

Reading Margaret Atwood's The Penelopiad as a Parody to Homer's The Odyssey

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Abstract:

The act of rewriting the classical works focusing on the side story of the marginalized characters has been the quest for many revisionist writers, among which Margaret Atwood is a pillar. Notably, her novella entitled *The Penelopiad*, which challenges the Homeric *Odyssey* by considering it as a male-focused epic tale is the work intended behind this study. In her narrative Atwood aimed at giving both the feminine narrative justice and multi-dimensional role for the two of the sidelined characters in *The Odyssey*. Therefore, by giving voice to Penelope and her Twelve hanged maids, Atwood offers the reader with an alternative version of the story, meanwhile applying a satiric approach while tracking original plot creating an interesting sub-plot. Henceforth, this article aimed at investigating how *The Penelopiad* bombarded *The Odyssey*, by following the ideas of intertextuality and parody since they are highly attached to postmodernism and so does the Novella. Subsequently, the findings specifies that Atwood's *The Penelopiad* function as a parody to the *Odyssey*, as it demystifies the ancient praised myths in the Homeric version, while offering space to the creation of a new myth that embrace the female as a hero and an active agent in the story.

Keywords: Atwood; Homer; Intertextuality; Parody; *The Odyssey*; *The Penelopiad*.

1- Introduction

According to Julia Kristeva's ideas of Intertextuality, there is no pure text. Any text is a varied combination of texts. Therefore, the text cannot be detached from cultural or institutional influence. More precisely, the reader can trace any text as a communicative interconnection with at least one other text. In her famous work "word, Dialogue and Novel" (1966), Kristeva expounds that a text can never exist as a self-sufficient entity. Thus, in order to understand a text the reader needs a critical reading, of other texts because the writer is primarily a reader. Margaret Atwood's "The Penelopiad" is one of the first books that aimed at retelling ancient myths by the Canadians Canongate House of publications, which aim at retell one hundred myths by the year 2038. This new versions respond to the original myths, which are regarded as the base, since they foreground these

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new versions. Notably, these revisionary works of fiction are perceived as self-reflexive literary products. Henceforth, they challenge canonical works by mocking or cutting them from novelistic conventions and traditional narrative techniques. These works are often addressed as parodies. Which is the case of Atwood's post-modern version of Homer's *Odyssey*.

Thus postmodernism is a movement highly attached to intertextuality, and since Skepticism dominates the movement, the rejection of any totalizing truth or belief and undermining the validity of canonical works is a trait found in many revisionist texts, which opt for satiric mode of writing often addressed as "Parody". More precisely, Parody is to rewrite a text in a humorist mocking style to create new meanings and reveal the hidden. For instance, Margaret Atwood's masterpiece *The Penelopiad* is a pure illustration of Parody. In her work, Atwood reworks Homer's Greek epic *The Odyssey* in a deriding mold. This Atwoodian masterpiece seems an attempt to revise the famous myth of Penelope and Odysseus, whereas dedicating the narration to the resurrected voices of Penelope and her maids

This article aims at investigating Atwood's dialogue with *The Odyssey* through the approach of intertextuality and Parody. Henceforth, this article is divided into two major sections, the first is designed to spot the traces of *The Odyssey* in *The Penelopiad*, and the second to clarify how *The Penelopiad* parodies *the Odyssey*.

1-1 Traces of the Odyssey in the Penelopiad

For a better understanding to the parodic ties between *The Odyssey* and *The Penelopiad*, we have first to spot the traces of the original text within the parodic version. For this reason, this section will shed light on the traces of *The Odyssey* within the plot skeleton *The Penelopiad*.

1-1-1 The Myth of Odysseus's wanderings

The Odyssey is an adventurous epic journey, henceforth, tracing the elements of Odysseus wanderings is key to signal the intertextuality between the original work and the re-written version. Odysseus journey can be traced through the narrative of Penelope, as she aimed at despising them, and questioning their truthfulness, however, this will be developed in the section after introducing the method. Most importantly, *The Penelopiad* best bond with Odysseus wondering is clearly apparent in the chapter thirteen entitled, "The Chorus Line: The Wily Sea Captain, a Sea Shanty Performed by the

Twelve Maids, in Sailor Costumes". In this chorus line, the maids sing a song about Odysseus and his journey starting from his alleged departure from Troy, tracing all the hardships he encounters, from the Lotus land eaters until his departure from the island of the nymph Calypso. The flow of the song events follows the same order, as those mentioned in *The Odyssey* from "Book Nine" until "Book Twelve", where Odysseus counts his misfortune journey to the king and queen of the Phaeacian land.

1-1-2 The Myth of Penelope's faithfulness (the Shroud)

The myth of Penelope's shroud as counted by Homer's *Odyssey* stood for so long as a pictogram of faithfulness and virtue. Thus, she tricked all the suitors by weaving a shroud that she unravels by night, gaining time waiting for her husband. Penelope becomes an icon of fidelity, and her reputation is praised in the Homeric epic,

"... Shrewd Odysseus!.. You are a fortunate man to have won a wife of such pre-eminent virtue! How faithful was your flawless Penelope, Icarius' daughter! How loyally she kept the memory of the husband of her youth! The glory of her virtue will not fade with the years, but the deathless gods themselves will make a beautiful song for mortal ears in honour of the constant Penelope." (Homer, 2003, p.24)

The trick of the shroud is similarly recalled in the new version, both to assert Penelope's faithfulness and cunningness. The modern Penelope devoted a chapter from her narrative to speak about her trick that she was proud of its effectiveness

"Here is what I did. I set up a large piece of weaving on my loom, and said it was a shroud for my father-in-law, Laertes, since it would be impious of me not to provide a costly winding sheet for him in the event that he should die. Not until this sacred work was finished could I even think of choosing a new husband, but once it was completed I would speedily select the lucky man" (Atwood, 2005, p.66).

However, Penelope deals with this scheme of shroud from different angles, as she reveals to the modern readers a set of related events, because "the trickery of the shroud is doubled here by revelation to another stratagem conceived by the queen and undetected in Homer's version" (Dell' Abate-Çelebe, 2016, p.125). In other words, Penelope speaks about her trick, which was mistakenly exposed to the suitors.

1-1-3 Tracing Characterization in *The Penelopiad*

Another important trace of the skeleton of *The Odyssey* within *The Penelopiad* would be characterization. Notably, *The Odyssey* is a long epic narrative, thus it is crowded with characters. Whereas, *The Penelopiad* is a novella, so it does not contain all the characters mentioned in *The Odyssey*, yet mainly those characters upon which the plot is developed, especially if the readers consider that *The Penelopiad* is merely a subplot driven from the main epic tale. Overall, Atwood devotes her *Penelopiad* to the characters who take part in Penelope's part of the myth. Of these characters we can name Penelope's husband Odysseus, her son Telemachus, her mother and father, as well as her mother and father in law, her cousin Helen, the twelve maids. Besides many other characters, which were only part of her narrative. Furthermore, all the characters borrowed from *The Odyssey* are kept with their names, positions, yet their images are changed due to the process of parodying.

2- Method:

2- 1 Intertextuality

The term "intertextuality" was first articulated by the late 1960, by the Bulgarian thinker Julia Kristeva in her works "Word, Dialogue and Novel" and then "The Bounded Text". However, it is agreed to have its origins in modern linguistic, because Kristeva "combined ideas from Bakhtin on the social context of language with Saussure's positing of the systematic feature of language" (Juliastuti, 2017, p. 23). According to this theory, authors do not create original texts from their minds; instead, their literary products are accumulated from previous text. Because authors are readers too, henceforth, their prior readings influence their literary products. In other words, Kristeva "argues that 'each word (text) is an inter section of other word (text) where at least one other word (text) can be read'" (Martinez, 1996, p.268). Despite the fact that intertextuality appeared decades ago, the modern age seems to be inclined greatly towards it. For instance, while many authors show a deep influence by other works, the postmodern writers use the techniques of intertextuality to re-write new works. As re-writing dominate the image of literature in the modern and postmodern age, authors seem no longer seeking for originality, thus for parallel versions of previous works. That is why, Martinez (1996) notes; "many contemporary writers consciously imitate, quote, plagiarize, parody...extensively" (p.5).

2– 2 Parody

By definition, it is correct to say that parody is a work that retell another work, yet with a mockery. Henceforth, according to the critic Simon (2000) “parody includes any cultural practice which provides relatively polemical allusive imitation to another cultural production or practice” (09). However, mocking and despite being unconsciously associated with parody, it does not necessarily conveys its essence. Revising previous literary works through the lights of parody is different from the traditional concept of despising or scorning works. In her “*Parody without Ridicule*”, Hutcheon (1978) signals clearly the function of parody in modern works, as she emphasizes that the aim of parody is not to ridicule or demolish the reputation of the works. According to her “parody implies a distance between the back grounded text being parodied and the new work, a distance usually signalled by irony but irony is more playful than ridiculing, more critical than destructive” (p.09). Indeed, parody is believed to function as a critic, as it preserve the text it seeks to bombard, through a paradoxical effect, which makes it according to some writers “serves as a normative critical function” (Dentith, 2000, p.33). Remarkably, parody has many contributions, one of which is the evolution of literary style. Yet, most importantly, parody is agreed by many scholars to be one of the intertextual allusions that reverse previous narratives, and act as a weapon serving of the new versions against the old ones.

2– 3 The Aims

This study aims at analyzing Atwood's “*The Penelopiad*” as a parodic version to *The Odyssey* by relying upon:

- Julia Kristeva idea of intertextuality and Linda Hutcheon's ideas of parody

This article will spot the instances where Atwood is seemingly parodying Homer:

- It starts by back tracing the traces of *The Odyssey* in *The Penelopiad*.
- Then, it tries to clarify why *The Penelopiad* is a Parody to *The Odyssey*.
- Finally, it decodes the parodic ties of novella and the Homeric epic.

3– How *The Penelopiad* Parodies *The Odyssey*

From the introduction of her novella, Margaret Atwood was clear about her intentions, as she gives the retelling honour to Penelope and her twelve handed maids. Since, Atwood reveals to the reader that she has been haunted by two question, “what led to the hanging of the maids, and what was Penelope really up to?” (Atwood, 2017, p.05).

For instance, in the original version of *The Odyssey*, Penelope along her maids, are regarded as passive characters, thus, the narrative is related to epic heroism, and “hero has no feminine gender in the age of heroes” (Finely, 2005, p. 25). Women in the ancient Grecian society were assigned to domestic affairs only

Notably, since *The Penelopiad* is a revisionary work that interpreted *The Odyssey* through Penelope and her maids, creating a domestic sub-plot aiming at giving new version of the myth through parodying the original epic tale. Following the story line where two marginalised characters from *The Odyssey* are brought into the centre of the narrative, the contemporary reader is expected to discover new dimension of Homer’s odyssey. A dimension where demythologizing myths, and revealing hidden secrets are keys, within a conversational parodic approach, that challenges the norms breaking away from the traditional concepts of writing myths.

3.1 Demythologizing the Myth of Odysseus

The epic tale of Odysseus and his ten-year journey home did not only turned him into classical hero, additionally it turned him into an enigmatic figure of bravery and cunningness. Songs of praise has been sung glorifying his name, and many literary works crowded with allusions to his magnificent adventures. However, unlike many books *The Penelopiad* did the opposite. Penelope aimed at telling her part of the story, which resulted in a demythologizing process, where the uniqueness and originality of homer’s version is weakened and questioned,

In Greek mythology, Odysseus is a legendary hero. The great king of Ithaca, the son of Laertes and Antyclea. Furthermore, he is the protagonist of Homer’s epic narrative. In this great epic tale, Odysseus resembles an outstanding image for cunningness, ingenuity, courage and a master of disguise. These unique features are repeatedly emphasized, through his achievement, both during the Trojan War, and during his ten years journey in his way back home after the war ended, during which, he confronted natural and supernatural threats ; shipwrecks, monsters, battles, beasts besides Poseidon’s antagonism. In brief, Homer’s *Odyssey* designs Odysseus as an extraordinary clever, courageous and resourceful warrior. However, this is not the only version of the story

Since the very first pages of *The Penelopiad*, Penelope seems to be clear about the image she is willing to deconstruct, criticise, and henceforth rebuild, a correct image without any mythic masculine glorification, as she believes. In one of the early

mentioning of her husband journey, Penelope says, "He was always so plausible. Many people have believed that his version of events was the true one" (p. 02) then she proceeds "I knew he was tricky and a liar, I just didn't think he would play his tricks and try out his lies on me" (p.02-03). This passage is key since "Atwood poetry and fiction is often a journey into the unconsciousness of her characters" (Dell' Abate-Çelebe, 2016, p.122), therefore, the modern Penelope is no longer restricted by the patriarchal system that force women to be passive. In her version of the story, Penelope reveals her inner thoughts about the greatness of her husband; consequently, she unveils her fake ancient admiration to her husband, by minimizing his deeds.

Atwood's parodic narrative is immersed with humour and irony. That is induced through the manner Penelope narrates the story and talks about her husband. For instance, each time Penelope refers to him, she bombards his male machismo of strength and virility, through making fun of his "barrel chest and short legs" and mocking "his rustic clothes" as well as his "manners of a small-town big short" (p.29). Furthermore, Penelope even states, "The other young men made jokes about him" (p. 29). In another passage, Penelope even criticizes his none fitting appearance when one of her maids responds unkindly, to how fast he can run mocking his short legs. Apparently, Penelope shares their same opinion as she adds, "Indeed the legs of Odysseus were quite short in relation to his body. It was all right when he was sitting down, you didn't notice, but standing up he looked top-heavy" (p.30).

Subsequently, Penelope goes for debunking Odysseus' braveries during his supposedly hard and challenging journey. In this process, Penelope theorises two possibilities. On the one hand, Penelope suggests that all the braveries and the great deeds aligned to Odysseus is no more than the fabrication of the minstrels, for the aim of gaining her rewards, "the minstrels took up these themes and embroidered them considerably. They always sang the noblest versions in my presence the ones in which Odysseus was clever, brave, and resourceful, and battling supernatural monsters, and beloved of goddesses" (p.70). To put it another way, Penelope here expresses her doubts that the minstrels, as well as the passing by travellers sophisticate rumours about the wondering of her husband, in order to alarm or to irritate her, "people were making things up just to alarm me, and to watch my eyes fill with tears. There is a certain zest to be had in tormenting the vulnerable" (p.76-77).

Soon after, Penelope draws a new hypothesis for the same claim. However, this time she goes for a direct demystification of Odysseus' achievements, she turns his whole journey into nothing more than illusions. His fight with a giant one-eyed Cyclops appeared to be "only one-eyed tavern keeper...over a non-payment of the bill" (p.66). Furthermore, the rumour about the cannibals turned to be "just a brawl of the usual kin, with ear-bitings and stabbing and nosebleeds and eviscerations" (p.70)

Nevertheless, Penelope did not only suspect the heroic deeds of Odysseus, but she satirizes his affairs with the divine nymphs Calypso and Circe. While in the Homeric version Odysseus emphasizes that "the divine Calypso was certainly for keeping me in her cavern home because she yearned for me to be her husband and with the same object Circe, the Aeaean witch, detained me in her palace" (Homer, 2003, p. 03). In her modern narrative, Penelope reduces these affairs to mere caprices in whorehouses, as she claims that "Odysseus was the guest of a goddess on an enchanted isle, said some...no, said others, it was just an expensive whorehouse, and he was sponging off the Madam" (p.66-70). Overall, the modern Penelope and through her ferocious wit and caustic humor reduces Odysseus's legendary adventures, fights with supernatural monsters and his stories of seductresses, into the level of popular gossip and rumors. Notably, more than a crafted liar, our Penelope proves Odysseus to have another specialty "getting away". Thus, it would be logical if we conclude that the entire epic journey as believed by Penelope is just an imaginative story composed by Odysseus in order to justify his long absence during which he was having fun, and that his return to Ithaca was just retirement plan, when he went old.

In brief, it is agreed that "in Atwood's *The Penelopiad* different contradictory voices offer a more complex and less heroic picture of the man and his legendary adventures" (Dell' Abate-Çelebe, 2016,p.125), and this is mainly what the modern reader is offered by in this revisionist work. However, the myth of Odysseus is not the only original part being parodied, because, Atwood and through her demystification of Odysseus myth, she brought into light a modern character for Penelope, a character that is different.

3.2 A Modern Penelope

In recent times, the traditional image of Penelope as a passive character has been challenged. Homer depicted Penelope as a veiled conservative silenced woman; the reader get to know her only through her husband Odysseus, her son Telemachus, or other male characters who praised her virtues. Unlikely, in Atwood's version, Penelope is the narrator, and the central character. In this masterpiece, Penelope speaks for herself; she narrates her life story, before, and after marrying Odysseus. She denies the old interpretation; instead, she became the central and the modifying agent of the plot. Atwood's clear attempt from her work is to offer a female counterpart to the male epic. Although her modern Penelope did not make any journey into a sea, fighting monsters and seducing male gods. Her journey is a unique mission, a heroic female quest, which "is to keep Odysseus's kingdom prosperous in the first place and then also whole and safe from the suitor's greedy wish to appropriate it" (Bottez, 2012, p. 52).

The modern age seems fitting for Penelope to tell her story, a story that is grounded in the domestic mundane life of a woman. Penelope is revealing her thoughts and conversing with an original version, a version she found unfair, subsequently she questions its validity saying, "what did I amount to, once the official version gained ground? An edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with" (p. 04). It is from the dissatisfaction that Penelope feels an urge to speak. Henceforth, the story she tells from the underworld sounds captivating, as "she sets up the confessional dynamics, seducing us with the promise to tell us 'everything'" (Howells, 2006, p. 11).

Correspondingly, Penelope builds her narration upon suspicions, she successively expresses her doubts and questionings, which proves that she is as cunning and smart as Odysseus. Exactly as asserted by Monica Bottez (2012), "In her story Penelope portrays herself in the light of a peer consort, an equal match to a trickster hero" (p.52). Astonishingly, the modern Penelope did not only suspect her husband deeds, she suspected even the existence of gods, and question the validity of their divine powers, believing they have gone to sleep, because the modern age is an age of reason.

As a pure postmodernist narrator, Penelope opens the closed doors to say the unsaid and to fill in the gaps; as she says at the very beginning when introducing herself "Of course I had inklings, about his slipperiness, his wiliness, his foxiness...his unscrupulousness, but I turned a blind eye. I kept my mouth shut; or, if I opened it, I sang

his praises. I didn't contradict; I didn't ask awkward questions, I didn't dig deep. I wanted happy endings in those days, and happy endings are best achieved by keeping the right doors locked and going to sleep during the rampages.” (06). In this passage, Penelope clearly destroys her ancient image of passiveness and ignorance, instead she argues that she knew everything, she could think, observe and analyse, yet she willingly and on purpose decided to keep silent and pretend to be convinced in order to avoid complication.

As follows, Penelope expresses her opinion about tale telling at that time. As she realizes that people turned her into a story, or rather stories both “clean and dirty”. Thus, she is inflamed to tell her own version of the story in order to settle everything up, which results in a practical denial of the truth in the ancient narrations. Subsequently, Penelope corroborates Graham Allen’s point that “Parody is not an empty, playful recording of culture, but a “radical questioning of the available forms of representation and thus the available mode of knowledge within culture.” (Allen, 2011, p.190). For this reason, Penelope justifies her silence until the modern time, as she says, “Though not the kind of stories I'd prefer to hear about myself. What can a woman do when scandalous gossip travels the world? If she defends herself, she sounds guilty. So I waited some more.” (p.07). In a word, Penelope accuses her time of being suppressive of women, a woman cannot even defend herself, and rather she would be taken for guilty.

Speaking from the after-death, the Atwoodian Penelope, paradoxically aims at re-establishing her image, and founding her own authority. By confessing that most of the times she cleverly makes things seem the way she wants them to seem “Perhaps I have only invented it in order to make myself feel better”. (p.08). Two major examples of that would be; her confession to be surprised of her son Telemachus’ secret departure in search of his father “I had to appear to be surprised.” (p.122). More clearly, Penelope explicitly parodies *The Odyssey*, that asserts her none- recognition of Odysseus, when he came back disguised as a beggar. In *The Penelopiad*, she recognizes him the moment she sees him “as soon as I saw that barrel chest and those short legs... It’s always an imprudence to step between a man and the reflection of his own cleverness” (p.136-137). More accurately, Penelope plays the role of the innocent and submissive in order to please her men’s ego, or else she is equally attentive and clever to any and each of them.

Penelope within her revisionist story deconstruct the official stories. Those stories which has no full details in Homer’s version, therefore, she shed light on the gaps in

Homer's narrative. For instance, while in the Homeric *Odyssey*, Odysseus is the master of disguise, in *The Penelopiad* we are introduced into another reality. A reality that indicates that Penelope actually recognised her beggar disguised husband. However, she went on his trick with him, as she decided to end set the final contest between the suitors, while bringing Odysseus bow asking them to use, and which is impossible, as Odysseus is the only man to have the full knowledge and strength to use. Penelope emphasised on this fact in her narrative claiming, "I knew that only Odysseus would be able to perform this archery trick. I knew that the beggar was Odysseus. There was no coincidence. I set the whole thing up on purpose" (p.114).

Further, in her parodic version, Penelope extends her scrutiny to reach another important figure of the epic, the glorious Helen.

3.3 The Exposure of Helen's Reality

In *The Odyssey*, Helen is best known for her divine Beauty, she is the embodiment of idyllic female attractiveness, besides being the princess of Sparta and wife of the king Menelaus. More importantly, Helen is the instigator of the Trojan War. Henceforth, In the process of parodying the previous versions of events and characters, Penelope embarked on a rivalry, where she bombarded the character of her cousin Helen, giving her a darker image. As far as Helen's image is concerned, Penelope seems to be in agreement with the idea that "Parody at once valorises and undermines the conventions and values that it parodies... an apt mode of criticism for postmodernism, itself paradoxical." (Hutcheon, 1978, p.129), because, in her postmodern narrative, Penelope confirms Helen's beauty and sophistication, yet, she criticises her intentions.

Throughout the narrative, Penelope condemns Helen to be a selfish, arrogant woman who uses her beauty to seduce men. Additionally, she finds pleasure in the mess she creates each time she appears in public. Even in her Cousin Penelope's wedding, Helen appeared in her exaggerative luxurious look to seize the light and attention for herself, as said by Penelope "my cousin Helen came sailing up...She had a distinctive swaying walk and she was exaggerating it. Although mine was the marriage in question, she wanted all the attention for herself... She was dressed to perfection" (p.31)

Penelope criticises the arrogance, selfishness and superficiality of her cousin, blaming her for all the suffering she passed through in her life. Penelope also insists that Helen should be punished for her crimes, and the quest of Penelope is simply to

“undermine the wrongly idealized image, transmitted through *The Odyssey*, of Helen as the archetype of femininity” (Dell’ Abate-Çelebe, 2016, p.127). In brief, Penelope intends to break the image of her cousin. However, regardless of the crimes Helen is believed to commit according to Penelope, the reader is introduced through this to another side of Penelope’s personality; a jealous ordinary woman, who is far from the virtuous image built in *The Odyssey*. *The Penelopiad* as a parody extend also to include another decisive character. A character that deepened further the effect of parody, offering another interpretation of the new version events, and this character is Penelope’s maids.

3.4 Narrative Justice for the Twelve Maids

Atwood’s inventiveness in *The Penelopiad* extend to include another marginalised characters from *The Odyssey*, which are Penelope’s twelve maids. In *The Odyssey*, these maids are as unvoiced as their master’s wife. Additionally, they “undergo a double oppression: social oppression as slaves and gender oppression in a patriarchal society” (Bottez, 2012, p.55). Tragically, the maids’ fate in *The Odyssey* was , because Odysseus order to slaughter them right after he seized back his throne. However, the passage dealing with their death is a small paragraph, which shows no sign of trial, as *The Odyssey* counts “they took the women out of the building, and herded them between the round-house and the great courtyard wall in a narrow space from which there was no escape” (Homer, 2003, p. 22). The maids role in *The Penelopiad* is decisive, as they share the narrative with Penelope, and perhaps their story is the mystery of the text, because the modern reader has no clue about their story in the Homeric *Odyssey*. Furthermore, Atwood claims, “I’ve always been haunted by the hanged maids; and, in *The Penelopiad*, so is Penelope herself”. (p.04), which signals the significance of their presence in Atwood’s narrative.

Unlike Penelope who followed a logical sequence while telling her story, the maids chose to tell their part using neither a narrative structure nor a chronological order. The maids prefer to transmit their story in artistic interpretations, using sea chants, dramas, lectures, ballads, and even a videotape. yet, what clearly distinguishes them more from the character of Penelope is that they speak in one entity, in a chorus line inspired from the Greek drama, as if they are avenging themselves for they had no voice in the original epic.

Since the first chorus line sung by the maids shouting from Hades “we are the maids the ones you killed the ones you failed we danced in air our bare feet twitched”

(p.07). The reader can feel the hardships they endured previously in their short misfortune lives, which Homer did not give a passage to reflect about in his epic poem. Penelope's twelve maids and since their slaughter, they had been wondering in the underworld, with restless souls seeking both revenge and justice, justice not only from their master who ordered to kill them, but also from Penelope herself. That is why; the narrative of Penelope is often interrupted by the maids, especially as the story reaches its climax.

Astonishingly, the maids through their polyphonic narration, they challenge both the original Homeric text, and Penelope modern version of the story, as stated "the maids version of the events discounts the mythical faithfulness of the queen, who deprived of her mythical fidelity aura shows the same desires and weaknesses as Odysseus" (Del'Abate 2016, p.133). The maids do not only create a voice for themselves, chanting their epic, but they parody the version of events told by Penelope herself. Hence, they thickened the layers of parody in *The Penelopiad*, creating through their juxtaposing version of events another dimension of *The Penelopiad* as a postmodern narrative. For instance, in one of the very significant chapters devoted to the maids, under the titles "The Perils of Penelope, A Drama Presented by: The Maids", the maids claim that Penelope was unfaithful to Odysseus, offering a counter version of Penelope's tale. This chapter starts by one of the maids saying "As we approach the climax, grim and gory Let us just say: There is another story." (p.119). In this chorus line the maids create a mini drama, where one of the maids play the role of Penelope and another one the role of Euryclea, and their dialogue is taking place right after the return of Odysseus. The maids claim that Penelope was not weaving any burial shroud, instead she was concealing her affairs with their help, and her trick was just a reason to stay in her room, enjoying her adulterous affairs with the suitors, "While you your famous loom claimed to be threading, In fact you were at work within the bedding!" (p.120).

Furthermore, the maids continue in their accusation of Penelope blaming her to be a direct reason behind their slaughter. The maids say that in fear of revealing her dirty secrets, she allied with Odysseus nurse, who is blinded by her deep motherly love to Odysseus, whom she is willing to preserve his honour, regardless of the costs, as the passage shows, "Penelope: Oh then, dear Nurse, it's really up to you To save me, and Odysseus' honour to! ...Point out those maids as feckless and disloyal, Snatched by the

Suitors as unlawful spoil, Polluted, shameless, and not fit to be The dotting slaves of such a Lord as he!”(p.121), and the nurse replied, “We’ll stop their mouths by sending them to Hades He’ll string them up as grubby wicked ladies!” (p.121). Unfortunately, the result was the maids’ merciless slaughter, and ever since the incident they have been languishing in the land of the dead, just to preserve the image of their master’s wife as a faithful wife.

4- Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter proves that Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad* is a parodic version to Homer’s *Odyssey*. In her work, Atwood derived a sub plot from the original pre-text. She follows a parodic approach that resulted in the demystification of Odysseus myth of bravery, Penelope’s image of faithfulness, and Helen’s myth of supreme beauty. Furthermore, to assert her parodic orientations, Atwood brought into light new facades of the two main characters in her work, Penelope and her twelve maids, which were marginalized in *The Odyssey*. Henceforth, parody gives them the power to transmit their thought, and jump into the centre of the narrative. Nevertheless, in her parody Atwood did not only create a unique style. She targeted the patriarchal division of power, and the dominating cultural understanding of womanhood.

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