing through various 'types' of women including the mythical goddesses, divinities and aristocratic women of the Homeric epics; the emancipated, rich, and educated Roman *matronae*, the female Athenian citizens whose obligations towards the *polis* is to perpetuate the *oikos*, and even the women slaves filling up the brothels of the city at the time of Solon's legislation.[89] In every era and in every social class of ancient Greece and Rome, female life experience is radically different, something which explains the absence of the word 'women' from Pomeroy's title: for the extremely patriarchal societies of ancient Greece and Rome, women are not "an undifferentiated mass",[90] and their treatment changes substantially based on the category in which men place them. Throughout her research, Pomeroy does not fail to notice the 'elusiveness' of women of classical antiquity, due to the scarce existent data or because of research conducted on rather untrustworthy material (for example, she dismisses studies who find a direct link between real women and tragical heroines). It is precisely because of ancient Greek and Roman women's elusiveness and because of the urgency of those (but also our) times that Arthur and Pomeroy are very quickly joined in their mission by scholars such as Eva Cantarella and Mary Lefkowitz, just to name a few,[91] confirming Pomeroy's judgement that

> [t]he story of the women of antiquity should be told *now*, not only because it is a legitimate aspect of social history, but because *the past illuminates contemporary problems* in relationships between men and women.[92]

Pomeroy's incisive words, along with the way in which classicists, historians, and anthropologists excavate and recover subjectivities marginalized by History, manifest a marked sense of urgency in the act of recovering the traces of the ancient past in the present moment.

The same resolve animating feminist classical studies is to be found in parallel with creative responses to works of classical antiquity authored by imaginative writers engaging in feminist revisionist mythmaking.[93] The term revision is coined by Adrienne Rich in one of her most

[89] *Ivi*, 73, 70.
[90] *Ivi*, 73.
[91] *Cf*. Eva Cantarella, *L'ambiguo malanno: Condizione e immagine della donna nell'antichità greca e romana [Riuniti, 1981]*, Digital (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 2013); Eva Cantarella, 'Dangling Virgins: Myth, Ritual and the Place of Women in Ancient Greece', *Poetics Today* 6, no. 1/2 (1985): 91-101; Maureen B. Fant and Mary R. Lefkowitz, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome [Duckworth, 1982]* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016); Mary R. Lefkowitz, 'Women in Greek Myth', *The American Scholar* 54, no. 2 (1985): 207-219.
[92] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 11. My emphasis.
[93] On the phenomenon of feminist revisionist mythmaking from its genesis in the 1970s up until the #metoo era, see also the introduction of Sylvie Humbert-Mougin in Sylvie Humbert-Mougin, ed., *Figures Mythiques Féminines à l'époque Contemporaine: Reconfigurations et Décentrements* (Paris: Kimé, 2024), 7-22.

influential papers, entitled "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision" (1972).[94] In the immediate aftermath of 1968, Rich comments on the puzzling feelings that a woman or man of the time may feel:

> [i]t's exhilarating to be alive in a time of awakening consciousness; it can also be confusing, disorienting, and painful. This awakening of dead or sleeping consciousness has already affected the lives of millions of women, even those who don't know it yet. It is also affecting the lives of men, even those who deny its claims upon them. The argument will go on whether an oppressive economic class system is responsible for the oppressive nature of male/female relations, or whether, in fact, the sexual class system is the original model on which all the others are based. But in the last few years connections have been drawn between our sexual lives and our political institutions, which are inescapable and illuminating. The sleepwalkers are coming awake, and for the first time this awakening has a collective reality; it is no longer such a lonely thing to open one's eyes.

Rich summarizes in just a few lines some of the most influential concepts of second wave feminism. Behind "our sexual lives and our political institutions" we can hear the famous slogan blending the personal and the political; the "oppressive economic class" speaks for the Marxist strand of feminism; similarly "the sexual class system" bespeaks reproductive exploitation and injustice; and what is billed as the new "collective reality", is a reminder that struggles are to be fought communally and that radical gains are achieved only through a vision of 'the people'. It is during "this awakening" that Rich re-discovers the importance of the eyes:

> 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*. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves.[95]

Rich proposes to return to the past so that we know it *differently*;[96] to approach again the literature that formed us (and that which was set aside by the exclusively male canon) and read again in light of new knowledges and critical grammars centering women's voice.

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[94] Adrienne Rich, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision', *College English* 34, no. 1 (1972): 18-30.
[95] *Ivi*, 18. My emphasis.
[96] Let us remember here the words of Charles Martindale, that "[e]ven to break with the past requires a dialogue with it": Charles Martindale, 'Redeeming the Text: The Validity of Comparisons of Classical and Postclassical Literature (A View from Britain)', *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 1, no. 3 (1991): 49. The same emphasis on the continuous dialogue between novelty and tradition is found in the Dutch research group Anchoring Innovation, that focuses on classical reception: Anchoring Innovation. On the notion of "anchoring" as "a new tool for thinking" that shows how innovative cultural and sociopolitical ideas are anchored in tradition, see Ineke Sluiter, 'Anchoring Innovation: A Classical Research Agenda', *European Review* 25, no. 1 (February 2017): 20-38.

While in this paper Rich talks about revision in literature in general, ten years later Alicia Ostriker will come back to the term to specify a phenomenon that is especially germane to myth. Coining the new syntagm "revisionist mythmaking", she defines it as such:

> Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible.[97]

Put this way, the practice is as old as myth itself, or at least since the Athenian drama (without even mentioning the Romans). And even if we set aside the reception of ancient literature *within* ancient literature, we find that mythical revisionism is everywhere, appropriated at every turn of every era. What is it thus that makes feminist revisionist mythmaking so different from other modes and specifically from their immediate ancestors, the big names of Modernism such as Ezra Pound, James Joyce or T. S. Eliot? The women poets who engage in revisionist mythmaking in the wake of 1968

> *do not share the Modernist nostalgia for a golden age of past culture*, and their mythmaking grows at least as much from a subterranean tradition of female self-projection and self-exploration as from the system building of the Romantic *and* Moderns. […] These poems generically assume the high literary status that myth confers and that women writers have often been denied because they write 'personally' or 'confessionally'. But in them the old stories are changed, *changed utterly*, *by female knowledge of female experience*, so that they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy. […] they are corrections; they are representations of what women find divine *and* demonic in themselves; they are retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered; in some cases *they are instructions for survival*.[98]

The difference thus between the Modernists and the women revisionists lies in the new critical direction out of which the latter are deemed to enter the myths of classical literature, which is that of radical feminism. If they do not have the same nostalgic feelings towards that era as their predecessors, that is because ancient Greek and Roman myths are populated with categories of women idealized *by* men and *for* men, and they have little if not nothing to do with actual female

[97] Alicia Ostriker, 'The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 8, no. 1 (1982): 72.
[98] *Ivi*, 73. My emphasis. In this paper Ostriker takes into consideration only American women poets even though the phenomenon well surpasses the Atlantic (and not only).

experience.[99] The aim, then, is 'to correct' the past, to transform mythology from an "inhospitable terrain" to a gendered space of creation;[100] one that will include the multitudes constituting modern subjectivity.

III. Penelopean *Fortleben*: Anxieties or Confidence?

In the work of both Adrienne Rich and Alicia Ostriker presented in the previous section, the word "survival" is emphatically used in the framing of feminist revision as a creative response to the literary canon. By revising and repurposing myth, artists of all walks of life guarantee its afterlife while also deploying it to heal personal and collective wounds, be these caused by the oppression of patriarchy in the case of feminist revisions or by the colonizer in the context of racial domination.[101] Likewise, classicists are by definition concerned with preservation and transmission; indeed, the concept of 'survival' is found in the German 'Fortleben', a foundational concept in the field of classical reception studies organizing research conducted on the afterlives of classical texts. But what about Penelope? How does her *Fortleben* change after the arrival of the second wave of feminism and what does this have to do with any wounds that might require tending to?

When I started this research three years ago, Kastrinaki's *Μίλα, Πηνελόπη!* (*Speak, Penelope!*) with its vast panoramic sweep of the heroine's metamorphoses over a century and a half had not

[99] Remembering Frazer's words that "men make gods and women worship them", Simone de Beauvoir highlights that "it is men who decide if their supreme divinities will be females or males; the place of woman in society is always the one they assign her; at no time has she imposed her own law": Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex [1949]*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, Digital (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2011), 92.

[100] Ostriker, 'The Thieves of Language', 71: "At first thought, mythology seems an inhospitable terrain for a woman writer. There we find the conquering gods and heroes, the deities of pure thought and spirituality so superior to Mother Nature; there we find the sexually wicked Venus, Circe, Pandora, Helen, Medea, Eve, and the virtuously passive Iphigenia, Alcestis, Mary, Cinderella. It is thanks to myth we believe that woman must be either 'angel' or 'monster'". In the case of myth as "an inhospitable terrain", Ostriker also cites de Beauvoir's chap. 9 of The Second Sex, called "Dreams, Fears, Idols".

[101] Postcolonial responses to classical texts are currently attracting plenty of international scholars who specialize in classical reception. Two among the most well-known are Patrice Rankine [see for instance his contribution to the recent *Brill's Companion to Classical Reception and Modern World Poetry* as well as his newly published book on postcolonial reception in American performance: Patrice Rankine, 'Black Poetry and the Classics', in *Brill's Companion to Classical Reception and Modern World Poetry*, ed. Polina Tambakaki (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 113-140; Patrice Rankine, *Theater and Crisis: Myth, Memory, and Racial Reckoning in America, 1964-2020* (Ann Arbor, MI: Lever Press, 2024)], and Justine McConnell who is a specialist on Caribbean and African American postcolonial reception works (see *inter alia* her work on multiple African Odysseys in Justine McConnell, *Black Odysseys: The Homeric* Odyssey *in the African Diaspora since 1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)]. One of the most known postcolonial revisions of the canonical epics of classical literature is that of the Caribbean Nobel prize winner Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), on whom McConnell published her latest book: Justine McConnell, *Derek Walcott and the Creation of a Classical Caribbean*, Classical Receptions in Twentieth-Century Writing (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

yet been published. In the absence of a such volume-guide, I turned my attention towards the dissertations written on the survival of Penelopean traditions in modernity,[102] as well as to the last chapter of Clayton's *A Penelopean Poetics*,[103] and to numerous articles published on the subject. I realized that Penelope's myth was not only surviving but thriving, travelling profusely across languages, continents, and genres. From Gabriel Fauré's lyric drama,[104] to pieces of contemporary art by Jean-Michel Maurice in Centre Pompidou,[105] and the stage of the Italian music festival of San Remo, where in 2021 the actress Monica Guerritore performed the first part of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* in Italian translation,[106] and the pop singer Achille Lauro sang his new single "Penelope" in collaboration with Emma[107], our heroine was alive and well.[108]

Notwithstanding Penelope's vast scope of appearances across time and different spheres of cultural production, what attracted me to lyric poetry as a stage for the heroine's post-68 metamorphoses was the genre's affordances in terms of allowing personal introspection and

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[102] Grigar, 'Penelopeia'; Cornacchia, 'La traccia del modello'; Lisa Kathleen Pike-Fiorindi, 'Penelope Speaks: Making The Mythic Specific in The Works of Five Contemporary Caribbean and Italian Writers: Lorna Goodison, Juana Rosa Pita, Derek Walcott, Silvana La Spina and Luigi Malerba' (PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, 2008); Reuter, 'Penelope Differently: Feminist Re-Visions of Myth'; Serena Alessi, 'From Silence to Voice: Penelope's Feminist *Odyssey* in Italian Literature' (PhD, Royal Holloway University of London, 2015); Roberta Truscia, 'Penélope tejiendo su existencia en *Ítaca* de Francisca Aguirre' (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2019). Platt's thesis also contains a precious catalogue of lyrical rewritings of Penelope, along with other Homeric and Virgilian characters:

[103] Barbara Clayton, 'Weaver and Artist: Surveying a Penelope Tradition', in *A Penelopean Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer's* Odyssey (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).

[104] Fauré composed the lyric drama *Penélope* in three acts, based on the text of René Fauchois, in 1912. For a comprehensive study of Fauré's work, see Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life [1991]*, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); especially on *Penélope*, see Jean-Michel Nectoux, 'Pénélope, Masques et Bergamasques [1991]', in *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life*, by Jean-Michel Nectoux, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 313-346.

[105] For an example of Penelopes in contemporary art, see Centre Pompidou, Jean-Michel Maurice, "Pénélope II" (1973).

[106] Atwood, *The Penelopiad*; Margaret Atwood, *Il canto di Penelope: il mito del ritorno di Odisseo*, trans. Margherita Crepax (Milano: Ponte alle Grazie, 2018). Note that the Italian translation of Atwood's book arrives in 2018, contemporarily with the beginning of the #metoo movement, and not before. From 2018 and on we also start finding various theatre performances of Atwood's text also outside the anglophone world. Such are Michela Embriaco's performance in Trento, Italy (Michela Embriaco, "Il canto di Penelope") and Livija Pandur's in the National Theatre of Ljubljana (Livija Pandur, "Penelopiad").

[107] You can watch the performance here: San Remo 2021: Guerritore and Atwood's "Penelopiad", Lauro & Emma and a new "Penelope".

[108] Here I only mention very few examples of explicit Penelopean revisions in the arts, while plenty others will be mentioned all along *Exit Penelope*. Implicit references to Penelope or Penelopean themes and tropes would be probably impossible to track down because of their numerosity. Even the lyrics of Marina Satti's song "Ζάρι" ("Dice") that represented Greece in the Eurovision Song Contest of 2024 could easily be imagined as words sung by Penelope: "μόνη κι αν μένω πάντα σε περιμένω / τρέμω σαν φλόγα σαν σπίρτο αναμμένο / όταν χαράζει με τρώει το μαράζι /μόνη πεθαίνω γιατί είσαι αλλού" ("even though alone, I always wait for you / I tremble like a flame, like a burning match / when the sun comes up, I die out of grief and longing / I die alone because you're elsewhere"). You can listen to the song here: Marina Satti, "Zari".

reflection while monumentalizing a specific moment in historical time, or, in other words, of taking an intimate snapshot of the contradictions of an era as the lyric subject processes her lacerations and traumas, while also seeking out moments of repair, consolation, and joy. Of course, the heroine's descent into lyric long precedes our current moment: as the works of Mactoux and Gilchrist have already shown, the heroine is an *habituée* to the genre already with the poets of ancient Rome.[109] Borrowing Raymond Williams' vocabulary of uneven and overlapping temporalities, as the lyrical Penelope traverses the centuries, her figurative elements will go through countless cycles of becoming residual, emergent, and dominant in alternate phases.

The most proximate uneven stage of re-emergence occupying us here can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century. There we find Penelope working on her 'lyric loom' already with H.D., who imagines her still "At Ithaca", "over and back", as she ravels and unravels and watches, through the goddess Athena's intervention, the war of Troy.[110] Dorothy Parker's "Penelope" is also "at home", among threads and "linen for the bed".[111] Mostly famously, perhaps, with Wallace Stevens' "The World as Meditation",[112] our heroine and her constant meditation become the "symbol of human achievement".[113] But as we proceed in time, Penelope's lyric recurrences begin to go hand in hand with the textual needs of subjects navigating dominant and emergent forms of feminist discourse. Some writers begin to publish single poems in literary magazines,[114] others start including Penelope in poetic books alongside other characters of mythology and/or history, mostly female, but again not exclusively. Such is the case of Jorie Graham's "Self-Portrait as Hurry and Delay [Penelope at her loom]" and "Ravel and Unravel" in *The End of Beauty*,[115] Bianca Tarozzi's "Variazioni sul tema Penelope" ("Variations on Penelope's Theme") in *Nessuno vince il*

[109] Especially her rewriting by the hands of Ovid in *Heroides* I, has a big influence in the heroine's reception in modern Western literature, since it is widely read long before Homer. As Clayton remarks, it is in Ovid's elegy that "Penelope slips into the role of the poet", turning from an endless weaver to a writer: Clayton, 'Weaver and Artist: Surveying a Penelope Tradition', 108. In our modern days, this will become a pattern particularly dear to feminist revisionism, who are also influenced by post-structuralism. But we will be seeing more of Ovid later (see subchapter 2.1. of this thesis).
[110] H.D., *Heliodora and Other Poems* (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924).
[111] Dorothy Parker, *Sunset Gun: Poems* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1928).
[112] Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954).
[113] Louis L. Martz, 'Wallace Stevens: The World as Meditation', in *Literature and Belief: English Institute Essays • 1957* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 140.
[114] Such is the case of most of the American lyric rewritings of Penelope that appear in Platt's "Descriptive Catalogue": Platt, 'Epic Reduction', 233-254. Platt takes a lot of her material from Deborah De Nicola, ed., *Orpheus and Company: Contemporary Poems on Greek Mythology* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1999).
[115] Jorie Graham, *The End of Beauty* (New York: Ecco Pr, 1987).

leone (*Nobody wins the lion*),[116] Carol Anne Duffy's "Penelope" in *The World's Wife*,[117] and Alicia E. Stalling's "The Wife of the Man of Many Wiles" in *Archaic Smile*,[118] – and this list could go on indefinitely.

Without underestimating at all the qualities of single, discrete Penelopean poems, many of which appear in this thesis as intertextual references, I focus primarily on book-length lyric representations of the Ithacan queen, based on the intuition that the more extensive space for expression and character development provided by such a format have granted Penelope a fuller role as protagonist of her own story. This decision is also informed by a publishing boom of Penelopean poetry books which appears in retrospect to overlap with the specific decades bookending the period of intensive "revisionist mythmaking", as Ostriker calls it, or what we might refer to as the long wake of '68, a period in which the ambiguous, indeterminate, enigmatic Penelope begins to attract lyric poets like bears to honey. And as she begins to demand a more extensive narrative arc to deliberate her internal struggles and intellectual preoccupations, this new lyrical self will begin to find a more expansive room in which to trace her evolution and growth as a subject marked by an overbearing absence.

The poets that I assemble – Francisca Aguirre, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, Louise Glück, Gail Holst-Warhaft, Phoebe Giannisi and José Gardeazabal – envision a delicate balance between constancy and variation, the two interconnected poles that characterize every rewriting of the myth. When examined separately, each poet's variation on the Penelopean theme "add[s] a flavor of its own, if unconsciously [we] can superimpose it on the earlier variation that [we] have listened to".[119] Reading three poets in each chapter, this thesis explores two interrelated elements of the Penelopean myth, the limbo of waiting for the Other, and the creative space of grief, sorrow and love that gives birth to song and poetry. Elaborating on the repetition with a difference of these constants, my grouping of poets centers on the link between lyrical expression and the woman's condition from the second half of the 20th century to our present day. Working in dialogue with each other, these texts re-memorialize the Penelopean Idea that has served generations of women as a template for navigating the process of interior and collective becoming. What we are about o picture in the books presented in *Exit Penelope* is the heroine captured in a "*dramatized conflict*

[116] Bianca Tarozzi, *Nessuno vince il leone. Variazioni e racconti in versi* (Venezia: Arsenale Editrice, 1988).
[117] Carol Ann Duffy, *The World's Wife [1999]*, Electronic (London: Picador, 2017).
[118] A. E. Stallings, *Archaic Smile [1999]* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022).
[119] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning [1978]*, E-book, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2005), 37.

between idea and movement",[120] and specifically ensnared between the *idea* of her supposedly fixed myth and the *movement* out of such a state of symbolic ossification. At stake in the resolution of this conflict, is the possibility for imaginative agency understood as the renewed act of double reception performed by authors and readers.

The new Penelopes presented in these rewritings vary in terms of background: they are written in different moments over the course of four decades from the 1970s to the 2020s; they span two continents (Europe in the case of Aguirre, Anghelaki-Rooke, Giannisi and Gardeazabal, the United States for Glück and Holst-Warhaft); their texts are written in different languages (English, modern Greek, Spanish, Portuguese) and respond to distinct aesthetic traditions and national contexts of reception and influence.[121] They also portray very different material and social worlds; some are composed towards the end (Aguirre) or in the aftermath of dictatorships (Anghelaki-Rooke); others are witnesses to recent economic and demographic crises in Europe (Giannisi, Gardeazabal);[122] still others are preoccupied with post-industrial North Atlantic societies marked by the global problems of consumerism, mass tourism and ecological devastation (Glück, Holst-Warhaft, Giannisi, Gardeazabal).

On the other hand, there is much they have in common. By far the most important element that these writers share is the inheritance of Greek myth.[123] Half of the poets read Homer in ancient Greek (Anghelaki-Rooke, Holst-Warhaft, Giannisi), while all of the poets included in the corpus are familiar with ancient Greek and Roman mythology, since they were raised and schooled in the same classics-oriented canon of Western literature and learned to read and write in modern

[120] Clare Carlisle, 'Kierkegaard's Repetition: The Possibility of Motion', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 13, no. 3 (2005): 523.
[121] Among these languages, only modern Greek has grammatical cases and does not have the infinitive; only English has gender-neutral adjectives and past participles (modern Greek has neutral only for inanimate objects). Most importantly through their languages, the texts carry a baggage of different literary traditions, with different national epics, traditional meters, and poetic modes, as well as different timings in the reception and development of each literary or social movement (the Greek modernism, for instance, is represented by the so-called generation of the Thirties, while the global revolutions of 1968 and the new wave of feminism arrive some years later, in 1974, with the fall of the military dictatorship). On Greek modernism and its important differences with regard to the 'major' European and north American modernisms, see the introduction of Dimitris Tziovas, ed., *Greek Modernism and beyond: Essays in Honor of Peter Bien*, Greek Studies Interdisciplinary Approaches (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).
[122] Power relations within the European Union during the economic crisis of the late 2000s-early 2010s and the possibly neocolonial policies of the central and north European states towards the European south are examined *inter alia* in Kyriakos Mikelis, "Neocolonial Power Europe'? Postcolonial Thought and the Eurozone Crisis', *French Journal for Media Research* 5 (2016).
[123] *Cf.* Louise Glück, 'Education of the Poet', in *Proofs & Theories: Essays on Poetry*, by Louise Glück (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1994), 10: "Before I was three, I was well grounded in the Greek myths, and the figures of those stories, together with certain images from the illustrations, became fundamental referents".

European languages.[124] Additionally, each of these revisionists is informed by other modern and premodern mythical rewritings written in different languages, above all Ovid's first of the *Heroides* and James Joyce's Molly in *Ulysses*. Another point of convergence lies in the fact that, rather than being an afterthought, Greek myth lies at the center of the authors' feminist imaginaries. Of course, this discursive interface is articulated differently each time: some are more implicit in their associations (Aguirre and Glück), some mediate this nexus overtly through the French and American feminism of the 1970s (Anghelaki-Rooke), while others offer glimpses into the global rise of #metoo or display ecofeminist and posthumanist concerns (Holst-Warhaft, Giannisi and Gardeazabal). Still, *all* of these poets write their new myths in the long wake of '68, each grappling with emergent forms of thinking and sensing that defamiliarize our received notions of the heroine. Proof of this double influence is disseminated all over their verses, and dramatized in vivid tales of Penelope's life the modern world as she speaks, shouts, laments, sings, desires, and creates new forms of embodied and affective experience.

But what we find at the heart of all these compositions, what we also find is a waiting woman who faces the void of absence with every medium at her disposition. In seeking out a gendered space for self-creation, these authors' choice of the long poem represents the most apt strategy for wrestling with the 'now' of classical antiquity by striking the right balance between epic narrative that leaves ample space for character development and lyrical expression which usually hosts the troubled self in moments of acute consciousness. But does Penelope's pronounced 'I' always evolve in the greater space of the poem sequence, or does her personality remain fixed in the characteristic "present of the lyric"?[125] Also, taking into consideration that five out of six poets are women, should we see their choice of lyric poetry, rather than epic poetry or novel, as a manifestation of "anxiety of authorship" or "of poetic genre"?[126] Finally, do evolutions in feminist

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[124] I have no evidence that Aguirre or Glück read Homer in the original, while I know for a fact that Gardeazabal does not. His *Odyssey* is that of the classicist Frederico Lourenço, who, apart from Homer's epics, has also translated the *Bible*: Homero, *Odisseia [Livros Cotovia, 2003]*, trans. Frederico Lourenço (Lisboa: Quetzal Editores, 2018). Important bibliographical references on Aguirre's education are found in Marco Federici, 'L'arte Come Rifugio e Presa Di Coscienza: Un Approccio Alla Poesia Di Francisca Aguirre', in *Le Geometrie Dell'essere. Identità, Identificazione, Diversità Nella Recente Letteratura Spagnola*, ed. Augusto Guarino, Puerta Del Sol 3 (Napoli: Tullio Pironti Editore, 2014), 167-185.

[125] Jonathan Culler, 'The Lyric Present', in *Theory of the Lyric*, by Jonathan Culler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 282-295. *Cf.* Jonathan Culler, 'Why Lyric?', *PMLA* 123, no. 1 (2008), 202: "If narrative is about what happens next, lyric is about what happens now".

[126] Friedman, 'Gender and Genre Anxiety'; Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination [1979]* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

discourse have a unique influence on the form of the extended lyric and if so, what are the broader implications of this formal tendency for classical revisionism?

In considering our tentative responses, I find it befitting to remember at this point the words of Rei Terada on the study of lyric poetry: "if 'lyric' is a concept that will help us think, it's because it helps us think about something *besides* lyric".[127] Applying Terada's statement to the present study, I rephrase and suggest that the lyric Penelopes gathered in this thesis are precious concepts, precisely because they help us think *besides and beyond* their lyric identities; they provide us with essential insights to problematics of modern societies and on women's changing position in them. Nevertheless, the two, lyric form and sociopolitical questions, are not separated, but rooted within the very creation of the lyric poem, as theorized by Theodor Adorno in "Lyric Poetry and Society":

> reflection on the work of art is justified in inquiring, and obligated to inquire concretely into its social content and not content itself with a vague feeling of something universal and inclusive. This kind of specification through thought is not some external reflection alien to art; on the contrary, all *linguistic works of art* demand it.[128]

These words remind us that the linguistic nature of lyric works of art precedes and is grounded in their social and historical worlds, shaping our reception of these works as bearers of non-objective and non-universal meanings.[129]

Adorno's thoughts on the peculiar dynamic between aesthetic universality of the lyric form and historical situatedness embedded in (non-objective and non-universal) linguistic enunciation that underlies the construction of a lyric poem is of crucial importance in the study of modern and contemporary art that recycles mythical material. Each revisionist lyric poem (or book) is a blending of the "absolute and thus, symbolic that constitutes the mythical act"[130] with the specific

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[127] Rei Terada, 'After the Critique of Lyric', *PMLA* 123, no. 1 (January 2008): 196. My emphasis.

[128] Theodor W. Adorno, 'On Lyric Poetry and Society [1974]', in *Notes to Literature*, European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism (Columbia University Press, 2019), 60. My emphasis.

[129] At this point it is relevant to remember Martin Heidegger's reflections on the human condition as an experience that is lived *in* and *through* language: "We can only speak and think in and through a particular language that we did not create, so that we are always thinking and speaking in a medium that is structured for us (historically) without its being mapped to the world in such a way that reveals the world without a point of view or with a *universal* point of view – though it may provide a simulacrum of such a view", in Stephen Hahn, *On Derrida* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, Inc., 2002), 51. For Heidegger's analysis of language as the human's "fundamental mode of being-in-the-world", see Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000).

[130] In his "Del mito, del simbolo e d'altro" ("Of myth, of symbol and of other"), Cesare Pavese speaks of the uniqueness and universality of the mythical act: "Quest'unicità del luogo è parte, del resto, di quella generale unicità del gesto e dell'evento, assoluti e quindi simbolici, che costituisce l'agire mitico" ("this uniqueness of place is part, after all, of that general uniqueness of gesture and event, absolute and symbolic, that constitute the mythical act"): Cesare Pavese, *La letteratura americana e altri saggi*, Digital (Torino: Einaudi, 2014), 261. My translation. Written between 1943-1944, the essay was first published in Cesare Pavese, *Feria d'agosto* (Torino: Einaudi, 1946), 209-218.

historical and sociopolitical context of the artist that conceives it. As Cesare Pavese explains, it is precisely because of its "absolute value" and of its "symbolic" nature that the myth resists an "unambiguous, allegorical meaning"; on the contrary, myths live "encapsulated", and they can "can explode in the most diverse and manifold blooms, depending on the terrain and the mood that wrap [them]".[131]

Bearing in mind the above considerations, this thesis takes on the task to illustrate some of Penelope's most intriguing lyric flowerings of the last decades, without forgetting to highlight those parts of her mythical symbolism that endure in our literary history. As we encounter the variations of the heroine included in *Exit Penelope*, we will bear in mind that the present lyric revisions hide in their skeleton a double level of universality and symbolism (lyric form and myth). This means that every author who rewrites Penelope in the universal form of lyric poetry struggles to negotiate the universality of the heroine's myth with the specific sociopolitical context of their time – "making the mythic specific", as Pike-Fiorindi incisively puts it in her study of contemporary Penelopes.[132]

In this process, however, one has to be conscious of the fact that by the time the 'universal myth' reaches an author, it has already been informed, made "specific" by, what Charles Martindale named, a "chain of receptions".[133] Another important consideration at this point is that by no means can we be sure that authors and readers are familiar with the same "chain of receptions" of each myth. If anything, we can affirm almost with certainty that this is rarely the case, and that while some readers may have a cultural background similar to that of the author/creator, there will certainly be readers coming to the text with different intellectual and artistic backgrounds. The artist may open multiple windows of intertextuality and play with the reader's "horizons of expectations",[134] but no one guarantees that the author's games of allusion

[131] Pavese, *La letteratura americana e altri saggi*, 262: "Un mito è sempre simbolico; per questo non ha mai un significato univoco, allegorico, ma vive di una vita incapsulata che, a seconda del terreno e dell'umore che l'avvolge, può esplodere nelle più diverse e molteplici fioriture" ("A myth is always symbolic; this is why it never has an unambiguous, allegoric meaning, but it lives an encapsualted life that can explode in the most diverse and manifold blooms, depending on the terraind and the mood that wraps it"). My translation.
[132] Pike-Fiorindi, 'Penelope Speaks'.
[133] Martindale, *Redeeming the Text*, 7: "our current interpretations of ancient texts, whether or not we are aware of it, are, in complex ways, constructed by the chain of receptions through which their continued readability has been affected. As a result we cannot get back to any originary meaning wholly free of subsequent accretions".
[134] Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti, Theory and History of Literature 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 23: "The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced.

will be perceived and understood by the audience as the author intended them. Still, there are some works along the reception-line that are more widely known than others and that change once and for all the conventional interpretation of each myth. In the particular case of Penelope, if her myth's literary history is supposed to start in the Homeric *Odyssey*, the line of revisions that inform and even surpass Homer's centrality in the modern and contemporary reception of the heroine may be constructed by Ovid's first of the *Heroides*, James Joyce's Molly Bloom in *Ulysses* and Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*.[135] Nevertheless, the degree up to which the "chain of receptions" influences every new artistic product varies substantially and no artist is called to take into consideration the entirety of the Penelopean myth: both the point of departure (the artist's inspiration for the new mythical revision) and the point of arrival (the reception of the new artistic product) can differ considerably.

Thus, by proposing a multifocal close reading of Penelope's ongoing lyric quest, I aim to offer a more flexible account of social and figural evolution via myth.[136] My hope in doing so, is to further illuminate a possible "mythical method[s]" for our times, which, as Eliot suggested in his reading of Joyce's Homeric inspirations, still animates the modern poets' "way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history".[137]

IV. What 'Looms' Ahead

In the two chapters that follow I will attempt to address some of the socio-formal problems we have been outlining so far in terms of re-imagining Penelope after '68, as well as imagining new

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Variation and correction determine the scope, whereas alteration and reproduction determine the borders of a genre-structure. The interpretative reception of a text always presupposes the context of experience of aesthetic perception: the question of the subjectivity of the interpretation and of the taste of different readers or levels of readers can be asked meaningfully only when one has first clarified which transsubjective horizon of understanding conditions the influence of the text".

[135] While it may seem early to judge the influence that Atwood's Penelope will have in the long history of the heroine's reception, and placing her next to Ovid's and Joyce's may be precocious, if we think about the number of languages in which *The Penelopiad* has been translated, the university courses where it is included, as well as its multiple performances in plenty of countries, I believe it is safe to consider Atwood's Penelope another worldly-wide revolutionary revision of the mythical heroine.

[136] In my close reading of theses authors, I by no means claim to exhaust the totality of the socio-formal concerns raised by each of their texts. Rather, through my comparative and intertextual approach, I limit myself to probing their representations of the Penelopean constants and mutations I am most concerned with and putting them into relation to one another.

[137] T. S. Eliot, '*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth [1923]', in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), 177.

literary worlds in which the heroine's exit from the epic scene presents emergent opportunities for individual and collective self-fashioning. As I combed through the verses included in *Exit Penelope*, various themes jumped due to their recurrence: the Other's absence and the (mostly secular) limbo of waiting in which the heroine is trapped; problematics of marriage, especially linked to the notions of fidelity and change in character development; a need for expression of the female desire that demonstrates a growing acquaintance and familiarity with the body; pain caused by various types of endings (or, worse, non-endings) and the will to mourn; and the lasting belief in the power of writing, lyric poetry and song.

Once assembled together into two larger groups, these themes seemed to sufficiently recapitulate the heroine's story both as it is presented in this *corpus*, and also in a harmonious relation between the present and her mythical diachrony. While the concepts of waiting, fidelity and the act of mourning immediately bring to mind the more traditional image of Penelope as it reaches us already from the Homeric text, the love for poetry or other forms of artistic expression and the explicit expression of female erotic desire can be said to be later additions to the history of Penelope's myth: we do see Penelope writing verses and demanding Odysseus' return in *Heroides* I, and we certainly do find Molly singing and openly expressing her sexual desires in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Thus, I start with the question of surviving the Other's absence while negotiating societal expectations of commemorative respectability. Chapter 1, named "Waiting and Fidelity", reprises Penelope's state of limbo during the hero's period away and queries how modern writers have reimagined the heroine's burden of memory along existential, psychoanalytic, and moral lines in order to grapple with their own condition of being suspended in a realm of anxious not-knowing and deferred desire. Beginning with Francisca Aguirre's depiction of *Ítaca* as site of waiting and absence, I reflect on how the act of waiting can be framed as a gendered aporia of loneliness.[138] Writing during the twilight of the Franco regime, the Spanish poet probes the experience of waiting through philosophical speculation while also deliberating on what it means for a bourgeois woman to feel alone both in terms of not having an interlocutor for one's most intimate thoughts, and in the sense of feeling ethically lonely in an authoritarian society in which a majority of one's fellow citizens has decided to either participate in or acquiesce to state violence. With Holst-Warhaft's *Penelope's Confession*, the notion of waiting becomes deeply imbricated in the moral question of

[138] Francisca Aguirre, *Ítaca [1972]* (Madrid: Tigres de Papel, 2017).

fidelity.[139] Here we have a Penelope who, contrary to readerly expectations, is eager to confess not a secret tryst with a suitor, but her repressed resentment towards her husband for his inability to remain loyal to a shared Ithacan project of home-making and good governance. The mythical island is again staged as a theatre of waiting, but as it shades into its contemporary double, figured as a key node in the global circuit of mass tourism, it allows the space for the elaboration of a self that is indivisible from a politics of care and fidelity towards a shared planet in the grips of ecological devastation. As we move on to contemplate the prospects of Penelope leaving Ithaca, we turn to a Portuguese case study in which limitations on the queen's freedom of movement across geographic and formal borders elicits affects of anger that are promptly disciplined and policed by the author and the reader alike. In *Penélope Está de Partida* by José Gardezabal, we witness Penelope's announcement of her imminent departure through a mostly individualist lens of emancipation.[140] It is in lyricizing this uncertainty that a new parenthetical existence is imagined as coming into being, one in which gendered subjects enjoy newfound agency in setting the terms of a lover's potential return but get to do so only in a new state of suspension overdetermined by the chronic indecisiveness shaping the liquid relations of intimacy in our modernity.

Proceeding onto rougher emotional terrain, Chapter 2, "Song and Lament", shifts gears as it extends the logics of perpetual waiting into the elaboration of personal and communal grief. The poets assembled in this section jointly but unevenly imagine a Penelope who no longer wishes to merely survive the absence of the Other but decides instead to confront it by finally mourning her lost object of desire. Reading Anghelaki-Rooke's *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης* (*The Scattered Papers of Penelope*) as a meta-aesthetic reflection on the status of poetry as a form of loss and recovery in post-dictatorship Greece, I explore the disavowal enacted by a despairing Penelope struggling to process a lifetime of everyday memories shaped by the systematic deprivation of touch and sensory intimacy.[141] In a series of interior monologues this modern heroine enacts a ritual of lamentation allowing her to process heartbreak as a kind of living death of the self. Echoing such a will to mourn but in the context of a post-industrial United States, Louise Glück's

[139] Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Penelope's Confession* (River Vale, NJ: Cosmos Publishing, 2007).
[140] José Gardeazabal, *Penélope Está de Partida* (Lisboa: Relógio d'Água, 2022). This name is the author's literary alter-ego. His real name is José Tavares, and he is a professor of economics in the Universidade Nova de Lisboa (for his academic profile, see here: José Tavares, academic profile). His brother is the well-known author Gonçalo M. Tavares.
[141] Κατερίνα Αγγελάκη-Ρουκ, *Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Εγνατία/Τραμ, 1977).

Meadowlands dramatizes a Penelope trying to come to terms with a dissolved marriage.[142] In what can be described as a mourning of the "we", the recent Nobel autobiographically remembers the moments of marital life in which the more felicitous past experiences appear to have masked the darkly ordinary omens of a conjugal downfall to come. Lamenting the middle-aged couple's inability to read and act on these ominous signs in due time, Glück performs a swan song that finds consolation in preserving traces of a once-fulfilling love through the act of archiving its inexorable dissolution. Lastly, Phoebe Giannisi's *Ομηρικά* (*Homerica*), written in the lead up of the Greek financial crisis, offers us a transmedial poetic performance in which a fragmented and polyphonic reflection on the amnesia-inducing effects of modernity doubles as the narrative of a Penelopean mother working through the painful void created when her beloved children leave the nest.[143]

Before embarking on this double-themed voyage, I would like to briefly discuss a major Penelopean trope that is only seemingly missing from the chapters ahead, and which finds its accommodation in the title of the present subchapter. To the regulars of Penelope, just one glance at the major themes discussed here or at the titles of chapters 1 and 2 would suffice for the following question to be raised: what about Penelope's loom? Does the weaving and unweaving remain a typical theme of her story after 1968 or is it absent from modern lyric rewritings of the heroine?

My answer to the query is twofold. First of all, we do not see Penelope weaving and unweaving *within* the Homeric text. The *Odyssey*, which famously starts *in medias res* but, in reality, it starts much closer to the end of Odysseus' *nostos* rather than the middle, presents us with a Penelope whose trick of raveling and unraveling has already been discovered years ago by the suitors and she has been forced to finish the shroud.[144] Thus, the scheme is a δόλος (guile) that belongs to Homeric Penelope's narrative past, and the ancient listener/modern reader of the *Odyssey* does not actually depict the heroine during the famous activity. What the Homeric audience really experiences is the woman *narrating* her past trickery from a narrative present full of exasperation and grief: she continuously cries, lamenting the years she did not live next to Odysseus and wishing to die. We neither see Penelope weaving and unweaving in Ovid's *Heroides*, where we find a dynamic and demanding woman who solicits her husband's return using as a tool the power of

[142] Louise Glück, *Meadowlands* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1996).
[143] Φοίβη Γιαννίση, *Ομηρικά* (Αθήνα: Κέδρος, 2009).
[144] Penelope narrates the entire trick of the shroud to the beggar-Odysseus during their *homilia* (*Od*.19.137-156).

rhetoric: she sends him a letter, whose structure and form (elegy) manifests once more her present grieving status. Nor do we find Molly at the loom at any point of *Ulysses*. Leopold Bloom's wife is rather found in bed in the middle (or even, liminal) space of reverie, speaking, singing, and remembering: this Penelope is also lamenting both the loss of a son, as well as the romantic beginning of her now troubled marriage.

Once we depart from the *Odyssey* and the subsequent influential steps of Penelope's reception then, yes, weaving and unweaving starts to play an important role in most of the modern lyric (and not only) revisions of the heroine.[145] Yet, in this *corpus*, the woman's ancient hobby, more than a typical theme, becomes a poetic mode. By this I suggest that the heroine's characteristic scheme of raveling and unraveling is found all over the poems of *Exit Penelope*, no longer as an activity or a trick *per se*, but rather as a way to write lyric poetry, and even more, books of lyric poetry dedicated to a specific figure. In the works that we are about to explore, the Penelopean weaving and unweaving becomes a way of *lyrically being*, a fundamental element of how the heroine is structured and imagined formally and linguistically. As we proceed from verse to verse and from poem to poem, Penelope will make statements and then take them back; her pronouns will transform her from subject to object; *enjambements* will overturn the meaning of the previous verse; and metrical forms will joke with the poetic subject's affirmations. With her continuous verse game of up-and-down, front-and-back, Penelope defers conclusive messages and resists rigid interpretations. Her new lyric personality is thus constructed against an 'either-or' logic leaving ample space for antithetical meanings and personality traits to coexist.

[145] This is the case, for example, already in Edmund Spenser's "Penelope for her Ulisses sake", where both Penelope and the poetic subject (a suitor) devise two opposing webs, the first to "deceave" her "woovers", the second weaving his courtship for her: *cf.* Clayton, 'Weaver and Artist: Surveying a Penelope Tradition', 109; then in H.D.'s "At Ithaca", mentioned also above, where we find her talking to herself, to her "spirit" while she works, whishing that "some fiery friend would sweep impetuously" these "fingers from the loom": H.D., *Collected Poems, 1912-1944*, ed. Louis L. Martz (New York: New Directions, 1986), 82; the heroine may not be at the loom (or the specific room of the loom), but she certainly holds again the knitting threads in Dorothy Parker's aforementioned Penelopean poem; some decades later, in Allen Grossman's "Berlin 1955", we find a post-WWII Penelope at her loom, resolving into threads the "Gypsies and Jews in an agony so remote" that the poetic "I cannot remember": Allen R. Grossman, *A Harlot's Hire: Poems* (Cambridge, MA: Walker-de Berry, 1961).

2. "Barbelope" exits the 'epic box' to enter the lyric scene. Project "Barbelope" by Marta Wanicka and Valerio Giuzio

Chapter 1. Waiting and Fidelity

“The life of waiting is a minefield of ambiguities”
Njabulo Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*[146]

1.1. “Penelope doesn’t (know how to) wait”?

This section borrows the title of an article reviewing a contemporary Penelopean performance published in the Italian magazine “L’Espresso”.[147] In the article, the cultural journalist Francesca De Sanctis observes that Penelope has stopped enacting one of her defining behaviors. The monologue under scrutiny, “Penelope”, written and directed by Martina Baldiluzzi and performed by Federica Carruba Toscano brings a new, more impatient face of Homer’s heroine to the Italian stages. This audacious re-casting elicits a question, namely: if the modern version of Penelope stops, unlearns, or simply refuses to wait, can we still call her ‘Penelope’ at all, or does she become something else entirely?

Following Hans Blumenberg’s definition, “[m]yths are stories that are distinguished by a high degree of constancy in their narrative core and by an equally pronounced capacity for marginal variation”.[148] What happens to the “high degree of constancy” in the Penelopean myth if her contemporary avatars suddenly stop waiting? If we agree with De Sanctis that the queen of Ithaca is undergoing a significant process of transfiguration, then the *when* and *how* of this post-Homeric shift deserves further attention. In terms of the *when* of this transformation, we could look into the ideological and formalist reverberations of successive waves of feminist movements and linger on 1968 as a defining moment. With regard to the “how” of the character’s alleged evolution, we might inquire into the changing relationship between the act of waiting and the performance of fidelity, the discrete moral value that has been most canonically attached to it. Bearing in mind this

[146] Njabulo Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela [David Philip Publishers, 2003]*, 2nd ed. (Banbury, England: Ayebia, 2004), 51.
[147] Espresso, Martina Badiluzzi's Penelope. In my translation of the article’s title, I use the parenthesis “know how to” in order to join the two different titles, “A teatro c’è una Penelope che non resta ad aspettare” (“At the theatre there’s a Penelope who doesn’t keep waiting”) and “Penelope non sa aspettare” (“Penelope doesn’t know how to wait”), that appear in the paper and the online versions of the article respectively. Other than the title, the two versions do not differ. The play was first presented on the 1st of July 2022 during Pergine Festival (Pergine Festival) near Trento, and then again on the 12th and 13th of November 2022, during RomaEuropa Festival, at Mattatoio theatre in Rome. At the moment of writing, it is still on tour. A short biography of the director Baldiluzzi can be found on: Fabula mundi, Martina Badiluzzi.
[148] Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace, (Originally in German by Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979), Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 34.

twofold line of questioning, and before proceeding to the analysis of the poems included in the corpus, let us revisit the Homeric text and look at three key elements considered definitional to Penelope's modality of waiting and examine its importance in the ancient epic.

Excepting the deceptive gender-neutral English term, 'waiting' in the other languages treated in this thesis is always gendered female: l'attesa, η αναμονή, a espera. Schoenberg's monodrama *Erwartung* (*Waiting*), composed in 1909, consists of just one character, a woman who is waiting alone in the forest for her lover, who *may or may have not* been killed, to return to her. Besides moving the setting from a forest to an island, the differences between Schoenberg's protagonist and the original Penelope are minimal: while the Homeric queen may not be literally alone given the presence of her son, her maids, her father-in-law and 120 men courting her, the emotional solitude she expresses in the epic is no doubt what distinguishes her condition. Both Schoenberg's and Homer's heroines experience what Roland Barthes identifies as key element of the lover's discourse: a "[t]umult of anxiety provoked by waiting for the loved being, subject to trivial delays (rendezvous, letters, telephone calls, returns)".[149] Solitude and waiting of the lover are co-extensive with the beloved's absence, even as "[h]istorically, the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman: Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys; Woman is faithful (she waits), man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises). It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction, for she has time to do so".[150]

For the ancient Greeks, the archetypical Woman denoting absence, desire, waiting is, of course, Penelope. "Toi, l'épouse modèle" sings of her the French singer-songwriter Georges Brassens, and the classics professor Giulia Sissa agrees with him: Penelope is not just "a", but "the Wife" – note another capital W –, representing the highly-esteemed womanly values of "legitimacy, loyalty and patience".[151] Her suspended condition is a direct consequence of Odysseus' departure from Ithaca.

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[149] Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2010), 37.

[150] *Ivi*, 13-14. Especially with regards to "historically": the Darwinian notion of Men-Hunters versus passive Women had its apotheosis in 1966 with the symposium "Man the Hunter", which later gave birth to the publication of the volume: Richard B. Lee and Irven DeVore, eds., *Man the Hunter* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1968). However, this binary has been challenged by feminist anthropology, ethnography and, more recently, biology: see for example, Abigail Anderson et al., 'The Myth of Man the Hunter: Women's Contribution to the Hunt across Ethnographic Contexts', *PLOS ONE* 18, no. 6 (June 2023); Cara Ocobock and Sarah Lacy, 'Woman the Hunter: The Physiological Evidence', *American Anthropologist*, 2023, 1-12.

[151] Giulia Sissa, *Sex and Sensuality in the Ancient World*, trans. George Staunton (New Haven, Conn. London: Yale University Press, 2008), 22. Interestingly, two of the women figures presented in the book, Clytemnestra and Deianeira, are defined in relation to Penelope, the first described as "Penelope's opposite", the second "Penelope and

The shape that Penelope gives to her husband's absence is filled with anxiety, "grief" and "longing", as the queen states to the bard Phemius in her first appearance in the *Odyssey*:

> […] ταύτης δ᾽ ἀποπαύε᾽ ἀοιδῆς
> λυγρῆς, ἥ τέ μοι αἰεὶ ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλον κῆρ
> τείρει, ἐπεί με μάλιστα καθίκετο πένθος ἄλαστον.
> τοίην γὰρ κεφαλὴν ποθέω μεμνημένη αἰεί,
> ἀνδρός, τοῦ κλέος εὐρὺ καθ᾽ Ἑλλάδα καὶ μέσον Ἄργος.
>
> […] but leave off singing this sad
> song, which always afflicts the dear heart deep inside me,
> since the unforgettable sorrow comes to me, beyond others,
> so dear a head do I long for whenever I am reminded
> of my husband, whose fame goes wide through Hellas and midmost Argos.
>
> *Od*.1.340-344[152]

Her undimmed longing and grief are the results of incessant memory work: Penelope is "always remembering" (μεμνημένη αἰεί) her husband, "whose *kleos* is widespread in Greece and Argos" (τοῦ κλέος εὐρὺ καθ᾽ Ἑλλάδα καὶ μέσον Ἄργος). What happens to this iron-clad spirit of remembrance through centuries of interpretation and rewritings? Do modern Penelopes mnemonically preserve their husband's aura with the same steadfastness and passion?

In the Homeric world – and, in many cases, in our own – if the married woman (queen or otherwise) does not wait for her husband to come back, she has no virtue (ἀρετή) and thus can make no claim to Homeric glory, that is *kleos*. Through the words spoken by Agamemnon's shade in the second *nekyia* (*Od*. 24.192-202), we are reminded that Penelope's *kleos* would never be lost precisely because of her "well remembering" (εὖ μέμνηται) of her husband.[153] Various critics, even

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more so". Deianeira is "more" than Penelope, because in Sophocles' *Trachinian Women,* she is considered to be even more loyal to Hercules than Penelope is to Odysseus. Regarding the juxtaposition of Penelope and Clytemnestra, Sissa reads the *Odyssey* as "the story of what could have happened to Agamemnon, had Clytemnestra behaved in a different manner. Vice versa, the *Oresteia* never disappears from the horizon of the Homeric narrative, as though it represented an immediate risk, a possible catastrophe, given the same point of departure: the exposed position of a wife who awaits her husband and is tempted by another man. The two stories mirror each other counterfactually: what if Penelope had acted like Clytemnestra; what if Clytemnestra had emulated Penelope?": Sissa, 104. The analogy of the two stories is extensively presented throughout Katz's *Penelope's Renown*, which Sissa however does not cite: Katz, *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the* Odyssey.

[152] Note the use of the verb τείρω ("[t]o wear out, distress, afflict, exhaust, bear hard upon, put to sore straits, reduce to extremity": Cunliffe, τείρω), through the use of which Homer creates an extraordinary metaphor. The song (ἀοιδή) has a very active meaning, functioning as a weapon which continuously rubs the woman's heart out until it is completely consumed. According to Liddell-Scott (LSJ, τείρω), the verb's etymology could also be connected to the noun τραῦμα (trauma), a detail that would undoubtedly classify the woman's listening to the specific song as a traumatic experience.

[153] *Od*. 24.192-198: "ὄλβιε Λαέρταο πάι, πολυμήχαν᾽ Ὀδυσσεῦ, / ἦ ἄρα σὺν μεγάλῃ ἀρετῇ ἐκτήσω ἄκοιτιν. / ὡς ἀγαθαὶ φρένες ἦσαν ἀμύμονι Πηνελοπείῃ, / κούρῃ Ἰκαρίου· ὡς εὖ μέμνητ᾽ Ὀδυσῆος, / ἀνδρὸς κουριδίου· τῷ οἱ κλέος οὔ ποτ᾽

after 1968, have agreed with Agamemnon's spirit on the issue: Anthony T. Edwards, for example, explicitly states that "Penelope's κλέος will be that she remained faithful to her husband in the face of the suitors, and through her μῆτις put them off until he returned".[154] On the other hand, Marilyn Katz, adopting a neoanalytic, discourse-centered approach to delve deeply into Penelope's crucial role in the Homeric text, has shown how the queen's "renown" has a "double aspect", due to the *Odyssey*'s "narrative *polytropia*, which […] constitutes an indeterminacy of both narrative form and character representation".[155] If the new Penelope were to stop 'remembering [Odysseus] well', or if she were to leave the island to travel or to marry another man, what type of *kleos* would she be ascribed, if any at all?

Of course, if Penelope is not waiting anymore, not only might she lose her own ancient *kleos*,[156] but a tremendous problem emerges for Odysseus' own fame and glory in the act of homecoming, and, by extension for the entire Homeric architecture of the poem. According to Zeitlin, the question of Penelope's "sexual fidelity to" Odysseus "is the principal anxiety that hovers over the whole poem".[157] This anxiety can be explained with Nagy's reading of Penelope as "the key not only to the *nóstos* but also to the *kléos* of Odysseus"; a *kleos* which, because of his wife's behavior, is considered "the best" one, achieved through "a genuine nóstos, while Agamemnon gets a false one and Achilles, none at all".[158] Also for Beye, Penelope represents "the marriage bed rooted to the earth", with her "all-encompassing stability at the end of man's adventuresome travels outside the home".[159] Without Penelope there is no marriage bed, hence, no marital glory. Under this lens,

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ὀλεῖται / ἧς ἀρετῆς, τεύξουσι δ᾽ ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἀοιδὴν / ἀθάνατοι χαρίεσσαν ἐχέφρονι Πηνελοπείῃ" ("'O fortunate son of Laertes, Odysseus of many devices, / surely you won yourself a wife endowed with great virtue. / How good was proved the heart that is in blameless Penelope, / Ikarios' daughter, and how well she remembered Odysseus, / her wedded husband. Thereby the fame of her virtue shall never / die away, but the immortals will make for the people / of earth a thing of grace in the song for prudent Penelope".

[154] Anthony T. Edwards, *Achilles in the* Odyssey, Beiträge Zur Klassischen Philologie 171 (Königstein: Anton Hain, 1985), 81.

[155] Katz, *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the* Odyssey, 6 and 192. On p. 18, Katz explains that her "approach to the *Odyssey* is similar to that of Sternberg's to the Bible in that it emphasizes 'discourse' over 'source'".

[156] I distinguish between ancient and modern *kleos* since the reasons for our appreciation of Penelope, and for the act of attributing glory to a female figure more broadly, have radically changed during the last decades.

[157] Zeitlin, 'Figuring Fidelity in Homer's *Odyssey*', 1995, 25.

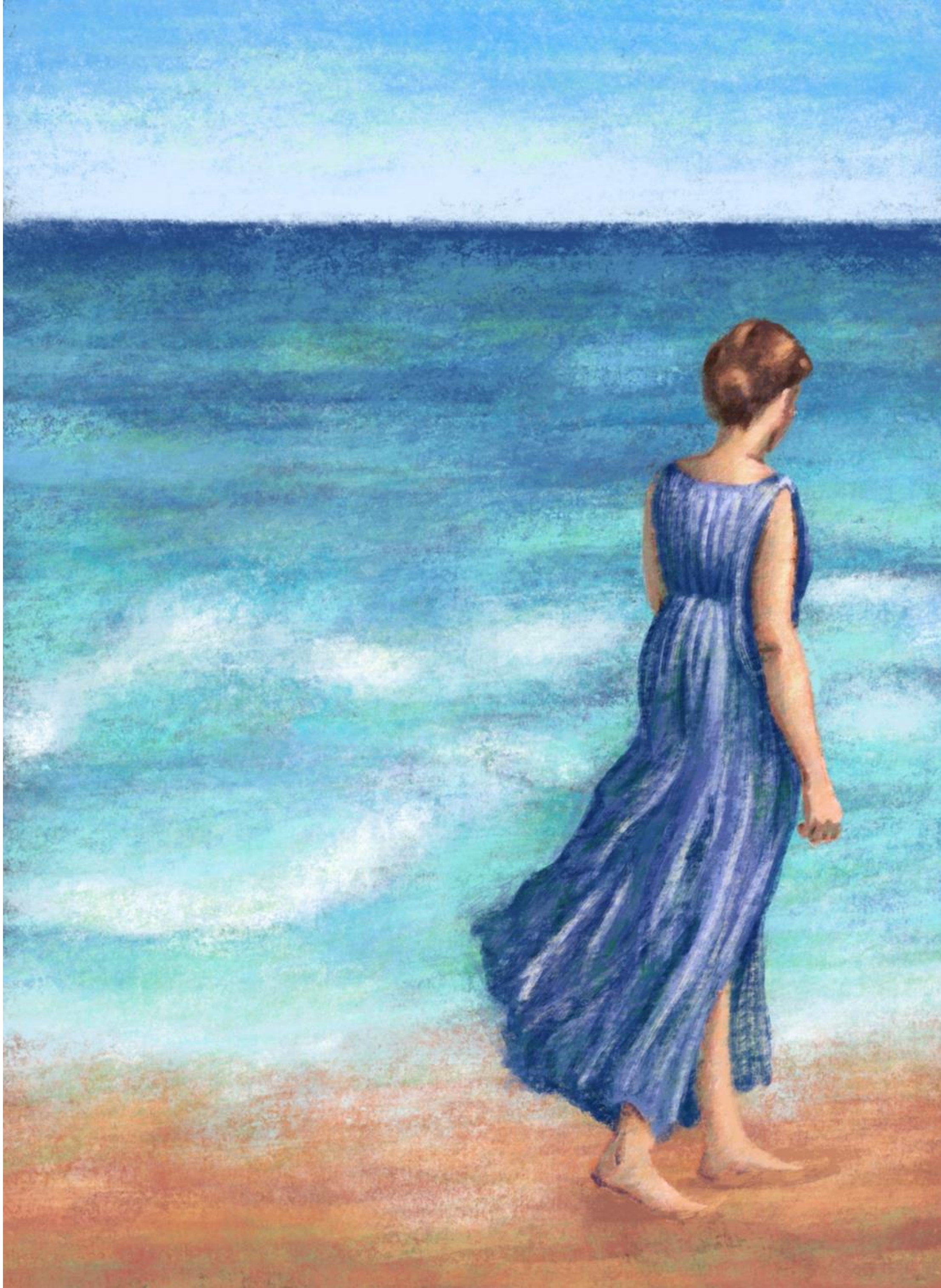
[158] Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry [1979]*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 72. Also in Sissa, *Sex and Sensuality in the Ancient World*, 25: "In book i, line 13, this woman [Penelope] makes her first appearance, and is the destination of his journey home".

[159] Charles Rowan Beye, 'Male and Female in the Homeric Poems', *Ramus* 3, no. 2 (1974): 98. The author is somehow ambivalent with regard to his opinion about Penelope. Even though in the beginning of his character analysis he considers her a rather "obvious figure", only to proceed on the very next page to call her "ambiguous" and distinguish some "disquieting details" of Penelope's character, which make her "suspect" to the reader. Again, we see critical

the return to the wife becomes the hero's ultimate destination, a *sine qua non* for a truly successful *nostos*. Without Penelope's waiting, the foundations of the plot are compromised, and consequently, the *telos* of the poem is undermined. Who would Odysseus be coming home to if the wife were no longer there expecting him with all her body and heart? What would become of the famous recognition scene followed by the reunion of the Odyssean couple, and what of the sense of heroic closure it inspires?

Absence of the beloved, memorial faithfulness as a conduit to *kleos*, and the plot tensions threatening the realization of the couple-centric *telos*: keeping in mind these three key elements of waiting within the Penelopean spacetime, this chapter engages a selection of modern poets who set out to question, update, and sometimes entirely dispel one of the mythical queen's cardinal behavioral traits. I will also occasionally place my lyric-centered corpus in intertextual and intermedial dialogue with other revisions drawn from works of prose, theatre, and song. In exploring how the Penelopean act of waiting travels across formal and generic boundaries, I hope to shed light on a broader contemporary re-engagement with the Homeric text.

ambivalence towards the character. On the importance of the bed as a μέγα σῆμα, see: Zeitlin, 'Figuring Fidelity in Homer's *Odyssey*', 1995.



3. Marella Amorini's “Penelope at the seashore”, inspired by Francisca Aguirre's Ithaca

1.2. "Porque la espera suena": in Francoist *Ítaca* with Francisca Aguirre

In 2018, during a peak moment of incipient fourth wave of feminism animated by the global virality of the #metoo movement being diffused on social media,[160] the Alicante-born poet Francisca Aguirre is awarded the Premio Nacional de Las Letras Españolas, a recognition for her literary career spanning nearly half a century.[161] Aguirre's poetic journey, defined as a "whispering (more than saying) words situated between conscience and memory",[162] begins with the book-length lyric *Ítaca*, published in 1972, four years into the global shockwaves of '68, and three years before the death of Francisco Franco and the fall of a dictatorship which had functioned *inter alia* as a mass backlash and weapon of retrenchment against women's emancipation.[163]

Usually categorized as a long poem,[164] *Ítaca* is divided into two sections or 'cantos', the first of which is called "El circulo de Ítaca" ("Ithaca's Circle"), and the second, only seemingly more referential to our heroine due to its title, "El desván de Penélope" ("Penelope's Attic"). The book's division into two sections, containing fourteen and thirty-three poems respectively, marks the very clear thematic separation of Aguirre's approach to her mythic retelling of the Homeric poem. The first section is essentially a meticulous attempt to rewrite the ancient epic through the Penelopean point of view, while the second is more of a first-person (semi)autobiographical narration of the poet's moments of meditation, most of which lend themselves strongly to an interpretation of the Penelopean experience.[165] In fact, Valverde Osan, Aguirre's translator in English, calls the first

[160] In Spain the #metoo movement comes to the fore particularly 2016, after the rape of an 18-year-old woman by five men during the running of the bulls festival in Pamplona. The group goes by the name 'manada', "a term often used to refer to a wolf pack"; they are initially found "guilty of the lesser charge of sexual abuse" and "sentenced to nine years of prison each", a court decision which leads "to mass protests and a debate in Spain over whether the judiciary was biased against women in cases of sexual assault". The court's decision changes three years later, in 2019, when the 'Wolf Pack' is charged with rape and sentenced to fifteen years in prison: in Raphael Minder, 'Spanish Court Sentences Pamplona "Wolf Pack" to 15 Years for Rape', *The New York Times*, June 2019, sec. World. Six years after the rape, in 2022, Spain takes a step even further, passing a law that requires 'freely expressed' consent for sex: in Emma Bubola and José Bautista, 'Spain Passes Law Requiring "Freely Expressed" Consent for Sex', *The New York Times*, August 2022, sec. World.

[161] Aguirre, Premio Nacional de Las Letras Españolas.

[162] *Ibidem*. As her award reads, Aguirre won the prize "por estar su poesía (la más machadiana de la generación del medio siglo) entre la desolación y la clarividencia, la lucidez y el dolor, susurrando (más que diciendo) palabras situadas entre la conciencia y la memoria". The part of the citation reported in the text is my translation.

[163] Francesca Aguirre, *Ítaca* (Madrid: Cultura Hispánica, 1972). For this book, Aguirre was awarded the poetry prize Leopoldo Panero. As already stated by Victoria Reuter, "Francisca Aguirre's *Ítaca* is categorized as a long poem", but, following Reuter's method, I will also "refer to the entirety of the long poem as *Ítaca*, to the cantos as cantos, and to the titled subdivision of the cantos as poems or by their individual titles", in Victoria Reuter, 'Iberian Sibyl: Francisca Aguirre on Cavafy and the Journey Out of Ithaca', in *Homer's Daughters: Women's Responses to Homer in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*, ed. Fiona Cox and Elena Theodorakopoulos (Oxford University Press, 2019), 0.

[164] *Cf.* Francisca Aguirre, *Ithaca*, trans. Ana Valverde Osan (Rochester, NY: BOA Editions, 2004), 10-11.

[165] *Cf.* Reuter, 'Iberian Sibyl', 212: "Aguirre's *Ítaca* is a far cry from a knee-jerk rewrite".

section “revisionist/mythical” and the second one “personal/historical”, and sees in this division the poet’s “attempt to subvert the long poem as a genre”, with its lack of “linear plot”, its “fragmentation” and the “give-and-take between the poetic and the everyday moments”.[166] Therefore, if the long poem is already a reaction to the rigid division between epic and lyric, Aguirre’s contribution to the tacit but concrete rules of the long poem could be interpreted as nothing short of revolutionary: here is a woman poet re-writing a venerated ancient male epic while also barging into the ‘golden’ male tradition of the Spanish long poem.[167]

This playing with generic rules, together with the “intermingling” of two types of discourse, the mythical and the personal,[168] becomes typical of women poets in Europe and the United States who revisit the ancient Greek myths in the decades following the feminist uprisings of 1968. It is a poetic strategy echoing Elizabeth Dodd’s analysis of the lyric in *The Veiled Mirror and the Woman Poet*, where she gives her definition of personal classicism: a mode typical of women poets, who “combine personal impulses (those that appear in confessional poetry) with careful elements of control that allow them to shape and frame – and mute – what are at their core romantic, personal poems”.[169] To illustrate this particular concept in which romanticism is blended with modernism and the personal becomes political, Dodd uses as case studies four major American women poets writing throughout the 20th century, starting from the imagist H. D., passing through Louise Bogan’s modernist “urge to achieve objectivity”,[170] and Elizabeth Bishop’s confessionalism, in order to finally reach the contemporary Nobel winner Louise Glück.[171]

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[166] Aguirre, *Ithaca*, 11.

[167] As Valverde Osan states in her introduction to the translation, in Spain, as elsewhere “[t]raditionally, the long poem, like its ancestor the epic, has been a genre exclusively dominated by male poets”, with Unamuno and Machado being “two of the poets most importantly identified with the long poem”, while Carmen Conde with her *Woman Without Eden* (*Mujer Sin Edén*, 1947) provided the “Spanish literary scene” with its “first long poem ever penned by a woman”: in Aguirre, 10. On the long poem during the Modernist era, see Margaret Dickie, *On the Modernist Long Poem* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986).; on women and the long poem, see Susan Stanford Friedman, ‘When a “Long” Poem Is a “Big” Poem: Self-authorizing Strategies in Women’s Twentieth-century “Long Poems”’, *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 2, no. 1 (1990): 9-25; on the theory of the long poem and its tradition in contemporary Canadian literature, see Smaro Kamboureli, *On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

[168] Aguirre, *Ithaca*, 11.

[169] Elizabeth Dodd, *The Veiled Mirror and the Woman Poet: H.D., Louise Bogan, Elizabeth Bishop and Louise Glück* (Columbia; London: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 1.

[170] *Ivi*, 102.

[171] Dodd publishes her book in 1992, and thus, she analyzes Glück’s revisionist modes as they appear up until *Ararat*, published in 1990. In the second chapter I will be treating Glück’s *Meadowlands* (1996), and thus we will have the chance to see first-hand how the poet’s mode of personal classicism has evolved in just a few years.

What Aguirre shares with the four American poets discussed by Dodd is the use of the myth as *both* a veil *and* a mirror, a tool to share her in poetry personal life experiences (read: mirror) without completely exposing herself (read: veil). Hence, distinctly hers are the unique political conditions of her country during the years that she composes and publishes *Ítaca*. As mentioned above, the book is written during the last years of Franco's dictatorship, and, according to Reuter, Aguirre "begins investigating Penelope's life because it is easier than directly probing her own" and this "is a method not uncommon among writers living under the censorship of political regimes".[172] A similar case will be presented further on with a modern Greek and anti-junta Penelope invented by Giannis Ritsos and written in the same years as Aguirre's *Ítaca*.

Bearing in mind the revolutionary aspect of Aguirre's choice to rewrite an ancient Greek epic using the well-known Odyssean spouse to partially mask herself during the twilight of the Spanish totalitarian regime, we may start by inquiring on why she opts for the form of the long poem and how this genre (at the time fairly new, all the more so for women) meets her expressive needs. Susan Stanford Friedman, a major scholar of the long poem and American women's poetry of the 20th century, finds that, due to its roots "in epic tradition, the twentieth century 'long poem' is an overdetermined discourse whose size, scope, and authority to define history, metaphysics, religion and aesthetics still erects a wall to keep women outside".[173] However, gradually throughout the century women enter the scene, engaging "in a feminization of the form", and, according to Friedman, most of them follow "at least four strategies, each one of which deconstructs the opposition of inside/outside that Derrida identifies as the structuring logic subtending the phallogocentrism of 'the law of genre'".[174] Out of the four strategies proposed by Friedman, the one that I find closer to the Spanish *Ítaca* is that of Adrienne Rich's concept of re-vision, according to which, the woman poet, as an outsider of the literary tradition "immerses herself in the discourse of the inside in order to transform it".[175]

Aguirre's textual revision of Ithaca's spacetime attributes a protagonist role to Penelope, even though this is not clear from reading the first poems of the volume, "Triste fiera" and "Ítaca", that feature an unknown subject. In the original Spanish we do not even understand if it is a he or a she

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[172] Reuter, 'Iberian Sibyl', 212.
[173] Friedman, 'When a "Long" Poem Is a "Big" Poem', 11.
[174] *Ivi*, 12. Friedman refers to the aforementioned: Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', trans. Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1, On Narrative (Autumn 1980): 55-81.
[175] Friedman, 'When a "Long" Poem Is a "Big" Poem', 12-13.

that is having a conversation with the sea: “En la noche fui hasta el mar para pedir socorro / y el mar me respondió: socorro” (“At night I went to the sea to ask for help, / and the sea replied: help”).[176] It is night, a classic moment of Penelopean action, and the poetic subject has gone to the sea to ask for help, even though the answer they receive is the echo of their own voice. The interaction with the sea is not limited to words and sounds: the subject touches the sea with care (“Fui hasta el mar y lo toqué / con cuidado”, “I went to the sea and touched it / with care”, v. 3-4).[177] At this point the sea is compared to

> […] un animal equívoco,
> un animal que se come la tierra
> y en su límite último intenta confundirse con el cielo
>
> […] a suspicious animal,
> an animal that eats the land
> and in its final limit tries to be one with the sky. (v. 4-6)

The sexual metaphor is explicit, with the sea (in Spanish masculine) reminding us of a (non-defined but probably male) animal, who is eating the earth (in Spanish feminine) and tries to mingle its body with the sky (in Spanish masculine). In the following verses things get complicated. The ambiguous animal now reminds the speaker of the ancient Sphinx, as the poetic subject gets closer to it “esperando una respuesta mayor que nuestra dolorosa pregunta” (“expecting a great answer than our painful question”): apparently, the sea has the power to respond not only to its current interlocutor, but potentially to the existential questions of all people (note: the sudden change to the first plural “nuestra”). The poem ends with the forging of an alliance between the poetic subject to the island of Ithaca: the two of them, as if they were a couple, go to the sea, which by now has been named “minotauro acuático” (“aquatic minotaur”), but again the only response they receive is the echo of their pleading: “socorro” (“help”).

While the first poem issues an externalized and urgent cry for help, what follows in the first section leads us onto a more self-reflexive, meditative terrain. The second poem of the section,

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[176] It is interesting that the Italian translator chooses already from the first verse to gender the subject female (“Sono andata […]”), probably in line with the rest of the poems of the same section, in which the subject is clearly revealed to be Penelope. The reason for which this happens is mostly grammatical: the Italian past perfect is formed with the past participle, which is gendered in Italian. Thus, when this tense is used the gender is marked. A different tense choice, for example the ‘passato remoto’, could help to maintain the gender neutral of the original but it would result less natural in the Italian version, since it is gradually disappearing from the everyday use in standard Italian: in Francisca Aguirre, *Itaca*, trans. Brigidina Gentile (Salerno: Edizioni Arcoiris, 2016), 27.

[177] We will attest how the sense of touch becomes an increasingly essential element of Penelopean lyric poetry during the decades taken into consideration.

"Ítaca", which names the whole book, initiates a dialogue with the Alexandrian poet C. P. Cavafy, a towering figure of modern Greek poetry and a major influence on Aguirre's poetic style.[178] In Cavafy's world-famous poem of the same name, "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";[179] Cavafy's subject (which is not gendered) should "hope that the road is a long one" ("να εύχεσαι να είναι μακρύς ο δρόμος"), rather than rushing towards the desired destination.[180] If the Alexandrian poets focuses on a journey "filled with adventures, filled with discoveries", and understands knowledge as something slowly gained along the way, Aguirre's "Ítaca" is also a journey of acquaintance with oneself; the journey she proposes, though, is a static one, marked by waiting. As is the case with the Alexandrian poet, Aguirre's gender-indeterminate subject takes for granted that the journey to Ithaca is an experience that any person can make – only in her case, it is specific to a moment or a phase in a person's life: "¿Y quien alguna vez no estuvo en Ítaca?" ("And who has never been to Ithaca?").[181] This Ithacan journey to self-awareness is distinguished by the island's peculiarities: its "áspero panorama" ("rugged environment"), a feeling of oppression due to the sea's circling ("el anillo de mar que la comprime", "the sea ring that oppresses her"), an "austere intimacy" that it "imposes on us" ("la austera intimidad que nos impone"), a sum of silences that it "draws for us" ("el silencio de suma que nos traza").[182] Presented as kind of claustrophobic encircling, the island's grim closing in on its people invokes a suffused sense of oppression felt by subjects living under totalitarian regimes – something that Aguirre experiences firsthand while composing *Ítaca* during the Franco regime and appears to be allegorizing here.

[178] As the same Aguirre states in an interview with Isabel Navarro that when she read Cavafy's "Waiting for the Barbarians", such was her poetic *prise de conscience*, that she burnt all of her previous work and tried to change her style. The interview closes the newest edition of Aguirre's first poetry book: Aguirre, *Ítaca [1972]*.On the influence of Cavafy on Aguirre's poetry, see also: Aguirre, *Ithaca*, 11; Reuter, 'Iberian Sibyl', 212-213; Καστρινάκη, *Μίλα, Πηνελόπη!*, 203-204. Aguirre probably read Cavafy through a Catalan translation: Konstantinos Kavafis, *Poemes de Kavafis*, trans. Carles Riba (Barcelona: Treide, 1962). Since I am writing in English, I opt for the spelling Cavafy, which is the one he used.
[179] Reuter, 'Iberian Sibyl', 218.
[180] I cite from one of the best recent English translations of Cavafy in English, that of Daniel Mendelson: C. P. Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, trans. Daniel Mendelsohn (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 67.
[181] This verse can also be read as an ironic response to the Alexandrian poet. Pronounced from a female point of view, it may allude to the fact that women, historically, have not had the same opportunities as men to take off on adventurous journeys. *Cf.* Reuter, 'Iberian Sibyl', 221.
[182] I occasionally use my own translation of the verses, especially because I want to maintain Ithaca's gender-neutral also in English, as it is presented in the Spanish version (Aguirre always uses the island's name, without marking a masculine or feminine gender). When I cite the English translation, I always refer to Valverde Osan's work.

Though the first verses of the poem present Ithaca as a rather stifling geo-emotional space to be in, it can also reveal itself to us less starkly, provided we learn how to listen to it. Eventually, the island can be perceived as topographically inscribing itself onto us, like a synopsis of our lives or a parallel (auto)biography ("Ítaca nos resume como un libro", "Ithaca summarizes us as a book"); it becomes our Virgilian guide towards the Socratic γνῶθι σαὐτόν ("nos acompaña hacia nosotros mismos", "she goes with us to our very selves"); and it "reveals to us the sound of waiting" ("nos descubre el sonido de la espera").[183] In these three verses, Aguirre echoes a range of crucial aspects about the female protagonist's spatial relations as presented in the Homeric *epos*; namely, Ithaca as the story of Penelope's (adult) life and the home to her joys and sorrows; Ithaca as the *topoi* of her personal development and her understanding of the world and her place in it; and, finally, Ithaca as the provider of sonic and other sensuous resources that help her fill the void of endless waiting. Indeed, it is the emphasis on the island's poetic soundscape and its therapeutic effect on the protagonist that distinguishes the self-enclosed Ithaca of Aguirre from Cavafy's symbol of an ever-onwards journey. Read through Reuter's feminist lens,

> 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 her *Ítaca* 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.[184]

The waiting condition in Aguirre's poem is defined by the sounds it carries: "Porque la espera suena: / mantiene el eco de voces que se han ido" ("Because waiting has a ring: / it preserves the echo of departed voices".[185] Living in a state of absence is thus inseparable from the recollection of aural traces of the past, "the echo of those who are gone",[186] among who Aguirre's beloved dad, a victim of Franco's dictatorship.[187] Though a consistent reminder of past relationships, those echoes do not correspond to actual voices but reveal, rather, the faint and fading reproductions of the psyche as it struggles with its desire to bring back to life those who have gone missing. Through

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[183] *Cf.* Reuter, 'Iberian Sibyl', 221: "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".

[184] *Ivi*, 219.

[185] Notice the wonderful wordplay that comes out in the English translation of "la espera suena". If read only in the English version, "waiting has a ring" actually depicts this chapter's title ("Waiting and Fidelity"); the 'waiting' eternally linked to marriage, and always symbolized by fidelity's wedding ring.

[186] At this point, one may grasp the famous Cavafian "Voices", those "[i]magined voices and beloved, too, / of those who died / of those who are / lost unto us like the dead": Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 123.

[187] *Cf.* Federici, 'L'arte Come Rifugio e Presa Di Coscienza', 168.

these echoing memories, "Ítaca nos denuncia el latido de la vida" ("Ithaca reveals to us life's heartbeat"), helping us sustain the rhythm of our breath and thus of our survival. At the same time, in affirming life while silently accepting the condition of waiting, we seem to become "accomplices of distance" ("cómplices de la distancia"). Could this be Aguirre's critique of the concept of Ithaca as a potential figure of self-delusion? Have 'we' really agreed to this imposed "distance", or is it a situation that, like Penelope, 'we' acquiesce into?

To this end, the following verses struggle with the inertia and passiveness of the poetic subject, which also syntactically becomes an object bound to Ithaca's totalizing agency: we become "blind sentinels of a path / that is taking shape without us" ("[Ítaca nos hace] ciegos vigías de una senda / que se va hacienda sin nosotros"). This 'nos' is so passive that it cannot control its own memory: the same path that is opening in front of us without our control, that "we will be unable to forget because / ignorance does not know oblivion" ("que no podremos olvidar porque / no existe olvido para la ignorancia"). The state of ignorance precipitated by Penelope's inability to know anything about her missing husband leads to a memorial impasse. She faces a well-known paradox overdetermining what she can and cannot do in the present and future: she suffers because she does not know, but because she cannot forget this ignorance, she cannot know her suffering.[188] Due to this defining aporia, found in the *Odyssey* and beyond, Penelope is "a person faced with the need to act without critical knowledge of the circumstances", which reminds us why, according to Helene Foley, she can be considered a truly tragic heroine in the Aristotelian sense.[189]

However, Aguirre's protagonist does not remain in a state of ignorance for eternity. There comes a moment when this Penelope, hidden under the guise of a collective 'we', has her moment of *prise de conscience* – and it is a painful one: "

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[188] As we already saw above, Penelope's constant "well remembering" (εὖ μέμνηται) of her husband is constitutive of her own *kleos*, as well as that of Odysseus and of the whole *oikos*. Here Aguirre's depiction of Penelope's memory through a lens of ignorance decenters a reading premised on her will to remain faithful. This does not mean that her Penelope desires other men or another marriage; what is different is the reason behind the not-forgetting: if one knows nothing, what can one forget? Penelope's memory will be central in various other rewritings, as Holst-Warhaft which we will see in the next subchapter. Memory is also extremely pertinent to Atwood's *Penelopiad*, where the heroine repeatedly refuses to drink from the river of forgetfulness, thus depriving herself of the possibility of being reborn into new literary lives.

[189] Foley, 'Penelope as a Moral Agent', 93. See also p. 107-108: "Penelope is apparently the only character in either of the two Homeric epics who faces a choice between two responsibilities to others, and it may be significant that she is never, like the male heroes, permitted an ethical soliloquy, but *always debates her alternatives in dialogue with other characters*. There are no discussions comparable to those about Penelope's remarriage in *Odyssey* 2 over whether a male agent has or should have the autonomy to make a critical decision". My emphasis, to show the importance attributed by Foley attributes to the question of Penelopean dialogues vs. monologues, an (in)balance of form and agency that, as we will see, gets recalibrated in the modern lyric revisions.

> Es doloroso despertar un día
> y contemplar el mar que nos abraza,
> que nos unge de sal y nos bautiza como nuevos hijos
>
> 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

These verses may allude to the famous Homeric scene on the island of Calypso (*Od*. 5.82-84), where Odysseus, incapable of acting against the nymph's will to retain him, passes his days looking at the sea, thinking of his wife and his homeland, thus creating an evocative parallel between the couple already known for its ὁμοφροσύνη. Nevertheless, in Aguirre's poem, the interaction between the subject and the sea differs from the Homeric one in that it adds an element of touch, which plays an essential role at the scene and provides a remedy to Penelope's chronic lack of physicality.[190] Gradually the representation of the sea changes from that of a mysterious and ominous beast ("animal equívoco"), to that of a kind of companion, like a mother hugging her children ("el mar que nos *abraza*, / que nos *unge* de sal"), or even a priest performing a baptism ("nos bautiza como nuevos hijos"), providing us with a kind of catharsis of affiliation and the hope for a new beginning.

Along with the baptism, there is another Christian allusion ("Recordamos los días del vino compartido", "We remember the days of shared wine") that replenishes the senses: the earlier echoes here are replaced by the memory of actual words, maybe the first time they were pronounced ("las palabras, no el eco", "the words, not the echo"). The fleshiness of real hands replaces the weak gesture of hand-shaking or caressing ("las manos, no el diluido gesto", "the hands, not the diluted gesture"). The stronger the memories flow in, the more they help solidify a new poetic subject, with the collective 'nos' granting its place to a first-person singular: "Veo el mar que me cerca" ("I see the sea that surrounds me"). Feminine touch here has shifted to the more male-dominant sense of vision,[191] but the subject remains non-gendered and constantly persecuted

[190] My emphasis.

[191] The 'male gaze' and its function in Hollywood's mainstream cinema was first theorized by the feminist film critic Laura Mulvey: in Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Feminism and Film Theory* (Routledge, 1988), 57-68. On the gaze-game between the two genders, see also John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, First published by the British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books 1972, Design (London: Penguin Books, 2008), chap. 3: "*men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus, she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight".

by the personified sea-hunter (note in Spanish the male-gendered, 'el mar'); that same sea which has won over the beloved ("el vago azul por el que te has perdido", "the misty azure in which you became lost").[192] The accusation is now clear and openly directed at the 'you', who has chosen "the vast blue" over the waiting subject. The resentful gaze directed at the menacing blue sea seems incapable of dominating it, ceaselessly scouring the horizon for possible arrivals ("compruebo el horizonte con avidez extenuada", "I check the horizon with exhausted eagerness").

In stark contrast to Cavafy's ending of *Ithaca*, this time the poetic I finds its consolation *within* rather than through the island, which is by no means presented as 'poor' or 'deceiving'.[193] The last verses of Aguirre's poem recognize the island's victory over the sea's distraction and seduction of the eyes:

> dejo a los ojos un momento
> cumplir su hermoso oficio;
> luego, vuelvo la espalda
> y encamino mis pasos hacia Ítaca
>
> I allow my eyes a moment
> to perform their beautiful function;
> then I turn my back
> and direct my footsteps towards Ithaca

Aguirre's response to Cavafy goes beyond a cinematographic corrective, as she turns her back on the male values of the "beautiful journey" and its glorious rewards, pinning her hopes of resolution on a return to the everyday realities of Ithaca's only ostensibly more ordinary lifeworld. If the sea had one task, that was to bring back the long-desired one; having failed its mission, it is no match for the quiet but dignified sense of stability provided by the place one calls home.

The reflection on the meaning of Ithaca as a site of (non-)waiting spills into a third poem, "Desde Fuera" ("From Without"), where we find the first direct mention of Penelope. As is already clear from the poem's title, we are presented with a sharp division between what is found inside and what is deemed to be outside of Ithaca and the values it represents. The poet repeatedly recalls the difference between εἶναι (to be) and φαίνεσθαι (to seem):

> *Desde fuera*, la isla es infinita:

[192] Again, as before, the Spanish version maintains the non-gendered subject ("te has perdido"), while the Italian translation easily attributes the lost 'you' to Odysseus ("ti sei perso"). Note also the ambiguous "por el" of the Spanish version, which can be both interpreted as "for which" or "in which". The English translator opts for the second option, a milder one, since it does not imply that the desired person actually chose the sea over the waiting subject.
[193] I am referring to one of "Ithaca" 's last verses, "κι αν πτωχική τη βρεις, η Ιθάκη δε σε γέλασε" ("And if you find her poor, Ithaca didn't deceive you"): Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 67.

> una vida resultaría escasa
> para cubrir su territorio.
> *Desde fuera*.
>
> *From without* the island is infinite:
> one lifetime would not be enough
> to cover its territories.
> *From without*.[194]

A seemingly infinite Ithaca, like the once infinite shroud that Penelope was weaving and unweaving. For the poetic subject, the island is difficult to approach ("no se alcanza", "one may not reach it"), especially for someone who is coming "from without", for a "stranger". Penelope actually wonders "¿Quien sería el extraño que quisiera / conocer un paisaje como este?" ("Who might be the stranger who would want / to know a landscape such as this one?"). The "stranger", this "torpe navegante" ("clumsy mariner") of course seems to reference the Homeric Odysseus, who arrives at the Ithacan palace disguised as a beggar, unrecognizable by his own people.

"Desde aquí", "from here", once we manage to enter the island, again also understood as the deepest recesses of our being, we can sense Ithaca's profound silence ("un silencio más vasto que el océano", "a silence greater than the ocean"),[195] a silence marked by the absence of words, and thus, of gods, because "gods are words; with silence, they die" ("los dioses son palabras; con el silencio, mueren"). With the gods contemplating the island only from afar ("Desde fuera, los dioses nos contemplan", "From without, the gods watch us" – note the collective conscience that reemerges through 'nos', here objectified by the gods' gaze) this soundless new Ithaca is a mystery. This is a place forgotten, shorn of any human interaction and thus of a palpable social reality; an "île de l'oubli"[196] that reminds us more of the distant islands of Calypso, Circe and the Phaeacians than Homeric Ithaca.

As we might imagine, the sole inhabitant of this silent Ithaca, where there is "only the sea / and the sky that crushes it" ("Ítaca es solo el mar / y un cielo que la aplasta"), is Penelope. At last, the Homeric queen breaks the unbearable silence, making her first appearance in the very last stanza of the poem. For her, the arrival of "the stranger" ("el extraño") feels menacing, since it seems that he has come to "check on" her "work" ("¿quién sería el extraño que quisiera / comprobar tu trabajo?"). But is it really Penelope talking in the first-person, one-question monologue, or is it

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[194] Aguirre, *Ithaca*, 22. My emphasis.

[195] Here the English translator's choice for "greater" removes the spatial dimension of the Spanish "vasto".

[196] *Cf.* Loraux, 'Préface'.

Aguirre's attempt to trace the beginning of a dialogue with her mythical counterpart? The stanza's punctuation, with the colon after Penelope's name ("Penelope:"), leaves the door open for both interpretations alongside an ongoing nod to Cavafy, known for his interior dialogues and the recurring use of the second person singular.

Now is when the poem's initial emphasis on the distinction between inside and outside is undermined by Penelope and her occupation of a lonely liminal space located somewhere in between the spheres of reality and imagination. The Ithacan queen, both physically and psychologically, is torn between the infinite horizon of the sea that lies in front of her and the (very) finite, rugged island of her everyday life. Her brief walks along the promenade demonstrate a certain will to go beyond the island's territory, imagining herself on the "pathways" of the waters ("las aguas son caminos"), but still never forgetting that those same pathways, "from the beach" where she stands, "they are only borders" ("desde la playa son solo frontera"). Thus, Penelope projects her evolving subjectivity at the meeting point of two worlds, one liquid, malleable, full of exciting Odyssean possibilities of discovery, and the other solid, securitizing and fixed in its certainties. If Penelope appears as a border figure, the same could be said, according to Reuter, about Aguirre's first published book: "*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 herself, mediated through the use of the Penelope figure".[197]

How does one deal with such a state of in-betweenness defined by the parenthetical condition of waiting inside a script typed by others? Aguirre's speaker offers some answers in the poem fittingly entitled "La Espera" ("The Wait").[198] The subject returns to an undefined, collective 'we' and there as still echoes of Cavafy's advisory tone: "Lo mejor que podemos hacer no asustarnos" ("The best thing we can do is not get scared"). However, only two verses below, they recognize the beneficial effect of fear: "Pero también el miedo une" ("But fear also binds"), and it also integrates. They recommend that 'we' safeguard the very Penelopean virtue of "Calma, mucha calma" ("Patience, a lot of patience"), even when we find ourselves "en medio del terror" ("in the midst of terror"). Though fearing death, they are afraid of solitude even more, because "morir as solas es más largo" ("to die alone takes longer"). The only remedy for fear, terror, and solitude, is

[197] Reuter, 'Iberian Sibyl', 215.
[198] Aguirre, *Ithaca*, 38-39.

to “apoyar una espalda contra otra. Alivia” (“to lean one’s back against another’s. It is soothing”). Only here, again at the end of the poem, does Aguirre reveal that the wise poetic subject is Penelope, and the precious advice is directed to her son, Telemachus: standing next to each other “inspires a certain sense of security / while the wait lasts, Telemachus, my son” (“[i]nfunde cierta seguridad / mientras dura la espera, Telémaco, hijo mío”).

In “La Espera”, we meet Penelope in a very distinctive situation: she is talking *to* her son, but she is not speaking *with* him. Even though articulated as direct speech and addressed to a seemingly very specific recipient, the tone remains that of an internal monologue (as we have already seen in “Triste Fiera”). Penelope lays out her feelings, explaining the situation in which she finds herself, and her weapons against the hardships provoked by the waiting. Telemachus is, no doubt, the reminder of her role as a mother – a single mother, who is raising her child alone in precarious conditions –, but the fact that she can address a poem to him is not of much help to her; he is not (at least, not yet) a true interlocutor for his mother or the sturdy back against which she can find a reliable “sense of security”. Thus, Aguirre can be seen to initiate a fresh tradition of Penelopean (quasi) monologues that, as we will see, is still evolving in the present.

While writing these verses, the Spanish poet, much like Penelope, is immersed in solitude, though one that is maybe more sentimental or spiritual than physical. Hence, she has to find her own ways to defend herself against the fear and terror visited upon her and her fellow citizens during her country’s authoritarian regime. As John Wilcox explains, the poetic use of myth and of Penelope in particular, help Aguirre overcome “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”.[199] In fact, even though for over half of her book she deploys Penelope as a mythic veil, this does not mean that her poetry retreats into purely fabulist abstraction: the poetic subject that she creates is firmly grounded in her society, never forgetting how important it is to “look at things with realism. / Nothing helps as much as reality” (“lo más seguro es ver los hechos con realismo. / Nada ayuda tanto como la realidad”).[200]

It seems, then, that for Aguirre myth is mediating tool that allows her to use poetry to understand reality just as much as it permits her to use reality to animate her poetry. This mythological realism

[199] John Chapman Wilcox, *Women Poets of Spain, 1860-1990: Toward a Gynocentric Vision* (University of Illinois Press, 1997), 234.
[200] How ironic that a poet disguised as a mythic figure would exalt the importance of realism and reality!

is accentuated much later in the book's second section, "El desván de Penélope" ("Penelope's attic"). Here, Aguirre's use of Penelope as a veil is no longer concealed. For instance, in "El orden", a title that appears to allude to a repressive socio-politically or ideological *order* governing a population, the poetic subject mediates on the sense of helplessness felt in the face of slow and insidious sprawl of violence into every nook and cranny of society. The poem describes what it means to passively look on as individual and collective selves turn into the living dead without knowing it, "no sabemos que estamos habitando nuestro proprio cadàver" ("we do not know that we are inhabiting our own corpse"). Following a depiction of the general silence and indifference possessing a collectivity as they witness and participate in their own ethical obliteration, in the last few verses, we read: "diciéndome: Penélope, / deberíamos hacer algo que no fuera morir" ("telling myself: Penelope, / we should do something other than dying"). Addressing herself *as* the queen, we see a *quasi*-splitting of the self that is dramatized as a debate on the relation between waiting and social death, a debate one that is perhaps internally repressed as an (im)possible dialogue to be had with other women such as one's neighbor, or any other fellow citizen sharing the dire predicaments of living under Franco's "orden".

Ultimately, Penelope's figuration of waiting as depicted in *Ítaca* does not proffer any explicit signposts of post-68 feminist discourse or of overt resistance to totalitarianism. Throughout the work, the author's contestatory thrust works *below* the surface, so subtle that a cursory, decontextualized reading of the text would most likely fail to yield any such insights.[201] At the same time, such indirect and stealthy forms of subversion are certainly in tune with the genre of lyrical poetry in general, and with Penelope's figure specifically. Finally, our reading of Aguirre's cunning verses allow us to take stock of some the features of the modern Penelope we have been tracking so far – her lonely position of liminality, her desire to express her thoughts and feelings somewhere in between monologic and pseudo-dialogic form, her aporetic quandaries – all traits that will recur in the decades to come and give fruit to new elaborations, including at the intersection between waiting and fidelity we turn into next.

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[201] *Cf.* Truscia, 'Penélope tejiendo su existencia en Ítaca de Francisca Aguirre', 26-37.

1.3. "Penelope contemplates infidelity": Gail Holst-Warhaft reveals *Penelope's Confession*

Aguirre's Penelope may be tired, lonely, and weighed down by social upheaval, but the fact that she is still waiting for her Ulysses is never called into question. This is not the case in the much more recent – and, certainly, more openly feminist – *Penelope's Confession*, written by the Australian-born scholar, poet, and translator Gail Holst-Warhaft.[202] If in Aguirre we have to wait for the last verses of the third poem to be (almost) sure that the speaking subject is, in fact, Penelope, with the honorary Greek Holst-Warhaft it is clear from the book's title, which suggests that our heroine in not only the enunciating subject of her own story, but that she may also have a (conjugal?) secret she wants to get off her chest. Does the choice of the term "confession", with its strong Catholic resonance and connotation of moral judgement, allude to an alternate unfolding of the Homeric story? Does this 21st century Penelope openly depart from Brassens' "épouse modèle" and Sissa's "the Wife", to finally admit what a series of critics and poets have been imagining since antiquity? Are we back to the mother of Pan or to Joyce's Molly?

Holst-Warhaft's book borrows its title from the homonymous second poem. Starting with a strong "I", Penelope addresses Odysseus, even though we do not know if he is actually present and listening to her. Her confession begins with an intelligent negative, or, to be exact, three negative affirmations: "I *won't* say there *wasn't* a night / that I *didn't* long to let one in".[203] Who this "one" may be is concealed, but we might parse her statement as an admission that on some nights she had longed to sleep with one of the suitors, chosen indiscriminately from the bunch. Of course, had she spoken only in affirmations, the effect on the reader-listener would perhaps have been more unsettling, but the subtext is the same: Holst-Warhaft's Penelope has the courage to admit the sexual desire she nursed during her husband's absence. However, reading the third verse and before the first punctuation point, we might posit that she 'saves' her 'venerated' reputation just in time: "but something held me back". By now we are eagerly awaiting her to reveal her confession, but, lo and behold, she belies the expectations created by the poem's title. And then, while Odysseus is already rejoicing at the idea that his wife is still in love with him, she undercuts him as well:

> It wasn't love of you

[202] Holst-Warhaft, *Penelope's Confession*.
[203] *Ivi*, 20. My emphasis.

but what we made together:
this boy, this home, this Ithaca.

Penelope, then, did not remain faithful because of her deep feelings for the husband; it is not the 'you' that matters anymore, but the 'we' and the 'together'. The collective life project she had committed to, starting with their progeny, "this son", and expanding to "this home", "this Ithaca": that is what has kept her from sleeping with other men. The emphasis with the three demonstrative pronouns and the tripartite climax help heighten the woman's accusation: 'you', Odysseus, forgot the 'we'; the ὁμοφροσύνη they once shared is gone.

The absent husband, companion, and lover leaves behind an emptiness; ironically, the abandoned woman tries to fill the empty space using the same material, the 'sea', once more personified, that took the husband away – here the verb "robbed" leaves no room for ambiguity, unlike the one we found in Aguirre's "vago azul por el que te has perdido". However, Holst-Warhaft manages to tame what in Aguirre's was a beastly entity, an "animal equivoco". Her Penelope gradually bonds with the sea:

Then it became my familiar;
I let it lap at my feet
imagining the same water
distant, licking your ship.

The sense of touch is again foregrounded, as the sea's water repeatedly touches both the woman's feet and her husband's ship (note: the implied sexual metaphor in "licking"), becoming an imaginative link with her husband while still remaining "distant" due to the verse's intelligent enjambement. The stanza ends with a second reformulation of the trope of Penelope using her craft to ward off her suitors:

For years I held sway
not by guile but taking
my cue from your nemesis.

It was neither love for the husband nor a trickster spirit ("guile") that prevented infidelity; rather, it was the fear of Odysseus or Telemachus exacting revenge that drove her decision-making. The ominous example of Clytemnestra and Orestes, which, shadows the *Odyssey*'s plot,[204] as we already saw in Katz, is evoked here through the word "nemesis", a reminder of the Greek goddess

[204] *Cf.* Katz, *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the* Odyssey.

of justice's divine retribution as well as a memorandum of the possible alternative track the epic could have veered on, had Penelope followed Clytemnestra's path.[205]

The next stanza shifts in rhetoric and style. Penelope abandons the series of negations to narrate what actually happened during the years of Odysseus' absence. Despite the many threats and challenges, she recounts, she managed to preserve the family's property: "Calm, terrible when crossed / I managed to keep *our* estate intact" (note how the possessive pronoun "our" highlights the togetherness that she so cherishes). Of course, part of the common "estate" is Penelope herself, and as she already mentioned, she also kept herself "intact". Indeed, the suitors' abusive behavior did not bring Penelope low:

> I let the oafs wallow
> out of their depths;
> what they wasted I learned
> to replenish; […]

The derogatory characterization of the suitors as "oafs" shows how the queen saw them with disdain, while the verb "wallow", frequently used for pigs rolling in the mud, connects them to Odysseus' fellow sailors transformed into pigs by Circe.[206] This allusion explains much about the new Penelope's view of her political power on the island during the years that she reigned alone: the suitors resemble Odysseus' companions in Aeaea, who, according to Wohl, were "literally unmanned in both senses of the word (ἀνήρ and ἄνθρωπος)".[207] However, while in the *Odyssey* the men's subordination to a woman's power would result in "the crumbling of the world order, a loss of the distinctions between men, beasts, and gods – semiotically, the felling of the cosmic pole",[208] in "Penelope's confession" the order in the palace and the island is not substantially disturbed by the looting suitors ("I managed to keep our estate intact"; "what they wasted I learned / to replenish").

At this point of the poem, Holst-Warhaft's reading of the Homeric text is also suggestive in relation to the act of recognition. In *Odyssey* 19, the couple has its first *tête-à-tête* after twenty years and on this occasion, Penelope asks her husband, who is still disguised as a beggar, to present

[205] In the poem's Greek translation by Anghelaki-Rooke the connection to the goddess is even more explicit, through the capitalized N and the personification of "Νέμεσις".
[206] The comparison between the two groups of men and their "animal-like" behavior is already found in Beye, 'Male and Female in the Homeric Poems', 98.
[207] Victoria Josselin Wohl, 'Standing by the Stathmos: The Creation of Sexual Ideology in the *Odyssey*', *Arethusa* 26, no. 1 (1993): 24.
[208] *Ibidem*.

himself (*Od.*19.104-105: "ξεῖνε, τὸ μέν σε πρῶτον ἐγὼν εἰρήσομαι αὐτή: / τίς πόθεν εἷς ἀνδρῶν; πόθι τοι πόλις ἠδὲ τοκῆες;", "Stranger, I myself first have a question to ask you. What man are you and whence? Where is your city? Your parents?"). Odysseus answers with a seven-verses-long *captatio benevolentiae* directs at his host in which he admires her *kleos* and compares it to that of an impeccable king (ἀμύμων βασιλεύς: note the masculine genre), whose kingdom has been prospering under his reign:

> ὦ γύναι, οὐκ ἄν τίς σε βροτῶν ἐπ᾽ ἀπείρονα γαῖαν
> νεικέοι: ἦ γάρ σευ κλέος οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἱκάνει,
> ὥς τέ τευ ἢ βασιλῆος ἀμύμονος, ὅς τε θεουδὴς
> ἀνδράσιν ἐν πολλοῖσι καὶ ἰφθίμοισιν ἀνάσσων
> εὐδικίας ἀνέχῃσι, φέρῃσι δὲ γαῖα μέλαινα
> πυροὺς καὶ κριθάς, βρίθῃσι δὲ δένδρεα καρπῷ,
> τίκτῃ δ᾽ ἔμπεδα μῆλα, θάλασσα δὲ παρέχῃ ἰχθῦς
> ἐξ εὐηγεσίης, ἀρετῶσι δὲ λαοὶ ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ. (v. 107-114)
>
> Lady, no mortal man on the endless earth could have cause
> to find fault with you; your fame goes up into the wide heaven,
> as of some king who, as a blameless man and god-fearing,
> and ruling as lord over many powerful people,
> upholds the way of good government, and the black earth yields him
> barley and wheat, his trees are heavy with fruit, his sheepflocks
> continue to bear young, the sea gives him fish, because of
> his good leadership, and his people prosper under him.[209]

This fascinating comparison belongs to the curious group of "inverse similes" found in the Homeric texts, which, as Helene Foley showed, "seem to suggest both a sense of identity between people in different social and sexual roles and a loss of stability, an inversion of the normal".[210] With this simile, Odysseus – presented as a beggar, i.e., in an inverted position of his usual social status – compliments his wife on her successful exercise of power, a role typically gendered male

[209] Reading this simile in Aristotle's terms, we could say that in these verses Penelope represents for the Greek mythic prototypes the exception that proves the rule: the deliberative part of her soul (τό βουλητικόν) is anything but not sovereign (ἄκυρον). She did manage to reign by herself for twenty years, without letting her deliberative part be overruled by her emotional side (τό ὀρεκτικόν). Thus, with her exercise of political power, she belies the limits credited to women and, in fact, the simile associates her to a male governor. *Cf.* Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham, vol. XXI, Loeb Classical Library 264 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1932), 62-63: "καὶ πᾶσιν ἐνυπάρχει μὲν τὰ μόρια τῆς ψυχῆς, ἀλλ᾽ ἐνυπάρχει διαφερόντως· ὁ μὲν γὰρ δοῦλος ὅλως οὐκ ἔχει τὸ βουλευτικόν, *τὸ δὲ θῆλυ ἔχει μέν, ἀλλ᾽ ἄκυρον*, ὁ δὲ παῖς ἔχει μέν, ἀλλ᾽ ἀτελές" ("And all possess the various parts of the soul, but possess them in different ways; for the slave has not got the deliberative part at all, and *the female has it, but without full authority*, while the child has it, but in an undeveloped form"). Italics are mine. For an analysis of this Aristotelian passage, see William W. Fortenbaugh, 'Aristotle on Slaves and Women', in *Aristotle's Practical Side* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 239-247.

[210] Foley, '"Reverse Similes" and Sex Roles in the *Odyssey*', 8.

in Homeric society, and exalts her *kleos*, a type of glory usually, if not always, attributed to men.[211] Still, for this and for every Homeric woman to be ascribed *kleos* and for her ruling accomplishments to be acknowledged, it must be a man who does so, irrespective of his social status (remember: Odysseus pronounces these words as a beggar).

This is also where Holst-Warhaft's revision gives us a different slant on the question of recognition. Her Penelope does not wait for the husband's compliments and admiration, nor does she need to conceal herself in a masculine similitude; she speaks out of her own initiative about the tireless work she has done all these years:

> […] never still,
> I oversaw each planting
> of olive and wine, each mating
> of bull with rutting heifer.

The verses offer a direct response to the Homer's: "I oversaw each planting of olive and wine" rewrites "φέρῃσι δὲ γαῖα μέλαινα πυροὺς καὶ κριθάς, βρίθῃσι δὲ δένδρεα καρπῷ", while "[I oversaw] each mating of bull with rutting heifer" revisits "τίκτῃ δ᾽ ἔμπεδα μῆλα". The sea, which in Homer "provided fish", is an afterthought to the more consequential land-based struggles for sustenance. The emphasis in the new narrative falls on the initial verb "I oversaw": it is not simply that under Penelope good government was "upheld", but that it was produced and renewed every day through her tireless supervision and direct interventions in agricultural and cattle-farming work. This relates to another insightful revision on Penelope's rule which proceeds as a shredding of the analogy with the hypothetical good king. In the eight verse-long similitude pronounced by Odysseus in the *Odyssey* we hear praise for the kind of lord that successfully subjugates other elites ("ὅς τε θεουδὴς […] εὐδικίας ἀνέχῃσι" and "ἀρετῶσι δὲ λαοὶ ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ"), and a translation of that submission in terms of nature's yielding response to the sovereign ("φέρῃσι δὲ […] παρέχῃ ἰχθῦς"). By way of contrast, in "Penelope's Confession", the queen does not laud herself for maintaining order; in fact, she instead speaks openly about the "oafs" that have "wasted" some of their property, which she, however, has managed "to replenish". What is foregrounded is her caring stewardship of the land, the trees, and the animals *despite* the social unrest (which was occasioned by Odysseus' negligence in the first place), thus troubling the link between the earth and a traditionally masculine form of power politics declenched as law and order.

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[211] *Cf.* Charles Segal, 'Kleos and Its Ironies in the *Odyssey*', *L'Antiquité Classique* 52 (1983): 32, especially regarding Penelope's *kleos*: "woman though she is, still gains the *kleos* usually reserved for male heroes".

In the ensuing verses, Penelope's personal relationship with the island shifts from one of brute control over nature to one of corporeal intimacy voiced as an indictment:

> You never loved Ithaca
> as I do. I dipped my hands
> in this earth and watched it fall,
> black through my fingers.

Like in Aguirre's *Ítaca*, the sense of touch again predominates, Penelope's hands mingling with the soil, as if she were about to bake it.[212] For a brief moment, the reader is invited to contemplate the possibility that Odysseus indeed may have always seen Ithaca as just a means to an end (even though it is his and not her place of origin). But the enjambement ("as I do") renders the observation relational, not absolute, thus making the accusation a bit milder. What seems certain is that there has always been a qualitative difference in their respective emotional attachments to the island.

The troubled Penelope-Odysseus-Ithaca love triangle extends itself into the poem's closure, but now through the analogy of parents taking care of their child:

> 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.

In a new similitude, Penelope compares the whole island to her sleeping child as it trembles beside her. Poseidon's earthquakes (who in Homer receives the epithet of "Earth-shaker") shake up the scene of intimacy. The affective response of the three – Penelope, the earth, the child – are fused into one through the repetition found in the previous parenthetical verse "(calm, terrible when crossed)", leaving us unsure of whose material and emotional instability she is referring to.[213] This ontological indeterminacy can be seen as disrupting the classic 'mother-earth' metaphor which, as some ecofeminist theorists have pointed out, often ends up reproducing the patriarchal binary of woman-nature vs man-culture it claims to challenge.[214] Here there are no one-to-one

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[212] This is reminiscent of the famous scene in *Gone with the wind* (1939), where Scarlett O'Hara's hands fill up with Tara's red earth.

[213] In the Greek translation, Anghelaki-Rooke uses the neutral, referring either to the soil (το χώμα) or to the boy (το αγόρι): "(ήρεμο, φοβερό σαν θυμώνει)".

[214] Catherine Roach has persuasively argued that the mother-earth metaphor is often used to license the twinned exploitation of women and planet through similitude, and thus can be deleterious both to women's freedom and to the environment: Catherine Roach, 'Loving Your Mother: On the Woman-Nature Relation', *Hypatia* 6, no. 1 (April 1991): 46-59. For a succinct analysis of this debate, see: Sherry B. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?',

correspondences that makes us perceive the earth *as* a mother we can take from without reciprocity. Instead, the earth is transfigured into a small boy requiring constant care and attention. Rather than a female object that can be endlessly exploited, we have a vulnerable, creaturely being that we have a responsibility to protect and nurture. Again, this is something that Penelope has been doing all along in contradistinction to her husband's negligence towards their child and the land that will be bequeathed to him and future generations of Ithacans.

The last verse, "and knew I could be faithful", finally shows us how the expectations created by the poem's title have been belied. Rather than an exposé of secret affairs, "Penelope's Confession" turns out to be a revelation of why she remained faithful not just to her marriage, but also to the place that nurtured her. But her decision was motivated less by a heroic resolve in complying with expected social norms, and more with a need to make redress for Odysseus' failure in shouldering his share of their collective project. While his worldview led him to leave and abdicate his duties to the marital home, their child, and their land, her response led her to double down on those responsibilities and dedicate herself wholeheartedly to a labor of care for her family and her people. What Holst-Warhaft suggests with this unexpected confession is that faithfulness is much more than a mere quarantine of sexual desire. Though her Penelope admits to having felt pangs of attraction towards other men, this line of reasoning is quickly cast aside and seen as missing the point: on a scale of conjugal misgivings, this kind of disloyalty is placed on a much lower grade of importance than that of absconding from collective projects of homing and community-making.

Lack of commitment, promises not kept or "deferred": these are also the themes of the book's next poem, "The Late Spring".[215] Here, as in most of the book's poems, Penelope is portrayed by a third-person narrator who seems to be able to penetrate her mind; "a technique, that" according to Reuter, "resembles novelistic free indirect speech",[216] and which contrasts John Stuart Mill's

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Feminist Studies 1, no. 2 (1972): 5-31. An interesting alternative figure is that of earth-sister proposed by the ecofeminist scholar, poet and playwright Susanne Griffin. In her poetic essay *Woman and Nature. The roaring insider her,* she advocates for an idea of sorority: "This earth is my sister; I love her daily grace, her silent daring, and how loved I am *how we admire this strength in each other, all that we have lost, all that we have suffered, all that we know: we are stunned by this beauty*, and I do not forget: what she is to me, what I am to her", in Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, Digital [1978; 1999] (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2015), 217.

[215] Holst-Warhaft, *Penelope's Confession*, 24-27.

[216] Reuter, Victoria, 'A Penelopean Return: Desire, Recognition, and Nostos in the Poems of Yannis Ritsos and Gail Holst-Warhaft', in *Odyssean Identities in Modern Cultures. The Journey Home*, ed. Murnaghan, Sheila and Gardner, Hunter, Classical Memories / Modern Identities (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2014), 97. The only

famous statement that lyric poetry is all about "overhearing" the other's thoughts.[217] The poetic subject tells the story of a hyper-contemporary Ithaca slowly preparing for the summer season and the arrival of mass tourism.[218] In the first stanza, a personified nature seems to snooze the summer's alarm clock:

> The spring is late.
> Anemones keep
> chutes shut;
> irises are reluctant
> to uncurl their panting
> tongues. A sluggishness
> has overcome the island
> and tourists shiver
> in their crush-proof clothes.

Nature's elements ("the spring", "anemones", "irises", "the island") create the impression of active agents who are choosing to hibernate over doing the highly demanding service work required of them, sleeping rather than getting up to serve the rich tourists whose high-tech attire announces their difference from the local flora and fauna.

And there stands our protagonist, acting as the sleepless sentinel of the island's lighthouse:

> Penelope waits
> but what she waits for

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three poems in the Penelopean part of the book that use a first-person speaking subject are "Penelope's confession", "Translation" and "Your name". This changes drastically in the much more personal second section of the book, "Turning back".

[217] John Stuart Mill, 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties', *The Crayon* 7, no. 4 (1860): 95: "eloquence is heard, poetry is overheard. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude, and embodying itself in symbols which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind". *Cf.* Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 250: "The lyric poet normally pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else: a spirit of nature, a muse, a personal friend, a lover, a god, a personifi ed abstraction, or a natural object… The radical of presentation in the lyric is the hypothetical form of what in religion is called the 'I- Thou' relationship. The poet, so to speak, turns his back on his listeners, though he may speak for them and though they may repeat some of his words after him". On lyric address, see Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 186-243.

[218] For analyses of mass tourism's effects on Southern Europe during the same years that Holst-Warhaft was writing *Penelope's Confession*, see Bill Bramwell, ed., *Coastal Mass Tourism: Diversification and Sustainable Development in Southern Europe* (Clevedon: Channel View Publications, 2004). Of special interest for the Greek islands' case, see chapter 6 (Konstantinos Andriotis, "Problems of Island Tourism Development: The Greek Insular Regions, p. 114-132) and chapter 13 (Ioannis Spilanis and Helen Vayanni, "Sustainable Tourism: Utopia or Necessity? The Role of New Forms of Tourism in the Aegean Islands", p. 269-291). Of course, the situation has radically changed (worsened) today, especially with the construction of airports on many small islands and the arrival of various low-cost airlines (Ryanair, Easyjet, Volotea) with connections to major European cities. Especially with regard to the Ionian islands, where yacht-sailing tourism already abounded, the tourist invasion was accelerated in Corfu, Zante, and Cephalonia. Tourism in Ithaca is not as intense, since it has no airport, and one has to reach the island either from the mainland or from nearby islands.

she can't say.

Does she not say because she wants to conceal the arrival of a suitor, perhaps a modern tourist who has come to be her lover? Or does she perhaps not even know what she is waiting for? Through double meaning, the poet again plays with the reader's expectations of the woman's misdeeds. But more than its Homeric ancestor, this Modern Ithaca resembles, of all places, a besieged Troy:

Boats come and go
bringing supplies
for a siege: beer,
bicycles, girls,
bottled water
that will last October
wearing away
the island's defenses.

The vocabulary used ("supplies", "siege", "defenses") build a clear analogy with defensive warfare. Tourists are invaders, consumerist conquerors in search of a dreamy sandy paradise to make their own. The island must prepare for the occupation, ironically by importing the missing elements for the adult amusement park: "beer", certainly not a traditionally Greek drink; "bicycles", probably not the most useful means of transport on a rather mountainous island; and "girls", standing in for the promise of a 'hot' summer.

The mention of "bottled water" evokes a central aspect of Holst-Warhaft's extra-literary activism on the environmental crises of the twenty-first century. In 2010, only three years after the publication of *Penelope's Confession*, Holst-Warhaft joined forces with the professor and engineer Tammo Steenhuis, and helped publish *Losing Paradise: The Water Crisis in the Mediterranean*, a collective volume that treats water scarcity in the Mediterranean from multiple angles.[219] In her chapter, that lends its title to the whole volume, Holst-Warhaft shares her personal experience of how climate change and tourism, in osmosis with bad governance, transformed Aegina, an island in the Saronic Gulf, very close to Athens (and to Holst-Warhaft's heart), for the worse:

> On the island of Aegina, where I had lived for more than a year, there was no longer any fresh water fit to drink, even to water kitchen gardens. The ground water was infiltrated with salt. A tanker brought water to the island each day in the summer, water that was used for most household purposes. *Islanders and visitors drank bottled water, the beaches were*

[219] Gail Holst-Warhaft and Tammo S. Steenhuis, eds., *Losing Paradise: The Water Crisis in the Mediterranean* (Farnham, UK; Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2010).

> *littered with plastic bottles that were not recycled*, and nobody I spoke to seemed to think there was a water crisis.[220]

Sadly, little has changed in the almost fifteen years since Holst-Warhaft raised the alarm and her Penelope condemned mass tourism's negative effect on the environment. If anything, "the island*s'* defenses" are growing ever weaker.[221]

As a meticulous observer of landscapes, Holst-Warhaft does not stop at the water crisis, the excessive use of plastic or the ill-chosen plantation of pistachios on unsuitable soil. "The Late Spring" also criticizes the unconscionable erection of houses on a land that has managed to remain untouched for a thousand years:

> Villas climb
> cleansing hillsides
> of oak and olive,
> electric lines
> follow, roads
> where turtles are splayed
> like slow infantry.

The terms "cleansing" and "infantry" are shadowed by the warlike metaphor of the previous strophe, only that this time the vulnerable groups are the millenarian "oak and olive" trees and the besieged marine and amphibian species. What place can Penelope preserve in this rapidly transforming Ithaca dotted with luxury condos?

> Away from the wind
> in the lee of a hill
> she stops to look at the raw sky,
> the clenched buds
> at her feet. She desires
> nothing more
> than this waiting,

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[220] Holst-Warhaft, Gail, 'Losing Paradise: The Water Crisis in the Mediterranean', in *Losing Paradise: The Water Crisis in the Mediterranean*, ed. Gail Holst-Warhaft and Tammo S. Steenhuis (Farnham, UK; Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2010), 3-26. My emphasis. Holst-Warhaft visited Aegina frequently, also to meet her dear friend and host, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke and others, like the musician of *rebetika*, Thanasis: *cf*. Gail Holst-Warhaft, *The Fall of Athens* (Burlington, VT: Fomite, 2016). Also Kastrinaki notes that Aegina provides the "background" for the Penelopean poems, even though she believes that Holst-Warhaft recalls the Aegina of the 1970s: "Το φόντο πίσω από τα ποιήματά της είναι η Αίγινα της δεκαετίας του 1970" ("The background of her poems is the Aegina of the 1970s"), in Καστρινάκη, *Μίλα, Πηνελόπη!*, 248. In the pages cited above, Holst-Warhaft explicitly states that she is referring to the huge changes regarding the water crisis and mass tourism in the thirty years that separated her first visit to Aegina, where she stayed for a year later followed up by other multiple visits in the 1990s and in the early 2000s. By invoking the mythical context of Ithaca in her poem, she is able to extend this critique in spatio-temporal terms.

[221] Emphasis because I edit the verse from "island's" to "islands'", since the tourism problem is a much broader phenomenon, not restrained to only one island.

the promise kept
back deferred, the late spring.

Wind is movement, change, the mistakenly opened bag of Aeolus, which can lead to catastrophic loss of control, and Penelope is naturally searching for a "lee" to shelter under. Her eyes are directed at the only space which still seems untouched by human intervention, the "raw sky";[222] then they turn to her feet – the same feet that in "Penelope's Confession" were touching the sea and connecting her to Odysseus – creating the impression that she can actually delay the season's opening, controlling "the clenched buds" so that they abstain from blossoming. Both in the "Penelope's Confession" and in "The Late Spring", feet seem intimately linked to desire, in the first case through the implicit sexual metaphor of the sea lapping at Penelope's feet and licking Odysseus' ship; here, by being positioned next to each other in the same verse ("at her feet. She desires"), where, once the period is eliminated, feet become the locus of the body where this version of Penelope feels desire. However, what she desires during this spring is not a suitor, as she confessed just a few pages ago, nor Odysseus' "coming alone" as Wallace Stevens had suggested in his late poem, "The World as Meditation".[223] She simply desires "this waiting", she prefers to remain in the same present situation (note the specification of "this"), sheltered both from the winter of past memories and the looming fracas of the summer.

As we proceed to the book's next poem, "Penelope's Nightstand", the heroine's object of desire changes anew, the poetic subject stating that "longing can only / take an indirect object" (v. 7-8).[224] Once again, read through the lens of the third-person narrator, we follow the heroine's steps from

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[222] Would Penelope still look at a "raw sky" in the Greek islands of 2023, with the enormous number of flights being operated? Holst-Warhaft translates this poem herself and chooses the adjective "άγριος" (wild, savage, rough) to render "raw". If read this way, it may mean that the sky and violence are interanimated through the tourist invasion.

[223] *Cf.* Stevens, *The Collected Poems*, 520, "The World as Meditation", v. 13: "She wanted nothing he could not bring her by coming – alone. / She wanted no fetchings. His arms would be her necklace / And her belt, the final fortune of their desire" (I use the em dash between coming and alone to mark Stevens' enjambement). Note the tense that is created by the double meaning of "alone", especially emphasized by its loneliness on the page, because of it creates the enjambement: 1) the only thing Penelope wanted was for Odysseus to come back; 2) she wanted him to come back alone, that is, without women-γέρατα, as, for example, Agamemnon had brought Cassandra. In the sadder revision that is "Η απόγνωση της Πηνελόπης" ("Penelope's Despair"), Giannis Ritsos presents a Penelope whose object(s) of desire is the suitors' group: "she looked closely at the slaughtered suitors on the floor as if looking / at her own dead desires"("κοίταξε αργά τους σκοτωμένους μνηστήρες στο πάτωμα, σα να κοιτούσε / νεκρές τις ίδιες της επιθυμίες"), in Γιάννης Ρίτσος, *Πέτρες, Επαναλήψεις, Κιγκλίδωμα* (Αθήνα: Κέδρος, 1972); Yannis Ritsos, *Selected Poems*, trans. Nikos Stangos (London: Penguin Books, 1974). Ritsos' most well-known translation in English is that of Yannis Ritsos, *Repetitions, Testimonies, Parentheses*, trans. Edmund Keeley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[224] Note that grammatically 'longing' can only take an object through the mediation of the preposition 'for' or it can redirect to an infinitive. Reading this verse from a Lacanian point of view, the real object of longing (desire, *désir*) is, in fact, longing itself; anything acquired in this process is transient, temporally gratifying, and ultimately displaced by the process of desiring anew.

the outer space ("the lee of a hill") to the place where we usually imagine her in the Homeric text, her bedroom, zooming in on an object that we had not noticed before, her "nightstand". Holst-Warhaft here also allocates to Penelope a relatively novel furry companion:

> Penelope envies the cat, comfortable
> on warm tiles. She wishes
> to curl herself into a ball
> and dream of her next meal or the night
> with a beggar or husband in disguise (v. 1-5).

Penelope's association with a cat, and her rather antagonistic, jealous feelings towards it creates a direct link to Blooms' cat from Joyce's *Ulysses* and Molly's ambivalent relationship with the pet.[225] Holst-Warhaft's heroine explicitly wishes to be transformed into a cat and adopt its flexibility ("She wishes / to *curl* herself *into a ball*"). The verse seems to be an inverted citation of the chapter "Calypso", where the cat climbs up on Molly's bed to "*curl* up *in a ball*" (*U* 4.469);[226] in this case however, as David Rando writes, it is not Molly, but Leopold who feels envy for the pet, since "the cat intended to fulfill another of Bloom's desires, to '[b]e near [Molly's] ample bedwarmed flesh. Yes, yes' (*U* 4.238-239)".[227] Still, in the "Nightstand", Penelope's dream of "the night / with a beggar or husband in disguise" connects her to Molly and her well-known reverie of "nostalgic longing".[228] The bed, once symbol of the Homeric couple's union, provides the two modern

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[225] *Cf.* David Rando, 'The Cat's Meow: *Ulysses*, Animals, and the Veterinary Gaze', *James Joyce Quarterly* 46, no. 3/4 (Spring-Summer 2009): 539-540: "Bloom is a cat person while *Molly seems wary of felines, perhaps to some extent because she identifies with them*: 'shes as bad as a woman always licking and lecking' and 'staring like that when she sits at the top of the stairs so long and listening as I wait always' (*U* 18.935-36, 937-38). In fact, Molly seems to prefer dogs. *She even conceived Rudy after she became aroused watching 'two dogs* up in her behind in the middle of the naked street' (*U* 18.1446-47). How unusual that copulating dogs should finally result here in a cat" – where "cat" see Rudy; my emphasis. Interesting that Molly's desire and sexual arousal starts with her watching the dogs, while Holst-Warhaft's Penelope starts expressing her desire through her envy of the cat; in both cases, animals stimulate sexual desire. For Rando, the cat is associated to Rudy, especially because of Bloom's mourning for the cat and Molly's not fully understanding him for that ("he insisted hed go into mourning for the cat", *U* 18.1310). In "Ithaca", the couple's daughter, Milly Bloom, is also compared to a "neckarching… mousewatching…earwashing…hearthdreaming cat" (*U* 17.17.896-906): *cf.* Maud Ellmann, '*Ulysses*: Changing into an Animal', *Field Day Review* 2 (2006): 76.

[226] My emphasis.

[227] Rando, 'The Cat's Meow', 536; *Ibidem*: "Bloom will have to wait until the end of a long day to return to bed with Molly, and before that time both the cat and Blazes Boylan get the invitation that Bloom does not". Rando and, earlier than him, Ellmann compare Bloom's meditation while looking at his cat to Derrida's, citing from Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008): in Ellmann, '*Ulysses*', 85-86; Rando, 'The Cat's Meow', 541. If, in Joyce and Derrida, the encounter with the cat initiates thinking and, in particular, meditating on one's self, I suggest that in Holst-Warhaft's poem watching the cat initiates Penelope's desire.

[228] *Cf.* Matthew Schultz, 'Molly Bloom's Nostalgic Reverie: A Phenomenology of Modernist Longing', *Irish Studies Review* 26, no. 4 (October 2018): 472-487. Schultz, following Enda Duffy, reads Molly as a 'subaltern woman': "for me, her final 'Yes' seems to declare that as a woman she is subaltern, and further, she affirms that her acceptance of

women (Joyce's Molly and Holst-Warhaft's Penelope) with the required space for the expression of reveries, sexual desire and vague, adulterous fantasies.

But let us take a closer look at Holst-Warhaft's curious syntax. A first reading of v. 1-5 suggests there are two alternative dreams (either-or) for Penelope-*qua*-cat: "She wishes to […] dream of her next meal or [dream] the night with a beggar or husband in disguise". In this reading, Penelope's night with the hypothetical lover is equated to the cat's next meal – whether a "beggar" or the "husband in disguise" is here less important. Sexual intercourse is thus presented as a basic corporeal need, with the sole scope of consumption, and the woman, or feminized cat is presented with control over the interchangeable male that is her culinary object of desire. The poet's second "or" adds a third possible dream: "Penelope wishes to […] dream of her next meal or [dream] the night with the beggar or [dream the night with the] husband in disguise". If the first possible dream (the cat's "next meal") manifests as hunger, and the second suggests adultery ("the night with a beggar"), the third somewhat 'corrects' the potential conjugal sin by rejoining her oneirically to her husband. The alternative scenarios' syntax with the multiple "or" is reminiscent of "Molly's flow", especially in *U* 18.1493-1495: "I'd have to get a nice pair of red slippers […] *or* yellow; and a nice semitransparent morning gown (that I badly want), *or* a peach-blossom dressing jacket like".[229] Of course, in every "or" scenario of Holst-Warhaft's poem, "the night with a beggar" brings us back to *Odyssey* 19 and the couple's first tête-à-tête, where Odysseus is, in fact, disguised as a beggar and Penelope narrates to him her famous dream of the killed geese, "the second of the three dreams which" she has throughout the epic.[230]

In addition to the link to Joyce's *Ulysses*, two other intermedial references to Penelope as a cat are worth mentioning. The first one is an Italian song by singer-songwriter Francesco Baccini, entitled "Penelope" and published in 1989 in his first album *Cartoons*. In the first few verses, we do not know the addressee of the song, but we do know she is gendered female because of a participle's feminine suffix ("disperata"):

> In mezzo al traffico rischiavi la vita
> eri mezzo disperata
> ma i tuoi occhi mi hanno stregato

Bloom's marriage proposal was a moment of self-damning", in Schultz, 478. For an extensive postcolonial reading of *Ulysses*, see: Enda Duffy, *The Subaltern* Ulysses (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

[229] Italics are mine. *Cf.* Derek Attridge, 'Molly's Flow: The Writing of "Penelope" and the Question of Women's Language', *Modern Fiction Studies* 35, no. 3 (1989): 543-565.

[230] For a detailed commentary and interpretation of Penelope's dream in *Odyssey* 19, see *inter alia* Alexandra Rozokoki, 'Penelope's Dream in Book 19 of the *Odyssey*', *Classical Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (2001): 1-6.

io mi sono innamorato

In the midst of the traffic, you were risking your life
you were half-desperate
but your eyes bewitched me
I fell in love[231]

The male-savior decides to name his damsel in distress 'Penelope', since her behavior matches all the traditional tropes: she is "always at home", "waiting for" him "in silence" ("ti ho chiamata Penelope / perché stai sempre a casa / tu mi aspetti in silenzio"). In the verse immediately preceding the refrain, we get a hint that the female may actually be a cat, since upon the singer's return home, she "purs" at him ("e dopo mi fai le fusa"); a hint confirmed just two verses later, when she receives a compliment for her beautiful "Persian fur" ("Penelope come sei bella / con il pelo persiano"). The intimacy escalates quickly with the man calling her "love" ("amore"), talking to her "for hours about love" ("e ti parlo d' amore / per ore, ore ed ore"), dreaming that he could bring her to dance ("se si potesse fare / io ti porterei a ballare"), dress her "with a skirt" ("poi ti metterei la gonna"), "marry" her ("magari ti potrei sposare"), or even "make a kitty" with her ("Penelope, facciamo un gattino?")! If, following Ellmann, in Leopold Bloom's case we notice a "displaced tenderness", where the man's feelings are directed to his pet instead of the wife, and "a desire to transform his women into cats",[232] the same applies to Baccini, where the male subject projects his romantic fantasies onto the animal. The singer's ironic lyrics present female animalization and domestication at its most distilled, with a silent Penelope who assumes her natural position at home without complaining, waiting for her man-owner to come back, and rejoicing at his arrival. To be sure, this passive dynamic resembles more Bloom's pet than the sexually desiring cat we find in "Penelope's Nightstand".

Notwithstanding Holst-Warhaft's musical expertise, we have no evidence that she knew Baccini's song when she wrote "Penelope's Nightstand", since Italy and Italian music are almost completely absent from her works. What seems more probable, due to her detailed familiarity with Greek music from the 60s and on, is that the poet was familiar with Lavrentis Machairitsas' song "Ένας Τούρκος στο Παρίσι" ("A Turk in Paris"), written by Isaak Sousis and released in the 1996

[231] My translation.
[232] Ellmann, '*Ulysses*', 77.

album *Παυσίλυπον* (*Sadnesskiller*).[233] The song is about a person's envy of his girlfriend's cat named "Turk" (remember "Turko the Terrible" mentioned in *Ulysses*), who keeps her company while she studies abroad in Paris:[234]

> ζηλεύω το μικρό σου το γατί
> στα πόδια σου κοιμάται όταν διαβάζεις
> δεν ξέρω αν κοιμάστε και μαζί
> ή μ' άλλον στο κρεβάτι τον αλλάζεις
>
> I envy your little cat
> it is sleeping at your feet while you read
> I don't know if you also sleep together
> or if you rather change him for another.

In Greek both "Turk" and "another" are males ("ο Τούρκος", "άλλον"), creating a wordplay between possible scenarios: "Turk" is the Greek man's adversary, a modern suitor who enjoys the woman's company while the couple is miles away; the woman is supposed to trade in "Turk" for another cat or for another man, and thus, the singer-lover would be twice betrayed. In an inversion of the Homeric couple's gender roles, now it is the woman who has left behind the man, and, like a cat, he "is meowing alone" ("νιαουρίζω μοναχός"). As in "Penelope's Nightstand" and in *Ulysses*, Sousis' lyrics of loneliness, envy, and sexual fantasies also turn on a competitive love triangle between a human couple and a feline interloper.

Loneliness and the mind's ceaseless longing for lost loved ones become the central theme of the second stanza in "Penelope's Nightstand".[235] Presented as an expert "in missing people", Penelope becomes a caretaker of photographs:

> She's has had years of expertise
> in missing persons, their photographs
> adorn her nightstand like mugshots
> growing grainy in the local post office,
> afraid to give themselves away (v. 9-13).

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[233] *Minutiae*: Παυσίλυπον is a compound adjective (here in neutral), derived from παύω (to pause) and λύπη (sadness), literally meaning "that which pauses sadness". In Euripides, we find the adjective attributed to the vine: *Bacchae*, 770, "τὴν παυσίλυπον ἄμπελον" ("the vine that puts an end to pain"), in Euripides, *Bacchae. Iphigenia at Aulis. Rhesus*, trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library 495 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 82-83. I suggest the translation "sadnesskiller" following the term "painkiller", to reproduce the analogy between παυσίλυπον and παυσίπονον.

[234] Paris was one of the most frequently chosen destinations for exiled Greeks during the military Junta (1967-1974) and the following decades, it remained a much-preferred city for young people who wanted to study abroad, especially because university education in France is public and without fees.

[235] In the analysis of "Penelope's Nightstand" second stanza I briefly introduce themes and modes of lamentation which will be the central topic of the second chapter, "The Song of Lament".

If Penelope is an expert on the missing Odysseus (remember the εὖ μέμνηται of *Od*.24.192), Holst-Warhaft herself is an expert in the grief and mourning of people who long for those have gone missing.[236] Verses 9-13 hide a specific autobiographical reference, since the poet, doubling as a journalist and an anthropologist, "has had years of expertise in missing persons" and in the role that photographs play in mediating loss. Her research on the topic resulted in the important volume *The Cue for Passion: Grief and its Political Uses*, published only a few years before her Penelopean poems.[237] The book's fourth chapter, "Disappearance", focuses on the political use of photographs by those who became the quintessential modern experts "in missing persons": the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, known globally for their indomitable search for the *desaparecidos* of the Argentinian Junta (1976-1983). The Mothers and Grandmothers used "the eloquence of their own bodies together with the representations of their children's absent bodies in the form of photographs and black silhouettes on newspaper".[238] The photographs "like mugshots growing grainy in the local post office" are reminiscent of the photographs that accompanied the *desaparecidos*' names, often listed in the "paid advertisement in the daily newspapers" placed by the Mothers in October 1977 – a practice that carries on to this day.[239]

Another intertextual link brings us to one of the major Greek women poets of the last century, Kiki Dimoula,[240] and her poetic 'photographic album' *Χαίρε Ποτέ* (*Hail Never*).[241] Holst-Warhaft

[236] Holst-Warhaft wrote her PhD dissertation on laments in modern Greek literature and various papers on mourning and its poetic representations: *cf.* Gail Lilian Holst-Warhaft, 'Dangerous voices: Women's laments and Greek literature' (Ph.D., Cornell University, 1991); Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992); Gail Holst-Warhaft, 'Knives, Forks, and Photographs: The Appropriation and Loss of Traditional Laments in the Writings of Palamás, Rítsos, Angheláki-Rooke, and Dimoulá', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 9, no. 2 (1991): 171-189; Gail Holst-Warhaft, 'The Poetics of Pain: Lament and Elegy in Modern Greek Literature', *Journal of World Literature* 8, no. 1 (April 2023): 104-122.
[237] Gail Holst-Warhaft, *The Cue for Passion: Grief and Its Political Uses* (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000). On the Mothers, see chapter 4 "Disappearance", 104-123.
[238] *Ivi*, 122.
[239] *Ivi*, 109.
[240] Kiki Dimoula won multiple national prizes for her poetry, the most important of which were the European Prize for Literature in 2009 and the national Grand Prize for Literature in 2010. For an in-depth analysis of Dimoula's work, see Δέσποινα Παπαστάθη, 'Η ποίηση και η ποιητική της Κικής Δημουλά' (Διδακτορική Διατριβή, Πανεπιστήμιο Ιωαννίνων, 2014).
[241] Κική Δημουλά, *Χαίρε Ποτέ* (Αθήνα: Στιγμή, 1988).; now in Κική Δημουλά, *Ποιήματα* (Αθήνα: Ίκαρος, 2005). The book won the First National Prize for Poetry in 1989. Many of the book's poems were read by Dimoula and accompanied by Thanos Mikroutsikos' original music in the disc *Στην αγκαλιά της άκρης* (*At the edge's hug*) (EMI Greece, 1998), now found on Spotify. Dimoula's poems have been translated into English in two different volumes: Kiki Dimoula, *Lethe's Adolescence*, trans. David Connolly (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Nostos, 1996); Kiki Dimoula, *The Brazen Plagiarist: Selected Poems*, trans. Cecile I. Margellos and Rika Lesser (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012). Holst-Warhaft reviewed Connolly's translation: Gail Holst-Warhaft, 'Kiki Dimoula. "Lethe's Adolescence". Translated and with an Introduction by David Connolly (Book Review)', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 17, no. 1 (May 1999). I cite from the Margellos and Lesser translation.

considers Dimoula's book "a thoroughly modern attempt to communicate the pain of loss", a modern type of lamentation, freed by traditional forms and meters, but "with the same determination to preserve 'ponos' ['pain'] that plays such an important part in the folk laments".[242] In the verses of *Hail Never* Dimoula speaks directly to her lost loved ones watching them through old photographs, trying "to communicate with the dead or to inscribe them on memory", but "her poems are as unsuccessful as photographs"; both mediums prove themselves to be "unsatisfactory substitutes for memory in her struggle to recreate the dead";[243] a probable explanation could be that, in them, "the soul of the party will be missing. The flesh".[244]

The missing flesh and the body's pleasures are precisely the things Penelope searches for in the closure of "Penelope's Nightstand", unsatisfied as she is with the photographs – "mugshots":

> Like the cat she wants meat,
> blood and bone, salt-lick,
> warm body. (v. 14-16)

The comparison with the cat (and thus, with Molly) persists; the body's desires are awakened and in the search for flesh, ready to devour the lover voraciously, get to "blood and bone" (as Bloom eats "with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls" the first time we encounter him in *U* 4.1-2); the sense of taste returns in "salt-lick", reminiscent of the sea's "water distant, licking" Odysseus' ship ("Penelope's Confession", v. 14-15). The last two words, "warm body", emphatically claim a whole verse, recalling the most crucial element that has gone missing in all these years from Penelope's bed (and nightstand) and evoke Leopold Bloom's all-too-human desire to be Molly and her "ample bed-warmed flesh. Yes, yes" (*U* 4.238-239).

Since photographs are disappointing, incapable of reproducing satisfying memories both in Dimoula's *Hail Never* and in "Penelope's Nightstand", other mediums are employed to reenact the past in Holst-Warhaft's next poem, "Penelope Contemplates Infidelity".[245] With the term "infidelity" the poem's title continues the game already initiated with "Penelope's Confession"

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[242] Holst-Warhaft, 'Dangerous voices', 248-249.
[243] *Ivi*, 248-249, 245. Holst-Warhaft cites poems that contain photographs of the husband ["Απροσδοκίες" ("Nonexpectations")], the mother ["Γενική Κληρονόμος Πορσελάνης" ("Sole Heir of Porcelain")], and an unnamed subject ("Passe-partout"). In a very recent paper of hers, the critic comes back to the same poems, briefly recycling the poems' analysis already found in her PhD thesis, cited above: *cf.* Holst-Warhaft, 'The Poetics of Pain', 116-117.
[244] Dimoula, *The Brazen Plagiarist: Selected Poems*, 115.
[245] Holst-Warhaft, *Penelope's Confession*, 30-33. Kastrinaki characterizes this poem, together with "Fidelity", as "poems of privation, of lack" ("ποιήματα στέρησης"): Καστρινάκη, *Μίλα, Πηνελόπη!*, 249; I find the characterization rather shallow for the poems' plurality of implicit notions. This poem is translated by Anghelaki-Rooke, together with "Penelope's Confession" and "Fidelity".

and carried on with Molly Bloom's enactment of an adulterous Penelope, while the verb "contemplates" enrolls the poem in the genre of the meditative lyric; a category in which Penelope has been included at least since Wallace Stevens' "The World as Meditation" alongside Eleanor Wilner's response in "The World is Not a Meditation".[246] In a contemporary setting of meditation, we find Penelope

> sitting at the waterfront,
> rain dripping from the awnings
> of cafis where tourists cluster
> to eat ice cream at the tables (v. 2-4).

As in Aguirre, the heroine has chosen the liminal space of "the waterfront", but this time she is not alone: she is immersed in the tourists' crowd, whose arrival she wanted to delay in "The Late Spring". Still, the packed coffee shops are not impeding her contemplative moment:

> She sips her ouzo slowly,
> gazes at the unforgiving sea,
> wonders how she became
> a symbol of fidelity – some
> poet's fault no doubt (v. 7-10).

What we read in these verses is Penelope's metapoetic recognition of the path her myth took in the thickets of the global literary tradition, an acknowledgement that is similar but certainly less bitter than the apologetic introduction of the heroine in Atwood's *The Penelopiad*: "And what did I amount to, once the official version gained ground? An edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with. Why couldn't they be as considerate, as trustworthy, as all-suffering as I had been? That was the line they took, the singers, the yarn-spinners".[247] In both works Penelope distrusts the epic poets' version of the myth, composed and sung by males. But while in Atwood the heroine is ready to "spin a thread of" her own",[248] and propose in prose *herstory*,[249] in Holst-Warhaft's verses the heroine *tries* to remember why she does not agree with the canonical reading.[250] In fact,

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[246] Eleanor Wilner, *Shekhinah* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984).; now in Eleanor Wilner, *Before Our Eyes: New and Selected Poems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 98-100.
[247] Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, 9-10. Published only two years before *Penelope's Confession*, it is however probable that Holst-Warhaft read *The Penelopiad* as she was writing these poems, considering its topic's affinity and Atwood's popularity.
[248] *Ibidem*.
[249] 'Herstory, n.', *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, July 2023), Oxford English Dictionary.
[250] Among others, the two rewritings share a special interest in the twelve maids' hanging of *Od.*22.437-473 (for a detailed analysis of the Homeric passage and its various symbolisms, see Laurel Fulkerson, 'Epic Ways of Killing a Woman: Gender and Transgression in *Odyssey* 22.465-72', *The Classical Journal* 97, no. 4 (2002): 335-350. Holst-Warhaft treats this subject in two poems of the book, both translated in Greek by Eleni Nika: "The Twelve Women"

the major difference between the two Penelopes is that Atwood's protagonist is not alive anymore: she is speaking from the Underworld, being "outside the human world of bodies and time and possibly inaudible".[251] In contrast, Holst-Warhaft's heroine is all about the senses, a gendered character who lives and remembers phenomenologically.[252]

We already saw touch playing a crucial role in the previous poems, with the sea water lapping at Penelope's feet, "licking" Odysseus ship, her hands dipped in the earth in "Penelope's Confession", or again "the clenched buds at her feet" in "The Late Spring". Now taste and smell become the protagonist, with ouzo eliciting the woman's memory and waiting:

> Penelope sips and waits.
> Memory once had a bouquet;
> now it needs flavoring
> like the milky liquor in her glass (v. 11-14).

Does the glass of ouzo function like the Proustian famous lime-blossomed madeleine,[253] eliciting Penelope's *mémoire involontaire*, or does its milkiness dim it, leaving the woman holding in her

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and "A Souvenir", in Holst-Warhaft, *Penelope's Confession*, 54-61. In "The Twelve Women" the poet goes back to Homer's text, providing a free translation/summary of the episode, including the Homeric image of the girls compared to the birds κίχλαι ("And as long-winged thrushes", v. 23) and that of their feet's last movement before dying ("ἤσπαιρον δὲ πόδεσσι μίνυνθά περ οὔ τι μάλα δήν", v. 473; "Their feet twitched for a while", v. 28). On her commentary on the poem, Reuter states that "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 Reuter, 'Penelope Differently: Feminist Re-Visions of Myth', 246. In "The Souvenir", Penelope, "[s]till fuddled by sleep", witnesses the maids' corpses "threaded like linnets / on a hunter's belt" and "kneels to remove / a slipper", which is "all that will last / of pretty Maia, a shoe / that danced the night away". The poem recalls an image traditionally linked to women and gender violence, through a mix of references from *Cinderella*, Hans Christian Andersen's *The Red Shoes* and the homonymous 1948 film, to the piles of shoes at Auschwitz (also mentioned in Holst-Warhaft's *The Cue for Passion: Grief and its Political Uses*, *op. cit.*) and the memorial *Shoes on the Danube Bank* (2005). Another key moment in the poem is Penelope speaking the maids' "names / one by one, as if naming / were a way to keep them safe"; a similar idea is found in Alice Oswald, *Memorial: An Excavation of the* Iliad (London: Faber and Faber, 2011). In *The Penelopiad* the maids form a chorus, constantly interrupting and undoing Penelope's prose narrative with lyrics in various forms, seeking revenge for their unjust death. If Atwood's Penelope is more of a bourgeois feminist character, the maids' subaltern chorus introduces the class struggle. On the chorus' function in *The Penelopiad*, see Susanne Jung, '"A Chorus Line": Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad* at the Crossroads of Narrative, Poetic and Dramatic Genres', *Connotations* 24, no. 1 (2015 2014): 41-62.

[251] Coral Ann Howells, '"We Can't Help but Be Modern": *The Penelopiad*', in *Once upon a Time: Myth, Fairy Tales and Legends in Margaret Atwood's Writings*, ed. Sarah A. Appleton (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 63.

[252] *Cf*. Linda Fisher, 'Gendering Embodied Memory', in *Time in Feminist Phenomenology*, ed. Christina Schües, Dorothea E. Olkowski, and Helen Fielding (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011), 91-110.

[253] Ouzo could be a perfect example for memory-triggers, with its strong smell and taste at the same time, since, according to Barry Smith, "what we call *tasting* involves not just taste, but interactions of taste, touch and smell, and it is smell that makes the largest contribution to experiences we have when tasting": in Barry C. Smith, 'Proust, the Madeleine and Memory', in *Memory in the Twenty-First Century: New Critical Perspectives from the Arts, Humanities, and Sciences*, ed. Sebastian Groes (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 39. For another recent artwork where ouzo (or raki) becomes a memory-trigger, see Ferzan Özpetek's new miniseries *The Istanbul Trilogy* (2023) produced by Netflix, and, in particular, the episode "Muhabbet".

"hands, usually weakly and loosely, but a few fringes of the carpet of lived existence"?[254] What may be happening is that we are witnessing a Penelopean moment of forgetting rather than one of remembrance, even though the two processes are inevitably intertwined and work together as threshold experience of subject-formation.[255]

The ambiguity of remembrance is better illustrated in the next two direct questions: "To what, then, is she faithful? / Memory's distilled spirit?" (v. 15-16). Here the poetic subject's mediations are as blurred as the glass of ouzo. The third person narration creates the mixed impression of accessing Penelope's thoughts but of being able to do so only from afar, witnessing her from a distance as she wonders about her faithfulness in a rather abstract way. As we follow along from a remove and try to understand her choices, the focus on "to what" she is faithful instead of "to whom" confirms once again that fidelity for Holst-Warhaft's heroine is a duty towards concrete agreements, projects, ideas, or values, rather than towards people (remember "Penelope's Confession", v. 3-6). Also, because memory can never act as a limpid, fully transparent mirror to reality, it is by nature unfaithful. Memory's cloudiness and the almost 40% alcoholic grade of the ouzo seem to take the edge off the woman as she searches for more "flavoring" in the present and appears glad, for once, to be navigating an impaired state of thinking and decision making.[256]
Then, the new experience appears in familiar disguise:

> Yet, that old hippie with
> the broken sandals was the first
> who dared (v. 17-19)

The Homeric cloak of the beggar-Odysseus has now turned into that of a flower child of the late 60s, while the possible lover's profile is again made indistinct between that of the husband in disguise and that of "the first" of the suitors "who dared". The relative clause ends without an object; not only do we not know the old hippie's real identity, but for a moment we also ignore *what* he "dared" to do. For all we know, he could be daring to stretch Odysseus' bow again, like in

[254] Walter Benjamin, 'On The Image of Proust', in *Selected Writings. 2,1: Vol. 2, Part 1, 1927-1930*, by Walter Benjamin, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 238.
[255] For the "Penelopean work" of remembering and forgetting and "memory as a special kind of threshold phenomenon" as theorized by Freud and Benjamin, see Roger W. Müller Farguell, 'Awakening Memory: Freud and Benjamin', in *Methods for the Study of Literature as Cultural Memory*, ed. Raymond Vervliet and Annemarie Estor (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 291-296.
[256] It could also be noted that this Penelope does not try as harshly to recall, as Proust's narrator does: in *In Search of Lost Time*, memory takes six pages to come back.

Odyssey 21. However, the next verse reveals that the old hippie is up to some pretty ordinary dalliances, his flirtations lacking the tragic consequences found in the Homeric pretext:

> Last night,
> pretending to drop a spoon
> he bent and kissed her knee
> under the tablecloth (v. 19-22).

A beggar, then, literally a supplicant, who, in his well-directed move of kissing the knee, follows what the ritual demands in exchange of tutelage by Zeus, the protector of supplicants (ἱκέσιος Ζεῦς), at the same time covering his misdeed under the covering of the tablecloth.

Ancient and modern disguises continue to blend, as the last strophe brings us back to the contemporary setting of a tavern,[257] where the lovers' secret moves are accompanied by traditional modern Greek sounds: "Someone is playing a bouzouki, / singing a rebetiko song" (v. 23-24).[258] Taking into account Holst-Warhaft's considerable expertise in *rebetika*, both as a scholar and a musician who toured around Greece with Mikis Theodorakis, one of the country's most important composers of the 20th century, it is only fitting that her Penelope enjoy herself, and even secretly flirt while listening to this unique "organic or unconscious fusion of [modern Greek] musical styles".[259] Even if we do not spot the Ithacan queen smoking a narghile or a hookah, in this setting,

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[257] By "cafi" (v. 4) Holst-Warhaft means the Greek καφενείο, a sort of an all-day coffee place and tavern, where one can go from the early morning to drink coffee, or throughout the day to eat some μεζέδες (appetizers), usually accompanied by strong alcoholic drinks, like ouzo, tsipouro or raki.

[258] In her chapter "Transgressing Musical Borders: Re(m)betika as Liminal Music", Holst-Warhaft narrates the birth of *rebetika*, a hybrid genre born because of continuous commercial and cultural exchanges between cities of the Asia Minor coast (in particular, Smyrna and Ayvalik) and important Greek port cities of the time, such as those of Lesvos, Syros and, above all, Piraeus. A historic event that marked the genre's evolution was the huge wave of Asia Minor refugees that arrived in Greece after Smyrna's Catastrophe in 1922 and the Greeks' expulsion from Turkey. *Cf.* Gail Holst-Warhaft, 'Transgressing Musical Borders: Re(m)Betika as Liminal Music', in *Borders and Borderlands: Explorations in Identity, Exile and Translation*, ed. Richard Pine and Vera Konidari, Durrell Studies 1 (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021), 154-170. For a sociopolitical explanation of the rise of *rebetika* and the typical dance *zeibekiko* in the early 20th century Greece, see Tachtsis' essay "Ζεϊμπέκικο 1964: ένα δοκίμιο" in Κώστας Ταχτσής, *Η γιαγιά μου, η Αθήνα, κι άλλα κείμενα*, 3rd ed. (Αθήνα: Ψυχογιός, 1979). *Rebetika* and its musicians were repeatedly harassed during the two military dictatorships of Greece during the 20th century, that of Ioannis Metaxas (1936-1940) and the Junta (1967-1974). *Cf.* Gail Holst-Warhaft, 'Reorienting the Rebetika', *Musica e Storia, Il Mulino - Rivisteweb*, no. 2 (2002): 547-570. One of the major contemporary composers of *rebetika* is Stavros Xarchakos, who also wrote the original soundtrack of the film *Rembetiko* (Ferris, 1983), with lyrics written by the poet Nikos Gatsos (*cf.* Gatsos Archive). The film is available on Youtube: Xarchakos, Rembetiko. In 2017 rebetiko was added to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists.

[259] Holst-Warhaft, 'Reorienting the Rebetika', 560. Host-Warhaft is one of the world's international experts on rebetika, her first book on the topic being Gail Holst, *Road to Rembetika: Music of a Greek Subculture [Denise Harvey, 1975]*, 4th ed. (River Vale, NJ: Attica Editions, 2006). The book was transformed into the Australian produced documentary *Rembetika, the blues of Greece* (1983), for which Holst-Warhaft wrote the script and participated in the production. It is available on Youtube: Rebetika, the blues of Greece. It was followed by multiple articles and book chapters, *inter alia*: Gail Holst-Warhaft, 'The Tame Show and the Wild Boar: Hybridization and the Rebetika', in

Penelope recalls a “female dervish”, a woman who is “mixed with socially marginalized *rebetes*” and competently negotiates “this male world”.[260] Her *rebetis* “comes limping, / smelling slightly of salt” (v. 25-26); the disguised Odysseus with the flawed leg may bare the same physical trait as his Sophoclean opponent, Philoctetes, but his salty scent and his mere presence provide what was missing “Penelope’s Nightstand”: “blood and bone, salt-lick, warm body”. The hippie fully embodies memory’s threshold-experience:

> Incarnate memory takes her
> by the hand, leads her
> to the house. […] (v. 27-29)

The paradoxical formulation of a man as “incarnate memory” leaves us in doubt until the poem’s ending; the reader does not know if the stranger is an actual person, a figment of the heroine’s imagination, or an after-effect of the ouzo and the inebriating music. Further it is once again not clear if the stranger is Odysseus or an actual stranger, thus leaving the door open for a possible act of infidelity. What we do sense is that the woman appears more than willing to abandon herself to the indeterminate; letting herself be guided in an almost childish way (“by the hand”), back to where her gender role stipulates: at home, away from the licentious *kafeneia*, and its *osée* music and dancing.

As the undefined lover-guide enters the sacred marital space, a ‘new’ character’s reaction to the couple’s arrival attracts our attention:

> Strange how
> the dog wags its tail
> as if it too is tired of waiting. (v. 29-31)[261]

The appearance of the faithful dog is an obvious allusion to the well-known Argos from the Homeric text and especially to *Od*.17.301-302: “ὡς ἐνόησεν Ὀδυσσέα ἐγγὺς ἐόντα, / οὐρῇ μέν ῥ’

Songs of the Minotaur: Hybridity and Popular Music in the Era of Globalization : A Comparative Analysis of Rebetika, Tango, Rai, Flamenco, Sardana, and English Urban Folk, ed. Gerhard Steingress (Münster; Hamburg; London: LIT Verlag, 2002), 21-50; Gail Holst-Warhaft, ‘The Female Dervish and Other Shady Ladies of the Rebetika’, in *Music and Gender: Perspectives from the Mediterranean*, ed. Tullia Magrini (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 169-194; Holst-Warhaft, ‘Transgressing Musical Borders: Re(m)betika as Liminal Music’.

[260] Holst-Warhaft, ‘The Female Dervish and Other Shady Ladies of the Rebetika’, 170.

[261] Note that in Holst-Warhaft’s poem “the dog” is not named, while Argos is “one of the first examples in ancient literature that are given names”, as well as “the only dog to have his name published in the *Odyssey*”: in Thorsten Fögen, ‘Lives in Interaction: Animal “Biographies” in Greco-Roman Literature?’, in *Interactions between Animals and Humans in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, ed. Edmund V. Thomas and Thorsten Fögen (Berlin; Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 93; Louise Calder, ‘Pet and Image in the Greek World: The Use of Domesticated Animals in Human Interaction’, in *Interactions between Animals and Humans in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, ed. Thorsten Fögen and Edmund V. Thomas (Berlin; Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 66. Both are cited in Magnus Frisch, ‘Ἦ Μάλα Θαῦμα Κύων Ὅδε Κεῖτ᾽ Ἐνὶ Κόπρῳ: The Anagnorisis of Odysseus and His Dog, Argos (Hom. *Od*. 17, 290-327)’, *Literatūra* 59, no. 3 (2017): 7-18.

ὅ γ᾽ ἔσηνε" ("as he perceived that Odysseus had come close to him, / he wagged his tail").[262] The motif of the dog's wagging tail is open to multiple interpretations and we should not take for granted its association to loyalty; as first Köhnken and then Frisch have shown, "[w]ith regard to Argos' loyalty, we should be far more cautious".[263] With her last verse, Holst-Warhaft repeats and, at the same time, debunks the romantic readings of the Homeric scene in which Argos supposedly dies from the sheer pleasure of seeing his master after so long.[264] Is the new dog wagging its tail because he has recognized Odysseus, or out of happiness for seeing his female master arrive? Undoubtedly, the "as if" further complicates what is already a vexed scenario and the "too" creates a link between the dog and Penelope, reflecting her feelings, in the same way that Argos' neglected condition reflects Odysseus' in the *Odyssey*.

The dog's wagging tail elicits a verse by Giannis Ritsos' poem "Άργος, ο σκύλος του Οδυσσέα" ("Argos, Odysseus' dog"), composed in 1968 during the poet's forced exile on the island of Leros, only one day after "Penelope's Despair".[265] The poem rewrites the Odyssean scene where Odysseus and Argos meet again after twenty years, but this time the one on who speaks and emotes is the dog. In the first stanza, Argos begs his master – the word "αφέντης" ("master") is repeated three times in a poem of twelve verses – to, at least, "look at" him ("κοίταξε με", v.1) and acknowledge his awful condition. "All these years, master, I didn't have / a person to wag my tail at" (v. 3-4),[266] the dog laments and goes on to remind his master of the beautiful moments they have shared together. Odysseus, though, rushing to the suitors' executions, pays the dog no heed and kicks it to the side (v. 9-10).[267] In Ritsos, the animal's ancient gesture is thus reiterated in

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[262] Lattimore, *The Odyssey of Homer [1965]*, 268.

[263] Adolf Köhnken, 'Perspektivisches Erzählen Im Homerischen Epos: Die Wiedererkennung Odysseus: Argos', *Hermes* 131, no. 4 (2003): 386-388., cited in Frisch, 'Ἦ Μάλα Θαῦμα Κύων Ὅδε Κεῖτ᾽ Ἐνὶ Κόπρῳ: The Anagnorisis of Odysseus and His Dog, Argos (Hom. *Od*. 17, 290-327)', 15.

[264] Thomas Schmitz, 'Ist Die *Odyssee* "Spannend"?: Anmerkungen zur Erzähltechnik des homerischen Epos', *Philologus* 138, no. 1 (1994): 9-10. *Cf.* Frisch, 'Ἦ Μάλα Θαῦμα Κύων Ὅδε Κεῖτ᾽ Ἐνὶ Κόπρῳ: The Anagnorisis of Odysseus and His Dog, Argos (Hom. *Od*. 17, 290-327)', 13.

[265] Both poems mention the date of their composition: "Penelope's Despair" was written on the 21st of September 1968, and "Argos, Odysseus' Dog" on the 22nd. However, unlike the first, the Argos poem was not included in the volume *Πέτρες, Επαναλήψεις, Κιγκλίδωμα* that appeared in 1972; it was only published in tenth volume of his *Collected Poems* in 1989: *cf.* Γιάννης Ρίτσος, *Ποιήματα Ι' (1963-1972)*, 2nd ed. (Αθήνα: Κέδρος, 1989). It can also be found on: Ρίτσος, "Άργος, ο σκύλος του Οδυσσέα".

[266] V. 3-6: "Τόσα χρόνια, αφέντη, και δεν είχα / σε ποιόνε να κουνήσω την ουρά μου. Που 'ναι τα πρωινά μας / με τη δροσιά στα δάση, τα νερά, τα φύλλα, το κυνήγι, / τα πολύχρωμα πούπουλα στον αέρα τα βράδια;" ("All these years, master, I didn't have / a person to wag my tail at. Where are our mornings / in the breeze of the forests, the waters, the leaves, the hunting / the colorful feathers in the air at night?"). Both in the text and here translation is mine.

[267] V. 9-10: "Ο αφέντης πέρασε, τον κλώτσησε, μπήκε στα δώματα. Σε λίγο / ακούστηκε το σφύριγμα απ' τα βέλη που καρφώνονταν στους τοίχους" ("The master passed, he kicked him, he entered the rooms. In a bit / [we] heard the whistle of the arrows nailing the walls").

connection with the old master, in contrast to Holst-Warhaft's verse where the ownership and loyalty of the dog is left undecided.

Ambiguity is in fact a key concept in "Penelope Contemplates Infidelity" and in *Penelope's Confession* as a whole. Besides the dog's warm welcoming of the couple, the poem's design pictures a Penelope ceaselessly questioning what has at this juncture turned into her "ethereal memory" (v. 1). While searching for possible ways of re-defining what faithfulness means to her (v. 8-9, 15-16), the poetic subject repeatedly suggests, dismisses, and reproposes a scenario of possible adultery. With its self-reflexive questions (v. 15-16), its moments of intense absorption (v. 2,8), its contradictions and hypotheses ("yet", "as if"), the poem becomes a textual embodiment of the heroine's struggle as she progressively grows "tired of waiting".

The climax of what we may call Penelope's 'waiting crisis' is reached in the poem "Fidelity", where, already in the first verse, we witness the dog's death:

> The dog died in the night;
> one twitch of a mangy tail
> was enough to loose its hold
> on life" (v. 1-4).[268]

Homeric references are again aplenty, with the "mangy tail" alluding to *Od*.17.300, where Argos is "all covered with dog ticks" ("ἐνίπλειος κυνοραιστέων"), and the "one twitch" implying once more *Od*.17.302, where Argos "wagged his tail" ("οὐρῇ μέν ῥ᾽ ὅ γ᾽ ἔσηνε").[269] However, Holst-Warhaft changes the dog's famous moment of death: in Homer, Argos dies after he sees Odysseus, after twenty years of waiting,[270] while here the only temporal indication is "in the night", without any mention of Odysseus or the number of years endured in his absence, thus strengthening the case for the dog's fidelity to Penelope.

The canine connection with our heroine and her trait of fidelity appear also in another contemporary rewriting, this time in the form of novella, Maria Grazia Ciani's *La morte di Penelope* (*Penelope's Death*).[271] After alternating internal monologues in which Penelope and

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[268] Holst-Warhaft, *Penelope's Confession*, 38-39. In the book's architecture, "Fidelity" appears after "The Recognition Scene", where Penelope spends a night of passion with an undefined lover. Again, we do not know if he was her husband in disguise or a total stranger; what is important to her is "her body's greed for further knowledge" (v. 21-22) and "her only surety is her body's need" (v. 24). I suggest that "Fidelity" undoes the previous poem's hint of a conjugal sin.

[269] Lattimore, *The Odyssey of Homer [1965]*, 268.

[270] *Od*.17.326-327: "Ἄργον δ᾽ αὖ κατὰ μοῖρ᾽ ἔλαβεν μέλανος θανάτοιο, / αὐτίκ᾽ ἰδόντ᾽ Ὀδυσῆα ἐεικοστῷ ἐνιαυτῷ".

[271] Maria Grazia Ciani, *La morte di Penelope* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2019). Maria Grazia Ciani is professor of ancient Greek language and literature at the University of Padova, in Italy. She has translated both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*,

Antinous admit to themselves their desire for each other, a series of brief scenes involving forbidden and silent *rendez-vous* ensue.[272] In these encounters, Argos, who here maintains the Homeric name, plays a crucial role, since he is the excuse Penelope uses to go out to the garden and exchanges erotic glances with Antinous. Throughout the book Ciani's Argos is humanized: he repeatedly looks at Antinous menacingly, because he hates both him and all of the suitors and "growls when he sees them" ("quel vecchio cane che mi odia, che odia tutti noi, e quando ci vede, ringhia").[273] According to Penelope, Argos still thinks of her as "one person with his master; he, who remembers everything" ("Lui mi credeva ancora un'unica persona con il suo padrone; lui, memore di tutto").[274] As a humanized guardian, the dog has the special role of keeping the *oikos*' memory, and specifically the "incarnate memory" of Odysseus' power on an island at risk of forgetting him. In fact, the narrative moment that signals the queen's *prise de coscience* regarding her love for Antinous coincides with the disappearance of Argos from her side.[275] In this version the "King's dog" ("il cane del Re") knows the correct "waiting place" ("il luogo dell'attesa") better than Penelope, rushing to the Nymphs' cave to welcome his master and to actively participate in the project of mass revenge.[276]

In much the same way, in Holst-Warhaft's "Fidelity" the dog's faithfulness also surpasses Penelope's. The poetic subject grants us access to the heroine's thoughts and to her judgement of the animal's behavior:

> 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. (v. 4-8)

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as well as Euripides' *Medea*, Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Oedipus Rex*, all for the publishing house Marsilio, and Apollodorus' *The library of Greek mythology* for Mondadori. Again for Marsilio, she has cured the series on reception studies "Variazioni sul mito", following the literary voyages of various characters, but not Penelope's. Ciani has also published an autobiographical novel connecting her dog's story to that of Argos: *cf.* Maria Grazia Ciani, *Storia di Argo* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2021).

[272] *La morte di Penelope* offers another example of Penelope's lack of substantial dialogue in the rewritings. Significant in this regard is p. 46, where in one of their secret appointments Antinous "took the veil's hem, kissed it and said: 'Queen…', and it seemed the beginning of a dialogue, a face to face, at last" ("lui prese il lembo del velo, lo baciò e disse: 'Regina…', e sembrava l'inizio di un dialogo, a tu per tu, finalmente"): in Ciani, *La morte di Penelope*, 46. Most of the rest of the book consists of monologues in juxtaposition, on the path of Luigi Malerba's novel *Ithaca per sempre*, written in alternating monologues by Penelope and Ulysses: *cf.* Luigi Malerba, *Itaca per sempre*, 3rd ed., Oscar Moderni (Milano: Mondadori, 1997). Translations from Ciani's novel are mine.

[273] Ciani, *La morte di Penelope*, 33.

[274] *Ivi*, 45.

[275] *Ivi*, 45-46.

[276] *Ivi*, 53.

If there was still some doubt in the previous poem's ("as if"), now her opinion is clear-cut, but she still hides what she thinks of herself by projecting her own bind on general statements about the dogs' habits. However, these words do not come out of blurred, ouzo-influenced memories; now Penelope is fully conscious, as she "drinks her coffee under the carob; its pods clack in the wind" (v. 8-9).[277] Meditation is again linked to the sense of taste through coffee, but here it is combined with sound rather than smell: not touristic crowds but nature itself, with the pods' clacking providing the soundboard of her thoughts. The pods' sound echoes the sound of her name's pronounced syllables:

> She has begun to hate the way
> her name rattles of the tongue:
> Penelope – fidelity –
> two seeds in a dry pod. (v. 11-14)[278]

The nouns' four syllables and their juxtaposition in the same verse, of which they are the sole inhabitants renders them a suggestive collocation, again open to various interpretations. It could be a clarification ("Penelope, [supposed to keep her] fidelity"), a pair of synonyms ("Penelope, [symbolizing] fidelity"), or, since she "hates" her name's sound and its rhyme to the suggested notion, she may want them to be thought as forced synonyms ("Penelope, [forced to maintain her] fidelity"). The idiom's modification with "seeds" instead of peas and the addition of "dry" (which could also hint to Penelope's lack of sexual intercourse) would point to a third interpretation: if 'two peas in a pod' are two things (or people) "extremely similar, indistinguishable",[279] a "dry pod", that is, a dead pod, would imply the end of similarity between the two objects of comparison.[280]

In the following verses the heroine continues her reflection on her own figure's constructed nature: "She's become an antidote / for adultery, Helen's counterpoise" (v. 15-16). This implies a continuity with the metaliterary discussion on her myth's tradition initiated in "Penelope

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[277] One may also think of Pablo Neruda's "Ode to a Dead Carob Tree".
[278] Could Penelope hate her name's sound, especially when in proximation to fidelity, because it is an automatic link hoisted upon her by others?
[279] '"as like as Two Peas" in Pea, Sense P.1', *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, September 2023), Oxford English Dictionary.
[280] The idiom's translation in Greek is "σαν δυο σταγόνες νερό" ("like two waterdrops"), which would be impossible to combine with "dry" or to maintain the connection with the carob tree and its pods. I imagine that this verse's translation gave a headache to Anghelaki-Rooke, who in fact chose to abstain from using the correspondent Greek idiom and opted for a more literal recreation of the seeds' image: "σα δυο σπόροι σε περικάρπιο ξερό". An incredible translator, Anghelaki-Rooke created a new image with her choice of "περικάρπιο" (both "pod" and "wrist strap" or "wristband"): that of a "wristband" pressuring Penelope's hand, as the leash presses a dog's neck. In the Greek rendering, Penelope and the dog are getting closer.

Contemplates Infidelity", but without the previous puzzlement (where she wondered "how she became a symbol of fidelity"); she is now sure of her character's fate, even more than the heroine we saw in Atwood's text. In addition, Penelope's juxtaposition to Helen is now carefully pictured as her "counterpoise". Again, this is a comparison we find in *The Penelopiad*, where the adulterous Helen is clearly depicted as the one who "ruined" Penelope's life and is hated by the latter even in the afterlife.[281] For Holst-Warhaft, the heroine's life may not have been ruined by Helen's actions, but it has been severely circumscribed:

> For another's
> infidelity she has lived
> her life on the threshold. (v. 20-22)

Such an explicit acknowledgement of her state limbo is rare throughout the corpus of Penelopean revisions, where the heroine's in-betweenness is usually allegorized via the liminal spaces she traverses, such as the waterfront (Aguirre), the reverie (Joyce and Holst-Warhaft), the Underworld (Atwood).[282]

The introspection crystallizes in the poem's last verse in the form of a prediction of the character's literary legacy:

> When all this becomes myth
> what woman worth her lover's
> salt will wish herself
> Penelope? (v. 17-20)

The mere existence of these verses (as well as of this whole thesis) disproves the poetic subject's suggestion, since there have been plenty of women writers, including Holst-Warhaft herself, who imagined themselves in the heroine's position. For Reuter, these particular verses and "Fidelity" more generally represent a necessary step for the poet's "struggle" with the ancient prototype, freeing herself through it, "abandoning both her fear and her hope of becoming the *Homeric* Penelope".[283] Although I agree with Reuter's point that in every mythical revision there is a "struggle" between tradition and innovation, I find it difficult to detect in "Fidelity" a unique shift leading to the creation of a new Penelope located entirely outside the Homeric paradigm. *Penelope's Confession* is not linear; readers are not asked to introject a heroine teleology. The book enacts a far more fragmentary and disjunctive mode of memory, with various flashbacks on crucial

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[281] For the chapters featuring Helen, see Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, chaps xi, xvii, xxii, xxvii.
[282] As we will see later on, the heroine explicitly speaks about her threshold life experience in Bianca Tarozzi's "Variazioni sul tema Penelope" (Variations on Penelope's Theme").
[283] Reuter, 'Penelope Differently: Feminist Re-Visions of Myth', 238.

moments of the character's past always interanimating critical takes on contemporary world issues such as the ongoing problems of mass tourism and the climate crisis.

In the end, Holst-Warhaft's lyrical memory leaves us still puzzling over Penelope's take on waiting and fidelity. The poet, ironically, remains faithful to the heroine's oft-commented skeptic nature. What we have come to expect from a Penelopean confession has definitely shifted, almost every verse undoes the previous one, every strophe upends previous suggestions, and each poem approaches different and contrasting memories. In the end, what we have is a desiring, meditative Penelope who takes the time to observe and reflect on what is around her in conjunction with her inner turmoil. Whether she waits for Odysseus, or as is more often the case, decides to build a new collective life for herself, what matters is that she has become unbound from rigid behavioral prescriptions, and now endeavors to reconstruct *her*story.

Although there is no straightforward indication as to whether Holst-Warhaft's Penelope committed adultery, in *Penelope's Confession* there is a clear sense that our heroine is still mostly mired in waiting. Even when Odysseus eventually does come back, the *nostos* cannot be considered a neat success. The years of distance have resulted in total estrangement between the two, something we already saw happening in Kazantzakis' sequel of the *Odyssey*.[284] Having developed disjointed personalities, they no longer share the same values. Far from enjoying Odysseus' narrations as she did in Homer,[285] this Penelope suffers through "*his* war tales", disappointed by the spoils of war he brought home, "*his* bag of wind, / *his* nymph's disease".[286] The repeated possessive pronoun marks the heroine's thinly concealed disdain. She distances herself from her husband's life choices, a remove that is also materially underscored through the book's unfolding since we are many pages away from "Penelope's confession" and its initial presentation of the couple's common property and projects ("*our* estate", "what *we* made together" – my emphasis).

[284] *Cf.* Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, where the fictional heroine explains to her husband their estrangement when he came out of prison: "Nelson, the truth is I could hold your hand in public and walk with you out of prison, but I could not face the close proximity of your body in the privacy of our bedroom. […] you and I no longer lived in the same space of feeling, imagination, and desire", in Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela [David Philip Publishers, 2003]*, 133.
[285] *Od.*23.306-308: "αὐτὰρ ὁ διογενὴς Ὀδυσεὺς ὅσα κήδε᾽ ἔθηκεν / ἀνθρώποις ὅσα τ᾽ αὐτὸς ὀϊζύσας ἐμόγησε, / πάντ᾽ ἔλεγ᾽: *ἡ δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἐτέρπετ᾽ ἀκούουσ᾽*, οὐδέ οἱ ὕπνος / πῖπτεν ἐπὶ βλεφάροισι πάρος καταλέξαι ἅπαντα." ("But shining Odysseus told of all the cares he inflicted / on other men, and told too of all that in his misery / he had toiled through. *She listened to him with delight*, nor did any / sleep fall upon her eyes until he had told her everything."): in Lattimore, *The Odyssey of Homer [1965]*, 351. My emphasis.
[286] "War Tales", v. 21-24. My emphasis.

The woman's new solo mission is to imagine and narrate "another version of the story", and speak for those subaltern subjects who did not survive, "[t]he men in trust / to him" whose disposable corpses

> littered
> the seabed briefly
> among hardier debris
> of metal and clay.[287]

Holst-Warhaft fashions a queen sensitive not only to environmental but also to class issues, conscious of her husband's aristocratic privilege and willing to commemorate the voices lost at the Homeric margins (the maids in "The Twelve Women" and "A Souvenir", the companions in "War Tales"). Social powerlessness and vulnerability are, of course, even more relevant where war and other forms of violence thrive; an issue close to Holst-Warhaft's heart, who composes these poems in the midst of the Global War on Terror headlined by the US-led invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003).[288] Figuring her creator's witnessing of a contemporary Trojan war, this Penelope openly condemns organized violence by reflecting on the failures of past and present systems of education. In "Your Name", one of the few poems where we hear her voice directly, she expresses to Telemachos her disapproval of the violence perpetrated against the maids and the suitors, calling it a "massacre of innocents" which, according to her, was carried out in a bid to prove a father-son resemblance.[289] Feeling defeated in her ethical loneliness, Penelope bitterly acknowledges that "[w]aiting is a dull art / compared to playing war";[290] in an eminently gender-divided society, Odysseus' male-warrior prototype overshadows Penelope's non-violent stratagems and all that is left of Telemachus' own name as a harbinger of peace in a cruel joke.[291]

After the wife's complete loss of admiration for the husband, *Penelope's Confession* can only finish with the couple's separation, an ending that has become a motif in Odyssean revisions, as we will see ahead in the poetry of Tarozzi and Glück.[292] After some poems of disappointment and

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[287] *Ivi*, v. 5-9.
[288] *Cf.* Holst-Warhaft, *Penelope's Confession*, chap. The Translations.: "The Penelope poems were written partly as a response to a new war, one that, like its ancient precursor, was fought for reasons other than the ones its leaders professed".
[289] Holst-Warhaft, 68-71, v. 21-25: "Like all new recruits you did / the dirty work for him, / the massacre of innocents, / outdoing him in cruelty / to prove yourself his son".
[290] *Ivi*, v. 14-15.
[291] *Ivi*, v. 26-30: "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".
[292] Tarozzi, *Nessuno vince il leone. Variazioni e racconti in versi*; Glück, *Meadowlands*, 1996. The epic couple *de facto* splits up also in Kazantzakis' sequel of the *Odyssey*, but there the focus is on Odysseus and his later adventures, rather than on Penelope's perception of the separation *per se* and her future.

bitter accusations, there comes "a time when modes are set; / hers is to wait, his is to wonder".[293] The traditional gender roles seem to be restored, and the heroine sounds at the same time disappointed and relieved by the marriage's resolution – bittersweet was the love, bittersweet its ending. In "A Parting of the Ways", the third-person subject penetrates Penelope's mind again as she is trying to orient herself in the aftermath of the marriage: "What's her to her or she / to him now they / have parted ways" (v. 1-3)?[294] Of the poem's five stanzas, the first four are direct questions, explorations of other impossible scenarios of the woman's past, in an effort to respond to life's big 'whys'. However, the poem's last strophe reveals one passion the couple now seems to share, that is, traveling: "One thing is sure. […] She's putting out to sea" (v. 13, 15).[295] Penelope's budding desire to travel is undoubtedly an appropriation of a characteristic intrinsically linked to Odysseus' traditional figure, but in this particular case, it may also be an autobiographical window onto the poet herself. As she states in her preface, Holst-Warhaft is "as homeless as Odysseus", a nonstop traveler "leading a double life" between her two Ithacas, Greece and New York.[296]

But if Penelope is dropping a one-verse presage of a future voyage, that is about all the readers can expect in terms of their queen's mobility. The announcement arrives towards the book's end, as if it were expressly positioned there to suggest that we have run out of poetic space and cannot elaborate on the possibility.[297] Thus, though Holst-Warhaft's heroine remains ambiguous regarding her fidelity, she certainly does not overcome her traditional image as a stationary character: *Penelope's Confession* remains a waiting room, confining its protagonist within the same coastline of Homeric Ithaca.

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[293] Holst-Warhaft, *Penelope's Confession*, 76.
[294] *Ivi*, 80-81.
[295] *Cf*. Reuter, 'Penelope Differently: Feminist Re-Visions of Myth', 218-219: "Holst-Warhaft's Penelope is more of a traveller, or wanderer […] This mobility is 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".
[296] Holst-Warhaft, *Penelope's Confession*, chap. The Translations.
[297] A similar hint of future travel is found in the ending of Malerba's novel *Itaca per sempre*. There the couple does not split, and Penelope dreams that *Odysseus will take her* to Egypt, which of course is a far cry from a woman who dreams of traveling alone. Still, the heroine's monologue bears an interesting reflection on women's right to movement and travel: "E perché mai, ho pensato, non dovrei fare anch'io qualche bel viaggio? […] chiederò a Ulisse di portarmi in Egitto. Mi dicono meraviglie di questo paese e io da quando mi sono sposata non sono mai uscita da Itaca, come da una prigione. Per caso solo gli uomini hanno diritto a viaggiare?" ("And why, I thought, shouldn't I also go on a nice trip? […] I will ask Odysseus to take me to Egypt. They tell me it is a marvelous country and since I got married, I never got out of Ithaca, as if it were a prison. Is it that only men have the right to travel?"), in Malerba, *Itaca per sempre*, 175. My translation.

4. "Barbelope" drinking a glass of ouzo: "Project Barbelope" by Marta Wanicka and Valerio Giuzio.

1.4. “por ti não espero mais   nem em literatura”: *Penélope Está de Partida* by José Gardezabal

In thinking of travelling and other forms of mobility, let us turn to the book-length lyric Penelope, as imagined by the Portuguese author, José Gardeazabal.[298] Finding herself in a city loosely evoking modern-day Lisbon, our heroine stages a series of interior monologues in which, even when remaining immobile, she is shaped by world that is constantly travelling *to* her. Whether through everyday commodities or media spectacles, Penelope is inundated by a metropolitan modernity that overwhelms her and saturates her existence. As she grapples with cosmetic products, washing machines, and IKEA furniture, or as she tries to process cinematic productions, or media coverage on the polycrisis in Europe and far away wars she compares to Troy, our protagonist defamiliarizes familiar tropes of the reader’s life through juxtapositions and other parallels with the antiquity she has emigrated out of.

The first image the reader sees on the cover of *Penélope Está de Partida* is that of a young woman, wearing a simple, white buttoned dress and holding a brown leather suitcase.[299] Though we cannot see her head and shoes (suggestively, the former has given its place to the book’s title, while the latter to the author’s name), in the background we see a blue sky and the grass at her feet. Her position *en plein air*, with her dress flapping in the wind, seems to herald an imminent departure, perhaps away from the city she complains of having been confined in for too long. As the title suggests, *Penelope is leaving*, but the reader has yet to discover what this contemporary voyage will actually entail.

Gardeazabal’s heroine suggests a first point of departure: “ainda tenho um pé na epopeia / por pouco tempo” (“I still have one foot in the epic / not for long”, v.1-2).[300] From the outset, Penelope

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[298] Gardeazabal, *Penélope Está de Partida*. As far as I know, this is the first study on the book, which is also absent from Kastrinaki’s recent volume.

[299] The cover picture can be found in the annex of this thesis. It brings to mind the famous track “Penélope” by the Catalan singer and composer Joan Manuel Serrat, where we find the heroine waiting om a platform for the first train to arrive (“Penélope / Se sienta en un banco en el andén / Y espera a que llegue el primer tren”). Like in Gardeazabal’s cover, this heroine is also holding a brown leathered bag and wearing high-hilled shoes and a Sunday dress (“Penélope / con su bolso de piel marrón / sus zapatos de tacón / y su vestido de domingo”). The song was published in 1969 and the same year Serrat participated with it in the “IV Festival Internacional da Canção Popular de Rio de Janeiro”. You can listen to the song here: Serrat, Penelope.

[300] The book has not yet been translated into English. All of the translated verses here are mine, for the purposes of this thesis. I would like to thank my colleague David Mesquita for teaching me Portuguese and for his invaluable help in the translation of the verses. I would also like to thank my friend Beatriz Almeida, for her important suggestions and notes.

launches into an explicitly metaliterary discussion, typical of mythical rewritings. She is aware of her character's origins in the genre of epic poetry, and even though a part of her is still rooted there, she declares that it is not for long.

A similar *genre* voyage had already taken place decades ago in "Variazioni sul tema di Penelope" ("Variations on Penelope's Theme"), an Italian poem written by Bianca Tarozzi.[301] This Penelope, narrated in the third person by an anonymous poetic subject is "searching for a slightly more literary genre" ("cerca un genere un po più letterario", v. 8) to write poetry in, while she believes that "for the epic she does not know enough" ("per l'epica non sa abbastanza cose", v. 11). The modern Penelope ironically acknowledges that, since "an epic has to include the knowledge of an era" ("un epos deve includere lo scibile / di un'epoca", v. 26-27), she could not write one, as "she is at least a two thousand years late / for the know-how" ("lei è in ritardo di almeno due milleni sullo know-how", v. 28-29). However, Tarozzi is certainly familiar with at least one defining element of Italian epic poetry, that is, the hendecasyllabic verse and she successfully bestows it onto the Homeric heroine to retrieve and create poetic knowledge. In fact, her version of a Penelope-poet and translator is entirely narrated in hendecasyllables; in some cases, she does not hesitate to play with the meter, disguising some by splitting them into two verses.[302]

In contrast to Tarozzi, and more in line with contemporary lyric poetry, Gardeazabal's Penelope defies metric restrictions. Her *genre* change is mirrored in the metric form of the first two verses. The first is decasyllabic, featuring a slant internal rhyme (pé-pei) and two strong accents on the sixth (pé) and tenth (-pei-) syllable, thus forming a *decassílabo heroico*, the established meter of

[301] Tarozzi, *Nessuno vince il leone. Variazioni e racconti in versi*, 21. To my knowledge, there exists no published English edition of Tarozzi's book. Serena Alessi has translated some of the verses in her paper on Italian Penelopean rewritings: Serena Alessi, 'Rewriting Classical Myth: The Case of Penelope', *MHRA Working Papers in the Humanities* 8 (2013): 42-53. Translations of the verses here are mine. Tarozzi was professor of Anglo-American literature at the Università di Verona, in Italy. To this day she actively collaborates with the newly founded poetry publishing house Molesini in Venice (Molesini Editore), and she continues to write and translate poetry. Her latest poetry books is Bianca Tarozzi, *Devozioni domestiche* (Venezia: Molesini editore, 2022). To remain on Ithacan territory, apart from writing her own Penelope, Tarozzi has translated distinguished American Penelopes in Italian, such as those of Robert Lowell and Louise Glück's *Meadowlands*: in Robert Lowell, 'Robert Lowell Tre poesie tradotte da Bianca Tarozzi', trans. Bianca Tarozzi, *Linea D'Ombra* 5/6, no. Speciale estate (1984): 28-40; Louise Glück, *Meadowlands*, trans. Bianca Tarozzi (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2022).

[302] When split, the hendecasyllable is usually divided in 7+4. Such is the case of "Telemaco le chiede / sempre qualcosa" ("Telemachus is asking / always for something"). Fidelity towards epic meter is accompanied by fidelity towards the epic husband. Nevertheless, Tarozzi's heroine has some suitors, namely poetry and translation, which are here personified. In this rewriting, literature wins over the woman's love for Odysseus, and rightfully so, since it is literature that fills in the emptiness created by Odysseus' absence.

Portuguese epic poetry at least since the time of the *Os Lusíadas*.[303] The second verse is a pentasyllabic iambus, which quickly undoes the previous epic *decassílabo* and moves Penelope's second foot in the genre of short poetry.[304] The heroine continues to speak in first person, announcing a transfiguration to the reader: "duas malas na mão / ou seja   estou de mãos livres" ("two suitcases in hand / that is,   my hands are free", v. 3-4).[305] She does carry some of her old belongings, but rather than feeling them to be a burden, luggage here signifies freedom. The image of free hands evokes its opposite: that of a captive's hands tied with handcuffs. Gardeazabal is suggesting that for a figure like Penelope, the epic genre and its tradition has been a prison throughout the centuries, and now that she is starting to have a new lyric life of her own, she is being liberated.[306] However, the suitcases testify that the heroine does not intend to abandon every personality trait attributed to her by the epic tradition.

The first page of the book inncludes antithethical pairs evoking Penelope's traditional traits, but presents them as overcome in the present. Thus, in "até aqui tecia   tecia   e nada acontecia" ("until now I was weaving   I was weaving   and nothing was happening", v. 5), the reader is reminded of Penelope's characteristic stratagem of the loom, interpreted both as symbol of her cunning (μῆτις) and of her faithfulness to Odysseus. The internal triple rhyme ("te<u>cia</u>", "te<u>cia</u>", "aconte<u>cia</u>"), the two deliberately situated blanks ("tecia[___]tecia[___]e), and the poet's choice of the verbal past tense of *pretérito imperfeito*, a tense closer to the English past continuous than to simple past, emphasizes the long duration and monotony of the weaving, transmitting to the reader a sense of the slow grind of the years bent over the loom. The verse ends with a double meaning ("e nada acontecia"), both confirming tradition because as the myth demands, Penelope spends her nights undoing what she weaves during the day resulting literally the production of nothing, and undoing it inasmuch as the contemporary heroine does not seem to recognize its utility as a stratagem, which for her Homeric ancestor was the most important example of her personal μῆτις, and kept the suitors at bay. Again, the content of the verse is mirrored in its metrical form. Should we

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[303] For the history of the Portuguese *decassílabo*, see José Américo Miranda and Rilane Teles de Souza, 'O verso decassílabo', *Texto Poético* 14, no. 24 (2018): 150-170. For a comparative analysis of the Italian hendecasyllable, the French and Galician-Portuguese decasyllable and the English iambic pentameter, see Martin J. Duffell, 'Chaucer, Gower, and the History of the Hendecasyllable', in *English Historical Metrics*, by C. B. McCully and J. J. Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 210-218.

[304] Here we may also recall an Ovidian game with the epic meter, in the elegiac distich of the *Heroides*.

[305] Gardeazabal frequently leaves big spaces within the same verse. After calculation, I have chosen to reproduce them here with three spaces without an ellipsis which would complicate the effect of the original blank space.

[306] The same image of a Penelope who feels imprisoned in Ithaca is mentioned Malerba, *Itaca per sempre*, 175.

eliminate the second "tecia", the verse becomes an archaic alexandrine of fourteen syllables, with two equal hemistiches and accents on the even, like the Italian *doppio settenario*: "a/té/ a/qui/ te/ci/a | e/ na/da a/con/te/ci/a". With the addition of the repeated "tecia" in the middle of the verse, the meter is broken, poetically underscoring the meaning of the words: both Penelopean 'texts' result in "nada".

Still, the pointlessness of a past spent biding time gives the heroine the needed strength to change: "Agora aqui em breve desapareço / sem raiva nem ruído" ("Now here in a bit I disappear / without rage nor noise", v. 6-7). The contrast between past ("até") and present ("agora") highlights the importance of the woman's unvaried, repeated position ("aqui"), which, as with her position inside the epic genre, will not last for long. Only five verses after her appearance, she pre-announces her disappearance, accompanied by a vague temporal indication ("em breve"). She also does not care to leave any hints regarding her future destination. Even more importantly, her disappearance will be quiet and not weighed down by anger.

The feeling of "raiva", "rage" has been constitutive of the epic genre since the times of the *Iliad*, whose central theme is the rage (μῆνις) of Achilles,[307] while "ruído", noise, can easily signify the epic poem's sprawling verses and polyphonic loudness. If interpreted in a metaliterary way, the heroine's claim can be taken as comment on the editorial world it circulates in. Given that this Penelope arrives *solo* in a lyric book of forty-two pages, and since, in their vast majority, contemporary books of lyric poetry usually collect dust on the shelves of bookshops, this Penelope might lack by definition the potential to cause the editorial 'noise' of a novel, that is, the epic of our times.[308] As such, like in Kazantzakis' poem, Penelope exits her husband's traditional genre

[307] Probably the most in-depth analysis of Achillean μῆνις is that of Leonard Charles Muellner, *The Anger of Achilles: Mēnis in Greek Epic* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

[308] This is the case of best-seller novels that revisit myth through a feminist lens, and which are being translated in other European languages very shortly after their publication in the original language. The trend started in the 2010s but saw a boom with the #metoo. Some of the writers who undertake this type of revisions are women, with an academic background in classics, usually at top notch British or American universities. See *inter alia* Emily Hauser, *For the Most Beautiful* (London: Black Swan, 2016); Pat Barker, *The Silence of the Girls* (New York: Doubleday, 2018); Madeline Miller, *Circe* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019); Natalie Haynes, *A Thousand Ships* (London: Pan MacMillan, 2019); Jennifer Saint, *Ariadne* (New York: Headline Publishing Group, 2021); Claire North, *Ithaca* (London: Orbit, 2022). The editorial phenomenon has reached such dimensions that it became in itself a subject for the academia: see for example the aforementioned conference organized in Rome on the 26th and 27th of October 2023, Best-Selling Muses Conference, Rome 26-27.10.2023. The literary value of these rewritings and their probable submission to contemporary trends of the publishing market will not be treated in this thesis. I limit myself to introduce the term 'myth industry', which I believe satisfyingly summarizes the phenomenon.

without threatening or caring to appropriate it, and the transition is preannounced as calm, without the poetic weight or loud fanfare of a new *epos*.

Yet the assurances given to the reader that the exit will be quiet and anger-free are also puzzling.[309] In a way, Gardeazabal's Penelope is reassuring the reader that she is not an "angry feminist" and that she will not become a "killjoy" by exasperating others with her chronic frustrations – tropes that have been long used to discipline women wearing their resistance to male domination on their sleeves.[310] Contemporary Feminist and other adjacent social movements, perceive in silence and (self-)censorship an insidious enemy,[311] and in suppressing rightous anger for the sake of respectability a form of accomodating forces perpetuating social injustice.[312] But even long before our current expressions of politicized rage,[313] already in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* anger (ὀργὴ) is presented as an ambivalent emotion, and "we [humans] have a bad disposition in regard to anger if we are disposed to get angry too violently or not violently enough,

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[309] Suffice it to mention the slogan of *Non Una di Meno* that echoed in Italian squares with the ocassion of the 25th of November and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women: "siamo il grido altissimo e feroce di tutte quelle donne che più non hanno voce" ("we are the scream, the highest and ferocious, of all those women that now are voiceless"). For more on these demonstrations, see manifestazione 23.11.2023, Italia. The participation in the feminist demonstrations of the 25th of November 2023 around Italy was even greater than that of previous years, due to the femicide of the 22-year-old Giulia Cecchettin by her companion. For more on the case and on why it may probably represent a milestone for the treatment of femicides in Italy, see Annalisa Camilli, 'Che c'è di diverso nel femminicidio di Giulia Cecchettin', *L'Essenziale*, November 2023.

[310] For an analysis of the feminist woman seen as "killjoy", see Sara Ahmed, 'Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 35, no. 3 (2010): 571-594.

[311] Every feminist movement has as a goal to "break the silence" – see *inter alia* Carol Gilligan, 'Breaking the Silence, or Who Says Shut Up?', *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 54, no. 4 (2018): 735-746. For an everyday-life example, see the title of a feminist gathering in Bologna, November 2023, in the annex. Returning to Penelopean spaces, Anghelaki-Rooke begins *The Scattered Papers of Penelope* with "Λέει η Πηνελόπη" ("Penelope Says"), Glück starts *Meadowlands* with "Penelope's Song", Villanueva's title of his revision *So Spoke Penelope* and Kastrinaki appropriately transformed the indicative in imperative with an exclamation mark in the title of her volume *Μίλα, Πηνελόπη!* (*Speak, Penelope!*).

[312] For women's anger, see Marilyn Frye, 'A Note on Anger', in *Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, by Marilyn Frye (Berkeley: Clarkson Potter / Ten Speed, 1983), 84-94. Anger has been a key element for black and intersectional feminism, as for example in Audre Lorde, 'The Uses of Anger', *Women's Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1981): 7–10., or more recently in Claudia Rankine's poetic essays: Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2014); Claudia Rankine, *Just Us: An American Conversation* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2020).

[313] Suffice it to mention the slogan *Non Una di Meno* that echoed in Italian squares with the ocassion of the 25th of November and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women: "siamo il grido altissimo e feroce di tutte quelle donne che più non hanno voce" ("we are the scream, the highest and ferocious, of all those women that now are voiceless"). For more on these demonstrations, see In cronaca, Unibo, Il grido feroce. The participation in the feminist demonstrations of the 25th of November 2023 around Italy was even greater than that of previous years, due to the femicide of the 22-year-old Giulia Cecchettin by her companion. For more on the case and on why it may probably represent a milestone for the treatment of femicides in Italy, see Camilli, 'Che c'è di diverso nel femminicidio di Giulia Cecchettin'.

a good disposition if we habitually feel a moderate amount of anger”.[314] For Aristotle, a modest amount of anger is not only acceptable, but welcome, since anger is a feeling (πάθος) and “in feelings and actions excess and deficiency are errors, while the mean amount is praised, and constitutes success”.[315] Aristotle’s words shed light on v. 6-7 pronounced by Gardeazabal’s Penelope. Even if she had been angry before and simply decided to dispense with this energy-consuming emotion before writing, her will to “disappear without rage or noise” depicts a blank, detached heroine who prefers to leave the scene without kicking up a big fuss. Her passivity thus alienates the modern readers who, far from hoping for any type of violent reaction, might perhaps expect at least some degree of frustration akin to a positive, “situated anger”, whose “discordant voice can attract attention in the public realm, demanding action and change”.[316]

But, as with most Penelopean rewritings, this heroine finds very little space in the public realm and is rarely seen as belonging to any group or collectivity. Interestingly though, she is aware of the economic system she lives under, but limits herself to describing the narcotic effects it has on her individual mood, “o capitalismo tarda-me” (“capitalism slows me down”, v. 4), again refraining from directing any anger towards the social phenomena connected to the system, such as the textile factories and the African migrant women she mentions seeing in the city.[317]

Still, in her solitary world she does try to change what she can on her own, starting from her core narrative traits: “por ti não espero mais   nem em literatura” (“for you I’ll wait no more   not even in literature”, v. 8)! There it is, transparent and melodic, with three negations (“não”, “mais”, “nem”), and, again, an archaic alexandrine of fourteen syllables, with a rational pause (“mais[___]nem”) between the two hemistichs, which separate the literal exclamation from the

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[314] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Harris Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 73 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 86-87: “πρὸς τὸ ὀργισθῆναι, εἰ μὲν σφοδρῶς ἢ ἀνειμένως, κακῶς ἔχομεν, εἰ δὲ μέσως, εὖ”.
[315] *Ivi*, 94-95: “ἐν οἷς [πάθοις καὶ πράξεσιν] ἡ μὲν ὑπερβολὴ ἁμαρτάνεται καὶ ἡ ἔλλειψις [ψέγεται,] τὸ δὲ μέσον ἐπαινεῖται καὶ κατορθοῦται”.
[316] Lucas A. Swaine, ‘Blameless, Constructive, and Political Anger’, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 26, no. 3 (1996): 257-274. Swaine starts his discussion on anger from Aristotle and continues through the Stoics (in particular Seneca), to Spinoza (anger in relation to pain and to the person provoking it), arriving at the definition (and defense) of “situational anger”.
[317] The textile industry recurs as a motif throughout the poems as what Penelope understands as having replaced her manual work with the loom (28, 50). Reading the city as stand-in for Lisbon, this could also be a possible topographic reference to what is now the mega-popular LX Factory, a trendy complex of restaurant and arty retailers located in the Alcantara neighborhood, which was previously the home to the weaving and textile company Companhia de Fiação e Tecidos Lisbonense, founded in 1846, and later gave way to the Companhia Industrial de Portugal e Colónias, both enterprises with structural ties to Portugal’s (neo)colonial economy. As a primary engine of the city’s growth in the 19th century, the building is now a space-symbol of post-industrial gentrification and is advertised as a “factory of experience”, Lx factory.

metaliterary one – and this time there is nothing like the previous “tecia” to undo the meaning of the verse. Most importantly, here appears the first mention of the second person (“ti”) to whom is directed both the verse and the whole book, and from the context it is obvious that the adressee is Odysseus. It is the first time that Penelope directly hails her husband, though without naming him, and she does so only to announce that she will not wait for him any more, thus definitively shedding one of her core figural traits.

Supporters of the couple’s break-up will not remain satisfied for long, however, since the heroine’s decision is quickly walked back: “(deixo a porta aberta para entrares)” [“(I leave the door open for you to enter)”, v. 9].[318] Whether Odysseus will be allowed to (re)enter just the house or also his wife’s life remains to be seen. As noted by the South-African Penelopes in Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandella*, the two returns are distinct, and a return to the common house does not translate to the wife’s acceptance: “should your husband return to you, he will not be walking into your life but into your house”.[319] Thus, for a couple to get together again, a gradual *nostos* is presupposed, which has as its climax the reunion between husband and wife – a pattern very familiar to us already from the *Odyssey*. However, if we take Penelope’s word on the fact that she has prepared her suitcases and is planning on dissapearing, then the parenthesis simply means that Odysseus can come back and resume his life in the house without her. Could this imply that the forever-waiting woman is severing ties from her husband, or does the parenthesis function as a window of promise for him to return to her life’s narrative?

Since we are dealing with lyric poetry, it is relevant to indulge in the poet’s choice to mark Ithaca’s open doors with a parenthesis as punctuation. According to the *Harper Handbook to Literature*, a parenthesis sets apart “a word or words included as a deviation from or addition to the primary flow of the thought in a sentence or a paragraph”.[320] If interpreted in this narrow way, the verse in parenthesis would mean that Odysseus is out of “the primary flow” of this Penelope’s thought process, and his return will not affect her plans. But as John Lennard has shown in his seminal study *But I Digress: The Exploitation of Parentheses in English Printed Verse*, in modern

[318] More decisive break-ups are to be found in Tarozzi, Glück (to follow) and Holst-Warhaft (analyzed above).
[319] Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela [David Philip Publishers, 2003]*, 97.
[320] Northrop Frye, Baker, Sheridan, and Perkins, George, eds., *The Harper Handbook to Literature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 336. For an analysis of the definition of the term ‘parenthesis’ in English literature handbooks and dictionaries, see Robert Grant Williams, ‘Reading the Parenthesis’, *SubStance* 22, no. 1 (1993): 53-66. Williams also cites the poem “l(a” by e. e. cummings, where the parenthesis depicts how “(a/ le/af/fa/ ll/s)”, symbolizing the “loneliness” that is found out of the brackets.

poetry the trope of parenthesis is much more than a simple deviation, as its content is "often original, relevant, central, emphatic, or indicative of the crux of the argument".[321] The "lunula", as the critic names the punctuation mark alone without its content, bears "artistic value", because it "marks a boundary between two textual states, one as it were the tonic, the other parenthetical to the tonic".[322] Thus, in the two textual states of Gardeazabal's poem, the tonic feature is that Penelope is not waiting anymore, and the parenthetical to the tonic expressing, seemingly in contradiction, that she is leaving the doors of the house and of the marriage open. Once again, Penelope is doing and undoing, one foot in and one out of the line defining the epic genre and her marriage.[323]

As Mae Losasso notes, "if the bliss of the bracket represents a climax, the return to the poem […] must engender a state of post-orgasmic boredom".[324] That is how Gardeazabal's reader may feel with what follows after Penelope's more assertive enunciations. The heroine quickly ends the discussion on future plans and returns to the narrative past, describing what she went through during the years of Odysseus' absence: "já recebi todos os presentes / fui todos os adjetivos" ("I already received all the presents / I have been all the adjectives", v. 10-11). Consciously declaimed from the narrative present, these verses refer to everything (note the repeated "todos") that is past, and nothing else is expected to happen. The verb "recebi" suggests that until now her condition has been one of passive acceptance, while the whole verse when read ironically leaves some margin for sexual connotation. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the complements at the end of the two verses shows that all the "presentes" Penelope received, probably from the suitors, were

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[321] John Lennard, *But I Digress: The Exploitation of Parentheses in English Printed Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 242.
[322] *Ibidem*.
[323] Among the lyric rewritings of Homer, probably the ones with the most exquisite use of the parenthesis are those of Giannis Ritsos. A nice example is found in the poem "Επιστροφή ΙΙ" ("Return II"), a rewriting of *Od*.13.187-216. The Phaeacians have dropped Odysseus off at Ithaca, and he wakes up without being able to recognize his motherland. The poetic subject, a third-person, omniscient one, comments that Odysseus "knew nothing, nothing. (Maybe he found them / greater or smaller?)" ["τίποτα, τίποτα δεν ήξερε. (Τάχα να τα 'βρισκε / τρανότερα ή μικρότερα;)" – my translation. Here the parenthesis shows how also a third-person, omniscient poetic subject cannot fully enter the mind of their created character. At the same time, Ritsos' is an ironic response to Cavafy's "Ithaca", v. 34 "κι αν πτωχική τη βρεις, η Ιθάκη δε σε γέλασε" ("and if you find her poor, Ithaca didn't deceive you"). Following Dante and Tennyson, Cavafy presents an Odysseus that has gained wisdom and experience ("έτσι σοφός που έγινες, με τόση πείρα"), while Ritsos' hero didn't learn "nothing, nothing", and thus, it is also probable that he finds Ithaca even greater than before. Γιάννης Ρίτσος, *Μαρτυρίες. Σειρά Δεύτερη* (Αθήνα: Κέδρος, 1966); Γιάννης Ρίτσος, *Ποιήματα Θ' (1958-1967)* (Αθήνα: Κέδρος, 1989); Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 67. Ritsos' poem can also be found here: Ρίτσος, Η Επιστροφή ΙΙ.
[324] Mae Losasso, '"Remember to Slam the Parentheses behind You": Structures of Attention in the Lyric Poetry of James Schuyler', *Textual Practice* 36, no. 5 (May 2022): 734. Losasso herself is reading Schuyler's use of parenthesis through Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text*.

mere "adjectives", decorative and insignificant. A focus on the syntax of v. 11 shows that "adjetivos" does not function as a mere attribute, but as a predicative nominative, thus mocking its own meaning – in the end, what Penelope was still lacking is, literally, the substance of a noun (in Portuguese, 'substantivo'). However, a positive note is added with the choice of "fui" ("was"), the past tense indicating once again the heroine steps away from the epic genre, consequently casting off the long list of adjectives attributed to her since antiquity and fashioning her figure anew.

Of course, pronounced in a Homeric context, this statement creates a direct link with the formulaic epithets that accompany the Homeric characters along the two epics.[325] The specific case of Penelope's attributes in the *Odyssey* and their relaying in modern translations and rewritings have a highly non-linear and fragmented genealogy.[326] It is a non-Homeric tradition of adjectives like 'chaste' and 'faithful', and not the ones found in the Homeric text,[327] that Gardeazabal's heroine is seeking to get rid of. In fact, at some point she reports a question that Odysseus (his own voice absent from the text) asked her:

> perguntas-me quão fiel foi Penélope
> fiel   não fui como um cão
> nem fiel fui por acidente
> a fidelidade é uma qualidade de manuscrito
>
> you ask me how faithful was Penelope
> faithful   I wasn't like a dog
> neither was I faithful by accident

[325] The Oral Studies started with Milman Parry's work on the Homeric formulas and his field research in Yugoslavia, in a moment when oral epic tradition there was still alive and kicking. His collected papers were published posthumous by his son and later professor of classics at Yale, Adam Parry: Adam Parry, ed., *The Making of Homeric Verse. The Collected Papers of Milman Parry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). Milman Parry's work was continued by his student Albert B. Lord, professor of comparative literature at Harvard, and then by John Miles Foley, Gregory Nagy, and many others up to this day. See *inter alia* Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales [1960]*, 2nd ed. (Harvard University Press, 1971); Albert B. Lord, *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition*, Myth and Poetics (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Albert B. Lord, *The Singer Resumes the Tale*, ed. Lord, Mary Louise (Center for Hellenic Studies, 1995); Gregory Nagy, *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); John Miles Foley, *Homer's Traditional Art* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 1999).

[326] Cornacchia dedicated the entire chapter II of her thesis to delineate the uses of Penelope's epithets in the *Odyssey*: Cornacchia, 'La traccia del modello', 67-156.

[327] *Cf.* Paolo Vivante, *Homer* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1985), 113, where he remarks that "no such epithets as 'chaste' or 'faithful' is ever applied to Penelope" in Homer; "Not even by calling her 'wise', 'prudent', or 'careful' would we do her justice. Her broader, more comprehensive epithets (*periphron*, *ekhephron*) melt with her name: what we see is her earnest, pensive image, restrained by no compulsive morality but contained, rather, within its purity of form". Cited also in Cornacchia, 'La traccia del modello', 157-158.

fidelity is a quality for the manuscripts (v. 1-4)[328]

At first glance, Odysseus' new question may seem a mere simplification of the one he asks his mother in *Od*.11.175-178:

> εἰπὲ δέ μοι μνηστῆς ἀλόχου βουλήν τε νόον τε,
> ἠὲ μένει παρὰ παιδὶ καὶ ἔμπεδα πάντα φυλάσσει
> ἦ ἤδη μιν ἔγημεν Ἀχαιῶν ὅς τις ἄριστος
>
> And tell me of my wife: how runs her thought,
> still with her child, still keeping our domains,
> or bride again to the best of the Akhaians.

Also later on, in the couple's recognition scene of *Odyssey* 23, the whole conversation is centered around the bed, σῆμα of recognition known only by the two, and which functions as a metonymy for Penelope's faithfulness (if no one has moved the bed, then no one has taken away her love for Odysseus, the root of the olive-tree is the root of the marriage, etc.).

Behind all these questions is the same motive, as both the ancient and the contemporary husband need to be sure their wife is still actively committed to the marriage. However, in the Portuguese question there are two novelties. While, in the ancient versions, the question of fidelity is explicit when asked to the mother but implicit when asked to Penelope, in Gardeazabal's poem, Penelope is interrogated directly and explicitly asked about her fidelity. Moreover, the emphasis in the verse, due to its construction, falls on its central words, "quão fiel", which means both "how faithful" and "how much faithful". The man is not only searching for a yes or no answer; he wants all the details. But Penelope does not cough up an answer so easily. She dwells on the meaning and the uses of the adjective, and she jokes with the double meaning of "quão". First comes a theatrical pause ("faithful[___]"), where the reader can picture the woman as she meditates on her answer. Suspense is created as she plays around with her traditional adjective, keeping at a safe distance from herself ("faithful[___]I"), and then swiftly undoing it: "I wasn't".

What looks like a confession is twisted further: "I wasn't [faithful] like a dog", which can mean "I was not faithful" or "I was faithful, but not as a dog is / would be". Positioned in the closure of v. 1-2, Penelope and dog are presented again as an ambivalent twin, as in Holst-Warhaft's "Fidelity", and once more they form a triangle with fidelity. The focus changes in v. 3, where the stress on the two last words "por acidente" speaks to the fact that her strong stand on faithfulness

[328] Gardeazabal, *Penélope Está de Partida*, 28. Every time I cite a new page from Gardezabal's book I start the enumeration of the verses from the beginning, as if it were a one-page poem. In the index of the book the pages bear the first verse of each page.

was not a mere coincidence. In other words, Penelope tells her husband "I am not a passive manuscript (of an ancient text, aka Homer) whose (philological) value is measured on the basis of its proximity to the original, nor a dog, for whom fidelity is considered a quality they have by nature". For Gardeazabal's heroine, fidelity is an active choice made during his years of absence. At the same time, and echoing Holst-Warhaft, the woman is arguing that faithfulness (and discussions on faithfulness) are not as important as her husband, or tradition itself ("manuscrito"), suggest. Implied is that there are better criteria by which to judge a human's qualities, beginning with a critical sensibility towards received truths and behavioral norms.

The crucial moment for the character's development arrives in the following page, where Penelope declares: "tornei-me substantivo" ("I became a noun", or more literally "I turned myself into a noun", v. 1).[329] In this verse there is no space left for another person, as all of its three syntactic roles (subject, complement and predicative nominative) belong to Penelope. This means that the heroine has left behind the more passive position she was once supposed to hold both syntactically and in the interpretation of her figure. This movement is also highlighted by the Portuguese reflexive verb "tornar-se", when taken into consideration its intransitive meaning "voltar", "to return". Again, the Odyssean context of the poem suggests a link to the traditional Homeric theme of *nostos*. As is well-known, throughout the *Odyssey*, Odysseus undergoes an elimination of his identity by presenting himself to the Cyclops as οὔτις ("no one"). His arrival at Scheria marks the gradual reconstruction of his subjectivity by means of memory and signs, both through Demodokos's listening to his story and then through the various recognition scenes with Telemachus, Argos, Eurykleia, Eumaeus, Penelope and Laertes.[330] Similarly, through a lyric of her own (and Gardeazabal's), Penelope is finally able to return to herself, to establish her own identity, setting aside the previous "nobody" version constructed around decorative attributes by the male-centered literary tradition. That self, defined by others, was full of "presentes" and "adjetivos", which the heroine is now rejecting: "desejo adjetivos como quem escapa à noite de um palácio"

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[329] *Ivi*, 29.

[330] Literature on this topic is infinite. Already Aristotle talks about the important of the recognition scenes (ἀναγνώρισις) in the *Poetics*: "ἡ δὲ Ὀδύσσεια πεπλεγμένον (ἀναγνώρισις γὰρ διόλου) καὶ ἠθική" ("while the *Odyssey* is complex (it is pervaded by recognition) and characterbased", in Aristotle, Longinus, and Demetrius, *Aristotle: Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style*, ed. D. A. Russell, trans. Stephen Halliwell, W. Hamilton Fyfe, and Doreen Innes, vol. XXIII, Loeb Classical Library 199 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 118-119. For more on recognition in the *Odyssey*, see *inter alia* Murnaghan, *Disguise and Recognition in the* Odyssey; Peter Gainsford, 'Formal Analysis of Recognition Scenes in the *Odyssey*', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 123 (November 2003): 41-59; Piero Boitani, 'Odysseus, Ulysses, Nobody: The Universe of Recognition', in *Anagnorisis: Scenes and Themes of Recognition and Revelation in Western Literature* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021), 39-72.

(“I desire adjectives like someone who escapes at night from a palace”, v. 2).[331] In Penelope’s mind, adjectives form a prison in which she is interred, and she desperately searches for a secret way out. Adjectives are words chosen by others, a narration that obstructs the heroine’s self-determination – something which this heroine will not renounce so easily.[332]

For a person to achieve true self-definition, a personal space is required. In tension with the lack of assertiveness described earlier, Gardeazabal’s Penelope has apparently done some feminist readings. She speaks through the mouth of Virginia Woolf, when she claims: “a minha autobiografia é um quarto só para mim” (“my autobiography is a room only for me”, v. 11).[333] In the feminist classic *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf states that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction”.[334] By alluding to her, Gardeazabal’s Penelope encapsulates in just one verse the reason for her lyric book, that is to narrate her story and enclose it in the spactime of a text to which only she will have access.[335] Compared to Woolf, however, the heroine emphasises the individual far more. In the repetition of the first person pronouns, possessive in the beginning and personal in the end of the verse (“minha”, “mim”), and by adding the adverb “só” (“only”), there is an unwillingness to share the space of lyric poetry that she has created for herself. Thus, the lyric room replaces the Homeric quarters of the loom. She now writes and unwrites the ancient narrative, as she previously raveled and unraveled Laertes’ shroud. This way Penelope transforms an initially forced seclusion into her own “separate place, where she belongs to herself”.[336]

Of course, narration of the self and creation of safe spaces does not (and most feminists argue *should* not) exclude one’s relations to other people. In this revision, Penelope understands and explains her subjectivity in contrast to that of Odysseus, evoking Simone de Beauvoir’s words: “the subject posits itself only in opposition; [...] the Other [woman] is posited as Other by the One

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[331] Gardeazabal, *Penélope Está de Partida*, 29.
[332] Even though not new, self-determination has been a key concept of #metoo movements. On the special case of Italy and Portugal, see Ana Cristina Santos and Mara Pieri, ‘My Body, My Rules? Self-Determination and Feminist Collective Action in Southern Europe’, in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary European Social Movements: Protest in Turbulent Times*, by Cristina Flesher Fominaya and Ramon A. Feenstra (London: Routledge, 2019).
[333] Gardeazabal, *Penélope Está de Partida*, 29.
[334] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own [Hogarth Press, 1929]* (London: Penguin, 2004), 8.
[335] Woolf is also explicitly mentioned in a rather unstylish list of well-known modern women, together with Marie Curie, Clarice Lispector and various others: Gardeazabal, *Penélope Está de Partida*, 40.
[336] Adriana Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 12. For the original Italian edition, see Adriana Cavarero, *Nonostante Platone: figure femminili nella filosofia antica [Editori Riuniti, 1990]*, 2nd ed., Testi 4 (Ombre Corte, 2009).

[man] positing itself as One".[337] The heroine, however, seems trapped in a negative relationality, "sou o avesso de uma viagem / a minha vida foi o contrário de uma paisagem" ("I am the opposite of a voyage / my life was the contrary of a landscape", v. 6-7).[338] If Odysseus represents a subject on the move, whose travel of *nostos* migh be imagined as pictures of fascinating landscapes, Penelope is visualized as his monotonous and house-bound opposite. While she remains closed in the room of her own autobiography, dwarfed in dimensions and life experiences, he is "huge and wandering" ("és enorme e erras", v. 6).[339] The double meaning of the verb 'errar', which as intransitive means 'to roam', 'to wander', and as transitive 'to get something wrong', 'to make a mistake', expresses the woman's veiled judgement of the husband's life choices.

Accusations accrue as Odysseus remains distant in time and space, both physically and as a personality: "de longe tornaste-te *voyeur*" ("from afar you became a *voyeur*", v. 1).[340] The French term *voyeur* marks an explicit moral judgement of the gazer while the chosen verb *tornar-se* stresses the uneven evolution of the couple: during his absence she replaced her long list of adjectives for the essential quality of a "noun" ("tornei-me substantivo", v. 1),[341] while during his wanderings, he roamed and beheld others as objects.[342] In a way, the juxtaposition of the two verses suggests that there was a positive unexpected outcome in Odysseus' absence, since without his impositions, Penelope found the needed space to flourish.

However, a part of Penelope is still deeply influenced by her husband, whose movements continue to define her. It is probably this that urges her, in a desperate need to communicate her state of mind to him, to write: "o teu mapa é o meu calendário" ("your map is my calendar", v. 7),[343] creating a rather melancholic image of a sedentary woman who crosses out days on the calendar or fills its empty boxes with Odysseus' travel-stops – far from the promise of autonomy she desires elsewhere. This image is also far from Adriana Cavarero's more oppositional analysis

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[337] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, Digital (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2011), 31-32. For the original French edition, see de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*.
[338] Gardeazabal, *Penélope Está de Partida*, 29.
[339] *Ivi*, 14.
[340] *Ibidem*. Translation note: "de longe" can indicate distance both in time ("it has been a long time"), and in space ("from afar"). I opted for the second one because that is the most frequent use.
[341] *Ivi*, 29.
[342] *Cf*. Jennifer Speake and Mark LaFlaur, 'Voyeur', *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English [1999]* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For an analysis of the male's powerful gaze in the epic genre, see Helen Lovatt, 'The Assaultive Gaze', in *The Epic Gaze: Vision, Gender and Narrative in Ancient Epic*, by Helen Lovatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 310-346.
[343] Gardeazabal, *Penélope Está de Partida*, 14.

that "Penelope's time cannot be touched by events, precisely because it cannot be reduced to either one of the two tempos that are alien to it: the tempo of men's actions and the tempo of wifely domestic production".[344] But in the Portuguese rewriting, the two rhythms are not only inextricably linked, they are also assimilated into social tempos. Insofar as the European city Penelope resides in patterns and arranges her consciousness, it is marked simultaneously by the residual traces of the textile industry (and its "jolting experience of time")[345] that powered its entry into capitalist modernity, and the emergent hyper-connective rhythms of urban life occasioned by the transition towards an emergent information economy.

Throughout the whole book Penelope alternates behaviors, sometimes creating the impression of extreme disjuncture. If in spurts she dissociates herself from Odysseus and tradition, and seeks out independence, she intermittently reproduces conventional patriarchal discourse. The impression created on the reader is estranging, but at the same time perfectly resonant with a phrase pronounced by the Homeric Penelope in *Od*.19.524: "ὣς καὶ ἐμοὶ δίχα θυμὸς ὀρώρεται ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα" ("so my mind is divided and starts one way, then another"). There, Penelope is torn between waiting and deciding to remarry, respecting the wedding oath or obeying the orders Odysseus gave her when he left Ithaca to remarry only when Telemachus had become an adult. The feeling of being stuck in the middle, unable to opt for one path or the other, has been intrinsic to Penelope's figure since Homer, a burden the woman has been carrying all the way through her entry into modern literature. As Gardeazabal's initial image proposes, Penelope is still divided, with one foot in the ancient epic and the other in modern lyric. In the very midst of the creation of a new self, she struggles to get rid of a centuries-long tradition that has defined her, though not indefinitely. In what is also presented as a *genre*-battle, the reader pictures the woman facing off against oral literature, that is, the epic:

> a literatura oral agarrou-se a mim
> com ambições de epopeia
> em pensamento fui despida por desconhecidos que não disseram olá
> coisas que não quis chegaram-me mascaradas a meio da noite
>
> oral literature grasped me
> with ambitions of an epic
> in thought I was undressed by strangers who didn't say a word

[344] Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato*, 16.
[345] Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, 31. For a socio-formal analysis of rhythm as social tempo, see 77-117.

things I didn't want arrived to me masked in the middle of the night (v. 10-13)[346]

Under the *genre* metaphor lies a scene of sexual violence in the guise of a woman alone at night, suffering both verbal and physical assault. The fact that the epic genre is associated with gender-based violence should not come as a surprise. After all, the *Iliad* begins with a fight between men for an objectified women won as γέρατα, that is, "honorific supplementary share" to their war prizes,[347] and the *Odyssey* with Telemachus telling off his mother for having trespassed onto the forbidden land of men's μῦθοι to ask Phemius for another song.[348] However, in Gardeazabal's text it is the entire epic mode that metaphorically assaults a female mythical figure, one that previously belonged to it and who is now desperately trying to escape. In this scene, the reader becomes a spectator of explicit physical violence, where the epic genre is depicted as a possessive man who believes he owns Penelope and who then treats her as a passive, anonymous object intended for his sexual pleasure, not even worthy of a basic greeting. Even more cruelly, the plural of "coisas" highlights how epic traits are weaponized against women, while a darker reading may suggest a gang-rape, possibly an allusion to the aforementioned version of the myth that sees Penelope sleeping with all of the suitors and giving birth to Pan. The adjective "mascaradas" that accompanies "coisas" reminds us of Odysseus meeting with Penelope disguised as a masked beggar in *Odyssey* 19 and of the woman's continuous fear of being deceived and lead into adultery by unknown men landing on Ithaca.[349]

[346] Gardeazabal, *Penélope Está de Partida*, 14.

[347] On the exchange of women in the *Iliad*, see Henry Staten, 'The Circulation of Bodies in the Iliad', *New Literary History* 24, no. 2 (1993): 339-361. For the idea of women as objects of transactions in markets directed only by men in patriarchal contemporary societies, see Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), and in particular, chapters 8 and 9 ("Women on the Market" and "Commodities among Themselves", respectively). For the original French edition, see Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1977).

[348] I am referring to the end of Telemachus' response to his mother in *Od.*1.356-359: "ἀλλ᾽ εἰς οἶκον ἰοῦσα τὰ σ᾽ αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε, / ἱστόν τ᾽ ἠλακάτην τε, καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε / ἔργον ἐποίχεσθαι: μῦθος δ᾽ ἄνδρεσσι μελήσει / πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ᾽ ἐμοί: τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ᾽ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ" ("Go therefore back in the house, and take up your own work, / the loom and the distaff, and see to it that your handmaidens / ply their work also; but the men must see to discussion, / all men, but I most of all. For mine is the power in this household"). Mary Beard refers to these verses to say that in "the tradition of Western literature", this is the "first recorded example of a man telling a woman to 'shut up'; telling her that her voice was not to be heard in public": in Beard, 'The Public Voice of Women [London Review of Books, 2013]', 809.

[349] This is how Penelope explains to Odysseus her hesitation to recognize his identity and welcome him back in *Od.*23.13-17: "αὐτὰρ μὴ νῦν μοι τόδε χώεο μηδὲ νεμέσσα, / οὕνεκά σ᾽ οὐ τὸ πρῶτον, ἐπεὶ ἴδον, ὧδ᾽ ἀγάπησα. / αἰεὶ γάρ μοι θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλοισιν / ἐρρίγει μή τίς με βροτῶν ἀπάφοιτο ἔπεσσιν / ἐλθών: πολλοὶ γὰρ κακὰ κέρδεα βουλεύουσιν" ("Then do not now be angry with me nor blame me, because / I did not greet you, as I do now, at first when I saw you. / For always the spirit deep in my very heart was fearful that some one of mortal men would come my way and deceive me / with words. For there are many who scheme for wicked advantage").

Still, despite the fact that this happens “a meio da noite”, the night is the time when the heroine seems to find herself most at ease:

> habituei-me à noite
> sou contra as metáforas
> metáforas são luzes de presença no escuro
> à noite acendi velas em divisões vazias
> […]
> a luz desequilibra-me
> substituto imperfeito para a nudez
> converti-me numa mulher no escuro
> a maldade e a espera a infetarem os meus espaços bons

> I got used to the night
> I’m against metaphors
> metaphors are lights of presence in the dark
> at night I lighted candles in empty divisions
> […]
> light throws me off balance
> imperfect substitute of nudity
> I became a woman in the dark
> cruelty and waiting infected my good spaces (v. 2-5, 8-11)[350]

The parallelism is clear. Night is the emptiness created by Odysseus’ long absence and light is what blinds human eyes that are so used to the dark. The woman’s unease in the light implies that his return would lacerate her, since he would upset (again) an everyday reality that he created and to which she unwillingly had to settle into. On another level, by claiming to be “against metaphors”, she is advocating against complex, implicit language, hidden associations and multiple meanings.[351] And still, just one verse later she cannot help creating her own metaphor: “metáforas são luzes de presença no escuro” – metrically a perfect *alexandrino* with two stressed syllables on the sixth and thirteenth syllable. Thus, Penelope invents her personal definition of the term, explaining what metaphors mean to her and how they affect her feelings. Through her attempt to define what she says she is against, the reader senses Penelope’s need to control her psycho-physical and symbolic environment. The same can also be said of the kind of ritual she has

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[350] Gardeazabal, *Penélope Está de Partida*, 22.

[351] *Minutiae*: compare Penelope’s repulsion for metaphors to Mario Ruoppolo’s joy the first time he understands he has ‘created’ a metaphor, while talking to Pablo Neruda in the film *Il Postino* (1994). Note how Donna Rosa, the aunt of Ruoppolo’s girlfriend-to-be, is afraid of metaphors and considers poetic language dangerous when used by a man towards an uncultivated woman, such as her niece (and herself).

invented: as a priestess she occasionally chooses to trouble her false sense of safety in darkness by reintroducing poetic light to the empty rooms of her palace – but is it really better, for her, to light a single candle than to curse the dungeon she is in? Once again, the heroine crafts something only to undo it when she feels like it, resisiting any real rupture point or liberatory *j'accuse* against the man who put her in the dark to begin with.

But to take a stand requires energy and a clear mind, and Gardeazabal's Penelope is exhausted from the cruel experience of waiting, the conflict with epic tradition, and the listless rhythm of the post-industrial metropole. As a mythical figure, she is "getting old" ("eu envelheço", v. 5) and "tired of *saudade*" ("cansei-me de saudade", v. 9).[352] By putting an end to her performance of nostalgia, the heroine declares that she will no longer pine endlessly and that her poem will not turn into yet another *cantiga d'amigo*, a song of a woman left behind, burning for the man's return.[353] This claim, combined with her other statement that she will not "lay down with *heterónimos*" ("recuso deitar-me com heterónimos", v. 7) – a wink to Pessoa's fictional pen-names –, troubles Penelope's (and the poet's) unwillingness to succumb to tradition and her will, naif as it may seem, to create her own poetics.[354]

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[352] Gardeazabal, *Penélope Está de Partida*, 29. Even though I could have approximately translated "saudade" with 'nostalgia', I preferred to keep the original to maintain its deep historical and cultural meaning and separate it from the English term which is closely related to the Homeric *nostos*. The term *saudade* is included in the *Dictionary of the Untranslatables*, where its definition reads: "*Saudade* is presented as the key feeling of the Portuguese soul. The word comes from the Latin plural *solitates*, "solitudes", but its derivation was influenced by the idea and sonority of the Latin *salvus*, "in good health", "safe". A long tradition that goes back to the origins of Lusophone language, to the thirteenth-century *cantiga d'amigo*, has repeatedly explored, in literature and philosophy, the special feeling of a people that has always looked beyond its transatlantic horizons. Drawn from a genuine suffering of the soul, *saudade* became, for philosophical speculation, particularly suitable for expressing the relationship of the human condition to temporality, finitude, and the infinite", in Barbara Cassin, ed., *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 2505. For the original French publication, see Barbara Cassin, ed., *Vocabulaire Européen Des Philosophies: Dictionnaire Des Intraduisibles* (Paris: Editions du Seuil / Dictionnaires Le Robert, 2004).

[353] As Roman Jakobson stated, the *cantigas d'amigo* are "magnificent creations of an exceptional period in the history of European verbal art": Roman Jakobson, 'Carta a Haroldo De Campos Sobre a Textura Poética De Martin Codax', trans. Francisco Achcar, *Grial* 9, no. 34 (1971): 37. I do not know to what degree, rather than convincing the reader, Penelope is eluding herself, since the entire book bears various similarities to medieval Galician-Portuguese lyrics, the most important of which is undoubtedly the fact that her poetic subjectivity is yet again constructed by a male poet, and her desire imagined and expressed through male authorship. On how the *cantigas d'amigo*, songs written by men but with women as protagonists, bear among others the political aim of containing women, see Ana Paula Ferreira, 'Telling Woman What She Wants: The Cantigas d'amigo as Strategies of Containment', *Portuguese Studies* 9 (1993): 23-38. This of course does not reduce the value of the songs that have survived till our days in their written form – if anything, it is precisely through them that we can trace some social changes of those centuries.

[354] The irony is strong, since, as stated in the introduction, Gardeazabal is in itself a pen name, the author's literary alter-ego. His real name is José Tavares.

The whole image of Gardeazabal's Penelope is that of a woman who is more frustrated with tradition than with her husband *per se*, and that is also why rupture is not suggested at any point throughout the book. After all these years of waiting, the woman addresses the husband directly, in what appears to be a desperate but gentle last cry for communication:

> de qualquer maneira   se quiseres   diz qualquer coisa
> vem
> não te prometo viagens
> ou melhor   se vieres
> viajas comigo
>
> either way   if you want   say something
> come
> I don't promise you voyages
> or better   if you come
> travel with me (v. 12-16)[355]

The last verses of the book prove the importance of the initial parenthesis: the doors are in fact still open for Odysseus to return, not only to his house, but also into his wife's arms.

Gardeazabal's complex revision of the Homeric heroine separates the two initially linked notions that have been analyzed in this chapter, as Penelope has decided to travel, yet not to a new lover's embrace. She is still committed to her husband. She may not wait anymore with her body, but she is always waiting with her mind. What appears to drive this woman is a new mastery over the reasons for her choices, and a new ability to take the initiative in outlining her desires, as well as her boundaries; in the future, *she* will be the one to travel, he can follow. Thus, even in this contemporary poem, which starts with the announcement of a voyage, the reader arrives at the last page and Penelope has not left her Ithaca/Lisbon. Departure is imminent, but the voyage again is not depicted in verses. The woman lives in this parenthetical moment, always already *about to* leave. Gardeazabal confirms that a travelling Penelope is not yet a fitting theme for lyric poetry.[356]

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[355] Gardeazabal, *Penélope Está de Partida*, 52.

[356] This appears to be true also for various post-colonial lyric Penelopes. See for instance the Cuban author's Juana Rosa Pita, *Viajes de Penélope* (Miami: Solar, 1980), 34, where the poetic subject affirms: "Ni Ulises ni sus viajes exteriores cantados por Homero poseen la respuesta, sino Penélope inmersa en su intimidad" ("Neither Ulysses his exterior voyages sung by Homer have the answer, but Penelope emerged in her intimacy"). On Pita's Penelope, see Brigidina Gentile, 'I Viaggi di Penelope: l'Odissea delle Donne, immaginata, vissuta e interpretata dalle scrittrici latino-americane contemporanee', in *Atti del XXI Convegno [Associazione Ispanisti Italiani]: Salamanca 12-14 settembre 2002*, vol. 1 (Salamanca: Associazione Ispanisti Italiani, AISPI, 2004), 287-298; Pike-Fiorindi, 'Penelope Speaks', 84-105.

1.5. Conclusions

In this first chapter we kept company to a solitary Penelope and experienced different approaches of three versions of hers towards two of her most traditional themes: waiting and fidelity.

Beginning with Francisca Aguirre, we experienced the loneliness of a waiting woman who lives under a prolonged totalitarian regime, and whose everyday life alternates moments of meditation and desperate cries for help. This Ithaca, which seems uninhabited, forgotten by the humans and abandoned by gods, becomes Francisca-Penelope's enemy and companion, her claustrophobic prison, as well as her safe refuge. The woman's shouts and the voices of the lost return in the form of echoes, reminiscent of the Penelopean act of back-and-forth. In the absence of human interlocutors, and in an urgent need for companionship, nature (the sea, the island) and myth (Penelope) can soothe the pain caused by the void of absence and help the poetic subject maintain the patience in the midst of terror. This is why Francisca and her Penelope prefer Ithaca to an epic quest or a Cavafian ongoing journey: it is *this* poetic space that supports the rhythm of their heartbeat, supplying the protagonist with the necessary impulse for survival. Both enclosed in the tightness of the lyric insular present, Francisca and Penelope get used to the intimacy of the Ithacan silence and verse by verse they fabricate a new self, through collective poetic experiences.

While Aguirre's *Ítaca* is all about surviving the perpetually static moment of an empty island, in Gail Holst-Warhaft's *Penelope's Confession*, the waiting spacetime includes various temporalities, that take the form of blurry personal flashbacks and preoccupations for the global future. Wanting to go against the frenetic pace of contemporary life and all of its destructive consequences (climate crisis, mass tourism), this Penelope emphatically claims back the waiting, and wishes to return to rhythms more congenital to those of nature. The heroine's relationship to the island has gone a step further compared to Aguirre's book: for Holst-Warhaft's protagonist, Ithaca means family, commitment and consistency to one's own projects and values. Still, commitment does not mean that the heroine has to accept stories imposed by others that block her within black and white oppositions. Her own narration, respectful to the distilled nature of memory, leaves ample space for personality nuances and alternative scenarios to coexist.

Alternative scenarios and contradictory behavioral traits are also a characteristic of José Gardeazabal's protagonist in *Penélope Está de Partida*. The heroine fabricated by the contemporary Portuguese poet is perfectly in line with the central image of our *Exit Penelope*: a dynamic woman who is leaving a genre that others inflicted upon her to create a "lyric of her own";

a gendered space, where verses will be constructed as she prefers, without manipulative adjectives that twist her way of being in the world. Yet, the dialogue with the past leads to no definitive rupture: her doors of parentheses are open for the ancient companion to return, only, this time, he will not find her in a stagnant waiting – “not even in literature”.

Chapter 2. The Song of Lament

2.1. *Parodos*: An Ovidian Chorus of Laments

At the end of Chapter 1 we left Penelope with her suitcases in hand, preparing her departure from Ithaca. Through the verses of José Gardeazabal, the heroine makes a last effort to communicate with her husband. She shares her experiences and feelings and invites him to follow her in the journey that she is about to begin. In a way, *Penélope Está de Partida* is the heroine's modern letter to Odysseus, an epistolary form that has its own illustrious genealogy. Indeed, the very first letter we have of hers, and that we have read from her hands, comes to us from Ovid.

The Latin poet's *Heroides* is an "antigeneric and anticanonical" text, a *unicum* of Roman literature: "not one reference exists to other" similar works.[357] In this "interrelated sequence" of elegiac epistles, "well-known heroines" of Greek and Latin literature descend from their previous epic, tragic or lyric thrones, to become "modern, erotic mistresses of the art of rhetoric, single-mindedly discoursing on desire".[358] Hence, the poem collection consists of a double *metamorphosis*: first, the heroines are transformed from objects in a male-driven, epic narration to 'authors' of their own desires *and* laments; secondly, the elegy and the epistle, genres predilected by Ovid and his contemporaries, cross-pollinate, defying their their proper "limits".[359]

As already shown by Demetrius in his treatise *On Style*, the epistle provides the most solid ground for complete figuration of a character, since it allows the possibility to create an almost "virtual image" of the writing subject's "own soul".[360] In fact, the revisited *Heroides* are provided

[357] Linda Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions*, *Discourses of Desire* (Cornell University Press, 2019), 31-32.

[358] Kauffman, 31. According to Rosati, that of Ovid is "una *scelta consapevole* di tradurre i suoi soggetti letterari da un codice a un altro, da quello eroico della sfera epico-tragica a quello più quotidiano, più aperto all'espressione dei sentimenti e degli affetti, del mondo elegiac" ("a conscious choice to translate his literary subjects from one code to another, from the heroic one of the epic-tragic sphere to one more apt to everyday life, more open to the expression of sentiments and affections of the elegiac world"): Gianpiero Rosati, 'Epistola Elegiaca e Lamento Femminile', in *Lettere Di Eroine [1989]*, by Ovidio, ed. and trans. Gianpiero Rosati, 16th ed. (Milano: BUR Rizzoli, 2021), 34: "costituisce". My translation.

[359] *Cf.* Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', 56: "As soon as the word 'genre' is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind".

[360] Aristotle, Longinus, and Demetrius, *Aristotle: Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style*, XXIII:479-481: "Πλεῖστον δὲ ἐχέτω τὸ ἠθικὸν ἡ ἐπιστολή, ὥσπερ καὶ ὁ διάλογος· σχεδὸν γὰρ εἰκόνα ἕκαστος τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῆς γράφει τὴν ἐπιστολήν. καὶ ἔστι μὲν καὶ ἐξ ἄλλου λόγου παντὸς ἰδεῖν τὸ ἦθος τοῦ γράφοντος, ἐξ οὐδενὸς δὲ οὕτως, ὡς

with "vivid, individual portraits, distinct from the poet and from each other".[361] This characteristic of the epistle suits Ovid's objective, as it helps him mask his poetic voice behind the subjectivity of the heroines *scribentes*.[362] The epistolary genre is amenable to the project of recasting the heroines, because by eliminating "any other 'voice' apart from that of the writing subject", it leads to the creation of

> un rapporto dialogico di intimità fra mittente e destinatario, accentua la privatezza della relazione, e comporta quindi anche un linguaggio non-eroico, quotidiano, che privilegia il registro affettivo e tende a interpretare anche grandi eventi mitici in una dimensione familiare e umana.
>
> a dialogic relation of intimacy between sender and recipient, it highlights the privateness of the relationship, and it thus entails a non-heroic, everyday language, that favors an emotional register and is prone to interpret even great mythical events into a familiar and human dimension.[363]

If the epistle's contribution is revealed through "the illusion of a dialogue", the "familiar and human dimension" of roman elegy provides the poet with the appropriate themes and *topoi* for his heroines.[364] The genre of "anxious love",[365] proves itself to be the most suitable for the desperate, Barbra Streisand-like cries of women in-love grieving for their departed ones.[366] And who fits this profile better than our own waiting and grieving Penelope?

ἐπιστολῆς." ("Like the dialogue, the letter should be strong in characterisation. Everyone writes a letter in the virtual image of his own soul. In every other form of speech, it is possible to see the writer's character, but in none so clearly as in the letter"). See also D. W. T. Vessey, 'Humor and Humanity in Ovid's Heroides', *Arethusa* 9, no. 1 (1976): 91: "the letter is an excellent instrument for the delineation of character (*ethopoiea*)".

[361] Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire*, 31.

[362] As Gardeazabal masks his own poetic voice behind Penelope, and behind his own penname.

[363] Rosati, 'Epistola Elegiaca e Lamento Femminile', 34. My translation. Already Fränkel talked about the epistles' "rare intimacy", since through them "we are permitted to read the mind of a lonely woman in distress and to watch its passionate arguing, anxious searching, pensive musing, and wishful daydreaming", in Hermann Fränkel, *Ovid: A Poet Between Two Worlds*, Sather Classical Lectures (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1945), 39, 45.

[364] *Cf*. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire*, 36: Epistolarity, being "an utterance, it is 'dialogic'; its existence depends on sustaining the illusion of a dialogue with the reader".

[365] Gianpiero Rosati, 'L'elegia al Femminile: Le *Heroides* Di Ovidio (e Altre Heroides)', *Materiali e Discussioni per l'analisi Dei Testi Classici*, no. 29 (1992): 80: "l'amore inquieto". My translation.

[366] Up until the *Heroides* and with the small exception of Propertius' fourth book, Latin elegy did not afford opportunities for women to speak for themselves. In contrast, in this genre "it is regularly the woman who grovels and humiliates herself, not the man", and in this regard, Ovid constructs "an exact reversal" of the Latin love elegy: Laurel Fulkerson, 'The Heroides: Female Elegy?', in *Oxford Readings in Ovid*, ed. Peter E. Knox, Oxford Readings in Classical Studies (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 84.

In fact, Ovid grants her the lead role among his lamenting chorus of *Heroides* and, by doing so, he gives us Penelope's debut as poet.[367] The heroine seems immediately at ease in the new environment: her verses transmit dramatic tension to the readers, who feel like "peeking over the woman's shoulder *as* she is writing" to her husband.[368] Without anxiety of authorship (after all, she is Ovid), she lets her imagination run wild ("fingebam", v. 13). Imperatives come and go (e.g. "ipse veni", v. 2) and unveil a determined woman with full dominion over her thoughts, who uses writing to enact her will. The emergence of Penelope as an 'I *scribens*' is part of a "specifically literary" challenge issued from "the writers of the *Heroides*": "by attempting to (re)write any part of their story, they join Ovid in competing with their literary predecessors", actively participating in the intertextual dialogue initiated by their reception.[369]

We may get a better sense of Ovid's project in the *Heroides* if we start looking into the book as a whole, noticing the particular connections among the heroines. Since in this chapter of the thesis I will be exploring the Penelopean themes of song and lament, my attention is particularly drawn to Ovid's juxtaposition of our heroine to Sappho in the *Heroides*. The chorus of heroines opens with Penelope and closes its first part with the Lesbian poet.[370] In epistle XV – much debated for its authenticity –[371] Sappho explains to Phaon the reason that led her to change her poetic style:

> Forsitan et quare mea sint alterna requiras
> carmina, cum lyricis sim magis apta modis.
> Flendus amor meus est: elegi quoque flebile carmen;
> non facit ad lacrimas barbitos ulla meas.

The Lesbian poet now produces different songs ("carmina"), which are alternated: she chooses to write in the elegiac couplet, where the dactylic hexameter is followed by a dactylic pentameter.

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[367] Knox insists on the poem's nature as an epistle, also because the heroine presents it as such: "Penelope's epistle is not simply a prolonged lament for her unfortunate position; more than in any of the other poems Ovid sustains the fiction that this is a real letter", in Ovid, *Ovid: Heroides: Select Epistles*, ed. Peter E. Knox, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 98.

[368] W. S. Anderson, 'The Heroides', in *Ovid*, ed. James Wallace Binns (London; Boston: Routledge; Kegan Paul, 1973), 66. My emphasis.

[369] Fulkerson, 'The Heroides: Female Elegy?', 85. See also Efrossini Spentzou, *Readers and Writers in Ovid's* Heroides*: Transgressions of Genre and Gender* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3, who describes the chosen genre of the elegiac epistle as a "defiant discourse", a literary space where women can "attack the male-dominant classics in what can also be seen as a narrativized struggle of a series of fictional characters writing against Homer, Euripides, Virgil". The heroines function of course as a mask for Ovid's own political views. *Cf.* Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire*, 61: Ovid himself opts for the chosen genre to challenge "the values of Augustan Rome by rejecting the officially endorsed genre of epic"; his feminine mask allows him to protest against "conventional notions of tradition, of origins, of fathers, of paternity, of authority, of identity".

[370] There follows a second part with epistles between couples (e.g. Helen and Paris), which will not be addressed here.

[371] *Cf.* Gianpiero Rosati, 'Sabinus, the Heroides and the Poetnightingale. Some Observations on the Authenticity of the Epistula Sapphus*', *The Classical Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (May 1996): 207-216.

The meter of the elegy is closer to that of the epic than that of the lyric, and so, Sappho's choice in *Heroides* XV distances her from the lyric modes ("lyricis modis") that were usually more apt ("apta") to her voice. She is currently an *infelix* woman whose unrequited love for Phaon dictates that she cry ("flendus amor meus est"). Thus, since there is no lyre ("barbitos") to suit her "tears" ("lacrimas"), she chooses to write this letter as an elegy, which is by definition *a crying ("flebile") song*. It is this form of weakness and fragility in song and lyric that we explore next as part of this chapter's broader concerns with questions of grieving and mourning the other.

2.2.“και μέσα άρχισε ξανά ο διάλογος με σένα”: Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke and *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης*

(Lament for the ‘I’)

In the paper “Sex Roles in Modern Greek Poetry”, published in 1983, the poet, translator, and literary critic Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke claims that “Modern Greek poetry as a whole is mainly inspired by death. Its general tone is elegiac, its central theme loss, its mythology resurrection”.[372] The same melancholic tone within a poetics of absence and hope in the afterlife could be applied to the author’s fourth book of lyric poetry that will be the focus of this subchapter. *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης*, translated in English as *The Scattered Papers of Penelope*, were first published in 1977, only six years before the aforementioned article, and contains eleven poems approximately one page long.[373] The poet’s staging of a mythical alter-ego is manifest already in the title,[374] while the noun phrase “scattered papers” captures the modern heroine doing what she loves most: writing.[375]

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[372] Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, ‘Sex Roles in Modern Greek Poetry’, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 1, no. 1 (1983): 145-146. In this article the author does not analyze her own work but outlines a brief panorama of basic modes and themes in Greek poetry of the 20th century and comments on the sharp gender division that can be noticed during those decades in poetry written by women and men.

[373] Αγγελάκη-Ρουκ, *Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης*; now it is included in a volume that includes almost all of Anghelaki-Rooke’s poetry, edited by the publishing house Kastaniotis: ‘Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης’, in *Ποίηση (1963-2011) [2014]*, by Κατερίνα Αγγελάκη-Ρουκ, 5th ed. (Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Καστανιώτη, 2020), 151-166. This book gave its title to an English anthology of Anghelaki-Rooke’s poems: Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, *The Scattered Papers of Penelope: New and Selected Poems*, ed. Karen Van Dyck (Saint Paul, Minn: Graywolf Press, 2009).

[374] Anghelaki-Rooke openly declares: “for many years I’ve been travelling with myths. And then little by little I started descending towards the soil and like a balloon I softly sat on the grass. Now Magdalene or Penelope is me with another name” (“[χ]ρόνια πολλά ταξίδευα με μύθους. Κι έπειτα σιγά σιγά άρχισα να κατεβαίνω προς το χώμα και σαν αερόστατο κάθησα μαλακά στο γρασίδι. Τώρα η Μαγδαληνή ή η Πηνελόπη είμαι εγώ με άλλο όνομα”), in Κατερίνα Αγγελάκη-Ρουκ, ‘Credo’, *Καινούρια Εποχή* Φθινόπωρο (1976): 49. My translation. *Cf.* Efi Ch. Petkou, ‘Οι μυθικές γυναικείες μορφές και η αναθεώρηση της γυναικείας υποκειμενικότητας στην ποίηση της Κατερίνας Αγγελάκη-Ρουκ’, *Neograeca Bohemica* 21, no. 1 (2021): 48.

[375] I do not agree with Kastrinaki that the adjective “σκόρπια” (“scattered”) speaks for the author’s “σεμνότητα” (“modesty”) regarding her poetry: Καστρινάκη, *Μίλα, Πηνελόπη!*, 255. I believe that Anghelaki-Rooke wants to depict in two words the poet during their time of poetic composition, immersed in an almost chaotic setting, surrounded by tons of books and papers with various verses deleted, rewritten, and then thrown away. After all, as mentioned above, this book was the fourth that Anghelaki-Rooke published, while she has already won Geneva’s first prize for poetry (Prix Hench) in 1962. Already from her first poem “Μοναξιά” (“Loneliness”) published in the review *Καινούρια Εποχή* (*New Era*) in 1956, she had the enthusiastic support of her godfather, Nikos Kazantzakis,: Κατερίνα Αγγελάκη-Ρουκ, ‘Μοναξιά’, *Καινούρια Εποχή* Φθινόπωρο (1956); now in ‘Αντί Για Πρόλογο’, in *Ποίηση (1963-2011) [2014]*, by Κατερίνα Αγγελάκη-Ρουκ, 5th ed. (Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Καστανιώτη, 2020), 9-10.

The first poem of the book opens programmatically with the title “Λέει η Πηνελόπη” (“Says Penelope”).[376] Since modern Greek is a language with grammatical cases, and the subject is always indicated in the nominative, the inversion of the usual syntactical order presented in the title of the poem (verb-subject instead of subject-verb) does not create an interpretative confusion; rather, it efficiently highlights the importance of Penelope’s enunciation while simultaneously creating an ironic distinction between poet and poetic subject (as if she were saying: “it is not me, Anghelaki-Rooke speaking, it is Penelope”). This choice to emphasize a ‘speaking woman’, and especially a mythical woman who is usually thought of as a silent weaver, does not come as a surprise if we consider the context of the poem’s composition. We are in the Seventies, a formative decade for feminist criticism and philosophy. This is “a time of awakening consciousness”, as Adrienne Rich states in her famous essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision”, where she urges women writers to enact a “re-vision” of canonical (that is, male) literature.[377] Then, in 1976, just one year before Anghelaki-Rooke’s Penelopean book, Héléne Cixous publishes the article “Le Sexe ou la tête” (“Castration or Decapitation”), where she insists on the need for the modern woman to “start speaking, [to] stop saying that she has nothing to say”.[378] Anghelaki-Rooke, who follows closely European and American feminist trends in literary and critical discourse, explores both as a critic and as a poet the ties between feminism and women’s poetry in Greece and deploys Penelope’s mythical prototype to break the silence of the ‘second sex’.[379]

Yet, before hearing the ancient heroine’s voice, the reader finds an epigraph with the words of the famous poet and translator Daniel Weissbort: “And your absence teaches me / what art could

[376] ‘Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης’, 153–155. For the English, I cite from Karen Van Dyck’s translation, but sometimes, as here, I will stick to a more literal one, to show the emphasis of the original Greek in certain points. Van Dyck’s translation first appeared in Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke and Karen Van Dyck, ‘Penelope Says’, *World Literature Today* 83, no. 1 (2009): 13, and it was later included in Anghelaki-Rooke, *The Scattered Papers of Penelope: New and Selected Poems*.

[377] Rich, ‘When We Dead Awaken’. For more Rich, Ostriker and theory of feminist revisionism, see the introduction of this thesis.

[378] Hélène Cixous, ‘Castration or Decapitation?’, trans. Annette Kuhn, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7, no. 1 (1981): 50. For the original French, see Hélène Cixous, ‘Le Sexe Ou La Tête?’, *Les Cahiers Du GRIF* 13 (1976): 5-15.

[379] As Karen Van Dyck notes, “Anghelaki-Rooke has continued to deploy myth in her poetry, and this seems to have as much to do with her close ties to American poetry as it does with her relation to the Greek tradition. Her famous rewriting of Penelope in her poem ‘Λέει η Πηνελόπη’ (‘Penelope says’) recalls the attempts of American women poets of the 1970s (e.g. Denise Levertov, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich and Anne Sexton) to empower women through myth”: Karen Van Dyck, ‘Bruised Necks and Crumpled Petticoats: What’s Left of Myth in Contemporary Greek Women’s Poetry’, in *Ancient Greek Myth in Modern Greek Poetry: Essays in Memory of C. A. Trypanis*, ed. Peter Mackridge (London; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1996), 123.

not".[380] Absence and art are juxtaposed in what is presented as an educational competition premised on who will manage to teach the poetic subject more. The instructors' challenge is real for a figure like Penelope, who since Homer's time has been a master both in the class of Odysseus' absence and in Athena's art of weaving. However, if we take a step back, we find that not only does absence teach Penelope more than art: it is precisely because of absence that she approaches weaving differently, inventing tricks, and applying her μῆτις, as she struggles to keep the suitors away. Read in this way, Odysseus' absence is for Penelope a double-edged sword: it is painful, since it is imposed and it evokes dangers both for her and for the οἶκος in general, and, at the same time, it is instructive, as it keeps her continuously alert, activating her cunning and granting her the chance to demonstrate her intelligence at a time (and within a literary tradition) that rarely praised the minds of mortal women.[381]

Odysseus' absence continues to play a central role in Anghelaki-Rooke's version of the myth, only that now the art associated to the Ithacan queen is performed on a different primary material:

> Δεν ύφαινα, δεν έπλεκα
> ένα γραφτό άρχιζα, κι έσβηνα
> κάτω απ'το βάρος της λέξης
>
> I wasn't weaving, I wasn't knitting,
> I was writing something
> erasing and being erased

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[380] The verses belong to the poem "Have Faith", published in the book *Soundings*, the same year as *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης*: Daniel Weissbort, *Soundings* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1977). Weissbort and Anghelaki-Rooke share a passion for poetry and translation, with a particular interest in Russian poetry. Weissbort was the editor of the renowned journal *Modern Poetry in Translation*, thanks to which many important poets of the ex-Soviet states were introduced to an English-speaking audience, and Anghelaki-Rooke translated into Greek such poets as Aleksandr Puskin and Vladimir Mayakovski among many others. Both Weissbort and Anghelaki-Rooke engaged with Joseph Brodsky's poetry.

[381] In his poem "Πηνελόπη" ("Penelope"), the Greek poet Athos Dimoulas, husband of Kiki Dimoula, explicitly links Odysseus' absence to the important space that the heroine occupies in the *Odyssey*: "Σ' έφερε στο προσκήνιο η απουσία του Οδυσσέα / Κι εκάλυψες ολόκληρο κεφάλαιο του έπους" ("Odysseus' absence brought you in the spotlight / And you covered an entire chapter of the epic"). However, according to Dimoulas, once Odysseus returns, Penelope is more than happy to renounce "the weight of the first role, that his absence had granted her" ("Ώσπου ήρθε, / πίσω ξανά στην αφάνεια του γυναικωνίτη στέλνοντάς σε, χαρούμενη για την επιστροφή του / και πως σε απάλλαξε απ' το μεγάλο βάρος πρώτου / ρόλου, που σου είχε η απουσία του αναθέσει"). The poem can be found in Άθως Δημουλάς, *Τα Ποιήματα 1951-1985* (Αθήνα: Ίκαρος, 1986), 82. My translation. Kastrinaki intelligently notes "the irony of destiny", since it was "Athos Dimoulas who fell into oblivion, because of Kiki Dimoula's brilliant [poetic] career, his wife since 1952": in Καστρινάκη, *Μίλα, Πηνελόπη!*, 176-177. It is also true that Kiki Dimoula's career saw an extraordinary take-off especially after her husband's death in 1985. In fact, the book that won her the first national prize for poetry, *Χαίρε Ποτέ* (*Hail Never*), was published in 1989, and it was the first she published after her husband's death. As its title shows, sorrow and mourning (or the impossibility to find a correct way of mourning) are crucial to this book. In a way, once more the husband's (this time definite) absence opened the path for the wife's already initiated career to reach its zenith.

under the weight of the word (v. 1-3)

To be sure, the connection between women's weaving and poetic creation does not come as a surprise. As many critics have shown, from very early on in Indo-European languages, poetry writing has been articulated through weaving metaphors, and weaving while simultaneously singing or lamenting are gendered activities linked to Homeric women already with the *Iliad*.[382] Thus, even though the weaving of Penelope is never metaphoric in the *Odyssey*, Anghelaki-Rooke's protagonist does not shock the reader when she uses this ancient metaphor to talk about her poetry. The novel element lies in the description of the artistic process together with the pain embodied in it.

In this modern model of raveling and unraveling, like with every other poet, Penelope is an artist who writes and erases continuously. As she does so, she becomes the object of her own words, which come to eliminate her previous iterations of the self or to doubt the way she wants to present herself on paper. Nevertheless, the same words that need to be uttered or written on paper so as to achieve the much-desired self-determination are the ones that come back to her as a boomerang, since they return with a physicality of their own: they have weight. The verb tense used in the original Greek is παρατατικός, akin to past continuous, and expresses the constancy and the slowness of the writing practice and of the self's creation. The same tense will be used in a similar, weaving verse by Gardeazabal almost half a century after Anghelaki-Rooke ("tecia tecia e nada acontecia"). As in Homer, in both revisions, absence is what pushes the heroine towards a form of art, and in both the process is fruitless. Thus, the general scheme produced and confirmed throughout the Penelopean tradition is absence → art → absence.

Nonetheless, in Anghelaki-Rooke's poem the use of the past tense may not be the first aspect to catch the reader's attention. Much more interesting is the repletion of the particle "δεν", which is the modern Greek equivalent of the English negation "not". As Kastrinaki notes, the negative particle becomes a trend among "Penelopean poems of the 20th century", as the modern version of the heroine "attracts negation", marking on paper the poets' desire for an "inversion of tradition".[383] According to the scholar, this trend of negation can probably trace its origins to

[382] As Snyder notes, in Homer the metaphorical sense of weaving is limited to men, with the exception of Athena – who, still, is a goddess, and who helps a man (Odysseus) "weave wiles": Jane McIntosh Snyder, 'The Web of Song: Weaving Imagery in Homer and the Lyric Poets', *The Classical Journal* 76, no. 3 (1981): 194.

[383] Καστρινάκη, *Μίλα, Πηνελόπη!*, 184.: "το 'δεν' ειδικά στα πηνελόπεια ποιήματα του 20ού αιώνα τείνει να αποτελέσει ένα είδος κανονικότητας […] Η Πηνελόπη έλκει την άρνηση, έλκει την αντιστροφή της παράδοσης". And

Bulgarian literature, and specifically to the well-known feminist poet Elisaveta Bagryana, and her poem "Penelope of the Twentieth Century".[384] Bagryana's claim of negation leaves no space for misunderstandings:

> I am not Penelope of ancient Greece
> humbly weaving then unpicking,
> waiting twenty years for Odysseus (v. 29-31)

As Kastrinaki notices, "for the new woman to be self-determined what is initially needed is a negation. She needs to deny a life of dependence: the waiting, the patience, the sentimental obedience to a man, and even more so, to an erratic man".[385] All these negations are indeed found in Bagryana's verses. But does self-determination work for Penelopean women as for other women? According to Simone De Beauvoir, self-definition of the woman-Other is traditionally built in contrast to the male-I, something we saw in the previous chapter in the case of Gardeazabal's Penelope. But this cannot be said to apply in Bagryana's version of the heroine: in this regard, the Bulgarian poet, though a contemporary of De Beauvoir, fabricates a Penelope who constructs a new self not around Odysseus' personality, but repudiating the ancient version of hers. If anything, her 'no' is directed at the static experience of waiting, and her goals are to become a traveler like Odysseus and to appropriate traditionally masculine roles. As we will see, for Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope the 'no' is different. She does not strictly reject her ancient traits (the pain of absence, the waiting, the weaving), but uses their subverted meanings as essential material to create poetry.

Narrowing the horizon of influence from European to modern Greek poetry, the Penelopean negative trend could be said to start with Giannis Ritsos. His "Η απόγνωση της Πηνελόπης" ("Penelope's Despair"), also starts with two "δεν", disproving Homer's narration of the couple's reunion and suggesting that the heroine fakes misrecognition of her husband, shocked as she is by

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later on, in *ivi*, 257: "εμφατική αποποίηση των τυπικών γυναικείων δραστηριοτήτων" ("emphatical disclaimer of typical female household activities") and "επιθυμεί να διαφοροποιηθεί πλήρως από ό,τι καθόριζε ως τώρα τις γυναίκες" ("[she] desires to differentiate [herself] completely from whatever determined women up until now"). My translation.

[384] *Cf. Ivi*, 124-128. Unfortunately I do not know Bulgarian, and thus I cite directly the English translation: Elisaveta Bagryana, *Penelope of the Twentieth Century: Selected Poems: Selected Poems of Elisaveta Bagryana*, trans. Brenda Walker, Valentine Borrisov, and Belin Tonchev (Forest Books, 1996).

[385] Καστρινάκη, *Μίλα, Πηνελόπη!*, 125: "Για να αυτοπροσδιοριστεί λοιπόν η νέα γυναίκα, της χρειάζεται αρχικά μια άρνηση. Αρνείται τη ζωή της εξάρτησης: την αναμονή, την υπομονή, τη συναισθηματική υποταγή σε έναν άντρα, και μάλιστα σε έναν άστατο άντρα". Translation in the main text is mine.

the suitors' slaughter and the violence that Odysseus brought into her house.[386] Interestingly, Ritsos' version of the heroine is published in 1972,[387] the same as year as Bagryana's modern Greek translation.[388] Considering the close dates between the publication of the three Penelopes (1972, 1972 and 1977),[389] it is probable that Anghelaki-Rooke read the other Penelopean poems before or while she composed her own.[390] Nevertheless, blatant similarities among the three poems end in their emphatical use of denial. While Bagryana's heroine dreams about Odyssean

[386] "Penelope's Despair" starts thus: "Δεν ήτανε πως δεν τον γνώρισε στο φως της παραστιάς· δεν ήταν / τα κουρέλια του επαίτη, η μεταμφίεση" ("It wasn't that she didn't recognize him in the dim light of the fire, it wasn't / his disguise, the beggar's rags", v. 1-2). For the English translation, I cite from Yannis Ritsos, 'Penelope's Despair', trans. Martin McKinsey, *The Kenyon Review* 5, no. 1 (1983): 87. For the case of Penelope's early or "intuitive" recognition of Odysseus, see Harsh, 'Penelope and Odysseus in *Odyssey* XIX'; Amory, 'The Reunion of Odysseus and Penelope'; Joseph Russo, 'Interview and Aftermath: Dream, Fantasy, and Intuition in Odyssey 19 and 20', *The American Journal of Philology* 103, no. 1 (1982): 4-18. On the other hand, Emlyn-Jones has shown the importance for the Homeric narrative of the couple's late recognition as a double climax of the *Odyssey*'s plot, together with the suitors' slaughter: Emlyn-Jones, 'The Reunion of Penelope and Odysseus'. For a summary of the Analytics' explanation of Penelope's early recognition as proof of another, earlier version of the myth and the epic, see Geoffrey S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 245-248.

[387] Ρίτσος, *Πέτρες, Επαναλήψεις, Κιγκλίδωμα*., now in Ρίτσος, *Ποιήματα Ι' (1963-1972)*., and online in Ρίτσος, Η απόγνωση της Πηνελόπης.

[388] Elissaveta Bagryana, *Ποιήματα*, trans. Ρίτα Μπούμη-Παπά (Αθήνα: Γρηγόρης, 1972).

[389] As the reader of this thesis knows, there is also another Penelope published in 1972, that of the Spanish poet Francisca Aguirre. Interestingly, both women's Penelopes (and, of course, that of Ritsos) are temporary close to the fall of totalitarian regimes in their countries. Aguirre's is published three years before the end of the Spanish dictatorship in 1975, and Anghelaki-Rooke's only three years after the fall of the Greek junta in 1974. However, there is no evidence that Anghelaki-Rooke had read Aguirre's book, also because Aguirre's poetry became famous decades later.

[390] Bagryana and Ritsos may have influenced Anghelaki-Rooke regarding the beginning of "Says Penelope", but the general idea of a strong female 'no' towards patriarchal mythical revisions was already present in Anghelaki-Rooke's "Η άρνηση της Ιφιγένειας" ("Iphigenia Says No"), published in Anghelaki-Rooke's first book, *Λύκοι και Σύννεφα* (*Wolves and Clouds*), in 1963. Now it can be found in 'Λύκοι Και Σύννεφα', in *Ποίηση (1963-2011) [2014]*, by Κατερίνα Αγγελάκη-Ρουκ, 5th ed. (Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Καστανιώτη, 2020), 27–31. and online in Αγγελάκη-Ρουκ, Η άρνηση της Ιφιγένειας. For a thorough close reading of the poem, also in relation to its major precursors, Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, and Giorgos Seferis' own lyric mythical rewritings, see Liana Giannakopoulou, 'A Feminist Act of Defiance: "Iphigenia Says No" by Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke', *Classical Receptions Journal* 15, no. 4 (2023): 376-395. Among others, Giannakopoulou takes notice of Anghelaki-Rooke's careful use of verb tenses, as the poetic subject moves back and forth among narrative temporalities. Since the poem (as well as the entire *Wolves and Clouds*) has not been translated into English, Giannakopoulou offers her own translation of "Iphigenia Says No" as an appendix to the article, p. 392-394.

voyages,[391] and Ritsos' welcomes her blood-thirsty husband with disgust,[392] Anghelaki-Rooke will try to understand the consequences of the unending absence she is immersed in.

In fact, her Penelope is conscious of the paradoxical situation she is in, where absence is more presence than presence – it is, in fact, the only presence:

> Κι ενώ η απουσία είναι το θέμα της ζωής μου
> – απουσία από τη ζωή –
> κλάματα βγαίνουν στο χαρτί
> κι η φυσική οδύνη του σώματος
> που στερείται.
>
> And while absence is the theme of my life
> – absence from life –
> crying comes out on paper
> and the natural grief of the body
> that's deprived. (v. 6-10)[393]

These verses have rightfully been at the center of Laura Jansen's recent discourse on classical absences in modern and contemporary literature and arts.[394] Commenting on this passage, Jansen notices how the motif of absence "makes up the backbone of the poem […] organizing two main narrative threads: (i) Odysseus as a non-presence in the narrator's physical space and sensuous experience and (ii) the cyclical erasure of the narrator's page and self".[395] Indeed, absence is the key element of these verses, as it connects Penelope's past (Odysseus) and present (art, weaving in Homer, writing in Anghelaki-Rooke), and impedes her from imagining any possible future. Almost personified, absence has a direct effect on both types of body: the literal, physical one belonging to the poetic subject, and the metaphorical, the one made of words, of signifiers not

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[391] Liana Giannakopoulou, '"Cutting the Threads with Words": The Figure of Penelope in the Poetry of Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke', *Књижeнство*, no. 11 (2021): 4. I agree with most of Giannakopoulou's analysis and intertextual relations, especially regarding Bagryana and Anghelaki-Rooke: "Bagryana's character aims at reforming the world. Following in Odysseus' footsteps, the modern Penelope is putting her thirst for life in the service of social change but with an agenda informed by the kind of political affiliation that Anghelaki-Rooke did not have: restless, ambitious, with fiery determination, she represents women's passion and the hope that it will fuel radical change in a world that has lost its moral compass", *ibidem*.

[392] Ρίτσος, Η απόγνωση της Πηνελόπης: "Και: 'καλωσόρισες' του είπε, / ακούγοντας ξένη, μακρινή τη φωνή της" ("And: 'welcome', she told him / and she heard her voice foreign, distant"). My translation.

[393] I slightly change Van Dyck's translation, which reads: "And while absence is the theme of my life / – absence from life – / tears and the natural suffering / of the deprived body / appear on the page".

[394] Laura Jansen, 'Classical Absences (1896-2017)', *Classical Receptions Journal* 14, no. 2 (2022): 178-203. Jansen's way of approaching Reception Studies is particularly innovative, as she searches for implicit references and influence of classical literature, rather than explicit ones. Of course, in the case of Anghelaki-Rooke's book, the reference to Penelope could not have been more explicit.

[395] *Ivi*, 187.

meeting their signifieds during the process of linguistic creation. Both bodies are "deprived", the first one of physical touch, bodily tenderness, and sexual intercourse, the second one of its written symbols, with the tears and the cries smudging and ruining the paper, the very material of their existence.

Thus, even if Penelope is desperately trying to invent new ways of understanding the limbo of waiting and the absence imposed on her, trying to create something out of it, her art bows before extreme pain: "γιατί εμποδίζεται η τέλεια έκφραση / όταν πιέζετ' από πόνο το μέσα" ("because perfect expression is obstructed / when the inside is pressured by pain", v. 4-5).[396] The search for the "perfect expression", the Flaubertian *mot juste*, cannot be achieved, Penelope says, in such an agonizing psychical condition. Behind the poet's arduous search for perfect lexical harmony, one may also glimpse the etymological link between "τέλεια" and the Aristotelian *telos*: the end of waiting, of absence and of the verse is continuously stymied; she searches for it, but she can never achieve it. At first glance, the modern Penelope seems to be desperately seeking poetic perfection, an ending on the paper that constantly eludes her. In this regard, she is different from her ancient self, who deliberately unweaves every night, consciously postponing finishing Laertes' shroud. Thus, in the ancient version of the myth, obstructing the ending signified agency, while in the modern rewriting it shows the impossibility of the woman's ability to control the pain and proceed with her art. But is this impasse really so insurmountable?

To answer this question, we have to look behind the words and search for the origin of the elements that appear on Penelope's papers. It is precisely the physical body with the tears it produces that destroys the metaphorical one, the body of the poem.[397] What happens to Penelope

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[396] I cite from Van Dyck's translation, but I change "blocked" to "obstructed", because in the first verb I see a more definitive situation in relation to the second.

[397] Emblematic in this regard is the first verse of Anghelaki-Rooke's first published book, *Λύκοι και Σύννεφα* (*Wolves and Clouds*): "Το σώμα μου έγινε η αρχή ενός ταξιδιού" ("My body became the beginning of a journey"), in 'Λύκοι Και Σύννεφα', 13. My translation. The centrality of the body in Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry has been repeatedly commented by critics. In the early 1990s, Susan Bohandy offered a close reading of two poems by Sylvia Plath and two by Anghelaki-Rooke, showing the different ways in which the self is constructed in relation the body. The critic suggested that "Anghelaki-Rooke's speakers turn to the sensual reality of the body in an abstracted, commodified 'man's world' as the locus of resistance to that world", while "Plath's speakers reject the body as a relic, an object of that world that must be transcended in order for wholeness and fulfillment to be achieved": in Susan Bohandy, 'Defining the Self through the Body in Four Poems by Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke and Sylvia Plath', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 12, no. 1 (1994): 22. Also, the literary critic Euripidis Garantoudis has repeatedly written on the body's role in Anghelaki-Rooke's poetry. See for instance Ευρυπίδης Γαραντούδης, 'Οι μεταμορφώσεις του σώματος σε ποίηση', *Ο αναγνώστης*, 2014; Ευρυπίδης Γαραντούδης, 'Κατερίνα Αγγελάκη-Ρουκ, το έσω σώμα', *Ο αναγνώστης*, 2014. In a recent master thesis, Euaggelia Grammenou wrote about the centrality of the body and loss in another, very famous book of Angelaki-Rooke, called *Λυπιού* (*Sadland*): Ευαγγελία Γραμμένου, 'Η Σωματικότητα

while composing these verses is a profound understanding of her body's importance in relation to human *cogito*. Poetry writing (*aka* culture) and tears (*aka* nature) are mingled in the space of the paper, proposing a self that gives importance both to mind and to body. Even more, the tears impose themselves on the paper, and as liquid they destroy it, leaving no space for the poetic subject to doubt the body's importance. This thought is very much aligned with radical second-wave feminism. In response to "liberal feminism's exclusion of the body and [its] failure to challenge the normative dualism" of culture vs nature, radical feminists "reinstated the centrality of the body both in women's oppression and in women's subjectivity".[398]

Indeed, Anghelaki-Rooke's poem is a dialectic representation of the continuous construction of the self between the two seemingly antithetical poles of presence and absence, body and non-body:

> Μόνη μου πληρωμή *αν* καταλάβω
> στο τέλος τι ανθρώπινη παρουσία
> τι απουσία
> ή πώς λειτουργεί το εγώ
> στην τόσην ερημιά, στον τόσο χρόνο
> πώς δε σταματάει με τίποτα το αύριο
> το σώμα όλο ξαναφτιάχνει τον εαυτό του
> σηκώνεται και πέφτει στο κρεβάτι
> σαν να το πελεκάνε
> πότε άρρωστο και πότε ερωτευμένο
>
> My only reward *if* I understood
> 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
> the body keeps remaking itself
> rising and falling on the bed
> as if axed down
> sometimes sick, sometimes in love (v. 42-51)[399]

The crucial notion that Penelope attempts to learn here is the meaning of her "εγώ", her "I". The verses seem to suggest that, for it to happen, two teachers are needed, absence together with art.

και η απώλεια στον "τόπο" της Λυπιού: μια περιδιάβαση στην ποίηση της Κατερίνας Αγγελάκη-Ρουκ' (MRes Thesis, Ελληνικό Ανοικτό Πανεπιστήμιο, 2018).

398 Chris Weedon, 'Subjects', in *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory*, ed. Mary Eagleton (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 114, 116.

399 'Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης', 154. My emphasis.

The presence of the "if" in v. 42 stands for the heroine's perennial uncertainty: she may learn the lesson, just as she may not; she may achieve the balance between multiple selves, or it may elude her entirely. In this process of apprehension, while the mind contorts itself, the body is beholden to its natural workings. At times completely functional, at others sensed as breaking down, it is always ready to cure its own wounds, to recreate itself. The vicissitudes of love surely have an impact on the body, but not enough to hinder its Promethean renewal. Once again, as on the paper, body wins over mind, as it can function in both situations, even without having the answer to the big 'why*s*' of the human condition.

One feeling seems to temporarily relieve Penelope from the anguish of uncertainty. If there is one way for the heroine to survive this immense spatial and temporal emptiness, it is to embrace some form of hope: "ελπίζοντας / πώς ό,τι χάνει σε αφή / κερδίζει σε ουσία" ("hoping / that what loses in touch / gains in essence", v. 53-54).[400] Yet, hope offers no certainty. Penelope finds it hard to understand how something can have (more) meaning when the sense of touch ("αφή") is absent. Even if she accepted that sometimes there is meaning without touch, she cannot imagine this to be right in a context of romantic relationships. As a matter of fact, some pages later, in the poem "Το Πρόσωπο στον Έρωτα" ("The Face in Love"), the poetic subject will state:

> Το πρόσωπο στον έρωτα
> δεν έχει οριστική μορφή
> και μόνο απ' την αφή
> φωτίζεται η ουσία.
>
> The face in love
> has no definite form
> and only through touch
> essence is enlightened. (v. 1-4)[401]

Thus, the body may renew itself eternally, but for the erotic relationship, touch is necessary in order to find meaning. The loved one undergoes constant change, as they are related to the desiring subject who is also constantly changing. Nothing is definite, since all experience is mediated through the body, and touch is perceived as the most poignant sense that can (re)generate both the other and the feeling for them.

However, sometimes Penelope's insistent lyric cries seem to surpass the obstacles put up by her "deprived body", as happens in "Says Penelope". Here, the screams are reported in direct speech

[400] *Ivi*, 155.
[401] *Ivi*, 159. For the entire poem, see p. 159-161. My translation.

(within the general direct speech of "Says Penelope"), as if they were older versions of this poem, first eliminated and later integrated into this one. The heroine exclaims desperately: "'Πού είσαι, έλα, σε περιμένω / ετούτη η άνοιξη δεν είναι σαν τις άλλες'" ("'Where are you, come, I'm waiting for you / this spring is not like other springs'", v. 13-14). In perfect iambic meter (the first verse contains nine syllables, the second thirteen), the punctual stress of the verses reflects the woman's persistence in her claim that Odysseus should come back, while her reference to spring, a typically melancholic season for lyric poetry, renders the atmosphere of the poem even more sorrowful and melancholic.[402]

The links to elegy and to traditional laments start to abound as the demand for the beloved's *nostos* turns into a certainty that he will never come: "you will never be here / to water the flowers with the garden hose" ("Δε θα 'σαι ποτέ εδώ / με το λάστιχο να ποτίζεις λουλούδια", v. 18-19). Penelope mourns Odysseus, even if she has no way of confirming his death, something she repeatedly did in the *Odyssey*. In fact, she does not need to know he is dead to mourn him, since the two have been separated for years, and, for a person in love, "για θάνατος λογιέται ο χωρισμός" ("separation is considered death").[403] In fact, the man's chronic absence gradually erases the woman's memories of him and makes it impossible for her imagination to reenact simple scenes of everyday life, such as that of a woman watching her husband as he waters the flowers in their garden. The example of the scene hides a sexual metaphor, as Penelope's body remains dry after all the years without sexual intercourse. The importance of the garden becomes greater if linked to the biblical Eden, of which the woman feels once more forced out of. The image of the garden also recalls the couple's bed made out of an olive tree, where Penelope has been sleeping alone for the past twenty years.

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[402] From Arthur Rimbaud's "et le printemps m'a apporté l'affreux rire de l'idiot" ("and spring gave me the idiot's horrible laughter") in *Une Saison en Enfer*, to the Greek *maudit* Kostas Karyotakis and his "garden of melancholy" ("κι είναι ο κήπος μας κήπος μελαγχολίας") in the poem "Spring", and to Maria Polydouri's lyric response to Karyotakis' suicide, who wonders "Τι θέλει πάλι η Άνοιξη… / τι να μας φέρει ακόμα…" ("What does Spring want again… / what more will she bring us…") in the poem "Τι θέλει τούτη η Άνοιξη…" ("What does this Spring want…"). Of course, even among the months of spring there are differences, especially since T. S. Eliot's "April is the cruelest month" in *The Waste Land* (1922). In Arthur Rimbaud, *Une Saison En Enfer [1873]*, Poésie 580 ([Bruxelles] Paris: [Alliance Typographique] Gallimard, 2023); Κώστας Καρυωτάκης, *Ὁ Πόνος Τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου Καί Τῶν Πραμάτων* (Ἀθήνα, 1919); Μαρία Πολυδούρη, *Ἠχώ Στό Χάος* (Ἀθῆναι: Καλέργης, 1929); T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2021). Karyotakis' book can also be found on: Καρυωτάκης, Ο πόνος του ανθρώπου και των πραμάτων. Of course, these are only a few out of thousands of references of melancholic springs in lyric poetry. In the next subchapter I will concentrate on the special case of April, with the occasion of Glück's "Nostos".

[403] This verse belongs to another poem of the book, entitled "Ο Χρόνος του Ερωτευμένου" ("The Time of the In-Love"): 'Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης', 157-158.

The tight link between absence and the sense of touch in romantic relationships is accentuated in the second poem of the book, entitled "Στη Γη" ("To Earth").[404] Here the speaker – who, though not explicitly named Penelope, bears all the conventional traits – carries on with her quest to understand her difficult position. Speaking to the earth, she suggests that the only possible "balm" to soothe her wound is the reunion with the other's body:

πάλι να φανταστώ τα σώματά μας
να κολλούν χωρίς οδύνη
εγώ κι εκείνος
[…]
να χάνουμε σε σημασία
κερδίζοντας σε αγάπη.

to imagine again our bodies
clinging without sorrow
me and him
[…]
to lose in essence
as we win in love. (v. 30-32, 35-36)[405]

Here the poet undoes the ending of "Says Penelope", as she no longer hopes for essence: why care about it when she can "win in love"? In order to successfully imagine love, the element of touch is essential, inherent in the meeting of the lovers' bodies, but absence has been so painful that it threatens to hurt even the imagination. The speaker's wish is indeed to fabricate a new corporeal union, one that will not be consumed by chronic grief. The melding of the two subjects is visually exhibited in v. 32, "εγώ κι εκείνος" ("me and him"). In Greek, in the nominative case, that is the case of the subjects, united by the participle "και" ("and"). Since it is the woman that is trying to fabricate the union in her mind, the 'I' that comes first is hers and 'he' comes added on afterwards. The change of the subject from an 'I' to a 'we' occurs harmonically, and it is a product of the 'I''s imagination and the gentle imperatives. The repeated particle of the subjunctive 'να', which in this case is close to the English 'to', is halfway between a subjunctive and an imperative, what in Greek grammar is called 'προτρεπτική υποτακτική', 'incentive subjunctive'. The first 'να' comes with the first-person singular "να φανταστώ", as an 'I' persuades itself "to imagine"; the second, in third

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[404] I have not found criticism on this poem, as with most poems of this book. Most of the articles that treat *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης* focus on the explicitly Penelopean poems, that is the first "Λέει η Πηνελόπη" ("Says Penelope") and the tenth "Οι Μνηστήρες" ("The Suitors"). Usually, they combine it with the poem "Η άλλη Πηνελόπη" ("The Other Penelope"), which belongs to the book *Ωραία Έρημος η Σάρκα* (*Flesh, a Nice Desert*), published in 1996.
[405] 'Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης', 156. My translation. For the whole poem, see p. 155-156.

plural “να κολλούν”, accompanies the objectified bodies in their fictional union; finally, the third arrives in first plural, “να χάνουμε”, only after the two have become united subjects in v. 32. Thus, through the trajectory of the grammatical subjects, the reader watches the gradual transformation of the persistent self to a couple, a change that happens only through persistent and steadfast imagination. An important detail is *where* this imaginary union takes place, that is, the earth's "baptismal font" (“κολυμπήθρα”).[406] The woman's visionary conception is grounded in the soil, and, as such, union will spring from the very origin and destination of human creation. Protected as a new-born baby, artistry will thrive, purified by an unusual baptism that soothes the pain of separation.

Still, crucial as it may be, this is not the only role attributed to earth in this poem. As the title and the first verse of the poem suggest, the speaker "turns *her* back on *her* audience" and addresses a plea to the personified earth.[407] She is desperate and seeks help from nature – and not from culture –, so as to cope with the pain of the loved one's absence. The woman starts her speech with a *captatio benevolentiae* to (mother)-earth, dividing it into two parts. The first part contains seven verses and mentions the different kinds of birds and waters the earth provides a home for (v. 2-8). The second part goes a step further, commenting on the special relationship between the speaker and earth:

> γη, που ‘σαι όλη κι όλη ό,τι ξέρω από τη φύση
> – κι ο ουρανός δικό σου πράγμα είναι –
> και θα στρωθείς απάνω μου
> σαν μαλακή κουβέρτα
>
> earth, nature's only thing I know
> – even the sky belongs to you –
> and you will lie on me
> like a soft blanket (v. 9-13)

[406] V. 29 reads: “και μες στην κολυμπήθρα σου” (“and in your baptismal font”), the “your” referring to the earth. In ‘Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης’, 156. My translation.

[407] My emphasis, because I change the "his" to "her" Northrop Frye's famous description of lyric poet as someone who "turns his back on his audience", in Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 250. The poem "To Earth" starts in a simple and programmatic way: “Μιλάω σήμερα στη γη και της λέω” (“Today I speak to earth and tell her”), in ‘Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης’, 155. My translation. Note the emphasis on the present, both with the present tense of the two verbs and with the precision of “σήμερα” (“today”). Of course, the day could be any day of the deserted woman's waiting-life, so the emphasis on the present is more a characteristic of lyric poetry, rather than a realistic element. Another emphasis is on the poetic subject's enunciation, which reminds the title of the first poem, “Λέει η Πηνελόπη” (“Says Penelope”).

In a way, these words legitimize the speaker's choice to seek help from earth. In evident contrast to Odysseus' prototype, the female speaker lacks any traveling experience, and thus, she does not know the sea, while she may be said to know the sky only because she can see it from the earth. Clinging to the soil and alone, without human beings around her, the earth is not only "nature's only thing" she knows, but she represents the only possible – and maybe the most powerful – interlocutor. After all, the earth is supposed to be her ultimate destination, her forever home after death, as is the case for every human being. More importantly, due to her close relationship to death, earth can also assume the role of a lament counselor, the only one who can respond to how and when a person should be mourned:

> μίλα μου, συμβούλεψε και πες μου
>
> πως όσο ζουν οι άνθρωποι δεν πρέπει να τους κλαίμε
> κι ας λείπουν απ' το πλάι μας σαν το νερό απ' τη γλώσσα
>
> talk to me, advise, and tell me
>
> that as long as people are alive, we're not supposed to mourn them
> even if we miss them from our side like tongue misses the water (v. 14-16)[408]

This brief lament is concluded with a third and last *captatio benevolentiae*, as always directed to the earth. This way the speaker structures her plea creating a ring, as if she were englobing the words of relief she would like to hear in a safe space of poetic kindness.[409] Taking a closer look at the verses cited, the repetition of three verbs in imperative which imply speech acts in v. 14, and which are twice accompanied by the indirect object "μου", "to me", show the woman's urgent need to establish a dialogue with the earth. Nevertheless, being too jealous of poetic space, she does not grant it dialogic agency. She has already prepared what she wants to hear, thus, she dictates the desired advice in iambic decapentasyllabic verse (v. 15-16).

Decapentasyllabic or political verse is the traditional meter of δημοτικά τραγούδια, the modern Greek folk songs. Among their many themes and forms, one of the most prominent is the traditional lament, called μοιρολόι, which us typically sung by professional women singers.[410]

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[408] 'Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης', 155.

[409] A ring that begins and ends a lament, marking its poetic space, is also found in Thetis' lament for her still alive son in *Il.*18.52-64. For a thorough analysis of the passage, see Christos C. Tsagalis, 'The Poetics of Sorrow: Thetis' Lament in *Iliad* 18, 52-64', *Quaderni Urbinati Di Cultura Classica* 76, no. 1 (2004): 9-32.

[410] *Cf.* Nadia C. Seremetakis, *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Holst-Warhaft, 'Dangerous voices'.

With urbanization and globalization, the rites of lament have radically changed in modern Greek cities, but there are still some rural areas of Greece (such as Mani in Peloponnesus) where one may encounter professional women mourners in funerals. Of course, the traditional forms of lament with their vocal excess, typical formulas and theatricality are far cry from the modes of modern lyric poetry. As Holst-Warhaft claims, modern Greek women poets, despite their formal innovations in the art of mourning, are not able to "prevent the echoes of traditional lament from intruding" into their poems.[411] In fact, contrary to male poets of the same generation, the women are unable "to fall back on the formulas of lament to express their grief", but they still bear a characteristic "sense of a pain that is incurable", and tend to "focus on themselves as survivors rather than on the dead".[412]

What I suggest is that in Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope,[413] and especially in the poem "To Earth", the reader may find a perfect example of a modern Greek woman's lyric lamentation. The female speaker does not know how to lament and searches for master guidance from nature, dedicating her a prayer (in Greek both nature and earth are female). The prayer to nature or elements of nature is a motif of Greek demotic songs and laments, only there the personified nature usually has a voice and decides her own response,[414] while here Penelope has already planned the answer she wants, and she has also formed it in impeccable political meter. Assuming both roles, that of the help-seeker and of the earth-guide, the woman both knows and does not know how to lament, desiring and turning away from it simultaneously. As she states in v. 15, she wants to hear that "still alive people are not to be mourned for", and that absence should not be equivalent to death, but the form her words take betray her opposing feelings. Stuck in this limbo of sorrow, she ends up concentrating on herself and on her poetic survival, putting the one-to-be-mourned in second place.

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[411] Holst-Warhaft, 'Knives, Forks, and Photographs', 172.

[412] Holst-Warhaft, 'Dangerous voices', 221-222. In this case, the critic cites the poets Kiki Dimoula and Victoria Theodorou, together with Anghelaki-Rooke. Women poets are juxtaposed to men poets of the 20th century, who, according to Holst-Warhaft, consciously and successfully adapt the traditionally female forms of lament. Among the men poets, she mentions Kostis Palamas, Kostas Varnalis, Nikos Kazantzakis, and Giannis Ritsos.

[413] As I mention above, Penelope is explicitly mentioned in only two poems, but I read the entire book as a Penelopean rewriting due to traditional traits of the heroine that accompany the female persona along *The Scattered Papers of Penelope*.

[414] The same applies to other personified elements of nature in demotic songs, such as the sun or the moon, the latter typically used in lullabies.

Penelope's difficult, liminal position is reproposed later on, in the poem "Μπορεί και να 'ναι ψυχρότητα όλο το πάθος" ("All of passion may be coldness").[415] There we find the woman meditating on the meaning of passion, thinking aloud the words of the title, as she walks "to the edge / of the cliff…silence" ("σκέφτηκα περπατώντας άκρη άκρη / στον γκρεμό…σιωπή", v. 3-4).[416] In Aguirre we saw Penelope at the seashore screaming "socorro" ("help"), but here the danger has come inside the verse that she has crafted. She is meditating in an emotionally dangerous place: on the one side of v. 4 we find the cliff and on the other silence, a premonition of death and the modern, urban way of (non)lament.[417] The three points "…" could also represent the heroine's steps while she is walking towards the end of the cliff (and of the verse), hinting at a possible suicide.[418] But the next verses elucidate that silence refers to the subject's passion, which seems to have been frozen, standing "behind the things", sensing them from afar, with "only one eye" and "only one ear", gazing without participating. Indicative of this is the fact that passion is mentioned generically, as an abstract idea, and it is not accompanied by possessive pronouns, as happens with most feelings or conditions throughout Anghelaki-Rooke's book. Thus, in this poem, the initial liminality figured in the woman's choice of a promenade next to the cliff speaks for her double distance from passion (and all the feelings included in it): on a first level of distance, she is meditating on the meaning of passion without feeling it; on a second level, the personified

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[415] 'Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης', 158-159. Since it has not been translated, the verses in English cited here are mine. Regarding the translation of the title, I understand that it may not bear all of the nuances that the original Greek does. Translating more literally we would have something like: "It may/could also be that all passion is coldness", but I find this very convoluted.

[416] *Ivi*, 158.

[417] The verse in its entirety is a nice rewriting of the Greek saying "μπρος γκρεμός και πίσω ρέμα", literally "ahead the cliff, behind the stream", used to demonstrate that someone is trapped in a no-win situation. Regarding silence in mourning in modern Greek urban contexts, see Marios Chatziprokopiou, 'Lamenting (with the) "Others", "Lamenting Our Failure to Lament"? An Auto-Ethnographic Account of the Vocal Expression of Loss.', in *Voice Studies: Critical Approaches to Process, Performance and Experience*, ed. Ben Macpherson and Konstantinos Thomaidis (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 120-131. For the consideration of silent death as "bad death" in rural societies, who stick to traditional lament (or, at least, they did so in until the last half of the 20th century), see Seremetakis, *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani*, 76.

[418] A hint for Penelope's suicide is also found in Eleanor Wilner's "The World Is Not a Meditation", an obvious lyric response to Wallace Stevens' Penelopean poem, "The World as Meditation". In Wilner's version, Odysseus' violence, and his indifference towards the fate of his companions is emphasized, and at the couple's reunion, Penelope thinks of him as "Odysseus the intruder". Thus, in the second part of the poem, Penelope decides to "pick up another thread from deep inside her" and puts another ending to the original version of the story: "A knock came at the door and then repeated. / She threw the bolt to buy herself / the time she needed. When he had forced / the door, the room was empty and the loom / stood vacant by the open window. / The sun was blinding: the frame held / only light without an image". The ending is left open; the reader does not know if Penelope jumps from the window committing suicide or if she jumps to simply escape. After all, as the narrator suggests, "[i]t is not the business of another to imagine any further". In Wilner, *Before Our Eyes*, 98-100.

passion senses with its half-mediums the emptiness of the world (“the caos”, “the silence”), beholding it without living in it.

Of course, Penelope does not need to go to the edge of a cliff to evince her liminal position. She can very well do so from inside her house, as occurs in the poem “Οι Μνηστήρες” (“The Suitors”). Maintaining her distant, cold position, she watches the suitors’ passionate participation in palace life, reminiscent of how violence – especially gendered – can manifest even more inside one’s home, pushing a woman to invent closed, impenetrable safe spaces. Contrary to *Od*.18.158-303, where Athena gets Penelope beautified and makes her go down to the pretendents to extract gifts from them,[419] this time the heroine remains shut out in her room. Again, in contrast to Homer,[420] the reader of Anghelaki-Rooke is given direct access to the woman’s thoughts:

> Απ’ το παράθυρο
> ο κήπος μοιάζει ν’ ανήκει
> αλλού
> και το σπίτι να ταξιδεύει
> πάνω σ’ ένα φύλλο.
>
> From the window
> the garden seems to belong
> elsewhere
> and the house to travel
> on a leaf. (v. 1-5)[421]

The Ithacan queen may not be travelling but she imagines her house doing so on a leaf, an image resonating with magic realist strategies of representing transport. Her perception of the world is framed by the shape of the window, appearing as though it were far away, literally transferred to… another verse (v. 3). Movements do not only happen far away from the woman, but some are directed at her: senses travel towards a Penelope who is shut off from the natural world, physiologically passive.[422] For example, a “smell of a barbecue” (“τσίκνα”) reaches the queen’s chambers, intruding her solitary safe space and obliging her to participate in the suitors’ feasts

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[419] For a thorough analysis of the Homeric scene, see Calvin S. Byre, ‘Penelope and the Suitors before Odysseus: *Odyssey* 18.158-303’, *The American Journal of Philology* 109, no. 2 (1988): 159-173.

[420] As Byre suggests, in this Homeric scene, “[o]f Penelope’s own thoughts and intentions we are not told anything explicitly by the poet; they must be inferred from her words and actions and from their effect upon others – particularly upon Odysseus”: *Ivi*, 160.

[421] ‘Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης’, 163. English translation by Karen Van Dyck, in Anghelaki-Rooke, *The Scattered Papers of Penelope: New and Selected Poems*.

[422] Physically and not mentally, since all of the poem the heroine’s careful meditation on her hyper complex situation.

against her will. Even if they cannot impose their bodies on her, the suitors invade the woman's senses, leaving their own aroma on her "exceptionally long waiting".[423]

Penelope's absence from cosmic life leaves the floor free for those who claim it. She calmly admits: "οι μνηστήρες της σιωπής μου / οργανώνουν τη ζωή μου" ("the suitors of *my* silence / organize *my* life", v. 8-9),[424] but the repeated possessive pronoun betrays the woman's bitter feelings and her intention to regain hold of her situation. Even more significant is the fact that the first possessive is attributed to silence and not to the suitors: it is because of her silence that they can still be in the palace. The moment that she breaks her silence and decides to end the waiting, they will have no excuse for their prolonged stay.

In fact, despite her confinement she monitors the intruders from afar. In the absence of Odysseus and, consequently, of the sense of touch, Penelope appropriates a typically male sense, as she manages to prevail over the suitors with her gaze:

> Πετούν γύρω μου οι μνηστήρες
> ζαλισμένοι απ' το φως
> της εκθαμβωτικής μοναξιάς μου·
> όταν τους κοιτώ από ψηλά
> είναι που βρίσκομαι σε μια κάμαρη
> γεμάτη Οδυσσέα.
>
> The suitors fly around me
> dizzy by the light
> of my dazzling loneliness;
> when I look at them from above
> it is because I am in a room
> full of Odysseus. (v. 15-20)[425]

The idea of the flying suitors is naturally not new. Already in Penelope's famous dream narrated in *Od*.19.535-553, the suitors are presented as geese and thus, they have the ability to fly – even though Penelope does not mention seeing them doing so in the dream.[426] The metaphor of the winged pretendants is recycled in Ritsos' "Penelope's Despair", where the heroine has woven birds

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[423] V. 16-19 read thus: "κι ανεβαίνει ως τα πάνω πατώματα / η τσίκνα / απ' τα εδέσματα / της μακρότατης αναμονής μου" ("and it climbs up to the upper chambers / the sizzle smell / of the delicacies / of my very long waiting"), in 'Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης', 164. My translation.

[424] *Ivi*, 163. My emphasis.

[425] *Ivi*, 164. For the English, I cite from Van Dyck's translation, only slightly changing v. 16-17, originally: "dazzled by light / of my blinding loneliness", in Anghelaki-Rooke, *The Scattered Papers of Penelope: New and Selected Poems*.

[426] In the Odyssean dream, Penelope sees the geese eating. Thus, the image is closer to the image of Anghelaki-Rooke's suitors having a barbecue.

“with her bright red thread, among the green of the leaves” (v. 13). Ritsos presents the night of Odysseus’ return, when the slaying of the suitors has an immediate effect on Penelope’s woven birds, who change from red to colors of “ash and black, flying low against the flat sky of final patience” (v. 14-15).[427] But in Anghelaki-Rooke’s poem the sky is not flat. The suitors fly around Penelope, who, like another sun, radiates light. The poet inverts the dark, depressing colors that are usually associated with loneliness, showing how imagination can sometimes fill in the absence of loved ones and simultaneously keep the unwanted ones at bay. Penelope’s parallelism with a bright sun suits her privileged director’s gaze, as she stares at the suitors “from above”, monitoring and controlling their flight.

The importance of the woman’s self-confinement and of her glance that escapes the physical limits of the room is repeated later on in the same poem:

> Κλεισμένη μες στο σπίτι
> όπως μες στον χρόνο
> κοιτάζω το δέντρο
> όπως το Θεό:
> έξω απ’ το χρόνο.
> Καταλαβαίνω λίγο
> την παρουσία μου
> εδώ
> μ’ εσένα και χώρια από σένα·
>
> Shut up in the house
> as if in time
> I look at the tree
> as if it were God:
> outside of time.
> I understand a little
> about my presence
> here
> with you and separate from you; (v. 55-63)[428]

[427] The original v. 12-15 read: “κι όσα πουλιά είχε υφάνει / με κόκκινες λαμπρές κλωστές σε πράσινα φυλλώματα, αίφνης, / τούτη τη νύχτα της επιστροφής, γύρισαν στο σταχτί και μαύρο / χαμοπετώντας στον επίπεδο ουρανό της τελευταίας καρτερίας”. My translation. For the original Greek version, see Ρίτσος, Η απόγνωση της Πηνελόπης.

[428] ‘Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης’, 165. Note the similarities between Penelope’s seclusion in this poem and the woman protagonist of the poem “Eros Turannos” by the American poet Edwin Arlington Robinson: “The falling leaf inaugurates / The reign of her confusion; / The pounding wave reverberates / The dirge of her illusion; / And home, where passion lived and died, / Becomes a place where she can hide, / While all the town and harbor side/ Vibrate with her seclusion” (v. 25-32): Edwin Arlington Robinson, ‘Eros Turannos’, *Poetry* 3, no. 6 (1914): 206-207.

Here we find once more a Penelope not only confined in the house, but also in time. Only one element of the body manages to escape the inside (that is, the body): the eye. It is through the glance and through the window of the room (another Penelopean classic) that the woman can still mark the differences between in and out, but, having no other corporeal access to the outside, everything there looks the same. Everything outside her spacetime can be equivalent to God, that is infinite, and perfectly opposed to where she is constricted: the finite human body.

The distance granted by the eyes and the deep knowledge of her body gives Penelope the chance to create a new philosophical territory. The verses present the heroine on the verge of understanding, as she builds a gradual consciousness of herself and of her presence – or better – of her absence from 'real history'. The graduality of the process is formally depicted through the loose disposition of the understood elements: first, the presence, *her* presence, a syntactical object that is difficult to grasp for a disoriented person that literally lives within absence; second, the 'where', represented by an imposing, one-word verse ("here"); lastly, the other, who can be present or absent – since the 'I' has already been defined and its presence is guaranteed, the 'you' is just an addition. Indeed, the other is and is not present, simultaneously, since he is here with the speaker's mind but not with her body. Again, for a poetics of lament, the other's simultaneous presence and absence is absolutely normal: in a funeral, the dead person is physically present but essentially absent, while after the burial, in the next memorial services the dead's absence is total.[429] For the rituals to proceed, what matters is the mourner's most resounding presence in body, mind, spirit and voice, and at such a scale that they are also able to reconvene the dead, even if for only a handful of minutes.[430]

The mourning heroine's presence "εδώ", in the "here" and now of lyric verse, has replaced the ancient weaving, and functions as a demonstration of her modern philosophical work. Outside of men's history but inside the human time of the physical body, the woman poetically reassembles the parts of the self, attributing to each the appropriate role for her lamentation:

> το κρέας μου σε περιμένει
> μα η σκέψη μου σ' είδε να 'ρχεσαι
> από καιρό
> και σ' έχει ξεπροβοδίσει πάλι.

[429] For the Greek orthodox church, the memorial services subsequent to the funeral are after three days, nine days, forty days, one and three years.
[430] For the interplay between presence and absence in Greek memorial services, see Seremetakis, *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani*, 95-97.

my flesh waits for you
but my thought saw you coming
long ago
and has already accompanied you to the door. (v. 64-67)[431]

Penelope's mind has "long ago" understood that the loved one is not coming back to stay with her. This means that she knows that he is not to be lamented for, since, as she stated in "To Earth", "as long as people are alive, we're not supposed to mourn them".[432] But this is her rationality speaking, and apparently her mind has achieved consciousness regarding Odysseus' absence long before the body, which is still waiting, and, while in limbo, grieving.

In this modern shroud made of lyric verses that is *Τα σκόρπια χαρτιά της Πηνελόπης*, the battle between the opposing needs and desires of mind and body intermingle on the paper and, becoming blurred, they create the woman's complete representation of herself. While absence continues to be Penelope's "theme of life", it also becomes her incentive to construct a poetics of her own. This lament is not about the deceased loved one – who, after all, is very much alive –, but about her own way of inhabiting his absence, of surviving the lack of corporeal union with his desired body. Thus, it is a lament concentrated on herself, echoing the new type of mourning that Holst-Warhaft noticed in Greek women poets from the mid-20th century and on.

In compliance with the formal needs of lyric poetry, the book is basically structured in a series of Penelopean interior monologues (or fake dialogue in the case of "To Earth"), granting the reader access to the woman's inner meditations. At the same time, the poems bare traces of traditional laments, establishing a fragmentary dialogue with the absent 'you': though even this dialogue takes place "inside" the self, without any moment of chorality, which is essential to traditional laments. In fact, Anghelaki-Rooke's book could be summarized with the two verses of the poem "The Time of the In-love" that name this subchapter: "και μέσα άρχισε ξανά / ο διάλογος με σένα" ("and inside started again / the dialogue with you", v. 11-12).[433] In her search to converse with the missing 'you', the woman has to invert her eyes and look back "inside", into her own body. In the end, all Penelope is left with is, once more, a monologue.

[431] 'Τα Σκόρπια Χαρτιά Της Πηνελόπης', 165.
[432] *Ivi*, 155.
[433] *Ivi*, 158.

2.3. "I wished for what I always wish for. I wished for another poem": among Louise Glück's *Meadowlands*

(Lament for the 'we')

Insofar as Anghelaki-Rooke's Penelope inaugurates a new dialogue with the self, her sorrowful song could be named a "lament for the I". Almost two decades later and an ocean away, the North American poet Louise Glück dusts Penelope off her Homeric shelf, in order to produce what I will call a "lament for the we", the 'we' intended here as that of a couple, a 'me and you'. We are in 1996 and the enigmatic title of Glück's seventh book of lyric poetry is *Meadowlands*.[434] The title prepares us for an *Odyssey* staged in what may initially seem like a classical *locus amoenus* of ancient Greek lyric, that is the Sapphic λειμῶνες ('meadows').[435] Does the Arcadian setting imply that Penelope will finally take up a lyre and sing?

Before answering this question, Glück leaves another intriguing clue in the epigraph:

- Let's play choosing music. Favorite form. (W)
- Opera. (H)
- Favorite work. (W)
- *Figaro*. No. *Figaro* and *Tannhauser*. Now it's your turn: sing one for me. (H)

This is the first of many brief dialogues between a couple, soon revealed to be the wife (W), that is Glück-persona, and the figure of her ex-husband (H).[436] The two are depicted in an everyday scene: of playfulness: the wife initiates a game while the husband gets to mention his preferences. As if to mock the critics' love for classification, in the middle of two ancient genres, epic and lyric, Glück inserts a third, much more modern one, that is, lyric opera. The common elements between Homer's *Odyssey* and Wagner's *Tannhäuser* are easily discernable in the principal characters and motifs: the waiting woman (Penelope, Elisabeth) and the *nostos* of the once-beloved man (Odysseus, Tannhäuser), who, in the meantime, has betrayed his wife with a divinity (Circe and

[434] This book of Glück will become famous years later. Its title probably gives a headache to its translators who tend to leave it unchanged, respectful of the multiple meanings it carries. See for instance the title of the French and the Italian editions: Glück, *Meadowlands*, 2022.

[435] I will gradually return to the multiple meanings of 'meadowlands', though it has been already analyzed in Corinne Pache, '"That's What I'll Remember": Louise Glück's Odyssey from Nostos to Nostalgia', *Classical and Modern Literature* 28, no. 2 (April 2008): 1-14.

[436] The (W) and (H) in the citation of the epigraph are mine. There is, of course, distance between the two, or better the three: the Glück-poet, who creates the Glück-character as wife in *Meadowlands*, who, in turn, mirrors the Glück-wife in real life. With the husband the distinction is easier, as he is not the poet: he is just the poetic construction who probably owns a lot to the real one.

Calypso, Venus).[437] To know if the scheme of the two remains unvaried in *Meadowlands* and to understand the connection with Mozart's *Figaro*,[438] the reader need only proceed to the next page.

The first poem of the book is entitled "Penelope's Song".[439] This heroine, two decades after Anghelaki-Rooke's poem "Says Penelope", does not simply speak out. She sings, not by externalizing her cries as she did in "To Earth" to seek help from nature, but rather to offer quiet advice to herself:

> Little soul, little perpetually undressed one,
> do now as I bid you, climb
> the shelf-like branches of the spruce tree;
> wait at the top, attentive, like
> a sentry or look-out. He will be home soon; (v. 1-5)

Penelope turns her back to the reader and apostrophizes her soul, which, as Bonnie Costello comments, is "now exposed to scrutiny".[440] This trope may initially appear unusual for Glück, who has repeatedly stated her "preference, from the beginning" for a type of "poetry that requests or craves a listener"; her need "to feel addressed" when she reads, and "to be heeded" when she speaks.[441] In fact, it is not Glück-character who speaks to the soul, but an ancient mythical woman, Penelope. As such, it is more predictable and 'forgivable' for her to deploy the apostrophe, which has been described as the "most radical, embarrassing, pretentious, and mystificatory" figure of the lyric genre.[442] The embarrassment of the poetic subject and of the reader is intensified as the soul is called "perpetually undressed", a syntagm that simultaneously entails eroticism and purity, the first through the image a nude body, the second of a soul during confession.

Penelope's tone here is that of a mother scolding her child,[443] as she proceeds with four imperatives ("do", "bid", "climb", "wait"). The three are orders to the soul, 'you' ('you do', 'you

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[437] William Anderson notes how "[t]he pre-Wagnerian theme of Tannhauser and Frau Venus shows a remarkable resemblance to that of Odysseus and Calypso. One can forget oneself in love, one can actually and symbolically die in love, as Shakespeare so carefully depicts Antony doing. Calypso then, in one sense, is death, with all its attractions of escape and self-indulgence": William S. Anderson, 'Calypso and Elysium', *The Classical Journal* 54, no. 1 (1958): 7.

[438] For a synopsis of the opera, see [Britannica, The Marriage of Figaro, Mozart].

[439] Louise Glück, 'Meadowlands', in *Poems: 1962-2020*, by Louise Glück, Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2021), 307.

[440] Bonnie Costello, '"Meadowlands": Trustworthy Speakers', *PN Review* 25, no. 6 (July 1999): 15. In his review of the book, Brian Henry interpreted the apostrophe to the soul as the mother's speech directed to the son, Telemachus: Brian Henry, review of *The Odyssey Revisited*, by Louise Glück, *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 74, no. 3 (1998): 571-577. I believe that this interpretation, which has not been seconded by any other scholars, finds no textual evidence in the poem.

[441] Glück, 'Education of the Poet', 11.

[442] Jonathan Culler, 'Apostrophe', *Diacritics* 7, no. 4 (Winter 1977): 60.

[443] This is what probably confused Henry in his interpretation. See n. 461.

climb', 'you wait') and she keeps the central and strongest one: "I bid". Even more telling for the speaker's authority is the construction of v. 2. It contains only one-syllable words, which creates an almost military rhythm. Of the two imperatives that open the verse ("do") and close it ("climb"), the second is a specification of the first, a postmodifier ('what you have to do is climb'). The most important part lies in the center, a perfect example of subject-verb-complement phrase, with innate verticality: "I bid you". Even though we are used to thinking of imperatives as coming from above, Penelope proposes an inverse movement, suggesting that her soul behaves as a bird: it should take the highest position of a spruce tree, and reassume the typical waiting role, pretending to be "a sentry or look-out" (v.5).

While we have already seen Penelope gazing from above both in Aguirre and Anghelaki-Rooke, the mention of the sentry in the very beginning of "Penelope's Song" (and of the entire book) cannot but take us back to ancient Greek tragedy, a genre where sentinels are frequently central to the plot.[444] Bearing in mind the Aegisthus and Clytemnestra paradigm that hovers all over the *Odyssey* and continuously menaces Odysseus' successful *nostos*,[445] the most important intertextual link between Penelope and a tragic guardian is probably found in the prologue of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (v. 1-39).[446] In the first verses of the tragedy, the watchman, probably seated somewhere above the stage,[447] explains that he has been there for a year, waiting for a sign that Troy has fallen and – what a surprise – the sign arrives precisely as he speaks.[448] This much commented prayer-like monologue, which, according to Fraenkel, gives an appropriate expression to the sentry's "protracted and tormenting loneliness",[449] ends with a wink to the Athenian audience, suggesting the big mysteries of the Atreides' family are about to be unveiled on stage. By asking her soul to assume the position of a sentry, Glück's Penelope plays with the expectations

[444] One of the most famous ones is that of the Sophoclean *Antigone*.
[445] *Cf.* Katz, *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the* Odyssey.
[446] For an analysis of *Agamemnon*'s sentry and its link to the Homeric reference in *Od*.4.524-527, see Cristina Pace, 'La sentinella di Egisto. Elementi omerici nell'Agamennone eschileo', 2013. As Pace cites, an ancient commentary on the first verse had already spotted the difference between the Homeric and the Aeschylean sentry, refering that the first was a spy put in that position by Aegisthus, while the second a servant of Agamemnon ("θεράπων Ἀγαμέμνονος ὁ προλογιζόμενος, οὐχὶ ὁ ὑπὸ Αἰγίσθου ταχθείς"): in *Schol*. **M** in Aesch. *Ag*. 1.
[447] For the placement of the watchman on stage, see Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 276, and on. Also cited in Pace, 'La sentinella di Egisto. Elementi omerici nell'Agamennone eschileo', 21.
[448] For a commentary of the prologue, see David Raeburn and Oliver Thomas, *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus: A Commentary for Students* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 65-71.
[449] Eduard Fraenkel, *Aeschylus Agamemnon*, vol. I–III (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), 25.

of readers initiated in the Homeric texts: what mysteries await this husband's *nostos*? Will Glück's Penelope turn herself into a Clytemnestra and the *Odyssey* into a tragedy?

In any case, one thing is certain: Odysseus will return. Indeed, the speaker's emphasis is not on the man's behavior, but on the woman's:

> it behooves you to be
> generous. *You* have not been completely
> perfect either; with *your* troublesome body
> *you* have done things *you* shouldn't
> discuss in poems. Therefore
> call out to him, over the open water, over the bright water (v. 6-11, my emphasis)

After the series of personal imperatives, the new order arrives with a generic, impersonal "it behooves you", that is 'one expects you to'. The verses of this passage are full of enjambments (v. 6,7,8,9), stressing the added elements and playing with contrasting meanings. In v. 6, the emphasis falls on the last words 'to be': 'remember, you are supposed to be present when he gets back, you should not leave (or marry someone else)'. Then, the first addition comes to slightly alter the expectations: it is not only presence that is requested from Penelope, but also her generosity. She has to forgive her husband for his absence and for whatever he has done while away. In the third appearance of the second person singular, the tense changes from present ("behooves") to present perfect ("have been"), a strategic grammatical move: before proceeding with the next orders, the soul needs to be reminded of its past behavior. The phrase in v. 7-8 highlights closure in three ways: i. the use of present perfect ("have been"); ii. the adverb ("completely"); iii. the predicate ("perfect"). The much-desired integrity is punctually thwarted with the negative ("not"), its complement ("either"), and with the choice to end the phrase with a semicolon. As the accusation is clarified, the presence of the 'you' is multiplied, with three repetitions (once as a possessive pronoun, twice as a subject), and thus, the abstract, undressed soul regains its corporeal existence. The speaker suggests that, with her "troublesome body", Penelope has indulged in pleasures of the flesh,[450] and with her playful enjambment in v. 9, she creates, if only momentarily, the impression of a rigid judge.

[450] In another interpretation of the poem, Penelope could be speaking to the soul of Glück-character. In that case, the reference to the "troublesome body" becomes clearly autobiographic, as Glück suffered from anorexia nervosa as an adolescent, an experience that marked her profoundly and led her to seven years of psychanalysis. She wrote about this experience in Glück, 'Education of the Poet', 12-14.

Yet, the speaker is not as interested in correcting an adultery, as she is in regaining control over the poetic material. Penelope can do whatever she wants with her body and her mythical persona: what matters to this speaker is what ends up inside the verses. This brief comment on what can or cannot be included in a poem, is Glück's programmatic announcement of the way in which she intends – or rather, how she does not intend – to transform her marriage in the present book. If the reader is on the lookout for Penelope's *faux pas*, this book will not satisfy them, since this is not going to be a book of 'dirty' confessions.[451]

Simultaneously and even more importantly, the poet is making a statement regarding her approach to lyric poetry. Since her debut with *Firstborn* in the late Sixties,[452] Glück has given critics a hard time in relation to whether or not she should be considered a confessional poet, in the school of Robert Lowell, John Berryman, or Anne Sexton, to name a few.[453] In part because she is younger than the major Confessionalists, Glück "escape[s] the label of confessionalism",[454] although every book of hers can easily be associated with an autobiographical event.[455] In fact, *Meadowlands* could be misclassified as a purely confessional work, as it gets published immediately after her divorce with John Dranow and its central theme is the slow and painful dissolution of a marriage – a foundational subject of Confessional poetry since W. D. Snodgrass' *Heart's Needle* and Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*.[456] Thus, with these verses, Glück-poet kills two birds with one stone: while Penelope is free to enjoy her "troublesome body" as long as she does not turn these experiences into the theme of the book, Glück is liberated from limiting categories that could harm her reputation as a lyric poet by highlighting only one part of her influences over the greater modernist tradition that she inherited and cherished.

But what are we to make of a poem directed to the soul that does not include commentary on one's behavior? As the title of the poem dictates, Penelope is expected to sing. As such, the double

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[451] To this regard, Joyce's Molly or Holst-Warhaft's "Penelope's Confession" offers what Glück decides to omit.

[452] Louise Glück, *Firstborn* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1968).; now in Louise Glück, 'Firstborn', in *Poems: 1962-2020*, by Louise Glück, Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2021), 1-54.

[453] For a defense and a canon of the Confessionalists, see Steven K. Hoffman, 'Impersonal Personalism: The Making of a Confessional Poetic', *ELH* 45, no. 4 (1978): 687-709.

[454] Waltraud Mitgutsch, 'Women in Transition: The Poetry of Anne Sexton and Luise Glück', *AAA: Arbeiten Aus Anglistik Und Amerikanistik* 9, no. 2 (1984): 132. Mitgutsch focuses on Glück's early work, that is *Firstborn* and *The House on Marshland*: Glück, *Firstborn*, 1968; Louise Glück, *The House on Marshland* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1975). Both are now included in Louise Glück, *Poems: 1962-2020*, Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2021).

[455] In Descending Figure, Glück explores the loss of her sister, while in *Ararat* that of her father.

[456] William De Snodgrass, *Heart's Needle* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959); Robert Lowell, *Life Studies: New Poems and an Authobiographical Fragment [1959]* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001). For these books, Snodgrass won the Pulitzer Prize and Lowell the American National Book Award.

vocative to the heroine's own soul will be transformed into another, more concrete one: a call for the absent Odysseus out, in the open sea, depicted in the longest verse of the poem (v. 11). The heroine is expected to transform herself into a siren and beckon the husband back home:

> with your dark song, with your grasping,
> unnatural song – passionate,
> like Maria Callas. Who
> wouldn't want you? Whose most demonic appetite
> could you possibly fail to answer? […] (v. 12-16)[457]

This is not the first time that Penelope unveils her musical abilities. Within the larger corpus of her rewritings, there is that momentous singer: *Ulysses*' Molly Bloom. As Patrick Reilly notes, in her double role as singer and siren, "Molly alludes to popular music fragments throughout her late-night ruminations" in the chapter "Penelope".[458] The same tunes that the wife remembers during her reverie of longing are also cited by title in the husband's reverie in the "Sirens", where Bloom is found drinking and listening to live music at the Ormond Bar. With his meticulous reconstruction of Bloom's synesthetic reverie,[459] Reilly has managed to reconstruct a part of the Ulyssean soundtrack, one of which is of particular interest to our case. The title of the song is "Waiting", its lyrics written by Ellen H. Flagg, and composed by Harrison Millard in 1867.[460] The speaker is, once more, a waiting woman, calling out for the return of her beloved:

> The stars shine on his pathway
> The trees bend back their leaves
> To guide him to the *meadow*,
> Among the golden sheaves,
> Where stand I, longing, loving,
> And listening as I wait,
> To *the nightingale's wild singing*,

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[457] The inverse, that is, the Sirens who imitate Penelope's voice, as well as Circe's and Calipso's, is found in the theatre performance "Circe, Calipso, Penelope e le Sirene. Il sogno di Ulisse" ("Circe, Calipso, Penelope and the Sirens. Ulysses' Dream") presented on the 18th of April 2013 at Goldoni Theatre, in Venice. The performance was part of a larger project named *Variazioni sul mito* (*Variations on myth*) coordinated by Monica Centanni and Daniela Sacco. More information on the performance and on the project in general can be found in this links: Circe, Calipso, Penelope e le Sirene. Il Sogno di Ulisse, Venezia 2013.
[458] Patrick Reilly, 'Love's Old Sweet Songs: How Music Scores Memory in the "Sirens" and "Penelope" Episodes in Ulysses', *Joyce Studies Annual*, 2019, 75. Reilly's article shows the importance of the allusions to the remembered tunes in *Ulysses*, proving how Molly's siren song succeeds in uniting the couple in longing and nostalgia. He also highlights how Molly's origins "from the Rock of Gibraltar" (*U* 11.514) make of her "a true Mediterranean siren": *Ivi*, p. 80.
[459] As the critic admits, "Joyce's epic requires detective work, and, to uncover the words and music that are clued by textual fragments of song, the reader must venture outside the text": *Ivi*, p. 86.
[460] For more information on the song, see: Digital Collection Berkeley, Waiting or Jhu, Waiting. Two years later, Millard published "The Return. Answer to Waiting", with lyrics written by George Cooper: H. Millard, The Return.

Sweet singing to its mate […] (v. 1-8, my emphasis)

The evoked female condition is eminently Penelopean. The female 'I' is yet again expecting the male's *nostos*, frozen in a limbo made up of gerunds: "longing", "loving", "listening". Connecting Molly's "Waiting" to Glück's rewriting, we find one particular word that rings a bell: the man is to be guided "to the meadow" (v. 3).

The waiting space of the woman in Millard's song is the ancient λειμών, a place known already from the *Odyssey*, as home to the Sirens,[461] but also present in various fragments by Sappho.[462] But in Glück's reappraisal of the setting there is a "machine in the garden".[463] As we learn in the poem "Meadowlands 3",[464] the book is also named after the New Jersey Meadowlands, the football stadium previously home of the New York Giants.[465] Before undergoing stark urbanization, this previously rural region was rich with biodiversity. By the end of the 20th century when Glück composes the poem,

[…] it has
about as much as common with pasture
as would the inside of an oven. (v. 2-4)

The destruction of the previous *locus amoenus* reflects the rot of the once blooming marriage. By commenting on the changes in the surrounding nature, Glück marks a parallel with the (un)ravelling nature of her relationship, making intelligent use of the meadows' ambivalent nature, "a space of both destruction and creation […] a site of anguish, but not without hope".[466] Indeed, for both Joyce's Molly and for Gluck's Penelope the meadows offer a space for gendered creation. The first used to sing so intensely that her song got imprinted on her husband's mind, while the second is asked to produce an extraordinary song: "dark", "grasping" and "unnatural", her creation carrying the mesmerizing impetus of the Homeric sirens.

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[461] *Od.*12.158-159: "Σειρήνων μὲν πρῶτον ἀνώγει θεσπεσιάων / φθόγγον ἀλεύασθαι καὶ λειμῶν' ἀνθεμόεντα" ("First of all she tells us to keep away from the magical / Sirens and their singing and their flowery meadow"). Λειμών appears ten times in the *Odyssey* and it is not exclusively attributed to the Sirens' place.

[462] For a thorough analysis of the meadows in ancient Greek literature, see Claude Calame, *The Poetics of Eros in Ancient Greece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), chap. VIII, IX.

[463] *Cf.* Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America [1964]*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[464] "Meadowlands 3" is the last of the 'Meadowlands' series within the book.

[465] Glück, 'Meadowlands', 2021, 335. In 2010 the Giants started to play at the MetLife Stadium, in East Rutherford, NJ.

[466] Pache, 'That's What I'll Remember', 7-8.

A further detail illuminates the intertextual connection between Millard's "Waiting", Molly Bloom and Glück's heroine. Millard's song is written "for Soprano or Tenor".[467] Fittingly, in "Penelope's Song", Glück's speaker enjoins her soul to sing "like Maria Callas" (v. 14), thus molding it to some extent in accordance with the husband's desires, who in the epigraph asked his wife to sing him an opera. The reference to Maria Callas, considered one of the most famous sopranos of the 20th century, nicknamed 'La Divina', is far from arbitrary. Callas functions as a rather fitting bridge between Penelope's and Glück's geohistorical loci, that is, Greece and the United States. Born in New York to a family of Greek immigrants, Callas shuttled incessantly between the US, Greece, Italy and, during her last years, France. In this regard, the two have little in common: Glück lives her entire life in the United States and, though she wins important national prizes for her poetry already in the 1990s,[468] she gains worldwide recognition only very late in her life, with the Nobel prize for literature in 2020.[469]

However, the two women are united by the experience of a drastic bodily transformation: Callas loses over thirty kilos in only two years (1952-1954), news that shocks the public and is excessively reported in the press; Glück suffers from anorexia nervosa during her adolescence, an experience that radically changes her approach towards life and writing after years of psychanalysis.[470] This common trait between the two women is invoked in v. 15 of "Penelope's Song", where the heroine asks: "Whose most demonic appetite could you possibly fail to answer"? Men's appetites are considered maniacal, especially when compared to these two women who had once tried to gain complete control over their bodies. To answer Penelope's question, Callas would probably name Aristotelis Onassis, the Greek millionaire with whom she had a passionate and turbulent relationship, and whose "demonic appetite" for socially prominent women led him to leave her to marry Jackie Kennedy in 1968. At that time, Glück's obvious answer would be her ex-

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[467] See the image in the annex.

[468] Her first big prize is the Pulitzer, won for the *Wild Iris*: Louise Glück, *The Wild Iris* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1992).; now in Louise Glück, 'The Wild Iris', in *Poems: 1962-2020*, by Louise Glück, Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2021), 243-304.

[469] Glück's Nobel prize took many by surprise, proof of the scarce attention that both the market and cultural journalism dedicate to lyric poetry in our days. As an example, I cite an article by Mariarosa Mancuso published in the Italian journal *Il Foglio*, where the author criticizes the jury's choice as one that is very far away from books that people read: Mariarosa Mancuso, 'Louise Glück, Chi?', *Il Foglio*, October 2020. Needless to say, I completely disagree with Mancuso. If the attribution of the Nobel to Glück convinced even one person to read her poetry or come closer to lyric poetry in general, then that is a very happy outcome.

[470] Of course, the experience of the body changes between the two women were very different, as that of Callas was a conscious choice, and she stopped the diet when she had achieved the result that she wanted, while Glück's anorexia was a serious eating disorder and mental health condition.

husband, John, director of a culinary institute, whom she divorced just before the publication of *Meadowlands*. As for Penelope, conventionally the model woman within a patriarchal society, we could reply, 'nobody' – that is, of course, Odysseus.

But some things never change. Odysseus still desires Penelope; the heroine's song leaves no doubt

> […] Soon,
> he will return from wherever he goes in the meantime,
> suntanned from *his* time away, wanting
> *his* grilled chicken. Ah, *you must* greet him,
> *you must* shake the boughs of the tree
> to get *his* attention,
> but carefully, carefully, lest
> *his* beautiful face be marred
> by too many falling needles. (v. 16-24, my emphasis)

Odysseus' return manifests through the length of the verses, as his wanderings continue to occupy the longest ones (v. 11 above, v. 17 here), and with his coming back, the lines become narrower, as if they were re-adapting themselves to the limited domestic space. The previously impersonal "it behooves you" and the general advice to be "generous" could not have been transformed into anything more intensely personal: a double "you must" and specific instructions for the warm welcome that the wife should prepare. Penelope has indeed "composed, so long, a self with which to welcome" Odysseus, she has even turned herself into the most famous soprano, but the two are not anymore "friend and dear friend" as Wallace Stevens had imagined.[471] Glück's verses teem with irony for the poor husband, who will come back tired from all the sunbathing of his vacation, expecting the impeccable wife and his home-cooked dinner.

In the poem's powerful concluding image, the man's "demonic appetite" for "grilled chicken" is transformed into the woman's diabolic, vengeful fantasy. From her privileged position up on the tree she will see him arriving before he notices her, and thus, she can startle him, maybe even frighten him, by shaking the boughs of the spruce tree. The speaker's tone shifts from purely ironic to somewhat sweet and nostalgic: Penelope insists on an attitude of attentiveness with *quasi* maternal care, repeating "carefully, carefully, lest" to make sure that the husband, in Homer a veteran, and sacker of cities,[472] is not alerted to his own wounds. The woman's excessive concern

[471] *Cf.* Wallace Stevens' "The World as Meditation", *cit*., v. 7 and 9.
[472] One of Odysseus' Homeric epithets is πτολίπορθος, sacker of cities.

from the top of the tree of longing produces a background sound. The reader almost grasps some notes of the classic jazz piece "Autumn Leaves", picturing Penelope yearning for the husband's "sunburned hands" she "used to hold".[473] Even more fitting to "Penelope's Song" is the original French version of "Autumn Leaves", that is "Les feuilles mortes" by Jacques Prévert and Joseph Kosma.[474] In this "prototype of a love song",[475] the singer remembers

> la chanson que tu me chantais
>
> *c'est une chanson qui nous ressemble*
> toi tu m'aimais, et je t'aimais
> nous vivions tous les deux ensembles
> toi qui m'aimais, moi qui t'aimais
> mais la vie sépare ceux qui s'aiment
> tout doucement, sans faire de bruit
> et la mer efface sur le sable
> les pas des amants désunis.
>
> the song that you were singing to me
>
> *it's a song that resembles us*
> you who loved me, me who loved you
> the two of us, we lived together
> you who loved me, me who loved you
> but life separates those who love each other
> gently, without making noise
> and the sea erases on the sand
> the steps of the separated lovers.[476]

How else could we better imagine an actual "Penelope's Song"? The poem (and the entire *Meadowlands*) is a song that resembles the route of the couple, a recreation of what they lived together and how they once loved each other. Yet, Glück's poem warns of a possible "noise" in the separation. Like the biblical Eden, the romantic scenery of "Penelope's Song" conceals a danger. The soul should pay attention, as what may fall from the tree are not leaves, but needles. Penelope

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[473] "Autumn leaves" has been sung by innumerable artists. I leave here the version of Nat King Cole: Nat King Cole, Autumn Leaves and my personal favorite by Eric Clapton: Eric Clapton, Autumn Leaves.

[474] In her very recent article, Alice Henschel traced the history of the poem/song and provided a rich analysis of its content: Alice Henschel, '"Les Feuilles Mortes" de Prévert et Kosma. À Propos de l'expérience Du Temps et de l'amour Dans La Chanson Française', *Volume !* 19, no. 1 (2022): 209-226.

[475] Philippe Grimbert, *Psychanalyse de La Chanson* (Paris: Hachette Littérature, 2004), 286. Also cited in Henschel, '"Les Feuilles Mortes" de Prévert et Kosma. À Propos de l'expérience Du Temps et de l'amour Dans La Chanson Française', 213.

[476] My emphasis. The version of the song as sung by Yves Montand can be found here: Yves Montand, Les Feuilles Mortes. My translation.

has not given up her ancient sport of the loom; with the slightest superfluous move, what once saved her marriage from the suitors, could now destroy "the beauty of the husband".[477]

The poem concludes with this simultaneously nostalgic and embittered Penelope, who, though frustrated with the husband, does not think of herself as defeated. Stevens' intuition, that "[t]he barbarous strength within her would never fail" is still pretty much real in Glück's version.[478] By means of lyric verse, Penelope transforms her almost primitive, "inhuman meditation",[479] in the "dark", "grasping", "unnatural song" of a contemporary siren. Does this mean that her song may actually entail danger or the power to change the route of her marriage? As Pietro Pucci showed, even in the *Odyssey* the song of the Homeric Sirens is not actually dangerous for Odysseus, because it is introduced and controlled by Circe, who instructs the hero appropriately so that he does not succumb to the creatures' magical powers.[480] In the same way that the Sirens are integrated in the Homeric "plot which frames and preempts their success",[481] "Penelope's Song" and its potentially harmful needles are inserted in the plot of the game that the couple chooses to play in the epigraph of *Meadowlands*. The Penelope-wife thus becomes an ἀοιδός-siren, and she performs the lyric poem (and not opera), as a response to the husband's request in a game she initiated herself. Since games are played by rules, their content: i. cannot effectively harm the addressee; ii. it is expected to have limited duration (that of a book of lyric poetry); iii. it will not

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[477] Five years after *Meadowlands*, the Canadian classicist and poet Anne Carson will sing (and tango) her own marriage's lament with the publication of the poetic essay *The Beauty of the Husband*, constructing a rich intertextual dialogue mainly with John Keats but also with Homer, the Homeric Hymns, and many others. In a poetic world full of citations and fragmented dialogues with the husband, the reader also finds pieces of monologues, which seem to be direct answers to possible questions raised during the reading: "So why did I love him from early girlhood to late middle age and the divorce decree came in the mail? Beauty. No great secret. Not ashamed to say I loved him for his beauty. As I would again if he came near. Beauty convinces. You know beauty makes sex possible. Beauty makes sex sex" in Anne Carson, *The Beauty of the Husband* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001). Their similar age notwithstanding, the differences in the way Glück and Carson work with poetic material are abysmal. Glück is (or, unfortunately, was), what could be said, a classical lyric poet, for whom word, verse, syntax, and form are the spinal cord of her work, while Carson's books could be considered as "prosthetic" poetry, including other types of art inside the book, or building on a network of intertextual connections – to this regard, see the exceptional analysis of Van Praet: Helena Van Praet, '"To Tell a Story by Not Telling It": Toward a Networked Poetics of Delay in Anne Carson's *The Beauty of the Husband*', *Poetics Today* 43, no. 4 (2022): 639-661. This difference is clear already by looking at the two books, *Meadowlands* and *The Beauty of the Husband*: if Glück follows Emily Dickinson's advice to "tell all the truth but tell it slant" using and dismissing the Penelope veil without explicitly informing the reader about these changes, Carson does the exact opposite, as she begins the book with an honesty pact ("Fair reader I offer merely an analogy", p. 5) and then provides in the notes information on her citations. I will come back to Carson's poetic modes in the next subchapter, as she is a major influence for Phoebe Giannisi.

[478] Wallace Stevens, "The Worlds as Meditation", *cit*., v. 21.

[479] *Ivi*, v. 11.

[480] Pietro Pucci, 'The Song of the Sirens', *Arethusa* 12, no. 2 (1979): 128-129.

[481] *Ivi*, 128.

actually change something in real, historic time. However, what the wife's song *can* do is arouse the feelings of the audience and provoke nostalgia.[482] To do so effectively, it rhapsodically remembers the past *kleos* of the couple's once happy marriage, mingling its story with the most canonically successful couple of ancient Greek mythology.[483]

The parallel but not identical path of the two couples is more explicitly depicted in the third poem of the book, "Quiet Evening".[484] The beginning is mysterious, like stepping into a fairytale or the world of dreams:

> *You* take *my* hand; then *we*'re alone
> in the life-threatening forest. Almost immediately
>
> we're in a house; Noah's
> grown and moved away; the clematis after ten years
> suddenly flowers white. (v. 1-5, my emphasis)

The reader who is initiated in the game of the couple already from the epigraph knows that the "you" is not directed at the husband. Still, it is difficult to see the offered hand in a lyric poem and not think of John Keats' performance of the very same gesture: "This living hand, now warm and capable […] I hold it towards you".[485] Even within the pattern of the couple's game, the use of the second person creates intimacy, or better, grants the reader an entrance to the intimacy of the couple, "the life-threatening forest" of their past memories. The "we" is created after the union of the hands, and it is simultaneously a 'we' of the couple and a 'we' of the poetic subject and the reader. The latter can participate in the couple's private memories and, at the same time, acknowledge the limitations of that intimacy. Through the memory of the couple as it is reconstructed in the poem, the reader briefly takes part in the couple's everyday life while remaining conscious of her status as an intruder.[486] Notwithstanding the union of the hands and the

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[482] *Cf*. Pache, 'That's What I'll Remember'.
[483] Again, this is perfectly in line with the Homeric Sirens, who "are really turned to the past, [and] live in a spatial and temporal remoteness": *Ivi*, p. 129.
[484] Glück, 'Meadowlands', 2021, 309.
[485] John Keats, *The Complete Poems [1973]*, ed. John Barnard, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 1988), 688. The offered hands in lyric poetry are numerous. One of the most interesting studies on the topic is an article by William Waters analyzing among others this poem of Keats: William Waters, 'Poetic Address and Intimate Reading: The Offered Hand', *Literary Imagination* 2, no. 2 (March 2000): 188-220.
[486] On the question of intimacy through the use of the second person in Claudia Rankine's *Cityzen*, see Karen Simecek, 'Cultivating Intimacy: The Use of the Second Person in Lyric Poetry', *Philosophy and Literature* 43, no. 2 (2019): 501-518. Simecek recognizes three levels of intimacy, the last and most complete of which would be intimacy with acknowledgment of the other's different life experiences. Though she focuses on *Cityzen* because of the moral messages that the book passes against racism, I believe that this third level of intimacy could be reached even in works of lyric poetry, whose aim is less didactic.

reader's participation, in the end of the verse each remains "alone": even a common experience is differently saved in the cupboards of each person's memory.

The narrative of "Quiet Evening" unfolds quickly, with short phrases that stop with semicolons in the middle of the verse and the repetition of unexpected events ("immediately", "suddenly"). Years pass in the blink of an eye: the couple meets (v. 1); they get married (v. 2); they enter the new family house, and the son is born (v. 3); the son becomes an adult and leaves the parents' house – Noah, Glück's child, is twenty-three by the time of the publication of *Meadowlands* – (v. 4); the clematis, which has been part of the family for years (in fact, it is introduced in the previous verse), has changed color, its flowers now white (v. 5). By this time, the woman will have probably gone into menopause – that is, climacteric –, and both of the couple's hair will have turned white, something suggested also in the title of the previous poem, "Cana".[487]

Precisely at that point the events slow down and the third, central stanza speaks words of tenderness:

> More than anything in the world
> I love these evenings when we're together
> the quiet evenings in summer, the sky still light at this hour. (v. 6-8)

The life-threatening forest has been transformed into a scene of serenity; loneliness is transfigured "together". Nothing is unforeseen, no semicolons mark swift changes. The entire stanza forms one long phrase, progressively widening, like the long, placid summer days. A modern Athena has used her divine powers so that the sun forgets to set for the modern couple, delaying sunrise so that Penelope and Odysseus could enjoy more time together during the first night of their Odyssean reunion.

Indeed, it is precisely at this moment that the couple is transferred to antiquity:

> So, Penelope took the hand of Odysseus,
> not to hold him back but to impress
> *this* peace on his memory:
>
> from this point on, the silence through which *you* move
> is *my* voice pursuing *you*. (v. 9-13, my emphasis)

[487] Here we can glimpse an allusion to the last two verses of the Ovidian Penelope of *Heroides* I: "Certe ego, quae fueram te discedente puella, / protinus ut venias, facta videbor anus" ("As for myself, who when you left my side was but a girl, though you should come straightway, I surely shall seem grown an aged dame").

Another couple joins hands, and now it is by the woman's initiative. Penelope searches for intimacy with a precise intention: to make sure that *this* calm, harmonious moment remains fixed in her husband's memory. She is the one who takes the hand; she gets to decide how and what he will remember – also because this is the only thing she can actually control, as he has already decided to set off once more.[488] To succeed, she uses two typically female characteristics: together, her sense of touch and her siren's voice will fill all of the man's future silent moments. The last verb, 'to pursue', changes Penelope-wife from a Siren to a Fury seeking revenge. Like in "Penelope's Song", at the last minute, the amicable, romantic atmosphere of "Quiet Evening" changes into a dangerous, avenging song and the 'we' is divided into an 'I' that chases 'you'. If for Sappho love is bittersweet, for Glück love's bittersweet memories are haunting, and the only thing that remains to figure out is who will haunt and who will be haunted.

Penelope may have won a single battle by impressing the memory she wanted, but her present situation *de facto* has not changed. In the "Moonless Night" the reader is shown a familiar image:

> A lady *wee*ps at a dark *wi*ndow.
> Must *we* say what it is? Can't *we* simply say
> a personal mater? It's early summer;
> next door the Lights are practicing klezmer music.
> A good night: the clarinet is in tune.
>
> As for the lady – she's going to *wai*t forever;
> there's no point in *wa*tching longer.
> After a*whi*le, the streetlight goes out.
>
> But is *wai*ting forever
> al*way*s the answer? Nothing
> is al*way*s the answer; the answer
> depends on the story. (v. 1-12, my emphasis)[489]

The woman is again seated beside the window, a typical Penelopean position. However, if in Anghelaki-Rooke's "The Suitors", Penelope had a privileged position, controlling with her gaze from above the disturbing suitors and describing with her own voice the situation, the lady of "Moonless Night" is crying alone, objectified by a generic 'we', that englobes both the gaze of the poetic subject and of the reader. Still, the speaker defends the lady's right to some privacy and partially anticipates possible questions and answers from her critics.

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[488] *Cf.* "Odysseus' Decision" in Glück, 'Meadowlands', 2021, 341.
[489] *Ivi*, 313.

At the same time, by asking "must we say what it is?" (v. 2), Glück challenges rigid interpretations that impoverish works of art rather than enrich them.[490] These verses contain strong, absolute words that both imitate and resist conventional catholic responses to life's predicaments. Twice the "waiting" is said to last "forever", as does the speaker's obsessive search for "the answer" (v. 10 & 11). Punctuation eludes the poetic subject, who can never reach a firm point: first a question mark (v. 10), then a semicolon (v. 11), in the end, the void (v. 11). Should we play with the structure of the stanza, we get to see that its horizontal, vertical, and diagonal schemes suggest numerous different paths. "Forever" is attributed to "waiting", but if combined with "nothing" it leads to emptiness, death. The same happens with "always", which is linked simultaneously to "nothing" and to "answer", the two being mutually excluding: where there is an answer, there is something, while nothing means no answer. The poem's actual response to an eternity of Penelopean waiting is clearer if we overlook the two middle verses (v. 10-11). Then, whether the heroine is "waiting forever … depends on the story".

In the meantime, the poet plays with sound repetitions. If we read aloud the verses and repeat the highlighted syllables focusing on the pronounced vowels, the main words that emerge are two: 'why' and 'way'. These two together sonically provide the synthesis of the poem, the reasons that lie *behind* the lady's waiting and lamenting, not whether she will do so in the first place. Our focus should be precisely on the different modalities by which these two Penelopean themes are re-interpreted by each author. These are the proposed focal points of every Penelopean revision, the traits that provide variations on her characteristic themes. At the same time, the 'why' and the 'way' are also the poet's suggested interpretation, asking us to delve jointly into the work's content *and* form, to indulge with it both by reading and by listening to it.

However, the reader and the weeping lady at the window are exposed to different sounds. At the Greek *kafeneion* of Holst-Warhaft's poem Penelope was listening to rebetika, while now from the house next door she can hear the group the Lights playing klezmer music (v. 4-5). About ten years before the publication of *Meadowlands*, Mark Slobin, writes one of the first articles that try to trace the evolution of klezmer music, a traditional Jewish genre from Eastern Europe introduced

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[490] *Cf.* Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays [1961]*, Digital (New York: Picador, 2013), 15: "For the contemporary zeal for the project of interpretation is often prompted not by piety toward the troublesome text (which may conceal an aggression), but by an open aggressiveness, an overt contempt for appearances. The old style of interpretation was insistent, but respectful; it erected another meaning on top of the literal one. The modern style of interpretation excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs 'behind' the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one".

into the United States together with the mass immigration of the early 20th century.[491] Notwithstanding the intrinsic difficulties of pinning down a genre that has undergone multiple changes, Slobin explains that originally (that is, when it was still blooming in eastern European territories) klezmer was "instrumental", "good-time" music, "most often associated with celebrations like weddings, and inextricably tied to dance".[492] Thus, the genre's continental transfusion marked its transition from folk to urban. This fact, together with the rapid influence of technology and the variety of connections with other ethnic musical traditions which were thriving in the States (like blues and jazz), had the result of changing some of the traditional instruments with which klezmer was played.[493]

One of the main instrument substitutions is confirmed in Glück's "Moonless Night", where in v. 5 the speaker recognizes that the "clarinet is in tune": the clarinet is the instrumental replacement of the "folk fiddle", "the quintessential image of the *klezmer*" in Eastern Europe.[494] Penelope not only immigrated to another continent; she is also engaging the multicultural environment of late 20th century American society and viewing firsthand the evolution of European traditions at their moment of contact with other cultures. That Glück chooses klezmer music as one of the soundtracks of her poetry does not come as a surprise. Both of her parents were Jewish descendants from Eastern Europe, the mother a Russian Jew, the father Hungarian Jewish from modern-day Romania. It is precisely there, in Bessarabia, that the musician and scholar Walter Zev Feldman, his own background from those latitudes of Romania, traces back the origins of klezmer music, distinguishing the genre from other types of Jewish music and demonstrating its particular connections with wedding rituals and festivities.[495]

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[491] Mark Slobin, 'Klezmer Music: An American Ethnic Genre', *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 16 (1984): 34-41. Nowadays there have been published various volumes on klezmer music, among which that of the same Slobin and of Walter Zev Feldman, world-leading scholar in Ottoman and Jewish Ashkenazic music: Mark Slobin, *Fiddler on the Move: Exploring the Klezmer World* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Walter Zev Feldman, *Klezmer: Music, History, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). As he narrates, Ven Feldman was actually the one who named the new urban genre 'klezmer music', when he was preparing a concert of Dave Tarras in New York in 1978: *Ivi*, p. xvi. Detailed information on Zev Feldman's old and current research projects can be found in: Walter Zev Feldman.
[492] Slobin, 'Klezmer Music', 35.
[493] Among other instrument replacements, there was that of the *tsimbl*. Slobin mentions the same Zev Feldman as "a key re-interpreter" of the 1970s, thanks to whom this instrument was reinstated: *Ivi*, p. 39.
[494] *Ivi*, 39.
[495] Feldman, *Klezmer: Music, History, and Memory*. On klezmer and wedding rituals and festivities, see chaps. 5 and 8.

Most fittingly, klezmer music returns in the last poem of the book, "Heart's Desire" as the soundtrack of an imaginary wedding.[496] The poem takes the form of a *quasi*-dialogue between the modern couple:

> *I want* to do two things:
> *I want* to order meat from Lobel's
> and *I want* to have a party. (W)[497]
>
> *You hate* parties. *You hate*
> any group bigger than four. (H)
>
> If I hate it
> I'll go upstairs. Also
> I'm only inviting people who can cook.
> Good cooks and all my old lovers.
> Maybe even your ex-girlfriends, except
> the exhibitionists. (W)
>
> If I were you,
> I'd start with the meat order. (H) (v. 1-13, my emphasis)

The woman, a new version of Clarissa Dalloway,[498] announces to the man a plan for a party. She has apparently already organized everything to the last detail, from the fancy food they will offer,[499] to those who will be invited. The husband is prompt in his ironic answer: 'why would you want to have a party when you hate crowds'? His wife's preference for seclusion is something on which he has already commented in "Ceremony",[500] the couple's first dialogue in *Meadowlands*:

> One thing *I've* always *hated*
> about you: *I hate* that you refuse
> to have people at the house. […] (v. 4-6, my emphasis)

While there the husband is concentrated on what *he* hates about her personality, in "Heart's Desire" he is surprised by her desire to plan a party, equal parts shocked and amused. The difference probably lies in the distance between the two poems, one at the beginning of the book, the other at the end. In "Ceremony" the couple still had the energy to argue, they felt the need to express what they could not stand in the other person's habits; now, in "Heart's Desire" they have reached the

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[496] Glück, 'Meadowlands', 2021, 359-360.
[497] The (W) and (H) are my additions for wife and husband.
[498] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway [1925]*, ed. Stella McNichol and Elaine Showalter, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2019).
[499] Lobel's is one of the most famous meat shops in New York: Lobels, NY.
[500] Glück, 'Meadowlands', 2021, 310.

end of the marriage, which is also the end of the book. In fact, looking past the ironic veneer, the husband's implied answer to the wife's imaginary scenario for a party could be rephrased as 'strange that all this is coming from you but do whatever you want'.

Needless to say, the fundamental differences between the couple persist. The man does not care so much about the other details: same old same old, he wants to see "the meat order" through, just as he pining for the "grilled chicken" in "Penelope's Song".[501] On her part, the wife is concentrated on flowers, again reminiscent of *Mrs. Dalloway*'s famous incipit ("Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself"), but also a returning element in Gluck's poetry,[502] and on people's feelings:

> *We'll* have buglights in the garden.
> When you look into people's faces
> you'*ll* see how happy they are. (W)
> […]
> It *will* be spring again; all
> the tulips *will* be opening. (W)
>
> The point isn't whether or not
> the guests are happy. (H)
>
> The point is whether or not
> they're dead. (H)
>
> Trust me: no one's
> going to be hurt again. (W)
>
> For one night, affection
> *will* triumph over passion. The passion
> *will all* be in the music. (W)
>
> If *you can* hear the music
> *you can* imagine the party.
> I have it *all* planned: first
> violent love, then
> sweetness. First *Norma*
> then maybe the Lights *will* play. (W) (v. 14-16 & 20-36, my emphasis)

Inside out, the world needs to be happy and blooming, and the suitable season is spring. No one, not even nature, will be able to ruin the woman's festivities. The husband's last sarcastic comment

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[501] *Ivi*, 307.
[502] Flowers are everywhere in Glück's poetry, but the book in which they get to be protagonists is *The Wild Iris*, 1992.

on the possibility that his wife's guests could be dead is emblematic of the frequent appearance of such guests in Glück's oeuvre, poetic conceits that often occasion laments for those that she has lost.[503]

But the wife is so determined, so driven by the "heart's desire", that she will not waste energy on rebuking the husband's black humor. After her emphatic half plea-half request to believe in her, the husband will not be granted the lyric floor again. The last three stanzas belong to the woman, he will just be there (or, at least, we suppose he is there), a passive listener. The woman's eyes and words are *all* projected into the future; her will (in both senses, as desire and future tense) carries such force that she can actually make the party happen in the mind of husband. In this technique she has had a good teacher in the Penelope of the "Quiet Evening", who impressed the memory of serenity on Odysseus. Still, Glück-persona does even more, since she is imprinting a memory from scratch without the physicality of the bodies and without any apt material, only by arranging words in lyric verses.

The last stanza of "Heart's Desire" can function as a summary to the entire book. The wife has planned everything for the husband: the party, the opera, the book. All he needs to do is listen carefully to the music and let his senses guide the mind to re-capture "love's old sweet song".[504] The core of the party, the marriage, and of *Meadowlands* as a whole, is music: "violent love, then / sweetness", passion of ἔρως in the beginning of a relationship, sweet ἀγάπη later. The oscillation of love is mirrored in the soundtrack of the party. The husband wanted the wedding of *Figaro* and *Tannhauser*, but the wife opts once more for Maria Callas and Bellini's *Norma*.[505] With a slight sign of hesitation, she reaches her last point: "then maybe the Lights will play" (v. 36). The lights may 'play' at the end of a performance, but as we saw earlier, the Lights play klezmer music, and bands versed in this genre were typically invited to play in Jewish American weddings to celebrate a felicitous communion.

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[503] Probably the most pertinent to this regard is *Ararat*, where she elaborates the grief for the father: Louise Glück, 'Ararat', in *Poems: 1962-2020*, by Louise Glück, Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2021), 201-242.

[504] There is no reference in Glück to this song of Molly, the association is mine. I leave here the link to Bing Crosby's rendering: Bing Crosby, "Love's Old Sweet Song".

[505] *Norma* was one of the operas that Callas most frequently performed in multiple venues. One of her renderings of "Casta Diva" from the first act of Norma can be found here: Norma, "Casta Diva" by Callas. 2023 marked the centenary of Callas' birth and thus multiple events commemorated her. The first museum dedicated to Maria Callas was inaugurated in the center of Athens (Maria Callas Museum), while two new movies were prepared: Maria Callas: *Letters and Memoirs* by Tom Volf and Yannis Dimolitsas, starring Monica Bellucci (a product that came out in 2023, after three years of theatre performances), and *Maria* by Pablo Larraín, starring Angelina Jolie (upcoming). Tom Volf also made the restauration of Callas' debut in the Opera of Paris in 1958 for the film *Callas – Paris, 1958* (2023).

Does the evocation of the Lights imply that the woman wants a new beginning for her marriage? Hardly. The rules of the game have been set already from the epigraph. *Meadowlands* is a performance, a siren's song, its eyes turned towards the past. If anything, what these poems can do is see again one's memories through the eyes and the words of the other, and in this process, re-create them from the beginning. The punctuation of the story's ending with a fictitious wedding note reverberates throughout the book in other analogies between the mythological family and the poet's modern one. Between the two climaxes of the *Odyssey*, the slaughter of the suitors (*Od.*22) and Penelope's recognition of the husband (*Od.*23), Odysseus orders his son to prepare everything as though they were having a wedding, so that the rumor of the killing of the suitors does not spread quickly and their relatives do not rush for vengeance.[506] With his instructions meticulously carried out, the people outside the precincts hear the music and the dances and mistake fact for fiction. Thus, Glück follows the Homeric paradigm even in her closing image, yet once again she subverts it, since now it is *her* persona, the woman, that is doing all the planning for the (wedding) party, and not the man, as in the *Odyssey*.

Glück initiates a venerable dialogue of domesticity with the Homeric legacy coursing through Greek and European literary traditions. By evoking Penelope, Odysseus, and Telemachus, her implied family becomes universal, and the Homeric one gets to experience a contemporary marriage on the East coast of the United States. Glück manages to keep the mythical analogy alive, but she also allows herself to go one step further, especially when she focuses on the contemporary couple. This partially explains a fundamental difference between the two. As we saw in the "Heart's Desire" and (only briefly) in "Ceremony", husband and wife engage each other through dialogue. Undoubtedly, it is not a perfect one: the wife is entirely focused on what she wants, the husband responds with dismissive sarcasm and the last part of the poem resembles a monologue of reverie. Still, despite its tensions, both parties attempt some kind of communication; we see the

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[506] *Od.*23.130-140: "τοιγὰρ ἐγὼν ἐρέω ὥς μοι δοκεῖ εἶναι ἄριστα. / πρῶτα μὲν ἂρ λούσασθε καὶ ἀμφιέσασθε χιτῶνας, / δμῳὰς δ᾽ ἐν μεγάροισιν ἀνώγετε εἵμαθ᾽ ἑλέσθαι: / αὐτὰρ θεῖος ἀοιδὸς ἔχων φόρμιγγα λίγειαν / ἡμῖν ἡγείσθω φιλοπαίγμονος ὀρχηθμοῖο, / ὥς κέν τις φαίη γάμον ἔμμεναι ἐκτὸς ἀκούων, / ἢ ἀν᾽ ὁδὸν στείχων, ἢ οἳ περιναιετάουσι: / μὴ πρόσθε κλέος εὐρὺ φόνου κατὰ ἄστυ γένηται / ἀνδρῶν μνηστήρων, πρίν γ᾽ ἡμέας ἐλθέμεν ἔξω / ἀγρὸν ἐς ἡμέτερον πολυδένδρεον: ἔνθα δ᾽ ἔπειτα / φρασσόμεθ᾽ ὅττι κε κέρδος Ὀλύμπιος ἐγγυαλίξῃ" ("So I will tell you the way of it, how it seems best to me. First, all go and wash, and put your tunics upon you, / and tell the women in the palace to choose out their clothing. / Then let the inspired singer take his clear-sounding lyre, / and give us the lead for festive dance, so that anyone / who is outside, some one of the neighbors, or a person going along the street, who hears us, will / think we are having a wedding. / Let no rumor go abroad in the town that the suitors / have been murdered, until such time as we can make our way / out to our estate with its many trees, and once there / see what profitable plan the Olympian shows us").

verses of both, side by side, depicted next to each other on the same page. This is a significant step forward compared to the ancient couple who, in yet another rewriting, sees the opportunity for dialogue fly away.

The image of a dialogue literally taking off is one that Glück's Penelope actually experiences, not with Odysseus – with him there is just some tender touching of hands – but with one of her rivals, Circe.[507] As a true architect in the construction of her book, Glück has places "Circe's Grief" and "Penelope's Stubbornness" next to each other.[508] In the first, Circe pays a visit to Penelope and then refers this visit to Odysseus, which is the narration that arrives to us:

> In the end, I made myself
> known to your wife as
> a god would, *in* her own house, *in*
> Ithaca, a voice
> without a body: she
> paused in *her* weaving, *her* head turning
> first to the right, then left
> though it was hopeless of course
> to trace that sound to any
> objective answer: I doubt
> she will return to her loom
> with what she knows now. When
> you see her again, tell her
> this is how a god says goodbye:
> if *I am* in *her* head forever
> *I am* in *your* life forever.

The poem starts with a concluding phrase because it is the last of the three poems that construct the 'Circean series'. In the previous two, "Circe's Power" and "Circe's Torment",[509] the goddess, always through direct speech to Odysseus, narrates her version of the evolution of their affair. She still has not come to terms with the fact that the man is so in love with his wife, and she has no interest in hiding her bitterness.[510] The desire to control the man's feelings is such that haunting him is not enough; to make sure that the marriage will never go back to how it was before Odysseus met her, she has to pass through the wife.

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[507] This is a tendency of the Penelopean rewritings, whereby Circe is preferred as the true rival of Penelope rather Calypso, despite the fact that in the *Odyssey* the hero stays on Circe's island (Aia) one year, while in Calypso's (Ogygia) seven.
[508] Glück, 'Meadowlands', 2021, 345-346. I cite the entire "Circe's Grief". My emphasis.
[509] *Ivi*, 338, 344.
[510] In "Circe's Torment", v. 17-18, she claims: "I refuse you / such feelings for your wife". *Ivi*, 344.

Where Odysseus closes the door, Penelope opens the window. Circe's manifestation in the human house is presented as an intrusion, with the repetition of "in", as another type of penetration, to which the woman has not given her consent. Even though Circe uses "god" instead of "goddess", her penetration is not male: she manifests herself not through a physical body, but with an unearthly voice which the human Penelope is enveloped by. A diagonal scheme of v. 4-5 manifests how Penelope *is* Ithaca, her body is the island, while Circe is just "a voice / without a body". The divinity's gaze follows Penelope's corporeality, as she moves her head trying to identify the source of the invisible voice. The woman is depicted in a scene of striking humanity: she can hear the divine voice, without seeing where it comes from. Like a god, Circe can choose the human sense with which to approach Penelope, but the mortal woman does not have the means to capture divinity in all of its essence. Trapped in the subjectivity of a human body, for her there will be no "objective answer".

And it does not stop there: Circe also mocks Penelope's philosophical skepticism, a trait characteristic of the heroine already from the *Odyssey*.[511] She appropriates it, first by stating herself "I doubt" and then by unveiling to the woman the specific (and probably, the only) type of information that can pull her out of uncertainty: she reveals Odysseus' infidelity. According to Circe, with this knowledge, Penelope will no longer have any reason to carry on with the endless conceit of the shroud. As Michelle Zerba has shown, Homeric Penelope's raveling and unraveling is intrinsically connected to her "cognitive state of *ou mallon*, poised between mutually exclusive views: no more is my husband dead than alive, no more am I a widow than not, no more shall I remarry than remain faithful and single".[512] Along with the certain knowledge that Odysseus *is* alive, Glück's Circe has given Penelope a new (and truer) reason to grieve, that is, the end of her marriage as she remembered it.

Yet, the last word of this, let us call it, conversation belongs to Penelope. The reader of "Penelope's Stubbornness" again finds the woman in a familiar position:

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[511] *Cf.* Michelle Zerba, 'What Penelope Knew: Doubt and Scepticism in the *Odyssey*', *The Classical Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (2009): 295-316. Zerba has also written an important volume, analyzing the concepts of doubt and skepticism from antiquity to the renaissance: Michelle Zerba, *Doubt and Skepticism in Antiquity and the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Her latest volume is fully insertable in the field of Reception Studies: Michelle Zerba, *Modern Odysseys: Cavafy, Woolf, Césaire, and a Poetics of Indirection*, Classical Memories/Modern Identities (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2021). I believe that the way in which Zerba and Jansen treat reception studies in their works is similar and is the next big trend of the field: namely, to search for classical influences in the absence of it, in implicitness, and indirection.

[512] *Ivi*, 305.

A bird comes to the window. It's a mistake
to think of them
as birds, they are so often
messengers. That is why, once they
plummet to the *sill*, they *sit*
so perfectly *still*, to mock
patience, lifting their heads to *sing*
poor lady, *poor lady*, their three-note
warning, later flying
like a dark cloud from the sill to the olive grove.
But who would send such a weightless being
to judge *my* life? *My* thoughts are deep
and *my* memory long; why would I envy such freedom
when I have humanity? Those
with the smallest hearts have
the greatest freedom.[513]

For the Homeric reader, when Penelope talks about birds, the first thing that comes to mind is her narration of the dream of the eagle and geese in the *homilia* with the beggar of *Odyssey* 19.[514] There, Penelope was given the interpretation of the dream by the dream itself and still, she doubted it, while in Glück's poem she does not seem to need all such information to reach her conclusions. Ironically, the reader of *Meadowlands* knows pretty well that the bird is Circe,[515] while Penelope probably ignores her existence. Nonetheless, she immediately understands that the bird has arrived with a 'message in a bottle'.[516] In the same way that Circe followed Penelope's head while she was searching for the origin of the voice in "Circe's Grief", Penelope watches the movements of the bird, its arrival, its harmonic sounds ("sill", "sit", "still", "sing").

For all we know, Circe could well be singing "Poor Lady (Midnight Baby)", a 1976 song by the Smokie:

Oh, poor lady, midnight baby,
no one wants your love at all,
oh, poor lady, midnight baby,
now you're heading for a fall,

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[513] Glück, 'Meadowlands', 2021, 346. I cite the entire poem. My emphasis, apart from "*poor lady*, *poor lady*", which is already put in italics by Glück.

[514] Penelope narrates her dream in *Od*.19.535-553, and Odysseus brief response is found in *Od*.19.555-559, and it is basically a confirmation of Penelope's own interpretation that is embedded in the dream.

[515] I say reader of the book and not of the poem because it is the structure of the book and the positioning of these poems in sequence that renders explicit their connection. Someone who reads "Penelope's Stubbornness" separately, for example in a blog or in an article, without other information on the specific position of the poem in *Meadowlands*, could hardly make the connection and interpret the bird as Circe.

[516] Cite Mandelstam, Celan.

and you really think you're something,
you know all the things to do
but poor lady, just a baby,
there's a hundred more like you.[517]

Penelope usually is a "midnight baby", a person who is more active late at night than during the day; she really knows all the things she does, as she is περίφρων; from Circe's point of view, there really exist "a hundred more like" her, since she is a mortal woman, and one mortal woman equals another. But whatever Circe's song is, what is certain is it irks Penelope so much that she does not notice the bird's ominous flight. Circe's 'dark cloud' has sat precisely over the hearth of her marriage, the couple's famous bed and σῆμα of recognition. Meanwhile, Penelope is too concentrated on herself and on her possessive pronouns: "my" is repeated three times in one verse and a half. Against the "weightless", unearthly bird, the woman chooses her corporality, over the freedom of eternity she chooses human memory.

Two elements betray Penelope's utter "stubbornness" in this rewriting. The first is her choice to cling onto her memory, something that is repeated a few years after *Meadowlands*, in Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*, where the heroine states that she will "never drink the Waters of Forgetfulness".[518] Glück comes back to the importance of memory in "Nostos".[519] Despite its Homeric title, the verses seem to come out of Glück-persona rather than Penelope. The woman is again "at the window" (v. 6), looking outside in the garden, remembering that once "[t]here was an apple tree in the yard" (v. 1). Reminiscent of the biblical tree of knowledge, the apple tree is followed by a passage of liturgical precision on modernity's turn away from godly transcendence and towards transient nature: "[s]ubstitution / of the immutable / for the shifting, the evolving" (v. 12-14), words that perfectly reflect T. S. Eliot's universalist influence on Glück.[520] The *nostos*

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[517] The association is mine. "Oh, poor lady" is indeed played on three notes. The song was published in the album *Midnight Café* in 1976 and you can listen to it here: "Oh, poor lady".
[518] Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, 106.
[519] Glück, 'Meadowlands', 2021, 342.
[520] The verses are better commented by this passage of hers: "The impulse of our century has been to substitute earth for god as an object of reverence. This seems an implicit rejection of the eternal. But the religious mind, with its hunger for meaning and disposition to awe, its craving for the path, the continuum, the unbroken line, for what is final, immutable, cannot sustain itself on matter and natural process. It feels misled by matter; as for the anecdotes of natural process, these it transforms to myth": in Louise Glück, *Proofs & Theories: Essays on Poetry* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1994), 23.

voyage, a never-ending search for the immutable Ithaca (the one which will never seem poor),[521] can only have a retrospective direction, moving towards the beginning of our lives:

> Fields. Smell of the tall grass, new cut.
> As one expects of a lyric poet.
> We look at the world once, in childhood.
> The rest is memory. (v. 21-24)

Poetry to remember and memory to poeticize; the two are intrinsically connected. For Glück the road to Ithaca is paved with lyric verses, the only tool she has at her disposal to manage her grief for the lost love. Thanks to poetry, hope is still there, it flies around *Meadowlands*, in the vest of a butterfly. In "The Butterfly", the husband pretends to see a butterfly and asks the wife to make a wish.[522] Later on, in "The Wish", he reveals his lie and admits that he thinks she had wished they would come back together. By now, the reader could have probably guessed the wife's answer:

> I wished for what I always wish for.
> I wished for another poem. (v. 9-10)

In *Meadowlands*, the act of poetry writing represents a refuge for the woman, both the ancient and the modern one; a spacetime for the elaboration of her failed marriage. Disruption shades into reconstruction, and in this process the self cannot act in extreme solitude. It is thus that, in Glück's work, Penelope gets integrated in the larger architecture of a book-length elaboration, which, within the ostensibly monologic genre of the lyric, manages to present a rich and constructive polyphony.

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[521] I'm referring to Cavafy's "Ithaca": "κι αν πτωχική τη βρεις, η Ιθάκη δε σε γέλασε" ("and if you find her poor, Ithaca didn't deceive you" v. 33).
[522] Glück, 'Meadowlands', 2021, 343, 357.

5. Project "Barbielope" in Louise Glück's Meadowlands*, by Marta Wanicka and Valerio Giuzio*

2.4. "το τραγούδι της πισίνας με σώζει": contemporary *Ομηρικά* by Phoebe Giannisi (Lament for the 'I+')

Leaving Leaving the American meadows for a *nostos* within the Greek seas, we find the last Penelope of this *corpus*, one immersed in lyric multivocality, that of Phoebe Giannisi's in *Ομηρικά* (*Homerica*). Published in 2007, *Homerica* is Giannisi's fourth book of lyric poetry and her first revision of the Homeric poems, but certainly not her first engagement with classics.[523] After obtaining her first degree in architecture, Giannisi moves to France to attend a master's in philosophy at Sorbonne and later a PhD in classics at Lyon.[524] It is during her studies for the doctorate degree, that she starts exploring the intersections between "chants et cheminements (songs and paths)" in ancient Greece, focusing, *inter alia*, on notions that unite the two spheres, such as "οἶμος (way, path, strip of land or strain of a song)" and "οἴμη (song)".[525]

Giannisi's passion for the nexus between the two seemingly distant domains of architecture and literature is carried on well beyond the years of her studies, finding its culmination in the construction of *Homerica*. The texts of the book are accompanied by a cd, on which the poet has included readings of these poems delivered during a two-day tour around the mountains of Pelion, in Thessaly.[526] Reprising the performative aspect of the lyric genre in antiquity, the author invites the reader to follow her on her journey and attend a performance, becoming once again an *audience* to lyric poetry. At the same time, by moving through the natural environment of Pelion, keeping track of the precise position and time of each recording, she captures a *hapax* of her performance, seeing that the imbrication of her voice with the specific sounds of nature in that moment, at that

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[523] Γιαννίση, *Ομηρικά*. The book was translated into English by Brian Sneeden: Phoebe Giannisi, *Homerica*, trans. Brian Sneeden (Storrs, CT: World Poetry Books, 2017). All of the English translations cited in this thesis are Sneeden's. He later translated Giannisi's following book: Φοίβη Γιαννίση, *Τέττιξ* (Αθήνα: Γαβριηλίδης, 2012); Phoebe Giannisi, *Cicada*, trans. Brian Sneeden (New York, NY: New Directions Publishing, 2022). Some of the poems of *Homerica* were previously included in the Penguin anthology of modern Greek poetry, *Austerity Measures*, in a translation by the professor of modern Greek literature at Columbia University, Karen Van Dyck: Karen Van Dyck, *Austerity Measures* (London: Penguin, 2016).

[524] An extensive biographical note can be found on Giannisi's university page: Phoebe Giannisi's academic page. Traces of almost all of her publications, lectures and performances can be found on her site: Phoebe Giannisi.

[525] *Cf.* Phœbe Giannisi, 'Chant et cheminement en Grèce archaique' (PhD Thesis, Lyon 2, 1994). A decade later her thesis turned into a book: Phoebe Giannisi, *Récits des voies : Chant et cheminement en Grèce archaïque* (Grenoble: Editions Jérôme Millon, 2006). As André Motte notes, the book was supposed to be introduced by Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Giannisi's dear professor, but he died just before the publication: André Motte, 'Giannisi Phoebé, Récits des voies. Chant et cheminement en Grèce archaïque', *Kernos. Revue internationale et pluridisciplinaire de religion grecque antique*, no. 20 (2007): 406-407. The poem "(Ούτις ΙΙ)" ("Nobody II") of *Homerica* is dedicated to Vidal-Naquet's memory: Γιαννίση, *Ομηρικά*, 75-77.

[526] See the image of the map in the annex of this thesis.

unique spot, etc. can never be identically reproduced.[527] But in which ways do Homer's figures repopulate the mountains of the Centaurs, and what is Penelope's place in all this?

Homerica works as a sequence of forty-three poems, some of which are only one page long, others reaching a maximum length of two, or two and a half pages. The title, a neutral plural of the adjective 'ομηρικός, -ή, -ό (Homeric)', anticipates the book's openness, as the implied nouns it elicits may range among the most obvious 'ποιήματα (poems)', to the more general 'λόγια (words or discourses)'. The accompanying cd might also be seen as preparing the reader for Homeric 'αναγνώσματα (readings)' or – even more performative – 'τραγούδια (songs)'. If we frame the book as a product of mythical revisionism, then the missing noun could also be 'θέματα (themes)', or 'αποσπάσματα (fragments, extracts)'. The noun of the title is not the only omitted element: punctuation is conspicuous through its absence. Throughout the entire book there appear no commas, no semicolons, no firm periods, no uppercase; occasionally some dashes appear to present mini hypothetical dialogues; there are (very) few question marks.

There is, however, an omnipresent punctuation sign that cannot escape the reader's eye: the titles of all the poems of *Homerica* are enclosed in parentheses. For the reader of modern Greek poetry, the use of this sign may very well bring to mind Giannis Ritsos, who not only named one of his early groups of poems *Παρενθέσεις* (*Parentheses*),[528] but who also frequently deployed these markers in his own poems that revisit Homeric scenes, stuffing their insides with sharp and usually ironic meta-commentaries.[529] But Ritsos uses the parenthesis *within* the text of the poems, not in their title as Giannisi does.

I propose two possible interpretations for Giannisi's use of the punctuation remark. The first is fitting with the book's nature as a work of classical reception: *Homerica* is a lyric response to a canonical epic that reproposes some characters and features of the ancient poem, without at any

[527] Her registrations become ever more important after the summer of 2023, when Pelion, and Thessaly in general, got devastated by extreme weather phenomena. A part of the mountain got burnt, and another got destroyed by unprecedented floods. *Cf.* Clea Skopeliti, '"The Earth Is Sick": Storm Daniel Has Passed, but Greeks Fear Its Deathly Legacy', *The Guardian*, September 2023, sec. World news.

[528] Ritsos named two volumes *Parentheses*. The poems of the first *Parentheses* were written between 1946-147, during the Greek civil war that followed WWII, and published in 1961: Γιάννης Ρίτσος, *Ποιήματα (1941-1958)*, vol. Β (Αθήνα: Κέδρος, 1961). The poems of the second were written between 1950-1961. Both were included in Edmund Keeley's first volume of his translations of Ritsos' poetry: Yannis Ritsos, *Ritsos in Parentheses*, trans. Edmund Keeley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), and later it was integrated in the larger volume always by the same translator: Ritsos, *Repetitions, Testimonies, Parentheses*.

[529] For more on the use of the parenthesis within the poetic text, see the subchapter on Gardeazabal in this thesis.

point obscuring the contemporary vest that enriches them.[530] Read in this way, the parenthesis assumes precisely this role of the vest, a delicate reminder that the poems exist at a crossroad of time (antiquity and contemporaneity), and genres (epic and lyric) – poles that mutually subvert each other and whose vexed meeting place is the printed paper. The second explanation of the parenthesis may suggest another crossroad, one dear to Giannisi and to other contemporary poets that she mostly admires, such as Anne Carson and Barbara Köhler, and that is the intermediate status of the written poems: after their initial conception in the mind of the artist and before they assume their 'final' form during per*form*ance.[531] These two readings of Giannisi's parenthesis can, of course, coexist and by no means exhaust the formal aspects of the content they enclose.

As one might expect from a Homeric rewriting, the book opens with a "(Προοίμιο), Proem".[532] The first noun of the poem, "πέτρα (pebble)", may not be as crucial for the book as μῆνις is for the *Iliad* and ἀνήρ for the *Odyssey*, but the first thirteen verses immerse the reader in the setting of the poem, Pelion's natural ecology:

> μία πέτρα στον βυθό άσπρη
> σειρές από γαλάζια χαλίκια το μούτρο
> πάνω τους μες στο νερό
> η αναπήδηση της βάρκας στα κύματα
> πάνω στα κύματα ταχύτητα του αέρα η ώθηση
> πετάμε
> ένας μοναχικός *γλάρος* στην ξέρα

[530] For one of her recent papers, Georgina Paul chose the term 'refigurings' to talk about contemporary revisionist lyric works of Alice Oswald and Barbara Köhler: Georgina Paul, 'From Epic to Lyric: Alice Oswald's and Barbara Köhler's Refigurings of Homeric Epic', in *Epic Performances from the Middle Ages into the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Fiona Macintosh et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 133-148. Both Oswald's Memorial and Köhler's *Niemands Frau* (*Nobody's Wife*) are accompanied by a cd with readings of the poems: Alice Oswald, *Memorial: A Version of Homer's Iliad* (New York, USA: Norton, 2013); Barbara Köhler, *Niemands Frau: Gesänge zur Odyssee* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlange, 2007). Paul, who is the English translator of Köhler's oeuvre, has edited a rich volume on *Niemands Frau*: Georgina Paul, ed., *An Odyssey for Our Time: Barbara Köhler's* Niemands Frau, German Monitor 78 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013). Giannisi has repeatedly cited Köhler as a poet whom she very much admires.

[531] *Cf.* Edward González's reading of Uruguayan poet and literary critic Luis Bravo concept of the "parenthesis encapsulates the textual rendition of that firs voice, where what is *in your head* becomes what is *on the page* and what was accessible only to us becomes readable to us and others, where what was invisible and internal becomes graphic and available for scrutiny": in Edward González, 'The Voice That Calls, The Voice That Answers (and The Parenthesis in Between)', *English Studies in Latin America* 24 (January 2023): 3. For Luis Bravo's analysis, see Luis Bravo, 'La "Puesta En Voz" de La Poesía, Antiguo Arte Multimedia', *Revista [Sic]*, no. 1 (2011): 6-22. A wide range of Bravo's poems have been translated into English and can be found in Luis Bravo, *Voice & Shadow: New and Selected Poems*, trans. Jesse Lee Kercheval and Catherine Jagoe (New Orleans: Diálogos, 2020).

[532] Γιαννίση, *Ομηρικά*, 9-10. Only for the titles of these poems, I invert my habit of using the parenthesis to provide the English translation of the original term, to respect and reproduce Giannisi's parenthesis in the titles of the poems. On the Homeric proems, see *inter alia* Samuel E. Bassett, 'The Proems of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*', *The American Journal of Philology* 44, no. 4 (1923): 339-348; James Redfield, 'The Proem of the *Iliad*: Homer's Art', *Classical Philology* 74, no. 2 (1979): 95-110; Pietro Pucci, 'The Proem of the *Odyssey*', *Arethusa* 15, no. 1/2 (1982): 39-62.

συνέλευση *γλάρ*ων οι *γλάρ*οι κρώζουν ασταμάτητα
κατά περιόδους
σιωπούν
όπως τα τζιτζίκια
ο ασταμάτητος βόμβος τους απότομα παύει την ώρα
της μεγαλύτερης αιθρίας της ζέστης του μεσημεριού

a stone on the seafloor white
rows of blue pebbles the face
above them in the water
the bobbing of the boat on the waves
the speed over the waves thrust of wind
we are flying
a lone sea*gull* on a reef
a congregation of sea*gulls*
endlessly cawing will
from time to time
grow silent
like cicadas
whose incessant drone cuts off
at the moment of calm in midday heat (v. 1-13, my emphasis)

The verses resemble a slow and spontaneous description of a painting, or better of a video. The syntax is loose: nouns separated from their adjectives ("μία πέτρα […] άσπρη", v. 1); grammatical subjects deferred to the end of the verse ("η ώθηση", v. 5). The portrait of nature gradually falls into place: one color at a time, first white (v. 1), then light blue (v. 2); one element at a time, first earth ("πέτρα", "βυθός", "χαλίκια", v. 1-2), then water ("νερό", "κύματα", v. 3-5), and finally, with a little "push" ("ώθηση", v. 5), we are up in the air ("πετάμε", "we fly", v. 6). The speaker's eyes move from the bottom ("the seabed") up to the air, where "we fly", moving in the opposite direction of the reader's gaze as she scrolls down verse by verse. Somewhere in the middle there is a boat, an artefact seemingly marginal to the scenery. The fly is evoked through a push ("ώθηση") to the next verse, like an airplane about to depart, and once up in the air 'we' are alone in the verse, though not as self-contained subjects. In these first verses human participation is implied in the mention of the boat, but it is not central to the lifeworld. The first living element to appear is a seagull staring out in loneliness ("ένας μοναχικός", v. 7) but immediately finding its crowd – and where there is a crowd, there is noise ("κρώζουν", v. 8). One sound is succeeded by another, after the seagulls and their repeated [γλα] we hear "the cicadas" ("τα τζιτζίκια", v. 11), mediated by a strategic pause in the middle: "σιωπούν" ("silence", v. 10).

With this last addition we are transferred to the middle of a summer day. With the sun at its peak, the cicadas provide the soundtrack for an afternoon slumber. We are simultaneously in the *locus amoenus* of Giannisi's contemporary Pelion and in the immediate vicinity, some kilometers south, of Hesiod's Helicon, where "ἠχέτα τέττιξ / δενδρέῳ ἐφεζόμενος λιγυρὴν καταχεύετ᾽ ἀοιδὴν / πυκνὸν ὑπὸ πτερύγων θέρεος καματώδεος ὥρῃ" ("the chirping cicada, sitting in a tree, incessantly pours out its clear-sounding song from under its wings in the season of toilsome summer").[533] Both in "(Proem)" and in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the cicadas' song has the power to inflict a pause on time, and to attract all concentration on itself, displacing the sphere of human activity

> με το αυτοκίνητο ο βόμβος των τζιτζικιών πιο συχνός
> πιο συνεχής
> πιο γρήγορος
> τα ξέχασες όλα
> δεν μπορείς να θυμηθείς
> το *πώς*
> αρχίζεις να ξεχνάς το *τι*
> *Ας ήτανε το πώς μια επανάληψη του τι*
>
> when from inside a car the drone repeats
> faster
> and you have forgotten everything
> you cannot remember
> the *how*
> and now you're forgetting the *what*
> *If only how was the recurrence of what* (v. 14-21)

When the car disrupts the idyllic scenery, its mechanical noise mingles with that of the cicadas.[534] Then, as if mimicking cars revving up for a race, the rhythm of the verses accelerates, punctuated by a thrumming repetition of comparatives ("πιο συχνός", "πιο συνεχής", "πιο γρήγορος", v. 14-16). Now there is no longer time for the placid observance of nature: after three long verses (v. 12-14), the lines narrow substantially, as if they were being reshaped by the rising sound. Eventually, the void: "you forgot everything" (v. 17). The modern self, here unable to process society's frantic rhythm of consciousness as a consequence of the increasingly chaotic relationship between nature and technology, draws a complete blank. This is when the poetic subject turns to the second person

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[533] Hesiod, *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*, trans. Glenn W. Most, Loeb Classical Library 57 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 134-135, v. 582-584.

[534] The entrance of the "machine in the garden" is something we also saw in Glück's "Meadowlands 3" in the previous subchapter. A seminal study on the entrance of technology in lyric poetry was that of Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America [1964]*.

singular in order to initiate a meditation on forgetfulness, trying to understand if there is a part of memory that can still be saved. In this process, there is a clear division between the "πώς" ("how") and the "τι" ("what"). The first is already forgotten, while the second is just starting to fall into oblivion. Thus, the "what" can be said to be closer to the core of the self, protected in the deepest recesses of memory, while the "how" is the first layer to be lost. With the wishful thought in italics of v. 21, the speaker explains that, contrary to the somewhat stable "what", an identical "how" is almost irretrievable: it perpetually changes, since each narration of the self requires a new trip in the dark depths of amnesia, and each *anabasis* brings back something different.

The connection between the song of cicadas and oblivion appears already in Plato's *Phaedrus*, where Socrates and Phaedrus, after the palinode of the first and their joint prayer to god Eros,[535] focus on the rhetoric of good and bad writing. As the two converse, Socrates, probably to keep Phaedrus alert and participative, notices "the cicadas, singing above [their] heads in the stifling heat" and warns him that it is best if the singing creatures perceive them as absorbed in conversation and ignoring their song, so that they may improve their candidacy for the cicadas' divine gift.[536] Phaedrus is intrigued, as he is not aware of the story. Thus, Socrates narrates:

> It's said that these cicadas were once humans before the Muses were born, but after the Muses were born and song came on the scene, some of those who were living at the time were actually so astounded with pleasure that *while singing they neglected their food and drink and died without realizing it*. From then afterward the race of cicadas was born, having accepted this gift from the Muses: that after their birth they have no need for sustenance, but sing immediately, without food and drink, until they die, and after this they go and inform the Muses which of those down here honors which of them. (259b-c)[537]

In Socrates' myth of metamorphosis, the "Precicadic men" get so absorbed by the Muses' song that they forget their basic human needs for food and drink and are thus led to death.[538] The death is not an actual one but a metempsychosis, a transformation from human to animal. In her reading

[535] On the palinode, see Daniel S. Werner, *Myth and Philosophy in Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), chaps 3-5.

[536] For a detailed analysis of the cicadas and their multiple symbolical meanings, see Daniel S. Werner, 'The Cicadas', in *Myth and Philosophy in Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 133-152.The narration of this myth is traditionally considered as original of Plato's: *cf*. David A. White, *Rhetoric and Reality in Plato's 'Phaedrus'* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), 183. For the connection of the cicadas to the muses, see Andrea Capra, *Plato's Four Muses: The Phaedrus and the Poetics of Philosophy*, Hellenic Studies 67 (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2015).

[537] Plato, *Lysis. Symposium. Phaedrus*, trans. Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, Plato, III [3] (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2022), 456-457. My emphasis.

[538] I borrow the term "Precicadic" from Marko Vitas, who recently published a paper showing the striking similarities between Hesiod's Golden Age generation and the Precicadic men of *Phaedrus*: Marko Vitas, 'Hesiodic Influence on Plato's Myth of the Cicadas', *PLATO JOURNAL* 24 (2023): 21-28.

of the tale, the contemporary classicist and poet Anne Carson reads the passage through the lens of erotic desire, which, of course, is a core theme of the entire *Phaedrus*.[539] For the Canadian author, the cicadas follow their musical passion, they "simply enter the 'now' of their desire and stay there. Abstracted from the processes of life, *oblivious to time*, they sustain the present indicative of pleasure […]".[540] The cicadas' entire life circles around their desire to sing, they enter the spacetime of the song and nothing exists outside of it. As they get absorbed by the song, they forget everything about real historical time. The time of the song is a dimension of its own, an eternal present, which of course also resonates with the main tense of lyric poetry.[541]

But what do the Platonic cicadas mean for Giannisi's poetic subject? The entrance to the book's song with the "(Proem)" marks also the entrance of the poetic subject to lyrical present time, from the acknowledgment of a past event ("τα ξέχασες όλα", "you forgot everything") to the present task of memory's exercise, destined to fail ("δεν μπορείς να θυμηθείς […] αρχίζεις να ξεχνάς", "you cannot remember […] you are starting to forget"). In an act of compassion, the speaker consoles the self:

> η λήθη των στιγμών για σένα είναι φάρμακο
> ενάντια
> στου αμετάκλητου τη λύπη
>
> forgetting the moment is for you a medicine
> against
> the finality of sorrow (v. 22-24)

In the statement that "λήθη" ("oblivion") can function as a φάρμακο ("medicine"), Giannisi plays with the *media vox* of the ancient term, usually translated as 'healing or noxious drug'.[542] Platonic reminiscences abound, as we are transferred to another myth narrated in *Phaedrus* (274e-275b). The passage treats the invention of writing, when the Egyptian divinity Theuth presents himself to the king Thamus, full of joy, for he has found "a drug to enhance memory and wisdom".[543] Thamus'

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[539] 'Cicadas', in *Eros the Bittersweet: An Essay*, by Anne Carson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 138-140.
[540] 'Cicadas', 139.
[541] *Cf.* Culler, 'The Lyric Present'.
[542] For the definition in LSJ, see: LSJ φάρμακο.
[543] Plato, *Lysis. Symposium. Phaedrus*, 514–515. My emphasis. Ian Rutherford has proposed a possible link between this passage of Plato and the myth of Palamedes, as reported in Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes* and in a fragment 578 of Euripides' lost tragedy, entitled *Palamedes*: Ian Rutherford, 'Μνήμης... Φάρμακον at Plato *Phaedrus* 274e-275a: An Imitation of Euripides Fr. 578?', *Hermes* 118, no. 3 (1990): 377-379.

reaction is not as enthusiastic as Theuth had probably expected. Other than participating in the inventor's joy, the king scolds him,

> 'For this invention will bring about *forgetfulness* in the souls of its learners *from the lack of practice in use of their memory*, inasmuch as through their reliance on writing they are reminded of things as a result of alien impressions which are from outside, and not from within, themselves by themselves. You have found *a drug not for memory but for reminding*. You are giving your students a semblance of wisdom, not the real thing'[544]

King Thamus calls the newly invented medium of writing an "ἀμελετησία", that is "a lack of practice", a non-studying. As such, he does not consider writing an exercise of memory, but rather a tool that will render people's minds lazier, leading them to illude themselves into thinking they are accessing more than a merely superficial levels of past knowledge. For Thamus, writing is not a journey into the depths of the self, towards the γνῶθι σεαυτόν; rather, its 'reminders' are external phenomena, "alien impressions" that distance us irretrievably from the substance of real memory.[545]

In part, Giannisi's speaker experiences the pitfall suggested by the Egyptian king. Trafficking in sounds and written verses, the subject has stumbled upon the void of oblivion: long-lost is an "αμετάκλητον", "irrevocable" *how* of the self's previous narrations. Since this recognition causes profound "λύπη" ("sadness"), a further forgetfulness of the "στιγμές" ("moments"), can function both as a remedy, soothing the pain provoked by the self's irrevocable losse, and as a potential danger that can lead to complete erasure of the self, say of the kind Odysseus risks on the island of Calypso.[546] But the protagonist of the proem reemerges from oblivion and he does so in a very Odyssean way, that is, through song:

> ακούς του εαυτού σου τον τραγουδιστή

[544] Plato, *Lysis. Symposium. Phaedrus*, 514-515. My emphasis.

[545] Jacques Derrida wrote a much-debated article on the use of the word 'φάρμακον' in Plato. With his deconstructive reading of this particular passage, he showed how Plato plays with the ambiguity of the term while he is also being played by the term itself: in Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy*', in *Tragedy*, ed. John Drakakis and Naomi Conn Liebler (London: Routledge, 1998). For the original French version, see Jacques Derrida, 'La Pharmacie de Platon', *Tel Quel* 32-33 (1968). In her reading of Derrida and Plato, Gabrièle Wersinger Taylor sees φάρμακον as a mirror for the figure of ἔρως, providing "a middle for the elaboration of principles", an "intermediate" state between "contrary couples": in Gabrièle Wersinger Taylor, 'Jeux d'Érôs dans « La Pharmacie de Platon » de Jacques Derrida : Contribution à la question de l'érotique comme intermédiaire', in *Du jeu dans la théorie de la lecture*, ed. Christine Chollier, Anne-Élisabeth Halpern, and Alain Trouvé, Approches interdisciplinaires de la lecture (Reims: Éditions et Presses universitaires de Reims, 2020), 37-70.

[546] For Calypso's power to hide (note the etymology of her name: 'καλύπτω', 'to conceal') the hero in her "no-where land", making him live "a life between parentheses" and fall into oblivion among the humans, see Jean-Pierre Vernant, 'Feminine Figures of Death in Greece', trans. Anne Doueihi, *Diacritics* 16, no. 2 (1986): 61-64. Vernant notes that in the *Odyssey* the two figures that hold this double power of Eros and Thanatos and who could potentially eliminate the hero's memory are the Sirens and Calypso.

λέξεις του Κανενός
δαήμονος ανδρός περιπλανήσεις
αέρα θάλασσα λάθη ανεπίστρεπτα δώρα
να αριθμεί
ξέρεις καλά ότι η σειρά των *τι* είναι εαυτός
αλλά άραγε να έμαθες ότι η σειρά των *πώς*
είναι ο άνεμος;

an unchartered place where your head is covered
you hear the singer of yourself
words of Nobody
journeyman wonderings
air sea mistakes irreversible gifts
counting
you know well that the self is a series of events
but have you learned yet that series of *hows*
is the wind? (v. 24-32)

In these concluding verses of "(Proem)", the reader watches the emergence of the poetic subject through song. First comes the listening ("ακούς"),[547] and then the transformation of the self from audience to singer ("τραγουδιστή"). And the song is not just any song: it is autobiographical ("του εαυτού σου τον τραγουδιστή"). Eclipsing the poem's initially impersonal atmosphere where the human self is forgotten amid the sounds of nature and encroaching modernity, it now sets out to reconstruct itself. The main character of the poem is finally revealed, and he is no other than the most famous non-person of Greek literature, a Nobody with an uppercase N ("Κανενός"): Odysseus. Now it is not the song of the cicadas, or the one of the Homeric Sirens or Calypso, but the human song, first Demodocus' and then his own, that restores Odysseus to his identity after his period of concealment.[548] Thus it is from Homer's *Apologoi* that the poet picks up the thread of narration, somehow creating an *in medias res* of the *in medias res* when considering that Odysseus' narrations to the Phaeacians takes place almost in the middle of the poem (books 9-12).

The song as a means of survival is the major connection between Odysseus and Penelope in Giannisi's *Homerica*. Following an Odysseus who in his song counts "air sea mistakes unreturned

[547] In modern Greek the verb 'ακούω' signifies both listening and hearing.
[548] This moment of the *Odyssey* is dear both to Hannah Arendt and to Adriana Cavarero. In her book *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Cavarero dedicates two chapters on Odysseus': the first, called "The Paradox of Ulysses" focuses on the moment when the hero listens to Demodocos' song in the court of the Phaeacians and bursts into tears; the second ". Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. Paul A. Kottman, Warwick Studies in European Philosophy (London: Routledge, 2000). For the original Italian edition, see Adriana Cavarero, *Tu Che Mi Guardi, Tu Che Mi Racconti: Filosofia Della Narrazione [1997]*, 9th ed. (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2011).

gifts" (v. 28), we find a Penelope counting her breaths in the water. In "(Πηνελόπη I-'m addicted to you)",[549] the first of the five poems dedicated to our heroine, the reader meets her in an unusual ambiance:

> έχει πάθος με την πισίνα
> κάθε μέρα στην πισίνα πάνω-κάτω
> την ίδια διαδρομή ξανά και ξανά
> η πισίνα την κρατά στη ζωή
> το κολύμπι στην πισίνα την συντηρεί
> το συνεχές πηγαινέλα
> η ρυθμική αναπνοή
> ο συντονισμός χεριών ποδιών
> με το κεφάλι
> μέσα έξω μέσα έξω
> στο νερό
> το κεφάλι
> επαναλαμβανόμενα μπαίνει και βγαίνει
> φυσά μέσα ρουφά έξω τον αέρα
> οι παύσεις κάθε λίγο στο διάδρομο
> τα πλακάκια κάτω από την επιφάνεια μέσα
> στο φως
> τα ξένα σώματα απειλητικά
> με σκουφιά ή με πέδιλα
> το νερό μες στο χλώριο
> ο ουρανός πάνω από κυπαρίσσια
> η πισίνα με κρατά στη ζωή
> το συνεχές τραγούδι
> το μέτρημα
> ένα δύο τρία τέσσερα πέντε
> έξι επτά οκτώ εννιά δεκαπέντε
> δεκαεννιά χτυπήματα περιστροφές
> το τραγούδι του μετρήματος η επανάληψη απολιθώνει
> το τραγούδι της πισίνας με σώζει
> με σώζει από τη γνώση πως
> δε μ' αγαπά
>
> she has a passion for the pool
> each day in the pool up and down
> the same circuit again and again
> the pool keeps her alive
> swimming in it sustains her
> the continuous back and forth

[549] Γιαννίση, *Ομηρικά*, 34-35. I cite the entire poem.

the rhythmic breathing
synchronicity of the hands and legs
with the head
in out in out
of the water
the head
repeatedly enters and leaves
blows inside sucks in air outside
pauses a bit each time in the lane
tiles underneath the surface under
the light
the bodies of strangers menacing
with caps and flippers
the water suffused with chlorine
the sky over cypress trees
the pool keeps me alive
the continual song
counting
one two three four five
six seven eight nine fifteen
nineteen blows rotations
the song of counting the repetition
turns you to stone
yet the song of the pool saves
saves me from the knowledge
he does not love me

Now *this* is a novel image of our heroine. Giannisi's modern Penelope is swimming! This should not come as a surprise for a woman who has spent a lifetime on an island, but a swimming Penelope is a spectacle we have hardly come across in the history of the heroine's rewritings. There is a scene in Varnalis' *Penelope's Diary* where the queen goes for a "βουτιά", a "dip", yet there the woman's contact with the water is brief and centered on the lover that she finds at the beach, while here the action is constant and is in itself the center of attention. As Eleni Philippou notes, Giannisi's poem "opens with the omniscient narrator's description of the woman's swimming and shifts to the internal thoughts of the woman herself only in its closing lines".[550] Indeed, along the verses the progression of the speaking subject is clear: it starts with a speaker (and reader) who watches Penelope as she swims (third person in v. 1, 4, 5, 13, 14); it passes over to a 'neutral'

[550] Eleni Philippou, 'Perennial Penelope and Lingering Lotus-Eaters: Revaluing Mythological Figures in the Poetry of the Greek Financial Crisis', *Dibur Literary Journal* Fall 2017, no. 5 (2018): 77.

passage, without verbs (v. 15-21); and it ends with the poetic subject's overlapping identification with the mythical protagonist (first person in v. 22, 29-31).

Initially, the speaker describes Penelope's new "passion" using a language that abounds with word couples and which confirm the initial statement: "πάνω-κάτω" ("up-down", v. 2), "ξανά και ξανά" ("again and again", v. 3), "πηγαινέλα" ("to-and-fro", v. 6), "χεριών ποδιών" ("of hands and feet", v. 8), "μέσα έξω μέσα έξω" ("in out in out", v. 10), "μπαίνει και βγαίνει" ("enters and exits", v. 13). Familiar with the "Penelopean poetics" of raveling and unraveling, the commentator is ready to use word pairs signaling antithesis, repetition, and above all constancy in the chosen activity – once the loom, now the pool (which counts six occurrences). As the poem unfolds and the speaker voice oscillates, we find repetition with a difference moving from "η πισίνα *την* κρατά στην ζωή (the pool keeps *her* in life)" of v. 4 to "η πισίνα *με* κρατά στη ζωή (the pool keeps *me* in life)" of v. 22. A pronoun suffices for Penelope to affirm the external speaker's claim before proceeding with a specification: while swimming she produces a special song, "the song of the pool", which is what ultimately saves her.

The woman indulges in this doubly incessant activity to keep the body and the mind working so that she can avoid thinking of the fact that the other (gender is undefined) "does not love" her. This news comes only at the end, in the very last verse of the poem, and it explains the nexus between song, swimming and survival: the thought of unreciprocated love raises the prospect of such destruction that Penelope needs to devise new strategies to stay afloat. In fact, swimming and singing are united in the importance they both attribute to a breath which is perfectly measured and under control. This measuring of breaths and time is rendered explicit in the counting from one to nineteen "περιστροφές (rotations)", intended both as the number of laps she does around the pool, and the years of waiting for Odysseus (who in Homer returns on the twentieth year). But in Giannisi's revision, Penelope has been "petrified" by the repetition of waiting – a possible nod to the "σιδήρεον ἐν φρεσὶ ἦτορ (heart of iron)" that Odysseus attributes to her when she abstains from recognizing him (*Od*.23.172).

Just as important as Penelope's new activities is the space in which they take place. The woman's liberating swim is not performed in the Ionian where Ithaca is, or in the Aegean of Pelion, from where this poem is written, or in any open sea. Notably, she is stroking away in the circumscribed space of a modern pool. Though Penelope's new form of waiting and meditation seems to transplant her to a new environment, outside the rooms of the palace, it still has not

translated into unconditional freedom of movement. Rather than a space of generative liminality, the pool appears limiting, standing in sharp contrast to the expansive seas in which the husband gets to swim. Yet, the two watery paths also seem to cross each other: she continues to swim and sing as she waits for him, he continues to swim and sing to get back to her. Were she to venture away and 'swim' off limits, their meeting point might be lost.

Interestingly, the pool as motif returns in another revision of our heroine, this time in the form of a theatre play. The Irish playwright Enda Walsh published his *Penelope* in 2010,[551] three years after Giannisi's *Homerica*.[552] The play presents four suitors of Penelope engaging in their own "anti-*Godot*" sort of waiting. Dwelling in an empty pool,[553] they live out a fallen socio-economic status and are terrified at the thought of Odysseus' return, alternating between moments of fake solidarity and violent antagonism. The heroine is simultaneously present and absent: she monitors them from above through a CCTV screen,[554] as if participants in a Big Brother-style reality show; occasionally, she switches on a red light on the monitor allowing the miserable men to show off their rhetoric skills one at a time in the hopes of holding the desired woman in their arms.

Two elements of the play are pertinent to the reinvented Penelopes we have seen in this thesis. The first is that Walsh's Penelope is secluded and voiceless: not only does she not hold a dialogue with her suitors as she does even in the *Odyssey*; she does not pronounce a single word during the entire play. Voice here is substituted by sight. Through her panopticon-like gaze, she holds power over the men, something which we also saw in Anghelaki-Rooke's "The Suitors". There the woman was shut off in her room, speaking *about* the suitors but not *with* them, whereas in Walsh

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[551] Enda Walsh, *Penelope* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2010). Patrick Lonergan notes that Walsh wrote *Penelope* after receiving an invitation by the German dramaturg Tilman Raabke, "as part of a group of six plays by European writers, all of which were about the *Odyssey*, and staged as part of the Ruhr Valley's year as one of Europe's Capitals of Culture in 2010": in Patrick Lonergan, '"The Lost and the Lonely": Crisis in Three Plays by Enda Walsh', *Études Irlandaises*, no. 40–2 (December 2015): 139-140. The trailer of the performance at Rogue Machine Theatre in 2014 can be seen on Trailer of Walsh's "Penelope" at the Rogue Machine Theatre.

[552] It is true that both Giannisi's and Walsh's Penelope were written and published in years close to the economic crisis of the two authors' countries, Greece, and Ireland respectively. Read through this lens, the choice of the pool could also be a hint to the multiple villas with swimming pools that had been constructed in the two countries during the previous decades, many of whom belonged to upper middle-class families.

[553] I borrow the term "anti-Godot" from Christopher Murray, 'The Plays of Enda Walsh: An Interim Report', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)* 23, no. 1 (2017): 22.

[554] The CCTV screen on the theatre scene confounds the spectator who watches both simultaneously, while the suitors know that they are being watched by both Penelope and the audience, Penelope knows that everyone desires to see her, but she can decide what and when to show something. Five years later Walsh used amplified the use of a screen on the scene in the musical *Lazarus* that he wrote together with David Bowie. The musical was produced also in Italy in 2023 by ERT (Emilia-Romagna Teatro) and its director, Walter Malosti. A short presentation of that performance along with some photos can be found here: Bologna, ERT, "Lazarus".

the suitors speak *about* and *to* Penelope but not *with* her. It is as if Penelope can possess either the gaze or the dialogue, but not both. The second element of interest, reconnecting us to Giannisi's poem, is the play's setting. Besides acting as a space for the humiliation of the declassed pretendants, the dried-out swimming pool also bespeaks the desiccation of the men's sexual life, a potentially combustible state of affairs symbolized by the presence of gas-fired barbecue amid the dearth of water. While in Walsh's play, the woman is physically absent, and, as a consequence, the pool is dry and the men's death imminent, in Giannisi the woman is immersed in a water that helps her breathe and thus keeps her alive.

Since mythical times, water has been associated with female fertility and rituals of passage in a woman's life.[555] In traditional and modern societies alike, swimming pools are occasionally chosen by women as an alternative space for a less painful childbirth. In fact, Penelope's rhythmic breaths in Giannisi's poem might evoke for us the intensive breathing required during the process of labor, or even the prenatal classes that some women take to rehearse it. Penelope's "pauses at times in the corridor" could take place next to a swimming pool or in the corridor of a clinic where women, before giving birth, usually walk "up and down / the same route again and again".

Indeed, motherhood is a crucial theme in Giannisi's rewriting of Penelope, and it is also one that connects her personally with the heroine. The importance that the poet gives to this trait is unique among the Penelopean revisions both within and beyond this corpus.[556] Despite the fact that Penelope raises Telemachus for twenty years on her own, her figuration as a single mother, especially in the revisionist criticism of the 1970s and the 1980s, has been systematically ignored or downplayed. This sidelining of such a fundamental aspect of women's lives can be partly explained, of course, as a consequence of second wave feminism's programmatic tendency to dissociate emancipation and equality from a body domesticated and entrapped by obligatory

[555] *Cf*. Evy Johanne Håland, 'Take Skamandros, My Virginity: Ideas of Water in Connection with Rites of Passage in Greece, Modern and Ancient', in *The Nature and Function of Water, Baths, Bathing, and Hygiene from Antiquity through the Renaissance*, ed. Anne Scott and Cynthia Kosso, Technology and Change in History 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 109-148.

[556] Among the books included in this thesis: i) Aguirre contains mere references to Telemachus: we understand nothing of the mother-son relationship or her feelings towards motherhood; ii) Anghelaki-Rooke is not at all interested in motherhood; iii) Holst-Warhaft mentions him in a couple of poems, but the emphasis is on the different educational methods between Penelope and Odysseus and the heroine's failure to impose her own; iv) Glück dedicates many poems to Telemachus, so that he extensively writes about his relationship with both parents and between them, but it is *his* point of view that we have, not Penelope's; her Penelope and her persona are concentrated on the husband and on the song/poem; v) Gardeazabal's Penelope, ready for her voyage, emphatically refers to Odysseus: "as for Telemachus, I leave him to you".

reproduction. This was a time in which winning the right to abortion and contraception was of the utmost priority, a struggle that seemed at odds with praise for a role that kept women at home. Once certain rights achieved formal recognition, feminist discourses began a vexed rapprochement with the notion of maternity, gradually reappropriating a defining experience no longer considered oppressive a priori provided it was lived *if*, *when* and *as* women wanted it. In fact, in the recent *Routledge Companion to Motherhood*, Andrea O'Reilly defines motherhood as "the unfinished business of feminism" and explores the "matricentric feminism" that flourished during the last decades.[557]

Giannisi, who certainly belongs to the next generation of feminists, takes up this "unfinished business" in her Penelopean poems, and returns repeatedly to the theme of motherhood, as in the poem "(Penelope III)":

> λατρεύει τα παιδιά της
> όταν ήταν μικρά από το πιάτο τελείωνε αυτή το φαγητό τους
> ακόμα τρώει τα υπολείμματα
> και τώρα πλέον
> φορά τα ρούχα της κόρης της από εκείνης ψηλότερης
> όταν τα έχει βρωμίσει και στο καλάθι τα αφήνει για πλύσιμο
> φορά τα καλτσάκια
> και πάει μ αυτά στη δουλειά
> τα λερωμένα δανείζεται
> άραγε κάνει οικονομία στις πλύσεις ή
> το φυλαχτό είναι ενεργό
> μονάχα
> όταν κρατά από το σώμα
> το πιο δικό μας
> ίχνος
> των εκκρίσεων τη μυρωδιά;
>
> she worships her children
> when they were little she'd take their plates
> and finish their food
> even now she eats the leftovers
> and also
> she puts on the clothes of her daughter who's taller than her
> when they're soiled and left out in the basket for washing
> she puts on the socks

[557] *Cf*. Andrea O'Reilly, 'Matricentric Feminism: A Feminism for Mothers', in *The Routledge Companion to Motherhood* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 51-60. Also cited in Amy Westervelt, 'Is Motherhood the Unfinished Work of Feminism?', *The Guardian*, May 2018, sec. Opinion: Feminism.

and goes in them to work
she borrows the dirty clothes
perhaps she's trying to save money on the laundry
or does the charm work
only if
it retains from the body
the strongest
traces
of our secreted smells?[558]

As with Giannisi's first Penelopean poem, this one also starts with an omniscient speaker who describes one of the woman's passions (there swimming, here her children) and slowly arrives to an inclusive, universalistic first-person plural ("μας", "our", v. 14). In the first verses, there is a sense of progression once more: the mother's love for her children was excessive when they were little, and it continues to be so today. The intensity of such love it ratcheted up, becoming ever more quirky, effuse, and borderline obsessive as we read on. What preoccupies the speaker in the entire second part of the poem is the question of how to understand Penelope's behavior without morally judging it. An initial hypothesis, that she could be facing economic hardship, is mentioned in a single verse but then quickly discarded as implausible. Greater emphasis is given to a second possibility, expressed in six verses, which is that the intimacy instilled between mother and child, informed by the former's efforts to maintain "the amulet" as fresh as possible, profoundly overwhelms any overly rigid notion of what constitutes rational parental behavior.

Senses play a central role in the mother's bond with her children. The woman starts by eating her children's leftover food, insisting on consuming it off their plate, as if their nutritional needs were still unified through her umbilical cord. Her ensuing antics include wearing her daughter's dirty clothes and socks driven by the desire to preserve the child's odors on her body. The daughter's smell will mingle with her own, and it will remain attached to her body, as if she had her again inside her belly as an extension of herself. She searches for the children's "bodily fluids" ("εκκρίσεις", v. 16), whether it be their saliva among the food leftovers or the sweat in the clothes they wear. These liquids with their smell keep the woman's memory awake, reminding her of the time in which her children depended on her for everything and were always in immediate proximity with her body. Under the mother's desperate addiction to materials that her children

[558] Γιαννίση, *Ομηρικά*, 54.

have in one way or another touched, there lies a deep pain: now, they can live without her, as they are no more attached to her.

The amulet is in fact still functioning, since some poems later, in “(Penelope IV)”, it awakens one of the woman’s sweetest memories of childbirth:

όταν γεννιέται ένα παιδί
η τρυφερότητα ρέει
όπως το γάλα απ’ τις ρώγες
ο ουρανός καθαρός
όπως τα μάτια του που θολά βλέπουν
γεννιέται μεγάλο μέσα στο τόσο μικρό
ανοιχτό και κλειστό
κάθε νεογέννητο ο Δίας στο άντρο του
θηλάζει απ’ την κατσίκα το γάλα
ανίσχυρο και για αυτό
δυνατότερο όλων
έτοιμο
έχει στα χέρια του τον κόσμο
ξύπνησα μέσα στη νύχτα
να μουρμουρίσω την αγάπη μου για αυτό
τον αγώνα τη δύναμή του για ζωή
τις κάλτσες τα ρούχα του
την δική *μας* ανίκητη μυρωδιά
τον ήσυχο ύπνο του
ένα απέραντο δώρο έπεσε πάλι από τα αστέρια

when a child is born
tenderness flows
like milk from the nipples
the sky clear
as its eyes that see clouded
something large born in something so small
open and closed
each newborn a Zeus in his grotto
sucking milk from the goat
powerless and therefore
mightiest of all
ready
in its hands the entire world
I woke in the night
to whisper my love for it
its struggle its strength for life
its socks its clothes

our own invincible scent
its quiet sleep
again a boundless gift has fallen from the stars (my emphasis)[559]

Once more, the speaker starts with the third-person singular, pronouncing a set of (seemingly) universal truths: an indefinite "όταν" ("when"), a regrouping "κάθε" ("every").[560] The reenacted liquids are both literal and metaphorical: the mother's milk is actually a medium to transfer her tender feelings to the child, a new kind of umbilical cord. Towards the end of the poem the impersonal switches to a first-person plural, when the smells of the two (mother and child) mingle in one and become "invincible" ("ανίκητη", v. 18) – an alliance, confirmed by the exchange of fluids, and that no one could defeat. Childbirth incites the purest of feelings,[561] as "the clear sky" is mirrored in the baby's eyes. Not everything is perfect, indeed antitheses are everywhere: while the baby's eyes are clean, its vision is still not fully developed, it sees "blurry"; simultaneously big and small (v. 6), "open and closed" (v. 7), simultaneously "powerless" and "the most powerful" (v. 10-11).

Still, this imperfect and fragile condition will not last for long. Just below, the newborn child is presented as "ready" to hold "the world in its hands" (v. 12-13). Along with the world, the baby seems to have enough power to hold poetry in its hands, as v. 12 is a one-word verse, and perfect one in the literal, etymological sense (*per factum*): "έτοιμο", "ready", it stands by itself and creates meaning in a lyric universe.[562] Despite the baby's preparedness, the mother does not lack an instinctive fear and the need to protect the newborn. Her anxieties are translated into the almost spasmodic action of waking it up at night, disturbing "its quiet sleep" (v. 19), only to stay by its side murmuring words of love (v. 14-15). She thus creates (or has the impression of creating) a shield of linguistic affection, one that would protect the newborn and repel its potential enemies.[563]

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[559] *Ivi*, 69. I cite the entire poem.

[560] As a classicist, Giannisi certainly knows that the ancient Greek ὅταν is usually translated as "κάθε φορά που" ("every time that"); read this way, "όταν" and "κάθε" become loose synonyms in this verse.

[561] The poetic subject does not mention to whom these "purest feelings" are incited, probably to maintain the feeling of universality that is evident already in the first verses of the poem.

[562] We could think here of Ferenczi's notion that children of a young age, since they are "less equipped with filters," compared to the adults, they "communicate with the environment over a much broader surface, which makes them capable of knowing 'much more about the world than our narrow horizon now allows'": Jô Gondar, 'Passion and Tenderness as Political Forces', *International Forum of Psychoanalysis* 32, no. 4 (October 2023), 235, citing Sándor Ferenczi, *The Clinical Diary of Sándor Ferenczi [1932]* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 148.

[563] Again, reading Giannisi's verses with Ferenczi, it is easy to imagine this moment as that of "the invasion of adult passions into the child's tender universe": Gondar, 'Passion and Tenderness as Political Forces', 235. This invasion as has a result a "trauma", provoked by the mingling of two different languages, the adults' "language of passions" and the babies "language of infantile tenderness": *ibidem*. Gondar, however, partially disagrees with Ferenczi, highlighting

During this tumultuous mix of feelings, the adult speaker is suddenly filled with an unprecedent optimism. Every newborn is a potential Zeus, its entire future is ahead of it, all the roads are open. As such, each baby has its own goat as potential breast feeders, like Amalthea who nurtured the 'father of men and gods' when he was a baby, hidden in the Cretan mountains of Ida to escape his father Cronus's voracious cannibalism;[564] thus, every child born is again a gift of Amalthea, falling down from the Capella constellation (the constellation of the goat) and other bodies of stars.

This Penelopean poem contains both fabulist and realist elements, partaking simultaneously in the starry world of the fairytales and in the anxious reality of a new mother who wants to make sure that her baby sleeps safe and sound. However, if I were to choose one main feeling that pours out of the verses during the reading of both the last two poems that we saw "(Penelope III)" and "(Penelope IV)", I would opt for the term 'τρυφερότητα', 'tenderness'.[565] When Giannisi wrote this poem in Volos, in 2008, she could not have foreseen that ten years later the word "tenderness" would become the topic of the Nobel speech delivered by the Polish author Olga Tokarczuk, winner of the 2018 Nobel prize for literature.[566] Like Giannisi, the first image that comes to Tokarczuk's mind when she speaks of tenderness is her mother:

> The first photograph I ever experienced consciously is a picture of my mother from before she gave birth to me. […] There's nothing really happening in the picture – it's a photograph of a state, not a process. The woman is sad, seemingly lost in thought – seemingly lost. When I later asked her about that sadness – which I did on numerous occasions, always prompting the same response – my mother would say that she was sad because I hadn't been born yet, yet she already missed me.
> "How can you miss me when I'm not there yet?" I would ask.
> I knew that you miss someone you've lost, that longing is an effect of loss.
> "But it can also work the other way around," she answered. "Missing a person means they're there".

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that this "trauma", "the confusion that occurs between them [adults and infants] is not linguistic, but affective": *ibidem*. I like the idea of a continuous blend of the two, only partially different, spheres, and thus, I opt for the joint image of a "shield of linguistic affection" that coins the two.

[564] On Amalthea and the symbolism of the goat in ancient Greece, see Giuseppina Paola Viscardi, 'Constructing Humans, Symbolising the Gods: The Cultural Value of the Goat in Greek Religion', in *Animals in Greek and Roman Religion and Myth*, ed. Patricia A. Johnston, Attilio Mastrocinque, and Sophia Papaioannou (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 115-140.

[565] Ovid's Penelope in *Heroides* I also uses the word 'tender' towards the end of her poem, when she says that Telamachus, "at his tender / age should have been trained in his father's ways" ("mollibus annis / in patrias artes erudiendus erat", v. 111-112): Ovid, *Ovid's Heroides: A New Translation and Critical Essays*, trans. Paul Murgatroyd, Bridget Reeves, and Sarah Parker (London; New York: Routledge, 2017), 10.

[566] Actually, Tokarczuk's lecture was delivered in October 2019, so eleven years after Giannisi wrote the poem, but ten years after the publication of *Homerica* in 2009. Tokarczuk's entire lecture can be read here: Nobel Prize, Tokarczuk's lecture.

> This brief exchange […] elevated my existence beyond the ordinary materiality of the world, beyond chance, beyond cause and effect and the laws of probability. She placed my existence out of time, in the sweet vicinity of eternity. In my child's mind, I understood then that there was more to me than I had ever imagined before. And that even if I were to say, "I'm lost," then I'd still be starting out with the words "I am" – the most important and the strangest set of words in the world.
> And so a young woman who was never religious – my mother – gave me something once known as a soul, thereby furnishing me with the world's greatest *tender narrator*.

This is the beginning of Tokarczuk's speech, and it shares the same starting point with her life: her mother. The first photograph that she remembers unites an image of her mother before she gave birth to her, but she can sense her presence close to her, even though she did not exist yet. To say it in Aristotelian terms, in the photo Tokarczuk was there as an 'ἐν δυνάμει ὄν', a 'potential being' and her mother's longing for the child's existence transformed her into an 'ἐν ἐνεργείᾳ ὄν', an 'actual being'.

The nostalgia felt by Tokarczuk's mother for a child who has not yet arrived and whom she is already missing, speaks for the tight union that unites the two, and echoes the nostalgia felt by the mother in "(Penelope III)", who could not let go of her children's odors. In both cases the reader watches two examples of how "the loss of the union is there from the start / *inside* the union",[567] and this results in the mother's mourning.[568] With the use of tender words, Tokarczuk's mother builds a magical, extraterrestrial connection, which functions as a shield for the child's identity, guaranteeing its ability to pronounce the words "I am". Similarly, the mother in "(Penelope IV)" provides each newborn with an Amalthea, that is an 'αἰγώ', and through her tender and rich nutrition the child will pronounce 'ἐγώ', 'I'.[569]

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[567] Γιαννίση, *Ομηρικά*, 60, v. 8-9: "η απώλεια της ένωσης υπάρχει εξαρχής /μέσα στην ένωση".

[568] In "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud defines the two terms: "[m]ourning is commonly the reaction to the loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal and so on. […] Melancholia is mentally characterized by a profoundly painful depression, a loss of interest in the outside world, the loss of the ability to love, the inhibition of any kind of performance and a reduction in the sense of self, expressed in self-recrimination and self-directed insults, intensifying into the delusory expectation of punishment. We have a better understanding of this when we bear in mind that mourning displays the same traits, apart from one: the disorder of self-esteem is absent. […] melancholic inhibition seems puzzling to us because we are unable to see what it is that so completely absorbs the patient", in Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia [1917]', in *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, by Sigmund Freud, trans. Thaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 2005), 232, 234. I choose the term 'mourning' for the mother in Tokarczuk and in Giannisi because we are *not* unable to see what absorbs them.

[569] Αιγώ is a main character in Giannisi's works, protagonist of *Χίμαιρα* (*Chimera*): Φοίβη Γιαννίση, *Χίμαιρα, Αιγωδία: Πολυφωνικό Ποίημα* (Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Καστανιώτη, 2019). There Αιγώ is in fact explained in the parenthesis as "εγώ = εδώ", that is "I = here": *Ivi*, 13.

Once the child is safe and ready for its own trajectory in the world, how does a woman cope with loss and with the excruciating passing of time? Giannisi provides some answers to these questions in "(Penelope II)":

η ζωή μιας γυναίκας έχει ζωή
όμως θεοί εσείς το ξέρετε
ποτέ τον χρόνο η γυναίκα δεν ξεχνά
τον πόλεμό της
τον ανταλλάσσει με μία στιγμή μπροστά
στο κύμα τον ανταλλάσσει με μία στιγμή μέσα
στο κύμα ανταλλάσσει τον χρόνο με υφάσματα
στολίδια τραγούδι
κάθε γυναίκα είναι υφάντρα
τραγουδίστρια
αλλά αίφνης το κύμα την ξεβράζει
στην ακτή
γυμνή
χωρίς στολίδια δίχως όπλα δίχως φωνή
κι ευτυχώς τότε πρέπει να επιστρέψει
έχει να μαγειρέψει[570]

the life of a woman has life
but you gods already knew that
a woman does not forget
her own war but exchanges
time for the moment just before
the wave she exchanges it for the moment inside
the wave she exchanges time for fabrics
ornaments song
each woman is a weaver
songstress
but out of nowhere the sea washes her up
onshore
naked
with no ornaments no weapons no voice
but fortunately just then
she has to get back
she has cooking to do

The theme of motherhood returns in the first verse ("the life of a woman has life"), where the word "γυναίκα" ("woman") is literally immersed in "ζωή" ("life"), on the left and on the right. Should

[570] Γιαννίση, *Ομηρικά*, 41. I cite the entire poem. The colors are mine, the blue to show the repeated words and the green to show words with the same etymology.

we think of time as depicted in a straight line, the woman feels life both in its past (her mother) and in its future (her potential to be a mother). Whether or not we thought of the past on the left and future on the right, as is typically the case in western societies, the meaning remains the same and the woman stands in at the center of the verse, that is, in the present.

However, the woman's attachment to the present does not mean that she in not weighed down by time passed by. With a sudden apostrophe to the "gods", Penelope reminds them that time is a woman's "war" ("πόλεμος"), and that she is a good fighter: she will invent any possible trick, prepare any gift if it results in biding some time. The repetition of the verb 'ανταλλάσσω' ('to exchange'), occurring three times, makes of the woman an eternal merchant. Yet hers is not an economy ruled by money, but rather an ancient one governed by a logic of exchange: she gives away "υφάσματα" ("fabrics"), "στολίδια" ("jewels"), "τραγούδι" ("song"), to receive "μια στιγμή μπροστά στο κύμα" ("a moment *in front* of the wave"), "μια στιγμή μέσα στο κύμα" ("a moment *in* the wave"). The qualities of "υφάντρα" ("weaver") and of "τραγουδίστρια" ("singer") are now universally linked to women: the emphasis on "κάθε" ("each") marks the claim as indisputable as the woman's connection to life. This was not always so. While in Homer weaving is the most common activity performed by women, singing is strictly male privilege (also the terms 'ἀοιδός' and 'ῥαψωδός' are masculine). As Lilian Doherty puts it, the Homeric tradition is "a tradition that acknowledges no female bards", and when it does so, it is for divinities, such as Circe and Calypso (who, in fact, weave and sing simultaneously), or the Sirens – of course, the song of these beings "is portrayed as threatening the *Odyssey* narrative and must be cut short by it".[571]

This is precisely what happens in Giannisi's poem: the woman's song is cut short abruptly in v. 11, with an emphatic "αλλά" ("but"). Just when Penelope, and by extension every woman, establishes her right to both weaving and singing — that is, just when she has become an artist— the world revokes her new identity. Not surprisingly, she is betrayed by "το κύμα" ("the wave"), the very object of her desire, which she has exchanged for everything she possessed. Reminiscent of Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale, where the little mermaid ends up voiceless and naked on the beach, Giannisi's Penelope is a victim of the wave, which dispossesses her and leaves her wrecked on the "ακτή" ("seashore", v. 12). Both women choose to exchange their talents for something else: the little mermaid because of her desire to have a human body and to win the heart

[571] Lillian E. Doherty, 'Sirens, Muses, and Female Narrators in the *Odyssey*', in *The Distaff Side: Representing the Female in Homer's* Odyssey, ed. Beth Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 88, 85.

of the man she loved, Giannisi's protagonist so that she could have some moments by the sea. Her punishment is that she ends up "γυμνή" ("naked", v. 13), in a likewise 'naked' verse which contradicts the other one-word verse of the poem, that is "τραγουδίστρια" ("singer", v. 10), thus further highlighting the absence of a voice in the present.

The poem's ending encapsulates Giannisi's feminist stance in socio-formal terms. With an amusingly ironic "ευτυχώς" ("fortunately") the brief fairytale ends, and Penelope's games with the waves are snuffed out. The image of the wave can also imply the ebb and flow of distinct feminist phases or *waves*, an allusion to how women's rights may come to the fore during peak moments of struggle, each time leading to some kind of advance of victory, and then, as the wave recedes due to come combination of reactionary backlash, inertia, and exhaustion, it cedes ground to conservative powers angling to re-establish domination over women and other marginalized subjects. Thus, the reader of "(Penelope II)" is quickly drawn back to a woman's everyday life and to her domestic 'obligations': the kitchen is waiting for her. Penelope is once more sent to another type of 'loom', her *nostos* is a sad return to a woman's expected role in a patriarchal society.[572]

Yet this scene does not exhaust the meaning of the Penelopean song as presented by Giannisi. Thankfully, the heroine does not stop singing after only a handful of poems dedicated to her. Eleven years and three books of poetry later, Giannisi returns to Penelope in *Θέτις και Αηδών* (*Thetis and Aedon*).[573] The work is subtitled "χιμαιρικό ποίημα" ("chimeric poem"), a syntagma deployed by the poet to explain her current approach to lyric books of poetry. Giannisi's interest in the idea of written poetry conjoined to performance (which resembles much more the idea of lyric in ancient Greek poetry than our contemporary, private, silent reading) was already there in *Homerica*, in the form of the cd which included her readings *in situ* around various locations in Pelion. Still, in that book the two 'fields' remain separate: the readers are free to choose if they want to read the poems *while* listening to the readings separately or opting for only one of the two modalities. The experience of the reader who prefer to not listen to the readings will be closer to a traditional reading of lyric poetry. But in Giannisi's subsequent work, verses found exclusively on the printed

[572] Cooking has been an important topic of discussion for feminists already from the second wave. While the main tendency is to see in cooking and in the kitchen a woman's obligation and restraint, there have been various feminists who have advocated for cooking as a way for the woman to reconnect with her body, as an act of care for people she loves or a way to be creative. See *inter alia* Elisabeth L'orange Fürst, 'Cooking and Femininity', *Women's Studies International Forum*, Concepts of Home, 20, no. 3 (May 1997): 441-449; Joanne Hollows, 'The Feminist and the Cook: Julia Child, Betty Friedan and Domestic Femininity', in *Gender and Consumption: Domestic Cultures and the Commercialisation of Everyday Life*, ed. Lydia Martens and Emma Casey (Routledge, 2016), 33-48.
[573] Φοίβη Γιαννίση, *Θέτις και Αηδών: Χιμαρικό ποίημα* (Αθήνα: Καστανιώτης, 2021).

page become rarer, and the performative aspect gains space. The books following *Homerica* are hybrid, 'chimeric', as Giannisi herself calls them: they propose a polyphonic self, one that includes and gives voice to diverse subjectivities.[574] This method is emblematic of the poet's embrace of posthuman feminism. As the philosopher Rosi Braidotti explains in "Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism", this type of feminism shifts the focus from the "Man" of humanism, from Anthropos to *zoe*, that is nonhuman life, promoting a "species egalitarianism, which opens up productive possibilities of relations, alliances, and mutual specification".[575] Its aim is to offer

> an expanded relational vision of the self, as a nomadic transversal assemblage engendered by the cumulative effect of multiple relational bonds. The relational capacity of the posthuman subject is not confined within our species, but includes all nonanthropomorphic elements, starting from the air we breathe.[576]

As is well known, Braidotti cites the pioneering work of Donna Haraway, whose definition of 'cyborg' published in 1985 is repeatedly evoked in Giannisi, both in her books and in her performances. In her seminal essay "A Cyborg Manifesto", Haraway proposes an understanding of the contemporary self as a cyborg, that is "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction".[577]

These are precisely the kind of poetic creatures that populate Giannisi's more recent books, from *Τέττιξ* (*Cicada*) to the one of interest for us here, *Θέτις και Αηδών* (*Thetis and Aedon*).[578] However, there remains at least one more source of influence to note. Alongside the poet's feminist and philosophical readings, is her double background as both an architect and a classicist, and thus her inclination towards innovative modes of classical reception which defy traditional forms and genres. That is where her poetic path encounters the networked poetics of Canadian classicist and poet Anne Carson. The theoretical approach that Helena Van Praet adopts to explain Carson's works could also be applied to Giannisi: like Carson, Giannisi's most recent books also rely "on

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[574] In fact, the volume that Laura Jansen and Vassilis Lambropoulos are preparing on Giannisi's work will bear the title *Chimeric Ecologies*, and for good reason: Laura Jansen and Vassilis Lambropoulos, eds., *Chimeric Ecologies: The Poetry of Phoebe Giannisi (Upcoming)* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2025). As I have stated before, Laura Jansen is a specialist of Classical Reception Studies, and she has been concentrating on particularly innovative forms of engagement with the classics, from implicit allusions and absences to prosthetic works. Among others, she has been working also on Anne Carson, on whom she edited a volume which focuses on Carson's relationship with the classics: Laura Jansen, ed., *Anne Carson: Antiquity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

[575] Rosi Braidotti, 'Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism', in *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. Richard A. Grusin, 21st Century Studies (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 21-22, 32.

[576] *Ivi*, 33.

[577] Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, by Donna Haraway (New York: Routledge, 1991), 150.

[578] Γιαννίση, *Τέττιξ*; Giannisi, *Cicada*; Γιαννίση, *Θέτις και Αηδών: Χιμαρικό ποίημα*.

other texts to exist, just as a prosthesis […] does not merely evoke an artificial apparatus but always also implies a lack or deficiency, thus having no 'originary integrality'".[579] Both poets write in ways that defy generic boundaries, embedding on printed paper a dense web of embodied and intermedial connections, weaving each external piece into a cognitive map taking shape through the form of a sprawling organic whole.[580]

The primary materials organizing the networked form of *Θέτις και Αηδών* are fragments taken from a vast range of sources including ancient and modern works of literature, criticism, other types of art; pieces of free translation and commentary; photographs of nature, animals, statues, or other archeological findings; photographs of pages that the poet was presumably reading before or while writing the book; and of course, some more 'traditional' lyric verses.[581] But, most interestingly for our case, is how Penelope gets integrated in this polymorphic collage.

As implied already in the book's title, the main characters are Thetis, mother of Achilles, and Aedon, the Nightingale. Remaining strictly on Homeric territory, Thetis has a special role in the *Iliad*, not only as the mother of the epic's hero and his intermediary between the world of gods and mortals, but as direct influence on the poem's narrative due to her special relationship with Zeus, whose βουλή controls the evolution of the war and, to some extent, the plot of the epic.[582] Even more pertinent to the subject of this thesis and to Giannisi's book is Thetis' exceptional lament for her still-living son in *Il.*18.52-64, this being "the only lament speech for Achilles in the *Iliad*".[583]

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[579] Van Praet, '"To Tell a Story by Not Telling It": Toward a Networked Poetics of Delay in Anne Carson's *The Beauty of the Husband*', 644. For 'prosthesis', see David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995)., also cited in Van Praet, '"To Tell a Story by Not Telling It": Toward a Networked Poetics of Delay in Anne Carson's *The Beauty of the Husband*', 644.

[580] Giannisi has also presented lectures and published on Anne Carson's work. See for instance Phoebe Giannisi, '*The Trojan Women* : A Chimeric Reading (Viva Voce in a Zoom Meeting)', *Classical Antiquity* 42, no. 2 (October 2023): 302-310.

[581] See the annex of this thesis.

[582] In the early 1990s Laura Slatkin wrote the first entire book on Thetis' role in Homer, applying neo-analysis and oral studies: Laura M. Slatkin, *The Power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in the* Iliad (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1991). Thirty years later, a new volume was published which reevaluates Thetis' role and her reception by other authors, genres and cultures: Maciej Paprocki, Gary Patrick Vos, and David John Wright, eds., *The Staying Power of Thetis: Allusion, Interaction, and Reception from Homer to the 21st Century* (Berlin; Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2023).

[583] Tsagalis, 'The Poetics of Sorrow', 9. As Tsagalis refers, Wilamowitz considered this lament to be "the free creation of the poet of Σ who devised it in order to unite three independent epic poems that antedated the *Iliad*, namely the **Patrocleia*, the **Shield of Achilles* and the **Achilleis*": *Ibidem*.

In Giannisi's revision, this immortal mother who laments her mortal son is mingled with an antithetical pair: that of the mortal Virgin Mary lamenting Christ, her only briefly mortal son.[584]

The other important mother-son pair of Giannisi's book emerges from the more enigmatic second name of the title, Aedon. In the Homeric world, Aedon appears in the *Odyssey* through the mouth of our Penelope in *Od*.19.518, that is during her famous dialogue with the disguised Odysseus and before her narration of the famous dream with the geese and the eagle. In a passage where, following Gregory Nagy, "the epic is representing lyric" and, in particular, "a song of lament",[585] Penelope describes to the *xenos* how difficult she finds it to fall asleep, blaming the "ὀξεῖαι μελεδῶνες" who "ὀδυρομένην ἐρέθουσιν". In the absence of a more prominent Penelopean song in Homer,[586] let us at least listen to this one:

> ξεῖνε, τὸ μέν σ᾽ ἔτι τυτθὸν ἐγὼν εἰρήσομαι αὐτή:
> καὶ γὰρ δὴ κοίτοιο τάχ᾽ ἔσσεται ἡδέος ὥρη,
> *ὅν τινά γ᾽ ὕπνος ἕλοι γλυκερός, καὶ κηδόμενόν περ*.
> αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ καὶ *πένθος ἀμέτρητον* πόρε δαίμων:
> ἤματα μὲν γὰρ *τέρπομ᾽ ὀδυρομένη, γοόωσα*,
> ἔς τ᾽ ἐμὰ ἔργ᾽ ὁρόωσα καὶ ἀμφιπόλων ἐνὶ οἴκῳ:
> αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν νὺξ ἔλθῃ, ἕλῃσί τε κοῖτος ἅπαντας,
> κεῖμαι ἐνὶ λέκτρῳ, *πυκιναὶ δέ μοι ἀμφ᾽ ἀδινὸν κῆρ*
> *ὀξεῖαι μελεδῶνες ὀδυρομένην ἐρέθουσιν.*
> *ὡς δ᾽ ὅτε Πανδαρέου κούρη, χλωρηῒς ἀηδών,*
> καλὸν ἀείδησιν ἔαρος νέον ἱσταμένοιο,
> δενδρέων ἐν πετάλοισι καθεζομένη πυκινοῖσιν,
> *ἥ τε θαμὰ τρωπῶσα χέει πολυηχέα φωνήν,*
> *παῖδ᾽ ὀλοφυρομένη Ἴτυλον φίλον*, ὅν ποτε χαλκῷ
> κτεῖνε δι᾽ ἀφραδίας, κοῦρον Ζήθοιο ἄνακτος […]
>
> Friend, I will stay here and talk to you, just for a little.
> To be sure, it will soon be the time for sweet rest,
> *for one delicious sleep takes hold of, although he may be*
> *sorrowful*. The divinity gave me *grief beyond measure*.
> The day times *I indulge in lamentation, mourning*
> as I look to my own tasks and those of my maids in the palace.
> But after the night comes and sleep has taken all others,
> I lie on my bed, and *the sharp anxieties swarming*

[584] On the lamenting Virgin Mary, see Anna Lefteratou, 'The Lament of the Virgin in the I Homeric Centos: An Early Threnos', in *The Genres of Late Antique Christian Poetry: Between Modulations and Transpositions*, ed. Fotini Hadjittofi and Anna Lefteratou (Berlin; Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020), 275-292.
[585] Gregory Nagy, 'The Homeric Nightingale and the Poetics of Variation in the Art of a Trobadour', in *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond*, by Gregory Nagy (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7.
[586] *Cf.* Pura Nieto Hernández, 'Penelope's Absent Song', *Phoenix* 62, no. 1/2 (2008): 39-62.

thick and fast on my beating heart torment my sorrowing
self. As when Pandareos' daughter, the greenwood nightingale,
perching in the deep of the forest foliage *sings out*
her lovely song, when springtime has just begun; *she, varying*
the manifold strains of her voice, pours out the melody, mourning
Itylos, son of the lord Zethos, *her own beloved*
child, whom she once killed with the bronze when the madness was on her;

(*Od*.19.509-523, my emphasis)

As Pura Nieto Hernández states, this "is the only passage" we have "in which Penelope is directly associated with singing",[587] or rather, if we slightly modify the point of emphasis, it is the only time when *she* associates herself to singing. To do so she deploys a simile which contains the mythical *exemplum* of Aedon,[588] which is frequently confused with another mythical nightingale and her sister, the swallow, Prokne and Philomela.[589] While the two stories vary substantially, their common elements are that they both speak about a mother who killed (Prokne willingly, Aedon not) her male child and then lamented eternally for this loss. Levaniouk has proved convincingly that Penelope's mythical paradigm is the Theban version of Aedon and not Prokne,[590] but Giannisi uses the second one to form a pair with our heroine, probably because it includes the husband's (Tereus) rape of Prokne's sister, Philomela, and the subsequent transformation of the two women in Nightingale and Swallow, which is closely resonates with Thetis' rape of Peleus and her transformation into a squid in order to elude him.[591]

These manifold references to female subjectivities forged through and in contradistinction to male violence give shape to Giannisi's innovative lamenting chorus of *Θέτις και Αηδών*, collectively affirming the poet's will to "reclaim culture from its phallogocentrism" – to use the term coined by Derrida which she herself cherishes.[592] Alongside Thetis, the Virgin Mary, Aedon-Procne and Penelope, there is also Sappho, who contributes with her own nightingale fragments, and last but not least, Giannisi's poetic persona woven together through fragments about her

[587] Hernández, 56.
[588] See Scholia to *Odyssey* 19.518, where Aedon kills her son by her own mistake and Eustathius 19.51, where she asks her son to sleep in another room and he forgets the instruction and she kills him. In both cases she does so unwillingly. Also cited in Levaniouk, 'Penelope and the Pandareids', 8.
[589] Which sister is transformed into which bird depends on mythical variation. For variations on the myth of Philomela and Prokne, see Paolo Monella, *Procne e Filomela: Dal Mito al Simbolo Letterario*, Testi e Manuali per l'insegnamento Universitario Del Latino 83 (Bologna: Pàtron, 2005).
[590] *Cf.* Levaniouk, 'Penelope and the Pandareids'.
[591] *Cf.* Maciej Paprocki, 'The Rape and Banding of Thetis in Its Mythological Context', in *The Staying Power of Thetis: Allusion, Interaction, and Reception from Homer to the 21st Century*, ed. Maciej Paprocki, Gary Patrick Vos, and David John Wright (Berlin; Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2023), 43-74.
[592] Gabriele Griffin, 'Phallogocentrism', *A Dictionary of Gender Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

relationship with her mother and her own children. Indeed, it is here that we find one of the most striking moments of the book (p. 15-24), where the poetic persona versifies her childbirth, with all the "push" and "courage" and "bravo!" that are typical of the 'moment'. This is how Giannisi transforms a 'song of lament' into a 'hymn to life' and to motherhood, putting into praxis her aphorism from "(Penelope II)" in *Homerica*: "the life of the woman has life" (v. 1).

Thus, twenty-one centuries after Ovid's *Heroides*, our heroine finds a new all-women chorus with which to desire, to sing and to lament. Giannisi's book is a polyphonic collage of ancient and modern female voices among whom Penelope can maintain her fundamentally lyrical expression while confronted with the stories of other women and their own types of μελεδῶνες. The structure of the lamenting Greek chorus – be it in traditional form or taking on a more modern, networked guise – assumes the spirit of a distinctly female group, a union of voices that share sorrows, consolations, and rebirths. And from this group emerges a multitudinous 'I', one that is inclusive and vocally hybrid and whose song might be called 'lament of the I+'.

…Somewhere there, when everyone in Ithaca goes to bed, a nightingale sings an old rebetiko:[593]

Σαν μαγεμένο το μυαλό μου φτερουγίζει
η κάθε σκέψη μου κοντά σου τριγυρίζει
δεν ησυχάζω και στον ύπνο που κοιμάμαι
εσένα πάντα αρχοντοπούλα μου θυμάμαι…

[593] The song is named "Σαν μαγεμένο το μυαλό μου" ("As if my mind were enchanted") and it was written by Dimitris Gkogkos. You can listen to the song here: Δημήτρης Γκόγκος, Σαν μαγεμένο το μυαλό μου. *Cf*. Γιαννίση, *Θέτις και Αηδών: Χιμαρικό ποίημα*, 71.

"Penelope at the window-loom" by Rinette Josafat

Conclusions

"When you court Penelope,
be wary of the tapestry
unraveling in your hands
just as quickly as it is woven"[594]

We began our journey into the contemporary Penelopean universe with an evocative scene of an alternate nostos dramatized by Kazantzakis in his modern *Odyssey* (1938), where the Mediterranean of classical antiquity overlaps with the European nation-state system of the early twentieth century. After a ghastly and failed reunion with Odysseus, followed by a fresh separation, we imagined our disillusioned heroine's act of exiting from the epic genre as a first step towards new imaginative possibilities. In many ways, such a departure prefigured some of the representational innovations that were to surface in the decades to come when the Ithacan queen would be again invoked to make sense of a radically changing world in which the drama of the waiting woman was to undergo an unprecedented transfiguration.

The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate the ways in which the mythological figure of Penelope illuminates the contemporary Western imaginary of gender relations as it continues to be rocked by the aftershocks of the global revolutions of 1968. In the introduction, I described a paradigm shift generated out of the concomitant rise of second wave feminism, a spike in the production and demand for cultural artefacts readapting stories of mythological women, and the development of what is now known as the field of classical reception studies. As a result of these convergent factors, beginning in the 1970s, revisionist criticism came under increased pressure to revisit the methodological and political coordinates of its knowledge production on gendered characters and plots originating in Homeric and other Classical texts. Out of this changing social and academic context, emerged a debate over how to redress gender imbalances in cultural and critical representation of myth in ways that are philologically sound, a task that was undertaken by a generation of feminist scholars showing us a way to the exits of the classical realm seen through the prism of male fantasy. This dissertation examines a grouping of texts contesting this fantasy by responding to calls made by scholars such as Sarah Pomeroy, Adrienne Rich, Alicia Ostriker and others, to think about retelling the story of the woman of antiquity as a matter of cultural,

[594] Michael Stanier, '"The Void Awaits Surely All Them That Weave the Wind": "Penelope" and "Sirens" in *Ulysses*', *Twentieth Century Literature* 41, no. 3 (1995): 319.

psychic and even disciplinary "survival", so that such a past may continue to "illuminate contemporary problems in relationships between men and women".[595]

In beginning to explore the ways in which my selected texts bring the ancient past to bare on the gender troubles of the present, I drew on a widening body of scholarship centering representations of Penelope both inside and beyond the Homeric source. Through my reading of a range of dissertations and volumes, I find that through most works on the subject seem to agree on the character's core being defined by absence, there is a broad distinction between centripetal and centrifugal modes of analysis whereby the former moves outward from the void and seeks external mediation and validation, and the latter moves within to delve deeper into the meaning of a life marked by chronic waiting. Building on this understanding of the Penelopean condition as a double-movement of protracted expectancy, and in following my critical foremothers and sisters, I outlined a path aiming to strike a balance between constancy and variation in the treatment of gendered experiences of memory, grief, and repair while in a state of indefinite limbo.

Crucially, though, studies on the revisionism of Penelope have tended to prioritize the epic, the novel, and the short poem, giving almost no attention to the question of how the character has been deployed as a figure of sustained development in the long lyric form (also known as the poem sequence). In addressing this gap in the research, I argue in the introduction that attention to book-length lyric elaborations of the Penelopean theme can help us overcome some of the limitations presented by the most visited arenas of representation (the epic, the novel), where expectations of successful quests, narrative wish-fulfillment, and of an immortalized affective present, can often obscure other strategies of subject-formation that prefer to combine different elements of these genres and create liminal forms of expression. These "reconfigurations" of older and more traditional genres are capable of oscillating between change and consistency.[596]

This focus on extended lyrical development opens up a space for reflection on the interrelationship between large-scale societal transformations and internal personal struggles. More importantly, though, it allows us to reassess one of the central tensions underwriting the Idea of Penelope after '68; namely the representation of her character either the archetype of the Good, Faithful woman, or as the unsung heroine of Feminism. In confronting this rigid opposition of ideal social types, the long poem offers us an alternative venue for literary crafting in which the

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[595] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 11.
[596] On reconfigurations, see the aforementioned Heidmann, 'Tourner Les Figures Mythiques Vers "l'ouvert Inconnu"'.

natural skepticism and behavioral ambiguities defining the character since antiquity find ample room to play themselves out, providing authors and readers with a poignant instrument to help them navigate the shifting terrain of modern gender relations in ways that accommodate non-deterministic models of temporality and non-linear iterations of social development and intimacy. My primary interest throughout this thesis has been with the ways in which the authors featured here stage a Penelope that intervenes at the margins of genres and social discourses. Above all, each text introduced here is forged around the tension between a lyrical "I" that is "creating, clarifying or freeing of the individual self" and an "epic self in the world" that is preoccupied with the major concerns of women in modern societies, especially with the question of how they are asked to wait in myriad ways, as well as how they can be seen to respond creatively to these expectations.

When creating a multifocal dialogue attendant to specific contexts of individual literary creations redeploy mythical archetypes, the challenge is often finding the way to strike the right balance between universalist and particularist horizons of interpretations. In elucidating this challenge, I draw on Caroline Levine's articulation of socio-formal analysis to suggest a flexible framework for tracking the Penelopean figure in the contemporary world. In this multifocal model of reading, the focus is firstly on making the social and formal aspects of mythmaking interilluminate each other rather being "contained" one within the other. Secondly, the aim is to capture Penelopean forms as both highly mobile and historically situated. In this sense, the heroine's story may travel between national contexts, but it by no means exceeds them. Finally, Penelopean forms should be articulated as plural and overlapping, so that "bounded whole" traditionally associated with the modern lyric may be seen in relation to other more connective and sprawling formal shapings of the social world it circulates in.

As we have seen, there are no straightforward formulas on how to address the social and formal predicaments raised in the act of revisionist mythmaking, nor do Penelopean forms fall neatly into pre-confected receptacles of feminist and anti-feminist subjectivity. Each author pushes back against patriarchal and other adjacent dogmas in highly distinct ways. Likewise, their heroines exhibit highly variable attitudes towards the process of waiting, in ways that resist any rushed desire for closure. Indeed, the entire inner development of this thesis may be described in such terms.

Taking for granted that modern Homeric reimaginations often frustrate a notion of nostos as a successful reunion, in Chapter 1, I examined three authors that collectively raise the question of what happens when Penelopean waiting is delinked from the prospect of narrative wish-fulfillment. Beginning with Francisca Aguirre, we experienced the loneliness of a waiting woman, alternating between moments of meditation on the symbolical meanings of Ithaca and desperate cries for help; the island is abandoned even by gods, and the only voices still heard are the echoes of those that are gone. Still, this Penelope prefers Ithaca to an epic quest, because it is this poetic space that supports the rhythm of her heartbeat. With Gail Holst-Warhaft, we saw how waiting is no longer connected to marital fidelity, but to consistency in one's own projects and values. Her Penelope consistently calls into question her own memory: how can it be trustworthy if it has such a "distilled spirit"? Still, she holds on to it, because it is all she has, the only material on which she can build her own narration of the story. Ending the chapter with the most recent Jose Gardeazabal, we had the chance to meet the heroine after she had already prepared her suitcases. This Penelope is leaving, she is not waiting any more with her body, she feels the need to travel. Yet, sentimentally she is still here, writing Ovidian-like letters and leaving the doors open for the Other to return, to follow her on adventures whose terms she will decide.

Chapter 2, on the other hand, builds on the concept of waiting but also gives way to forms of expression that more explicitly leave space for the mourning of the missing Other. The authors examined here depict Penelopes that are still compromised by their condition of limbo, but ultimately decide to grieve and mourn their lost object of desire. Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke returns to the well-known trope of a Penelope-weaver of verses and shows the immediate effect of absence on poetic expression: the Other's loss is simultaneously the reason to write and the pain that destroys this same writing. Her Penelope lament and grieves *with* her body, constantly searching for touch, but with her mind she "has already accompanied" Odysseus "to the door". An even more sorrowful ending is sung by Louise Gluck, who seeks out Penelope's company to cope with the pain of divorce. Her book is like a photographic album of the ended marriage, alternating between sweet and bitter memories, siren songs and fragmented conversations. For this Penelope, there is only one remedy to the pain of the loss, and that is to imagine the next poem. In the last part of the chapter, through the verses of Phoebe Giannisi, Penelope is confronted with another loss, that of the children who have grown up and are not any more dependent on the mother. Verses full of

tender love and care alternate others of existential agony: this woman is fighting against time, and song is her weapon.

The versatile figure of the heroine as she emerges from the joint reading of these books brings us back to the central questions of *Exit Penelope*: why is it important to look at Penelopes rendered in book-length lyric poetry composed and published in the long wake of ’68, and what is gained by doing so through a comparative lense? What does the diachronic Penelopean imaginary have to offer to artists who plunge into mythical worlds to help them make sense of modern subjectivities shaped by distinct and overlapping feminist waves of social change?

What I believe this thesis has shown is that, if “mythmakers usually fabricate and celebrate the category of the ‘hero elect’ – unwavering, singular, usually male resisters, whom the community should worship and honor for generations to come”,[597] the mythmakers that opt for the figure of a new Penelope choose instead to devise a multi-faceted heroine whose humanity is capacious enough, especially when mediated trough the form of the long lyric, to allow for a whole lot of wavering, self-skepticism, and contradition. Working *through* traditional traits of the Penelopean myth, and thus “anchoring innovation in tradition”,[598] in the pages of *Exit Penelope* we witness the spacetime of waiting becoming a home to Penelope’s existential anxieties (Aguirre, Anghelaki-Rooke) *and* to her quest for self-determination (Holst-Warhaft, Gardeazabal); it catalyzes her esoteric meditation (Aguirre) *and* her critical reflections on her rapidly changing surroundings (Holst-Warhaft, Gardeazabal, Glück); it propels her demonstrations of tender love, care and faithfulness towards the projects that *she* chooses to carry on (Holst-Warhaft, Giannisi) *and* allows her to rebuff the narrations imposed on her by others (Gardeazabal). The spacetime of waiting, static as it may seem through its gerund*ial* nature, manages to accommodate the woman’s present of uncertainties and agony (Aguirre), her “distilled” memories of a distant mythical past (Holst-Warhaft), and her dreams for a more self-governing future (Gardeazabal). Above all, the practice of waiting in Penelope’s extended lyric trains us readers to follow a pace we have grown unaccustomed to in our contemporary world: a slow, cyclical rhythm that, rather than rushing towards a goal, a result, or even a *nostos*, it regularly returns to the same themes, topics, arguments and *stays* with them, re-elaborating them each time from a different angle, revealing a “minefield

[597] Mihaela Mihai, *Political Memory and the Aesthetics of Care: The Art of Complicity and Resistance*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022), 6.
[598] Sluiter, ‘Anchoring Innovation’.

of ambiguities"[599] and a multilayered personality that refuses to abide to old and new dogmas of being in the world. In the lyrical verse found *Exit Penelope*, waiting is a spacetime of poetic resistance, that challenges easy transformations and holds out against fast-paced trends.

It is in this mighty wor(l)dly tool that the poets of *Exit Penelope*, and especially of Chapter 2, 'take an oath', conscious of the magic stardust that they hold in their hands. If the protagonists of the first chapter remain largely concentrated on the manifestations of the waiting *within* the waiting, the Penelopes of "The Song of Lament" embark on a voyage of lyric expression that elaborates the pain provoked by absence – what is to be made of it. Once more, the extended space of long-lyric grants the heroine with the possibility to show herself in the world in a plurality of times and feelings: we witness her exasperation (Anghelaki-Rooke), her bittersweet irony (Glück), her nostalgia (Giannisi); we depict her grief manifested in the tears that fall and destroy the poetic paper (Anghelaki-Rooke), in the swan song she sings not to mend but to worship the pieces of a broken marriage (Glück), in the desperate swimming stretches in a pool empty of love (Giannisi); we are testimonies *both* of her female power to overcome the void by "bearing life inside her" (Giannisi) *and* of her vulnerability as she anxiously wakes up her child in the night (Giannisi).

Lyric poetry arms Penelope with a strong 'I' with which to meditate, confess, express herself and ultimately survive. And yet, if we can learn something from these Penelopes, this is because we can feel them close to us, because their lyric essence speaks also *besides* this essence.[600] Wrapped in the universality of her myth, the realistic modern woman depicted in *Exit Penelope* tries, failures, and then gets up to try again, sometimes with success, others without. She does not ask to be worshipped for their numerous achievements but rather for her patience to pull herself back together when things go wrong, taking the necessary time to soothe her pain through periods of internal reflection and then proceeds to a courageous artistic expression of her will, her desires, her grief. In this way, the protagonists of *Exit Penelope* provide an alternative model for modern feminists, advocating for slow-paced and in-depth critical reflections, that resist oppositional binarisms and encourage a more expansive presentation of human personalities, acknowledging and worshipping the diversiform nuances that they may hide.

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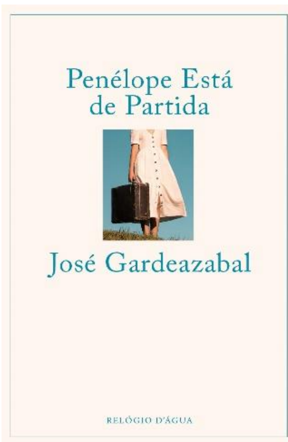
[599] Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela [David Philip Publishers, 2003]*, 51.

[600] Paraphrasing the aforementioned words by Rei Terada that "if 'lyric' is a concept that will help us think, it's because it helps us think about something *besides* lyric", in Terada, 'After the Critique of Lyric', 196.

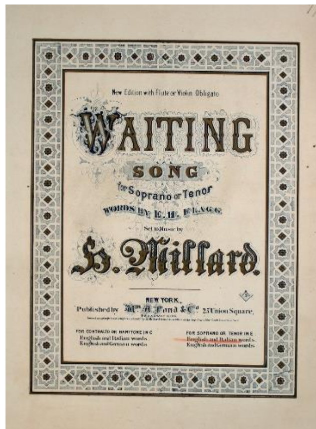
Annex of Images

“Memory’s Distilled Spirit”, inspired by Gail Holst-Warhaft’s verse
Images created with AI by Canva



José Gardeazabal, *Penélope Está De Partida*, Cover

Poster for a demonstration organised by the feminist union La mala educación. Bologna, 24.11.2023



"Waiting Song for Soprano or Tenor" by H. Millard

Bonus Soundtrack

As we saw all along this thesis, Penelope is immersed in lyrics, not only in those of the 'silent, destined to private reading' lyric poetry, but also to lyrics of actual songs. Her relationship to modern and contemporary music and songs is one of the many subjects that merit to be studied. I leave here a list of Penelopean songs, some of which were indeed allusions in the texts presented, others who are connections of my own. Most of them make explicit reference to our heroine and to typical Penelopean themes, such as the waiting and the weaving.

1. Vincenzo Bellini, *Norma* (1831): Maria Callas, Casta Diva (1958, Paris).
2. Harrison Millard, lyrics by Ellen H. Flagg, "Waiting" (1864): Millan & Flagg, Waiting.
3. James Lynam Molloy, lyrics by Graham Clifton Bingham, "Love's Old Sweet Song" (1884): Bing Crosby, Love's old sweet song.
4. Δημήτρης Γκόγκος (Μπαγιαντέρας), "Σαν μαγεμένο το μυαλό μου" ("My mind, enchanted") (1940?): Δημήτρης Γκόγκος, Σαν μαγεμένο το μυαλό μου; Gadjo Dillo, Σαν μαγεμένο το μυαλό μου.
5. Joseph Kosma, lyrics by Jacques Prévert, "Les feuilles mortes" (1946): Yves Montand, Les feuilles mortes (1945); English lyrics by Johnny Mercer, Jo Stafford, Autumn Leaves (1950) & Nat King Cole, Autumn Leaves.
6. Georges Brassens, "Pénélope" (1960): Georges Brassens, Penélope.
7. Joan Manuel Serrat, "Penelope" (1969): Joan Manuel Serrat, Penelope.
8. José Mário Branco, "Fado Penélope" (1982): José Mário Branco, Fado Penelope.
9. Francesco Baccini, *Cartoons*, "Penelope" (1989): Francesco Baccini, Penelope.
10. Νάμα, *Anamniseis* (*Memories*) (1992), i. "Ράβε ξήλωνε" ("Ravel unravel"): Νάμα, Ράβε ξήλωνε; "Οδυσσέας" ("Odysseus"): Νάμα, Οδυσσέας.
11. Robby Rosa (*aka* Draco Rosa), *Vagabundo*, "Penélope" (1996): Draco Rosa, Penélope (live version).
12. Μίλτος Πασχαλίδης, *Κακές συνήθειες* (*Bad Habits*), "Πηνελόπη" (1998): Μίλτος Πασχαλίδης, Πηνελόπη.
13. Ευανθία Ρεμπούτσικα, lyrics by Μιχάλης Γκάνας, "Πηνελόπη" (2004): Έλλη Πασπαλά, Πηνελόπη.
14. Jovanotti, *Buon sangue*, "Penelope" (2005): Jovanotti, Penelope.
15. Μίκης Θεοδωράκης, *Οδύσσεια* (2007): sang by Μαρία Φαραντούρη, lyrics written by Κώστας Καρτέλιας.
16. Fred Nevché, "Pénélope" (2018): Fred Nevché, Penélope.

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"Barbielope reading Notes on Anarchism*": Project Barbielope, by Marta Wanicka and Valerio Giuzio.*