40. The Rest is 'not' Silence: Rereading Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* as a Counterwriting Practice[1]

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Abstract

The ideological construction of the Western literary canon sparked heated arguments, particularly after the 1980s, in the context of 'opening up the canon' issue. Since then, contemporary women writers have questioned the monolithic perspective of the literary tradition which has systematically ignored the experiences of women, minorities, and those from lower classes. As a reactionary yet strategic move, contemporary women writers have produced 'counterwritings' through rewriting canonical texts in order to undermine the patriarchal conventions of the literary pantheon and transform it into a polyphonic narrative entity through which the voices of the silenced, exploited and marginalized are heard. In *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning* (2001), Christian Moraru defines 'counterwriting' as a revisionary and critical rewriting practice that "work[s] on – and, again, obsessively work[s] through — other bodies of writings" because mythic stories "explain us," they are "founding-texts" (2001, p. 8). This article explores Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's (1939-   ) novella *The Penelopiad* (2005) as a contemporary revisionary myth-making practice in the light of Christian Moraru's 'counterwriting' concept. The article will provide a theoretical background to discuss 'counterwritings'. It then deals with Atwood's motivation for producing a 'counterwriting', as well as how she relies on the source text while being unconstrained by its restrictions using postmodern narrative strategies. The article also sheds light on how a founding myth of the Western literary tradition has been used as a reference point in a counterwriting to question the authority of its source text, Homer's *The Odyssey*.

Keywords: *The Penelopiad*, counterwriting, rewriting, Margaret Atwood, Christian Moraru

Geriye Kalan Sessizlik 'değil' : Margaret Atwood'un *Penelope* adlı eserini bir Karşı-Yazın Pratiği Olarak Yeniden Okumak

Öz

Batı Edebiyatı Kanonu'nun ideolojik temeller üzerine inşa edilmesi, özellikle 1980'li yıllardan sonra "kanonun açılması" konusu bağlamında hararetli tartışmalara yol açmıştır. O zamandan beri, çağdaş kadın yazarlar kadınların, azınlıkların ve görece daha düşük sosyal sınıflara mensup kişilerin deneyimlerinin sistematik olarak görmezden gelindiği edebi geleneğin tek sesli bakış açısını sorgulamışlardır. Tepkisel ve aynı zamanda stratejik bir hamle olarak, edebiyat panteonunun ataerkil geleneklerini temelinden sarsmak ve edebi geleneği susturulan, sömürülen ve ötekileştirilen

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karakterlerinin seslerinin duyulduğu çok yönlü bir anlatıya dönüştürmek amacıyla kanonik metinleri yeniden yazarak 'karşı-yazınlar' üretmişlerdir. Christian Moraru *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning* (2001) [Yeniden Yazım: Klonlama Çağında Postmodern Anlatı ve Kültürel Eleştiri] adlı çalışmasında 'karşı-yazını' "diğer yazınlar üzerinde, sürekli, saplantılı bir biçimde çalışan" yeniden yorumlayıcı ve eleştirel bir yeniden yazım pratiği olarak tanımlar, çünkü mitsel hikâyeler "bizi tanımlar", onlar bizim "bağlayıcı metinlerimizdir" (2001, s. 8). Bu makale Kanadalı yazar Margaret Atwood'un (1939-   ) *The Penelopiad* (2005) adlı kısa romanını Christian Moraru'nun 'karşı-yazın' kavramı bağlamında çağdaş bir gözden geçirme pratiği olarak ele almaktadır. Makale, 'karşı-yazın' kavramını tartışmak üzere bir teorik arka plan sunacaktır. Ardından, Atwood'un 'karşı-yazın' üretme nedenlerinin yanı sıra, yazarın postmodern anlatı stratejileri kullanarak kaynak metne nasıl dayandığı ancak kaynak metnin sınırlılıklarından nasıl bağlı kalmadığı tartışılacaktır. Ayrıca, bu makale Batı edebi geleneğinin kurucu metni olarak sayılan Homer'in *Odyssey* destanının edebi otoritesini sorgulamanın karşı-yazında nasıl bir referans noktası olarak kullanıldığına ışık tutmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: *The Penelopiad*, karşı-yazın, yeniden yazım, Margaret Atwood, Christian Moraru

I.Introduction

The concept of 'the literary canon' poses some problems in terms of its reception since the formation of the literary tradition, or to say 'canonization' process to put it forwardly, is ideological. As Peter Widdowson (1999) contends in his study *Literature*, the criteria of the canonization process are "imprecise, unexplained, tacitly assumed and thoroughly naturalised" (p.13) since the literary canon is "constructed on behalf of some very powerful and insistent ideological imperatives and vested interests" (p. 13-14). The widely accepted definition of the word 'canon' suggested by *The Literary Encyclopaedia* justifies the ideological structure of the tradition, explaining the 'canon' as follows:

> [o]riginally applied to books of the Bible deemed to be both genuine and authoritative, 'canon' was later extended to secular works. Canonical status was afforded to a number of books from the classical to the modern period written by a number of authors such as Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, Austen and Dickens. These writers are venerated throughout literary history as writers of the classics; not only are they worthy of serious academic attention, they have also become 'celebrated names' holding some measure of universal acclaim. (Stevens, 2007)

As this definition implies, canonized texts are sealed with the academic notion of 'greatness' and they function as 'reference points' in a privileged tradition which is universally approved and agreed upon. Speaking of 'affording canonical status' reveals the authoritative and hierarchical formation of the literary canon casting some writers as 'masters' of literature and excluding 'others' who do not meet the 'universal criteria'. However, it is apparent that this comprehensive definition justifies the literary canon that is deaf to gender issues since it depicts a view of literature mostly 'fathered' with Dante, Milton, Shakespeare and Dickens, and the 'only' woman writer who is included in the pantheon of the narrative tradition is Jane Austen. In this case, there lies a crucial problem beneath the surface: 'the legitimacy of the tradition'.

The absence of female voices in literature generated lively debates especially during the 1980s about 'opening up the canon' issue which "sat squarely at the centre of one of the most heated intellectual controversies in the twentieth century" (Villa, 2012, p. 5). The decade was marked by contemporary women writers' questioning the legitimacy of the literary tradition and raising their voices to discuss the

'transcendent value' of the literary canon. Calling for the need of diversity in literature and disturbing the comfort zone of patriarchal Western discourse, contemporary women writers have rewritten the canonical classics in order to bring 'their' perspectives into literature, thus they created an alternative space to construct a counter discourse, which is embodied in 'counterwritings' as Christian Moraru defines them. The aim of this article is to explore Margaret Atwood's novella *The Penelopiad* (2005), the retelling of the myth of Penelope and Odysseus with a contemporary critical twist, as one of the examples of counterwriting practices. The article deals with the motives of Atwood to produce a 'counterwriting', her revisionary myth-making process and how the writer depends on the source text but at the same time how she is not constrained by the limitations of it. The article also sheds light on how a founding myth of the Western literary tradition has been used as a reference point in a counterwriting to question the authority of its source text, Homer's *The Odyssey*.

Before situating the bulk of my argument as *The Penelopiad* as a counterwriting practice, reflecting on the theoretical basis of rewriting the literary canon using a counter discourse will provide a framework for a better understanding of the core of the article.

II. Rewriting as a Counterwriting Practice: A brief theoretical background

In *The Illusion of the End* (1994), Jean Baudrillard points out the repetitive characteristic of literature and narrates that the stories we tell and write are "re-citare", "quotation" (p.2) of precedent stories. When rewriting is analysed in the framework of intertextual relations, then, each precedent narrative functions as a model to future texts. Terry Eagleton (1996) comments on rewriting as being an indispensable aspect of producing a literary work because in the critic's view "every word, phrase, or segment is a reworking of other writings which precede or surround the individual work" (p. 119). In this respect, rewriting dates back to antiquity as Christian Moraru (2001) defines rewriting as "the motor of literary history in the West: from the Homeric epic poems as retellings – to the early modern invention of the genre in Cervantes's parody of chivalresque romance to Laurence Sterne's own exploitation of *Don Quixote* in *Tristram Shandy*, to Joyce, modernism and postmodernism" (p.7). By the same token, Nancy Walker (1995) points out the repetitive characteristic of literature and states that the narrative tradition owes its continuity to "the human impulse to work changes on the inherited stories of a cultural tradition – to tell the story from a perspective or with narrative elements that make it more congenial to one's circumstances or goals" (p. 2). To this end, the act of rewriting can be defined as the driving force behind literature. As these remarks explicitly argue, the interrelatedness of intertextuality and rewriting is generic to literature.

It is also important to highlight that when rewriting is under discussion, there are "competing terms" (p. 160) as Liedeke Plate (2011) points out because in addition to textual barrowings and lendings, there have been cultural and ideological issues regarding the textual transformations: Rewriting is often used interchangeably with Adrienne's Rich's 're-vision', Gerard Genette's 'hypertextuality', André Lefevere's 'refraction' or 'diffraction', or to speak of the term more broadly, rewriting might be put forward as the process or the product of literary 'recycling', 'retelling' or 'adaptation' (p.160). However, this article limits its scope with rewriting as a strategy to embody a counter discourse in women's rewriting practices embodied in Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005). Therefore, putting aside the terminological squabbles aside and focusing on the "illuminating partnership of gender and rewriting" (Moraru, 2001, p. xv) will enhance the argument in this article.

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As it has been stated in the introduction of this paper briefly, gaining its momentum especially after 1970s and 1980s, the systematic neglect of women writers in the literary tradition led to a disobedient critical stance against such patriarchal formation of the literary canon. Molly Hite (1989) argues that the neglect of women writers in the literary canon is "so obvious that it rarely provokes comment" (p. 11) because the canonical list of 'great' English novelists count very few women writers such as "Jane Austen, one or two Brontes and George Eliot in the nineteenth century", and Virginia Woolf stands as the only woman writer who occupies a place "in the company of Joyce, Conrad, Lawrence, Forster, Ford, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner" (p. 12) in the first half of the twentieth century. Due to this respect, contemporary women writers have argued that from the very beginning, the literary canon has been on monolithic patriarchal grounds which has well served as a protected shield to silence, thus exclude, the experiences of women, minorities and lower social classes. Admittedly, this challenge is closely interrelated with the rise of the Postmodernism movement and the reception of critical theories such as Feminism, Postcolonialism, Marxism, Cultural Studies, New Historicism, Ecocriticism and Ecofeminism.

When the ties of rewriting to postmodernism are considered, feminism occupies a major strain in terms of identifying rewriting practises as a postmodern literary strategy. In Ioana-Gianina Haneş's (2018) opinion, the principals of postmodernism and feminism are interrelated because both movements share common grounds as they suggest that "the unjust, biased past dominated by patriarchal societies must be revised, reconstrued, and eventually rewritten" (p. 54).[3] Therefore, as Molly Hite (1989) narrates, contemporary women writers such as Jean Rhys, Doris Lessing, Alice Walker and Margaret Atwood "share the decentring and disseminating strategies of postmodern narratives" and turn to "conventionally marginal characters and themes" which "*re*-center[s] the value structure of the narrative" in order to rewrite the biased, patriarchal past (2). It is important to note at this point that contemporary women writers challenging the ideological structure of the canon do not deny the existence of a literary tradition, rather their route is to work dually: writing within and against the tradition to undermine the patriarchal assumptions embedded in the cradle of it. As Widdowson (1999) argues, without the existence of a canonical texts,

> there would be no perceptible coordinates of a literary culture and it is salutary to remember how often contemporary writers —especially those from national, social and sexual groups whose forebears were, *de facto,* excluded from the canon—still 'write back' to canonic texts, both as a point of reference and to revise and 're-vision' those texts themselves. (p. 25)

Contemporary women writers including Margaret Atwood are well aware of the fact that through rewriting the literary texts with a critical and revisionist eye, they build up a link to the "narrative tradition that works to inscribe [the female subject] within its ideological codes"; therefore, their narrative strategy is to "read other-wise" (Hite, 1989, p. 3). 'Reading other-wise' is ideological and political, thus well serves to the transformative function of rewriting which enables to "subvert literary masters, their styles and their ideologies" (Moraru, 2001, p. 9). Such a subversive challenge aims to lay bare the gaps, erasures and silences of marginalized characters in the literary canon through creating counterwritings which aim to problematize and transform the canonical classics.

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[3]   Yet, as Linda Hutcheon argues in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (2002), although feminism and postmodernism are very much interrelated in terms of their emphasis on plurality and relativism, feminism is 'politics' whereas postmodernism cannot be simply identified as 'political' (p. 163). Hutcheon remarks that postmodernism is "politically ambivalent, doubly encoded as both complicity and critique, so that can be (and has been) recuperated by both the left and the right" (163). Feminism, on the other hand, calls for social change by challenging patriarchal society to alter its ideological thrusts, thus transform it.

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Christian Moraru (2001) defines 'counterwritings' as the rewritings which "work on – and, again, obsessively work through – other bodies of writings […] narrativized and decisively structured core ideas, identities, and existential rites" (p. 8). In other words, counterwritings destabilize the textual authority of metanarratives. To quote Moraru once more, the metanarratives are "our mythic stories", they " 'explain' us – they represent our *legends*, literally the founding texts that, etymologically, we are to *read*. They literally *tell* us" (p. 8) (emphasis Moraru's). To this end, counterwritings which are transformative and critical by nature revisiting the literary tradition peek into the realm of literature through a new window and destabilize it, thus undermine the ideological assumptions that have been justified throughout centuries. Thus, re-telling (re-writing) these "heavily heavily-ideology-laden tales" (p. xiii) is "a serious business" (p. 8). Counterwritings are not "footnotes to available stories" (p. 8) in the way 'underwritings' are, which Moraru defines as the narratives lack of a critical stance to their host texts. Underwritings do not "displace" the source texts as 'counterwritings' do but they do "replace" them (p. 9). Due to this respect, when let alone as the mere duplication of the existing discourse, underwritings are exhausted narratives, or in Moraru's words, they are "shallow recyclings" (p. 9), or in other words, they celebrate the source narrative as its textual model and finds comfort in having intertextual connection with the source text.

Counterwritings, then, are more than modelling, they can be explained as "anti-readings which upset the limits of patriarchal tradition"[4] (Direnç, 2014, p. 150) since they polemically raise suspicion of the literary past as Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* does. I contend that *The Penelopiad* is a counterwriting practice as the title of this article suggests and I tend to utilize the word 'practice' instead of 'narrative' because undoubtedly as all revisionist and critical contemporary women's rewritings aim, Atwood functionally moves back and forward in the literary mythic past and such a working within and against the literary canon with a critical eye involves 'movement' as any practice suggests. The practice aims to create a rupture and in a way, it is a break away with the traditional Western discourse.

III. *The Penelopiad* as an example of Counterwriting Practices

In his book *A Map of Misreading* (1975), Harold Bloom, the ardent critic of the Western canon, speaks of Homer as follows: "Everyone who now reads and writes in the West, of whatever racial background, sex or ideological camp is still a son or daughter of Homer" (p. 33). Shining light on his ideas of literary influence, Bloom, probably with a romantic impulse, establishes a genealogical line back to the writer of the Greek epic *The Odyssey* and through calling the future generations of writers as sons and daughters, he utilizes the metaphor of a family. However, as often-quoted first sentence of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1878) says "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way", daughters of this literary 'familial bond' are simply 'unhappy in their own way' with what their ancestor, Homer, has left behind: a family prioritizing the sons and neglecting the daughters. Therefore, following the footsteps of Virginia Woolf, they have challenged the fathered tradition and have created 'a room of their own' through raising their voices and bringing their 'own perspectives' to this both familial and familiar story. Margaret Atwood's counterwriting *The Penelopiad* [5](2005), the retelling of the myth of Penelope and Odysseus, strikes the right cord by taking on Homer's epic as its source text to problematize the

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[4]   The translation from Turkish into English was made by the author of this article.

[5]   *The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus* is one of the three books of the series *The Myths*, published by Canongate Press Edinburgh in 2006 along with Karen Armstrong's *A Short History of the Myth* and Jeanette Winterson's *Weight*. The Canongate Press intend to publish a hundred books in the series which retell the Western myths with a revisionary perspective by 2038. The other books which have been published in the series so far are as follows: Alexander McCall Smith's *Dream Angus* (2007), Ali Smith's *Girl meets boy* (2008), David Grossman's *Lion's Honey* (2009), Philip Pullman's *The Good Man Jesus and the Christ* (2011) and A.S. Byatt's *Ragnarok* (2013).

established familiar assumptions of the narrative tradition and questions the role of Homer as the literary father.

Homer's *The Odyssey* is a highly canonical epic, and Odysseus is an archetypal figure capturing the essence of the Western androcentric culture. A very prominent example in literature is Northrop Frye's theory of archetypal criticism that bounds itself to Homer's hero describing the quest for journey despite the confrontations as the journey of humankind: 'The Odyssey'. However the arrows of such archetypal criticism miss the target as the journey which Frye speaks of here is literally man-made because the misogynistic attitude embedded in the epic manifests itself throughout the narrative. The depiction of Penelope as the flawless and faithful wife of Odysseus who has been on a homebound journey to Ithaca after the Trojan War and the twelve maids who have never been offered a chance to speak but hanged at make *The Odyssey* a masculine, man-made text silencing the female voice. To this end, *The Odyssey* is a text rich in silences, gaps and erasures. Establishing a counter discourse challenging the representation of women by Homer, in *The Penelopiad*, Atwood goes after these silences and erasures, thus moves beyond the limitations of the source text and asks: "what led to the hanging of the maids, and what was Penelope really up to?" (2005, p. xxi). The writer also explicitly lays bare her motives to rewrite the epic in the introduction of the novella as she has "always been haunted by the hanged maids; and in *The Penelopiad*, so is Penelope herself" (p. xxi). Therefore, replacing Odysseus's version with that of Penelope's, Atwood spins a thread of female perspective on an established myth through demythologizing it, thus she employs a revisionist/critical discourse in a similar vein counterwritings aim.

This revisionary struggle, I define it 'a struggle' because rewriting *The Odyssey* is quite "a sabotage" (2011, p. 4) , to borrow the word from Moraru who uses it as a metaphor for counterwritings, to a well-received myth in the Western culture; *The Penelopiad* is a revisionary myth-making project which creates a self-reflexive alternative text. In women's critical rewriting practices, the concept 're-vision' is of great importance as the American poet and critic Adrienne Rich whom Moraru identifies as "a most original theorist of rewriting" (2001, p. 26) contends in her 1972 article "When We Dead Are 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" (p. 18). In this respect, Atwood's *The Penelopiad* opens up a new direction in the narrative tradition and enables us to see the possibilities of revisionist mythmaking. In her article "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking", Alicia Ostriker (1982) makes fair parallels with Rich's definition of 're-vision' and defines 'revisionary mythmaking' as 'instructions of survival':

> Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible. [...] old stories are changed, changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience, so that they can no longer stand as foundations of male fantasy. [...] they are retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered; in some cases they are instructions of survival. (p.72-73)

In a similar fashion to Rich and Ostriker, Margaret Atwood (2004) writes of her determinacy to refashion the myths from different angles:

> 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. (p. 292)

To open a parentheses here, *The Penelopiad* is not Atwood's first work flirting with revisionary myth-making.[6] Before delving into the myth of Penelope and Odysseus, in 1974, Atwood published *Circe/Mud Poems* in her six book of poetry *You Are Happy*. "Circe / Mud Poems" draw on the erotic relationship between goddess Circe and Odysseus on Circe's island where 'the hero' is narrated to be kept captive by Circe in the Greek epic. Circe whose name has long been a synonym for a seducer and sorceress preventing Odysseus from his journey back home to his loyal wife Penelope has now a right to speak in Atwood's version. The writer refashions Circe as a character who is aware of her strengths and she refuses to be bounded by the roles imposed on her by patriarchal order. Indeed, Atwood signals that another female character to rewrite would be Penelope as Circe talks to Odysseus about Penelope's weaving and how the act of weaving is related to storytelling: *She is up to something, she's weaving /Histories, they are never right,/ she has to do them over, / she is weaving her version.* ("Circe / Mud Poems"). In 1995, Atwood published her poem "Helen of Troy Does Counter Dancing" – the word 'counter' here matches with the title of this article but used in the poem in an entirely different with its very first meaning as a noun– which appeared in Part II of *Morning in the Burned House*. In the canonical classic *The Iliad*, Helen is portrayed as the embodiment of beauty who caused The Trojan War eloping with Paris after having betrayed her husband King Menelaus. She, then, betrays Paris and helps Odysseus to defeat the Trojans. Contemporary Helen is not in need of a hero to live on contrary to Homer's version as she, still beautiful and attractive, makes money by dancing on a counter in a strip club. Atwood's poem portrays Helen as a woman who has become the object of desire in the gaze of the patriarchal order, thus she is exploited by the androcentric culture. The third book of Atwood on revisionary myth-making is Penelope's story which this article mainly occupies itself with. To this end, it could be argued that these three re-visions of mythology are a trilogy which make the critique of the existing culture and delegitimize the inherited assumptions.

When these three revisionary myth-makings are considered as a trilogy bearing the modes of intertextuality, it is important to specify that in *The Penelopiad*, Atwood makes her textual transformation through using other sources. In the introduction of the book, she narrates she had drawn on other material because the book does not only retell Penelope's story in Ithaca while waiting for Odysseus to return, instead its first sentence "Now that I'm dead I know everything" (p.1) indicates that she speaks from the underworld and the rewriting gives accounts about Penelope's parents, childhood, marriage, the maids and her relationship to Helen. In a nutshell, *The Penelopiad* tells the reader what 'really' happened during twenty years' absence of Odysseus from Penelope's and the maids' perspectives (p. xx). When analysed through this aspect, *The Penelopiad* offers the reader an 'extensive' rereading that is "more conspicuous and critical" (Moraru, 2011, p. xii), to use Christian Moraru's phrase for counterwritings, rather than an "intensive reading" which is "more programmatic and coded" (p. xii), the ones which comply with the statement that "every piece of writing is a reworking of other writings" (p. xii). As an extensive counterwriting through Penelope's eyes, the title of the novella, *The Penelopiad*, hints that this is a personal history as the suffix "–iad" is used intentionally. The '-iad' suffix in the title connotes *The Iliad* by Homer and gives *The Penelopiad* a sense of epic, but with a critical twist: It belongs to Penelope as she says: "I begin with my *own* birth" (p. 7) (emphasis mine). Moreover, Atwood follows the plotline of *The Odyssey* and in a similar vein to the characteristics of an epic genre, she narrates *The Penelopiad* using a linear timeline, with a beginning, middle and end. Also, the narrative consists of

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6   Atwood's first poetry collection *Double Persophone* (1961) also draws on mythology and the poems in the collection focus on the contradictory nature of life and death.

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twenty-nine episodes which is a fair parallel to *The Odyssey*. In this respect, Atwood's counterwriting depends on the source text, but this is not a full commitment as the writer problematizes the epic genre in form through using the prose form. In this respect, it is hard to locate *The Penelopiad* in the conventions of a specific genre in terms of its form. The book is mostly referred as 'a novella' rather than a novel in accord with the length of the narrative. In "Flirting with Tragedy: *Margaret Atwood's* The Penelopiad, and *the Play of the Text*" (2008), Earl G. Ingersoll argues that *The Penelopiad* is incapable "to evade the exigencies of a kind of 'faithfulness' to an unwritten ur-text of the myth" (p. 111), therefore it "seems legitimate to classify it not as a 'novel' but as a prose fiction of the myth, a kind of 'novelization', or adaptation of a prior text" (p. 111). To speak of 'faithfulness' to the ur-text or the source text, I agree with Ingersoll's remarks; however, I contend that *The Penelopiad* cannot be defined simply as 'adaptation of a prior text', it is quite 'an appropriation'. To elaborate, adaptation is an overused term for all rewriting practices and no need to say, it has a connection with the literary canon. Yet, as Julie Sanders (2006) states, an adaptation displays a close connection with its source text(s) and does not challenge the authority of the prior text, because it is "a transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of revision itself […] an exercise of trimming and pruning […] also an amplificatory procedure, engaged in addition, expansion, accretion, interpolation" (p. 18). On the other hand, an appropriation is in the pursuit of challenging the canonical status of 'sacred texts' in the literary canon, thus it moves beyond the limitations of it. In Sander's words, an appropriation "carries the same sustained engagement as adaptation but frequently adopts a posture of critique, even assault" (p. 4). As such a critique necessitates to locate a counter discourse in a rewriting and following Sander's definition of these two often-interchangeably used terms, it would not be incorrect to assume *The Penelopiad* as an appropriation using a counter narrative strategy. Such a narrative strategy requires locating different perspectives in a text and novella as a form provides the writer to create polyphony in the counterwriting. Casting Penelope and the maids as storytellers to present a different version of the well-known story to 'hear' their voices add an entire new dimension to the myth and liberate the female voices which have been muted in the metanarrative.

Rewriting the ancient myth in novel form enables Atwood to benefit from the infinite possibilities of the genre. Destabilizing the omniscient third person narration in Homer's text, the writer employs two centres of consciousness, the first of which is of Penelope and the latter is of maids. With a conscience, the existence of double consciousness is interrelated to postmodernist notion *The Penelopiad* holds. As French theorist François Lyotard (1984) has famously pointed out that postmodernism is "incredulity towards metanarratives" (p.2), employing various and marginalized voices in *The Penelopiad* makes the reader be suspicious of the authority of the source text. When *The Odyssey* is considered as a grand narrative deeply embedded in our cultural mindset, *The Penelopiad* functions as an active instrument to be skeptical about metanarratives; it arouses a sense of mistrust and the need to employ a counter discourse. In this sense, rubbing up against the textual authority of a grand narrative and undermining the constructed nature of the third person narration, *The Penelopiad* also employs unreliable narration. Penelope says that neither Odysseus nor she is reliable: "The two of us were –by our admission- proficient and shameless liars of long standing" (p. 173). Unreliable narration adds provisional and indeterminate dimension to the novella which also manifests itself between chapters when the twelve maids comment on issues from their own standpoints. The maids introduce themselves through a song that accuses Odysseus of killing them. They mention Penelope as a cunning figure, having caused them to be seduced and raped by the suitors. In their eyes, it is Penelope who has ordered their execution. They make a parallel between Penelope and Artemis, a death bringing moon goddess, whose arrows killed them:

> We would then have willingly sacrificed ourselves, as was necessary, re-enacting the dark-of-the-moon phase, in order that the whole cycle might begin again and the silverly new moon goddess rise once more. Why should Iphigenia be credited with selflessness and devotion, more than we? (p. 164).

The Penelopiad also sheds light on the relationship between Helen of Troy and Penelope who now seems to be a "witty, curt and rather ungracious" (Khalid, 2010, p.47) character contrary to her flawless faithful wife portrait in *The Odyssey*. The contemporary Penelope blames Helen for being the cause of the Trojan War and bringing conflicts into her life: "And so we climbed into the very same bed where we'd spent a great many happy hours when we were first married, before Helen took it into her head to run off with Paris, lighting the fires of war and bringing desolation to my house", she says (p. 171-172). When her son Telemachus speaks of Helen as "radiant as golden Aphrodite", Penelope shows signals of jealousy: "She must be getting a little *older* by now. [...] Helen could not possibly still be as radiant as golden Aphrodite! It would not be within nature!" (p. 132). Penelope uses vulgar speech speaking of Troy of Helen and she calls her as "septic bitch" (p. 131). Such a portrayal of Penelope "underscores the constructed nature of so-called authentic interpretations" (Khalid, 2010, p. 47). Using multiple points of view, unreliable narration and postmodernist writing strategies destabilizing the authority of the metanarratives are strategic moves to create a counterwriting and as Marcel Cornis-Pope (1991) argues these strategic moves are "revisionistic strategies [that] allow alternative modes of narrative articulation – more fluid, interrogative, mutivoiced" (p. 87). Such a critical rereading of a myth-laden text like *The Odysseus* using postmodern narrative strategies makes *The Penelopiad* a counterwriting practice which stands in solidarity with the silenced voices in the literary canon.

IV. Conclusion

In reaching the end of my article, I would like to draw an analogy between the maids who take an oath to take their revenge from Odysseus by saying "Now you can't get rid of us, wherever you go: in your life or your afterlife or any of your other lives" (p. 192) and the contemporary women writers who produce counterwriting practices. In a similar fashion to the maids' commitment to go after the canonical figure Odysseus, counterwritings of contemporary women writers go after the canonical classics, they haunt them and never let these narratives have a closure, rest in peace. In other words, for contemporary women writers the rest is 'not' silence[7] but their main concern is to restore voice to the silenced oppressed characters in the canonical classics. Through rewriting the most renowned myth of the Western literary canon, Margaret Atwood haunts *The Odyssey* and enables us to 'hear' the oppressed female characters who have not been given a chance to 'speak'. *The Penelopiad* is more than a narrative parallelism because it thrusts a critical dimension to the mythic past to shed light on the present. Questioning and destabilizing the textual authority of Homer's text, Atwood skillfully produces a counterwriting that offers the reader a route to undermine the prevailing patriarchal ideology of the literary pantheon.

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7   "The rest is silence" is an often-quoted line from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603).

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