

RENUNCIATION AND RECONFIGURATION OF PHALLOCENTRIC PENELOPE IN CLAIRE NORTH'S *ITHACA*

CLAIRE NORTH'UN *İTHACA* ADLI ESERİNDE FALLOSENTRİK PENELOPE
TEMSİLİNİN TERKEDİLMESİ VE YENİDEN YAPILANDIRILMASI

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Abstract

This study aims to show that Claire North uses retelling Greek myths as a strategy to dismantle the prepotency of phallocentrism designating steady female identities and resituates the feminine passivated and ossified in canonical male texts in her novel, *Ithaca*, through a lens of Irigarayan standpoint and feminist revisionist mythmaking. In the myth of Penelope forming the basis of the novel, the feminine is embedded and appreciated in cultural memory as faithful, passive, subservient, and complementary of man. North evacuates the feminine from the monolithic and homogenizing representations in Greek myths and reverberates that the feminine solidified and essentialized by the omnipotence of phallocentrism is artifact through engendering alternative realities and pluralistic interpretations about the struggles of Penelope. Re-fictionalizing the peripheral object of phallogenic logic in myths as speaking subject, she destabilizes the phallogenic notions which are premised upon solid entities and accord no specificity to the feminine and reconstruct the feminine as dynamic subject which is not jammed in singular and static concepts. North also rejuvenates the feminine disidentified and obfuscated by phallogenic decrees by endowing female figure of Greek myths, Penelope, with cunning and strategic features and mutate the quiescent, virtuous, and man-dependent woman into self-reflexive subject afar from symbolic systems subtended by male imaginary. Thus, she builds a new feminine culture defying passivity of the feminine through providing alternative experiences of Penelope which are not imbedded by male imaginary in Greek myths and renouncing the phallogenic representations of the feminine embedded in cultural memory.

Keywords: Greek Myths, Revisionist Mythmaking, Phallogenic, Luce Irigaray, Claire North, Penelope

Özet

Bu çalışma, Claire North'un *İthaca* adlı romanında Yunan mitlerini yeniden-anlatım stratejisini, fallosentrizmin kadın kimliklerini durağanlaştıran baskın yapısını yıkma ve kanonik metinlerde pasifleştirilen ve kemikleştirilen dişliliği yeniden konumlandırma aracı olarak kullandığını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Romanın temelini oluşturan Penelope mitinde, dişlilik kültürel hafızaya sadık, pasif, itaatkâr ve erkeğin tamamlayıcısı olarak yerleşmiştir. North, Yunan mitlerindeki dişliliği tekdüze ve homojenleştirici temsillerden arındırır ve fallosentrizmin mutlak otoritesi tarafından katılaştırılmış ve özelleştirilmiş dişliliğin bir kurgu olduğunu, Penelope'nin mücadelelerine dair alternatif gerçeklikler ve çoğulcu yorumlar üretmek ifade eder. Mitlerde fallosentrik mantığın periferik nesnesini konuşan bir özne olarak yeniden kurgulayan North, yekpare varlıklar üzerine kurulu olan ve dişliliğe hiçbir özgünlük tanımayan fallosentrik kavramları sarsar. Dişliliği tekil ve statik kavramlarda sıkışmış olmaktan uzaklaştırarak dinamik, çok biçimli ve akışkan özneler olarak yeniden inşa eder. Ayrıca, fallosentrik buyurganlık tarafından kimliksizleştirilen ve bulanıklaştırılan dişliliği yeniden canlandırır. Yunan mitlerindeki kadın figürü Penelope'yi kurnaz özelliklerle donatarak, sessiz, erdemli ve erkeğe bağımlı kadını, erkek hayal gücü tarafından desteklenen sembolik sistemlerin ötesinde, kendi üzerine düşünen bir özneye dönüştürür. North, Penelope'nin erkek hayal gücü tarafından şekillendirilmeyen alternatif deneyimlerini sunarak dişliliğin marjinalliği ve pasifliğini reddeden yeni bir kadın kültürü inşa eder ve kültürel hafızaya yerleşmiş fallosentrik dişlilik temsillerini reddeder.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yunan Mitleri, Revizyonist Mit Yaratımı, Fallosentrik, Luce Irigaray, Claire North, Penelope

*Water does not resist. Water flows. When you plunge your hand into it, all you feel is a caress.
Water is not a solid wall, it will not stop you. But water always goes where it wants to go,
and nothing in the end can stand against it. Water is patient. Dripping water wears away a stone.
-Margaret Atwood, The Penelopiad*

Introduction

Myths are traditional stories that express a myriad of meanings from human existence, religion, and politics to gender roles; transmit the beliefs, values, experiences, and morals which operate as a unifying force within society from generation to generation; and mediate to build and reinforce cultural memory. Since ancient times, myths have pervaded into cultural memory with their teachings, molded humans in accordance with norms, and legitimated the prevailing social structure. As a charter of behaviors, myths have established certain forms of ethics, instructed humans about what the ideal practice is, and aspired to justify the existing social system and the accepted patterns of values, customs, and morals. As Mark Schorer emphasizes, myth is “a large, controlling image” imprinted in human experiences, thought is sustained and propelled by its images, and behaviors are activated and motivated by its ideas, systems, and ideologies (1959, 360). The narratives of myths have been conveyed through the agency of language, and the transmitted myths have been naturalized, stabilized, and engraved in human mind, albeit often unconsciously, through a process of repetition over centuries. Thus, myths are not the natural expressions of cultural values but are constructed through language and discourse, thus naturalizing and reinforcing dominant ideologies and cultural values by presenting them as universal and timeless.

Over centuries, language has been monopolized by men; therefore, myths have been recorded and conveyed in their voices and words. Since the myth-creator has the power to use language, man has the power to penetrate human minds in line with their own judgements and thus control reality. With this privileged power, male myth creators have created female templates in accordance with their perspectives and determined the roles women would play in society for centuries. On the other hand, women have historically been excluded from many domains of public life, and their voices have been marginalized and silenced within public discourse. The idea that pen belongs to men has privileged and celebrated the perspectives of men in every field while repelling feminine experiences and leaving them to confront with insuperable barriers to speak out. As language, voice, and pen have been allocated to men, all ideological and cultural patterns presented through myths, as in all fields, are based on phallogocentric logic that places the values and perspectives of masculinity over the ones of femininity. In this sense, it is undeniable that myths have significant effects on the phallogocentric construction and perpetuation of femininity over centuries as they are articulated and transmitted through the agency of language that reinforces male-dominated beliefs, attitudes, and expectations embedded in cultural memory about what a woman means. As women have not been allowed to have a word and voice for centuries, their self-perceptions, desires, and experiences are often underestimated, and the essence of femininity is merely constructed in accordance with the ideals of phallogocentric logic in myths. They could not enunciate their identities, sexualities, desires, experiences, and perspectives in their voices and language. In other words, the feminine in myths is the vestige of phallogocentric language and the catalog of meanings men have uploaded upon women as their voice and identity is absent.

As language is allocated to men, femininity has been repeatedly marginalized, vilified, and subdued by phallogocentric logic since the myth of Adam and Eve depicting Eve as subordinate and inferior to Adam- because she was created from Adam’s rib- and weak and temptress- because she succumbed to temptation of evil serpent and enticed Adam to eat the forbidden fruit

resulting in human's expulsion from heaven. Through male figures such as Odysseus using his intelligence to outsmart his enemies, Zeus wielding his mighty thunderbolt, Hercule slaying monsters, Archilles striking fear into hearts of his opponents with his prowess, Perseus slaying the Gorgon Medusa, Poseidon creating massive waves and earthquakes with a single motion of his trident, and Hades having unwavering determination and persistence, the traits of masculinity have been glorified and associated with physical strength, virility, wisdom, rulemaking, authority, control, bravery, honor, and respect in myths. On the other hand, the feminine has been identified with inferiority, passivity, irrationality, frailness, perilousness, and seductiveness through the characters of vulnerable virgins, innocent victims, ruthless exploiters, and femme fatales. For instance, Helen's beauty and allure are portrayed as an object of male desire and as a catalyst for the invasion of Troy. Pandora symbolizes women's inherent proneness to temptation and the perilousness of female curiosity, opening the box and unleashing all the evils onto the world. Through Clytemnestra who murders her husband in cold blood, the feminine is reflected as deceitful, treacherous, irrational, and a threat to male power and authority. Persephone, confiscated and snatched down into the underworld by Hades, is a passive victim, submissive figure to male power, and object of male desire. Medea is an irrational and demonic female figure who murders her children as her desires are thwarted. Circe is also conveyed as a seductive and dangerous figure using her magical powers to lure men into her realm and as a threat to male strength and virility. Daphne is also identified as a passive object of male desire pursued by Apollo and transformed into a laurel tree to protect her virginity. Medusa is a terrifying monster with venomous snakes on her head whose gazes turn men into stone. These are phallogocentric fabrications of femininity to ensnare women, thwart them of their needs, and prevents them from contacting with their essence, energies, and desires. Women have internalized an image of themselves as passive objects, captive beauties, hero's rewards, witches, devouring mothers framed by the phallogocentric structure of myths. Those portrayals of female figures in myths have had a long-lasting impact on the way femininity is perceived and ingrained in cultural memory, reinforcing the phallogocentric idea that women are passive, subservient, and positioned on a lower pedestal than men, and their desires are seductive, alluring, fearsome, hazardous, and prone to sin. Preaching phallogocentric ideology, myths reify femininity as the site of male-dominated logic; produce steady codes about the feminine desires and experiences charted by phallogocentrism; diffuse the phallus-reigned unbending definitions of the feminine into cultural memory. For centuries, man has been playing masculine and woman has been playing feminine in accordance with the scenario set by phallogocentric logic and language. If the silenced, denigrated, marginalized Medusas, Helens, Persephones could speak, what would they say about their desires, experiences, and perceptions?

Emerged in the 1960s, post-structuralism discards the idea that meanings are fully resolved, objective, and fixed and emphasizes that meaning and reality are inherently unstable, fluid, and subject to multiple interpretations. In this context, Derrida questions the binary opposites because all dualities in culture assure one term as privileged over the other. One term is considered superior and central while the other one is conceived as secondary, derivative, and peripheral. According to Derrida, these oppositions are unnatural but "a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms govern the other or has the upper hand" (1982, 41). Therefore, Derrida employs a strategy of decentering and destabilizing the primary terms, called deconstruction, to examine multiple layers of meaning, challenge dominant assumptions and power structures, provide new possibilities for interpretation, and let the secondary term overthrow hierarchy. Within the binary oppositions of gender, the privileged term is the one associated with phallus. Man is conceived as the perfect while woman is defined as castrated form of man. Influenced by Derridean idea that meaning is neither fixed nor stable, French post-structuralist feminists-Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva- disaffirm phallogocentrism relegating the feminine into the margin

and secondary position and privileging the position of man. Dissenting from femininity wrapped up in phallogocentric biases, logic, and language, they point out that there is no univocal truth about the feminine through a critique of the texts of male precursors.

Women have become alien to their voices for centuries. Their perceptions, desires, and experiences have been muted, and they have been compelled to speak in feeble tone through an alienating language borrowed from men over centuries. Thus, they have been blocked from identifying themselves with an active subject and framed as passive objects in the phallogocentric structure. In this sense, in her essay, *The Laugh of Medusa*, Helene Cixous appeals to women through a call for *écriture féminine*, feminine writing, that emancipates them from the biases of phallogocentric rhetoric and appreciates their essence, bodies, desires, voices, and identities. She stimulatingly exhorts women to write themselves to reclaim their true identities, create new meanings about femininity eluded from predominant phallogocentric codes, and break “an arid millennial ground” formed by phallogocentrism (1976, 875). Cixous argues the effects of the past persist; however, women must “refuse to strengthen them by repeating them, to confer upon them an irremovability the equivalent of destiny, to confuse the biological and the cultural” (1976: 875). Thus, women can strike free of all chains of the phallogocentric standard discourse which consigns them to a negative, rubbed-out, inactive, and marginal status; recover their undermined identity and reinstate the feminine by dispersing the authoritarian subject; and establish a new culture that esteems the fluidity and abundance of the feminine experiences and desires in opposition to the rigidity and linearity of male-dominated norms about femininity.

Inspired by those philosophical developments in the twentieth century, contemporary women novelists put female figures who have been pushed aside at the center of the texts by rewriting and revising old texts and myths from a feminine perspective. Thus, they recast female identities, desires, and values and devitalize the teachings of phallogocentric myths grafted into cultural memory on the negation, passivation, and marginalization of femininity. As Larrington notes, myths about femininity are not actually women’s myth because “historically women have been disbarred from the means to fix their myths in literary form, to give them a distinctively female perspective” (1992, xii). Through revisionist mythmaking, they “foray into the realm traditionally forbidden” to women, save them from being the ancillary of myths, and retrieve their experiences, memories, dreams, and desires from the impositions of phallogocentric constructions of reality, establishing a female oriented myth (Caputi, 1993, 427). Revisionist feminist myth-makers challenge the narratives of myths imprisoning women into the no-choice definitions where femininity is judged in accordance with masculine standards by reimagining the female figures, using the power of rewriting. They endeavor to get rid of the chains of man-made language in myth by deconstructing the prevalent norms and reinscribing the feminine through creating a new language and perspective of their own, thereby freely explaining the female experiences. As Alicia Ostriker notes, revisionist mythmaking “deconstructs a prior myth or story and constructs a new one which includes, instead of excluding herself” (1987, 72). They transform myths as muteness into myth as voice because the depths of femininity cannot be interpreted if their stories are not told in their voices. Through revisionist mythmaking, the female consciousness sunk into a deep sleep in old texts and myths is awake, and this awakening breaks the phallogocentric idolatry being on the detriment of women, attributes new and positive meanings to the desires and experiences of she-monsters, femme fatales, witches, seductresses, and passive victims of the phallogocentric logic, and creates a new feminine culture by creating alternative truths and obliterating the fallacious images of femininity in cultural memory. As Ostriker quotes, revisionist mythmaking makes “the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual but ultimately making cultural change possible” (1987, 72).

Luce Irigaray’s ideas which provide a comprehensive approach to the renunciation of

phallographic projection of the feminine is important for the process of discussion in the current study because she seeks to uncover the absence of female subjectivity which is assimilated to male subjectivity, to recover the reduction of all things feminine into a marginal and inferior status, and to remedy the deficiency of a feminine culture far away from phallographic shadow through providing a wide and efficacious critique to philosophy, psychoanalysis, and linguistics which do not consider women full subjects and a genuine social existence. She considers philosophy a master discourse and criticizes the fact that it has been produced and controlled by male imaginary, perspectives, and truths since ancient times; therefore, the feminine “has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters” (Irigaray, 1985, 23). She criticizes phallographic theories of sexuality premised on one-sex, regarding man as the measure of all things, privileging the phallus, and defining the feminine as the lack- a defective and castrated form of man.

Irigaray is against the logic of sameness in which man and woman are merged into one, woman is constructed as merely the specular Other of man, and phallographic truth is only truth because it is impossible for woman being off-stage and outsider to represent her selfhood. She also argues that phallograticism could not discover the essence of femininity because his ideas are only based on one- sex theory considering women as a variation of men and the feminine cannot be understood through lenses of a one-sex model. Therefore, Irigaray ponders upon how woman reconfigures her subjectivity in a way that one sex does not exist at the expense of the other and posits a feminine language which is based upon the diversity, fluidity, and multiple possibilities inherent in the feminine and evades from the monolithic representations of phallographic logic. The feminine is conveyed through male imaginary and “woman, in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man’s fantasies” (Irigaray, 1985, 25). Therefore, Irigaray urges for turning back the masculine imaginary to interpret the way the male imaginary reduces woman to silence and mimicry and rediscovering a space for the female imaginary to reclaim a new feminine subjectivity.

Furthermore, Irigaray endeavors to write the feminine culture governed by phallograticism in a deconstructive way and puts forward the idea that woman is never set up as a totality although the feminine has been theorized on the basis of the castrated form of man in phallographic logic. Drawing attention to the multiplicity of female sexuality in its erogenous zones, Irigaray sees the feminine not as the lack of penis but as “two lips” different from the unitariness of the phallus. According to her, the feminine is characterized by multiplicity, and the reduction of the feminine into solid phallographic patterns does not accord with her fluid and plural nature. As Carolyn Burke explains, the image of two-lips “should not be reduced to a literally anatomical specification” because it implies plurality and loosening the rigidity of phallographic logic about femininity (1981, 303). Irigaray believes that the feminine cannot be signified in any proper meaning; therefore, she abstains from prescribing a female identity. According to her, expressing the feminine in the form of a concept is “to allow oneself to be caught up again in a system of masculine representations in which women are trapped in a system of meaning” (1985, 122). Therefore, she does not outline the truth of female sexuality but just creates a new feminine perspective to combat the othering and marginalizing policies of phallograticism.

Irigaray also underlines that woman is going to reproduce the same history and fail to assert herself if she keeps on speaking the same language as they have been taught to speak for centuries. She keeps on being a “spoken machine, speaking machine” as she is absent from herself, packed in proper skins but not her own, and enveloped in proper names. Therefore, she advises women to “come out of their language” and build a new feminine culture, tearing the feminine encoded within phallographic system apart (1985, 205). In the light of Irigaray’s ideas on the feminine and feminist revisionist mythmaking, this study argues that Claire North

rewrites Greek myth of Penelope to provide a space for female imaginary departing from the phallogocentric orbit, nullify the phallogocentric images and revivify the feminine beaten up over centuries in Greek myths by consigning specificity and multiplicity to them, change the images of the feminine wrapped in phallogocentric logic imbued in cultural memory, and provide possibilities for creating a new feminine culture, in her novel *Ithaca*.

Defying the Phallogocentric Images of Woman in *Ithaca*

In Homer's *Odyssey*, Penelope, the famed wife of Odysseus, epitomizes the enduring image of faithful woman, being renowned and acclaimed for her resilience and fidelity during a long-lasting absence of her husband. After Odysseus leaves for the Trojan War, Penelope remains in Ithaca to manage their household and care for their son, Telemachus. As the years pass, and Odysseus does not return, the countless suitors descend upon Ithaca, vying for Penelope's hand in marriage to ascend the throne. Penelope remains steadfast in her belief that Odysseus may still be alive, but she is tormented by grief and uncertainty. She resists pressure from the suitors while longing for her husband's return. Thus, to delay remarriage, Penelope devises a cunning plan. She promises to choose a suitor once she finished weaving a burial shroud for her father-in-law. However, she secretly unravels the weaving each night, buying time for Odysseus to return. This cunning deception goes on for years until a maid reveals her trick to the suitors. Penelope's efforts to spare herself from suitor's importunities and exigency of remarrying have been celebrated, and the chastity and fidelity she embodies have been cemented and transmitted to cultural memory as ideal characteristics of woman by canonical narratives silencing the female voice under phallogocentric logic.

As a reaction against phallogocentric archetype of Penelope as a moral exemplum that typifies ideal womanhood framed by loyalty and virtue, Claire North reimagines her as a strategic and dynamic character in *Ithaca*, deprecating her traditional and monolithic portrayal of a quiescent, tamed, and long-suffering wife prevalent in classical mythology. North produces a counter-writing to emasculate the phallogocentric conventions of literary canon and metamorphose it into a multiple-voiced narrative entity through which the female voices of the silenced and idealized are turned up and esteemed. Reimagining and narrating the happenings in Ithaca from the perspective of the goddess, Hera, she brings the periphery to the forefront, offers a route to undermine the prevailing patriarchal ideologies imposed on women, and demythologizes the phallogocentric images of Penelope by giving a fresh breath into old phallogocentric narrative, namely *filling the old vessel with new wine* as indicated in the following extract:

Forget the songs of Apollo, or the proud declarations of haughty Athena. Their poems only glorify themselves. Listen to my voice: I who have been stripped of honour, of power and of that fire that should be mine, I who have nothing to lose that the poets have not already taken from me, only I will tell you the truth. I, who part the veil of time, will tell those stories that only the women tell. So follow me to the western isles, to the halls of Odysseus, and listen... The poets will tell you a lot about the heroes of Troy. Some details they have correct; in others, as with all things, they lie. They lie to please their masters. They lie without knowing what they do, for it is the poet's art to make every ear that hears the ancient songs think they have been sung for them alone, the old made new. Whereas I sing for no creature's pleasure but my own, and can attest that what you think you know of the last heroes of Greece, you do not know at all. Follow me through the halls of the palace of Odysseus; follow to hear the stories that the men-poets of the greedy kings do not tell (North, 2022, 7-10).

Here, Hera invites readers to penetrate into the feminine space the male-dominated narratives have overlooked and casted a veil over to reveal their stories kept under wraps. Beyond the

heroic and mannish lies of old texts, she pledges for a narration rooted in unvarnished truths about those pushed to the margins and offers the story of Penelope of Ithaca that has never been told before beyond the dictates of men, thereby providing a space for female imaginary. Irigaray highlights that the existing canonical texts are constructed within a patriarchal framework that marginalizes women; therefore, she calls for women to speak as a woman and to look for ways of expressing what has been rendered unspeakable so as to disrupt the prepotency of phallogocentric logic that excludes and erases women (1985, 136-137). In this sense, rather than furnishing Penelope an object of the stories where men are glorified and women are gone by the wayside, North makes her a speaking-subject, giving narrative voice to her thoughts, wits, and the burdens she bears, hereby disrupting the symbolic order that positions women as mere reflections of male desires or ideals.

Penelope is engraved in cultural memory as the faithful wife of Odysseus, whose primary role is to wait for his return despite his prolonged absence. This unconditional waiting is a passive endurance, reflecting the idealized submissive, pure, and chaste woman who exists in relation to her husband. The portrayal of Penelope's fidelity as a central virtue disdains her desires, agency, and struggles, limiting her to a secondary role in the myth and reducing her to a saintly figure of devotion. However, North dismantles the phallogocentric representation of Penelope as a passive and idealized figure of enduring faithfulness, instead portraying her as a strategic, autonomous, and unservile woman. Penelope explicitly rejects the idealized image of herself as merely faithful wife as follows: "I have been queen in Ithaca far longer than I have been Odysseus' wife" (North, 2022, 136). North reclaims her not as an emblem of quiet patience awaiting Odysseus's return but as an active agent, proactive leader, and strategist tactician that navigates the affairs of Ithaca, maintains the stability, protects territorial integrity from being invaded, and manages resources. In a conversation with Priene, a woman warrior from the east of Ithaca, Penelope utters:

Do you know how Ithaca has survived these last eighteen years? ... Who brings in the firewood? Who keeps the wolves at bay? Who hunts the wild boar, sets traps in the forest, builds walls when the storm has battered from the west? Who was left, when my husband took the men to Troy, to do all this? (North, 2022, 92-93).

This quote repulses the common depiction of Penelope as a passively enduring and waiting-wife figure. As the primary caretaker, protector, and leader of Ithaca, she contributes to the upkeep of Ithaca by shouldering responsibilities typically assigned to the domain of men. Despite abiding by the feminine historically defined through the lens of masculine norms and standards, Irigaray rejects the masculine parameters that operate on a one-sex model, where man is considered the universal standard, the phallus is elevated as central, and the feminine is reduced to a state of deficiency, a flawed and castrated version of man (1985, 159). Thus, she calls for women to build a female imaginary purged of male imagination, where woman serves as a compliant figure to facilitate the perpetuation of man's fantasies (1985, 25). Similarly, in *Ithaca*, North strips the feminine from the phallogocentric ideals of passivity and deficiency by decorating Penelope with strategic qualities of the ruler not attributed to women in male-centric thinking. In this new feminine imaginary, North's Penelope is an active force within Ithaca, subtly maintaining control and order and managing the constant threat from the suitors and political pressures with tact, patience, and quiet strength in Odysseus' prolonged absence.

According to Irigaray, the feminine cannot be accurately represented by any singular meaning. As a result, she refrains from imposing a fixed female identity and instead advocates for women to define themselves on their own terms (1985, 122). North also resists the stable definitions and ideals of the feminine by moving beyond singular and reductive identity for Penelope. She portrays Penelope as a multifaceted character- faithful yet cunning, strategist, intelligent, resistant, and determined for self-sufficient- who withstands being confined to a singular

archetype of devoted wife. Instead of merely waiting for Odysseus and adhering to a static, subjugated, and passive-suffering role, she does not align with patriarchal expectations- despite not in a full rebellious mode- and makes her own decisions by finding ways to exert her will. After rumors mount that Odysseus is dead, a wide array of suitors surges into Ithaca to marry the widowed queen and rule the lands of Odysseus. Despite all pressures, Penelope not only stalls her suitors with her weaving a shroud for Leartes but also strategically expresses that she does not want to remarry. Penelope's subtly resistance against suitors goes beyond mere loyalty to Odysseus. Her resistance is rooted in her desire to maintain agency and control over her own life and the kingdom of Ithaca whereas her weaving is idealized as fidelity to her husband in phallogocentric narratives. She does not want to be reduced to a mere prize or object to be acclaimed by men. Instead, she desires to assert her autonomy to choose both her future and the fortune of Ithaca, refusing the dictates of patriarchal forces around her in a controlled manner. The following conversation between Penelope and Kenamon, an Egyptian suitor, shows her position caught between her own will and patriarchal expectations:

“My lady- do you seek a husband?”

“Do I...seek a husband? ...You will observe that we have a shortage of both on Ithaca. Currently my husband's reputation keeps the worst of the raiders away, just in case he comes back and is unimpressed to discover his so-called allies have been pillaging his lands in his absence. Illyrians- barbarians from the north who do not understand our ways-sometimes strike, but never other Greeks. Not yet. Odysseus' name is powerful, you see. The poets sing of him in the same breath as Achilles and Neoptolemus. But with every month that he does not return, the power wanes. The fear his name inspires wanes. And so there must be someone new who our enemies- and our less consistent friends-can fear. Clearly they will not fear me- I am just a woman. And my son, Telemachus, does not have loyal veterans and trained soldiers to draw upon. So husband is required, though it is impossible that I marry. Does that answer your question?” (North, 2022, 44-45).

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Despite the mounting pressure that she should remarry for the protection of Ithaca in the prolonged absence of Odysseus and the stern reality that the power vacuum and the dangers posed by external enemies require the presence of a male figure who can command fear and loyalty, she prefers asserting her authority over being tied to a male figure around her to govern Ithaca and preserve the land's integrity. In this sense, her resistance to the suitors is a form of rebellion against the patriarchal structures that seek to control the fate of both her own and Ithaca, beyond a saint-like loyalty to her husband.

Medon, an old and friendly councilor of Odysseus, warns Penelope about the impending war she cannot prevent and recommends she choose a suitor. She acknowledges that remarriage is unavoidable; however, she harbors hope for something other than a forced politically driven marriage and being mere extension to a man, and she still tries to maintain sense of control over her own life and future even if the remarriage seems certain. As Medon tells her that she is waiting for her husband, Penelope rejects that she procrastinates remarriage because she is still waiting for Odysseus by saying “What? No” (North, 2022, 130). Penelope is only sixteen when she marries Odysseus, leaving behind her father's court for a man she barely knows and repeating “I will love, I will Love, I will love” (North, 2022, 131). However, Hera narrates that Penelope “spent more time frowning at the mention of his name, putting on a countenance of profoundest sorrow to please those who look upon her, than she has smiling at his presence. That when she says his name, it is to perform some political act rather than because she hears her husband there” (North, 2022, 131). It is clearly seen that Penelope's use of Odysseus' name and public mourning are not about personal longing but about fulfilling a role that sustains the political and social structure around her. She speaks his name out of obligation and duty, not

because it brings her emotional comfort or connection. Here, North dismantles the phallogocentric idealization of Penelope's enduring waiting as fidelity in the face of prolonged absence. The following dialogue unfolds between Medon and Penelope as Medon realizes that love is not the reason for Penelope's waiting and delay of remarriage:

“If it is not love, then what are you waiting for, may I ask? ... If you are not waiting for Odysseus to return, and if you must marry, then why wait? There will be war no matter what. What does waiting achieve?”

“War no matter what- I do not like inevitabilities” (North, 2022, 132).

Medon questions Penelope's delay in remarrying, asking the reason why she continues to wait if she is not in love with Odysseus or expecting his return. He implies that waiting is futile and there is no reason to delay the marriage decision if she is not emotionally tied to Odysseus and suggests that she should choose a new suitor now, rather than holding out hope for a future reunion that may never come. However, Penelope's response reveals her discomfort with the predestined actions imposed upon her. While she acknowledges the pressure to remarry, she resists the notion that her future is inevitable, especially the social, political, and emotional forces that seem to dictate her actions. Her resistance to inevitabilities highlights her desire for agency and the ability to shape her own destiny, even in a situation where much of her life seems out of her control. Defying the expectations of patriarchy, Penelope asserts a subtle form of autonomy by rejecting the inevitability of war and remarriage. She does not want to be pushed into a decision without her will or consent. By not accepting that her choices are completely determined by external forces and phallogocentric impositions, Penelope insists on holding onto the possibility that she can maintain the stability in both her life and Ithaca without being a mere extension to a suitor. Her refusal to accept inevitabilities can be seen as an attempt to preserve her control over her own life and decisions, even in a world where women are often seen as yielding to the will of men and their phallogocentric forces. Furthermore, despite being besieged by over a hundred suitors eager to claim her hand and Ithaca's throne, she devises clever strategies. Her weaving and unweaving of Laertes' shroud is a prime example of her ingenuity and steadfastness to delay remarriage and sustain her own agency. Although weaving arises as a symbol of loyalty in canonical narrative, North reframes it as a tool of strategic survival, reflecting her active resistance rather than passive waiting. Weaving was intended to buy time for the plans she would make to hold her power, protect her country, and shield her son, not to wait hopefully for her husband's return and bless her fidelity to Odysseus. When Medon asks her “For how long? How long are you going to weave Laertes' funeral shroud,” she responds, “As long as I can” (North, 2022, 132). It shows that Penelope is willing to endure as long as necessary to preserve her autonomy and protect Ithaca from descending into chaos under the suitors' control.

Andraemon, a veteran of Troy, accuses Penelope of either lying or withholding the truth about Ithaca's wealth. He implies that Penelope is pretending that the island is poor by saying, “But both your husband and his father were notorious raiders and thieves, before the war. Tin and amber flow through your ports; so don't try to convince me that Ithaca has no gold in its belly” (North, 2022, 225-226). To him, Ithaca is not as impoverished as Penelope portrays despite the difficulties she faces, and she intentionally withholds its wealth to manipulate the situation. Penelope responds to the suitor's insinuation by emphasizing the heavy financial toll the Trojan War takes on Ithaca. She explains that the constant demands of messengers and a relentless cycle of requisitions and growing debt puts the strain on Ithaca's economy and resources. Andraemon continues to pursue his aggressive strategy to weaken her resolve and push her into marriage by accusing her of the dire financial situation she faces. Penelope is aware of the intimidation tactics employed by the suitors; however, she has no intention of surrendering them, indicated as below:

“But even if I could make any great profit from the enterprise-and truthfully, I can barely make enough to keep my household in the poor state you see it now-you suitors have drained me dry. Deliberately, of course. The more you eat, the more you drink, the more you test to breaking point every sacred rule that stands between guest and host, the more desperate you make me. A desperate woman with an empty treasury must, surely, at some point yield. Must at some point choose a husband, to put an end to this slow bleed. I see your stratagem” (North, 2022, 226).

Penelope knows that she will risk her son and beget a bloody war with other suitors on the isle if she bends to the pressures Andraemon and marries him on the one hand; if she does not accept to marry Andraemon, he will plunder her shores until there is nothing left on the other hand. Any decision she makes will drag Ithaca into a bloody chaos; however, she gets strength from the teaching of Anticlea, the mother of Odysseus: “when the south wind is dull and heavy, you do not sweat; nor when the north howls in the harshest of winters must you shiver. The storm may bend your back, but only you can straighten it again” (North, 2022, 33). Therefore, she decides to be the orchestrator of Ithaca’s salvation and raise an army composed of women instead of marrying and witnessing what happens under the tutelage of a man. In this sense, North demythologizes the phallogocentric image of woman as a faithful wife affiliated with a man by dismantling the static identity of Penelope and reimagining her as an active, strategist, and cunning leader that is determined to maintain the order in Ithaca singlehandedly without yielding to any phallogocentric force. North’s Penelope mirrors the quiet yet unstoppable power of water. Like a stream carving its path through unyielding rock, she flows silently, shaping her resilience and will over time. She does not resist the tides of hardship with blunt force; instead, she waits, endures, and persists, letting her quiet strength seep into every corner of her life. The constant pressure of suitors and phallogocentric impositions might have seemed insurmountable, like towering cliffs. Yet, Penelope, like a flowing river, wears them down, persistently following her own path, nourishing her strategies, and sustaining her resolve. The solid barriers of patriarchy do not block her path, and her resilience erodes even the hardest stones of patriarchy, firmly reshaping the narrative of her life.

Conclusion

North revitalizes the feminine, which has been marginalized and obscured by phallogocentric norms, by reimagining the Greek mythological figure Penelope. She imbues Penelope with cunning and strategic qualities, transforming her from a passive, virtuous, and man-dependent archetype into a self-aware subject operating beyond the symbolic frameworks shaped by the male imaginary. By reimagining the marginal figure of phallogocentric logic in myths as a speaking subject, she disrupts phallogocentric notions rooted in fixed entities that deny specificity to the feminine. Instead, she reconstructs the feminine as a dynamic, fluid subject, unbound by singular or static definitions. Instead of relegating Penelope to the role of an object in stories that glorify men while sidelining women, North transforms her into a speaking subject. She grants Penelope a narrative voice to express her thoughts, intelligence, and the weight of her struggles, thereby challenging the symbolic order that reduces women to mere reflections of male desires or ideals. Penelope is traditionally etched into cultural memory as the faithful wife of Odysseus, defined primarily by her unwavering patience during his prolonged absence. This passive endurance embodies the idealized image of a submissive, pure, and chaste woman whose existence revolves around her husband's return. Her fidelity, celebrated as a central virtue, suppresses her desires, agency, and struggles, relegating her to a secondary role and reducing her to a saintly symbol of devotion. However, North subverts this phallogocentric depiction by reimagining Penelope not as a passive and idealized figure of faithfulness, but as a strategic, autonomous, and unyielding woman. In *Ithaca*, North dismantles the phallogocentric ideals of passivity and deficiency traditionally associated with femininity by endowing

Penelope with the strategic acumen of a ruler and qualities rarely attributed to women in male-centric narratives. In this reimagined feminine framework, Penelope emerges as an active force within Ithaca, skillfully preserving control and order. She navigates the persistent threats posed by the suitors and the pressures of political instability with remarkable tact, patience, and quiet strength, asserting her agency in the prolonged absence of Odysseus. Penelope's resistance stems from her determination to retain agency and control over her life and the kingdom of Ithaca, contrasting with phallogocentric narratives that romanticize her weaving as a symbol of fidelity to her husband. She refuses to be reduced to a mere prize or object for men's acclaim. Instead, Penelope asserts her autonomy, striving to shape both her future and Ithaca's fate. Through calculated and deliberate actions, she defies the patriarchal forces surrounding her, embodying a quiet yet resolute challenge to their dictates. Despite increasing pressure to remarry for Ithaca's protection during Odysseus' prolonged absence and the stark reality that the power vacuum and threats from external enemies seemingly demand a male figure to inspire fear and loyalty, Penelope chooses to assert her own authority. Rather than yielding to the expectation of aligning herself with a man to govern and safeguard Ithaca, she resolutely maintains her autonomy, demonstrating her capacity to preserve Ithaca's integrity on her own terms. Defying patriarchal expectations, Penelope subtly asserts her autonomy by rejecting the perceived inevitability of war and remarriage. She refuses to be coerced into a decision without her will or consent, challenging the notion that her choices are entirely dictated by external pressures and phallogocentric impositions. By holding firm to the belief that she can sustain stability in her life and in Ithaca without becoming an extension of a suitor, Penelope insists on her right to self-determination. Her refusal to accept these inevitabilities reflects her desire to preserve control over her own life and decisions, even in a world where women are typically expected to yield to the will of men and their patriarchal forces.

In a nutshell, North uses reimagining the experiences of Penelope as an ideological tool to unsettle the predominance of phallogocentric logic over the construction of the feminine. She discharges the feminine from the monolithic representations of phallogocentrism offering alternative experiences of Penelope. She enacts the plurality of the feminine in opposition to the rigid and stable definitions phallogocentrism loads upon the feminine. Through *Ithaca*, North reclaims Penelope's story, transforming her from a passive emblem of loyalty into a dynamic, strategist, and multidimensional character. In *Ithaca*, Penelope is not merely waiting for Odysseus but actively managing Ithaca in his prolonged absence as a shrewd and resourceful leader maintaining her power and autonomy, protecting her lands, and warding off the suitors vying for her hand. By offering a new perspective on Penelope's character, North challenges the normative, phallogocentric ideals that have historically confined female characters to secondary, subjugated roles, ultimately re-envisioning a more inclusive and empowering cultural narrative. Thus, she disrupts the phallogocentric feminine engraved into cultural memory and create a new feminine culture.

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