DOKUZ EYLÜL UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE
AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE PROGRAM
MASTER'S THESIS

NARRATIVE OF THE UNTOLD: REWRITING ANCIENT MYTHS IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE PENELOPIAD* AND SELECTED POEMS

Merve SABUNCUOĞLU

Supervisor
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yeşim BAŞARIR

İZMİR-2016

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ABSTRACT

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The postmodern period has witnessed innumerable literary works which draw a parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity by retelling mythology. Revision of existing narratives, canonical literature and mythology challenges the concepts of originality, uniqueness and authorship as well as destructing male-oriented discourse, androcentric patterns, and archetypes. The debunking of millennial conventional structures encoded by male privilege has set the basis for the rise of feminist revisionary mythology. Feminist revision of myth achieves the true representation of the subordinate, oppressed, muted, displaced, and left behind through attacking the dominant paradigms of classic literature which were undeniably proven phallogocentric, privileging masculinity in the construction of meaning.

Margaret Atwood's rewriting of *The Odyssey* subverts the Homeric myth of faithful Penelope and explores the dark alleys of a central literary work of classical myth which celebrates male heroism. Margaret Atwood grants her protagonists freedom of speech in order to express the weight of being a member of the minority in a dominant society. By narrating the untold, voicing the silenced, balancing power relations, she shifts the focal point to a woman-

centered angle. Without *The Odyssey*, *The Penelopiad* would not make sense. However, more importantly, it is impossible to read *The Odyssey* or *The Iliad* in the same way after reading Atwood's subversive rewritings. Postmodern Penelope, Circe and Helen reweave the narrative of *The Odyssey*, as well as *The Iliad* to some extent, with corrections, justifications and regulations provided by female perspective. It is an ongoing process of the cycle of weaving-unweaving-reweaving.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood, Homeric epics, rewriting, Postmodernism, revision.

ÖZET

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Söylenmeyeni Anlatmak: Margaret Atwood'un *The Penelopiad* Romanında ve Seçilmiş Şiirlerinde Eski Mitlerin Yeniden Yazılması

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Postmodern dönem, mitolojinin yeniden ele alınmasıyla, eski ve yeni arasında bağ kuran sayısız edebi esere tanıklık eder. Var olan anlatıların, edebiyat kanonunun ve mitlerin gözden geçirilmesi, arketipleri ve ataerkil söylemi altüst etmekle birlikte, özgünlük, eşsizlik ve yazarlık kavramlarına da meydan okuyor. Feminist mitoloji uyarlamasının yükselişi erkek egemenliğine dayalı binlerce yıllık geleneksel yapının çürütülmesi temeline dayandırılıyor. Mitin feminist yeniden yazımı, anlam kurmada masküliniteyi inkar edilemez şekilde imtiyazlı kılan fallogosantrik klasik edebiyatın baskın paradigmalarını yıkarak küçümsenmiş, ikinci plana atılmış, susturulmuş, dışlanmış ve geride bırakılmış olanı temsil eder.

Margaret Atwood'un *Odysseia* yeniden yazımı, sadakatli Penolope'nin Homerik mitini altüst edip erkek kahramanlığını göklere çıkaran klasik mitin karanlık sokaklarına ışık tutuyor. Margaret Atwood, baskın toplumlarda azınlık üyesi olan kahramanlarına taşıdıkları yükü ifade edebilecekleri konuşma özgürlüğünü bahşediyor. Söylenmeyeni anlatıp susturulmuş olanı konuşturarak ve böylece güç dengesi sağlayarak, Atwood odak noktasını kadın merkezli bir açıya alıyor. *Odysseia* olmasaydı, *The Penelopiad* hiçbir anlam

ifade etmeyecekti. Bununla birlikte, Atwood'un eseri, *Odysseia* ve *İlyada*'nın tekrar ilk seferki gibi okunmasını imkânsız kılar. Atwood'un postmodern kahramanları Penelope, Circe ve Helen, *Odysseia*'nın ve hatta *İlyada*'nın anlatısını düzeltmelerle, gerekçelerle ve düzenlemelerle yeniden dokuyarak dişil bir perspektif sunarlar. Bu, süregelen bir süreçtir: dokumak, sökmek ve yeniden dokumak.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Margaret Atwood, Homerik destanlar, yeniden yazım, Postmodernizm, uyarlama.

NARRATIVE OF THE UNTOLD:

REWRITING ANCIENT MYTHS IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S

***THE PENELOPIAD* AND SELECTED POEMS**

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation aims to illuminate the revisionist strategies on mythmaking employed by Margaret Atwood in her selected works, *The Penelopiad*, "Circe/Mud Poems", and "Helen of Troy Does Counter Dancing", each being an influential example of postmodern revision. The aim of this study is to examine the function of revisionary mythmaking which is considered to be a distinctive practice in (post)modern literature. There are three main chapters in this research which propose an outline of the study of myth and revisionist mythology within the scope of Postmodernism, Post-structuralism, and Deconstruction. In the light of these movements, the thesis explores the techniques Margaret Atwood performs on her poems "Helen of Troy Does Counter Dancing" and "Circe/Mud Poems", as well as on her novella *The Penelopiad,* published as part of the first set of books in the *Canongate Myth Series* which consists of the rewritings of ancient myths by contemporary writers. Margaret Atwood's works analyzed in this dissertation are among the most powerful and impressive instances of the revisiting of antiquity, rewriting of Greek mythology.

The first chapter of the thesis introduces the concepts of myth and mythology as well as investigating their role in shaping social norms and archetypes. With respect to archetypal criticism, the investigation is supported by the studies of the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung and the Canadian literary critic and theorist Herman Northrop Frye in the fields of psychology and literature. The first chapter focuses extensively on Northrop Frye's archetypal theory as a consequent of his influence on Margaret Atwood as her college professor. Frye's idea of "garrison mentality" is also explored in this chapter to illuminate the major themes in Canadian literature as part of American literature in a wider sense. Margaret Atwood adopts and further develops the concept which asserts that Canada, geographically and psychologically, poses a negative attitude as a huge, unthinking, hostile, menacing, and formidable physical setting.

In addition to these, the first chapter dwells on the life and works of the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood who has remained an important figure, both nationwide and international, in the fields of literary, cultural, and social life

throughout decades. This chapter illustrates how Margaret Atwood has gained recognition not only as a writer but also as a contemporary literary celebrity, media star, cultural critic, environmentalist, human and women's rights spokeswoman, satirist and cartoonist. The framework of this part of the dissertation is supported by the evaluation, investigation and commentary by notable critics and writers.

Within the scope of postmodern fiction, *The Penelopiad* heavily draws on the practice of rewriting. The second chapter forms the theoretical framework of this study by exploring Postmodernism which has produced innumerable literary works in an attempt to draw a parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity by retelling earlier stories, myths, and fairy tales. In order to explore the movement, Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* is scrutinized widely in this chapter. In the light of Postmodernism, Post-structuralist and Deconstructionist approaches are also analyzed. The practice of rewriting, including Feminist Revisionist Mythology, is put under the scope of this study in the second chapter.

Having set the theoretical basis of the study, the second chapter offers a descriptive account of the classical epic poem *The Odyssey* which bears the central characters of Margaret Atwood's beforementioned works that will be explored in this thesis. This part of the dissertation does not only give a brief summary of the Homeric epic but also offers the analysis and the criticism by notable writers and critics of the academia. A postmodern reading of *The Odyssey* is included in this chapter for the purpose of further investigation and understanding.

The final chapter of this research mainly dwells on Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* which is a retelling of *The Odyssey* from the perspective of Penelope, the embodiment of every virtue expected of a "good" woman by the patriarchal society. The study shows how Margaret Atwood challenges the conventions of the patriarchal narration through the voices of Penelope and the twelve maids, who have long been deprived of expression. Having long been disturbed by the lack of Penelope's perspective in the Homeric epic and haunted by the hanging of the twelve maids who were accused of being disloyal, Margaret Atwood reformulates the narration of *The Odyssey* with the purpose of balancing power relations. In doing so, *The Penelopiad*

stands as a correction to the Homeric epic and challenges the authority of canonical literature. The structural analysis of the novella is provided in order to highlight the revisionist strategies Margaret Atwood employs. Besides archetypal analysis, the language, genre, and style are further explored in this chapter.

The third chapter of the dissertation continues with an analysis of Margaret Atwood's use of mythological figures in her poetry. Although the use of mythological intertexts are abundant in Atwood's works, this study exclusively focuses on Penelope, Circe, and Helen; three silenced women who play significant roles in Odysseus's life and journey en route home under the curse of Poseidon who avenges his son's death by Odysseus. They speak for the first time throughout centuries in order to tell their side of the story. The dissertation explores Atwood's method of postmodern revision in both genres in an attempt to explain how she shifts the focal point of myth to a woman-centered angle by narrating the untold, voicing the silenced. By including the twelve maids in her novella, she does not only provide a feminist perspective but also points to the class discrimination and hierarchal structure of society.

Consequently, this dissertation examines the role of postmodern revisionism in restoring, re-imagining, re-working, re-vising, and re-telling of existing narratives in order to challenge canonical works and provide new perspectives, thereby securing justice for the ones that are excluded from or muted by the canon. The study aims to explain how postmodern rewriting achieves and celebrates multidimensionality through the analysis of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, "Circe/Mud Poems", and "Helen of Troy Does Counter Dancing".

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1. MYTH AND MYTHOLOGY

The twentieth century saw a myriad of writers, philosophers, and theorists who studied the subject of myth. The significance of mythology and the relationship between myth and literature was not discovered in the twentieth century, though. The study of myth dates back to antiquity and the linkage of literature to myth and ritual is found debated in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. It is difficult to attach a single, strict definition to myth since it is a broad term to define. On the plurality of its meaning, Northrop Frye states, "The word myth is used in such a bewildering variety of contexts that anyone talking about it has to say first of all what his chosen context is."[1] The wide-ranging definitions of the terms myth and mythology all admit and highlight the influence these myths have on social values and perception. David Leeming, in the "Introduction" of *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, defines myths as "for the most part religious narratives that transcend the possibilities of common experience and that express any given culture's literal or metaphorical understanding of various aspects of reality."[2] Myths or mythology, so to speak, have been used to explain reality beyond simple logic, support a particular system, justify its theology, or disclose what human mind cannot comprehend. Likewise, J. A. Cuddon, in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, gives the definition of myth as "a story which is not 'true' and which involves (as a rule) supernatural beings—or at any rate suprahuman beings. Myth is always concerned with creation. Myth explains how something came to exist."[3] Cuddon resolutely states that myths are untrue sources of existence. Therefore, myth emerged as an attempt to make sense of natural phenomena.

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[1] Frye, Northrop. (1990) **Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays, 1974-1988**. Ed. Robert D. Denham. Charlottesville, VA: UP of Virginia, p. 3.

[2] Leeming, David Adams. (2005) **The Oxford Companion to World Mythology**. Oxford: Oxford UP, p. xi.

[3] Cuddon, J. A. (1991) **The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory**. London: Penguin Books, p. 562.

Myth plays a crucial role in shaping social norms and archetypes, revealing a society's underlying contradictions as well as resolving them, when they remain unresolvable in real world. Myth is a means of organizing collective world experience. The term mythology refers to the study of myth or collection of myths of a particular culture, religion, or society. Myths bind societies together by addressing fears, hopes, beliefs and vital issues of human experience. Although mythology is taken by contemporary readers as not true, many notable thinkers have purported that it consists of universal symbols every individual can relate to. Myths does not necessarily mean supernatural stories about gods and goddesses or unworldly creatures, nor do they solely refer to Greek myths, as Margaret Atwood suggests:

> *Myths mean stories and traitional myths mean traditional stories that have been repeated frequently. The term doesn't pertain to Greek myths alone. Grimm's Fairy Tales are just as much myth or story as anything else. But some get repeated so often in the society that they become definitive, i.e. myths of that society. Certainly Biblical ones have been very important in our society.*[4]

On that account, myths cannot be constrained to Classical or Greco-Roman mythology. Neither can they be interpreted into single, fixed meanings since they bare endless aspects, implications and interpretations. From the Greek *mythos*, myth means word, tale, or story. Both mythology and literature is possible by the means of language and they both tell stories. Roland Barthes argues in his book *Mythologies* that, according to etymology, "myth is a type of speech", but it is not just any type, it requires particular conditions, it is a way of conveying messages.[5] Therefore, Barthes suggests, it is a metalanguage that expresses the intentions of its teller through religion, politics, culture, mass media, art, entertainment etc. Myth and language, so to speak, are intertwined and inseparable. It's a type of speech that uses stories to create meaning. The fact that it provides an endless array of meanings paves the way for endless interpretation, reinvention, revision, rewriting, and renewal. Northrop Frye, whose *Anatomy of Criticism* is a core source for archetypal literary criticism, states that "[m]ythology as a whole provides a kind of diagram or blueprint of what literature as a whole is all about, an imaginative survey of the human situation from the beginning to the end, from the height to the depth, of what is imaginatively

[4] Hammond, Karla. (2006) "Articulating the Mute." **Waltzing Again: New and Selected Conversations with Margaret Atwood.** By Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review, p. 72.

[5] Barthes, R., & Lavers, A. (1972). **Mythologies.** New York: Hill and Wang, p. 109.

conceivable."[6] Frye suggests that mythology is universal and it bespeaks human condition just as literature does.

Because most mythmakers are men, like most writers until the recent past, women are stereotyped and forced to accept identities which do not represent their true nature. The seeds of the foremost instance of gender discrimination were rooted in Greek Mythology, with the two sons of Zeus: Apollo and Dionysus. Whereas Apollo, the god of reason and rational, is associated with men, Dionysus, the god of irrational and chaos, is attributed to women. Eventually, this opposition resulted in the creation of Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy. It was Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) that granted recognition to this dualism. As all opposites do, these two terms need one another in order to exist. Without the Apollonian, the Dionysian lacks form and structure whereas without the Dionysian, the Apollonian lacks vitality and passion. It was impossible until the deconstruction of this male oriented discourse to give voice to women who have been absent or mute for a long time. Women's effort to revise and rewrite dominant cultural discourses has cleared the way for the destruction of these androcentric patterns that form the basis of mythology. In an attempt to break away from these binary oppositions produced by patriarchy, feminist literary critics started to analyse canonical literature and mythology. In doing so, these critics do not mean that myths are lies, they feel the urge to revise and rewrite because they are aware of the fact that myths are more influential and accordingly dangerous than they are assumed to be. Feminist archetypal theory and revisionist mythology shall be further explored in the framework of Postmodernism in the following chapter.

Myths bear symbols that play an important role in shaping the archetypes by forming and expressing the norms of the society. The term "archetype" is first researched by the founder of analytical psychology Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist. According to Jung, aspects of the outer world and the archetypes act as power sources that resupply the *psyche,* whose structure organizes experience, and the unknown process of the psyche is "unconscious." He states that "myths are original revelations of the preconcious psyche, involuntary

[6] Frye, Northrop. (1970) **The Stubborn Structure.** Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, p. 102.

statements about unconscious psychic happenings, and anything but allegories of psychical processes."[7] Jung believes that the source of the whole of mythology is collective unconscious which he defines as a part of the unconscious mind, different from the personal unconscious, unexplainable by individual experience, common to all human beings, the product of ancestral experience. The contents of the "collective unconscious" are formed by primitive people by creating symbols to give meaning to the incidents and objects of the world surrounding them. These primordial symbols are archetypes:

> *Whereas the personal unconscious consists for the most part of "complexes", the content of the collective unconscious is made up essentially of "archetypes". The concept of the archetype, which is an indispensable correlate of the idea of the collective unconscious, indicates the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere. Mythological research calls them 'motifs'; in the psychology of primitives they correspond to Levy-Bruhl's concept of "representations collectives," and in the field of comparative religion they have been defined by Hubert and Mauss as 'categories of the imagination'.... My thesis, then, is as follows: In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix), there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals.*[8]

Archetypes are inherent in all mankind, Jung argues, they account for shaping our thoughts and behaviour throughout centuries. Hence, the source of a work of art is the collective unconscious. "All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes," says Jung, explaining the significance of archetypes in his book:

> *This is particularly true of religious ideas, but the central concepts of science, philosophy, and ethics are no exception to this rule. In their present form they are variants of archetypal ideas created by consciously applying and adapting these ideas to reality. For it is the function of consciousness, not only to recognize and assimilate the external world through the gateway of the senses, but to translate into visible reality the world within us.*[9]

As well as believing that the number of archetypes may be countless, Jung identifies four main archetypes: the self, the shadow, the anima (or animus), and the persona. The Persona is our presentation of ourselves to the outside world, like a mask. Although it is not our real selves, we tend to believe it to be so. The Animus

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[7] Jung, C. G. (1959) **The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious.** New York: Pantheon, p. 154.

[8] Jung, **The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious**, p. 42-43.

[9] Jung, C. G. (1969) **The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, p. 158.

and the Anima have been regarded as problematic and controversial since they bear the binary opposition of female and male. The Anima (soul) is a feminine image in the male psyche and the Animus (spirit) is a male image in the female psyche. That is, the Anima is men's collective perception of women, and the Animus, vice versa. These two are crucial in the process of individuation what Jung defines as a process of psychological integration when individuals are formed and differentiated from other human beings. The Self which Jung often depicts as a circle, square or mandala is the centre of the psyche. It includes all the other acrhetypes. The shadow, as its name suggests, represents the darker side of the psyche, repressed desires, weaknesses, and instincts. Although the basis of Jung's and Freud's theories depends on logocentrism, feminist thinkers have been using their theories on myths and archetypes.

1.2. HERMAN NORTHROP FRYE AND HIS ARCHETYPAL THEORY

Among historians, librarians, scholars and specialists who have been endeavouring to define Canadian Literature within an international framework, Northrop Frye accounts for establishing the Canadian literary context in which it would be possible to review Canadian literature. Frye outlines literature as a "systematic structure of knowledge."[10] The committed critic's Canadian criticism aims at a decolonized national-cultural literature. Although some criticized him for being obsessed with the search for Canadian identity, his desire for the creation of a decolonized national-cultural space has been celebrated by most critics. Frye identifies the Canadian genius as neither British nor American but peculiarly their own. He encouraged many authors to publish their works and review the pre-existing ones in order to engage national literature and identity. Northrop Frye wrote Canadian criticism from 1943 until 1990, one year before his death. In his essays, Frye evaluates Canadian writing and suggests that Canadian writing should be studied as part of Canadian life. Herman Northrop Frye gained international

[10] Northrop Frye, Herman. (1957) **Anatomy of Criticism.** New Jersey: Princeton U. Press, p. 19.

recognition for his literary theories through his main works such as *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957), *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947), and *The Great Code* (1982). His analyses on literature extends the ideas of his contemporaries.

Besides his criticisms on Canadian Literature, Herman Northrop Frye also provides a theory of narrative. Frye analyses the ways myths shape literature. Northrop Frye's career as a mythologist starts with his first book *Fearful Symmetry* which focuses on William Blake's poetry. In this book, Frye suggests that Blake's poetry is an important example of how myth provides the basis of literature. "There are practical and theoretical recreations of myth:" Frye suggests, "the practical one is literature, the theoretical one the criticism of literature which has to expand into a theory of myth as a whole."[11]

In the development of his theory, Frye was mainly influenced by Oswald Spengler who was an observer of mythic patterns in history, social anthropologist James Frazer, philosopher Ernst Cassirer, neurologist Sigmund Freud, and psychiatrist Carl Jung. Because, Frye links literature to most of the social sciences and humanities, like the relationship of mathematics to the sciences. Herman Northrop Frye's archetypal theory suggests that archetypes are models of literary criticism and they are connected with society and history. Archetypes are asserted to exist in our collective unconscious, that is, they present common ideas society shares, obtained through the means of myths and literary works. Frye thinks that literature grows out of myth and specifically Western literature originates in biblical and classical myth, and "everything in the Bible that isn't a myth is an excrescence."[12] Mythology, Frye suggests, "is the matrix of literature"[13] and religion is applied mythology.

Northrop Frye works on archetypal criticism in 1950s; having undoubtedly been inspired by Jung's studies on archetypes, he dwells on the influence of

[11] Frye, Northrop, and Robert Dayton Denham. (2000) **Northrop Frye's Late Notebooks: 1982-1990: Architecture of the Spiritual World.** Toronto: U of Toronto, p. 67.

[12] Frye, **Northrop Frye's Late Notebooks: 1982-1990: Architecture of the Spiritual World**, p. 358.

[13] Frye, Northrop. (1963) **Fables of Identity; Studies in Poetic Mythology**. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, p. 33.

archetypes on religion, culture, language, and literature. Frye's criticism differs from Jung's as he bases it to the reader on a literary framework as distinct from a psychological theory. In his *The Critical Path*, Frye primarily deals with the literary aspects of mythology. He says, "(…) as a culture develops, its mythology tends to become encyclopedic, expanding into a total myth covering a society's view of its past, present, and future, its relation to its gods and its neighbours, its traditions, its social and religious duties, and its ultimate destiny."[14] This encyclopedic myth includes everything that it concerns its society to know, which Frye calls a mythology of concern, or in short, a myth of concern. Truth and reality are socially established because belief is a statement of willingness to participate in the myth of concern. Therefore, the language of concern becomes the language of belief and it has roots in religion. It holds the society together with common acts and assumptions. Its social, political, legal and literary branches develop later. Frye asserts that concern is deeply associated with ritual, to coronations, weddings, funerals, parades, demonstrations, which express social identity. In this way, it binds together society and establishes cultural bonds, by means of literature. That is why, the modern critic is a student of mythology, and his subject is not only literature but also the areas of concern, because literature is the representation of mythology of concern.

Among his works, *Anatomy of Criticism*, which consists of "Historical Criticism: Theory of Modes", "Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbols", "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths", and "Rhetorical Criticism: Theory of Genres", has an important role in influencing the modern critical theory by setting a systematic analysis of literary criticism as well as expressing his conception of the theory of archetypes. According to Frye, archetypes are patterns which shape literary genres, that are; "romance," "tragedy," "comedy," and "irony/satire." Although most theorists confine themselves to a single literary genre such as tragedy, Frye dwells on all the main literary genres. Frye's theory of genres is called "mythoi" and he relates literary genres to the seasons as the symbols of the eternal recurrence. Accordingly,

[14] Frye, Northrop. (1971) **The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism**. Bloomington: Indiana UP, p. 36.

mythoi of summer is romance, mythoi of spring is comedy, mythoi of autumn is tragedy, and mythoi of winter is irony and satire.

In his "Polemical Introduction", Frye mentions the need for literary criticism and distinguishes its genuine form from other forms of criticism. Why Frye gives this introduction the title of "Polemical Introduction" is evident because criticism is rather a controversial topic of discussion from which many theories and perspectives have developed. Frye says:

> *All the essays deal with criticism, but by criticism I mean the whole work of scholarship and taste concerned with literature which is a part of what is variously called liberal education, culture, or the study of the humanities. I start from the principle that criticism is not simply a part of this larger activity, but an essential part of it.*[15]

Frye thinks that criticism is an art and he attempts to clarify the principles of it. He wrote these essays to propose a general theory of literature through his concept of archetypal criticism. According to Frye, without criticism, Shakespeare and Keats would not have revived, that is to say, criticism is crucial for literature.

His first essay, "Historical Criticism: Theory of Modes", is built upon four fundamental categories; fictional, thematic, ethos, and mode. His theory of modes establishes a classification system which categorizes literature according to characters' heroic powers of action. There are five levels of modes based on this relation of power to other characters and to the world; the first one is Mythic mode where the character has omnipotent powers and is superior to both. In legend, romance and folk tale modes, the protagonist is again superior to both to a certain extent. In High Mimetic modes (epic and tragic), as Frye suggests, "'If superior in degree to other men but not to his natural environment, the hero is a leader. He has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours, but what he does is subject both to social criticism and to the order of nature."[16] In Low Mimetic modes (comic and realistic fiction), the hero is one of us as he is superior to neither to other men nor to his environment. Finally, the hero is inferior in power and intelligence to us in the Ironic Mode where there are scenes of bondage, absurdity, and frustration.

[15] Frye, **Anatomy of Criticism**, p. 3.
[16] Frye, **Anatomy of Criticism**, p. 34.

He introduces five levels of symbolism in his second essay, “Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbols”. He starts his essay where he dwells on the quest for poetic meaning saying that there is a lack of technical vocabulary in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Criticism functions as a means of systematizing of literary symbolism. Frye mentions four phases of symbolism; literal and descriptive, formal, mytical, and anagogic. Literature has been and can be interpreted within these phases which represent methods of analyzing symbolic meaning. Symbols do not represent, but connect. These two phases are linked as a result of dichotomous connection where one defines the other by its contrast. These contrasting terms are symbol as motif and symbol as sign. When the symbol is a sign, the direction of reading is centrifugal, as in descriptive or assertive works; and when the symbol is a motif, the direction of reading is inward or centripetal, as in imaginative, or in Frye’s words, “hypothetical works.” In both cases, according to Frye, descriptive or literal symbols are conventionally and arbitrarily stand for and point to things outside the place where they occur.

Similarly, Frye relates meaning to the form of symbols and signs in the formal phase which relates to the imagery of poetry. Formal criticism begins with an examination of the imagery to bring out its distinctive pattern in a poem. Tonality is formed by the recurring or most frequently repeated images. In this sense, he examines the imagery of Macbeth, aiming at bringing out its distinctive pattern. In Macbeth, the colour red which connects with the most frequently repeated images of blood and sleeplessness sets the tone of a tragedy of murder and remorse. In the line "Making the green one red," green is used in contrast to red and all the images it symbolizes. As a result, Frye states, the recurring images form the tonality, and isolated images relate themselves to those images in a hierarchic structure.

Frye’s mythical phase acknowledges symbols as archetypes by relating a symbol in a work to a similar symbol in an other work of literature written before, that is, all symbols inherit from one another. Myths are traditional stories of so-called historical events that set a record of the early history and world view of a group of people, and their practices, beliefs, or natural phenomenon. He says, “The world of mythical imagery is usually represented by the conception of heaven or Paradise in religion, and it is apocalyptic, in the sense of that word already explained, a world of

total metaphor, in which everything is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body."[17] Writers imitate, adapt, and derive their material from other works of literature which all together constitute this single infinite body. Hence, the study of an archetype in a work requires the study of it in literature and these symbols unify our literary experience by connecting poems.

Finally, the anagogic phase regards symbols as monads. Frye associates archetypes and myths particularly with primitive and popular literature which he defines as "literature which affords an unobstructed view of archetypes."[18] He concludes his second essay describing literature as anagogic by seeing "poetry as the imitation of infinite social action and infinite human thought, the mind of a man who is all men, the universal creative word which is all words."[19] For Frye, a monad is a microcosm of all literature, it opens a window through which the reader sees the reflection of his entire literary experience: "The sense of the infinitely varied unity of poetry may come, not only explicitly from an apocalyptic epic, but implicitly from any poem. Thus the center of the literary universe is whatever poem we happen to be reading. One step further, and the poem appears as a microcosm of all literature, an individual manifestation of the total order of words."[20]

In his third essay, "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths", Frye uses Biblical symbolism. He classifies his theory of meaning in three categories; apocalyptic imagery, demonic imagery, and analogical imagery. The apocalyptic world presents the categories of reality in the forms of human desire which is based on three human fulfillments; individual, sexual, and social. The city, the garden, and the sheepfold are structural elements in the apocalyptic World. On the other hand, demonic imagery presents a world which desire totaly rejects. It is a depiction of the world "as it is before the human imagination begins to work on it and before any image of human desire, such as the city or the garden, has been solidly established; the World also of perverted or wasted work, ruins and catacombs, instruments of torture and monuments of folly."[21] Lastly, the analogical imagery of Frye stands

[17] Frye, **Anatomy of Criticism**, p. 136.
[18] Frye, **Anatomy of Criticism**, p. 116.
[19] Frye, **Anatomy of Criticism**, p. 125.
[20] Frye, **Anatomy of Criticism**, p. 121.
[21] Frye, **Anatomy of Criticism**, p. 147.

between the apocalyptic and the demonic by depicting much less extreme worlds, only similar to paradise or hell but not identical. Frye identifies the mythical mode with the apocalyptic. The demonic imagery is appropriate to the ironic mode. Adding romantic, high mimetic and low mimetic modes up to these, Frye places them in a circular structure which forms the cycle of myth and archetypes. Myths dwell on nature and its cyclical order, the recurrent structures of nature; the seasons, dawning and setting of the sun and human life. He tries to categorize the genres of literature according to their archetypal, natural, and seasonal motifs. Literature represents the natural cycle of life which includes the four seasons that represent comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony or satire. According to Frye, the individual and the universal forms of an image are to be identical in order to mention archetypal criticism. He defines the archetype "as a unit of a work of literary art, which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experince."[22] Thus, Frye defines archetypes as integrative tools which connect individual with universal:

> *As the archetype is the communicable symbol, archetypal criticism is primarily concerned with literature as a social fact and as a mode of communication. By the study of conventions and genres, it attempts to fit poems into the body of poetry as a whole.*[23]

In his last essay "Rhetorical Criticism: Theory of Genres", Frye makes a distinction between persuasive and ornamental rhetoric and dwells on the latter. Ornamental rhetoric and literature are intertwined by arousing emotions whereas persuasive rhetoric is applied literature in order to strenghten the power of argument by manipulation. Frye's theory of rhetoric unites style and genre. He is criticized for categorizing works with respect to their genres and interpreting the archetypes accordingly. Although he makes strict distinctions, he also makes an exception for neutral archetypes. Circe's island, for example, is neither tragic nor comedic, according to Frye. That is to say, Frye's definitions of the genres should not be regarded as precisely exclusive categories into which any work can be properly fitted. As Frye explains, the point of thinking in terms of genre is "not so much to classify as to clarify… traditions and affinities, thereby bringing out a large number

[22] Frye, Northrop, and Robert D. Denham. (2002) **Northrop Frye on Literature and Society, 1936-1989: Unpublished Papers.** Toronto: U of Toronto, p. 184.

[23] Frye, **Anatomy of Criticism**, p. 99.

of literary relationships that would not be noticed as long as there were no context established for them."[24]

Besides these vital works, Northrop Frye states his thoughts and arguements on Canadian identity by identifying how Canadian culture has developed in his *Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada* (1965). Frye expresses his thoughts on Canada's interaction with the United States and the results of this interaction as well as the comparisons between the two countries. In Frye's opinion, "many Canadian cultural phenomena are not peculiarly Canadian at all, but are typical of their wider North American and Western contexts."[25] The contexts he refers to are primarily French and British. In history, Canada began as an obstacle as it was blocking the way for the explorers to the East. Once explored, it could only be a passage to reach the sources of the East, not the destination itself. Hence, the United States had become a defined part of the Western World long before Canada and this is closely related to the geographical states of the countries. Canada has no Atlantic seaboard. A traveller from Europe needs to slip past the Straits of Belle Isle into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, surrounded by five Canadian provinces, most of the country remaining invisible. The inhabited country shows itself when he goes up the St. Lawrence. Consequently, "To enter the United States is a matter of crossing an ocean; to enter Canada is a matter of being silently swallowed by an alien continent."[26] Frye calls this experience unforgettable and intimidating. The source of this fear is historical as Canada began as a series of small communities who maintained their psychological, political and economic relations with England. Canadians, as a result, saw nature as opposed to everything which represents their ordered, safe, civilized mother country. That is why, Canadians approached nature with a negative attitude.

Canada's identity is said to be found between the two cultures which have a great influence on British Canada; the British and American. As a smaller country, Canada has been anxious about the huge mass movements which drive the United States. In the Canadas, the frontier was all around one's whole imaginative being,

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[24] Frye, **Anatomy of Criticism**, p. 247-48.

[25] Frye, Northrop; Carl F. Klinck (1965). **Conclusion, Literary History of Canada**. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 214.

[26] Frye, Northrop. (1995) **The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination.** Toronto: Anansi, p. 343.

initially separating the Canadian, physically or mentally, from Great Britain, from the United States, and from other Canadian communities. Life in Canada, as Frye concludes, is the paradox of vast empty spaces and lack of privacy. It consists of small and isolated communities which are confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting, separated from one another and from their British or American cultural sources by a surrounding physical or psychological frontier. Nonetheless, these communities and their values are held together by law and order and they are bound to develop a garrison mentality. "A garrison," Frye explains, "is a closely knit and beleaguered society, and its moral and social values are unquestionable."[27] Frye's conception of garrison mentality, characters' building walls against the outside world, has become a frequent theme in Canadian Literature. It plays an important role in the development of Canadian imagination. Frye later stated that he used the phrase "garrison mentality" to "describe the psychological effects in Canada of the Anglo-French wars, fear of Indian attacks, and protection against an implacably indifferent nature, with its cycle of intense heat, intense cold, and the coming of spring along with the black flies."[28] As Frye implies, this mentality is a trope of the colonized mind. Canadian identity is defined by its environment and is trying to break free from the limitations imposed by its colonial status and physical world. Years after Frye's presentation of garrison mentality, especially in the 1970s, many books and articles were written to support Frye's theory and discover the tendency of Canadian writers to represent nature in negative ways.

Garrison mentality develops at the center of a mythical and symbolic anti-Americanism, that is, anti-Americanism is a reflection of this mentality. Early histories of settlement in the United States and Canada reflects the differences between the two peoples. First American settlers arrived with a colonial spirit. As Reingard M. Nischik suggests, "the idea of American exceptionalism was closely connected to the land from the first days of settlement through the building of the nation in the eighteenth century and well into the cultural founding of the nation in

[27] Frye, Northrop, David Staines, and Jean O'Grady. (2003) **Northrop Frye on Canada.** Toronto: U of Toronto, 2003, p. 351.

[28] **Northrop Frye on Canada**, p. 647.

nineteenth-century romanticism."[29] However, Canadian settlers did not have as many missionary ambitions as Americans. Instead of the exceptionalism Americans adopted, struggle and survival were emphasized for the Canadian settlers. The vast land of Canada, as a result, created a sense of alienation in the early settlers whereas the constantly advancing frontier creates a sense of development in the United States.

Frye's "garrison mentality" is later adopted and developed by one of his students at the University of Toronto, Margaret Eleanor Atwood, a novelist, playwright, poet, book illustrator, cartoonist, and one of Canada's major contemporary writers. Atwood focuses on survival as a major Canadian literary theme as springing less from the threat of the wilderness than from the threat of American cultural domination. She sets forth that Canadian writers depict nature in negative reflections because they always suspect some dirty trick from it. She says, "Not surprisingly in a country with such a high ratio of trees, lakes and rocks to people, images from Nature are almost everywhere. Added up, they depict a Nature that is often dead and unanswering or actively hostile to man..."[30]

1.3. MARGARET ELEANOR ATWOOD

Atwood was born in 1939 in Ottawa, and grew up in Toronto and Quebec, and in northern Ontario, the bush country which is reflected in many of her works. The forests of Ontario and Quebec are frequently featured in Atwood's books. Atwood defines herself as a pantheist. She remains an important figure in almost every field of Canada's literary, cultural, and social life. Throughout decades, Margaret Atwood has gained recognition not only as a writer but also as a Canadian contemporary literary celebrity, media star, cultural critic, environmentalist, human and women's rights spokeswoman, satirist and cartoonist. From the beginning of her career, her success evolved towards international reputation and her works have

[29] Nischik, Reingard M. (2014) **The Palgrave Handbook of Comparative North American Literature.** New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 239.

[30] Atwood, Margaret. (1972) **Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature**. Toronto: Anansi, p. 49.

become the subject of academia since then. She gained national and international reputation in the 1970s when feminism and cultural nationalism started to rise in Canada. Although she refuses to be classified as a member of a particular tradition, she is regarded as feminist, nationalist, postmodern, and postcolonial. She has been writing for almost fifty years and her influence on Canadian as well as contemporary literature is undeniably enormous. Her parents were from Nova Scotia and they were great readers. Atwood says her family gave her a very big support expecting her to make use of her intelligence and abilities, unlike the majority of the society in the fifties: "(…) while the society around me, in the fifties, was very bent on having girls collect china, become cheerleaders, and get married, my parents were from a different culture. They just believed that it was incumbent on me to become as educated as possible."[31] On the contrary, she read "whatever [she] could get [her] hands on." Atwood describes books as her friends, companions: "The books were declaring that they were my pals; they promised to accompany me on my travels; and they would not only offer me some helpful hints, they'd be right there by my side whenever I really needed them. It's always nice to have someone you can depend on."[32]

She received her undergraduate degree from Victoria College at the University of Toronto. She studied English, with minors French and philosophy, at the University of Toronto from 1957 to 1961. Later, she received her master's degree from Radcliffe College in 1962. She has also done graduate work at Harvard University and she is regarded as a "North American" or "American" writer in the United States, whereas she remains resolutely Canadian. Spending time outside of Canada gave her the opportunity to think out of the box and brought in new perspectives as she expresses in an interview that was published on The Ontario Review:

> *It was the place where I started thinking seriously about Canada as having a shape and a culture of its own. Partly because I was studying the literature of the American Puritans, which was not notable for its purely literary values- if one can study this in a university, I thought, why not Canadian literature? (you must understand that at the time Canadian literature was simply not taught in high schools and universities in*

[31] Hammond, Karla. (2006) "Articulating the Mute." **Waltzing Again: New and Selected Conversations with Margaret Atwood.** By Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review, p. 73.

[32] Atwood, Margaret. (2014) **On Writers and Writing.** Toronto: Emblem Editions, p. 155.

Canada) – and partly because Boston was, in certain ways, so similar, in climate and landscape, to part of Canada. One began to look for differences. (Fall-Winter 1978-79: 9)[33]

Atwood got her Master's degree and began her doctoral studies at Harvard University with a thesis on "The English Metaphysical Romance" which remains unfinished because she continued with her creative writing instead and performed various jobs such as a cashier, waitress, market research writer, and screenwriter. Her work experiences have traces on her fiction. Atwood's works have been taught at schools all over the world. Her novels are variously described as realism, romance, ghost story, thriller, memoir, Bildungsroman, Kunstlerroman, science fiction, metafiction, anti-novel, fairy tale, satire, parody, Gothic, dystopian, nationalist, feminist, revisionist, modernist, intramodern, postmodern, and postcolonial.[34] She surprises the reader with new genres but never confines her writing to the boundaries, conventions or limitations of them. Carol Ann Howells suggests that her novels, with the empirical and speculative intelligence combined, "challenge her readers to see more by seeing differently. As the female artist in *Cat's Eye* realises when confronted by her brother's scientific perspective on the world, "There are, apparently, a great many more dimensions than four."[35] Howells highlights that Atwood is an extremely versatile writer as she employs the characteristics of a different narrative form in each of her novels: Gothic romance, fairy tale, spy thriller, science fiction or history – "working within those conventions and reshaping them. Her writing insistently challenges the limits of traditional genres, yet this experimentalism is balanced against a strong continuity of interests which are both aesthetic and social."[36]

Mythological figures are recurrent images in Margaret Atwood's writing so as to question and break away from the male-oriented canon, patriarchal classical mythology. She emphasizes the power of myths by saying that they transform, double, change shape, take on new meanings but they never die out. Margaret Atwood's use of intertextuality has been widely examined. However, as Sharon

[33] Howells, Coral Ann. (2006) **The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood**. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, p. 15.

[34] Howells, **The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood**, p. 176.

[35] Howells, Coral Ann. (1996) "Fact File and Significant Characteristics." **Margaret Atwood**. New York: St. Martin's, p. 3.

[36] Howells, **Margaret Atwood**, p. 6.

Wilson remarks, "Despite hundreds of articles on Atwood published in the last few years, scholars are only beginning to recognize the variety and significance of her mythic intertexts."[37] These intertexts, revisions, or rewritings pave the way for new perspectives by reversing roles or establishing pluralities. In her essay "Mythological Intertexts in Margaret Atwood's Works" (2000), Sharon Wilson states that Atwood uses mythology and its symbols "not only to provide a mythic resonance and polyphonic melody, but to parody or undercut narrative authority in a postmodern way."[38] She goes on to analyse and categorize the purposes of Atwood's work into five categories:

> *As can be seen in Atwood's use of fairy tales and other folklore, myth intertexts generally serve at least five connected purposes throughout Atwood's works. One, they indicate the quality and nature of characters' cultural contexts; two, they signify characters'—and readers'—entrapment in pre-existing patterns; and three, they comment self-consciously on these patterns – including the embedded myths, fairy tales, and related popular traditional stories – often by deconstructing constricting literary, folkloric, and cultural plots with transgressive language, thus filling in the gaps of female narrative. Four, myth and other intertexts comment self-consciously on the frame story, on themselves, and on their intertexts. When used in metafiction, intertexts call attention to themselves as intertexts, highlighting their shortcomings or celebrating the power of language and story. Finally, five, and most important, mythic intertexts structure the characters' imaginative or 'magical' release from externally imposed patterns, offering the possibility of transformation for the novel's characters, for the country they partly represent, and for all human beings.*[39]

In her works, Margaret Atwood has reflected countless realistic portraits of human life as a great analyst of human mind. She renders her characters within the framework of social or political issues. These characters have human limitations and weaknesses rather than heroic or mythical traits. Atwood thinks of her poetry as a lens that gives a condensation, not only a reflection. As Rama Gupta says,

> *She creates a fictive World in which her characters live, struggle with life and try to come to grips with the lived reality. This World is as real as the World we inhabit and the tensions of the personages living in this World are also as real. It is a triumph of Atwood's art as a novelist that she weaves the rich experience of life with her rich artistic material and produces mimetic pictures. The characters are highly distinctive in their motivations, conflicts, mannners and methods, and lend depth to her art.*[40]

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[37] Wilson, Sharon R. (2000) "Mythological Intertexts in Margaret Atwood's Works", in **Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact**. Ed. Reingard M. Nischik. New York: Camden House, p. 215.

[38] Wilson, **Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact**, p. 215.

[39] Wilson, **Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact**, p. 225-226.

[40] Gupta, R. (2006). **Margaret Atwood: A psychoanalytical study.** Elgin, IL: New Dawn Press, p. 137.

Atwood and Frye inevitably share some ideas and similarities; the reflection of the horridness of nature, garrisons and victims, the interest in defining Canadian identity, and the tendency towards myth and archetype. Although these similarities do not necessarily signal any influence as both writers come from the same place, time, and background (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and Canadian), it is obviously seen that Margaret Atwood admired Frye to a great extent and he had a decisive influence on her career:

> *It was done like this. He stood at the front of the room. He took one step forward, put his left hand on the table, took another step forward, put his right hand on the table, took a step back, removed his left hand, another step back, removed his right hand, and repeated the pattern. While he was doing this, püre prose, in real sentences and paragraphs, issued from his mouth. He didn't say 'um', as most of us did, or leave sentences unfinished, or correct himself. I had never heard anyone do this before. It was like seeing a magician producing birds from a hat. You kept wanting to go around behind Frye or look under the table to see how he did it.*[41]

More than a successful writer, Atwood has become a a spokesperson, activist, critic, editor and arbiter. Her prolific and versatile works discusses the issues of women and feminism. She was active over several years in the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and Amnesty International on account for her interest in equality and civil rights. Her works are often autobiographical. Atwood generally chooses female protagonists in her works in order to bring women's issues to light. Her depiction of nature is closely associated with her exploration of the survival theme in Canadian literature which also portrays women in a patriarchal society. Her female characters are described as figures victimized by culture and archetypes who achieve survival later by regaining authentic voice. She has focused much of her writing on political themes such as feminism, power politics, censorship, human rights, empowerment, environmental damage, Canada's relationship with the United States, postcolonialism, pandemics, totalitarianism, militarism and identity. When asked about her engagement in these issues if she feels a great sense of responsibility as a writer, she answers: "No, not as a writer, as a human being."[42] Nevertheless, she has never abandoned literature for propaganda. She uses metaphors, puns, and irony to contribute to her humorous and almost satirical style. She has taught not only in

[41] Atwood, Margaret. (1982) "Northrop Frye Observed." In **Second Words: Selected Critical Prose**. Toronto: Anansi, p. 399-400.

[42] Gibson, Graeme. (1990) "Dissecting the Way a Writer Works." **Margaret Atwood: Conversations**. By Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review, p. 163.

Canadian universities but also at the University of Alabama, Macquarie University in Australia, and Cambridge University. For the non-Canadian readers, she has become one of the most notable contemporary Canadian writers. She has received many literary awards which attest to her achievement of an international literary reputation. Still, she lives in Canada and has always had a Canadian temperament.

Margaret Atwood could not easily build her successful career which contributed a lot to the promotion of Canadian national identity. In the 1950s when she was growing up, Canadians were barely making efforts to construct their self-consciousness. As Heidi Slettedahl suggests:

> *The most important contexts for situating the work of Margaret Atwood include her position as a Canadian writer, particularly given that she began writing at a time when a tradition of Canadian literature was not visible; her own criticism, which emerged partly out of this absence of a critical heritage; and her relationship with feminism.*[43]

Atwood worked devotedly to construct a Canadian literary identity when it was a matter of politics. According to her, the study and teaching of Canadian Literature is a political act. She suggests that writing Canadian literature has been historically a very private act, "teaching it, however, is a political act. If done badly it can make people even more bored with their country than they already are; if done well, it may suggest them why they have been taught to be bored for their country and whose interests that boredom serves."[44]

She published *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* in 1972, which is a survey of Canadian literature that emphasizes the privative figure of the victim. In her youth, as she states in this book which is divided into twelve chapters, they were not taught about a Canadian canon and there was nothing related to Canadian Literature on university syllabi even at the departments of literature. She writes in the preface to a later edition that she believed Canadian literature was still in a quest for a national identity that would be comparable to that of Great Britain or the United States in the early 1970s and she wrote *Survival* to deal with this issue. *Survival* is "something that would make Canadian literature, as Canadian literature -

[43] Macpherson, Heidi Slettedahl. (2010) **The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood**. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, p. 11.

[44] Atwood, Margaret. (1972) **Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature.** Toronto: Anansi, p. 21.

not just literature that happened to be written in Canada – accessible to people other than scholars and specialists, and that would do it with simplicity and practicality."[45] Atwood states that most Canadian literature deals with victims and survival is Canada's and its culture's central theme. The victims of Canadian literature are categorized by Atwood into four categories. The first one denies the fact of being a victim, the second type admits being a victim under uncontrollable forces and conforms his/her fate beyond free will. Type three acknowledges being a victim but does not accept it as an inescapable position. Finally, the fourth type of victim is a non-victim who is free to be creative. For all four positions, survival is against the forces of nature and history; and the victim of this conflict constitutes an obstacle to the development of a distinctive and positive Canadian identity. Atwood provides the reader with an explanation of why she wrote this book in the first chapter "What, Why, and Where Is Here?":

> *I intended to produce a short easy-to-use guide to Canadian literature, largely fort he benefit of the students and all of those teachers in high schools, community colleges and universities who suddenly find themselves teaching a subject they have never studied: 'Canlit.' Through my own struggles with the same problem I knew there was a considerable amount of material already available, but it consisted primarily of all-inclusive historical surveys, individual biographies or in-depth academic studies which discuss Works often out of print. In Canada there are many authors and many books, but few obvious classics; as a result those compiling sources or distributing information tend to fall back on long lists of writers and book-titles, among which the prospective reader or teacher must scrabble around and choose as best he may. But the inevitable question will be raised, sooner or later, in one or another of its forms: 'Why are we studying him (instead of Faulkner)?' 'Why do we have to read this (instead of Hermann Hesse)?' Or, in its true shape, 'What's so Canadian about Canadian literature, and why should we be bothered?*[46]

Much of her work is connected with the theme of survival in an environment or relationship both familiar and alien to the characters' sense of wholeness. These characters spend their lives arranged in an urban order in modern settings in order to defend themselves from a darker side that they suppress; the wilderness, that is, nature. Atwood reflects this sense of victimization in her novels. According to Atwood, when you identify yourself as the victim, you become the object of the victor, it is not your fault but someone else's. In an interview, while speaking about her novel *Surfacing*, she approaches the victim position sceptically:

[45] Atwood, **Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature**, p. 13.
[46] Atwood, **Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature**, p. 17.

> *If you define yourself as innocent then nothing is ever your fault – it is always somebody else doing it to you, and until you stop defining yourself as a victim that will always be true. It will always be somebody else's fault, and you will always be the object of that rather than somebody who has any choices or takes responsibility for their life. And that is not only the Canadian stance towards the world, but the usual female one. "Look what a mess I am and it's all their fault."*[47]

This way, you don't take any responsibilities because you define yourself as someone who does not have any choice. This victimization that Margaret Atwood strongly rejects is adopted not only by Canadians but also the female in general. Taking Canada as the victim, the ruthless United States is marked guilty whereas for the female it is always the fault of the male world.

The American presence in English-Canadian literature has always been an issue to examine for critics. In her essay "Through the One-Way Mirror" which she wrote in 1984, Margaret Atwood resembles the relationship between the United States and Canada to a one-way mirror. She calls the border between the United States and Canada "the longest undefended backyard fence in the world", a one-way mirror through which the Canadians observe and try to analyze the Americans. The Americans, on the other hand, rarely think about Canada and are barely aware of the fact that they are being watched by its inhabitants, as Margaret Atwood describes: "It's not that the Americans I met had any odd or 'upsetting' attitudes toward Canada. They simply didn't have any attitudes at all. They had a vague idea that such a place existed--- it was that blank area north of the map where the bad weather come from."[48] The Americans call Canada either their backyard or their frontyard, both of which grant them ownership.

In Atwood's novels, garrison mentality is reflected through the preference of the primitive and dangerous over the relatively urban and safe. Atwood's protagonists are usually young women who have roots in the wilderness but who currently live in an urban or suburban place that represents materialism, consumerism, exploitation, and male chauvinism. These are all seen as products of the United States. She examines and reflects female subjectivity both as a victim and victor. The landscapes literally and symbolically have an important role in shaping

[47] Gibson, Graeme. (1990) "Dissecting the Way a Writer Works." **Margaret Atwood: Conversations.** By Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review, p. 13.

[48] Gibson, **Margaret Atwood: Conversations**, p. 78.

the lives of her female characters, who are both women and products, objects in a society where everything is for sale. This society poses psychological threats and eventually the female characters who are anxious, uneasy, nervous, uncomfortable, half-aware of their problems leave it for another environment, although more primitive and dangerous. Nevertheless, it is a rehabilitative journey which is mythical, psychological, and literal. It is a journey of "individuation" in Jungian terms, the quest for awakening and rebirth. Hence, Atwood's works are concerned with the reactions of mankind that is surrounded by geographical and psychological landscapes and the threats they pose. People establish abstract patterns to keep the unknown at a safe distance in order to survive, and Atwood claims the theme of survival to be distinctly Canadian. Her protagonists survive through the journey to nature, or wilderness. As Coral Ann Howells purports, her protagonists grow into an awareness:

> *One by one her female protagonists are forced to confront the gap between traditional narratives of female helplessness and a far more complex reality which forces women to revise their life stories. It is the female narrator's process of growth into an awareness of personal moral responsibility which is repeatedly figured in all Atwood's novels.*[49]

[49] Howells, Coral Ann. (1996) "Fact File and Significant Characteristics." **Margaret Atwood**. New York: St. Martin's, p. 10.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CRITICAL REVIEW OF *THE ODYSSEY*

2.1. POSTMODERNISM

Beginning around the turn of the twentieth century, the modern period and later its successor the postmodern period has particularly witnessed innumerable literary works that have been created in an attempt to draw a parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity by retelling earlier stories, myths, and fairy tales. Re-telling of existing narratives from mythology, religion, folk tales, science and even history was evident throughout literary history, but the Postmodern era has incomparably seen much evidence of this contemporary phenomena. For this reason, especially the Postmodernist Era has been regarded as the age of cloning and dispupatiously been accused of lacking originality. In opposition, postmodern writers dwell on the necessity of revising the values and notions that shape our cultural mythology, considering postmodern rewriting as a culturally innovative phenomenon. Postmodernism is a critique of structures, a style of literature, philosophy, arts, criticism, and architecture that began in the 1940s. Postmodern fiction has been studied by a great number of critics and writers to put forth a unified and fixed definition of the main characteristics of postmodern literature. Although posmodernism comprises hostility toward the ideals of consensus and objects to any definition or classification as a movement, literary postmodernism is generally characterized by intertextuality, deconstruction, combination, discontinuity, randomness, absurdity, unexpectedness, disruption, pastiche, parody, metafiction, fragmentation, and paradox.

It is essential to take a glance back at Modernism in order to comprehend Postmodernism, because postmodernism, as Bill Readings and Bennet Schaber suggest, “is not a break with modernity, but a radical rewriting, asking what phrase to

link to modernity, what to put next". (13)[1] Rooted in Renaissance, the idea that human reason has the capacity to understand and dominate nature gave rise to Modernism which was recognized after the First World War. Scientific improvements and technological developments brought about high expectations on the potential of human mind as well as creating an illusionary self-perception. These innovations soon became a means of corruption by the end of the 19th century and the belief in human reason was shuttered by colonialism. It was well understood that all the advances that had been made did not necessarily turn the world into a better place, neither did they create a better society. The First World War showed that modernism's faith in scientific and technological progress, together with the belief that humankind is flawless, ultimately failed. No sooner had Modernism received the strike of the First World War, than the Second World War wiped off the remaining faith in man's perfection. Nuclear weapons, holocausts (particularly the Nazi holocaust), atomic bombs, and wars led to the complete destruction of Modernism and the birth of Postmodernism.

To start with, there is a myriad of diverse criticisms regarding Postmodernism. The "post" in this term, says Lyotard, one of the leading definers of the movement, implies the Greek preposition *ana*, which means "back, again." Jean-François Lyotard goes further: "The post modern would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo)."[2] Thus, he thought of postmodernism not as a follow-up but a return to earlier sources and a part of modernism, incredulously. Likewise, Umberto Eco points to the postmodern acceptance of the challenge of the past, "of the already said" as it cannot be eliminated:

> *The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently… Irony, metalinguistic play, enunciation squared… with the postmodern, it is possible not to understand the game and yet to take it seriously.*[3]

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[1] Moraru, Christian. (2001) **Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning.** Albany: SUNY, p. 12.
[2] Lyotard, Jean-François. (1984) "What is Postmodernism", **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, p. 81.
[3] Eco, Umberto. (1998) **The Name of the Rose**, trans. William Weaver, London: Vintage, p. 570-571.

Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* came to help for those who seek to define the postmodern and its condition in 1979, when he did not consider it a work of philosophy. It was written upon the request of Quebec's Conseil des Universités as an epistemological research. The mentioned writer, French philosopher, sociologist, and literary theorist Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) is most famous for his associations with postmodernism. He studied philosophy and literature at the Sorbonne. He was a first-aid volunteer in the streets of Paris in August 1944 during World War II which inevitably brought about changes in his way of living and perspective on life. He later became a member of the socialist revolutionary organisation *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (Socialism or Barbarism). He addresses the dehumanizing influence of capitalism in his writings. He committed himself to the cause of socialist revolution for a long period in his life, that is why, his earlier writings focus on revolutionary politics until 1964. What led him to concentrate on postmodernism and philosophy was a disunity in the organisation. Consequently, his later works reflect his loss of faith in Marxism. His writings cover a wide range of topics such as politics, aesthetics, philosophy, phenomenology, structuralism, and postmodernism.

The advancement of science and technology, huge success in human endeavor of science corresponding to the modern era has been put under the scope of the postmodern philosophy. In *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Lyotard dwells on the definition and legitimation of knowledge as well as examining the status of science in the modern world. The object of his study is "the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies."[4] He describes how knowledge has operated in the West since the Renaissance. Lyotard defines the post-modernist era by problematizing modernism and modern philosophy. He sceptically questions and investigates rational theory. For Lyotard, the legitimation of knowledge is a political action as politics needs accurate representations of reality. He enquires on the existence and validity of knowledge and who controls it, as well as who has access to it and concludes that the acceptance of science having a higher kind of knowledge is completely unacceptable and wrong.

[4] Lyotard, **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**, p. xxiii.

It is essential to scrutinize Lyotard's conception of modern in order to understand his definiton of the postmodern. He uses 'modern' to address to any science which legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse in relation to certain grand narratives. What made Lyotard a leading explicator of postmodernism is not only his evaluations on the legitimation of knowledge but also his claim that the narrative knowledge science relies on has taken the form of two grand narratives. The term grand narrative, or *metanarrative*, was initially introduced by Lyotard himself in this beforementioned book. A narrative is simply a story, narrative knowledge is knowledge embedded in culture and transmitted by story-telling. Myths and legends, the narrative of which not only explained but also legitimated knowledge on behalf of the existing power relations or traditions in the ancient times, can be accounted as a form of this type of knowledge. The two grand narratives Lyotard mentions are: (1) the narrative of emancipation, a narrative to free people for which science is believed to serve (American and French revolutions), and (2) the narrative of science as the authentic knowledge (Enlightenment, Hegelianism, and nineteenth-century positivism.) Lyotard purports that Marxism has benefited from both types of narrative legitimation. In relation to these, religion also provides a legitimation of the norms of society. Neither did science in the modern era displace narrative knowledge, but benefited from it. The grand narrative unifies historical experience or knowledge for the sake of the legitimation of a master idea. The postmodern discredits the grand narrative which constitutes an essential part of modernity, it has lost its credibility, as Lyotard expresses: "'Postmodern' designates incredulity toward metanarratives."[5]

Lyotard highlights the transformation in the nature of knowledge. Knowledge has the power to legitimate and scientific knowledge is a kind of discourse, what makes it the source of power in the 21st century. That is why it parallels the process of legitimation in politics, as well. For the last forty years, sciences and technologies have had to deal with language, phonology, linguistics, communication and cybernetics, translation, computers, et cetera. Science appears to be a metadiscourse of politics for its legitimation. In a contemporary post-industrial society, this legitimation resulted in the loss of credibility of the grand narratives. The method of

[5] Lyotard, **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**, p. xxiv.

discourse constantly changes according to the type of arguement and results in 'language games', a term Lyotard borrowed from Ludwig Wittgenstein. He asserted that concepts do not need to be clearly, precisely and accurately defined to be meaningful. Because, all the words in a language do not necessarily have precise meanings and language consists of many smaller and simpler language games. "For a large class of cases — though not for all — in which we employ the word *meaning* it can be explained thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language."[6] Words have contextual meanings depending on the social interaction within which they are uttered. That is why, they should be described not explained:

> *Knowledge now consists of a heterogeneity of competing local knowledges in which there are simply 'islands of determinism'. Knowledges have become performative, arbitrated no longer by the question 'Is it true?' but 'What use is it?', each discourse judged in terms of what Lyotard calls 'paralogy', the ability of parallel rather than hierarchically arranged knowledges to come up with a new move, an innovation.*[7]

Paralogy is an ongoing process of creation of meaning, which makes innovation possible by expanding new ideas. Lyotard explicitly employs Wittgenstein's concept of language-games in developing his own notion of metanarratives. However, the plurality of Wittgenstein's concept cannot be limited to contemporary discourse. Lyotard describes Wittgenstein's "language games" as such: "…each of the various categories of utterance can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put – in exactly the same way as the game of chess is defined by a set of rules determining the properties of each of the pieces, in other words, the proper way to move them."[8] Therefore, each utterance is a move in a game. The reason why Lyotard pays close attention to language games is because 'the observable social bond is composed of "language moves."[9] Without these rules, there would be no game which is necessary for the existence of society and social bonds. The lack of a rule of judgement brings about a case of conflict, what Lyotard calls *the differend*. Conflict can mean innumerable things; different opinions, judgements, tastes, religions, character, political views, and so on. The wronged side may not justify their position within the boundaries of another vocabulary and value system, which ultimately results in incommensurability

[6] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1967) **Philosophical Investigations**. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p 43.
[7] Sim, Stuart. (2005) **The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism**. London: Routledge, p. 19-20.
[8] Lyotard, **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**, p. 10.
[9] Lyotard, **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**, p. 11.

of language games and misunderstandings. Differends remain unexpressed because they are inexpressible. Differends exist; that they often exist on behalf of dominant groups against the ones who cannot justify their rights. The differend covers an injustice caused by the nature of discourse, done to the ones that are left incompetent in expression by the language itself which is oppresive and violent.

As societies enter the postindustrial age and cultures enter the postmodern age, knowledge has become a commodity and is merchandised. Lyotard says that to understand the nature of knowledge in the most highly-developed contemporary society, one must be able to understand how it operates. Postmodern society is either a whole which is unified and cohesive, or split in two as a dissonant society where the needs of its people and functions of its system are incompatible with each other. Either way, society is a giant machine, and the knowledge has a crucial role in the functioning of society. In postmodern society, we have two types of knowledge: narrative and scientific. Narrative knowledge, which is based on storytelling, is the kind of knowledge found in traditional societies. This type of knowledge does not require legitimation, it is transmitted without questioning. However, scientific knowledge is obliged to legitimation. Lyotard warns his readers about the dominance of scientific knowledge over narrative knowledge as he believes that either can be judged as right, wrong, true, false, worse or better in comparison to the other.

The postmodern, as Lyotard explains, refers to "the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts."[10] The postindustrial society has a sceptical and declinatory behavior towards the grand narratives. In the postmodern world, power is having, creating, and reformatting information as much as possible. "There is a strict interlinkage between the kind of language called science and the kind called ethics and politics"[11] That is why, the gap between developed and developing countries will grow wider in the future as knowledge becomes the major stake in the worldwide competition for power. Hence, in a postmodern world where knowledge is constantly changing and piling, it is crucial to

[10] Lyotard, **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**, p. xxiii.
[11] Lyotard, **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**, p. 8.

learn how to select data from a pool of information and make combinations in meaningful ways.

2.1.1 Post-structuralist Approach to Textual Analysis

The instability in the human sciences and the plurality of meaning Jean-François Lyotard adresses is the central theme of the more precise, less inclusive term Post-structuralism which emerged in France in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Departing from objectivity and fixed binary oppositions, it is a critique of structuralism which is an intellectual movement developed in Europe from the early to mid-20th century. Post-structuralism reveals rhetoric as the subversive of the logic of language. Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism, works of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco, the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, the historical critiques of Michel Foucault, and the writings of Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard constitute the pillars of Post-structuralism. These contributors are generally labeled as post-structuralists by others rather than by themselves. Divergent from one another in many aspects, these writers all try to disclose the constructed metaphors that constitute social norms. All aim to question unquestioned concepts and binarisms. Different from one another in many respects, all these writers had an attempt to reveal the unquestioned metaphors which constructed social and disciplinary norms.

In the Post-Structuralist approach, the reader rejects a central fixation on the author and replaces the author as the prime source of a work's semantic content. The interpretation of a text is no longer fixed on a singular, objective 'self', but it differs according to a reader's subjective conception of 'self'. In this sense, Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida proved the necessity of the decease of the author. In his 1967 essay *The Death of the Author (La mort de l'auteur)*, Roland Barthes argues against the interpretation of a text dependent on the intentions, biographical context and identity of an author. "To give an Author to a text," Barthes argues, "is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the

writing," that is, to impose a limit on that text. A literary work must not be evaluated from its creator's perspective, because each piece of literary work contains multiple writings;

> *...issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination; but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted.*[12]

Barthes refuses a single interpretation or perspective, an ultimate meaning. Consequently, in order to give way to the birth of the reader, the death of the author is compulsory and inevitable. He claims that a text's unity lies in its destination rather than its origin, so a text should not be analyzed in the context of its author's life. As John M. Burke asserts, "Unleashed from subjective, expressive or mimetic obligations, language wells its own story, cleansed of all referentiality or empirical concern. The sublime origin of literature which the romantics sought alternately in imagination, or in the Muse, is now discovered within language itself, freed from its author."[13] The death of the author is caused by inability to create, produce, or discover, because the author collects preexisting ideas who have already been discovered or concluded. Thus, his/her work becomes meaningful when it arrives its destination, the reader, and achieves plurality.

Literature is tyrannically centered on the author. Barthes, in his essay, mentions the influence of Stéphane Mallarmé as the first to highlight the necessity of the death of the author:

> *In France, Mallarmé was doubtless the first to see and to foresee in its full extent the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner. For him, for us too, it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs,' not 'me.' Mallarmé's entire poetics consists in suppressing the*

[12] Barthes, R., & Heath, S. (1977). "The Death of the Author", **Image, music, text**. New York: Hill and Wang, p. 142-8.
[13] Burke, J. M. (1989). The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida (master's thesis). University of Edinburgh. https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/7375, (30.03.2015), p. 5.

author in the interests of writing (which is, as will be seen, to restore the place of the reader.)[14]

It is the language that makes an author and not vice versa. The gesture the writer imitates is never original. In saying so, Barthes opposes the idea of writing as originating from a single fixed source.

2.1.2 Deconstruction

We can never precisely and accurately say what something is, but we can more easily define it by saying what it is not. Because of this inability, all meanings are eternally deferred without reaching any central point, which the French philosopher Jacques Derrida calls "differ'ance". *Différance*, from the French verb *différer*, which means both to differ and to defer, comprises the basis for deconstruction. There is an absence or deferral in any thing to another related thing which is both the same and other where difference transforms into equivalence. When something is defined by its contrast, one of them always has a positive connotation, and vice versa. These binaries are called violent hierarchies by deconstructionists, because one term is always forced to have negative associations. Deconstructionists seek to demolish, shatter, and reverse these binary oppositions in order to prevent hierarchy and exclusion in discourse, in culture, and in literature.

Deconstructionism, coined by Jacques Derrida, is a late twentieth-century literary theory that concentrates on enabling the critic to "deconstruct" a text by finding inconsistencies and questioning traditional assumptions about certainty, identity, and truth. The primary source for deconstructive criticism is Derrida's 1967 book *Of Grammatology* which is an examination of the relation between speech and writing. Derrida revolts against the stabilization of meanings in language as well as arguing that writing does not exist in order to represent speech, they each are legitimate signifiers of their own. He points out that this fallacy has been examined in innumerable philosophical and scientific investigations of the origin of language. According to this attitude, speech is assumed to be closer to the truth of meaning and

[14] Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author", p. 143.

representation. However, he puts forward the idea that it is the interaction between speech and writing that leads to the development of language. Derrida fixes the reader's attention on how speech is the privileged term in Plato, Rousseau and Levi-Strauss's structural anthropology.

Derrida's concept of "deconstruction" aims at an examination of binary opposites in a text's claims to truth, authority and authenticity. According to this post-structuralist theory, it is essential to find the main binary oppositions within the text in order to analyse the privileged and degraded sides. Because, rather than having opposite meanings, the contrasting sides of a binary opposition are mutual constituents of each other:

> *'Deconstruction' is the name given to the critical operation by which such oppositions can be partly undermined, or by which they can be shown partly to undermine each other in the process of textual meaning. […] Perhaps what is outside is also somehow inside, what is alien also intimate –so that man needs to police the absolute frontier between the two realms as vigilantly as he does just because it may always be transgressed, has always been transgressed already, and is much less absolute than it appears.*[15]

The logos which helps construct the binary opposites and justify the position of the privileged side then has to be decentred to show how the degraded can become the privileged, and vice versa. In doing so, deconstruction stands against logocentrism that puts logos in the center of language and philosophy. Logos is the Greek term for speech, thought, or reason. Thus, speech is the original signifier of meaning. On account of the logocentric fact that a signifier derives its meaning from a signified idea and writing is only a representation of speech, then it is only a signifier of a signifier. Terry Eagleton explains this situation as follows:

> *There is no fixed distinction between signifiers and signifieds. If you want to know the meaning (or signified) of a signifier, you can look it up in the dictionary; but all you will find will be yet more signifiers, whose signifieds you can in turn look up, and so on. This process is somehow circular: signifiers keep transforming into signifieds and vice versa, and you will never arrive at a final signified which is not a signifier in itself.*[16]

Logocentrism is a term used to describe the Western tradition of science and philosophy that favours fixity of meaning and puts logos, or speech, in a superior situation in a structure. All forms of thought are based on an external point of

[15] Eagleton, Terry. (1983) **Literary Theory: An Introduction**. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, p 115.
[16] Eagleton, **Literary Theory: An Introduction**, p 111.

reference and ideal representation of original objects, or Ideas, for logocentrism, is logos. It seeks for an external point of reference such as science, or God. According to Derrida, all Western thought from Plato to the present has tried to ground its basis on a meaning, "presence," or "existence":

> *We already have a foreboding that phonocentrism merges with the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as presence, with all the subdeterminations which depend on this general form and which organize within it their system and their historical sequence (presence of the thing to the sight as eidos, presence as substance / essence / existence [ousia], temporal presence as point [stigme] of the now or of the moment [nun] , the self-presence of the cogito, consciousness, subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and of the self, intersubjectivity as the intentional phenomenon of the ego, and so forth). Logocentrism would thus support the determination of the being of the entity as presence.*[17]

In Western philosophy, truth is always based on logocentrism. Derrida, in his aforementioned work, highlights the notion of writing as a supplement to speech. This means that speech is lacking in something because a supplement fills in a lack. Deconstructionists try to show how truth and meaning are created forcefully by fixing a meaning and constructing a binarism. Deconstruction challenges transcendental ideas and stabilized binaries that construct the truth in politics and philosophy. According to Derrida, language consists of unstable interactions between signifiers which do not necessarily reach a signified. Although deconstruction was introduced by Derrida, the term is later explained and developed by numerous thinkers. M.A.R Habib defines deconstruction as "a way of reading, a mode of writing, and, above all, a way of challenging interpretations of texts based upon conventional notions of the stability of the human self, the external world, and of language and meaning."[18] (649) Deconstruction aims at dismantling logocentrism. In order to deconstruct, one needs to understand how a whole was constituted and reconstruct it. Deconstruction is destabilization and is essential for progress.

"The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures,"[19] Derrida suggests. Derrida points to the possibility of

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[17] Derrida, Jacques. (1976) **Of Grammatology**. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, p. 12.
[18] Habib, M. A. R. (2005) **A History of Literary Criticism: From Plato to the Present**. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, p. 649.
[19] Derrida, **Of Grammatology**, p. 24.

an outside, and the necessity of operating from the inside. Handling a text from the inside requires an investigation on inconsistencies, deficiencies, and binary oppositions. Deconstruction opens new perspectives and create new meanings or interpretations. By reversing binary oppositions, one is able to examine the values and beliefs underlying. Through destruction, every act of reading becomes a new interpretation of meaning. The reader does not dwell on the author's intended meaning but produces a new meaning out of the so-called original text. The reason why it is "so-called original" is because Derrida believes there is no original text, including his own texts, and all texts inherit from the preexisting ones. The plurality of meanings is produced by the reader through a process which Derrida calls 'grafting'. Derrida thinks that writing and grafting are the same word. The reader rewrites the original text and produces a new text by grafting what he/she interprets onto the original text. Derrida calls the process through which grafting takes place 'dissemination' which means to collage/montage. Hence, a reader becomes a writer, that is, reading and writing are inseparable.

2.1.3 Postmodern Rewriting

> *There is an international effort in "reviewing everything, rewriting everything, restoring everything, face-lifting everything, to produce, as it seems, in a burst of paranoia a perfect set of the accounts at the end of the century, a universally positive balance sheet.*[20]

Jean Baudrillard points at the universal attempt of rereading, reconsidering, rewriting, and rearticulating what has been said as a consequence of the new perspectives Postmodernism brings along. In doing so, he brings into question one of the most conspicuous features of Postmodernism: Rewriting. According to the French philosopher, the postmodern society is in a mode of recycling, to "rewind modernity like a tape," (11) we are left a huge "dustbin" (26) of ideologies and grand narratives of Modernism. Although rewriting is accepted as one of the distinctive features of Postmodernism, it is as ancient as narrative itself as it is naturally a part of storytelling in oral traditions. However, there was an increased interest to revise

[20] Baudrillard, Jean. (1994) **The Illusion of the End.** Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, p. 12.

existing metanarratives in the Postmodern era. Whereas neoclassical philosophy of rewriting do not subvert what they rewrite, postmodern rewriting practices set sup "a *counterwriting* distance, a "rupture" between themselves and what they redo-the literary past-as well as between themselves and various hegemonic forces active at the moment and in the milieu of "redoing."[21] Rewriting refers to re-imagining, re-working, re-vising, and re-telling of existing narratives. Revisionary fiction often critiques what it rewrites. Rewriting the literary canon provides the reader with new perspectives and styles by challenging the concepts of originality, uniqueness and authorship. Postmodern rewriting secures justice for the ones that are excluded from or muted by the canon. Rewriting exposes, alters, and renews the meanings of the so-called original text, and adapt it to new audiences. It is often discussed if rewriting is a genre or not. It is also questioned how to distinguish it from other forms of intertextuality such as parody, revision, translation, or potpourri. All rewritings, André Lefevere argues, "whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way."[22] Whilst some rewrites celebrate canon literature, others are written in order to question and restore.

According to American literary critic Harold Bloom, "any poem is an inter-poem, and any reading of a poem is an inter-reading. A poem is not writing, but rewriting, and though a strong poem is a fresh start, such a start is a starting-again."[23] Bloom bases the relationship between the rewriters and their precursors on the Oedipal complex. He argues that precursors (fathers) do not always have an inspirational influence, which leads rewriters (sons) to enter a state of anxiety and fear for not achieving originality, because "poetry lives always under the shadow of poetry."[24] Language, Bloom asserts, is always a revision of previous language and this revisionism bears repression. The urge to surpass their predecessors, carry out recognition and success directs them to destruct and renovate. Some rewrites get ahead of their source-texts so influentially that the source-texts are sometimes

[21] Moraru, Christian. (2001) **Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning**. Albany: SUNY, p. 9.
[22] Moraru, **Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning**, p. 11.
[23] Bloom, H. (1975). Poetry, Revisionism, Repression. **Critical Inquiry**, 2(2), 233–251. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1342901, (20.04.2016).
[24] Bloom, Poetry, Revisionism, Repression, p. 233-251.

considered to be incomplete without them. As a matter of fact, rewriters sometimes make the reader feel that he/she is the geniune writer of the source-text. "The term 're-vision' deploys a strategic ambiguity between the word revise: 'to examine and correct; to make a new, improved version of; to study anew,' and re-vision: to see in another light; to re-envision or perceive differently; and thus to recast and re-evaluate the original."[25] As a consequent of this re-evaluation, there is wide range of the styles of rewriting. Not all works which borrow from literature have the same intentions. While some praise the source-text, others satirize. Revisionary works, Widdowson argues, tend to rewrite canonical texts and constantly keep in dialogue with it. They not only re-write the original as a different, separate, new work but also provide the reader with new aspects and critical directions.[26]

Notable critics such as Matei Calinescu, Marcel Cornis-Pope, Roland Barthes, André Lefevere and Michael Riffaterre among others point to the close relation between rewriting and rereading. Christian Moraru quotes Calinescu's notion of this connection in the Epilogue of his *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning*: "[I]t is from the perspective of (re)reading-closely connected with what we might call (re)writing-that the postmodern sensitivity to the phenomenon of hypertextuality can be better judged. (Calinescu, "Rewriting", 244)[27] A reader rewrites a text while reading, as (s)he always inevitably processes more than one text of any kind. This is an unending process, Christian Moraru argues: "[R]ather than a rounded-off product, a text is a "blueprint" for its completion through rewriting, presenting us with a set of "rewrite rules" whose activation yields more elaborate structures."[28]

Margaret Atwood emphasizes the necessity of "larceny" in her *Negotiating with the Dead*. She claims that "all writing of the narrative kind, and perhaps all writing, is motivated, deep down, by a fear of and a fascination with mortality (…) to bring something or someone back from the dead."[29] The dead stands for the preceding writers, or more generally, ancestors, and all writers learn from them,

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[25] Widdowson, Peter. (1999) **Literature.** London: Routledge, p. 164.
[26] Widdowson, **Literature**, p. 165.
[27] Moraru, **Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning**, p. 167.
[28] Moraru, **Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning**, p. 15.
[29] Atwood, Margaret. (2014) **On Writers and Writing**. Emblem Editions, p. 156.

because they control the past, the stories, and certain kinds of truth. Hence, it is impossible to avoid the dead if one is going to engage in writing. All writers ineavitably deal with their predecessors. That is why, Atwood states:

> *All (writers) must commit acts of larceny, or else of reclamation, depending how you look at it. The dead may guard the treasure, but it's useless treasure unless it can be brought back into the land of the living and allowed to enter time once more – which means to enter the realm of the audience, the realm of the readers, the realm of change. (Negotiating, 178-9)*

The theory of the impossibility of creating an entirely new piece of literature implies that literature springs from itself. "The terms "Rewriting/reprising" seem to imply that art depends on art, that artistic creation as an autonomous pursuit is only concerned with itself and draws its material from its own practice.[30] Reprising is included as a term of musicology as it means to return to the beginning of a piece of musical art. Georges Letissier's *Rewriting/reprising: Plural Intertextualities* is composed of a collection of sixteen essays written by various writers on the subject matter of intertextuality. Letissier, in his "Introduction", makes it clear that the study does not confine to literature alone, but the fine arts and musicology as well, as included by Julia Kristeva who coined the term *intertextualité*. Kristeva includes more generally art rather than literature alone. The term had frequently been handled by critics, but Kristeva was the first to use the it in print in an article on Bakhtin in *"Word, Dialogue and Novel"* (1966) and then in *"The Bounded Text"* (1966-67). Intertextuality excludes author as the center of criticism but focuses on the process in reader's mind. It is not possible for a text to exist solely on its own because all texts refer to other texts. Regardless of the intentions of their authors, literary works are multi-dimensional and interwoven, and they speak for one another:

> *All literary texts are woven out of other literary texts, not in the conventional sense that they bear the traces of 'influence' but in the more radical sense that every word, phrase or segment is a reworking of other writings which precede or surround the individual work. There is no such thing as the 'first' literary work: all literature is intertextual.*[31]

The inter-dependence of art brings along multidimensionality. This interdependence is determined by David Cowart as "literary symbiosis" where

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[30] Letissier, Georges. (2009) Introduction. **Rewriting/reprising: Plural Intertextualities**. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub., p. 1.
[31] Eagleton, Terry. (1983) **Literary Theory: An Introduction.** Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, p 138.

classics benefit from their rewrites. He suggests that all writing results from these symbiotic exchanges.[32] On the other side, Gérard Genette excludes other forms of art from his restrictive concept 'transtextuality' in an attempt to restrict the definitions of intertextuality put forward by Kristeva, Derrida, or Barthes. He particularly dwells on the literary text in literal terms and explores all kinds of relationships between texts. He suggests the term transtextuality instead of intertextuality as he thinks it is insufficient for defining the diversity of connections between texts. Transtextuality, he defines, "is the textual transcendence of the text. (…) All that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts."[33] Although he precisely focuses on literature, he accepts that it is impossible to study it alone. Genette introduces five subcategories of transtextuality. The first category is intertextuality; the actual presence of one text within another, any kind of co-presence between texts, by means of plagiarism, quotation or allusion. The second one, paratextuality refers to the connection between the body of a text and its title, subtitle, preface, foreword, book cover, intertitles, epigraphs, illustrations, notes, first drafts, and other kinds of secondary signals which comment on the text. Metatextuality, the third category, is the relation, frequently regarded as commentary, which connects one text with another that comments on it without citing or mentioning it. The fourth type is architextuality which is the genre a text belongs to. Hypertextuality is the last subcategory Genette lists; it is the relationship between the hypertext (subsequent text) and hypotext (its predecessor). Every text which directly or indirectly imitates a text (hypotext) is a hypertext, excluding commentaries. A hypertext may be in various forms such as parody, pastiche, caricature, transposition, forgery, imitation etc. It does not necessarily make reference to the hypotext, but cannot exist without it. For example, *Ulysses* or *The Penelopiad* are hypertexts of the hypotext, *The Odyssey*. As Genette sums up: "It is now taken for granted that all text is by definition palimpsestuous: "Any text is a hypertext, grafting itself onto a hypotext, an earlier text that it imitates and transforms."[34]

[32] Moraru, **Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning**, p. 18.
[33] Genette, Gérard. (1997) **Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree**. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, p. 1.
[34] Genette, **Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree**, p. ix-xviii.

2.1.4. Feminist Revisionist Mythology

What would become of logocentrism, of the great philosophical systems, of world order in general if the rock upon which they founded their church were to crumble?

Helene Cixous

"Then all the stories would have to be told differently," Cixous continues, "the future would be incalculable, the historical forces would, will, change hands, bodies; another thinking as yet not thinkable will transform the functioning of all society."[35] She points to the fact that we are now going through this era when the millennial conventional structures encoded by male privilege are being debunked. The Postmodern era has set the basis for the rise of feminist revisionary mythology. Rediscovering and transforming old texts, as well as subverting gender stereotypes and sexist symbols embodied in myths, lets women describe and express their experience and resist sexist language. In doing so, feminist writers have been revealing the point view of women which has been ignored for ages. Feminist revision of myth emerged from the need to ask new questions and open new perspectives on the dominant paradigms of classic literature which were undeniably proven phallogocentric, privileging masculinity in the construction of meaning. For this purpose, feminist writers endeavor to give birth, or rebirth, to a separate and equal female language. In her article "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking", Alicia Ostriker defines "revisionist mythmaking" in this way:

> *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*

[35] Helene Cixous, "Sorties," in La jeune née, trans. Ann Liddle (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 10/18, 1975, quoted by Alicia Ostriker in "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking" (1982) Signs, 8(1), 68–90. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173482, (03.05.2016).

vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible.[36]

Cultural change is essential for the real existence of female experience, not in relation to the male protagonist but of its own. When conventional myths are changed by female knowledge of female experience, Ostriker argues, they can no longer stand as "foundations of collective male fantasy". Then, they become corrections of gender stereotypes embodied in male gaze, manifestations of female suffering. Women in literature have existed either to play the social gender roles attributed by society or to demonstrate male desire, hatred, or fear. Susan Gubar argues that women have been confined to a dichotomy where they can be either solely good or solely bad, an angel, a victim, or a monster, a devil (as cited in Ostriker, 1982):

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 Iphegenia, Alcestis, Mary, Cinderella. It is thanks to myth we believe that women must be either 'angel' or 'monster'. (Gubar, 1979: 302)[37]

Because, the presence of goodness requires absolute absence of evil, vice versa. Through revisionist mythmaking, we can redefine ourselves and consequently our culture. According to Ostriker, feminist mythmaking reevaluates social, political, and philosophical values, especially in occidental literature. New meanings bring about new forms which reveal discrepancies between conventional concepts and female revision. Revision mythmaking intends to voice women who have been left behind by questioning and subverting existing narratives that make up cultural heritage. Even women writers had to adopt a masculine style in writing in order to please the male audience to be accepted as writers. It is worth quoting a whole paragraph here from the French feminist critic Hélène Cixous's essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976):

I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as marked writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural -- hence political, typically masculine -- economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often

[36] Ostriker, **The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking**, p. 72.
[37] Ostriker, **The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking**, p. 71.

> *hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction; that this locus has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman has never her turn to speak.*[38]

Revision and rewriting of the dominant cultural discourse pave the way for the true representation of the subordinate, oppressed, muted, displaced, and left behind. In this sense, Margaret Atwood mentions the importance of canon revision and formation not only for cultural but also national consciousness: "Even the things we look at demand our participation, and our commitment: if this participation and commitment are given, what can result is a 'jailbreak,' an escape from our old habits of looking at things, and a 'recreation,' a new way of seeing, experiencing and imaging—or imagining— which we ourselves have helped to shape."[39] Atwood lays stress on the role of victimized in deconstructing and reforming false images. Because, through revision, the oppressed can be placed back in discourse and history.

Adrienne Rich is another remarkable feminist critic whose essay "When we dead awaken" (1971) emphasizes the need for women to be aware, to awaken:

> *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. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society.*[40]

Rich summons women to revise metanarratives and rewrite them as it is through revision women can affirm their place in society. The anger and the victimization women experience is real and rooted in the society, Rich states, and should be explored by poets. Writers should not follow the tradition set by androcentric writers but should awaken, analyse, subvert and recreate it to break its hold on women and live afresh. This way, the discourse that entrapped women will liberate them through revision. In her article "The Thieves of Language: Woman Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking", Alicia Ostriker argues that feminist revision of myth is an essential tool for redefining cultural discourses and conventional

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[38] Cixous, Hélène. (1976) "The Laugh of the Medusa". **Signs**, Vol. 1, No. 4. The U of Chicago P, p. 879.

[39] Atwood, Margaret. (2004) **Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature**. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, p. 292.

[40] Rich, Adrienne. (1971) **On Lies, Secrets, and Silence**. London: Virago, p. 35.

representations of the female. Revisionist mythmaking breaks against and exceeds the frame of patriarchal discourse, Liz Yorke says, and is possible:

> *Anywhere that experience, memory, fantasy or dream can be retrieved, whether in words or images, it may be revalued, and re-presented. This effort of retrieval may permit different textures, colours, aspects, lights and shadings to be heard, seen and felt: such feminist transvaluation is a continual re-processing.*[41]

2.2. A GLANCE BACK AT HOMER'S *ODYSSEY*

The central characters of Margaret Atwood's works which will be explored in this thesis are from the most well-known and widely-read pieces of literature, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* that were composed nearly three thousand years ago and have remained a source of inspiration and debate since then. People have studied, discussed, retold, resonated, uncovered, constructed and deconstructed the works attributed to the poet Homer. The epic poems have always been published under the name 'Homer' as the author, who had presumably lived in the late eighth and early ninth centuries B.C.E. He was believed to be the greatest epic poet of ancient times and he is a monumental figure in Western literary canon. However, critics have been questioning if the aforementioned two epic poems were written by a single person. Even if these canonical works had been written by one single poet then he must have fostered from other sources by compiling, expanding, contracting, editing, or adopting, owing to the tradition of oral poetry. While some analysts argue that the two poems were evidently written by at least two different individuals due to the difference in style, others believe *The Iliad* was written in Homer's youth and *The Odyssey*, in his old age. Although very little is known about Homer, he is central to Western literature. He was born in Ionia, present-day Turkey. He was believed to be blind because of the etymology of his name. "Homer", as some linguists explain, derives from the word for "blind" or "follower" in some Greek dialects. The depiction of the blind bard Demodocus in *The Odyssey* is seen as a self-portrait to support this hypothesis. He is described as such: "The squire now came, leading their favorite bard, whom the Muse loved above all others, [al]though she had mingled

[41] Yorke, Liz. (1991) **Impertinent Voices: Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Women's Poetry.** London: Routledge, p. 23.

good and evil in her gifts, robbing him of his eyes but granting him the gift of sweet song."[42] (8.62–67) Homer's works have survived and even flourished in the postmodern world due to their versatility. They have found audience in every era, making him modern for every age.

The famous *Iliad* narrates the Trojan War which was caused by the runaway queen of Sparta, wife of Menelaus, Helen, in the city of Ilion, or Ilium, a city in Troy. Originally written in Homeric Greek, a combination of Ionic Greek and other dialects, *The Iliad* combines the history, legends and religion of the ancient Greeks. The word Iliad means 'pertaining to Ilion'. The Iliad is a poetic description of the war, the ten-year invasion of Ilion by the Greek, depicting the Greek and Trojan warriors and pointing at their relations with their Gods. It begins with the withdrawal of the Greek hero Achilles from the fighting in the Trojan War and ends after he returns to kill the Trojan hero Hector. There lies the legend of Helen and Paris behind *The Iliad*. The eloping of Paris with Menelaus's wife Helen is the real reason for the war between the Greeks and Trojans. Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, has "come out of an egg, being the daughter of Zeus who'd raped her mother in the form of a swan." (*The Penelopiad*, 20) She later thinks that running off with Paris was a big mistake. Her character has been scrutinized in many literary rewritings and analyses. The roles of Homer's women vary from faithful wife or goddess caretaker to monster. Among many of her roles in others' lives, the "seductive" and "treacherous" Helen means trouble to Trojans. Even the Dioscuri, her twin brothers Castor and Pollux, and her mother Leda, as reported by Euripides, commit suicide out of shame for the actions of Helen.[43] She is the embodiment of destructive beauty. That is, like many other mythic women of canonical mythology, Helen's character perpetuates patriarchal perspective on women.

Odysseus, the generous, gentle and pious king of Ithaca, goes to Troy as a warrior to fight in the Trojan War to keep his promise to Menelaus. He represents intelligence as the cleverest Achaean commander and an influential, persuasive public speaker. *The Odyssey* is a follow-up which narrates the journey of Odysseus from the ten-year Trojan war to his home, Ithaca. He has been away from the isle of

[42] Homer, and Robert Fitzgerald. (1961) **The Odyssey**. Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday.
[43] Allan, William, and Euripides. (2008) **Euripides: Helen**. Cambridge: Cambridge U.

Ithaca for twenty years, the first ten spent in the Trojan War, the next ten in wanderings en route home under the curse of Poseidon who avenges his son's death by Odysseus. Before going to Troy, Odysseus leaves everything in Penelope's care, which indicates his confidence in his wife. In his absence, a large crowd of suitors overrun his palace and harass his faithful wife. In spite of all the rumor that Odysseus is already dead, she remains hopeful that Odysseus will come back one day, expresses yearning for her husband: "I waste my heart away in longing for Odysseus." (19.136) Penelope is often moved to mournful tears by the stories told about her husband, which is regarded by Eumaios as "the right way for a wife when her husband is far and perished." (14.130) While mourning for her lost husband, she tantalizes the suitors at the same time. She stalls them by promising them that she will make a choice when she finishes knitting a burial shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes, while she secretly undoes the garment by night. However, there remains the threat from Laertes's death which will bring about the discovery of her plan and disgracefulness. Eventually, the suitors find out about Penelope's trick and demand she marry one of them immediately. At such times, Penelope finds herself in a double bind and speaks her indecision:

> *Shall I stay here by my son and keep all in order,*
> *My property my serving maids, and my great high-roofed house,*
> *Keep faith with my husband's bed and regard the voice of the people,*
> *Or go away at last with the best of all those Achaians*
> *Who court me here in the palace with endless gifts to win me? (19.525-29)*

Prince Telemachus wants to get rid of the suitors who feast at his father's palace, abuse his servants and plunder his livestock, but he is not able to, because he has not developed into maturity. Among the suitors, especially Antinous wants to make away with the prince so much that he plans an assassination, yet fails and dies first when Odysseus returns. More importantly, his return means the end of Penelope's indeterminacy:

> *Penelope's presence in the palace has been, Telemachus realizes, as much the reason for its occupation by the suitors as is Odysseus's absence. The Odyssey, in fact, is as much Penelope's epic as it is Odysseus's, for she, flirtatious and faithful, decisive in*

her indecision, freezes time while her husband wanders between time and timelessness.[44]

Thus, she will return to the world of time if she marries a suitor or if Odysseus returns. However, "it is not the date of Odysseus's return that restores Penelope to sequential time but the moment she acknowledges his return."

The goddess of wisdom, Athene, plays an important role in the plot by begging and convincing her father Zeus, the brother of Poseidon, to gurantee Odysseus' return. She also plays an important role in leading Telemachus into maturity. Upon Athene's advice to seek for his father, Telemachus sets sail and goes to Menelaus who tells him that his father is held captive by Calypso; "a nymph, immortal and most beautiful, who craved Odysseus for her own." (1.1.23-24) Eventually, Odysseus is set free after spending seven years with the immortal Calypso when Zeus sends Hermes to her island in order to grant him liberty. Calypso does everything to convince him to stay with her, even comparing herself to mortal Penelope to make him change his mind:

but if only you knew…
You would stay here with me and be the lord of this household
And be an immortal, for all your longing once more to look on
That wife for whom you are pining all your days here. And yet
I think that I can claim that I am not her inferior
Either in build or stature, since it is not likely that mortal
Women can challenge the goddesses for build and beauty. (5.206-13)

Nonetheless, Odysseus refuses immortality and agelessness, and sails on a boat that he has made himself and again gets dispersed by wrathful Poseidon, yet lands on Scheria, the isle of the Phaeaceans. The next morning, Odysseus is found shipwrecked on the island by the Princess of the Phaeaceans, Nausikaa, and her handmaids, who altogether take him to the palace of Alcinoös and Arete, the King and the Queen, where he enchants them with his tales and is inevitably likened to an expert bard by Alcinoös. He is also likened to a lion among Nausikaa and her handmaids: "like some hill-kept lion," (6.130-38) meaning that, though prone to

[44] Ahl, Frederick, and Hanna Roisman. (1996) **The Odyssey Re-formed**. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, p. 206.

violence, he does not “mingle” with neither Nausikaa nor any of her handmaids, but merely charms her into granting him refuge. Because by the time he meets Nausikaa, he has already fulfilled his need for an exotic lover with Circe and Calypso. There he encounters the blind bard Demodocus who tells about heroes, gods and goddesses. Once the King and the Queen learn Odysseus’ identity, they ask for his narration of his adventures. Odysseus recounts his adventures beginning from his departure from Troy until Calypso’s island. Pleased with his stories, The Phaeaceans give Odysseus vast amount of gifts and help him return Ithaca.

In Ithaca, Athene meets Odysseus, who has left two goddesses who desired him as their husband, and disguises him as an old beggar; so, without being noticed, he goes to meet Eumaeus, the swineherd, who remains loyal all the time. Odysseus has to confront the consequences of his absence: his son’s transition from adolescence to maturity and his wife’s obligation to remarry one of the suitors. Thus, he is consumed by wondering whether Penelope is still the women he left and his mind is occupied with questions of her fidelity: "Tell me about the wife I married, her plan and her mind, and whether she stays fast by my son, and guards everything, or if the best man among the Achaeans.” (11.177-79) In shaping her character, writes Nancy Felson-Rubin in *Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics*, Homer raises alternative plot possibilities by inviting his audiences to construct parallels with Klytaimestra and Helen and other female characters, and by supporting an ongoing male conversation about whether she will wait for Odysseus’s return or marry beforehand.[45] Telemachus meets the old beggar at Eumaeus’ shelter where he reveals his identity and they make a plan to get rid of the suitors. They wait until night when the suitors go back to their homes to hide all the weapons which are kept in the main hall. Along with Odysseus’s return to Ithaca, both Telemachus’s and Penelope’s statuses and roles change. Odysseus’s return resolves the problem of Telemachus’s isolation and physical incapacity, and thus enables the realization of Telemachus’s authority as head of his household.[46] Telemachus grows mature with the recognition of his father’s homecoming. On the other hand, Telemachus’

[45] Felson, Nancy. (1994) **Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, p. 67.
[46] Katz, Marylin A. (1991) **Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in The Odyssey**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, p. 129.

accession to maturity makes it possible for Penelope to remarry, in order to get rid of the suitors' threat (the plot of the assassination of Telemachus) and plunderage. This draws a parallel between Penelope and Helen who is willing to seduce men, the Greek leaders, while still a married woman. In this sense, Nancy Felson-Rubin suggests, Penelope enjoys three separate courtships: by the suitors, by the stranger, and by the returned Odysseus. In each, she plays with her expected role as an object of desire.[47]

In the meantime, the suitors not only abuse Penelope but also harrass her female servants. It is also important to ponder on Odysseus's revelation of his identity to his son but not to his wife. Odysseus, wanting to test the servants, warns his son:

> *Let no one from now on hear that Odysseus is within,*
> *do not let either Laertes or the swineherd know it,*
> *nor any of the house servants nor Penelope herself.*
> *But you and I alone will find out right away about the women;*
> *and we could test the men servants as well. (16.301-5)*

In collusion with Telemachus, Odysseus identifies his wife and father with the servants and put them all to a test, particularly the female servants, the women behind the scenes, and Penelope.

Later on, Penelope, wanting to question Odysseus as the old beggar in hope of learning where her husband is, asks Eumaeus to summon him. However, Odysseus declines this request and sets arranges another meeting in the time and place he organizes, as if he is not a beggar but the King. What is more, he offers to meet at the hearth which is the innermost space of the household:

> *Reports of Penelope's activities have a cumulative effect on Odysseus, causing sometimes faint concern, sometimes sharp anxiety about whether she will wait or act precipitously. Odysseus takes control of the time and place of their interview. He achieves this indirectly, through an intermediary, Eumaios the swineherd. The swineherd himself does not know the role he is playing as he transmits messages back and forth. In this way, Odysseus and Penelope "converse" via Eumaios.*[48]

[47] Felson, **Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics**, p. 64.
[48] Felson, **Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics**, p. 53.

Eumaeus, now a palace messenger more than a swineherd, describes Penelope as "the mother of Telemachus", not "the wife of Odysseus" whilst Odysseus calls his wife "the daughter of Icarus", distancing himself from her in order not to reveal his secret in front of Eumaeus. When they eventually meet, Penelope orders her servant Euryclia, Odysseus's nurse when he was a little boy, to wash Odysseus' feet and the old woman recognizes Odysseus' scar but is immeadiately hushed by him. Odysseus's reputation is notably so glorious that it precludes his cover-up. Penelope, on the other hand, gains respect and reputation for resisting remarriage as the majority of Ithacans expect a woman in her position to take the easy wat out and choose safety and wealth provided by one of the suitors. By proving them wrong, she earns glory, that is, *kleos* which shows a character's virtue. Kleos is defined by what is said of a character by other characters. Therefore, it is very significant for Homeric characters; Odysseus, for example, even when he disguises himself as an old beggar, the scar on his feet reveals his glorious identity. His son Telemachus is intentionally sent abroad by Athene to gain his *kleos*; he returns matured and helps his father get rid of the suitors. His personality shifts to a confident, independent man. However, unlike Odysseus or other Homeric characters, Penelope's kleos, Richard Heitman suggests, stems from inaction which makes her a tragic heroine:

> *Heroes are heroes because they make the hard choice that no one else can. In return for their heroism, they win kleos. But Penelope will not. For her, heroism demands the courage to go unrecognized as a hero. I call this tragic. No one else in Homeric epics is called on to take such a great sacrifice.*[49]

The next day when the suitors arrive, Penelope comes to the hall with Odysseus' bow and proposes that the one suitor who can string it and shoot an arrow through twelve axe handles may marry her. Her decision to arrange a bow contest is motivated by Odysseus' own words before his departure for Troy that she should marry again if he does not return by the time Telemachus grows beard. However, it is widely discussed why Penelope has waited so long and has decided to remarry when the old beggar has taken an oath assuring Odysseus will soon come home. Why does she make up her mind to remarry at this precise moment?:

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[49] Heitman, Richard. (2005) **Taking Her Seriously: Penelope & the Plot of Homer's Odyssey.** Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, p. 84.

Come, suitors, since this is the contest before you:
for I shall set up the great bow of godlike Odysseus,
and whoever is able to string it easily in his hand,
and to send an arrow through all twelve axes,
him would I follow along after, abandoning this house
of my marriage, which is a lovely one, and full of good livelihood,
which I think I shall remember always, even in my dreams. (21.81-90)

They all fail. However, despite the suitors' humiliation and objection, Penelope insists him be given a try as if she knows it is Odysseus pretending to be a beggar before the suitors. Odysseus, still disguised as an old beggar, strings it and shoots through the handles. The bow symbolizes his rightful place as the king of Ithaca and the husband of Penelope. Immediately after that, he starts shooting the suitors with the help of Telemachus, Eumaeus, and Philoitius. They also execute Melanthius the goatherd and the bondswomen who has aided and remained loyal to the suitors. The hanging of the twelve maids is an important issue that shall be dwelled on in the next chapter. After they slay them all, Penelope goes to Odysseus but remains sceptical about his true identity until she tricks him. After the revelation of Odysseus's identity, they reunite on their marriage bed, "hewn long before by the bridegroom Odysseus, a bed whose roots go deep into the earth. On that rooted bed they exhange stories of the adventures each underwent in the other's absence."[50] Their reunion is the climax of *The Odyssey* plot. Finally, Odysseus reconciles with the relatives of the dead suitors once again with the help of Athene, and continues ruling Ithaca.

It is clearly seen at the first glance in the accounts of his adventures that Odysseus has always been tempted by women who constantly try to seduce him. That is the reason why it is often questioned if Odysseus has intentionally prolonged his journey back home for the women he has met en route. Each female offers him something. Throughout the myth of Odyssey, woman is represented diversely in various shapes with different roles; Penelope stands for the faithful wife; Nausikaa as a young girl represents the freshness of youth; Eurycleia reflects motherly love; Calypso, a passionate, lustrous lover; animal tamer Circe recalls an enchanting

[50] Felson, **Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics**, p. 63.

sorcerer. Calypso and Circe are particularly represented as seductresses who become an obstacle on his way back home to his faithful wife. What is more, Odysseus is not the only male to suffer at the hands of females; the innocent Penelope wards off the suitors by deceiving them with a false promise. Even though women use their powers on men, they are eventually dependent on the decisions and actions of men or the gods. This is most clearly observed on the Sirens, the demonic, seductive monsters who lure seamen to death with their captivating song, yet are bound to the rocks and unable to move. Even Circe, the powerful sorceress, the embodiment of the exercise of evil power over men, is left behind by Odysseus. With the help of the moly given by Hermes, which served as an antidote to Circe's spell, he is lucky enough to escape the fate of animality his crew have had to face. She later reverses the spell and hosts Odysseus for a year, as a lover. Odysseus's men hesitate to raise the subject of departure from her island for an entire year because of the relationship between them. Nevertheless, Odysseus leaves Circe and then Calypso, the immortal beauty and youth. While other women might appeal to him, Odysseus eventually longs for the stability of his own wife. Calypso and Circe with whom Odysseus has extended affairs are both strong, independent characters who assist Odysseus in his journey willingly or unwillingly; however, he wants to return home to his wife Penelope who is unable to help her husband. He even refuses immortality offered by Calypso who holds Odysseus captive on her island for seven years and is eventually forced by the order from Zeus to release him.

The Odyssey has been put under the scope of symbolic interpretation and structural analysis since antiquity. The postmodern reading of *The Odyssey*, looking at a canonical work with new eyes, revealed a multiplicity of voices, questions and conflicts. In the analysis of *The Odyssey*, the openness/closeness of the text (if it is available for the plurality of interpretation or not) is in charge of making room for interpretative activity. French literary theorist Gerard Genetté, in his *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, looks at the internal mechanisms of narrative, from a structuralist point of view. His theory of narratology consists of five elements; order, frequency, duration, voice, mood. In terms of order, the textual form of *The Odyssey* is interwoven with the frequent use of analepses or flashbacks and prolepses or flashforwards. Analepsis is a form of flashback in which earlier parts of

a narrative are related to others that have already been narrated. For instance, Odysseus's narrative to the Phaeacians is an analepsis. The reader gains a temporal orientation as soon as she or he constructs a coherent series of events and any anachrony will be perceived as a flashback or a flashforward from that moment on. In *The Odyssey*, the story does not begin chronologically but in medias res, when Odysseus is about to be freed from the isle of Calypso. The interruption of the present narrative flow is related to temporal relations between narrative and story, namely tense. The discrepancy between the order of events in the narrative and the order of the same events in the story reveal *anachronies*, that is, analepsis or prolepsis. This spatio-temporal relationship creates a chiastic structure, that is, a return from present to past to present again or from present to future to present again. As a result of this structural symmetry, the beginning and ending point is always the same. This symmetrical/cyclical pattern, called *ring composition*, is frequently found in ancient and oral literature. In this type of composition, beginning and end parallels each other, and thus narrative bears hints of upcoming events. The beginning, middle, and end are composed as a harmonious whole. The narrative pattern featured in *The Odyssey* consists of a lenghty complex of interwoven motifs and recurrence:

> *Odysseus comes alone to each island, disoriented, uncertain of his whereabouts. He proceeds to the palace, His identity unknown, receiving an uncertain reception, but slowly acquiring some status, and comes into friction with a band of abusive young men (the Phaiakian athletes, the suitors), led by Euryalos/Eurymakhos. Odysseus persevers, receiving the blessing of a powerful female figure (Arete, Penelope), and attains what he desires, Access to the next phase of his homecoming- the band of young men having been destroyed.*[51]

This recurrence is clearly observed on three islands; on Aiaia, Odysseus, Kirke, and the crew; on Skheria, Odysseus, Nausikaa/Arete, and the Phaiakian Athletes; on Ithaca, Odysseus, Penelope, and the suitors. Odysseus is obliged to endure the suitors' abuse and plunder silently, while making plans to cut them up as well as taking the opportunity to test his wife. It is broadly discussed and accepted that Penelope' story in *The Odyssey* is not presented in full. Although traditional interpretation of Penelope from a male-focalized perspective resigns her to a single stereotype (the faithful wife), she is a versatile character and she plays different roles

[51] Louden, Bruce. (1999) **The Odyssey: Structure, Narration, and Meaning**. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, p. 1-2.

in various plot throughout the epic. Particularly, her idea of the web and the bride contest reflect the complexity of her character. Nancy Felson-Rubin outlines Penelope's position in her essay, *Penelope's Perspective*:

> *Penelope in The Odyssey both weaves and interprets plots; she also takes pleasure in the plots she has woven. Yet the traditional view of Penelope limits her to a single plot, MARRIAGE-AVOIDANCE, and confines her to a single role, faithful and enduring wife. This single plot belongs primarily to a larger plot schema: RETURN OF HUSBAND, RECOVERY OF WIFE AS BRIDE, VENGEANCE AGAINST FALSE SUITORS. As a subordinate plot, it lacks autonomy, and its heroine seems to act more to suit her husband than out of personal desire.*[52]

While the actions of Odysseus, the suitors, and even the gods are estimated in the plot, there are never any clues for what Penelope will do. Penelope brings along indeterminacy to the epic. There are other plot-types, Felson-Rubin adds, that Penelope weaves; in BRIDE-PRIZE the suitors want to marry her and compete in a contest in order to achieve this; in FRIGIDITY and TEASE Penelope makes a false promise without the intention of marriage, her web is an entrapment for the suitors like Kirke's island for Odysseus's men; in LOYALTY and CUNNING she keeps the suitors close until Odysseus returns; in COURTSHIP and MARRIAGE she takes pleasure in being the center of male attention, participates actively in courtship and accepts to be a bride-prize; in DALLIANCE and INFIDELITY Penelope enjoys courtship while Odysseus is away; in DISDAIN and BRIDE OF DEATH she prefers virginal death to marrying one of the suitors. Penelope is aware of the plots she weaves and secures her interests. She is not as superficial as she is reflected; she encourages the suitors, fools them with the never-ending weaving of the web, accept their gifts, questions the old beggar and tell him about a specific dream, arranges the contest of the bow and traps her husband into unveiling his secret knowledge of their marriage bed. Odysseus, on the other side, "is not offended when he sees his wife winning male attention. He values the economic gains, which will help replenish the household. As a tactician himself, he respects her tactics."[53]

Storytelling is a recurrent motif that empowers the richness of the plots of *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*. Various characters take turns telling stories which altogether contribute to the whole, such as Menelaus, Nestor, Phemius, Demodocus,

[52] Felson, Nancy. (1996) "Penelope's Perspective", **Reading The Odyssey: Selected Interpretive Essays**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, p. 163.
[53] Felson, "Penelope's Perspective", p. 174.

Agamemnon, Helen, and Ajax. As Roland Barthes purports in his The Pleasure of The Text, producing a text is similar to spinning and weaving fabric, as the text is a tissue or spider web:

> *Text means Tissue; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue-this texture-the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web. Were we fond of neologisms, we might define the theory of the text as an hyphology (hyphos is the tissue and the spider's web).*[54]

As Barthes explains, all texts participate in an act of undoing. In Penelope's and Helen's case, storytelling is associated with the act of weaving. Weaving is an important motif attributed to women in the Homeric poems. With her silver work basket and blue wool, Helen makes herself heard through weaving which showed the battles of the Greeks and Trojans in Book 3 of the Iliad. Penelope's weaving is different in its pattern and the outcome. Her faithfulness in the creative process of weaving, unweaving and reweaving surpasses the product. Both Helen and Penelope are literal and figurative weavers, thus, bards and weavers of narrative. Nevertheless, they speak within the restrictions of patriarchy:

> *Although Penelope represents the "good, loyal spouse" and Helen "the false wife" we might ask if their weaving is so radically different as their reputations indicate. Is not their weaving joined in service to the same authority? Both Penelope and Helen can waive (or speak) without consequence to the patriarchal order because they do not threaten it. Although they speak, they are also "spoken for." Helen speaks (or weaves) because she is already spoken by Homer – her words are constituted by his, her threads depicting the body of his poem.*[55]

Penelope crafts her *kleos* by weaving and unravelling her great shroud for Laertes. Her reputation lies within her fidelity which comes from her refusal to remarry. Odysseus's return, in this sense, means the end of Penelope's weaving. His presence ceases her unending task. Neither Penelope nor Helen is granted the opportunity to tell the accounts of their lives, unlike Odysseus who is a direct narrator of his adventures. Some critics associated the weaving of female characters with the monthly cycle of the womb, an unending renewal which bears new

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[54] Barthes, Roland, Richard Miller, and Richard Howard. (1975) **The Pleasure of the Text**. New York: Hill and Wang, p. 64.

[55] Kruger, Kathryn Sullivan. (2001) **Weaving the Word: The Metaphorics of Weaving and Female Textual Production**. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, p. 83.

possibilities each time. It is very much like the act of rewriting itself. Each renewal reveals new interpretations.

Furthermore, Felson-Rubin states that Homer gives legitimate and reasonable excuses for Penelope's multiplicity of purposes. Penelope too makes reasonable explanations for her coming dangerously close to marrying a suitor. She puts herself in Helen's place and justifies her actions, though she does not usually emphatize with her:

> *Do not be angry with me, Odysseus, since, beyond other men,*
> *you have the most understanding. The gods granted us misery,*
> *in jealousy over the thought that we two, always together,*
> *should enjoy our youth, and then come to the threshold of old age.*
> *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.*
> *For neither would… Helen of Argos*
> *Have lain in love with an outlander…*
> *İf she had known that the warlike sons of the Achaians would bring her*
> *Home again to the beloved land of her fathers.*
> *It was a god who stirred her to do the shameful thing she*
> *Did, and never before had she had in her heart this terrible*
> *Wildness, out of which came suffering to us also.*
> *But now, since you have given me accurate proof…*
> *So you persuade my heart, though it has been very stubborn. (23.209-30)*

Penelope implies that ignorance of the future leads to Helen's wrongdoing. If she married a suitor without knowing if Odysseus was dead, alive, or already in Ithaca, she would also cause another war like Helen. In the end, she remains faithful to her husband but comes really close to betrayal.

There are three main narratorial motivations in *The Odyssey*, according to Irene D. F. De Jong; the first one is to introduce the Ithacan cast; the second is to

compare Odysseus with other Greek heroes; and the third is to initiate the characterization of Odysseus. The Ithacan cast includes Penelope, Telemachus, Laertes, the suitors, Phemius, and Eurcklia, with the exception of Eumaeus. The introduction of these characters makes the reader understand Odysseus's longing for Ithaca. His property, his wife and his son is threatened by the presence of the suitors and the Ithacans cannot stop them. Secondly, Odysseus, in terms of *nostos*, an epic hero returning home by sea, is compared to those who fought before Troy: Agamemnon, Nestor, Menelaus, Ajax, and Achilles. In the beginning his nostos seems to be the worst as he has not even returned home to Ithaca yet. As the story continues it is made clear that Odysseus's nostos is the best of all these characters. He does not die in the battlefield like Achilles, or on the way back home like Ajax, he is not killed by the suitors in his own property, neither does he have an unfaithful wife like Agamemnon or Menelaus. As a third narratorial motivation, Odysseus's character is described and praised by the others, notably Athene.

The *Odyssey* is credited for the socio-cultural development of the life of ancient Greece through archetypes. The 'Odyssey' as a whole is an archetype itself, an epic journey. It has previously been purported that the archetypal quest myth of the hero as developed by Jung, Cassirer, and Frazer is one of the central themes of Northrop Frye's theory of literary criticism. Frye suggests that it is the hero's accessibility to all of humanity that is essential for the archetypal construction of myth; a hero, both human and Godlike, who is on a quest. The hero's quest to get home, journey archetype, sets the foundation of *The Odyssey*. Odysseus's voyage is a manifestation of the archetype of man's journey into the realm of the confrontations awaiting him (in Ithaca). What distinguishes him from many other heroes is his wisdom. This wisdom when allied with craftiness and disguise makes him a fine example of the trickster archetype. Additionally, Odysseus is Hermes's great-grand son, known to be a cunning trickster who would outwit the gods. The trickster relies on his or her wits, crosses the boundaries between underworld and earth, and is brave and bold. Through the power of rhetoric, language games, humor, sarcasm, or irony, the trickster finds a way out of trouble. In *The Iliad*, for example, it is Odysseus who proposes the idea of the Trojan Horse which insures the defeat of the Trojans.

Another fundamental archetype is the initiation archetype which, in *The Odyssey*, is exemplified by Telemachus, Odysseus's son. Without his father, he is left in an ambiguous situation where he remains indecisive under the threat of the suitors. He is not mature enough to take responsibility until he meets Athene and is assigned a journey abroad in search of his father. His search for news about his father is also a search for confirmation of his identity as Odysseus's son; various caharacters will remark upon his resemblance to his father.[56] This transformation does not go unnoticed and is the starting point of the initiation process he undergoes. His journey into adulthood is an example of the initiation archetype. *The Odyssey* embodies various archetypes: The Sirens are femme fatale, as bringers of disastrous events with their irresistible allure; Athene is the mentor; Poseidon, the villain or antagonist. The task is to save Penelope and kill the suitors with the use of the bow as the magic weapon. The archetype of death and rebirth is reflected on Odysseus's return from his visit to Tereseias in the Underworld. Eumaios, Eurycleia, Eurynome, and Philoitios are the loyal retainers. Argos, Odysseus's dog, is the representation of friendly beast symbolizing fidelity like Penelope; Calypso is the temptress; the gods and the goddesses are archetypes of supernatural intervention.

[56] Jong, Irene J. F. De. (2001) **A Narratological Commentary on The Odyssey.** Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, p. 4.

CHAPTER THREE

NARRATING THE UNTOLD: REWRITING ANTIQUITY IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S SELECTED WORKS

3.1. PENELOPE'S PERSPECTIVE: *THE PENELOPIAD*

> *Penelope: The place of space, stasis, the chaste. The figure of home, the (loyal) body as home, the place of start and finish, the womb/tomb. Unnarratable, the space out of which narrative time emerges, to which it returns. The dutiful daughter-in-law whose weaving and unweaving of the father-in-law's shroud protects the husband's honor. The figure of not-Helen, the wife as ever there, never-lost (never-here/ever-lost) maternal body, the origin and end of adventure.*[1]

Penelope has been the representative of every virtue expected of a "good" woman by the patriarchal society who have had the dominance over literature and history as well as other spheres throughout ages. Although she is one of the biggest tricksters of literary history who keeps her suitors waiting for twenty years by several strategies, seldom has her shrewdness been noted or celebrated, very much unlike her husband's. Instead, it is her fidelity that resonates throughout centuries. Having long been disturbed by the lack of Penelope's perspective in the Homeric epic and haunted by the hanging of the twelve maids, Margaret Atwood rewrites the myth of Odysseus from Penelope's perspective, by granting her and the twelve maids the voice they have long been deprived of. In doing so, Atwood debunks "history" and rebuilds "herstory" as the title suggests. *The Penelopiad* can be read as a correction and a sequel of "the official version" as modern-day Penelope calls it. Margaret Atwood not only reinvents the plot of *The Odyssey* but also modifies its genre by adopting it to the Postmodernist movement, thereby reformulating the rules of the epic genre and challenging its hypotext both semantically and structurally. Penelope does not recall any heroic or warlike action, quite the contrary she mentions her childhood, marriage and maternal years and what "really" happened in the absence of Odysseus. Finally given the freedom of speech, Penelope and the maids express the weight of being women in a patriarchal society which caused their tragic ends.

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[1] Stanford Friedman, Susan. (1990) ***Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.'s Fiction***. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, p. 1.

> *Strong myths never die. Sometimes they die down, but they don't die out. In many ways, myths cannot really be translated with any accuracy from their native soil—from their own place and time. We will never know exactly what they meant to their ancient audiences. But myths can be used—as they have been, so frequently—as the foundation stones for new renderings that find their meanings within their own times and places.*[2]

Margaret Atwood indicates that myths do not fade away in time, they adapt to the era and take on other meanings: "A myth would be told one way in one place and quite differently in another"[3] Rewriting of an ancient myth in this era cannot possibly escape the influence of contemporaneity. Over the course of centuries, the adaptations of *The Odyssey* have always been abundant in literature and other spheres of art. It has inspired a myriad of rewritings throughout literary history. The majority of the depictions dwelled on Penelope's faithfulness until the emergence of deconstruction and feminist revisionism in the twentieth century. By subverting the Homeric myth of faithful Penelope and challenging the authority of canonical literature, Margaret Atwood's rewriting of *The Odyssey* explores the dark alleys of a central literary work of classical myth which celebrates male heroism. Still, it is "both a celebration and a subversion of myth in a self-conscious revisioning process," Carol Ann Howells suggests, "Atwood enmeshes mythic patterns in a recognizable network of contemporary human relations."[4] The use of mythological intertexts are abundant in Atwood's works. By narrating the untold, voicing the silenced, she shifts the focal point of the myth to a woman-centered angle.

The Penelopiad was first published in October 2005 as part of the first set of books in the *Canongate Myth Series* which consists of the rewritings of ancient myths by contemporary writers. With the intention of having one hundred rewritings by the year 2038, writers from around the world were asked to retell a myth of their choosing, each in their own ways and in their own languages. Canongate Books says that "*The Myths* is a long-term global publishing project where some of the world's most respected authors re-tell myths in a manner of their own choosing."[5]

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[2] Atwood, Margaret. "The Myths Series and Me", **Publishers Weekly**, 28 Nov. 2005. http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/columns-and-blogs/soapbox/article/37037-the-myths-series-and-me.html, (25.02.2016).
[3] Atwood, M. (2005). Introduction. ***The Penelopiad*.** New York: Canongate, p. xiv.
[4] Howells, Carol Ann. (2006) "Five Ways of Looking at *The Penelopiad*". **Sidney English Studies** 32. No. 14, p. 10.
[5] Canongate, "About the Myths". http://www.themyths.co.uk/, (28.01.2016).

Canongate's first set of books in *Myth Series* consists of three books: Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, Karen Armstrong's *A Short History of Myth* and Jeanette Winterson's *Weight*, retellings of the myths of Penelope, Atlas and Heracles. Atwood admits that she failed at her first attempts and even thought of canceling the contract. Later, she chooses to tell the story of Penelope, mainly because, as she puts it, she had always been haunted by the hanging of the twelve maids, and in the *Penelopiad*, so is Penelope. Hence, she grants voice to Penelope and the twelve maids, or slaves, in a challenging, parodic manner.

3.1.1. The Structure, Style, and Genre

Fascinated by myth and archetype, Margaret Atwood has a unique style in re-imagining and rewriting myths. She employed references to classical myths in her books ever since the beginning of her career. Through the voice of Penelope, she challenges the conventions of the patriarchal narration by showing that female characters should be defined by female experience. Atwood's Penelope demonstrates more sophistication and complexity than most other versions of her. In an interview, Atwood describes Penelope's objective: "She wants to tell you that she's not what people thought, that other people had told stories about her, but now she is down in the underworld she doesn't care about social convention, she's going to tell her own story."[6] As noted by Thomas E. Jenkins, *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood and another contemporary rewriting of Virgil's epic *Aeneid* by Ursula K. Le Guin:

> *not only rewrite a "masculine text" from a female point of view, but spring from an interpretive crux or problem in the original text. In each case, the original poem's problematic construction of gender relations provides the impetus for a new, "corrective" version, one that redresses the ancient's poem's flawed depiction of female subjectivity.*[7]

[6] Atwood, Margaret. "Margaret Atwood Discusses *The Penelopiad* with Phyllida Lloyd." **The Guardian**. Guardian News and Media, 26 Oct. 2005. http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/oct/26/theatre.classics, (21.12.2015).

[7] Jenkins, Thomas E. (2015) ***Antiquity Now: The Classical World in the Contemporary American Imagination*.** Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, p. 184.

First of all, Jenkins suggests, the title confirms that it is an epic told from female perspective. The suffix –iad in the title gives the impression of a grand narrative such as a heroic epic but it is merely a novella. After having to endure the scorn of the suitors and cruel rumors as well as maintaining the kingdom of Ithaca and dealing with a son at a critical age, Penelope speaks of a story which has never been heard, or listened. She even overreaches the plot of *The Odyssey*, goes further by giving details of her childhood, marriage and parentage. Penelope recalls memories from her life since birth, including the contest Odysseus won to marry her, her childhood with her cousin Helen, her father Icarius's attempt to kill her, or her mother Periboea who was beautiful but "chilly at heart." (10) Her narration is often interrupted by the chorus of the twelve maids who were accused of being disloyal and ultimately hung. In the Introduction of her novel, Atwood states that she has "always been haunted by the hanged maids" and that she will "give the telling of the story to Penelope and to the twelve hanged maids."[8] It is not surprising that Atwood assigns Penelope and the maids this task, because she wants to deal with the inconsistencies caused by the lack of their perspective in *The Odyssey*.

Now endowed with a voice, the twelve maids speak for the first time throughout centuries in order to tell their side of the story and express their anger. This anger is also caused by their unprivileged position as helpless maids which originates from the class difference between themselves and Penelope, the daughter of a King and of semi-divine mother. It is not only gender discrimination that causes the inequality but also the class difference, in a wider sense, what puts Penelope in a comparatively advantageous position. Against all odds, they transform their resentment into art. Each time they enter the scene, their speech comes in a new genre, a "higher" genre indeed, such as a lament, an idyll, a sea shanty, a jump-rope (skipping) rhyme, a court trial, a lecture, a drama, a song etc. Like Penelope, the maids address the world of the living from the underworld, stating their reaction, asking questions, questioning the murder, blaming Penelope as well as Odysseus and Telemachus. They all have a humorous, even sarcastic tone.

[8] Atwood, Margaret. (2005) ***The Penelopiad***. New York: Canongate, p. xv.

While *The Odyssey* is an epic poem, *The Penelopiad* is a novella. These two genres each come with particular characteristics. Initially, *The Odyssey* is not solely an epic but it belongs to mythology as well. This categorization makes the epic a sacred narrative which had been regarded by ancient people as the cornerstones of their past. Pertaining to superhuman powers that shape destiny, epics have always been about the past. That generates a distance between the story and the reader, or even the bard who composes the epic; a distance that separates the epic world from the contemporary world. It is maintained by the inaccessible nature of the epic which cannot be sympathized with by reader. The epic is not concerned with ordinary men/women and his/her life; it mostly tells stories about gods and goddesses, supernatural interventions, heroes, the upper class, and is handed down to the lower class by means of bards. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, an epic is "a long narrative poem celebrating the great deeds of one or more legendary heroes, in a grand ceremonious style. The hero, usually protected by or even descended from gods, performs superhuman exploits in battle or in marvelous voyages (…)"[9] Homer's epic poetry, or heroic poetry in other words, bears the conventions of the invocation of a muse, the use of epithets, the listing of heroes and combatants, and the beginning in medias res. (Baldick)

The Penelopiad does not start in medias res or depict an unreal, epic world. Neither does it tell grand narratives like the stories of great heroes or great wars, singing their deeds and feats. Instead, it focuses on women who have been helplessly muted in those grand narratives. Penelope's account of her everyday domestic life is a realistic 'herstory'. Standing at a crossroads of genres, *The Penelopiad* might not be easily categorized, but is primarily a novella due to its length and style. The composition of multiple genres is typical of contemporary fiction. The novella is a literary genre which is longer than a story and shorter than a novel. The word derives from feminine of Italian word "novello", meaning "new", inasmuch as novel is comparably newer, or younger, than the other genres. The novel is concerned with the present as well as the past, which breaks the distance generated by the epic. It is quite difficult to give a precise definition of the novel, therefore The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms gives an explanation as such:

[9] Baldick, Chris. (2008) ***The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms***. Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 111.

> *Nearly always an extended fictional prose narrative, although some novels are very short, some are non-fictional, some have been written in verse, and some do not even tell a story. Such exceptions help to indicate that the novel as a literary genre is itself exceptional: it disregards the constraints that govern other literary forms, and acknowledges no obligatory structure, style, or subject-matter. Thriving on this openness and flexibility, the novel has become the most important literary genre of the modern age, superseding the epic, the romance, and other narrative forms.*[10]

This exceptionality and instability in form, context and structure puts the novel in the center of (post)modern literature which breaks away from the constraints of regulations. The novel offers an open-ended, versatile range of perspectives, as seen in *The Penelopiad*, the incidents are seen through the eyes of different narrators, doubling the narration and confronting each other, leaving the choice of interpretation to the reader. Furthermore, as the definitions of the novel suggest, it is a genre which is still in progress. The contributing authors of *Canongate Myth Series* were asked to adapt epic content to a new form at a length of roughly one hundred pages, so as to speak, novellas. The novella has a less complex plot and usually depicts the story of a single character, with fewer themes and conflicts than the novel has. Novellas are not usually divided into chapters, but there are twenty nine chapters in *The Penelopiad*, eighteen of which were narrated by Penelope and the rest by the chorus of the maids. Although the twelve maids and Penelope take turns speaking, the main focus, as the title suggests, is on the latter. The interludes of the maids contribute to metafiction and the employment of a mix of dramatic, narrative, and poetic styles. Two years after the publication of *The Penelopiad*, Atwood adapted her witty novella to the stage and played Penelope herself.

Hilde Steals suggests that *The Penelopiad* is a work of parody and burlesque travesty. In her article "*The Penelopiad* and Weight: Contemporary Parodic and Burlesque Transformations of Classical Myths", Steals asserts that Atwood's rewriting of the myth of the Odysseus "parodically disrupts the hierarchy between 'high' and 'low' literary genres," and aims at "liberating the protagonist(s) from the boundaries and limitations of the ancient epic story world." [11] *The Penelopiad* is a "multivoiced and multiperspectival novella." (106) Atwood transforms *The Odyssey*

[10] Baldick, **The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms**.
[11] Staels, H., (2009) "*The Penelopiad* and *Weight:* Contemporary Parodic and Burlesque Transformations of Classical Myths." **College Literature,** 36(4), 100–118. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20642058, (12.03.2016), p. 100 – 101.

by means of postmodern metafictional parody and burlesque travesty as well as destroying the epic distance that separates the epic world and reality. The difference between parody, burlesque and travesty is explained by Steals supported by Mikhail Bakhtin's, Dana Sutton's, Gérard Genette's and Linda Hutcheon's ideas on the genres. Accordingly, burlesque and travesty ridicule and degrade the epic whereas parody does not necessarily imply degradation. Travesty involves stylistic transformation by means of anachronism: "Travesty brings the past closer to the present by means of anachronism and the modification of a noble style into a familiar, vulgar and modern one (67)," which precisely applies to *The Penelopiad*. (Steals, 103) Penelope and the maids successfully carry out a parodic narration. According to J. A. Cuddon, parody is very difficult to accomplish well:

> *There has to be a subtle balance between close resemblance to the 'original' and a deliberate distortion of its principal characteristics. It is, therefore, a minor form of literary art which is likely to be successful only in the hands of writers who are original and creative themselves. In fact, the majority of the best parodies are the work of gifted writers.*[12]

Parody has particularly become a recurrent strategy in postmodernist works of literature. It has not only been used for deconstructing but also exploring what has remained shadowed for ages. With an ironic and subversive attitude, Penelope ably parodies Homeric myths of male heroism and divinity. She speaks disrespectfully of the gods "diddling around on Olympus, wallowing in the nectar and ambrosia and the aroma of burning bones and fat, mischievous as a pack of ten-year-olds with a sick cat to play with and a lot of time on their hands. 'Which prayer shall we answer today?" (135) In the same parodic tone, the postmodern Penelope also comments on her faithfulness to Odysseus, implying the suitors: "I can't pretend that I didn't enjoy a certain amount of this…I occasionally daydreamed about which one I would rather go to bed with, if it came to that." (104-5) Hence, the idealization of the values of the past is destroyed by contemporary narrations of Penelope and the maids.

According to Carol Ann Howells, *The Penelopiad* also belongs to the Gothic: "Her description of the play script version as an echo of an echo of an echo of an

[12] Cuddon, J. A., and Claire Preston. (1998) ***A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory***. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, p. 640.

echo of an echo of an echo[13] could be read as either very Gothic with its whispered continuities or as very postmodern with its deferrals and indeterminacies."[14] The shape-changing of the book and the surreptitious returns from the dead contribute to the gothic elements already present in *The Penelopiad*. According to Hilde Steals, Gothic relates to the hidden, repressed and menacing because "it is still alive and blocked off from consciousness though ready to spring out." This explanation is redolent of the twelve maids who continue to come out of the repressed unconscious of their masters and haunt them in the afterlife. In Gothic plots, multiple stories, narrators, perspectives, and genres are intertwined. Hilde Staels places fear at the center of Gothic sensibility:

> *At the core of the Gothic sensibility is fear-fear of ghosts, women's fear of men, fear of the dark, fear of what is hidden but might leap out unexpectedly, fear of something floating around loose which lurks behind the everyday. The emblematic fear within Gothic fantasy is that something that seemed to be dead and buried might not be dead at all. Hence, the Gothic outbreaks of terror and violence as things cross forbidden barriers between dream and waking, life and death.*[15]

Staels continues her article with Gothic's role in the works of women writers. Gothic is a device used for expressing female desires and fears. In Atwood's books, the traditional forms survive, modified but still menacing and mysterious, "while balancing women's urge toward self-discovery and self-assertiveness with self-doubts, between celebration of new social freedoms and women's sense of not being free of traditional assumptions and myths about femininity." (153) Atwood thinks "All writers learn from the dead" as they control the past and the stories, so it is inevitable not to deal with them if one is going to deal with narration.[16] It is, as Howells suggests, a shape-changing text, first appearing as a book in 2005 and then as a play in 2007, intertwined with an array of genres, "*The Penelopiad* refuses to be confined within a single definitive form." (Howells, 59) Howells lays emphasis on Atwood's use of shifting forms:

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[13] Atwood, M. (2007). ***The Penelopiad: The Play***. London: Faber & Faber, p. v.

[14] Howells, Carol Ann. (2008) "We Can't Help but Be Modern." ***Once upon a Time: Myth, Fairy Tales and Legends in Margaret Atwood's Writings***. By Sarah A. Appleton. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, p. 58.

[15] Steals, Hilde, (2000) "Atwoodian Gothic: From Lady Oracle to The Robber Bride."***Margaret Atwood.*** By Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, p. 152.

[16] Margaret Atwood, (2003) ***Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing.*** London: Virago, p. 154.

> *So Atwood challenges The Odyssey by deliberately flouting epic conventions: instead of war she deals with domestic relations, shifting the action indoors, and dismantling the epic model by transforming it into a double-voiced female confessional narrative, interspersed with song-and-dance routines, a burlesque drama, an anthropology lecture, and a trial scene, videotaped by the maids. These shifting forms draw attention to the different generic conventions through which stories may be told, so casting doubt on the authority of any single account. Atwood is highlighting the malleability of myths and their openness to revision as she offers her gendered reading designed to focus on some of the gaps and silences relating to woman's lives in The Odyssey.*[17]

Consequently, removing the borders between forms and genres paves the way for the micronarratives of women at home, as Howells suggests, to subvert the grand narratives of war and male heroism. This transgression of boundaries of time and genre, truth and lie, between the voices of the living and the dead, is evidence for the Gothic and the postmodern sensibility. (Howells, 63) Finally, Carol Ann Howells further explores *The Penelopiad* within the framework of fictive autobiography and asserts that it's Atwood's favourite genre. She quotes Paul de Man's definition of autobiography as a discourse of self restoration, whether fact or fiction, "in the face of death and the power of mortality, and therefore subject to distortion through the chosen rhetorical mode of presentation."[18] Penelope accomplishes self justification through the rhetoric of words although she is faceless. She confesses self-assuredly and promises to tell the truth. Contradictiously, she admits making things up or role playing when she is supposed to look surprised. She belies Homer's version by saying that she recognized her husband "as soon as (she) saw that barrel chest and those short legs." (136) Penelope's role play and ambiguous statements reveal her a trickster and a liar just like her husband. (Howells, 12)

3.1.2. Plurality of Truth

As mentioned above, postmodern Revisionist writers rely on the disproof of one-sided truth and celebrate the multiplicity of perspectives. *The Penelopiad* sets a great example for the disproof of absolute truth by contradicting not only its source

[17] Howells, ***Once upon a Time: Myth, Fairy Tales and Legends in Margaret Atwood's Writings***, p. 61.
[18] Howells, "Five Ways of Looking at *The Penelopiad*", p. 11.

text but also itself. The novella opens with a contradictory sentence from Penelope: "Now that I'm dead I know everything. This is what I wish would happen, but like so many of my wishes it failed to come true." (1) It is expected from Penelope to know everything, because she is in a privileged position speaking from the underworld, embedded out of time, where the dead know both the past and the future, as Atwood suggests in her *Negotiating with The Dead*. However, Penelope's second sentence contradicts her first, implying that it is impossible to gain knowledge of absolute truth, because there is no absolute truth. Attacking the reliability of male account, *The Penelopiad* challenges the grand narratives of literature and history. Because, as Derrida states, "History and knowledge, istoria and episteme have always been determined (and not only etymologically or philosophically) as detours for the purpose of the reappropriation of presence."[19] In the first pages of the novella, Penelope is indecisive on where to start; she is left with two choices: "at the beginning or not at the beginning. The real beginning would be the beginning of the world, after which one thing has led to another; but since there are differences of opinion about that," she begins with her own birth. (7) Penelope highlights the impossibility of a single, absolute reality at every turn. The reader is puzzled by the contradictions in the stories of Odysseus's journey, so is Penelope:

> *Odysseus had been to the Land of the Dead to consult the spirits, said some. No, he'd merely spent the night in a gloomy old cave full of bats, said others. He'd made his men put wax in their ears, said one, while sailing past the alluring Sirens—half-bird, half-woman—who enticed men to their island and then ate them, though he'd tied himself to the mast so he could listen to their irresistible singing without jumping overboard. No, said another, it was a high-class Sicilian knocking shop—the courtesans there were known for their musical talents and their fancy feathered outfits. (Atwood, Penelopiad 91)*

There is something beyond puzzlement for Penelope, she is "manifesting a very postmodern skepticism towards tales of heroism and the sacred." (Howells, 65) In fact, Postmodern Penelope's skepticism echoes that of reality in a wider sense: "The truth dear auditors, is seldom certain." (148) After explaining the death-rebirth cycle, Penelope adds: "Such is the theory; but like all theories, it's only a theory" (186), discrediting the logos. Coral Ann Howells argues that Atwood challenges the conventions of realism as "there are always gaps to be negotiated, by the characters

[19] Derrida, ***Of Grammatology***, p. 10.

in the novels and also by the reader."[20] By repeatedly mentioning Odysseus's short legs and unscrupulousness, she mocks both his physical appearance and morality. She intentionally underestimates his heroic adventures and mentions them as if they were gossips of no significance. Speaking of gossip, Penelope denies all the rumors that have been going on about her infidelity and gives detailed explanations for them. Hence, it is a mystery if the long-celebrated symbol of chastity committed adultery or not. Some critics say that the real reason for Odysseus's disguise is his suspicion of Penelope's infidelity. *The Penelopiad* leaves the reader suspicious of discrepancies and contradictions. Although the myth is consistent in itself, approving Odysseus's account of the story, Atwood's Penelope contradicts the story, the official myth, or the rumors about her, even herself, leaving the reader in a world of uncertainties: "*The Odyssey* doesn't hold water: there are too many inconsistencies." (Introduction, xv) What is more, the unreliability of a single perspective is reinforced by the maids who controvert Penelope's accounts of the past at every turn.

3.1.3. Transtextuality

The relationship between *The Odyssey* and *The Penelopiad* befits Genette's five subcategories of transtextuality which overlap one another: Intertextual with the actual presence of *The Odyssey* in *The Penelopiad* through quotations, allusions etc.; Paratextual with its title, content, epigraphs, notes etc.; Metatextual with *The Penelopiad* as a commentary on *The Odyssey*; Architextual pertaining to the genre relations between the two texts; Hypertextual with *The Penelopiad* as the hypertext which cannot exist without its hypotext, *The Odyssey*.

The Penelopiad revolts against grand narratives of male heroism from the beginning with its title. As the title suggests, *The Penelopiad* is the story of Penelope, just as *The Iliad* is a story about Illium and *The Odyssey* is the story of Odysseus. There are two epigraphs taken from *The Odyssey* coming right after the title. In the first one, Atwood presents an appraisal of Penelope from Book 24, when the ghost of

[20] Howells, Coral Ann. (1996) "Fact File and Significant Characteristics." ***Margaret Atwood***. New York: St. Martin's, p. 8.

Agamemnon who is murdered by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover upon his return from Troy comments on the incidents that took place at the arrival of Odysseus:

> *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. (24: 191-194)*

Upon hearing about Penelope's scheme of the shroud and how she managed to wait for twenty years maintaining the kingdom in the absence of her husband, Agamemnon labels her with qualifiers of male gaze: faithful, flawless, virtuous, constant. In the second epigraph, the hanging of the twelve maids is described:

> *"he took a cable which had been service on a blue-bowed ship, made one end fast to a high column in the portico, and threw the other over the round-house, high up, so that their feet would not touch the ground. As when long-winged thrushes or doves get entangled in a snare . . . so the women's heads were held fast in a row, with nooses round their necks, to bring them to the most pitiable end. For a little while their feet twitched, but not for very long." (22: 470-3)*

Atwood clearly states the reason why she chose these two epigraphs in her Introduction. It is previously mentioned that Atwood, like Penelope, has always been haunted by the hanging of the twelve maids. The frightful execution is described briefly in a paragraph as a minor incident. Moreover, Penelope has never had a chance to speak her mind in *The Odyssey.* Even when she speaks, she speaks with concerns of the reception of her words by the patriarchal society surrounding her. The echoes of the faithfulness of Penelope and the unfaithfulness of the maids have long been resonating in literature. By voicing them, Atwood breaks the echo of Grecian phallogocentric mythology.

3.1.4. The Interludes

The main narrative of *The Penelopiad* is Penelope's prose monologue which is intertwined with the twelve maids' interludes, where they comment both on the official story and Penelope's version, each time with a different genre mostly in verse. Their voice is expelled from Penelope's prose narrative, they make themselves

heard in other forms of speech and they achieve audibility. These interventions debunk Penelope's reliability. The maids' language, like Penelope's, is far from epic. The story does not start in medias res like epics do. Although the chorus of the maids parallels the chorus in Greek tragedy in its commentary manner, Atwood's chorus of the maids does more than solely commenting on the actions. By including the chorus of maids in *The Penelopiad*, she goes one step further than other feminist rewritings of Penelope. Voicing the maids not only adds to the multiplicity of feminine perspectives but also dwells on the class discrimination and hierarchy. The first encounter with the maids takes place in the second chapter, where they start with a rope-jumping rhyme:

> *we are the maids*
> *the ones you killed*
> *the ones you failed*
> *we danced in air*
> *our bare feet twitched*
> *it was not fair.*[21]

The jump-rope rhyme has iambic diameter, each stanza having three lines with anaphoras like "the ones you failed / the ones you killed," and "you" in order to emphasize the unfair slaughter they underwent. When they say "you," they address Penelope as well. Sleeping with the suitors was not something they had planned or done willingly but they did so to spy on them as Penelope instructed. As a consequent, they were raped or seduced by them. They accuse Penelope of causing their death by not telling her husband that they were assigned by her to mingle with the suitors:

> *I told my twelve young maids – the loveliest, the most beguiling – to hang around the Suitors and spy on them, using whatever enticing arts they could invent. No one knew of my instructions but myself and the maids in question; I chose not to share the secret with Eurycleia – in hindsight, a grave mistake. This plan came to grief. Several of the girls were unfortunately raped, others were seduced, or were hard pressed and decided that it was better to give in than to resist. (115)*

Penelope regrets having to keep silent but also accuses the patriarchal society of forcing her to remain silent for years: "It's a wonder I had any tongue left, so

[21] Atwood, ***The Penelopiad***, p. 5.

frequently had I bitten it over the years." (160) Nevertheless, her seemingly sincere confession does not soothe the maids' rage. On the contrary, Margaret Atwood grants the maids a collective voice which turns *The Penelopiad* "into a polyphonic narrative where the maids' tale-telling casts doubt on the authenticity of Penelope's confession, extending the issue of power politics beyond the traditional male/female binary to include women's relations with one another." (Howells, 67) Penelope's struggle to explain her innocence does nothing more than casting doubt on the reliability of her excuses.

While Odysseus "scratched [his] itch / with every goddess, queen and bitch" the maids did much less. Even Penelope, as implied by the maids, was not faithful to Odysseus and let them die in the hands of Telemachus because she was afraid they were going to "spill the beans". As understood from their song "We're Walking Behind You, A Love Song", they follow Odysseus wherever he goes: "They make him nervous. They make him restless. They cause him pain. They make him want to be anywhere and anyone else" (Atwood, *The Penelopiad*: 189) Both Odysseus and Penelope are haunted by the maids in the Underworld.

The popular tune "As Performed by the Maids, with a Fiddle, an Accordion, and a Penny Whistle" (51) describes their daily routine in Odysseus's kingdom and employs four-line stanzas in a tetrameter with rhyming couplets. They talk about their dreams of becoming princesses. In "The Birth of Telemachus, An Idyll" the maids relate to the birth and childhood of Telemachus when they were playmates. They dwell on the inequality of gender and class by contrasting themselves with the privileged Telemachus whom they grew up with: "For his birth was longed-for and feasted, as our births were not./ … / We were animal young, to be disposed of at will,/ Sold, drowned in the well, traded, used, discarded when bloomless." (66-67) In their sea shanty, the maids try to recall the accounts of Odysseus's journey, dressed as his sailors. The sea shanty, "As Performed by the Twelve Maids, in Sailor Costumes" (Atwood, Penelopiad 93) consists of regular four-line stanzas with tetrameter, except for the concluding line that uses trimeter. The maids' longing for the sea represents their longing for independence. Unlike Odysseus whose whole story is about his struggles for landing ashore, the maids associate the sea with freedom.

The following ballad uses four lines which alternate between iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter, with one rhyme in each stanza: “In dreams we all are beautiful / In glossy crimson dresses; / We sleep with every man we love, / We shower them with kisses. / … / But then the morning wakes us up: / Once more we toil and slave, / And hoist our skirts at their command / For every prick and knave.” (Atwood, 125-26)

The maids’ representation of Penelope contradicts Penelope’s words, especially in The Perils of Penelope, a Drama, where they play the roles of Penelope and Eurycleia as schemers, partners in crime. They present Penelope as an unfaithful wife who planned to get rid of the maids before they reveal her infidelity. Thus, she orders Eurycleia to give Odysseus the names of the twelve maids who have witnessed her unfaithful acts: “Point out those maids as feckless and disloyal, Snatched by the Suitors as unlawful spoil, Polluted, shameless, and not fit to be/The doting slaves of such a Lord as he!” (150) The maids were being loyal indeed, as they were told that it was “one way of serving [their] master” and he would be very pleased with them when he returned. (117) What is more, Penelope also complains about the maids to Odysseus herself in the official version:

> *Three whole years I deceived them blind, seduced them with this scheme. Then, when the wheeling seasons brought the fourth year on and the months waned and the long days came round once more, then, thanks to my maid--the shameless, reckless creatures--the suitors caught me in the act, denounced me harshly. So I finished it off. Against my will. They forced me. (19: 169-175)*

The replay of Odysseus’s trial blends myth and modernity in a twenty-first century court where Odysseus is on trial, with goddess Athene on his side invoked by his attorney. The judge, upon consulting *The Odyssey*, cannot find evidence for the slaughter of the twelve maids against Odysseus. Upon seeing this, the maids summon the Erinyes, twelve angry Furies who punish the ones that swear false oath, to take revenge on Odysseus: “Oh, Angry Ones, Oh Furies, you are our last hope.” (183) However, Athene spirits Odysseus away in a cloud and the judge describes the hanging of the maids as a “regrettable but minor incident”. The judge’s awkward behavior contributes to the parodic tone of the novella, not paying attention to the case or the alleged criminal but regarding rape as an ambiguous crime or asking Athene to cover her chest and put down her spear. This interlude emphasizes the

perceptual and judicatory differences of norms between the ancient and postmodern times. Eventually, the judge dismisses the case out of the fear for being charged with anachronism. (182) Once again, Odysseus "[gets] away with everything." (2)

Margaret Atwood employs a similar poetic form in the envoi: three five-line stanzas with iambic dimeter and rhyme. Particularly in "A Rope-Jumping Rhyme" and the "Envoi", Hilde Steals argues, "plebeian rhyming four-beat lines give expression to the maidservants' anger about the brutal violence and sexism to which they fell victim."[22] The maids repeat what they have been saying since their first appearance in the beginning, "It was not fair":

we had no voice
we had no name
we had no choice
we had one face
one face the same
we took the blame
it was not fair
but now we're here
we're all here too
the same as you
and now we follow
you, we find you
now, we call
to you to you
too wit too woo
too wit too woo
too woo. (Atwood, Penelopiad 195-96)

Then they exit the scene "sprout[ing] feathers, and fly[ing] away as owls" (Penelopiad 196). They emphasize divine justice brought along by death when saying "the same as you." Eventually, death ensures equality between the slaves (the maids) and their masters (Penelope and Odysseus). Their exit is an open ending,

[22] Staels, "*The Penelopiad* and *Weight"*, p. 107.

unfinished as an example of a postmodern writing. According to Hilde Steals, Atwood does not incidentally end her novella with an image of metamorphosis:

> *The owl is a symbol of Athene, the Great Goddess who helps Odysseus murder the suitors and who possesses the power of wisdom and transformation. The image of metamorphosis foregrounds the narrative process of mythologizing and demythologizing thanks to parody and burlesque travesty, mechanisms that essentially honour past texts by renewing them. The Penelopiad self-consciously confirms that timeless myths and archetypes are infinitely malleable and will survive as intertexts as long as artistic creativity exists. (110)*

In the end, they take their vengeance in an immortal, artistic way: "Dog his footsteps, on earth or in Hades, wherever he may take refuge, in songs and in plays, in tomes and in theses, in marginal notes and in appendices! Appear to him in our forms, our ruined forms, the forms of our pitiable corpses! Let him never be at rest!" (183) Penelope says that this is the reason why Odysseus repeatedly leaves her in the Underworld in order to escape the maids and travels into the contemporary world.

It is true that without *The Odyssey*, *The Penelopiad* would not make sense. However, more importantly, it is impossible to read *The Odyssey* in the same way after reading Atwood's subversive rewriting. Penelope's story stands as a correction to the ancient version. Although Atwood does not change the details of Homer's story, the shift in the perspective leads the reader to explore new interpretations.

3.1.5. The Language

The language of the epic is an elevated poetic language as required by the form of the verse. *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* are written in dactylic hexameter which considered to be the form of classical (epic) poetry. The formal, dignified language contributes to the heroic deeds of Odysseus and stresses the divine intervention. The speech is far from everyday language and full of supernatural references. The language is enriched with epic similes, as well.

The choice of narrator plays an important role in the perception of the story. Homeric epic poetry employs the third person omniscient narrator, or heterodiegetic narrator, one with the narrator absent from the story he tells, as defined by Gerard

Genetté. According to Genetté, the novelist's choice is between two narrative postures: "to have the story told by one of its characters, or to have it told by a narrator outside of the story."[23] Atwood challenges heterodiegetic narrator expected from Greek epics and employs autodiegetic narrator instead.

Margaret Atwood shifts the time and space of the hypotext from classical antiquity to the twenty-first century. She uses a simple, sincere everyday language through homodiegetic narration which undermines the Homeric image of Odysseus. She debunks his heroic achievements, claiming that Cyclops was indeed a one-eyed tavern keeper and their fight "was over non-payment of the bill," or Circe's island was in fact a whorehouse and "he was sponging off the Madam." (83-84) The language uttered by Penelope or the maids is very colloquial, refined from complex literary devices. They directly address the reader through the second person pronoun, comment on the past, link it to the present, and most importantly, they ask questions. This tone of voice completely breaks away from the distance maintained by the epic. What attracts attention the most about the language is Atwood's use of the same tone for both Penelope's and the maids' speeches. Above all, both Penelope and the chorus cross the boundaries of the Homeric hierarchal restrictions of particular tones of speech reserved for different classes. Although daily language is expected from the maids as they belong to a lower class, they also use epic descriptions in specific interludes. It is Penelope's plain diction that surprises the reader with vulgar language, because she is least expected to use this language, thereby once again subverting the distance maintained between the characters and the reader by the epic. From the opening pages of *The Penelopiad*, the reader can identify him/herself with the main character thanks to the sincere, natural speech provided by Penelope:

> *Where shall I begin? There are only two choices: at the beginning or not at the beginning. The real beginning would be the beginning of the world, after which one thing has led to another; but since there are differences of opinion about that, I'll begin with my own birth. My father was King Icarius of Sparta. My mother was a Naiad. Daughters of naiads were a dime a dozen in those days; the place was crawling with them. Nevertheless, it never hurts to be of semidivine birth. Or it never hurts immediately. (Atwood, 7)*

[23] Genette, Gerard. (1983) ***Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*.** Trans. Jane E. Lewin. New York: Cornell UP, p. 244.

Here she clearly shows that she does not care about divine, supernatural powers. Her use of language is the most important device that generates a connection between her and the reader, making her a realistic character with humanly feelings such as anger, hatred, jealousy and disappointment. By giving up the high discourse, Penelope deconstructs the hierarchy of ancient epics. Obviously, Penelope holds no respect for gods, she even mocks divinity when talking about the origins of semi-gods:

> *All the rest was just copulation of various kinds – rapes or seductions, love affairs or one-night stands, with gods who said they were shepherds or shepherds who said they were gods. Occasionally a goddess might get mixed up in it too, dabble around in perishable flesh like a queen playing at milkmaids, but the reward for the man was a shortened life and often a violent death. (23)*

As a consequence, Atwood destructs the hierarchy of genres by adapting the epic which was considered to be the highest genre to the novel, or the novella. In this way, Steals argues, "Atwood's burlesque first-person narrators undermine high Homeric style by using a trivializing transgressive speech. The shared carnivalesque discourse also neutralizes ancient class distinctions between Penelope and her maids."[24]

3.1.6. The Twelve Maids

Although the maids are almost invisible in *The Odyssey*, they are given a large space to speak their case in *The Penelopiad*. In the source text, they appear several times accompanying Penelope, grieving with her, chattering inter se, carrying gifts of the suitors to Penelope, unraveling her tricky shroud at night. Other than these, most importantly, they actually served as "entertainment, servants and sex toys all in one."[25] Margaret Atwood makes the hanging of the twelve maids the central mystery of the text, it is "perhaps the main motivation for Penelope's narrative":

[24] Staels, "*The Penelopiad* and *Weight*", p. 107.
[25] Atwood, "Margaret Atwood Discusses *The Penelopiad* with Phyllida Lloyd".

"Their tale-telling highlights gender and class issues which go unchallenged in The Odyssey: the physical and sexual exploitation of servant girls, male violence against women, and also, more shamefully, women's betrayals of other women."[26]

The double standard between the aristocratic ruling class and the lower classes cannot go unnoticed throughout *The Odyssey*. The elite is always favored and privileged whereas the minor characters are given all the punishment, such as Odysseus's crew or the maids. As Valerie Miner says in her article *Fictions and Frictions*, "The maids remind us that if Penelope was disenfranchised by sex, they were further disadvantaged by class."[27] Penelope is also in an inferior position where she is silenced. It is only after her death that she is granted voice and free to tell her version of the story which challenges the grand narrative. Still, as an aristocratic woman, she is in a comparatively privileged position unlike the maids who were born to "wrong parents, poor parents, slave parents, peasant parents, and serf parents," as they express in "Kiddie Mourn, a Lament by the Maids." (Penelopiad, 13) They expose the hierarchal structure of Grecian society. Nonetheless, what hurts the most is probably not their death by the hands of aristocratic ruling men but the duplicitous scheme of a woman they cared about.

Eurycleia, Eurynome and Melantho vary from the maids regarding their duties and presentations in *The Odyssey*. Eurycleia the nursemaid is a central figure among the maids as she raised both Odysseus and his son Telemachus who repose confidence in her. She is the one who recognizes Odysseus before Penelope upon seeing the scar on his leg while washing his feet. Unaware of Penelope's scheme, she is the one who gives the names of the 'unfaithful' maids to Odysseus: "Of these twelve in all have set their feet in the way of shamelessness, and regard not me nor Penelope herself." (22:424-5) Eurynome is merely a housekeeper but she is present near Penelope when she meets the disguised Odysseus. Melantho, on the other hand, is depicted as an unfaithful maid, "whom Dolius begot, but whom Penelope had reared and cherished as her own child, and gave her playthings to her heart's desire. Yet even so she had at heart no sorrow for Penelope, but she loved Eurymachus and

[26] Howells, "Five Ways of Looking at *The Penelopiad*", p. 13.
[27] Miner, V.. (2006). Fictions and Frictions [Review of *The Penelopiad; The Tent*]. **The Women's Review of Books**, *23*(5), 20–21. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4024613, (15.02.2016), p. 20.

was wont to lie with him." (18:320-5) She goes even further by making fun of her disguised master:

> *Wretched stranger, thou art but a crack-brained fellow, unwilling to go to a smithy to sleep, or to a common lodge, but pratest here continually, 18.330unabashed in the company of many lords, and hast no fear at heart. Surely wine has mastered thy wits, or else thy mind is ever thus, that thou dost babble idly. Art thou beside thyself because thou hast beaten that vagrant Irus? Beware, lest presently another better than Irus shall rise up against thee 18.335to beat thee about the head with heavy hands, and befoul thee with streams of blood, and send thee forth from the house. (18:326-36)*

These scornful words are not received with calmness by Odysseus who warns the maids about the death that awaits them if they treat him this way. However, it was again Penelope who told the maids to "say rude and disrespectful things about her (me) and Telemachus, and about Odysseus as well, in order to further the illusion," and Melantho was particularly adept at this project. (117) Some of them even fell in love with the suitors, as reported by Penelope. They are eventually punished in such a horrible way that they even have to clean up the mess left from the slaughter of the suitors.

The maids insistently claim that they were killed because they knew of Penelope's affair with Amphinomus and they were punished as surrogates for Penelope.[28] There is an intimate relationship between Penelope and the maids. They were always there to support her in the absence of her husband while raising her son alone, ruling the kingdom and taking care of the suitors. Leaving the elevated language, Penelope expresses herself in the same way the maids express themselves, which makes them equal in the eyes of the reader. Some of the maids were raised by her like her children, some of them were sisters to her, some others were friends, as Penelope describes:

> *They were my most trusted eyes and ears in the palace, and it was they who helped me to pick away at my weaving, behind locked doors, at dead of night, and by torchlight, for more than three years. Though we had to do it carefully, and talk in whispers, these nights had a touch of festivity about them, a touch – even – of hilarity. Melantho of the Pretty Cheeks smuggled in treats for us to nibble on – figs in season, bread dipped in honeycomb, heated wine in winter. We told stories as we worked away at our task of destruction; we shared riddles; we made jokes. In the flickering light of the torches our daylight faces were softened and changed, and our daylight manners. We*

[28] Suzuki, M., (2007). Rewriting the "Odyssey" in the Twenty-First Century: Mary Zimmerman's "Odyssey" and Margaret Atwood's "Penelopiad". **College Literature**, *34*(2), 263–278. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25115430 274, (17.02.2016).

> *were almost like sisters. In the mornings, our eyes darkened by lack of sleep, we'd exchange smiles of complicity, and here and there a quick squeeze of the hand. Their 'Yes ma'ams' and 'No ma'ams' hovered on the edge of laughter, as if neither they nor I could take their servile behaviour seriously. (114)*

For this reason, Penelope's betrayal is devastating and unacceptable for the maids. She shows them how the end justifies the means: "I had to use every ruse and stratagem at my command." (118) In return, they take their revenge by haunting the couple in the afterlife. Even their death was not given any importance to be mentioned in more than a single paragraph in the Homeric epic. They stand as a symbol for the return of the repressed, which brings about a new outlook to *The Odyssey:*

> *Like the ancient myths, this story has no ending, for the Maids continue to run from Penelope without answering her questions (though '"Run" isn't quite accurate', p. 190) and they haunt Odysseus through eternity: 'We'll stick to you like your shadow, soft and relentless as glue. Pretty maids all in a row' (p. 193). As Penelope's voice ceases and the Maids fly away, Atwood's act of literary reclamation comes to an end, for Penelope and her Maids, like the mythic figures in Prospero's masque, 'were all spirits and / Are melted into air, into thin air,'22 perhaps ready once again to change costumes and as Atwood reminds us, 'to take on other meanings.'*[29]

The open-endedness avoids conclusiveness, "offering instead hesitation, absence or silence while hovering on the verge of new possibilities."[30]

3.1.7. Archetypal Analysis

As explained in detail before, most of the archetypes are rooted in the myths. Atwood's employment of myths exemplifies the archetypal theory of Northrop Frye. The influence of Northrop Frye on the works of Margaret Atwood has previously been mentioned. The footprints of Frye's theories of myth are observed in Atwood's revisionary novella. By taking up the task of challenging mythic archetypes, Atwood points to the universal impact of myth on literature, as explained by Frye: "Myths explain the structural principles behind familiar literary facts."[31] Literary archetypes affect the world view of even contemporary readers. Atwood acknowledges Frye's

[29] Howells, "Five Ways of Looking at *The Penelopiad*", p. 16.
[30] Howells, "Fact File and Significant Characteristics", p. 10.
[31] Frye, ***Anatomy of Criticism***, p. 215.

theory and goes further by reinterpreting one of the pillars of western literature, thereby subverting and reshaping these archetypes.

In time, archetypes become so conventional and indestructible that it becomes so difficult or even impossible to distinguish them as impositions from one's own thoughts, just as Penelope complains that "so much whispering goes on, in the dark caverns, in the meadows, that sometimes it's hard to know whether the whispering is coming from others or from the inside of your own head." (9) In the case of Penelope, *The Penelopiad* accomplishes subverting the archetype of faithful wife. Atwood debunks the archetypes of female submissiveness and subordination. It has previously been mentioned that Odysseus represents the trickster figure. In addition to him, in *The Penelopiad*, Penelope and the maids are as well the representatives of the trickster archetype, because language is the principal tool of the trickster. Carol Ann Howells asserts that both Penelope and Odysseus are "fellow conspirators and tricksters, and if Penelope is charmed by Odysseus's storytelling it is because she can spin a good yarn herself as she weaves her web of words as deftly as she wove her father-in-law's shroud." (66) For Penelope is a weaver, she is also a trickster, fabric/ator, spinner of artifice.[32] Her web is both a literal and a figurative craft. Not only does Penelope trick the suitors but she fools Odysseus as well. She makes him think that she did not recognize him when he arrived. She orders Eurycleia to move their marriage bed which is a symbol of Penelope's fidelity in order to tease him one last time:

> *I ordered Eurycleia to move the bed outside the bedroom of Odysseus, and to make it up for the stranger. You'll recall that one post of this bed was carved from a tree still rooted in the ground. Nobody knew about it except Odysseus, myself, and my maid Actoris, from Sparta, who by that time was long dead. (171)*

Fooled by Penelope, Odysseus gets angry at once. Penelope claims that it was nothing but a bedpost test and seeing him lose his temper confirmed his true identity as Odysseus. As a trickster figure, Penelope is also a fool, who regrets having foolishly sent the maids to spy on the suitors. She says that she knew Odysseus had been tricky and a liar, but she just hadn't thought "he would play his tricks and try out his lies on [her]." (2) What is more, Odysseus is not fooled only by Penelope but

[32] Stanford Friedman, ***Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.'s Fiction*,** p. 1.

by the maids as well: “the fabulating hero refuses to recognize his own shadow, the repressed “other” inside his unconscious. They believe their master murdered them (…) because he refused to acknowledge his sexual escapades with female temptresses.” (Steals, 109-10) That is why they continue to cross the boundaries between the worlds of the dead and the living, which is typical of tricksters.

“The trickster as a transformation archetype also applies to the author’s revisionist practice.” (Steals, 110) Penelope describes her act of unraveling her father-in-law’s shroud in a mischievous tone: “these nights has a touch of festivity about them, a touch-even-of hilarity….We told stories as we worked away at our task of destruction.” (114) Like the unravelling of the shroud, Atwood destructs the construction of epic history of Penelope and reweaves herstory.

Kathryn Van Spanckeren comments on the tricksterism in her article “Humanizing the Fox: Atwood’s Poetic Tricksters and Morning in the Burned House”:

> *The shape-shifting trickster’s sheer creative energy fuels its Protean resistance to formulations of all kinds. There is danger in any critical attempt to theorize tricksterism, since its essence is disruption. Attempts to codify trickster narratives threaten to co-opt the trickster, to beat the joke-teller to the punch line….a trickster is a trickster only insofar as the tricks work, and that they may work on the reader as well as on other characters.*[33]

She concludes that trickster texts manipulates the readers by disrupting their preconceptions.

In addition to the trickster archetype, Atwood’s Penelope is also a representative of the Great Mother archetype. In ancient times, the great mother archetype was primarily associated with the earth as a nourishing mother, the source of life, protection, growth and abundance, which is Gaia, Cybele, or Rhea in Greek Mythology. In western cultures, it is associated with Eve or Mary. It is also found in the symbols of the church, the nation, the ocean, or a forest, according to Jung. Later, with the agricultural improvements, the great mother archetype developed into the Great Goddess, such as Demeter or Artemis, who shares the same ambiguities with

[33] Van Spanckeren, Kathryn. (2003) "Humanizing the Fox: Atwood’s Poetic Tricksters and Morning in the Burned House." ***Margaret Atwood's Textual Assassinations: Recent Poetry and Fiction***. Ed. Sharon Rose. Wilson. Columbus: Ohio State UP, p. 102-3.

the great mother, as nature itself is capable of great damage besides creation. Although a mother is essential for survival, she, as nature, could also cause great pain to humans. In this sense, the negative associations with the Great Mother are the witch, femme fatale, sorceress, or siren, related to sensuality, sexuality, fear, danger, darkness, death; the mysteries of unconscious. Northrop Frye emphasizes the significance of the mother archetype as the earth-mother:

> *from whom everything is born and to whom everything returns at death. Such an earth mother is the most easily understood image of natura naturans, and she acquires its moral ambivalence. As the womb of all forms of life, she has a cherishing and nourishing aspect; as the tomb of all forms of life, she has a menacing and sinister aspect; as the manifestation of an unending cycle of life and death, she has an inscrutable and elusive aspect. Hence, she is often a diva triformis, a goddess of a threefold form of some kind, usually birth, death, and renewal in time; or heaven, earth, and hell in space.*[34]

In *The Penelopiad*, in "An Anthropology Lecture", which is based upon Robert Graves's The White Goddess, the maids sarcastically attack anthropologists of the myth such as Sir James Frazer or Northrop Frye. The maids make a comparison between Penelope and Artemis, who is an advocate for sisterhood that comes to the rescue of women; one of the major Olympian goddesses of the Greek; the goddess of forest, hunt, wild animals, childbirth, and virginity, associated with the moon as the twin sister of Apollo, the sun. She is also described as a militant virgin, as discovered by Acteon, a young man: "After purely by chance coming upon her bathing in the forest, poor Actean was changed into a stag and hunted down by Artemis's dogs for his "sin"."[35] The maids draw a parallel between Penelope and Artemis in "The Chorus Line: An Anthropology Lecture" where they give their own reading of the myth: "For we were not simply maids. We were not mere slaves and drudges. Oh no! Could it be that we were not the twelve maids, but the twelve maidens? The twelve moon-maidens, companions of Artemis, virginal but deadly goddess of the moon?" (163-164) Here they say that they were ritual sacrifices, devoted priestesses doing their part "first by indulging in orgiastic fertility-rite behavior with the Suitors, then purifying [themselves] by washing [themselves] in the blood of the slain male victims - such heaps of them, such honor to the Goddess!"

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[34] Rampton, David. (2009) ***Northrop Frye: New Directions from Old*.** Ottawa: U of Ottawa, p. 259.
[35] Leeming, David Adams. (2005) ***The Oxford Companion to World Mythology***. Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 31.

They indicate that they would renew their virginity, as Artemis did by bathing in the blood of Actaeon, that they would have eagerly sacrificed themselves as a requirement for re-enacting the dark-of-the-moon phase, and they conclude that "possibly [their] rape and subsequent hanging represent the overthrow of a matrilineal moon-cult by an incoming group of usurping patriarchal father-god-worshipping barbarians." (165) The maids obviously satirize Graves's The White Goddess which "terrified" Atwood, as she states:

> *Graves did not dismiss women. In fact he placed them right at the center of his poetic theory; but they were to be inspirations rather than creators, and a funny sort of inspiration at that. They were to be the incarnation of the White Goddess herself, alternately loving and destructive, and men who got involved with them ran the risk of disembowelment or worse.*[36]

Hilde Steals interprets Atwood's references to the Great Mother as Artemis and the twelve maids as her followers as follows:

> *In The Penelopiad, references to the Great Mother are a means for the artist to allude to a lost matriarchal culture and female-centred religion that belongs to the Minoan-Mycenaean civilisation of Crete in the 14th-12th century BC, before the patriarchal civilisation of Greece. Atwood recreates the eclipsed pre-Homeric Great Goddess myth by associating Penelope with Artemis, the powerful goddess of fertility (as moon-goddess) and the maids with her followers (2005, 166). During the twenty-first-century trial of Odysseus, this ancient story of Greek patriarchal oppression is ironically reiterated as soon as the male judge and attorney for the defence marginalize the moon maidens' personal voice and silence their history of victimization. (108-109)*

The maids finish the lecture with a statement directly quoted from Levi Strauss's *Elementary Structures of Kinship*: "Consider us pure symbol. We're no more real than money"[37] (*The Penelopiad*, 168). By alluding to the class hierarchies, highlighting the uncertainty of truth and debunking grand narratives of male heroism, *The Penelopiad* seems to please the structuralists.

Water is another symbol Atwood uses for Penelope, as it is also associated with the moon. Scientifically, the Moon's gravitational pull causes tidal flow. As a Naiad, Penelope's mother advises her to be patient and adaptable like water:

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[36] VanSpanckeren, Kathryn, and Jan Garden. Castro. (1988) ***Margaret Atwood: Vision and Forms*.** Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, p. xv.

[37] Suzuki, "Rewriting *The Odyssey* in the Twenty-First Century: Mary Zimmerman's*Odyssey* and Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*", p. 263–278.

Water does not resist. Water flows. When you plunge your hand into it, all you feel is a caress. Water is not a solid wall, it will not stop you. But water always goes where it wants to go, and nothing in the end can stand against it. Water is patient. Dripping water wears away a stone. Remember that, my child. Remember you are half water. If you can't go through an obstacle, go around it. Water does. (43)

Water symbolizes passivity, flexibility, adaptability, fertility and purity. Atwood employs a traditional, natural image for the female body but transforms its meaning so that water means patience, safety, and determination. She demonstrates water's passivity in association with flexibility and persistence as a strength to go around obstacles.

Atwood's use of archetypes keeps pace with contemporaneity. She reestablishes other archetypes such as the hero and the anima by modernizing them. For instance, Odysseus repeatedly incarnates as heroes of modern times: "He's been a French general, he's been a Mongolian invader, he's been a tycoon in America, he's been a headhunter in Borneo." (189) In addition to the hero archetype, Atwood affirms and modernizes the sexual aspect of the anima archetype within Helen: "who is this 'Marilyn' everyone is so keen on?" (186) Margaret Atwood uses archetypes so wisely that she reestablishes them with new outlooks by changing the conventional archetypes. Although "trickster myths are frequently phallic and highly sexual in nature"[38], Atwood sculpts them on a female protagonist. Atwood's Penelope is not confined to the symbol of a patient, faithful wife, she develops from a stock character into a real woman.

3.2. ATWOOD'S POETRY

Margaret Atwood's early use of the short lyric poem has shown that for her, "to write is to fix, to order into a static form." Canadian literary critic Linda Hutcheon puts forth the thought that "it is only the *written* that is fixed" and writing itself "is a dynamic process which though it can only employ the static counters of language, is capable of being resurrected in the equally dynamic process of reading,

[38] Leeming, ***The Oxford Companion to World Mythology***, p. 147.

the bringing to life of the dead black marks on the white page."[39] Hutcheon refers to the revisionist power of debunking history and rewriting herstory, as Atwood explores the unconscious mythologies in her poetry.

In Atwood's poetry, women always end up defeated in their interaction with men, they are both physically and emotionally devastated: "you fit into me / like a hook into an eye / a fish hook / an open eye." The collection of poems in You Are Happy analyze the nature of love in relationships where men do not see the need for change as their power does not bring about suffering. Usually in Atwood's poetry and novels, Jane Lilienfeld explains in her article "Circe's Emergence: Transforming Traditional Love in Margaret Atwood's You Are Happy":

> *Her lovers back away at each other, clad in their social roles; interaction becomes a war, and sexual involvement causes pain to the women and shatters their selfhood. This warfare occurs because the restrictions on women in traditional sexual roles create the anger which infuses Atwood's women and causes them to resist what their lovers offer. The men seem to emerge unscathed, hardly aware that they gouge their lovers.*[40]

3.2.1. "Circe/Mud Poems"

Circe-Mud Poems (45-70) appeared in Atwood's sixth book of poetry *You Are Happy* in 1974, summarizing Odysseus and the witch Circe's intense love affair on her island before he set sail for his wife at home where he could find unconditional obedience and patriarchal order. Circe's voice is intelligent and self-assured, her poem consists of twenty-four cycles which correspond to the number of the Books in *The Odyssey*. The first and the last poems are written in italics, indicating more metaphors. Like much of her poetry, *You Are Happy* is concerned with sexual politics, consciousness of minorities, male domination, gender politics and female victimization. Unlike the long conventional epics of male heroism, Atwood's poetry is relatively short and passionate adorned with strong metaphors.

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[39] Hutcheon, Linda. (1983) "From Poetic to Narrative Structures: The Novels of Margaret Atwood" ***Margaret Atwood: Language, Text, and System.*** By Sherrill E. Grace. Univ of British Columbia Press, p. 17.

[40] Lilienfeld, Jane. (1988) "Circe's Emergence: Transforming Traditional Love in Margaret Atwood's You Are Happy." ***Critical Essays on Margaret Atwood***. By Judith McCombs. Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, p. 123.

According to John Wilson Foster, Atwood's poetry explores certain fashionable minority psychologies and "Circe/Mud Poems" is a re-examination of women's mythologically inherited roles.[41]

Let us first take a glance at the character of Circe. Circe is one of the most mysterious and strong characters in *The Odyssey*, central to the plot; her presence takes on definiteness and force, but never surrenders its dangerous tinge of the enigmatic.[42] She makes her appearance when Odysseus is completely lost in Book 10 and disappears when he gains strength in Book 12. Her island, as Odysseus describes, is a place "where the dwellings and dancing floors of early-born Dawn are, and the rising places of the Sun." (12.3-4) This island is believed to be located in the Pontus Black Sea, which in Homer's time was the edge of the known world; its shores populated by wealthy, barbarous, shamanistic Scythians and by their Amazon neighbors, quite appropriate to be home to Circe, the daughter of the sun god Helios.[43] In *The Odyssey*, the reader is told the story of Circe on Nausicaa's island of Phaiacia. She is the daughter of Helios by the ocean nymph Perse and sister of Aietes. Her name Circe (Kirke) is the feminine form of *kirkos*, which means falcon or hawk, like her brother Aietes's name, derived from *aietos*, meaning eagle.[44] Because birds were taught to be sacred creatures, they were associated with gods and goddesses. As the Greeks approach Circe's home, they see her singing while weaving fabrics on her loom. Although she is a goddess, she too is a weaver, a fabric/ator in the Homeric epic, like Penelope and Helen. The fulfilment of Odysseus's men's carnivalesque desires by the offerings of Circe's table transforms them into swine. Luckily for them, she later transforms them back from bestiality, feasting them for months, offering Odysseus her bed, and eventually helping him return home through Hades where he consults Teiresias.

Atwood's poem is alternately in narrative prose and verse, this time from contemporary Circe's point of view which have remained for the most part unexpressed. Usually, writers focused on her magical powers until the emergence of

[41] Foster, John Wilson. "The Poetry of Margaret Atwood" **Canadian Literature** 74 (Autumn 1977), p. 5.
[42] Yarnall, Judith. (1994) ***Transformations of Circe: The History of An Enchantress.*** University of Illinois: United States of America, p. 9.
[43] Yarnall, ***Transformations of Circe,*** p. 10.
[44] Yarnall, ***Transformations of Circe,*** p. 28.

predominantly female, (post)modern revisionism. She is another woman in the heroic narrative who had not been given a voice to express herself.

Above all, Circe is a different goddess with unexpected human sides. As Judith Yarnall suggests, "For insofar as woman creates, whether artist or mother, she is goddess; and insofar as she opens her heart to love or grief, she is mortal woman."[45] Hence, she is connected both to the supernatural and the earthly. While she builds temples for the moon, she keeps her head pressed on the earth in order to collect "the few muted syllables left over." The poem which is written in italics begins with the description of Circe's island: dry land, a burned and sparse forest with blunted trunks and charred branches. Apparently, this place has gone through a disaster. This ruined environment gives the impression that the goddess of the island is in a devastated state.

The second poem explicitly criticizes patriarchal history and male heroism. Seeing in Homer's myth a metaphor for the meeting (or collision) of patriarchal manhood and feminine power occurring in her own time, Atwood's Circe retain most of the archetype's traditional powers as well as casting a cold eye on the conventions of heroism and quest myths.[46] Circe is not a woman to impress by mythological male power, hybrids, gods, or demi-gods like Daedelus or his son Icarus:

Men with the heads of eagles
No longer interest me
Or pig-men, or those who can fly
With the aid of wax and feathers
or those who take off their clothes
to reveal other clothes
or those with skins of blue leather….
(…)
I search for the others,
The ones left over,
The ones who have escaped from these

[45] Yarnall, ***Transformations of Circe***, p. 184.
[46] Yarnall, ***Transformations of Circe***, p. 186.

Mythologies with barely their lives. (47)

She is capable of manifacturing what myths create, or else she can find it easily as "they swoop and thunder around [her] island, common as flies." That is why she is bored with the spells of transformation and looks for the ones left over. She might have thought the possibility that Odysseus is one of the left-overs. She is a powerful figure but her power "rarely destroys men" as Odysseus's men turn into swine themselves because bestiality is inherent in them and they even use their bestiality to transform women. Her enormous power does not keep her from wanting to love and to be loved.[47] She denies her involvement in the transformation of Odysseus men into swine as she does not say anything, she uses neither the power of magic nor words: "I did not say anything, I sat / and watched, they happened / because I did not say anything." Circe, "the voice and spirit of the wilderness", denies having been involved in this metamorphosis, their own masculine nature resulted in their bestiality once they left the female sea, thus she resents the penetrations of these male pioneers.[48]

Circe is literally isolated on Aiaia, just like Penelope in Ithaca, or the Sirens on unnamed islands, which implies limitation, David Buchbinder suggests, "yet all three figures possess the power to attract and affect males." However, Odysseus recites his encounters with Circe and the Sirens on the island of Scheria, they are thus a past tense of the epic whereas Penelope is a future tense. Being aware of the Homeric intertext, Circe is locked into a temporal loop that "causes the known past to become the predictable future:"[49]

> *It's story that counts. No use telling me this isn't a story, or not the same story. I know you've fulfilled everything you promised, you love me, we sleep till noon and we spend the rest of the day eating, the food is superb, I don't deny that. But I worry about the future.... Don't evade, don't pretend you won't leave after all: you leave in the story and the story is ruthless. (68)*

In the fourth poem, Circe says "Come away with me, he said, we will live on a desert island. I said, I am a desert island. It was not what he had in mind." (204)

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[47] Lilienfeld, "Circe's Emergence: Transforming Traditional Love in Margaret Atwood's You Are Happy", p. 124-126.

[48] Foster, John Wilson. "The Poetry of Margaret Atwood" **Canadian Literature** 74 (Autumn 1977), p. 18.

[49] Buchbinder, David. (1988) "Weaving Her Version: The Homeric Model and Gender Politics in Selected Poems." ***Margaret Atwood: Vision and Forms***. By Kathryn VanSpanckeren and Jan Garden. Castro. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, p. 126.

She is not what Odysseus had in mind. She is a complicated character. Even Frye admits that although his theory of archetypes is simplistic, notes that Circe's island is a neutral archetype which can be categorized neither tragic nor comedic. She is not confined to the dichotomy other female characters were doomed to:

Between these poles of female fidelity other female figures range themselves paradigmatically as positive or negative mediators, helpers or hinderers, creators or destroyers. The most interesting of these is Circe, whose function in the poem is ambiguous: an enchantress (creator) whose powers are dangerous (that is, potentially destructive) to mortals, she also aids Odysseus (after the failure of her attempt to transform him [Homer, pp. 175-76]. She occupies, therefore, a position intermediate between the two poles and shares qualities of each.[50]

In the sixth poem, Circe points to the futility of epic adventure. She doesn't want mythic men, she wants "the ones left over" instead, the men who left the realm of myth, as she finds heroic quest meaningless, asking Odysseus: "Don't you get tired of saying Onward?" (206) Alicia Ostriker thinks she describes the deporsenolizing effects of myths on people and how they repeat themselves again and again and "the events run themselves through/almost without us."[51] Circe goes on saying that there are two islands which "do not exclude each other," the second island "has never happened" and "is not finished" or "frozen yet." Therefore, it is an island of possibilities which includes Circe, thereby deconstructing the myth and rewriting it as herstory. Ostriker thinks that Circe is transformed into an angry but also quite powerless woman. As previously mentioned, even the transformation of Odysseus's men happens by itself without Circe's intervention. At their first encounter, Circe, aware of the traditional role of men, asks Odysseus "Will you hurt me?" indicating that she is in a vulnerable state. She also leaves Odysseus with two choices: to be feared or to be despised, that are the only choices left for men in a patriarchal culture. Circe functions as a victim because she knows that she will be abandoned by Odysseus, yet she is also a victimizer; as the intertext suggests that she

[50] Buchbinder, "Weaving Her Version: The Homeric Model and Gender Politics in Selected Poems", p. 125.
[51] Ostriker, A., (1982) "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking." **Signs,** *8*(1), 68–90. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173482, (23.02.2016), p. 72.

enchants unwary travelers.[52] Both roles are subordinate, unlike Odysseus who is the victor. As mentioned in the first chapter of the thesis, Atwood categorizes victimization into four types and dwell on type four who is a non-victim and thus free to be creative. Her subordination is her choice, otherwise she is a powerful goddess. The same story is repeatedly told for so many times and now it is time those stories must be retold differently. Ostriker goes on saying that "Circe is "a desert island," as she describes herself, or "a woman of mud" made for sexual exploitation, and her encounters with Odysseus are war games of rape, indifference, betrayal, which she can analyze caustically, mounting a shrewd critique of the heroic ethos."[53]

Don't you get tired of killing
Those whose deaths have been predicted
And are therefore dead already? (206)

Odysseus does not need Hermes's moly in Atwood's version, because they are equally powerful or powerless. Barbara Blakely explains this relationship in her article "The Pronunciation of Flesh: A Feminist Reading of Margaret Atwood's Poetry": "As poles creating and created by a common field, they are both dependent upon, yet differentiated from, each other. They exist separately only by existing together."[54] " The tone of the poem changes according to their need to defend, control and survive. As they get closer, Circe is at risk of losing her self-possion, She wears a charm around her neck, a withered fist whose fingers rub together in the "worn moon rituals" of goddess-based religion, which, Judith Yarnall suggests, might be Circe's moly. By unbuckling it, Odysseus symbolically breaks "her connection with the angry ancient powers that have protected and sustained her."[55] What Atwood implies is that "the female power to do evil is a direct function of her powerlessness to do anything else."[56]

It is the fifteenth poem, Circe realizes Odysseus' fragility and sees him beyond his heroic character upon seeing his body without its armor, his

[52] VanSpanckeren, ***Margaret Atwood: Vision and Forms***, p. 126.
[53] Ostriker, "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking", p. 78.
[54] Blakely, Barbara. (1983) "The Pronunciation of Flesh: A Feminist Reading of Margaret Atwood's Poetry" **Margaret Atwood: Language, Text, and System**. By Sherrill E. Grace. Univ of British Columbia Press, p. 34.
[55] Yarnall, ***Transformations of Circe: The History of An Enchantress,*** p. 189.
[56] Atwood, M. (1974). ***You Are Happy***. New York: Harper & Row, p. 51, 38-39.

imperfections. She associates his "moonmarks" with The Mother, herself. Circe chooses to renounce her moon power for the sake of love of a "warring mortal whose scars are their meeting place." Yet it does not change the fact that he is a marked man who "is bound to and by battle, to Penelope, to a relentless future.[57] The following poem mentions a mud woman who has haunted Circe since she heard it from a traveler passing through her island. He told her that he and a friend of his constructed a woman out of mud, which "began at the neck and ended at the knees and elbows: they stuck to the essentials." They would rape her by turns with flawless satisfaction. "Is this what you would like me to be?" Circe asks Odysseus, "It would be so simple." This simplicity comes from being passive and the mud woman represents Circe's eartly side. Yarnall argues; "Given the tendency of patriarchy to deny women's voices and of Western culture to equate the feminine with the material and corporeal, Circe's fear here (which seems to include a fear of her own complicity) cannot be dismissed as paranoia."[58]

The poem reflects some jealousy, as well: "When you look at nothing / what are you looking at? / Whose face floats on the water / dissolving like a paper plate?" These lines directly evoke the memory of Penelope who is waiting for Odysseus at home. Circe depicts her as a domestic woman, surrounded by household items, likening to a paper plate in the first place, offering tea and sex to the suitors:

Meanwhile she sits in her chair
waxing and waning
like an inner tube or a mother,
breathing out, breathing in,
surrounded by bowls, bowls, bowls,
tributes from the suitors
who are having a good time in the kitchen
waiting for her to decide
on the dialogue for this evening
which will be in perfect taste

[57] Lilienfeld, "Circe's Emergence: Transforming Traditional Love in Margaret Atwood's *You Are Happy*", p. 128-130.
[58] Yarnall, ***Transformations of Circe: The History of An Enchantress***, p. 190.

and will include tea and sex

dispensed graciously both at once.

She explicitly makes a connection between Penelope's weaving and storytelling: "She's up to something, she's weaving/histories, they are never right,/she has to do them over,/ she is weaving her version,/ the one you will believe in,/the only one you will hear." In a sense, she is warning Odysseus that Penelope is going to make him believe in 'herstory'. Circe is aware of the power of language and articulation. In the first cycle of the Circe/Mud Poems, she says that Odysseus "move[s] within the range of my words." She calls the cliffs of her landscape "wretched words". Unlike the official version, Circe is granted voice this time.

In the last italicized poem, Circe sounds withdrawn, she fantasizes herself and Odysseus in a romantic setting in November, licking snow from each other's mouths. As Jane Lilienfeld suggests: "Atwood uses women's anger to create new possibilities for love, for Circe is forced to imagine a new world in which love might consist of equality and compassion."[59] This island, "miraculous in an ordinary way, exists potentially in any moment and is the magnification of a moment. As such it represents an escape from the relentless compulsions of individual and cultural history, a leap into the timelessness of love."[60] Atwood's Circe is a projection of how relationships would be if both sides surrendered equally for love, without any conventional expectations, power struggle or the desire to control. Yarnall concludes that Margaret Atwood distinctively pointed a direction in which this myth can evolve:

> *Atwood's adoption of the Circe mask may well have provided the poet herself, [however], with the direction she needed. It allowed her to speak in the voice of a woman unashamed of her strengths and unwilling to confine herself to a victim's role. Itb allowed her to explore the condition of such a woman on the periphery of patriarchy and in the relationship to a male equal. And finally, it enabled her to discover and express the limits of power conceived as the will to dominate rather than as the capacity to love.*[61]

[59] Lilienfeld, "Circe's Emergence: Transforming Traditional Love in Margaret Atwood's You Are Happy", p. 124.
[60] Yarnall, ***Transformations of Circe: The History of An Enchantress***, p. 192.
[61] Yarnall, ***Transformations of Circe: The History of An Enchantress***, p. 193.

3.2.2. "Helen of Troy Does Counter Dancing"

"Helen of Troy Does Counter Dancing," appeared in Part II of Atwood's latest collection of poetry, *Morning in the Burned House*.[62] The poem is written in the first person singular employing free verse without rhyme or meter. The collection deconstructs conventional myths, cultural images of feminine sexuality, and symbols of femininity. Dale Jacobs describes the collection as a revelation in which "she attempts to uncover the connection between the flesh and the word, locating experience – both her own and those of her characters – at the intersection of physicality and language." Like Atwood's Circe and Penelope, Helen is a contemporary figure who demystifies the conventional story about her. She is no longer an object of male gaze, Jacobs purports, she finds a way out through speaking, "because she has translated her flesh into word, moving beyond physicality."[63]

According to the Homeric epic, Helen is a betrayer; she first betrays her husband Menelaus by eloping with Paris, and then betrays Paris and the Trojans by helping Odysseus with his scheme. She represents the nature of beauty which is enchanting but dangerous and therefore must be controlled. She does not deny her beauty, as always, and is not ashamed of using it. Modern-day Helen is not concerned with heroes, she is dancing on a counter to make her living. Helen's narration is in the present tense as she is a contemporary Helen. Like Penelope's, her language is not epic but vulgar and sarcastic. She works at what seems to be a strip club, dancing on a counter, thus making the reader think that she is still as beautiful and seductive as her mythic image. Yet she is no longer a powerful and deceitful goddess as depicted in the Homeric epic and canonical mythology. Instead, she is "exploited" as the other women describe her.

Having been a reflection of male fantasy for centuries, Helen sounds weary of being simultaneously in the center of female prejudice and judgement: "The world is full of women / who'd tell me I should be ashamed of myself." This brings to mind her cousin Penelope's severe criticism on her in *The Penelopiad*. Penelope denies

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[62] Atwood, M. (1995). ***Morning in the Burned House***. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, p. 33-36.
[63] Jacobs, D., (1998). [Review of *Morning in the Burned House*]. **Prairie Schooner**, *72*(1), 183–185. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40634824, (03.03.2016), p. 183-185.

Helen's divine lineage and speaks very disrespectfully of her, "Helen the lovely, Helen the septic bitch, root cause of all [her] misfortunes." Seeing her hang around with men, dancing and speaking scornfully of Penelope, among others, she wonders how she escaped punishment:

> *Helen was never punished, not one bit. Why not, I'd like to know? Other people got strangled by sea serpents and drowned in storms and turned into spiders and shot with arrows for much smaller crimes. Eating the wrong cows. Boasting. That sort of thing. You'd think Helen might have got a good whipping at the very least, after all the harm and suffering she caused to countless other people. But she didn't. (22)*

Helen undermines Penelope's beauty by remarking her short legs: "She and Odysseus are two of a kind. They both have such short legs," and calling her a "little duckie." (33) She competitively asks Penelope the number of the men Odysseus killed for herself, as she regards the number of the death in the Trojan War as an attribute to her greatness. Penelope draws attention to the injustice of male authorities in the classical antiquity as well as the unfair exemption of Helen of Troy. Helen is depicted as an innocent goddess by both ancient epics and contemporary culture. "It was the god [Aphrodite] who drove her to do [her] shameful deed." (23: 221-2) Undoubtedly, postmodern Penelope sounds jealous while talking about Helen. There is something more than a need for justice, more like a craving for vengeance, toward the woman she accuses of ruining her life. Unlike Helen who is always boasting of her beauty around, Penelope emphasizes her cleverness over beauty. She is clearly compares and contrasts herself to Helen: "I was not a man-eater… I was not like cousin Helen who loved to make conquests just to show she could…. I was a kind girl-kinder than Helen, or so I thought." (29) Through Penelope's anger and jealousy, Atwood recreates the character of the femme fatale Helen of Troy, who is "intolerably beautiful" (33) whereas Penelope is short and described by others with her wits rather than her beauty. Helen is a "notoriously more comely Spartan, who taunts, teases, and infuriates Penelope throughout her life and even after death."[64]
Penelope accuses Helen of all the troubles in her life and asks: "Why is it that really beautiful people think everyone else in the world exists merely for their amusement?" (33-34)

[64] Miner, "Fictions and Frictions [Review of *The Penelopiad; The Tent*]", p. 20.

There is again a spatial and temporal shift in the poem, she is taken from the high palaces of Troy or Sparta to a strip club where she dances for money. She might also be doing pole dancing as understood from the following lines: “Look – my feet don’t hit the marble! / Like breath or a balloon, I’m rising, / I hover six inches in the air / in my blazing swan-egg of light.” (36) She makes a reference to her lineage and demystifies her goddess image.

The adaptation of a goddess at the center of desire, jealousy, rage, and accusation to a twentieth century strip club where she is seen “naked as a meat sandwich” objectifies Helen. As well as being a product in a consumer society, she is also a seller and consumer herself. She believes that working as a cashier with “minimum wage, and varicose veins, just standing in one place for eight hours behind a glass counter bundled up to neck” is worse than being a stripper, because at least she sells “vision” and “desire” instead of “gloves or something.” What she sells is not only material but also ideology, vision, implying that everything has a price and for sale. Mihoko Suzuki suggests that she “exposes the violent underside of male fetishizing of the female body as tantamount to dismemberment:”[65]

…. They gaze at me and see
A chain-saw murder just before it happens,
When thigh, ass, inkblot, crevice, tit and nipple
Are still connected. (34)

Helen is a trickster figure, as Kathryn Van Spanckeren describes the poem as “a classic trickster text” in her essay “Humanizing the Fox: Atwood’s Poetic Tricksters and Morning in the Burned House.” She implies a trickster archetype beyond the character inherent in the “witty” and “thought-provoking” text which manipulates the reader. Atwood’s subverts the conventions in her poetry where “she is free to play with language, the primary tool of the trickster.”[66] Like Atwood’s Circe, Helen too is both powerful and powerless at the same time, and she does not sound like a victim. She seems to be carrying her proud and self-assurance. As a trickster, she challenges the reader whom, she thinks, sucpects her Olympian lineage:

[65] Suzuki, “Rewriting the "Odyssey" in the Twenty-First Century”, p. 263–278.
[66] Van Spanckeren, "Humanizing the Fox: Atwood’s Poetic Tricksters and Morning in the Burned House", p. 103-112.

“You think I’m not a goddess? / Try me. / This is a torch song. / Touch me and you’ll burn.” (36) She is an unreliable narrator like Penelope, implying the impossibility of single truth and celebrating the plurality of perspectives.

CONCLUSION

Myth and mythology have been studied by a myriad of writers, critics, philosophers, and theorists throughout history. Of all the definitions and endless interpretations of myth and mythology, the influence of myth on social values and their role in shaping archetypes by forming and expressing social norms is the most highlighted point. Myths or mythology aims to make sense of natural phenomena so as to explain reality beyond simple logic, support a particular system, justify its theology, resolve a society's underlying contradictions, or disclose what human mind cannot comprehend. Myths bind societies together by addressing fears, hopes, beliefs and vital issues of human experience, thereby organizing collective world experience. The fact that myth provides an endless array of meanings paves the way for endless interpretation, reinvention, revision, rewriting, and renewal.

Throughout the history of myth, women, among others, have particularly been stereotyped, muted and confined into identities which do not represent their true nature. The seeds of the foremost instance of gender dichotomy were rooted in Greek Mythology, with the two sons of Zeus as its symbols: Apollo and Dionysus. Whereas Apollo is associated with men and the representative of masculinity as the god of reason and rational, women and femininity are associated with Dionysus, the god of irrational and chaos. This categorization results in the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy.[1] The revision of canonical literature and mythology paved the way for the destruction of this male-oriented discourse and androcentric patterns that form the basis of mythology. These revisions, or rewritings bring about a plurality of perspectives by reversing roles or establishing pluralities.

Canadian critic Herman Northrop Frye analyses how myths shape literature through archetypes. Archetypes, which Frye defines as integrative tools which connect individual with universal, exist in our collective unconscious and present common ideas society shares. Frye thinks that literature grows out of myth and Western literature originates in biblical and classical myth. Margaret Atwood admired Frye to a great extent and he had a decisive influence on her career as her professor. It is not surprising to find similarities Atwood and Frye share, such as the

[1] It was Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) that granted recognition to this dualism.

reflection of the horridness of nature, garrisons and victims, the interest in defining Canadian identity, and the tendency towards myth and archetype.

The footprints of Frye's theories of myth are observed in Atwood's revisionary works. By taking up the task of challenging mythic archetypes, Atwood highlights the universal impact of myth on literature, as explained by Frye: "Myths explain the structural principles behind familiar literary facts."[2] Even the perception and the comprehension of contemporary readers is influenced by literary archetypes. Atwood acknowledges Frye's theory and goes further by reinterpreting one of the pillars of western literature, *The Odyssey*, thereby subverting and reshaping these archetypes so that they take on new meanings.

Margaret Atwood has gained recognition not only as a writer but also as a Canadian contemporary literary celebrity, media star, cultural critic, environmentalist, human and women's rights spokeswoman, satirist and cartoonist, whose success evolved towards international reputation from the beginning of her career and works have become the subject of academia since then. Much of her writing is focused on political themes such as feminism, power politics, censorship, human rights, empowerment, environmental damage, Canada's relationship with the United States, postcolonialism, pandemics, totalitarianism, militarism and identity. Mythological figures are abundant and recurrent in Atwood's writing in an attempt to question and break away from the male-oriented canon, patriarchal classical mythology. That is why, her use of intertextuality has been widely studied.

The postmodern period has witnessed innumerable literary works which aim to draw a parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity by retelling mythology, earlier stories, myths, fairy tales, religion, folk tales, science and even history. The narratives of myths and legends, what Jean François Lyotard calls grand narratives, do not only explain but also legitimate knowledge on behalf of the existing power relations or traditions. The grand narrative unifies historical experience or knowledge for the sake of the legitimation of a master idea. The postmodern discredits the grand narrative which constitutes an essential part of modernity, it has lost its credibility, as

[2] Frye, ***Anatomy of Criticism***, p. 215.

Lyotard expresses: "'Postmodern' designates incredulity toward metanarratives."[3] Hence, in the postmodern world, power is having, creating, reformatting, and rewriting information as much as possible.

Rewriting refers to re-imagining, re-working, re-vising, and re-telling of existing narratives by challenging the concepts of originality, uniqueness and authorship. Postmodern rewriting secures justice for the ones that are excluded from or muted by the canon. Constructed binarisms which constitute social and disciplinary norms are questioned and disclosed by post-structuralist writers who aim to reveal the unquestioned metaphors. Deconstructionism, coined by Jacques Derrida, is a late twentieth-century literary theory that concentrates on enabling the critic to "deconstruct" a text by finding inconsistencies and questioning traditional assumptions about certainty, identity, and truth. Therefore, deconstruction aims at dismantling logocentrism.

The debunking of millennial conventional structures encoded by male privilege has set the basis for the rise of feminist revisionary mythology. Rediscovering and transforming old texts, adapting them to new audiences as well as subverting gender stereotypes and sexist symbols embodied in myths, lets women describe and express their experience which has been ignored for ages and resist sexist language. Feminist revision of myth achieves the true representation of the subordinate, oppressed, muted, displaced, and left behind through attacking the dominant paradigms of classic literature which were undeniably proven phallogocentric, privileging masculinity in the construction of meaning.

The Iliad and *The Odyssey*, as grand narratives which were composed nearly three thousand years ago, have remained a source of inspiration and debate since then. People have studied, discussed, retold, resonated, uncovered, constructed and deconstructed the works attributed to the poet Homer. The epic poems confine women into roles varying from faithful wife or goddess caretaker to monster or seducer. By subverting the Homeric myth of faithful Penelope and challenging the authority of canonical literature, Margaret Atwood's rewriting of *The Odyssey*

[3] Lyotard, ***The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge***, p. xxiv.

explores the dark alleys of a central literary work of classical myth which celebrates male heroism.

The Penelopiad can be read as a correction and a sequel of *The Odyssey.* Atwood's protagonist is Penelope who has been the representative of every virtue expected of a "good" woman by the patriarchal society. Although she is one of the biggest tricksters of literary history who keeps her suitors waiting for twenty years by several strategies, seldom has her shrewdness been noted or celebrated, very much unlike her husband's. Her loyalty and fidelity resonate throughout centuries instead. However, Atwood's Penelope demonstrates more sophistication and complexity than most other versions of her. She does not mention any heroic or warlike action, quite the contrary she recalls her childhood, marriage and maternal years and what "really" happened in the absence of Odysseus. Margaret Atwood not only reinvents the plot of *The Odyssey* but also modifies its genre by adopting it to the Postmodernist movement, thereby reformulating the rules of the epic genre and challenging its hypotext both semantically and structurally. Having long been disturbed by the lack of Penelope's perspective in the Homeric epic and haunted by the hanging of the twelve maids, Margaret Atwood rewrites the myth of Odysseus from Penelope's perspective, by granting her and the twelve maids the voice they have long been deprived of.

Atwood explores the unconscious mythologies in her poetry as well. "Circe/Mud Poems" summarizes Odysseus and the witch Circe's intense love affair on her island before he set sail for his wife at home where he could find unconditional obedience and patriarchal order. Atwood's poem is alternately in narrative prose and verse, this time from contemporary Circe's point of view which have remained for the most part unexpressed. Atwood's Circe is a goddess with unexpected, earthly, "muddy", human sides. Circe is not a woman to impress by mythological male power as she is capable of manifacturing what myths create, instead she yearns for a man who left the realm of myths. Circe is a victim because she knows that she will be abandoned by Odysseus, yet she is also a victimizer at the same time as the intertext suggests that she enchants unwary travelers.[4] Both roles

[4] VanSpanckeren, ***Margaret Atwood: Vision and Forms***, p. 126.

are subordinate, unlike Odysseus who is the victor. However, her subordination is her choice, otherwise she is a powerful goddess. Atwood's Circe is a projection of how relationships would be if both sides surrendered equally for love, without any conventional expectations, power struggle or the desire to control.

"Helen of Troy Does Counter Dancing" is another work examined in this dissertation, which deconstructs conventional myths, cultural images of feminine sexuality, and symbols of femininity. Like Atwood's Circe and Penelope, Helen is a contemporary figure who demystifies the conventional story about her. She is no longer an object of male gaze. Having been a reflection of male fantasy for centuries, Helen sounds weary of being simultaneously in the center of female prejudice and judgement. In spite of being taken from the high palaces of Troy or Sparta to a strip club where she dances for money, Helen does not sound like a victim. She sounds proud and self-assured.

Atwood's female protagonists are literal and figurative weavers, as they are in the Homeric epic. On the contrary, they do not speak within the restrictions of patriarchy. Although ancient Penelope, Helen, or Circe is not granted the opportunity to tell the accounts of their lives, unlike Odysseus who is a direct narrator of his adventures, Atwood's protagonists are bards of their own experience. Their use of language is the most important device that generates a connection between them and the reader, making them realistic characters with humanly feelings such as anger, hatred, jealousy and disappointment. They celebrate the plurality of perspectives.

Atwood debunks "history" and rebuilds "herstory" in the selected works analyzed in this dissertation. Margaret Atwood grants these characters the freedom of speech in order to express the weight of being a member of the minority in a dominant society. By narrating the untold, voicing the silenced, she shifts the focal point of the myth to a woman-centered angle. She challenges the conventions of the patriarchal narration by showing that female characters should be defined by female experience.

It is true that without *The Odyssey*, *The Penelopiad* would not make sense. However, more importantly, it is impossible to read *The Odyssey* or *The Iliad* in the same way after reading Atwood's subversive rewritings. Margaret Atwood's

reformulation of cultural narratives vocalized through Penelope and the twelve maids, Circe, and Helen aims at an equity between the privileged and the oppressed, thereby balancing the power relations. Postmodern Penelope, Circe and Helen reweave *The Odyssey,* as well as *The Iliad* to some extent, with corrections, justifications and regulations provided by female perspective. It is an ongoing process of the cycle of weaving-unweaving-reweaving. In the end, the twelve maids, alongside all other muted women in literary history, take their vengeance in an immortal, artistic way, through the use of postmodern rewriting: "Dog his footsteps, on earth or in Hades, wherever he may take refuge, in songs and in plays, in tomes and in theses, in marginal notes and in appendices! Appear to him in our forms, our ruined forms, the forms of our pitiable corpses! Let him never be at rest!"

Odysseus will never be at rest.

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