

## Margaret Atwood: *The Penelopiad* – Rewriting in Postmodern Feminine Literature

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### **Abstract:**

This paper underlines the role of postmodern rewriting in feminist literature based on the novel *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood. *The Penelopiad* is a postmodern rewriting in which the feminist discourse criticizes the patriarchal view on the relationship between sexes in the desacralization of the Odysseus – Penelope couple. In her desire to disclose the flaws of patriarchy, Atwood shifts the centre of the narrative perspective from the masculine to the feminine and draws attention to the victims of this type of society. In this feminist rewriting, Atwood aims beyond the Homeric myth, at the contemporary society that, despite its theoretical principles about equality between sexes, is unable to provide a climate in which women are granted full rights. In this context, rewriting becomes not only a means of social criticism, but also a field for the battle against the centre, and the myth is the story that must be eliminated because it reflects a guilty, intolerant mentality that is incompatible with progress.

**Keywords:** postmodernism, rewriting, feminism, desacralisation, mythology

### **1. Introduction**

As an intertextual phenomenon with a wide range of significations, rewriting encompasses the idea of the need to make corrections: you rewrite when what has already been written is not correct, complete or requires amendments. From this point of view, rewriting is a necessity of postmodern literature, but claims its role as an original strategy, although it uses established texts belonging to the literary past. The novelty of rewriting lies in how such texts are approached. They undergo thorough revision made with critical, often malicious intentions. Just as postmodernism recycles the themes of the past, giving them new meanings, postmodern rewriting recycles the old, canonical texts in a textual transfiguration. In this manner, the old becomes the new, the past is brought face to face with the present, and the interest lies not only in textual derivation, but also in the national, ethnic or social aspects involved. Consequently, rewriting becomes a necessity, the voice of those marginalised in their attempt to right the wrongs in their parents' past, and materialises in an independent work with explicit major goals. With this in mind, Christian Moraru points out the role of

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rewriting in reasserting identity, whether national, sexual or ethnical: “[...] critical rewriting is a form of asserting, changing, and reasserting – renarrating – identity” (Moraru, 2001: 173). In other words, postmodernism uses rewriting not for lack of themes, but out of the necessity of outlining an identity that has been broken. The old text, the source text, occupies a privileged place within the literary canon and critical rewriting chooses it to compromise the principles lying at its creation, replacing them with new, non-discriminatory, politically correct ones. The resemantization of the source text by deconstruction and reconstruction, although radical, does not succeed – or intend – to knock the canonical text off its pedestal; on the contrary, its consequence is most often the consolidation of the source text. To put it differently, this text is brought to the present, discussed, analysed and given new meanings, while shaking the dust from its covers and placing it in the universe of contemporary readings.

In this manner, new types of discourse mark the shift from the “serious” literature to paraliterature, from the canonical text to the minor text included in the so-called *marginal genres*. Postmodernism promotes the closing of the borders between genres, between major and minor art and from this perspective impurity and uniformity become aesthetic principles. The official epic institutionalised a message to which the minor variants of literary postmodernism have assigned a new vision, a new meaning. All the former systems of reference have been discredited in an attempt to assimilate respectable literature to pulp literature in the name of pluralism, eclecticism and globalisation. For this reason, the dismissed genres become bearers of serious, deep messages through which modern authors suppress the cultural clichés that literature reflected faithfully. Based on these ideas, postmodern literature condemns the patterns dictated by the canonical writings and develops an aversion to the concept of canon itself, dissolving the centre-margin dichotomy.

In the context described above, the Homeric rewritings intend to put the official version through an intensive process of deheroization and demythologization. The purpose of this process is to link the mythical theme to the contemporary ideology and to bring literature closer to the prosaic reality of the individual, a reality without heroes that reassesses the role women play in society. In other words, the myth is no longer perceived as a means of recovering a single whole; “losing its prestige, the myth becomes nothing but an ordinary element of reality” (Bădărău, 2007: 32).

## **2. Rewriting as a Feminist Weapon**

The novel *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood, published in 2005, is a postmodern rewriting of *Odyssey* that should be analysed in close

connection to the social and literary phenomenon of feminism. By adopting the feminist perspective, Atwood established a type of rewriting relying on different coordinates than other rewritings of the Odyssean myth. This is justified by the clear authorial intention: to reorganise, supplement and dismiss the Homeric data about the Odyssean myth by replacing Homer's omniscient view with an unrelenting feminist multiple perspective of the patriarchy. Atwood questions the official, hegemonic version of the Odyssean myth that the canon attributes to Homer right from the Introduction to her novel, specifying that she also had other sources of inspiration, given that "Mythic material was originally oral" (Atwood, 2008: 2), and the versions multiplied. She expresses her lack of trust in the Homer's view of the facts directly – "The story as told in *The Odyssey* doesn't hold water: there are too many inconsistencies" (Atwood, 2008: 2) – and notices that the epic discourse does not contain references to women's inner universe and is not interested in their experiences, a fact that generates the following questions along which the narrative develops: "what led to the hanging of the maids, and what was Penelope really up to?" (Atwood, 2008: 2). The author's confessions include the novel in the feminist literature from the beginning, by discrediting the traditional version and focusing on women's status in the patriarchal world. In her rewriting, Atwood gives freedom of speech to the characters that Homer ignored and cast shadow on their actions, desires and traumas.

The association of the feminist movement and the principles of postmodernism is obvious and relevant within the novel, since "the parodic representational strategies have offered feminist artists an effective way of working within and yet challenging dominant patriarchal discourses" (Hutcheon, 2003: 163). Women's emancipation, the dissolution of the patriarchal world and the promotion of women's rights and gender equality are among the objectives of the challenge. Standing against the principles of the unique truth, the universal, the blind trust in the power of reason, postmodernism serves the purposes of the feminist movement that aims to impose alternative, previously marginalised viewpoints and to affirm the value of alterity (the other sex). The postmodern precepts such as supporting plurality, fragmentary and subjective aspects were embraced by the feminist movement in their fight against universal truths. Moreover, when the battle is fought on the field of literature, feminism borrows the entire postmodern artillery and uses it against the canon dominated by masculine discourses that pretend to be universal. Postmodern literature questions the canon and its hierarchies and recycles literary hegemonic discourses in the name of the particular. That is why literary feminism takes postmodern weapons such as parody and irony and attacks sexist discourses, patriarchal

visions, hegemonic texts and everything involving women's discrimination both as authors and as characters.

Margaret Atwood is that kind of feminist author who transfers her uncertainties and obsessions about the inconsistencies in the official version of the Odyssean myth to her central character, Penelope: "I have always been haunted by the hanged maids; and, in *The Penelopiad*, so is Penelope herself" (Atwood, 2008: 11). Alternating with the twelve maids, Penelope tells her own variant of the Odyssean myth subjectively and often contradicting and adding to the Homeric information. The maids become a collective, non-individualised character and their story and version of the truth is expressed in songs sung by to the entire world, as the oral epic poets once did. The narrators, both Penelope and her maids narrate retrospectively, from the dark realm of Hades, something that happened thousands of years before. They start with the relevant episodes of their childhood to the time Odysseus returns to Ithaca, a moment that marks their destiny. We know from Homer that the hero decides to kill them to punish them for their promiscuous, betraying relationships with the suitors and for backbiting against their masters. Atwood's rewriting promotes other sides of the story. According to one of them, the maids flirt with the suitors at the request of Penelope who wanted to discover their intentions and regain control of the wooing affair that for a woman of no authority was hard to manage.

### **3. Feminine Corporeality and the Superficiality of a Myth**

Refocalisation lays the foundations of critical, feminist rewriting in which the myth is rebuilt from its foundations. The patriarchal society of the ancient world is dominated by superficiality and injustice especially as regards the relationship between sexes. The male controls the female, both in matters of paternity and conjugality. Penelope's destiny is decisively influenced by her father before her husband, since Icarius tried to take her life to make a sacrifice for Neptune. Ever since her childhood, she faces the effects of male violence, being extremely vulnerable. A Naiad's daughter, she knows she is worth nothing and the only thing she learnt from her mother was to be patient and evasive, like water, an element she herself was made of: "Behave like water [...]. Don't try to oppose them. When they try to grasp you, slip through their fingers. Flow around them" (Atwood, 2008: 26). This is exactly what Penelope does when she pretends to be weaving the shroud to avoid her suitors. This is precisely what women do in a society where dodging is the only chance they have, their true power and capacity to cope with the male-dominated situations. The issue of the suitors is resolved only through the intervention of Odysseus who, due to the characteristic violence of ancient patriarchal world, kills the obstacles Penelope avoided.

Helen, famous for her beauty, is part of the same family as Penelope. The latter's aversion to her is partly justified in the patriarchal society that places physical beauty on a pedestal to the detriment of true values like intelligence. Penelope is often discriminated in the novel because "although I was not deformed or ugly, I was nothing special to look at (Atwood, 2008: 6). How men look at women is essential and how their eyes reflect their image defines their values in the society. Many men, Odysseus included, fought for Helen's hand. In the end, Odysseus had to settle for Penelope, who "was at best only second prize" (Atwood, 2008: 9). The superficiality of the values in men's eyes forces women to comply with this unjust code, generating a ridiculous competition that makes Penelope consider herself inferior and always envy "Helen the lovely, Helen the septic bitch, root cause of all my misfortunes" (Atwood, 2008: 31).

Helen is not the only victim of the male-dominated society that she tolerates with her lascivious attitude. Penelope also conveys her frustration, offending other women whom she believes physically inferior: "who would want to seduce Anticleia? It would be like seducing a prow" (Atwood, 2008: 12). Her competition with Helen turns into an obsession. When Telemachus returns from Menelaus's court, what interests Penelope is not the news about Odysseus, but her rival's external appearance. Atwood's satire on the myth of beauty is felt in the grotesque conversation the two cousins have about the many men have died for them, whose number is an indicative of "the most beautiful".

The patriarchal mentality remains discriminatory even in Hades. In an excess of sincerity, Antinous confesses that the real reason for courting Penelope was not her beauty, but Odysseus's wealth: "You weren't exactly a Helen, but we could have dealt with that" (Atwood, 2008: 24). Challenged by Penelope's questions about their dangerous courting, Antinous's blatant sexism discloses the mechanisms of patriarchal thinking in a specific of the society he belongs to: "You could probably have still squeezed out one or two little brats" (Atwood, 2008: 24). A new step on the scale of values, the mother-woman, is thus outlined. Seen from this angle – no less discriminatory – Penelope is better than Helen because she gave birth to Telemachus. Odysseus notices this and expresses it as a consolation: "Helen hasn't borne a son yet," he said, which ought to have made me glad" (Atwood, 2008: 16). Nevertheless, Penelope fails her mission as a mother, as she can't show her love to Telemachus because of the overprotective nurse Euryclea, who usurps her status as a mother. Euryclea plants in Penelope's mind the clichéd idea that the ideal wife is supposed to take care of her husband. This is the definition of the woman in the patriarchal society. Her only role is to attend to her husband's needs and perpetuate him.

Yet Penelope seems to be neither like Aphrodite nor like Demeter; instead, she asserts a complex personality that does not fit the intolerant traditional constraints of the myth.

It is clearly understood that Atwood does not refer strictly to the patriarchal society of Greek antiquity. The feminist discourse identifies a number of correspondences between the ancient society and the one she lives in and deals with them in an ironical key. Both societies lack profundity in their hierarchy of human values. Helen often uses the souls' opportunity to reincarnate and keeps up with what the myth of beauty means in the (post)modern era, sensing its artificial side when she speaks about "girdles, and bikinis, and aerobic exercises, and body piercings, and liposuction" (Atwood, 2008: 42). The writer's feminine perspective highlights the women's obsession with bodily beauty, once again fuelled by what men may think when they look at them. Consequently, women are interested in their physical appearance only to be appreciated by men: "Social order operated like a market of symbolic goods dominated by the male vision. For a woman, TO BE means TO BE SEEN by a man's eye" (Miroiu, 2002: 262). By rewriting the Odyssean myth, Atwood criticises the artificial side of the society to which she belongs, underlining the idea that woman's role has remained marginal, despite any progress made in various other fields. Penelope's rhetorical question formulated in the context of reincarnation possibilities is relevant in this regard: "My past life was fraught with many difficulties, but who's to say the next one wouldn't be worse?" (Atwood, 2008: 43), and her conclusion about the modern world mirrors the writer's feminist conception: "As for human nature, it's as tawdry as ever" (Atwood, 2008: 43).

#### **4. Penelope Overturn Her Myth**

Atwood's critical rewriting focuses mainly on the idea of deconstructing myths. The novelty is her attitude toward the role of the traditional myths in contemporary society. If so far the dissolution of the myths was a consequence of the postmodern authors' revolt against the remains of the canonical literature that promoted the universal truth, in Atwood's feminist novel the myth is perceived as a real danger because it is the foundation of a retrograde mentality. The myth is a reflection of society's vision on the world. The feminist movement understands that the marginalisation of women is perpetuated in literature through mythology; therefore, it is essential to reconfigure it through irony and parody. Speaking about how Atwood relates to the myth in her work, the German critic Peter Müller holds that "Traditional myths are destructive for Atwood because they annihilate human freedom and the possibility of creating something new" (Nischik, 2000: 247). In other words, holding on to the values and principles developed by mythology is

similar to regress and the evolution of mentality is stopped or in any case hindered. The same critic reveals how the author perceives the influence of myths and how she thinks one could break the chains of mythology: “Atwood criticizes the strong influence they [myths] have had upon people’s perceptions of reality, and adds new perspectives and new possibilities by reversing roles, changing solutions etc.” (Nischik, 2000: 247). Under the circumstances, the only choice is to create parodic representations of the mythological characters and a counter-discourse that exposes the shortcomings of the mythological themes – with irony. This is the discourse of *The Penelopiad*, in which the targets of the irony are the myths. Atwood debunks not only the myth of beauty, but also that of Penelope’s faithfulness, Odysseus and their androgynous relationship that Homer outlined in his *Odyssey*. Atwood analyses the mythological substance and after she removes the legendary aura, she discovers the faulty relationship between the man and the woman, i.e. the subjugation women by men. As far as the men in her life are concerned – her father, her son, her suitors – Penelope feels like the object of a transaction, valuable only financially. When she was very young, she was handed over to Odysseus “like a package of meat” (Atwood, 2008: 10) by her father Icarius, who saw in this a clever strategic manoeuvre. For the 15-year-old girl, marriage meant living with a stranger in a foreign country and sexual submission to a man who, as the maids warn her, has become the master of her body: “I would be torn apart as the earth is by the plough” (Atwood, 2008: 11). After the wedding, that “auction for a horse” (Atwood, 2008: 11), came motherhood. Then Odysseus left to fight in the Trojan War, but not before asserting his status as her owner, warning her of the consequences of adultery: “[...] he would have to chop me into little pieces with his sword or hang me from the roof beam” (Atwood, 2008: 18). Faithfulness is imposed on her under the death penalty. According to the maids, she would have yielded to temptation anyway, and the rumours about the queen’s promiscuous affairs have become famous over the centuries. Whatever the truth, Penelope’s faithfulness in the name of her love for Odysseus is nothing but a myth. She herself confesses that she wants her husband back only because she is bored: “When would he come back and relieve my boredom? (Atwood, 2008: 20). And the only reason for her sexual abstinence is that she fears her husband and the society, so she is not indifferent to the presence of the suitors. On the contrary, she is deeply roused: “I occasionally daydreamed about which one I would rather go to bed with, if it came to that” (Atwood, 2008: 25). But the suitors are not attracted to this “old cow”, all they want is Odysseus’s social position and the riches of his kingdom, so Penelope is just the tool they needed to obtain them. The

mother-son relationship is not based on unconditioned affection either. Telemachus associates his mother with his family's wealth and considers it her fault that the suitors spend the royal treasure. He accuses her of passivity and lack of affection when Odysseus reveals his true identity. Resigned, Penelope realises that she acts submissively to both men: "the two of them siding against me, grown men together, two roosters in charge of the henhouse (Atwood, 2008: 39).

Men's complete disregard of women in the phallogocentric society turns the latter into silent, aesthetic objects: "mute bodies to be gazed at, fantasized about, probed, used and abused, fabricated as commodities, exploited as saleable goods or expendable national resources" (Howells, 1996: 56). Atwood outlines women's situation as minor entities in a men's world in a frustrated Penelope who is used to hiding her feelings and opinions from her husband: I kept my mouth shut; or, if I opened it, I sang his praises. I didn't contradict, I didn't ask awkward questions, I didn't dig deep" (Atwood, 2008: 3). The silent woman is a more general theme of feminist literature that Atwood approaches by laying out the female characters' complex emotions. Reghina Dascăl points out that in ancient societies silence was a woman's true virtue. Sophocles' words in the tragedy *Ajax* – which the critic uses as an argument – is a good example in this regard: "Only silence makes women truly charming" (Dascăl, 2001: 167). Atwood demonstrates that women's shyness is nothing but the repression of their feelings for the sake of the social codes. Penelope contradicts the myth of her modesty when she says that she only covered her face with a veil to hide her laughing at her father who was desperate when she left with Odysseus to Ithaca. Nevertheless, her actions bear the stigma of androcentrism, since she manages the affairs of the kingdom in her husband's absence only to see that on his return he is pleased with his wife and tells her: "You're worth a thousand Helens" (Atwood, 2008: 21). Consequently, her personal success matters only as long as they please her husband.

Atwood thinks myths are "stifling chains and dead stories" (Nischik, 2000: 247) and the critical rewriting of the Odyssean myth reveals precisely the idea of freeing the woman from the mentality-related constraints to which she was subjected for centuries on end. Much of the remaining refractory thinking – demonstrates the author – is still visible in modern world. Not just Penelope, but also the twelve maids who have to cope with so much gender and social status discrimination, representing the periphery from all points of view are the victims of patriarchy. The writer's decision to divide the narrative perspective between Penelope and the chorus of the maids marks the shift from the centre to the periphery and the chance to express the truth of a social category that is completely ignored by the official discourse. The nameless, defenceless maids are the ones whom Penelope sends to

worm the secrets out of the suitors and whom Odysseus hangs when he returns, unaware that the “betrayal” was part of Penelope’s plan. They are the victims of their masters, the “dirty girls” of the house, Telemachus’s “toys and pets”, Penelope’s “sources of information”, the sex toys of the suitors who “helped themselves to the maids in the same way they helped themselves to the sheep and pigs and goats and cows” (Atwood, 2008: 27–28). They didn’t even control their own bodies: “If our owners or the sons of our owners or a visiting nobleman or the sons of a visiting nobleman wanted to sleep with us, we could not refuse” (Atwood, 2008: 5) Aware of the maids’ status, Penelope cannot show solidarity with the ones she calls “sisters” and keeps using them even after she has learnt that the suitors raped them, telling them that their destiny is to please their master and “and he’ll be very pleased with you when he comes home” (Atwood, 2008: 28). Not only that they do not have a “voice” in Homer’s epic, but their killing is considered an act of justice done by the hero Odysseus, the man who, once he has returned home, puts everything back in order.

The author believes that from the perspective of the mythological patriarchy, women have “the quality of «thinghood»” (Nischik, 2000: 247), and her discourse illustrates this feature in characters like Penelope, Helen or the twelve maids. The gender differences that Atwood reveals in her novel can be interpreted based on Simone de Beauvoir’s opinions about the woman’s discriminated status: “she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (Beauvoir, 1998: 3). Odysseus remains in control even when he is not present, while Penelope is just an extension of the hero. The myth of faithful Penelope would not have existed if it had not been related to Odysseus, and Homer respects the hero’s status and turns it into the subject of his epic. Atwood’s novel is no longer about Odysseus, but, as the title anticipates, Penelope, a character who manages to assert herself by recounting her own experience subjectively. Mihaela Miroiu’s assertion is relevant in this regard: “in order to become a subject, women must start from their own experiences as centres of knowledge” (Miroiu, 2002: 140).

To put it differently, Penelope becomes the *centre of knowledge* by recounting her own experiences after a long time, when she understands the facts better, as she confesses in the beginning of the novel: “Now that I’m dead I know everything” (Atwood, 2008: 2).

### **5. The Intentions of the Parodic Discourse**

The authenticity of Penelope and the maids’ version is enhanced by the oral nature of the feminist/postmodern discourse built as a dialogue with the reader to whom the narrators speak directly and whom they

invite to reflect upon the facts. The language is typical of postmodern literature, shifting the substance of the discourse toward the materiality of everyday life and making the transition from the classical style of the epic obvious.

Penelope speaks to the women readers on this discursive tone and explains them that her confessions contradict the official version of the myth, compromising its exemplary nature: Don't follow my example, I want to scream in your ears – yes, yours! (Atwood, 2008: 3) “Now that all the others have run out of air (Atwood, 2008: 3), Penelope decides to “spin a thread of my own” (Atwood, 2008: 3). She and her maids undo Homer's story and recount it again from a woman's point of view. Moreover, they contradict and question the former story: Penelope knows that the beggar who came to their court is Odysseus, that he has been unfaithful to her many times and that Euryclea has seen his scar while he bathed. Even the famous interpretation of the dream with the geese is discredited, because they do not symbolize the suitors about to be killed by the eagle, but the maids who are unjustly punished by Odysseus. “Now you've heard the plain truth”, Penelope warns us, but Atwood questions even the authenticity of her version when the chorus accuses her of deceptiveness and complicity to murder: to remain a famous “model wife” (Atwood, 2008: 35), fearing the possible confessions of “the cheeky young wigglers” (Atwood, 2008: 43), Penelope did not hurry to defend them, but pretended to be fast asleep. The various versions of the truth suggest that there is no absolute truth, only subjective, fragmentary perceptions of reality. This is one of the postmodernist principles that Atwood promotes to discredit the dated, obstructive canonical text. The text is no longer holds an exclusive truth, but a set of subjective truths that the readers are free to judge/interpret as they please.

The narrators' voice blend in a way that no version can be considered the actual truth, but they have one thing in common: Odysseus has been unfaithful and is no longer a hero. For Penelope, Odysseus is obviously “tricky and a liar” who has told her “the nobler versions, with the monsters and the goddesses, rather than the more sordid ones with the innkeepers and whores” (Atwood, 2008: 39). Even some singers who come to the court in Ithaca bring news about Odysseus and his lovers, not about Sirens, the cave full of bats or the Land of the Dead. The chorus sings sarcastically about the adventurer who “bedded the goddess so fine” (Atwood, 2008: 33 – a reference to Circe), left Calypso after “seven long years there of kissing and woo” (Atwood, 2008: 23) and “Then he told his adventures and laid to his store/A hundred disasters and sufferings galore” (Atwood, 2008: 33). Homer does not hide the erotic side of Odysseus's adventures, but gives them the mythical aura of a hero subjected to the whimsical, vengeful

gods who make him walk a tortuous path. Atwood casts a shadow on his heroism in these versions that call him a hypocrite, tricky adulterer and liar.

The climax of the parodic vision is the staging of the trial of Odysseus, an opportunity for the writer to reassert the idea of patriarchy in modern society and its obtuse mentality. The hero is absolved of the crime of killing the suitors because, according to the attorney for the defence, “our generally esteemed client Odysseus was merely acting in self-defence (Atwood, 2008: 169–40). As for the hanging of the maids, the Judge denies the accusations in the name of the famous Odyssean myth that he considers superior to the murder of the twelve women: “It would be unfortunate if this regrettable but minor incident were allowed to stand as a blot on an otherwise exceedingly distinguished career” (Atwood, 2008: 42). In the patriarchal vision, the maids were guilty because they “were raped without permission” – Odysseus’s permission, obviously –, as their master also owned their bodies. Naturally, the “minor incident” is the result of the Judge’s discriminating perception of gender differences. Therefore, the maids are forced to invoke the Angry Ones – it is not a coincidence that they are female goddess –, since they are the only ones who can do justice and haunt Odysseus for his *hybris*. Odysseus will be haunted in “songs and in plays, in tomes and in theses, in marginal notes and in appendices!” (Atwood, 2008: 42), which suggests that the Odyssean myth will be rewritten over time. Besides its ludic, even ridiculous aspect, the mixture of contemporary law-specific elements with mythological ones is meant to connect the ancient with the modern based on the myth, once again demonstrating the negative consequences that mythological thinking perpetuates within the society.

## 6. Conclusions

Atwood abandons the idea of “happy endings” (Atwood, 2008: 3), as Penelope does when she decides to spin her own yarn. Life is too complex and complicated for literature to make up stories based on myths that are known to impose the universal truth, happy endings and final solutions to the plots. The critical rewriting of the Odyssean myth from the feminist perspective means, as we have already shown, debunking the myths and the patriarchal mentalities at their foundations, and impose a subjective narrative bearing the individual truth: “The rewritings of the model text given to «public use» establish a different kind of legitimacy by discrediting the official, deceiving discourse that serves the policy of the state conservation system and by asserting the individual, subjective, fragmentary truth” (Bodiştean, 2015: 101–115). *The Penelopiad* reconfigures the woman’s status in the couple and the relationship with the patriarchal society by reinterpreting the myth of the

Odyssean couple and conjugal happiness. In this novel, the deconstruction of the myth under the influence of feminist thinking is meant to draw attention to the superficiality of the contemporary society that promotes the retrograde thinking of the Homeric patriarchy. For Atwood, myth is a danger and demystification is the only way to eliminate its influence on mentality.

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