

A Revisionist Approach to Patriarchal Ideas in Margret Atwood "The Penelopiad"

مقاربة تنقيحية للمثل الأبوية في رواية "ذا بينيلوبياد" لمارغريت أتوود

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ملخص باللغة العربية

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى تطبيق المنهج النقدي لأدريان ريتش على رواية مارغريت أتوود، "ذا بينيلوبياد" (2005). تقدم هذه الرواية مراجعة مابعد حدثية للملحمة الكبرى في الأدب اليوناني القديم، "الأوديسة" (800 ق.م) لهوميروس، الذي صور البطل الشجاع، أوديسيوس، والزوجة الوفية، بينيلوبي، كنماذج مثلى للزوج والزوجة - أمثلة يجب على الجميع أن يتبعوها ويقتدوا بها. في سرد أتوود، يغدو نفس البطلين نموذجين للخديعة ويمثلان الفرد المستعد لأداء أي فعل مشين لتحقيق هدفه. تستند المقولة الرئيسية في هذا البحث إلى أن رواية مارغريت أتوود، "ذا بينيلوبياد"، تعتمد نهجًا نقديًا لمراجعة وإعادة تقييم المثل الأبوية التقليدية، خاصة تلك التي مثلتها ملحمة "الأوديسة" لهوميروس. تهدف تلك المراجعة إلى إعادة النظر ومراجعة المفاهيم التقليدية للبطل الشجاع والزوجة الوفية، التي تم تقديمها كنماذج مثلى للذكر والأنثى كما يستكشف البحث كيف تحولت تلك الشخصيات البطولية التقليدية في "الأوديسة" في سردية أتوود إلى شخصيات تشارك في أفعال ذات طابع أخلاقي مريب يتحدى الصورة المثالية المرسومة في ملحمة هوميروس. تسعى الدراسة إلى فهم كيف قامت أتوود بأنسنة هذه الشخصيات، بنقلها بعيدًا عن صورها التقليدية كأبطال. يُستخدم هذا النهج كطريقة لإبراز جوانب التحرير في أعمال أتوود. وبهذه الطريقة، تفحص الدراسة كيف حاولت أتوود توليف التغيير في سرد الشخصيات، مما أدى إلى أنسنة البطل المثالي والزوجة المثالية. وتشير نتائج البحث إلى أن منهج المراجعات النقدية قد تم تطبيقه من خلال منح الضحية والمستضعفون ومن لا صوت لهم والمسكوت عنهم فرصة للتحدث والانتقام ممن اضطهدهم الكلمات الرئيسية: مارغريت أتوود، ذا بينيلوبياد، البطرياركية، المراجعات، الأوديسة

Abstract:

This paper aims to read Margaret Atwood's novel, The Penelopiad (2005), via a revisionist approach. This novel offers a postmodernist exploration of the grand-narrative myth in the ancient Greek epic, The Odyssey (800 BC) by Homer, who portrayed the heroic warrior, Odysseus, and the faithful wife, Penelope, as epitomes of

perfect male and female models – examples whom all should follow and mimic. In Atwood's narrative, the same two hero models are the two great tricksters who are willing to perform any sort of obnoxious act for achieving their goals. The main argument of this paper is that Margaret Atwood's novel, *The Penelopiad*, employs a revisionist approach to challenge and reevaluate traditional patriarchal ideals, particularly those portrayed in *The Odyssey* by Homer. It aims to question and revise the conventional notions of the heroic warrior and the faithful wife, which were presented as perfect male and female models in the epic. The research explores how Atwood's narrative in *The Penelopiad* transforms the traditional heroic figures from *The Odyssey* into characters who engage in morally ambiguous actions and challenges the idealized portrayals. It seeks to understand how Atwood humanizes these figures, moving them away from their traditional heroic personas. This paper tries to employ the comparative analysis approach particularly in terms of character portrayal and the humanization of heroes and heroines where it compares the traditional heroic and idealized figures from *The Odyssey* with their transformed versions in Atwood's narrative. This comparison serves as a method of highlighting the revisionist aspects of Atwood's work. In this way, the research examines how Atwood tried to synthesize the change in character's narratives leading to the humanization of the perfect hero and the ideal wife. Research findings are that revisionist approach was applied through giving an opportunity to the victimized and the voiceless to speak out and retaliate against their prosecutions.

Keywords: Margret Atwood, The Penelopiad, Patriarchy, Revisionism, The Odyssey.

Introduction:

“Re-vision” is a term coined by Adrienne Rich, which means looking back at an old text from a new critical direction to understand the assumptions that women are drenched in . This definition has been elaborated by Sharon Friedman who stressed that re-visioning involves interpretation, both for the contemporary writer retelling a story or myth and for readers who can open up new interpretive possibilities . Helene Cixous has noted that women read myths differently, from a different perspective, with different questions in mind. Re-visioning is about questioning the assumptions and biases that underlie a text, examining power dynamics and uncovering hidden perspectives that have been marginalized. This process allows us to challenge dominant narratives, see things from new perspectives, and create new possibilities . This paper is using the critical tools of feminist theorists Adrienne Rich, Helene Cixous and Sharon Friedman to analyze and reinterpret old myths and stories. These three theorists are rooted in feminist literary theory, which seeks to examine literature through the lens of gender and power dynamics. They emphasize the importance of recognizing and challenging patriarchal norms and structures in literary works. One of their critical tools involved in this analysis is the reinterpretation and revision of literary texts to highlight alternative perspectives and narratives. This process often involves uncovering hidden or suppressed aspects of stories.

The purpose of this analysis is to uncover how the hidden patriarchal practices that are present in these myths were exposed by Margret Atwood. Through Atwood's eyes, looking back at these stories with a fresh perspective, she managed to shed light on the ways in which the myths were created to reinforce gender roles and other patriarchal practices. The researcher has used an interdisciplinary approach where the feminist and revisionist theories were implemented to identify and find out the new interpretations of the myths that center the experiences and perspectives of women.

Margret Atwood and The Penelopiad

The Penelopiad received much encouragement and was recommended by a vast number of critical magazines. It has been subject to several discussions previously. These discussions have approached aspects of the novel such as comparisons to the original version, feminism, the nature of storytelling, and the writer's background impact. Despite the author's claim that the novel is not of a feminist nature, several critics tend to consider it this way since the protagonists are females. Other critics support this claim by referring to Atwood's previous works defending female figures and classified as feminist. For example, Shannon Collins discussed the circumstances affecting storytelling considering age and politics as well as the personal advantage and matters of survival which includes female competition between characters of the novel.

Another point covered in her paper "Setting the Stories Straight: A Reading of Margaret Atwood's The Penelopiad" is the method of dealing with the suitors and sacrificing 12 innocent maids for the sake of survival. In addition, Monica Bottez in Another Penelope:

Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* displays the difference between the meta narrative and the revised version of Atwood where she observes the concept of realism, focusing on Penelope's character. In their *Deconstructing Gender and Myth in Margaret Atwood's The Penelopiad*, Shasita Irshad and Niroj Banerji explained how *The Penelopiad* deconstructed gender and the mythical version of male while empowering and giving voice to females. In addition to stating that the characters used to conform with patriarchal society's rules through deceit and sacrificing the lower class members and that Penelope was only freed from the prison of patriarchy after death, they suggest that "The novel also subverts the gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity establishing them to be discursive constructs of myths, traditional beliefs, practices, conventional patterns and norms ."

Moreover, in *Ways of Sentencing: Female Violence and Narrative Justice in Margaret Atwood's The Penelopiad*, Kiley Kapuscinski argues that female characters are attempting to change the narratives and though the title of the novel suggests both singularity and Penelope's higher authority, the maids seem to intervene and claim their rights as well. Finally, Rūta Šlapkauskaitė's work, *Postmodern Voices from Beyond*, explores the relationship between Margaret Atwood's age and her retelling of myths, taking into account her postmodern Canadian background and her previous works. In particular, the work examines how Atwood's age and life experiences may have influenced her reinterpretation of myths and her use of postmodern techniques in her writing. The work also considers Atwood's Canadian identity and how this may have shaped her perspective on the myths she is retelling .

What is literary Revisionism?

Adrian Rich defined the concept of re-vision as “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entertaining an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter of cultural history: it is an act of survival .” In the light of this definition, literary revisionism is used in this paper to refer to the practices of reinterpretation, reexamination as a tool to do the following:

- Subvert the established narratives
- Centralize the marginalized/underrepresented characters
- Salvage the muted voices in the epic/myth
- Offers a reinterpretation of the epic

Thus, literary revisionism entails an intentional and sometimes a deliberate reframing of both the old narratives and the well-established myths. Authors who engage in literary revisionism seek to:

1- Reinterpret Characters: by offering a different insight of the often ideal hero and transforming him/her into a somehow realistic figure.

2- Rebuild Narratives: this happens through using aesthetic elements in the plot and the narrative structure and by doing so challenge expectations and subvert the mythological use of the old narrative.

3- Question Conventions: the revisionist approach defy fixed the literary norms and debunk the thematic interpretations .

In his book, *Criticism and Ideology*, Terry Eagleton observes that “works of literature signify history indirectly via the ways in which they signify the ideologies which mediate their relations to history”

. This remark by Eagleton confirms the resemblance between fiction and history. Like historical narratives, fiction is a method for documenting the histories of nations . While historical narratives are typically understood to be based on factual events, they are still constructed through the use of narrative techniques that are also found in fictional narratives. This means that historical narratives, like fictional ones, are subject to interpretation and manipulation by those who construct them.

In the following table, I will elaborate the resemblance between two different types of narrative; the first is based on factual events while the second is purely narrative.

Historical Narrative vs. Fictional Narrative

Historical Narrative

Fictional Narrative

Ex. American Revolution

Ex. The Great Gatsby

1- Factual Events: The American Revolution is a factual event in which 13 colonies of Great Britain's North America land gained independence from British rule.

1-Fictional Story:
The Great Gatsby is a novel by Scot Fitzgerald. It turns around Jay Gatsby's obsession with Daisy Buchanan; it tackles a myriad of themes such as wealth, social class, and moral decay.

2- Narrative Techniques: In historical narratives, historians

employ narrative techniques such as storytelling, producing central figures like George Washington, and listing a timeline of events.

3- Subject to Interpretation: Historiographers may see events subjectively. For instance, one historian might emphasize the role of the proletarians while another might stress the presence of a given figure. The discrepancy in reading these events can lead to a totally different if not conflicting insight of the same historical event¹.

2- Narrative Technique: Similar to historical narratives, *The Great Gatsby* uses narrative techniques such as character development (the growth of the protagonist), storytelling and other aesthetic elements. This novel is narrated in the first person.

3- Subject to Interpretation: *The Great Gatsby* can be read in multiple ways and have several meanings. It may be seen as focusing on theme of corruption and may be analyzed from a social and Marxist perspective. All in all, the novel stirs up a lot of discussions about morality, ethics etc².

Both historical and fictional narratives are forms of storytelling that use similar techniques. Whereas historical narratives depict factual events, choices are there when it comes to which events to omit, which to highlight, how to frame them, and in what way you

introduce them. These choices are subject to the historian's viewpoint or agenda, potentially leading to different interpretations of history. Similarly, fictional narratives like *The Great Gatsby* construct stories with characters and plots that convey certain themes or messages. Readers may interpret these narratives differently based on their own perspectives and experiences. In essence, both historical and fictional narratives are forms of storytelling that record the histories of nations, and both are subject to interpretation and manipulation by those who construct them; this in turn underscores the intersectionality between history and fiction as distinct forms of narrative.

Critics such as Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White and Frank Lentricchia confirm this interference of narrativity and history . As L.B. Cebik explains in his seminal book, *Fictional Narrative and Truth*, that "extensive probing into historical narrative led to the conclusion that the features of narrative that were epistemically fundamental to that form of discourse were common to both its historical and fictional instances.

In addition to this, the issues of historians' biased nature along with the influence of their own ideologies on their perspective of events further limits their credibility. "In other words, historians pattern their narratives on the basis of their historical knowledge, but the moment they do so, their own subjectivity interferes with their treatment. In this sense, no history is purely objective, because subjectivity is bound to enter into its writing ." Ideologies differ with time and with their differences came a difference in communities' authorities and common sense. Jean Francois Lyotard in *The Post Modern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*

introduces how the change in society's ideologies lead to a change in what is considered a legitimate form of knowledge and the process of legitimation itself . The postmodern age featuring technology and computerization simply would not accept knowledge only because it came from power holders who are consequently changing themselves. Therefore, the legitimation and absolute authority of history and historians were undermined. The perfect wife is no longer the female model to follow and the cunning warrior is no more than a myth for children and superstition believers. The reason why both fields (I mean narrativity & history) are subject to the same treatments and applications such as revisionism is that both history and narrative literature are intertwined. The historian uses tools of narration to submit his addition to history into its place. For historians, historical knowledge, facts and pure narratives are the raw material that play a role in how we see the past; however, they cannot be seen as the only player in shaping this past. Although historians struggle to gather historical facts, it is through the art of storytelling and narrative construction that these facts come to life. This dance between historical facts and narrativity builds the foundation stone of historical interpretation; history does not acquire its presence through the recording of events; rather, it turns into a historical narrative through merging the historical occurrence with the narrative which thus imbues it with what can be called historical significance. Khan contends that:

The skeleton of historical facts is obvious enough but this skeleton is embodied by the flesh and blood of 'narrativity' running through it. In other words, what happened at a certain period or point of

time in the past does not by itself make that 'event' an historical event until and unless the historian processes it for his own purpose. It means that this 'processing' has to do with the artifact of language and narrative .

In *The Penelopiad* (2005), literary revisionism is employed by Margaret Atwood to reinterpret the famous tale of Homer's *The Odyssey* from a feminist perception. In doing so, Atwood uses the bulk of historical and mythological framework surrounding the character Penelope and reexamines it through her narrative lens. Through framing the same story in a totally different perspective, this revisionist approach applies the concept discussed earlier: the skeleton of historical or mythological facts is present in the original tale, but it's the narrative and language employed by Atwood that imbues the story with a new meaning and a new insight.

In *The Penelopiad*, the myth of Odysseus and Penelope is placed in a realistic feminist and revisionist frame. Revisionism in literature is crucial because art is not only a mirror of society but also a participant in shaping its morals and ethics. Inhumanities and injustice if tolerated in arts will surely have an impact on societies. Therefore, refining history is an important step in promoting justice and challenging the portrayal of power holders as flawless and infallible; the novel serves as a means for narrative justice enforcement. The maids echo the voices of the oppressed seeking a review of their stories and a vengeance for the wrongs done to them.

The Penelopiad is a summary of the story of Penelope, as told from her perspective in the book. It begins with Penelope's desire to tell

her own story and clarify her own perspective, and then follows her life from birth until the hanging of the maids and the return of Odysseus. The story highlights the challenges that Penelope faced as the wife of a powerful man who was absent for many years. She was left to fend for herself against a group of suitors who sought to take her husband's place and claim his possessions. Despite being trapped in her estate, Penelope used her intelligence and resourcefulness to stall the suitors and protect her own interests. Throughout the story, the reader is given a glimpse into Penelope's thoughts, feelings, and experiences, as well as those of the maids who work in her household. The maids, in particular, are given a voice in the story, as they sing their own stories from their perspective and provide insight into the challenges they faced in serving Penelope and her husband. The story also highlights the flaws and shortcomings of Odysseus, who won Penelope's hand through cheating and is depicted as a ruthless and vengeful character who orders the hanging of the maids as traitors. Overall, the story of Penelope provides a new perspective on the classic tale of the Odyssey, and challenges traditional ideas about gender, power, and heroism.

The Revisionist Approach in The Penelopiade

The main critical approach used in this research is the revisionist approach which helps the researcher to uncover the author's reinterpretation of Homer's classical narrative. Aligned with this approach are the concepts of survival, trickery, and retaliation employed by Atwood in "The Penelopiad". In essence, they are considered deeper analytical themes that not only serve but relate to

the revisionist approach. Revision involves reevaluating and reinterpreting existing narratives, challenging traditional perspectives, and offering alternative viewpoints. In the following lines, I will clarify how these themes are not only related to revisionism but also intertwined with it.

1- Survival: The concept of survival in *The Penelopiad* aligns with the idea of survival and resilience of marginalized voices within literature. Through digging deep in Penelope's fight for survival, the novel stresses the importance of acknowledging and amplifying the voices that have historically been marginalized or underrepresented by dominant narratives. The revisionist method allows for a revisit and a reconsideration of the text highlighting the voices of the voiceless and giving them agency.

2- Trickery: Trickery, as a recurring theme in *The Penelopiad* can be linked to the method of revision by reversing the stereotypical depiction of Penelope and her role in the narrative. Penelope is portrayed as a complex and sly personality who manipulates others and fool them to escape societal pressures and empower herself. Revisionism is fundamentally based on debunking and subverting established interpretations; by so doing it offers a deeper exploration of characters and their motives beyond traditional stereotypes.

3. Retaliation: Retaliation in *The Penelopiad* is expressed in Penelope's focus on storytelling and reframing her narrative through her lens. This act of retaliation challenges the dominant storytelling that has marginalized her and seeks to reshape her identity.

Likewise, revisionism encompasses questioning and challenging existing narratives to reexamine and reinterpret them, reversing

viewpoints centered on power imbalances and providing a more inclusive understanding of the text.

Through revision/revisionism, the themes of survival, trickery, and retaliation in *The Penelopiad* can be examined and re-contextualized. It allows for a critical analysis that disrupts traditional power dynamics, reevaluates characters' actions and motivations, and amplifies underrepresented voices within the text.

Survivor, Trickster, and Retaliation

Penelope (Survival):

In *The Penelopiad*, survival indicates Penelope's ability to endure and maintain her autonomy, identity, and position within a patriarchal society. It also refers to the efforts she makes to survive the power dynamics that shape her life and the strategies she employs to protect herself, her household, and her agency. In addition, survival holds a significant place within the larger system of power dynamics in the Greek society. The idea of gender power imbalance is deeply rooted in ancient Greek society where there is a massive power imbalance between men and women. Penelope's survival stands for women's struggle to maintain their minimal rights in a male-dominated society. She has grappled with exploitative suitors who seek to assert control over her and her household during Odysseus's absence. Her survival strategy was embodied in escaping suitors' proposals, asserting her agency, refusing societal stereotyping and defying the power structures that seek to subjugate her.

In Homer's version of the tale (The Odyssey), Penelope held immeasurable loyalty to her husband. Her character was not only a flat impression of how a perfect wife is meant to be according to the patriarchal society but also a depiction of the ideologies and ideals of the age in which it was written. In accordance with Homer's version of the tale, notions such as honor, loyalty, and virtuousness were given the utmost signification and women; those of noble blood cherished such morals more than life itself. The most prominent figure of the mentioned qualities was Penelope, who waited twenty years for her husband's return against all odds and regardless of the endless temptations and threats.

The myth of Penelope and Odysseus, as depicted in Homer's Odyssey, promotes a grand narrative of dedication, faithfulness, and altruism from wives, while their husbands indulge in extramarital affairs with goddesses. This narrative is in line with the patriarchal values of ancient Greek society, and is transmitted through literature and other forms of media. In this sense, Lukacs contends that "The historical novel in its origin, development, rise and decline follows inevitably upon the great social transformations of modern times. ".

Thus, it can be safely stated that the Homeric version of the myth of Penelope and Odysseus represents a prototype that is compatible with the ideals of that age.

In the Odyssey, Homer writes:

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 honor of the constant Penelope .

In contrast, the postmodernist rewriting of the myth, as seen in Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, is meant to deconstruct this prototype, since it is no longer embraced by contemporary society. Literature, in both cases, serves as a medium for culture construction and reflection, and the patriarchal ideology of the original myth has the power to shape the aspirations of women, even unconsciously, through repeated retellings of the story.

In *The Penelopiad*, Margaret Atwood creates a drastically modernized narrative that provides depth to the characters and repositions marginalized characters into their rightful place. The novel's narrator, Penelope, is no longer a flat impression of a perfect wife, but rather a complex character who reclaims her agency and voice. Penelope's status as a woman has been entirely altered in this revisionist version of the myth. Instead of being a passive figure who waits for her husband's return, Penelope is a strong and independent woman who challenges the patriarchal norms of her society. She is no longer defined solely by her loyalty to her husband, but rather by her own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. As a historian, Penelope is acutely aware of the power of storytelling and the ways in which narratives can be used to shape and preserve social values and ideologies. She carefully selects the versions of the myth that match her worldview and preserve her status as a woman, while also shedding light on the experiences of the previously marginalized characters, such as the maids who were executed for their alleged role in the suitors' murders. Through Penelope's perspective, Atwood provides a feminist critique of the

original myth and challenges the patriarchal values that it promotes. In this revised version, Penelope is no longer a symbol of idealized femininity, but rather a complex and multifaceted character who refuses to be defined by societal expectations.

Even readers themselves, by the end of the tale, find themselves parallel to historians, fraught with various plausible versions given by various characters and holding the choice of believing whichever suits their ideologies. This flexibility and relative nihilism open a room for revising or rewriting every story one has ever encountered, ultimately placing revisionism as an instinctual judgment. The author, a feminist post-modernist female writer, chose the formerly oppressed characters to serve as her protagonists and even though the novel is named after Penelope, the true heroines and only benefitting characters here are the maids. The only logical reason behind naming this novel after Penelope is that the maids were not mentioned previously and are anonymous or rather nameless. Atwood stated that "I've chosen to give the telling of the story to Penelopiad and the twelve hanged maids "

The documentation of myths was meant to establish models and patterns of idealism for others to honor, uphold, and mimic in order to preserve the authority's dominance. Under the ruling of patriarchy, the female idol was expected to be an all-giving, no-demanding wife who would sacrifice her own friends, children, and even saviors with cold blood to preserve that image. Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* challenges this idealized version of femininity by portraying Penelope as a complex and multifaceted character who is both proficient and shameless in her lies.

Penelope's admission that they (Penelope and her husband) were both proficient and shameless liars suggests that the original myth was not a reliable historical account, but rather a carefully crafted narrative designed to promote certain values and ideals. Penelope and Odysseus both present themselves as honest and trustworthy, but their actions and words reveal their true motives and intentions. Atwood's novel subverts the patriarchal ideal of the perfect wife by portraying Penelope as a woman who is capable of deception and manipulation, but who is also fiercely loyal to her family and determined to protect her own interests. By exposing the lies and contradictions in the original myth, Atwood challenges the dominant narrative and offers a more nuanced and complex view of the characters and their motivations. Once and again, Atwood stressed that "And what did I amount to, once the official version gained ground? An edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with. Why couldn't they be a considerate, as trustworthy, as all-suffering as I had been? "

As argued before, in *The Penelopiad* , Penelope herself admits that they were both proficient and shameless liars . The prominent theme in *The Penelopiad* is the relativity of the concept of truth, as demonstrated through the pretense and deception of the narrators and listeners. Penelope and Odysseus both present themselves as honest and trustworthy, but their actions and words reveal their true motives and intentions. This challenges the idea that there is a single, objective truth that can be easily discerned. The novel's exploration of the relativity of truth serves revisionist ideologies by challenging the notion of objective truth and questioning the reliability of traditional narratives. By exposing the motives and

biases of the narrators, Atwood encourages readers to question their own assumptions and beliefs about the world.

The novel also deconstructs Penelope's relationship with her family; she is not the loving daughter, the dedicated wife or even the sacrificing mother she was once depicted to be. She is a princess who is to become a queen and at first sight her life appears to be rather easy and rewarding; however, her father attempted to drown her as a baby "Possibly he thought that if he killed me first, his shroud would never be woven and he would live forever. I can see how the reasoning might have gone. In that case, his wish to drown me came from an understandable desire to protect himself.

One of the features of revisionism in *The Penelopiad* is its expansion of the story to include Penelope's early life and family history. Through this expansion, the novel offers a more nuanced and complex understanding of Penelope's character and motivations, and allows the reader to analyze each incident as part of a greater picture. Penelope's grudge against her father and mother for their actions demonstrates the ways in which her early experiences have shaped her worldview and priorities. Her mother's advice to avoid confrontation and go with the flow is reflected in Penelope's own actions seeking survival as her utmost priority, even if it means treating everyone as a disposable chess card. Her mother, a naiad, had almost no connection to her except telling her at the wedding "Remember that, my child. Remember you are half water. If you can't go through an obstacle, go around it. Water does ." Through its contextualization of historical events and exploration of the characters' motives and experiences, *The Penelopiad* challenges traditional ideas about history and encourages readers to

think critically about the ways in which historical narratives are constructed and presented.

The Penelopiad deconstructs the image of the wise and powerful gods and goddesses by portraying them as "childish." This challenges the traditional view of the gods and goddesses as all-knowing and all-powerful beings, and presents them as fallible and flawed.

Penelope's newfound honesty and credibility is also highlighted in the novel. The absence of accountability from a punishing authority allows her to speak more freely and from the heart, giving the reader more reason to believe her words. The reader also notices Penelope's new honesty; she is almost no more that silent discrete wife anymore. Penelope confessed that "I can say this now because I no longer have a body, I am beyond that kind of suffering ."

Additionally, her willingness to break her own perfect image and acknowledge the exaggerations surrounding her status and suitors adds to her credibility as a narrator. She believes that "I know it isn't me they're after, not Penelope the duck ." She denies her suitors infatuation with her ravishing beauty, having their main concern her dowry. Even though admitting this denigrates her perfect image and the stories surrounding her many suitors and places her in a less admirable but more realistic status. The Penelopiad exposes the hierarchical and patriarchal nature of ancient Greek society, in which women were considered inferior and valued primarily for their dowry. Even women in positions of power, such as princesses or queens, were subject to the authority of their male counterparts and could be easily threatened or punished for any perceived transgression.

Love, passion and beauty are only fake labeling to furnish the process of competing for a bride with a nobler appearance. Notwithstanding that it is no more than a race for her family's possessions and political support. Penelope commented that "And so I was handed over to Odysseus like a package of meat. A package of meat in a wrapping of gold, mind you. ". Penelope's understanding of her place in society and her efforts to maintain her position by any means necessary reflect the ways in which women were forced to navigate a system that was designed to limit their agency and autonomy. Her survival was dependent on her ability to understand and navigate the power dynamics of her world, and to use whatever means were available to her to protect herself and her interests. By situating Penelope and other female characters within the larger social and political context of ancient Greece, *The Penelopiad* offers a more nuanced and complex understanding of their worldviews and decision-making processes. It highlights the ways in which gender, class, and power intersected to shape the lives and experiences of women in this society, and challenges traditional views of women as passive and submissive.

The common point both narratives agree on is Penelope's inability to confront; she either prays, cries or acts behind curtains. She has been deliberately absent on every grand occasion whether the race which determined her spouse or the hanging of the maids. She resembles many citizens who are absent on events, told about them and eventually make the choice to blindly believe the versions they are given. The reader holds Penelope accountable for the maids' death due to her silence. Then find themselves repeating the same act in a scene where literature offers its education being the mirror

audience needed for centuries. Penelope's deliberate absence from events, such as the race that determined her spouse or the hanging of the maids, reflects the ways in which women were often excluded from decision-making processes and denied agency. Her silence on the maids' death also holds her accountable for their fate, demonstrating the ways in which complicity and inaction can perpetuate injustice.

In the final analysis, survival in *The Penelopiad* represented a myriad of meanings: endurance, resistance and self-empowerment. This has happened in a male-dominated society where patriarchy is prevailing norm and law. Through challenging dominant power dynamics and defying gender power imbalance, Penelope has succeeded in subverting societal expectations and reclaiming her narrative control. This survival in itself is a testament of revision and revisionism on which the whole narrative is centered.

Odysseus (Political Trickster):

Trickery in *The Penelopiad* is seen through the implementation of cunning, manipulation, and deceit to serve one's personal interests and escape life perilous events. Odysseus, the husband of Penelope and a renowned character from Greek mythology, is mainly depicted as a political trickster.

Through *The Penelopiad*, the focus of the original myth is reversed by centering on Penelope's perspective and introducing other characters, including Odysseus, through her lens. In contrast to Homer's version, where Odysseus is the central protagonist, in *The Penelopiad* he is only briefly mentioned as Penelope's absent husband, and his character is portrayed as flawed and diminished.

His voice is almost never to be heard in the novel. His words are told through Penelope among others and in the court scene he hides behind his attorney. He is not the same fierce courageous fighter he once was depicted. He is living fully on trickery and dirty politics. Homer's protagonist is nowhere to be found in The Penelopiad; the character is reduced further throughout every scene he appears in, losing the heroic characteristics one by one.

In spite of his reduced role in the modernized version, Odysseus represents the dominative authority, shaping the rules and passing judgments. He still holds the highest authority on his court, even with the strong probability of his death. This hints at the absolute authority – it is not merely a ruling position but a state of mind all rulers held on their subjects. They honor, follow and above all fear him. It is his patriarchal ruler's right which has been inherited and asserted by him. Nonetheless, he no longer holds that privilege among the dead who know neither fear nor falsehood. By the end of the novel, we find the hero as a fugitive who is constantly terrified of the girls' ghosts, as opposed to their status when alive. The land of death knows no authorities nor discrimination and Odysseus has no place there so he is endlessly escaping.

While there are too many stories of his adventures, there are some which are heroic and noble and others that are sneaky and lecherous; Penelope and others at court willingly choose to believe and repeat the nobler versions. The same incidents are told, retold and interpreted multiple times based on who is telling and who is listening. This is a reinforcement to the deconstruction of history's credibility and authority. It can be easily misinterpreted and rewritten to fit the goals of the narrator.

Odysseus and his men had got drunk at their first port of call and the men had mutinied, said some; no, said others, they'd eaten a magic plant that had caused them to lose their memories, and Odysseus had saved them by having them tied up and carried onto the ships. Odysseus had been in a fight with a giant one-eyed Cyclops, said some; no, it was only a one-eyed tavern keeper, said another, and the fight was over non-payment of the bill .

To sum up, portraying Odysseus as a political trickster in The Penelopiad, the author has manifested trickery as a fundamental strategy for survival and power. In essence, Odysseus represents the subtle use of deception, manipulation and political trickery. In doing so, a more realistic version of Odysseus comes to life and becomes a more humanized character that acts according to its inner triggers and social dynamics.

The Maids (Retaliation Seekers):

Retaliation is employed in The Penelopiad to mean finding retribution or achieving justice in return for someone's evil actions or deeds. It is also seen through the 12 maids who were killed in cold blood by Odysseus when he returned to the city. The 12 maids have sought retaliation through the following:

- 1- A response to the injustices and oppression done unto them
- 2- Retelling their own story
- 3- Unveiling the truth and becoming truth seekers
- 4- Demanding justice and defying existing power structures

The maids in the Meta Narrative were seductive adulterous traitors who cooperated with the suitors against their owners. Upon the

return of Odysseus, they were brutally hanged as a farmer would cut out harmful weeds or throw away a broken device. Twelve maids at the core of the tale were mentioned only briefly and allowed no sympathy or given any weight. This is what Abdulhamid Khan described in his research as "the over emphasis of one group of facts and the under- representation of the other group. " The facts that they are women, slaves and condemned by their owner to be guilty were more than sufficient to end their lives so brutally and none paid any concern to them, whether in real life or fiction. "You don't have to think of us as real girls, real flesh and blood, real pain, real injustice. That might be too upsetting. Just discard the sordid part consider us pure symbol. We're no more real than money ". Objectifying everyone and limiting their existence to their wanted tasks leads to illuminating pity and sympathy, creating a state of otherness which makes sentencing characters that have been present in Penelope's life for very long much less emotional; they are not really humans worthy of consideration but mere objects of property that can be disposed once their tasks are fulfilled. "To help me in this laborious task I chose twelve of my maidservants the youngest ones, because these had been with me all their lives. I had bought them or acquired them when they were small children, brought them up as playmates for Telemachus, and trained them carefully in everything they would need to know around the palace ." Penelope bought the girls as she would buy kettle and kept them for her disposal. Whether in life or death the girls, like any other slave, held the same value as any property. "Hard work is my destiny, death is my fate. " Their entire lives are summed in an endless toil crowned by a torturous death.

In a post-modernist framework, they have a powerful voice and demand justice. Revisionism as a movement holds an impact that extends history to affect how we analyze our daily input subjecting every granted information to the privilege of the doubt. No given input we receive is trustworthy since even history can be manipulated facts for authority's advantages. After the conclusion of the tale, Atwood offers a trial for Odysseus appropriately held in the twenty first century court. Interestingly, the book the judge uses as a reference for the tale is *The Odyssey*. The trial puts the reader again in a revisionist position where they deny the heroic portrayal of Odysseus and Penelope. The maids here are not seen as property but actual humans and worthy of sympathy. The twenty first century judge comments critically on the incidents and characters of the myth with his contemporary ideologies. "This is a twenty-first-century court of justice! You there, get down from the ceiling! Stop that barking and hissing! Madam, cover up your chest and put down your spear! " Even though the judge is a twenty first century one, he dismissed the maids' case because according to him, Odysseus was acting within the laws of his time and "It would be unfortunate if this regrettable but minor incident were allowed to stand as a blot on an otherwise exceedingly distinguished career . " When modernism failed them, they resorted to the justice seekers of myth and another conflict arises. The most prominent action here is the endless will in the maids to see their prosecutors punished. Even if all means of justice shall fail them, their souls will hunt those of the perfect spouses. Their words will bring stains to their astonishingly flawless reputations. "We'll never leave you; we'll stick to you like your shadow, soft and relentless as glue. "

They call Odysseus "grandson of thieves and liars "; restrictions such as the falseness of the living and fear for life no longer apply to them. As a revisionist reveals new aspects of history or literature, regardless of the once constraining powers, so can they reveal the truth about Odysseus. As in all counter narratives, the tables are turned and roles reversed. Odysseus is the one constantly scared and escaping from the girls who now hold the upper hand on him.

"They make him nervous. They make him restless. They cause him pain. They make him want to be anywhere and anyone else ."

In conclusion, seeking retaliation signifies a harsh criticism of the oppression, violence and injustices committed against the 12 maids. This retaliation has been embodied in a number of acts: retelling the story through their voices, exposing wrongs and evil done unto them, speaking up and uncovering the truth, and finally demanding justice and punishing the perpetrators. Through their voice, the 12 maids have made a revision and a reframing of the whole narrative where the marginalized and the underrepresented try to correct and take revenge of whoever did injustices to them.

Conclusion:

In summary, Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* is a prime example of literary revisionism that demonstrates the transformative power of narrative and language in reinterpreting established stories. It parallels the concept that historical and mythological events are not fixed constructs but are subject to interpretation and reinterpretation through the art of storytelling. Through her revisionist narrative, Atwood constructs a new historical interpretation of Penelope's story, challenges traditional gender roles and gives voice to the marginalized characters. Throughout

the novel, revisionism has been utilized by the author to re-read, reframe and challenge the biases that underlie a text; it also tried to examine power dynamics and uncover hidden perspectives that have been marginalized. All over the story, revisionism has been implemented on three main levels:

1- Role of Narrative in Revisionism:

Atwood's revisionist narrative is not merely a retelling of a story; it's a cautious production of identity that reinterprets Penelope's character, giving her a voice and agency that she lacked in the original myth. Through the use of first-person narration, Atwood constructs a narrative that challenges traditional portrayals of women in ancient literature. This narrative choice is essential in revisionism as it allows for the reevaluation and re-contextualization of the character.

2- Shaping Historical Interpretation:

Similar to historians who build historical events through the art of narratives, Atwood induces an interpretation of the mythological past in "The Penelopiad." By stressing on the perspective of Penelope and the experiences of the twelve maids who were hanged in the original epic, Atwood forms a discourse that reprocesses the original myth for her own purpose. Counting on a completely different interpretation of the Penelopiad narrative, Atwood constructs a different story, a competing narrative of origins that would produce a different identity. This was effectively done via shedding light on the victimized and the voiceless characters. This new framing of storytelling involves linguistic and narrative choices that challenge and reinterpret the traditional myth.

3- Subjectivity and Perspective:

Atwood's revisionism also underlines her nuanced subjectivity embedded in historical and mythological interpretation. Like historians who bring their personal preferences to the reconstruction of the past, Atwood implants her feminist perspective in the reinterpretation of *The Odyssey*. Her choice of language, character development, and narrative structure influences how readers perceive the events and characters in the story. To sum up, in *The Penelopiad*, Margaret Atwood has applied the transformative power of literary revisionism through re-exploring old narratives. Through redressing Penelope a totally new character, Atwood has managed to defy gender roles, centralize the under-represented voices, and revisits the ideals of historical and mythological interpretation. Atwood's subjective and feminist treatment of the traditional myth has highlighted the agency of previously voiceless characters; it also left an impact on readers who would re-question the conventional interpretations. *The Penelopiad* has been an effective instrument that proves the ability of revisionism to examine biases and empower the voiceless and emphasize the fluidity of historical narratives via using techniques of language and storytelling.

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