

**Reading Barbara Köhler's *Niemand's Frau*
as a Radical Poetic Response to Homer's *Odyssey***

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Abstract

This thesis presents the first sustained analysis of *Niemands Frau* (2007), Barbara Köhler's radical poetic engagement with Homer's *Odyssey*. Köhler weaves together a vast web of intertextual references including Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and a biography of Alan Turing, and subjects including quantum mechanics, computers and cloning. To provide a coherent structure and facilitate navigation of the potentially overwhelming network of references, I anchor analysis to Köhler's engagement with classical tradition and the major Odyssean figures that feature in the cantos. Key to my methodology is close reading, essential to gain access to complex and often syntactically irregular cantos. As *Niemands Frau* resists the total application of a single theoretical or philosophical approach, I draw selectively on the work of thinkers including Deleuze, Barthes, Freud, Cavareto, and Adorno and Horkheimer, in order to elucidate specific aspects. While the introduction provides a review of secondary literature and discussion of the physical construction of *Niemands Frau*, the first chapter examines Köhler's text as a feminist critical and creative response to the German tradition of *Odyssey* translation and reception, as a radical, 'minor' translation. Subsequent chapters analyse the literary traditions surrounding Penelope, Helen of Troy, Tiresias and Odysseus to show how Köhler has used elements for her own poetic purposes. I argue that *Niemands Frau* calls for a close engagement with the literary canon to rehabilitate its 'other': the women, monsters and queer figures repressed by (patriarchal) cultural reception. Köhler's poetic reworking of marginalised figures is political in making marginalised voices heard and, furthermore, derives an ethics from them. She criticises the political, scientific, philosophical and cultural traditions that she perceives as – currently and historically – repressive, and strives for an embodied and differentiated appreciation of life.

Contents

Formatting.....	4
List of Figures.....	4
Notice of pre-publication.....	5
Acknowledgements.....	6
Chapter 1	
Introduction.....	7
Chapter 2	
<i>Niemand's Frau</i> as a 'minor' translation of the <i>Odyssey</i> from 'er' to 'sie'.....	38
Chapter 3	
Penelope's Web or, 'the voice[s] of the shuttle'.....	65
Chapter 4	
Helen of Troy: The Image, Power and the Impoverishment of Life.....	97
Chapter 5	
The Possibility of Recognising and Loving 'Niemand'.....	138
Chapter 6	
Tiresias, Turing and Dystopian Transformations in Köhler's <i>Waste Land</i>	170
Chapter 7	
The Genealogy and Operation of Patriarchal Power in <i>Niemand's Frau</i>	214
Chapter 8	
Conclusion.....	242
Bibliography	248

Formatting

Where quotations from *Niemand's Frau* are indented they will be laid out as closely as possible in accordance with the original edition of *Niemand's Frau* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2007). In such instances I will use Courier New font, as Köhler's use of this font plays a role in how the text is interpreted. When shorter quotations are embedded within the body of the text they will follow the font style of the body text, that is, Garamond. When referencing line breaks in *Niemand's Frau* within the body of the text, I will place the forward slash symbol within square brackets like this [/] to indicate that the slash was not in Köhler's text. I am doing this because Köhler uses the forward slash relatively frequently in *Niemand's Frau* as part of the text's semantic content.

List of Figures

1. Vertical loom, in Luanne Brown and Sidna Rachid, *Egyptian Carpets. A Practical Guide* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1986), p. 14.
2. "I want you for U.S. Army : nearest recruiting station", c. 1917, poster by James Montgomery Flagg. Library of Congress. Retrieved from:
<<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/96507165/>> [accessed: 11th June 2016]
3. 'Ehrentribüne mit Kanzel des Führers auf der Zeppelinniese', 1942, photograph by Karl Gasser. Das Bundesarchiv. Retrieved from
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_146-2008-0028,_N%C3%BCrnberg,_Parteitagsgel%C3%A4nde,_Ehrentrib%C3%BCne.jpg>
[accessed: 1 June 2016]
4. 'La Città ideale', c. 1470, by central Italian artist, Ministry of Heritage and Culture, Italy. Retrieved from < <http://www.altritaliani.net/spip.php?article1033> > [accessed: 1 June 2016]

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The title of Homer's second epic narrative, the *Odyssey* (c. 800 BC), has long since entered the common lexicon in Western culture as a term for a challenging journey, real or metaphorical. Thanks to its afterlife in canonical texts such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (c. 8 AD), Dante's *Inferno* (c. 1300), and in modernist texts such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), as well as in popular culture and education, figures and stories from the text are ingrained in everyday language. The word 'siren' is now a clichéd way to describe a threatening but alluring woman and 'stuck between Scylla and Charybdis' is easily understood as a difficult situation in between two dangers. A journey that uses trickster wit and intelligence as the primary means of overcoming danger has appealed to many writers and philosophers as an allegory for the emergence of the rational subject. The *Odyssey's* status as a homecoming narrative too, where a man returns home to a woman after military victory (the Trojan wars), has attracted nationalist, romantic and political interpretations. However, the fact that Odysseus is gendered male and that most of his foes are gendered female, and that the modern, rational subject, for which he has been an archetype, committed barbaric acts of mass murder in the twentieth century has also made the text fertile ground for cultural criticism and philosophical reflection. As Edith Hall comments in her extensive investigation into reception, 'it can be difficult even to identify "spin-offs" from the *Odyssey*, so deeply has it shaped our imagination and cultural values'. As a work whose stories have been translated, plumbed, reworked and debated by writers, philosophers and artists over the course of almost three thousand years, the *Odyssey* is a foundational text of Western culture.¹

¹ Edith Hall, *The Return of Ulysses* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), p. 3; other substantial surveys of reception include the following: Georg Finser, *Homer in der Neuzeit von Dante bis Goethe. Italien, Frankreich, England, Deutschland* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1912; repr. New York: Hildesheim, 1973); W.B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme. A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973); Harold Bloom, *Odysseus/Ulysses* (New York: Chelsea House, 1991); Piero Boitani, *The Shadow of Ulysses*, trans. Anita Weston (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

In 2007 German poet Barbara Köhler published *Niemand's Frau*, a radical poetic response to Homer's *Odyssey*.² As signalled by her title, where Homer's text focuses on the journey of one man, Köhler's cycle of cantos gives voice to female figures whom she considers to have been marginalised by the male-dominated reception of Homer. She engages with the *Odyssey* in order to challenge the logic and grammar of patriarchal power, and criticises aspects of Western culture, thought and politics that she perceives as damaging or repressive to life. An interrogation of the history of science and of contemporary developments in genetic and computer science constitutes an important element of Köhler's epic survey of modernity.

While *Niemand's Frau* is centrally a response to Homer's *Odyssey*, it incorporates a vast number of intertextual references and themes including Plato's *Republic* (c. 380 BC), Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and biographies of cryptanalyst and computer pioneer Alan Turing, as well as films, computer codes and mathematical equations, making *Niemand's Frau* a truly modern epic. Setting the ancient and modern together allows Köhler to situate her thoughts about modernity in a broader debate and to trace what she regards as problematic aspects of contemporary life back to ancient contexts. As well as incorporating a wealth of references from across Western culture, there are many ways in which *Niemand's Frau* is a specifically German reading of Homer. Köhler addresses the German reception of Homer, as well as German history and German intellectual culture throughout the cycle. Furthermore, the German language and its effects is one of the chief subjects of scrutiny in *Niemand's Frau*.

Niemand's Frau is a demanding and densely woven text, and in this thesis I attempt the first sustained and full-length analysis of it. In this introduction, I will set out the critical and cultural contexts surrounding the text. First, I will describe the place and significance of the *Odyssey* in modern German culture, situate *Niemand's Frau* within its contemporary literary landscape, and give a brief biography of its author. Second, I will outline what kind of text Köhler has produced, in terms of its content, the different versions published and its physical form, which is unconventional in several regards. I will provide an explanation of how the three epigraphs offer clues to reading the main text and also demonstrate how Köhler uses the material form of the text to shape meaning. Third, I will characterise the methodology of this thesis. Fourth I will survey

² Barbara Köhler, *Niemand's Frau* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2007). Henceforth, page numbers will be given in parentheses in the body of the text, following the abbreviation *NF*.

the existing literary reception of *Niemand's Frau* and summarise Köhler's literary *oeuvre*. Finally, I will set out the structure of the thesis and give abstracts for each chapter.

The German Reception of Homer and the *Odyssey*

Homer and the *Odyssey* in particular arguably have something of a 'special relationship' with German culture. Since the late eighteenth century, the text has been at the heart of German cultural soul-searching and questions of national identity. The translation of the *Odyssey* from ancient Greek into German hexameters by Johann Heinrich Voss in 1781 was a formative event in the emergence of German as a literary language after centuries of French dominance and is still in print.³ Homeric texts became popular during the nineteenth century when writers and composers looked to ancient Greece as a spiritual antecedent to a Germany that was emerging as a cultural and political force on the world stage. During the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1871), which preceded German unification, nationalistic fervour swept through Germany and attempts were made to demonstrate kinship between Homer's texts and the twelfth-century German epic *Das Nibelungenlied*. Multiple new translations of the *Odyssey* were produced from the Greek into the 'Nibelungenstrophe' of the German text.⁴ Twentieth-century reception of the *Odyssey* was shaped by the repeated rise and fall of Germany's imperialist and nationalist ambitions and its subsequent division and reunification. The *Odyssey* remained an important text for writers and commentators on both left and right of the political spectrum. In the crushed post-World War I Weimar Republic, nineteenth-century imperialism seemed out of date and the German Homeric texts that were popular in 1870s fell out of fashion.⁵ However, the rejuvenation of nationalism under the National Socialists brought the return of ancient Greece and Homer as a source of inspiration for right-wing theorists. In *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (1939), for example, Alfred Rosenberg, one of Hitler's chief racial ideologues, put forward a racial interpretation of history that argued for a common

³ All quotations from the German translation of Homer's *Odyssee* in this thesis are taken from Johann Heinrich Voss's 1781 version, as published in the Fischer edition: Homer, *Odyssee*, trans. Johann Heinrich Voss (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2011). References to Book and line numbers will be given in parentheses in the main body of the text. The impact of Voss's translation is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis. For a survey of German reception of classical literature, see: Volker Riedel, *Antikerezeption in der deutschen Literatur vom Renaissance-Humanismus bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart; Weimar: Metzler, 2000).

⁴ Günter Häntzschel, 'Odysseus in der deutschen Literatur vor und nach 1945', *Zeitschrift für deutschsprachige Kultur und Literaturen*, 15 (2006), 55-75; see also: Bernard Fenik, *Homer and The Nibelungenlied. Comparative Studies in Epic Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

⁵ Hall, p. 65.

heredity between Germans and Greeks and cast Homer as a ‘nordic’ defender of the Aryan race.⁶

Sirens and Siren-like subjects recur throughout *Niemand's Frau* and, although I do not devote a chapter to them, analysis of Köhler’s poetic treatment of the Sirens appears throughout my thesis. The ‘Sirens’ episode in the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus ties himself to his mast and plugs his oarsmen’s ears with wax so that they cannot hear the Sirens’ song, captured the imaginations of modernist German-language writers.⁷ Re-evaluations that challenge Homer’s version, such as Rainer Maria Rilke’s poem ‘Die Insel der Sirenen’ (1907), Franz Kafka’s short story ‘Das Schweigen der Sirenen’ (1917) and Bertolt Brecht’s parable ‘Odysseus und die Sirenen’ (1933), anticipate Köhler’s feminist, deconstructive and critical approach to the *Odyssey*. In Rilke’s poem ‘Die Insel der Sirenen’ Odysseus reflects on the dangers of the Sirens’ singing even when not heard: the rowers with blocked ears are overwhelmed by silence. Rilke suggests that Odysseus was foolish to assume that the Sirens could be blocked out so crudely and challenges the idea that silence is nothing more than the unthreatening absence of sound. However, the poem is still oriented around Odysseus’s telling and does not give the Sirens a voice. Kafka’s ‘Das Schweigen der Sirenen’ is a profoundly ambiguous narrative in which the Sirens are close to being animals.⁸ They do not have human consciousness and their motive not to sing to Odysseus is left ambiguous. The Sirens *may* intentionally be attempting to destroy him, or they may merely be absentminded, captivated by the radiance emitted by Odysseus’s eyes, Kafka suggests. In the latter version, the Homeric relationship between the Sirens and Odysseus is reversed, here it is Odysseus who captivates; however, the power relationship remains unchanged and he still holds the power and the narrative priority. *They* disappear from his sight. Elizabeth Boa suggests that Kafka’s version reveals a ‘growing sense of [his] collusion in a culture which was oppressive to women, yet at the same time an inability to break free from the prevailing gender ideology.’⁹

⁶ Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit* (Munich: Hoheneichen, 1936).

⁷ For more on reception of the Sirens episode in twentieth-century texts, see: Frank Dietrich Wagner, *Antike Mythen. Kafka und Brecht* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006).

⁸ Franz Kafka, ‘Das Schweigen der Sirenen’, in *Die Erzählungen und andere ausgewählte Prosa*, ed. Roger Hermes (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1996), pp. 351–2.

⁹ Elizabeth Boa, ‘Revoicing Silenced Sirens: A Changing Motif in Works by Franz Kafka, Frank Wedekind and Barbara Köhler’, *German Life and Letters*, 57 (2004), 8–20 (p. 8).

The openly critical style and perspectival shift of Brecht's Sirens' narrative foreshadow Köhler's retelling of the Sirens narrative in *Niemands Frau*. Brecht openly 'doubts' Odysseus' version of events and more broadly, the value of Odysseus's perspective. 'Odysseus und die Sirenen' (1933) which bears the subtitle 'Zweifel am Mythos', is told from a Marxist, proto-feminist perspective, and is a parable about the function of art under fascism that was hostile to culture. Odysseus is cast as a patriarchal subject in crisis, while the Sirens in contrast are transformed from objects of his gaze, into powerful witnesses to his foolish, self-imposed physical repression:

Das ganze Altertum glaubte dem Schlauling des Gelingen seiner List. Sollte ich der erste sein, dem Bedenken aufsteigen? Ich sage mir nämlich so: alles gut, aber wer – außer Odysseus – sagt uns, daß die Sirenen wirklich sangen, angesichts des angebundenen Mannes? Sollten diese machtvollen und gewandten Weiber ihre Kunst wirklich an Leute verschwendet haben, die keine Bewegungsfreiheit besaßen? Ist das das Wesen der Kunst?¹⁰

Unlike Rilke and Kafka, Brecht diminishes the status of Odysseus's speech and prioritises the Sirens' perspective. Brecht's focus on the body as central to the appreciation of art and on Odysseus's attempted repression of the Sirens' perspective anticipates Köhler's approach in *Niemands Frau*. Köhler repeatedly questions Odysseus's telling of events and that disseminated by canonical, male-dominated classical reception, challenging it by raising the voices of silenced female figures from the *Odyssey*. Brecht's account also highlights the absurd quality of Odysseus's actions and claims, which anticipates Köhler's exposure of the self-defeating and often absurd logic of patriarchal power.

The cultural criticism in Brecht's brief *Odyssey* narrative anticipates Theodor Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's seminal reading of Odysseus as the archetype for the fallen, post-Enlightenment subject, in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944). Their comment on the Sirens episode echoes that of Brecht, but whereas Brecht doubts that the Sirens

¹⁰ Bertolt Brecht, 'Odysseus und die Sirenen', in: Brecht, *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, ed. Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei and Klaus-Detlef Müller, 30 vols (Berlin, Weimar, Frankfurt a.M.: Aufbau-Verlag, Suhrkamp, 1997), vol. 19: *Prosa 4, Geschichten, Filmgeschichten, Drehbücher 1913-1939*, pp. 338-41 (p. 338). For a brief discussion of Brecht's 'correction', see: Karen Leeder, "'Argo Cargo': The Role of the Classical Past in Contemporary German Poetry", in *An Odyssey for Our Time*, ed. Paul (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 19-50 (pp. 19-21).

would sing for a fool tied to the mast, Adorno and Horkheimer analyse Odysseus's survival as an allegory for the relationship between the human subject and nature after the Enlightenment:

Die Bande, mit denen er sich unwiderruflich an die Praxis gefesselt hat, halten zugleich die Sirenen aus der Praxis fern: ihre Lockung wird zur bloßen Gegenstand der Kontemplation neutralisiert, zur Kunst. [...] Das Kulturgut steht zur kommandierten Arbeit in genauer Korrelation, und beide gründen im unentrinnbaren Zwang zur gesellschaftlichen Herrschaft über die Natur. Maßnahmen, wie sie auf dem Schiff des Odysseus in Angesicht der Sirenen durchgeführt werden, sind die ahnungsvolle Allegorie der Dialektik der Aufklärung.¹¹

According to Adorno and Horkheimer, Homer reduces the Sirens' song to the status of decorative art. In Odysseus' bonded means of listening to the Sirens while his unhearing men do the work of rowing, they identify a relationship that echoes that of the master and slave dialectic in Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807). The slaves mediate between the master and nature, which forms the basis for their mutual obligations. However, the slaves and the master both suffer: because the slaves remain enslaved, the bonded master regresses to a stage even before the participation in labour. A withering away of imagination and the human spirit takes place, as all energy is channelled into domination of the environment and of oneself.¹² For Adorno and Horkheimer, such was the situation Western man had produced for himself after the Enlightenment.

Hall summarises the significance of Adorno's and Horkheimer's choice of the *Odyssey* for their philosophical evaluation of Western culture:

When [Horkheimer and Adorno] traced the genealogy of the dark underbelly of Western reason, it was the voyage of Odysseus which they selected for their allegorical case study, thus tracing the destructive potential of reason to the *Odyssey*... They argue that this Odyssean rationality, already bound to identity, inevitably represses singularity and difference. Reason offers humans

¹¹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Alfred Schmidt and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, 19 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1985-96), V, 'Dialektik der Aufklärung' pp. 57-58.

¹² Ibid.

extraordinary, un hoped-for success in dominating nature through scientific and intellectual advancements, but inevitably leads to the domination of some men by others, and of most women by most men.¹³

As Hall points out, Adorno's and Horkheimer's critique of modernity and of the modern construction of the subject is specifically gendered and points to a male subject in crisis, as well as a marginalised female subject.¹⁴ The essay significantly influenced subsequent German intellectual activity, especially among writers investigating the effects and logic of patriarchal power, such as Ingeborg Bachmann, Heiner Müller, Christa Wolf, and Anne Duden, as well as Barbara Köhler herself.¹⁵ *Dialektik der Aufklärung* also inspired a number of theatrical projects in both the GDR and West Germany whose cultural criticisms take their cue from its 'Odysseus-Exkurs' section.¹⁶ More broadly, however, German literary reception of classical texts saw something of a decline in the first few decades after World War II. According to Wolfgang Emmerich, in West Germany there was widespread public recoiling from mythical and classical texts in reaction to the enthusiastic deployment of myth in propaganda by the Nazis: 'Die moderne, demokratische, rationale orientierte Bundesrepublik schien der Mythen nicht zu bedürfen.'¹⁷ Classical texts and references gradually lost some of their stigma, and the rehabilitation of myth in West Germany was represented by the, then unprecedented, *Antikenprojekt* at the Berliner Schaubühne in 1974, followed by Peter Stein's *Oresteia* in 1980 at the same theatre.¹⁸

¹³ Hall, p. 94.

¹⁴ Paul, *Perspectives on Gender in post-1945 German Literature* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), pp. 35-64 (p. 57).

¹⁵ Sigrid Weigel, *Ingeborg Bachmann. Hinterlassenschaften unter Wahrung des Briefgeheimnisses* (Vienna: Zsolnay, 1999), p. 530; Franziska Frei Gerlach, *Schrift und Geschlecht. Feministische Entwürfe und Lektüren von Marlen Haushofer, Ingeborg Bachmann und Anne Duden* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1998); Brigitte Rossbacher, 'Gender and the "Dialectic of Enlightenment"', in *Illusions of Progress. Christa Wolf and the Critique of Science in GDR Women's Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); Paul, *Perspectives on Gender in post-1945 German Literature*, pp. 87-90; Teresa Ludden, 'Das Undarstellbare darstellen'. *Kulturkritik and the representation of difference in the works of Anne Duden* (Berlin: Weidler, 2006).

¹⁶ Wolfgang Emmerich, 'Mythos als Erbe. Antikenprojekte der 80er Jahre auf den Theatern der Bundesrepublik und der DDR', in *Kulturelles Erbe zwischen Tradition und Avantgarde*, eds Thomas Metscher and Christian Marzahn (Cologne: Böhlau, 1991), pp. 443-457.

¹⁷ Wolfgang Emmerich, "'Eine Phantasie des Verlustes': Botho Strauß' Wendung zum Mythos', in *Mythen in nachmythischer Zeit*, eds Seidensticker and Vöhler (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2002), pp. 321-43 (p. 321).

¹⁸ Wolfgang Emmerich, 'Entzauberung – Wiederverzauberung. Die Maschine Mythos im 20. Jahrhundert', in *Mythenkorrekturen. Zu einer paradoxalen Form der Mythenrezeption*, eds Martin Vöhler, Bernd Seidensticker, Wolfgang Emmerich (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005) pp. 411-436 (p. 412).

Classical references became a defining characteristic of work produced in the German Democratic Republic.¹⁹ Classical sources could provide GDR authors with a means to process the trauma of World War II and had a sufficiently distant setting to debate themes that state censors would have not tolerated – although, as Karen Leeder points out, classical references were not limited to this function, and writers such as Müller reached beyond this towards more universal poetic goals.²⁰ Wolf's feminist intervention into classical tradition with *Kassandra* (1983) can be regarded as a significant antecedent to *Niemands Frau*. The first public airing of the *Kassandra* project was in a series of five lectures delivered in 1982. The first four were non-fiction pieces in the form of travel reports, journal entries and a letter commenting on world politics, female aesthetics and poetics, followed by an early version of *Kassandra*, which Wolf later revised and expanded. According to Paul, the project was conceived of as:

a web (*Gewebe*) or network (*Netzwerk*) of different narrative forms, containing multiple cross-references creating tensions of difference that assist the text in avoiding ultimate closure of meaning: a deliberate counter-model to the male-authored epic against which Wolf was reacting. Furthermore, in its first public form, it actualized other aspects of conceptual female counter-aesthetics: the work not as a transhistorical text, removed from the body and person of its originator and presented as a coherent, closed and authoritative whole, but as the “living word,” “the spoken word” *voiced* by the physically present author in the Now.²¹

The form and multimedia presentation of *Kassandra*, the emphasis on the embodiment of the author, the styling of the text as a ‘web’, and its status as a feminist intervention into a male-dominated classical tradition set a precedent for Köhler's *oeuvre*. The lectures and publication of *Kassandra* took place just before Köhler started to write her cycle ‘Elektra. Spiegelungen’ (written 1984-1986); furthermore, Köhler describes *Niemands Frau* as a

¹⁹ For substantial studies into classical reception since 1945, see: *Mythen in nachmythischer Zeit. Die Antike in der deutschsprachigen Literatur der Gegenwart*, eds Seidensticker and Vöhler; Heinz-Peter Preußner, *Mythos als Sinnkonstruktion. Die Antikeprojekte von Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller, Stefan Schütz und Volker Braun* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2000); *Antike – Lyrik – Heute. Griechisch-römisches Altertum in Gedichten von der Moderne bis zur Gegenwart*, eds Stefan Elit, Kai Bremer and Friederike Reents (Remschied: Gardez!, 2010).

²⁰ Leeder, “Argo Cargo”, p. 26.

²¹ Paul, *Perspectives on Gender in post-1945 German Literature*, pp. 189-222 (pp. 200-210).

‘web’ of voices and references at several points in the text and distributed with the book a CD recording of her reading the text, placing a focus on her situated and embodied authorship of the text.

The final years of the GDR and the decades since the reunification of Germany in 1989 saw a blossoming of work that engaged with classical texts, and in particular, those of Homer. Leeder’s essay in the first collected volume of scholarship on *Niemand’s Frau* draws attention to a ‘Classical Turn’ in German-language writing and beyond. A generation of German-language writers born in the late 1950s and 60s, including Durs Grünbein, Brigitte Oleschinski, Thomas Kling, Raoul Schrott and Ulrike Draesner, have engaged with classical models ‘in light of and as an answer to’ the destabilisation of identity through historical uncertainty, political fracture, and developments in science, technology and media.²² Signalling the appetite for Homer, two new translations of his epics have been published in the last decade: *Odyssee* by Kurt Steinmann (2007) and *Ilias* by Raoul Schrott (2008), who also wrote the controversial text *Homers Heimat. Der Kampf um Troia und seine realen Hintergründe* (2008), which scandalized German philologists for attempting to prove the near Eastern origin of Homer and the influence of near Eastern texts on the *Iliad*.²³ Schrott excavates ancient poetry and attempts to trace the ‘real’ Homer by literally retracing his steps. Köhler, in contrast, ironizes touristic quests for an ‘authentic Greece’ in *Niemand’s Frau* and takes a critical position towards male-dominated classical reception that obsesses over the identity of Homer. Leeder identifies Oleschinski as the contemporary writer with the most in common with Köhler’s poetic project in her texts *Argo Cargo* (2003) and *Geisterströmung* (2004): ‘Common to both writers is an engagement with recalling women’s experience, travel, the female body, orality and poetry, but also the politics of myth, colonisation and their contemporary historical moment.’²⁴ To that roster of themes, Köhler’s reception of Homer in *Niemand’s Frau* adds a significant concern with the history and direction of science and technology.

In the English language, the emphasis of classicist Anne Carson’s work invites comparison with Köhler. Carson’s oeuvre features many radical translations and reformulations of classical texts; her multimedia collection *Decreation* (2006), which depicts an X-ray of a dress on the book cover and consists of poetry, essays and opera,

²² Leeder, “Argo Cargo”, p. 28; see also: Anielia Knoblich, *Antikenkonfigurationen in der deutschsprachigen Lyrik nach 1990* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014).

²³ Homer, *Odyssee*, trans. Kurt Steinmann (Munich: Manesse, 2007); Homer, *Ilias*, trans. Raoul Schrott (Munich: Carl Hanser, 2008); Raoul Schrott, *Homers Heimat. Der Kampf um Troia und seine realen Hintergründe* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 2008).

²⁴ Leeder, “Argo Cargo”, p. 33.

to ponder the ‘undoing of the subject’, shares qualities with *Niemand's Frau*. Köhler’s multimedia cycle seeks to ‘undo’ the patriarchal subject of Western culture, is a timely feminist intervention into German classical tradition that is rigorously critical of its history, is formally innovative, and makes a rich poetic contribution to discourse about the politics of science and technology.

Barbara Köhler

Barbara Köhler was born in 1959 in Saxony and grew up in the GDR where she studied between 1985 and 1988 at the Leipziger Literatur-Institut. She was part of the unofficial – that is, non state-sanctioned – literary scene, or collection of scenes in the GDR in the 1980s.²⁵ In many ways *Niemand's Frau*, which took Köhler around twelve years to write beginning in the mid-1990s, is a culmination and extension of all of the elements that constitute her poetic *oeuvre* from the start of her career up to the point of its publication in 2007. Engagement with classical literature, poetic dialogue with her forbears, collaboration with artists to produce innovative physical texts, a critical approach to grammar, polyvalency, intertextuality, and a fascination with science and technology can be traced throughout her career.

Köhler first rose to public attention with the volume of poetry *Deutsches Roulette*, published after reunification in 1991, though written during the final five years of the GDR. The book includes a cycle of poems that engage with classical figures titled ‘Elektra. Spiegelungen’, originally published during the GDR as a collaborative project with the visual artist Gudrun Höritzsch.²⁶ Subsequently, *Blue Box* (1995) introduces computers and film into Köhler’s poetry and focuses more intensively on language as a means of relation between subjects, engaging with Ludwig Wittgenstein’s theory of language.²⁷ In the collection of theoretical essays, exhibition texts and collaborations with visual artists, *Wittgensteins Nichts* (1999), whose title is a reference to Thomas Bernhard’s autobiographical text *Wittgensteins Neffe* (1982), Köhler meditates intensively on gendered

²⁵ For a survey of poetry in the German Democratic Republic, see: Karen Leeder, *Breaking Boundaries. A New Generation of Poets in the GDR* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

²⁶ Barbara Köhler, ‘Elektra. Spiegelungen’, in *Deutsches Roulette* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), pp. 22 -31; for more detail about this cycle of poems, see: Paul, *Perspectives on Gender in post-1945 German Literature*, pp. 222-237.

²⁷ Barbara Köhler, *Blue Box* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995).

power relationships generated by German grammar.²⁸ Formal innovation is a focus of *Wittgensteins Nichte* too, and texts are printed in different fonts, mixed with images, printed at a 90-degree angle to the rest of the volume, and letters are spaced unconventionally.

Köhler's practice of publishing collaborative works in smaller editions during the GDR continued after unification with the volume *cor responde* (1998), an art book produced after a journey to Portugal, with photographs by Ueli Michel. The poem cycle engages with Portuguese literary tradition, and translations of the poems into Portuguese by Maria Teresa Dias Furtado run alongside.²⁹ Creative translation, a writing practice that informs the composition of *Niemand's Frau*, has been a feature throughout Köhler's career, notably in her versions of Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, entitled *Zarte knöpft* (2004) and Samuel Beckett's *Mirlitonrades*, entitled *Trötentöne* (2005).³⁰ Furthermore, an earlier version of *Niemand's Frau* consisting of nine 'Gesänge' and featuring a number of older translations of the *Odyssey* into German appeared in a volume of Heinz Ludwig Arnold's *Göttinger Sudelblätter* (2000) that focuses on radical translation practice and places Köhler alongside work by poets Ulrike Draesner and Peter Waterhouse.³¹ Four years before the *Sudelblätter* edition, in 1996, two cantos that appear in the final version *Niemand's Frau* were published in the literary journal *Akzente* alongside other contemporary poetry.³²

The full cycle of cantos was published by Suhrkamp in 2007 and includes a CD recording of Köhler reading the poems aloud, as well as a cover image taken from a film that Köhler made with the Swiss artist Andrea Wolfensberger. As a continuation of her practice of making collaborative editions, in the same year, Köhler published a limited run of 360 copies of a version entitled 'No One's Box', made with graphic artist Hans-Dirk Hotzel. The contents of the re-inforced grey cardboard box are: the Suhrkamp edition, the additional texts 'Die Aufrechterhaltung der Wellenfunktion' and 'Sprachspiel', a text entitled 'Die Box. Ein Gedankenexperiment' glued into the box lid,

²⁸Köhler's title *Wittgensteins Nichte* is a play on the title of the autobiographical text by Thomas Bernhard *Wittgensteins Nichte. Vermischte Schriften. Mixed Media* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1999).

²⁹ Barbara Köhler, Ueli Michal, Maria Teresa Dias Furtado, *cor responde* (Duisberg: pict.im, 1998).

³⁰ Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons, Zarte knöpft*, trans. Barbara Köhler (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004); Samuel Beckett, *Trötentöne / Mirlitonrades*, trans. Barbara Köhler (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2005).

³¹ Barbara Köhler, 'Niemand's Frau, Gesänge zur Odyssee', in : *to change the subject*, Göttinger Sudelblätter, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2000), pp. 35-51.

³² Barbara Köhler, 'Niemand's Frau', *Akzente*, 43:5 (1996), 438-44.

and a DVD: 'NIEMANDS FRAU : MOVIES'.³³ One effect of the 'No One's Box' edition is that no one true 'final version' of the text exists, an idea that is part of Köhler's opposition to the construction of monolithic, objective texts.

Since *Niemands Frau*, Köhler has published two further multimedia texts that continue to develop her interest in journeys and movement, both physical and metaphorical. *Neufundland. Schriften, teils bestimmt* (2012) is a volume of short narratives, poems, essays and translations, rich in intertexts and engagement with other writers and cultural figures, is arguably a continuation of the journey gestured towards at the end of *Niemands Frau*.³⁴ Like *Niemands Frau*, it includes a CD recording of Köhler reading some of the text. It is a book of journeys, real and literary, from Nova Scotia to London, from Gertrude Stein to Mechthild von Magdeburg, always asking questions about the unknown. As in *Niemands Frau*, quantum physics, classical figures and translations feature in Köhler's quest for knowledge. Subsequently, following a period spent in Istanbul, Köhler published *Istanbul, zusehends* (2015), her photographic and poetic response as a *flâneuse* to the Turkish city of Istanbul, mixing everyday images of food, streets and people with classical myth, and bringing German into dialogue with Turkish language. *Istanbul, zusehends* is a volume of directly observational, almost anthropological writing, as Köhler encounters the city and engages with its material realities, its Islamic culture, and reflects on the art of seeing and her place as the observing subject.³⁵

Experimentation with linguistic and printed form, multimedia formats, collaboration with other writers and artists and a critical investigation of hegemonic aspects of culture have characterised Köhler's work since the beginning of her writing career. *Niemands Frau* is the most ambitious and comprehensive work of Köhler's literary *oeuvre*, a tightly woven epic cycle that marks a significant contribution to the classical tradition in the German language.

The form and content of *Niemands Frau*

Niemands Frau is a complex material entity: it can be heard, seen, found in a box and read, and it is always in more than one place at a time. The CD that is included with the

³³ Barbara Köhler and Andrea Wolfensberger, *No-One's Box* (Lucerne and Poschiavo: Edizioni Periferia, 2007). Karen Leeder has written the most significant analysis to date of the extra texts published in 'No-One's Box': Leeder, "Argo Cargo", pp. 36-37.

³⁴ Barbara Köhler, *Neufundland. Schriften, teils bestimmt* (Vienna: Edition Korrespondenzen, 2012).

³⁵ Barbara Köhler, *Istanbul, zusehends* (Düsseldorf: Lillienfeld, 2015).

Suhrkamp edition offers a vocal version of the text that reminds the reader of Köhler's body, her gravelly voice, its texture, its jumps, its *crescendos*, its *diminuendos*, its occasional emphasis of innuendo and its mortality. She does not wish to be 'Niemand'. While Köhler makes her physical presence known through the inclusion of an audio recording, the inclusion of the CD as well as the printed text leaves open the possibility that the words can be read aloud by another person in a different voice. The CD also functions to express the aural pleasure that the text can give as a musical, poetic and audibly voiced work as well as a vigorously critical one.

Köhler writes in one of the afterword passages of *Niemands Frau* (which she names 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG') that she had spent around ten years working on the text, the same duration as Odysseus's journey to Ithaca. For over a decade of work (in fact it took her almost twelve years), the Suhrkamp edition might initially seem a slim volume at 109 pages of double-spaced text. *Niemands Frau* is nonetheless epic, not in page count but in terms of what its content encompasses and projects. It is a text that challenges and unpicks both contemporary life and the history of Western thought, from the way that grammar colludes in the exclusion of women from power, to the emerging possibilities for artificial life, whether through cloning or artificial intelligence. As signalled by the title 'Niemand's Frau', as well as the epigraphs, the cantos in Köhler's text prioritise the perspectives of female figures, specifically those she perceives as 'silenced' by a male-dominated classical tradition.

Niemands Frau is divided into twenty-four numbered sections that include twenty cantos ('Gesänge'), one epilogue and three afterword sections which Köhler names 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG'. The division establishes a structural similarity to Homer's *Odyssey* by mirroring the division into twenty-four 'Books' in Homer's text. In addition, there are three epigraphs to the volume and a section entitled 'NOTEN', in which numbered passages correspond to the numbered cantos; these 'NOTEN' provide partial explanations and further information to help elucidate the cantos.

The epigraphs to *Niemands Frau*

Each of the three epigraphs which introduce the printed volume of *Niemands Frau* gives the reader clues as to how the text within can be read and how its language operates. The first, on the back of the title page, is the homophone of the word 'Odyssey', 'Ob die see?', is attributed to Oskar Pastior (1927-2006), a Romanian-born German-language poet and

translator and the only German member of the ‘Oulipo’ poetic movement that wrote within rigorously defined frameworks of rules. ‘*Ob die see!*’ comes from the afterword to *o du rober iasmin* (2002), a volume of 43 ‘intonationen’ – inventive and idiosyncratic translations, including homophonic transformations and anagrams of Baudelaire’s poem ‘Harmonie du soir’ from *Les Fleurs du mal* (1858).

The second, as Köhler’s informs us in the ‘NOTEN’ (NF, p. 92), is a transcript of the opening words of a 1929 voice recording of James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*, with Köhler’s playful translation of the passage into German underneath.³⁶ The first epigraph shows the how the printed word can be transformed in the voicing of a text and reveals the ambiguity and possibility for play in the space between printed lexeme and spoken word. The reader experiences a clash and mixing of printed and aural meaning even when reading silently: as Paul notes, ‘the trick works because a reader internally ‘voices’ the words of a written text as she or he reads; i.e. reading written words, even when done silently to oneself, activates the trace of voice’.³⁷ The Joyce quotation, transcribed from an audio recording, takes the oral/aural version as its original ‘source’ rather than the printed text, revealing Köhler’s preoccupation with the physical presence of the author and of corporeal life over and above a voice that purports to come from nowhere and belong to nobody in particular.

On the reverse of that page is the proposition ‘(Die Beobachterin ist Teil des Systems)’, which introduces the role that quantum physics play in *Niemand’s Frau* as a scientific basis for Köhler’s insistence on the participatory and partial status of all knowledge, and also of the embodied (gendered) status of all observers. The statement is a modification of an idea from quantum physics that has subsequently become a widely used truism that, ‘der Beobachter ist Teil des Experiments’, first presented by Niels Bohr in 1927. John Gribbin, in his influential popularisation of theories of quantum physics *In Search of Schrödinger’s Cat* (1984), explained Bohr’s theory thus: ‘whereas in classical physics we imagine a system of interacting particles to function, like clockwork, regardless of whether or not they are observed, in quantum physics the observer interacts with the system to such an extent that the system cannot be thought of as having an independent

³⁶ James Joyce, *Finnegan’s Wake*, eds Danis Rose and John O’Hanlon (London: Penguin Classics, 2010), p. 167.

³⁷ Georgina Paul, ‘Different Voices: Other Poets in Barbara Köhler’s *Niemand’s Frau*, with a Special Study of the Significance of T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*’, in *An Odyssey for Our Time*, ed. Paul, pp. 185-210, (p. 187).

existence.³⁸ Köhler's modification is self-referential and points to her position as a woman 'observing the system' and changing it as she does so, refusing the idea of transcendent, objective and disembodied viewpoint and a voice that has no particular origin.

The cantos

Köhler presents the first twenty cantos in five groups of four under the subheadings 'ZWISCHEN NIEMAND UND ETWAS'; 'ZWISCHEN TELEMACH UND ASTYANAX'; 'ZWISCHEN HADES UND PERSEPHONE'; 'ZWISCHEN SKYLLA UND KALYPSO'; 'ZWISCHEN NACHT UND TAG'. The subheadings describe different stages of an odyssey as re-imagined by Köhler, and although there are narrative connections to the *Odyssey* in some cantos, the content and ordering of information moves far from Homer's text. I choose to analyse cantos featuring figures in *Niemands Frau* to whom Köhler has devoted the most attention and about which substantial work has not yet been done: those featuring Penelope, Odysseus, Helena and Tiresias/Alan Turing. While other figures such as Kirke and Nausikaa do feature in individual cantos, their thematic importance across the whole cycle is not as significant. Furthermore, where relevant, figures that are not the focus of my thesis are brought into my analysis. I do not analyse *Niemands Frau* in chronological order, but rather group cantos according to their association with each figure on whom I focus. I have chosen to give full analyses of each canto that I focus on, rather than moving thematically across the cycle. Each canto, although always linked to the cycle as a whole, possesses its own rigorous internal logic and form, the interrogation of which is essential for understanding *Niemands Frau*.

It is not possible to summarise adequately most of the cantos in *Niemands Frau* given their dense content and often abstract, non-narrative style, but I will give a broad overview of the five subheaded groups Köhler has created. The four cantos under the heading 'ZWISCHEN NIEMAND UND ETWAS' do not retell recognisable narratives from the *Odyssey*, although there are references to the Muses, Troy, Odysseus, Hades, the Sirens and Skylla. Rather, they are characterised by a wider reflection of the crisis of the Western, rational subject and the destruction of life due to violently rationalistic forms of thought and law. The title of the section is indicative of its content, as it is Odysseus's

³⁸ John Gribbin, *In Search of Schrödinger's Cat* (London: Black Swan, 1991), p. 160.

occupation of the position of 'Niemand' in the *Odyssey* that Köhler finds deeply problematic, and explores throughout *Niemands Frau*. The second canto, 'AUTOPILOT', which depicts Odysseus's departure from Troy as a flight taking off with Odysseus as the pilot, flying through time, and philosophical and literary history from Homer to Ovid to Dante to Descartes to T. S. Eliot, does not feature extensively in this thesis. The cantos in this section are highly intertextual and abstract in style.

The title 'ZWISCHEN TELEMACH UND ASTYANAX' refers to Odysseus's son Telemachus, and to Hector's son Astyanax (Hector was Prince of Troy). The cantos retell recognisable episodes from Odysseus's and Penelope's lives during the journey from Troy back to Ithaca. The first, 'NAUSIKAA : RAPPORT', which does not feature extensively in this thesis, focuses on Odysseus's encounter with Nausicaa who, in Homer's text, rescues Odysseus when he washes up in Phoenicia. The canto portrays the relational role that the female figures play in the *Odyssey* critically, always secondary to Odysseus. The second focuses on Penelope's weaving trick and challenges the idea that Penelope was waiting for Odysseus; the third reveals Odysseus's memories of the Trojan war and his sorrow at the ostensibly inescapable violence of patriarchy; and the fourth, 'KIRKE' is the sorceress Kirke's critical reflection on being visited by Odysseus and his men. 'KIRKE' which does not feature heavily in this thesis, voices the sorceress's view of Odysseus and his men and strips the nobility out of their acts of violence in war, characterising them as a horde of murderers, no better than animals (*NF*, p. 28). In the cantos in this section, Köhler subverts Homer's narratives and tells the stories from the 'other side', just as Brecht does in his 'doubting' of the Sirens narrative.

The first two cantos under the subheading 'ZWISCHEN HADES UND PERSEPHONE' deal with themes of death, 'seers' and the future in ancient and modern contexts. Köhler brings together a group of 'seers' including the clairvoyant consulted by computer scientist Alan Turing, Turing himself, computers, and haruspex. There are recognisable elements from Homer's text in these cantos, but these are more abstract than directly narrative and these cantos are heavily intertextual. The third, 'HADES : LEKTÜRE : HADES', which is not analysed fully in this thesis, deals with the issue of fear of women that is intrinsic to patriarchal power. The final canto in the section, 'MATRIX / AMATRIX' moves away from the theme of death and focuses on Helena as an embodiment of the dualism of mother/whore in the representation of women in Western culture.

‘ZWISCHEN SKYLLA UND KALYPSO’ refers to the passage of Odysseus’s voyage from Skylla (and Charybdis) to Calypso’s cave in the *Odyssey*. Three of the cantos are Köhler’s critical retellings of Odysseus’s encounters with female figures on his journey, the Sirens, Skylla and Calypso’s Cave, and Leukothea, and the remaining canto is Köhler’s critical reflection on the role of the male creative genius, starting with Orpheus (who does not appear in the *Odyssey*). Köhler’s retellings reverse the perspective of Homer’s text, for example, she reveals the Sirens’ empathetic view of Odysseus’s need painfully to bind his body. ‘LEUKOTHEA : WHITE OUTS’, which does not feature in this thesis, tells the story of Ino/Leukothea, who in the *Odyssey*, helped Odysseus survive after his ship was wrecked. The canto exhibits elements of ‘konkrete poesie’, that are a feature of *Niemands Frau*, whereby the sinking and rising of Odysseus’s ship are shown through the arrangement of words on the printed page. Of the cantos in this section, ‘SKYLLA / ENTHÜLLEN’ is particularly wide-ranging in its references, from Plato, to Greta Garbo, to Pavlovian conditioning experiments.

Finally, the first three cantos of ‘ZWISCHEN NACHT UND TAG’ concern Penelope and her feelings about Odysseus’s absence, his return and her recognition of him. The title of the section refers to the night that Penelope spends with Odysseus after his return, reflecting on their relationship and its position towards the end of *Niemands Frau* reflects the point of Odysseus’s return and Penelope’s recognition of him in Homer’s text. As is the case throughout *Niemands Frau* Köhler challenges the account of Penelope’s feelings for Odysseus in Homer’s text, conveying her sorrow and frustration at his absence and disappointment, disillusionment and despair upon his return. The final canto in this section moves from the *Odyssey* to the voice of the theoretical cat from Erwin Schrödinger’s experiment into quantum particles. Köhler identifies Schrödinger’s cat as analogous to silenced women, as speaking from ‘die nachtseite des abendlands’ (*NF*, p. 66). ‘DIE KATZ’, which does not receive a full commentary in this thesis, epitomises Köhler’s use of quantum physics to articulate thoughts about lived reality with her project to liberate repressed voices from the history of Western culture.

Paratexts in *Niemands Frau*

Including explanatory notes has been an element of Köhler’s work since the first volume *Deutsches Roulette* (1991), which includes a brief ‘Erläuterungen’ section, and *Blue Box*,

which includes 'Anmerkungen'. The form and content of the afterwords and notes sections in *Niemands Frau* deviate from conventional afterwords and notes sections in various ways. In the section titled 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG' (NF, pp. 73-90), which consists of three separately numbered texts, Köhler articulates most clearly what she criticises in earlier reception and translation of the *Odyssey*, and how she envisages her own text. The 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG' is not a traditional afterword in terms of format or content, and its status is formally ambiguous. The way in which Köhler sets out the 'afterwords' is in keeping with the notion, discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, that there is no entirely external space from which to comment on language, but gestures nonetheless towards the reflective externality of a paratext. The title 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG', insists that the texts may not be considered a permanent reflection external to the flow of time, but are situated in, and contingent on, the moment at which they were written. As *afterwords* conventionally are, the 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG' section is situated spatially after what can be conceived of as the 'main' poetic texts, and it is written in a tone that indicates that it was written temporally *after* the cantos too. However, Köhler numbers its three subsections among the 24 sections that include the 'main' poetic texts. However, the numbering itself is then undermined by being in parentheses, unlike the numbers for the 'main' texts, and has the addition of an extra numbering system of ('1/22', '2/23', '3/24'). Furthermore, the typesetting of the afterword texts differentiates them from most of the cantos, which are mostly arranged in a regimented box form, whereas the lines of the 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG' become progressively less regimented from the first afterword, to the third, with no apparent pattern of line-endings. The less regulated typesetting indicates that their form is not being employed as actively to create poetic meaning as it is in the main cantos.

The afterwords therefore hover formally between poetic text and reflective paratext: they are signalled as both belonging and not belonging to the 'main text'. Stylistically too, the language used in the 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG' section does not clearly belong to either poetic text or explanatory prosaic text and is a liminal form. The irregular syntax, grammar and orthography of the section recall the style of more evidently 'poetic' cantos and in the first of the three afterwords, the anaphoric refrain at the beginning of each gives it a song-like quality, but overall, they are more syntactically regular and obviously coherent than the main poetic cantos. Through the formal and stylistic indeterminacy of the afterwords, Köhler ensures that they cannot be thought of as entirely separate from the poetic cantos, and so incorporates reflection on *Niemands*

Frau into *Niemands Frau*. By doing this, she tries to ensure that the cycle cannot become monumentalised or completed and is always in process: the explanatory paratexts raise, as well as answer, questions. However, the tone of the 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG' is nonetheless more explanatory than the main poetic texts in the cycle, and thus they do function to elucidate the poetic texts for the reader.

The 'NOTEN' section of the text, which follows the provisional afterword, consists of brief notes that give explanatory and sometimes perplexing information and external references that correspond numerically to the 21 poetic texts and the three texts in the 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG'. The word 'NOTEN' describes a 'musical score' or 'musical notation' and corresponds to the subtitle of the cycle announced on the text's inside pages, 'Gesänge'. Köhler is keen for the lyrical and aural aspect of the poetic texts not to be forgotten and reminds the reader that the cantos are not merely to be read, but *read aloud*. No actual musical notation for the 'Gesänge' (cantos) is provided and Köhler reads them out on the CD recording included with the print edition, rather than singing them. However, her insistence on framing the texts in musical terms also reflects her desire to achieve in poetry a semantic polyphony akin to that produced aurally in music. The 'NOTEN' help her achieve semantic polysemy by weaving more layers of meaning into the poetic text through the references, ideas and explanations contained within them. However, the content of the 'NOTEN' is not complete and does not account for all of the references made in the body text and Köhler does not always account for her sources. The 'NOTEN' themselves are also partial and resemble the notes to T.S. Eliot's poem cycle *The Waste Land*, which is a key intertext for *Niemands Frau*.³⁹

In *Paratexts* (1997), Gerard Genette observes there is no standard location for a 'notes' section in the modern book format. The situation of notes evolved from the Middle Ages, prior to the invention of the printing press, when they surrounded, or were larded into the text in smaller letters, this practice continued into the early years of print, before giving way to the side notes, or 'marginal' notes, of the sixteenth century. By the eighteenth century they tended to be placed at the bottom of the page, while their placement is nowadays highly varied.⁴⁰ In putting them at the very end of her text, Köhler assigns her 'NOTEN' the most external position possible, making it physically

³⁹ T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber, 1969), pp. 59-80. Quotations from Eliot's poem will be given with line numbers.

⁴⁰ Gerard Genette, *Paratexts. Thresholds of interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 319-343 (p. 320).

inconvenient for the reader to view the 'NOTEN' and thereby possibly reducing the polyphony they create. However, the physical inconvenience that the location of Köhler's notes causes also has the effect of emphasizing the embodied reading experience, as the reader has to labour physically to read *Niemand's Frau*. The reader must move herself or himself, and become physically as well as mentally mobile to access more of the text. This is especially true given the content of the 'NOTEN', some of which are explanatory, while others merely give a reference to another external text or a film, are incomplete in their explanation, or introduce concepts from mathematics that require further investigation for non-specialists. In this way the 'NOTEN', combined with the poetic texts, create lines of investigation that the reader is invited to follow up through the labour of research using other texts and the internet (to which *Niemand's Frau* repeatedly refers) and by making the leaps of intellect and imagination that are required to perceive meaning in the text. Köhler's paratexts thus have an important function in making *Niemand's Frau* an intellectual and cultural odyssey for the reader through the rich network of references that she brings together.

A further effect of the 'NOTEN' is to raise the question of whether *Niemand's Frau* is a fictional or a more didactic intellectual text. As Genette points out in his analysis of note forms, authorial notes in fictional texts are 'used most often with texts whose fictionality is very "impure", very conspicuous for its historical references or sometimes for its philosophical reflections: novels or poems whose notes for the most part bear precisely on the nonfictional aspect of the narrative'.⁴¹ Genette's assertion bears fruit when considering the status of *Niemand's Frau*, which is as much a philosophical and political document expressing the stagnation of culture and thought along narrow patriarchal lines as Köhler perceives it, as it is a radical retelling of Homer's *Odyssey*. The 'NOTEN' and the 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG' aid Köhler in her quest to challenge norms of understanding, and reveal the metaphorical connections she sees between physics, language, cultural history and philosophy.

Box Form

Most of the cantos are formatted into a 'box' form layout – literally, in a box shape on the page – and use the monospaced font 'Courier New', where every letter occupies an

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 332.

identical amount of space. Each line should therefore have an identical number of characters. In an interview about her use of the box form in the online magazine *karawa*, Köhler describes the form as machine-like, as if using a typewriter: ‘Die Blöcke, die ich verwende, sind eine rein maschinelle Form, herkommend von der Schreibmaschine. Ich empfand das als sehr hilfreich, sich von etwas Außer-körperlichem Grenzen setzen zu lassen. Und dazwischen kann dann die Post abgehen.’⁴² Köhler draws inspiration from the limits that an obsolete technology places on writing and finds in the limits it imposes, a dynamic and dialectical collaborative tool. The box form means that words are pushed over line breaks or split in two, often producing multiple possibilities for interpretation.

In the same interview, Köhler compares the box form to a Rubik’s cube, where each turn, dictated by the form of the cube, can produce a new combination. However, Köhler also creates calculated transgressions of the box form: ‘Da sind dann Texte dabei, wo ein oder zwei Buchstaben rauslappen, was mir aber auch wichtig ist: dass die Form über die Verletzung deutlich wird.’ In the canto SIRENEN, for example, the image of the bound Odysseus straining at the ropes that hurt him is made more visceral by the escaped ‘g’ on the third full line of this extract.

was
kommt aus seinen händen den ge
bundenen hat er sich in gewalt
gegeben den tauben ohren seines
gleichen die stricke schneiden
das eigene fleisch es schmerzt
(*NF*, p. 47)

The visual and semantic elements of the text intersect, creating the sense that the text on the page is enacting what is being conveyed semantically by the words, and the reader witnesses the temporary failure of the box form to restrain the words within it, just as Odysseus does not passively submit to restraint.

Other breaks with the box form are similarly expressive: ‘POLYMORPHEM’ (*NF*, pp. 16-17) for example, has fairly uneven edges on the inner margins of the boxes of two pages facing each other, which almost resemble the uneven ‘cut pages’ of older books – perhaps relating to the canto’s content that refers to the origins of printing. The

⁴² ‘Würfel, Kiste, Box – Gespräch mit Barbara Köhler’, *karawa* : www.karawa.net/content/wuerfel-kiste-box-gespraech-mit-barbara-koehler [accessed: 12th September 2015].

box form is also used to make one word into two, creating at least two narratives at once, as in this example:

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retour ins futur als  
låg der tod schon hinter uns vor uns un  
sterblichkeit VATER & KLON  
(NF, pp. 50-51)
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By dividing up the word ‘unsterblichkeit’ over the line break, effectively making two words, Köhler draws out the ambiguous status of cloned life and also of the patriarchal father-son relationship, where each father attempts to produce an identical successor. The cloned life is at once mortal (sterblich) because it is made of flesh and also immortal (unsterblich) because it is the repetition of genes and holds the potential to ensure that the same life is reproduced forever. While the words seem to be saying that death is a thing of the past for the clone, by splitting the word un/sterblichkeit’, Köhler makes it waver. This idea is developed as Köhler comments that the operation of patriarchal power depends on the effective production of sons who fulfil the identical function of their father.

It must be noted that, while on the Suhrkamp printed page the box form is used for many of the cantos, one discovers when attempting to type out those same cantos in Courier New using Microsoft Word that they do not always reproduce Köhler’s neat boxes. Köhler has employed editing software to kern the text so that it fits within the box form when she wants it to, even if the line lengths differ slightly, revealing her meticulous involvement with the layout of the printed edition. The paratextual sections ‘NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG’ and the ‘NOTEN’ abandon the box form, signalling that they can be read more as prose than poetry, though the content of the afterword section often shifts into a poetic mode of expression. Furthermore, the ‘NOTEN’ are printed in a smaller font than the rest of the cycle, perhaps indicating a lower position in the hierarchy of the text. Syntax, capitalisation, grammar and punctuation are used unconventionally throughout the cycle for specific semantic reasons and to produce reactions on the part of the reader as they are encountered visually. Italics are often used to denote that text comes from elsewhere such as in ‘HADES : PROJEKTION : HADES’ where Köhler quotes from *The Waste Land* (NF, p. 38) or to denote that the words are in another language; words entirely in upper case are sometimes used to suggest a slogan or mantra or a pop-cultural reference such as ‘BOY MEETS GIRL’ in

‘SKYLLA / ENTHÜLLEN’ (NF, p. 53). However, there is no consistent rule for how Köhler uses these visual tools.

Review of Secondary Literature on *Niemand's Frau*

As Georgina Paul comments in the introduction to *An Odyssey for Our Time. Barbara Köhler's Niemand's Frau*, the cycle received a muted and relatively negative critical response in the German media.⁴³ However, in academic circles, *Niemand's Frau* has received more substantial attention. A number of articles have been written about two cantos that were first published in *Akzente* in 1996, before their eventual appearance in the 2007 Suhrkamp edition.

Margaret Littler's article (1999) reflects on the appropriation of mythical female figures from classical narratives and Köhler's poetic images of the sea and uses Luce Irigaray's concept of 'a new subject-object relation on the basis of this fluid notion of the subject; a relationship in which desire and identification are not necessarily mutually exclusive'.⁴⁴ Helmut Schmitz's article in the first *German Monitor* volume to focus on Köhler's work in 2000 examines the 'semantic multiplicity' of her poetry within a discussion of gender relations and finds that it moves towards a utopia of the subject that attempts to escape the binary grammatical positions of 'Mann' and 'Frau'.⁴⁵ Schmitz's later article 'Grammatik der Differenz – Barbara Köhlers Suche nach einer nichtidentischen Subjektivität' offers a complex analysis of the subject across Köhler's poetic *oeuvre* including the *Niemand's Frau* poems published in the *Göttinger Sudelblätter*, and demonstrates the open-endedness of her vision of the subject, without situating it as the articulation of a biological, corporeally grounded difference to propose a notion of 'Differenz ohne Identität'.⁴⁶ He ponders whether the utopian form of the subject imagined by Köhler can only exist within the space of performance or poetic text, identifying a

⁴³ Georgina Paul, 'Introduction' in *An Odyssey for our Time*, ed. Paul, pp. 1-18 (p. 7 and p. 16, n. 26).

⁴⁴ Margaret Littler, 'Rivers, Seas, and Estuaries: Margins of the Self in the world of Barbara Köhler', in *Nachdenken über Grenzen*, eds Rüdiger Görner and Suzanne Kirkbright (Munich: Iudicium, 1999), pp. 191-208 (p. 195).

⁴⁵ Helmut Schmitz, 'Viele Ausgänge'? On some Motifs in Barbara Köhler's Poetry', in *Entgegenkommen. Dialogues with Barbara Köhler*, eds Georgina Paul and Helmut Schmitz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 127-146.

⁴⁶ Helmut Schmitz, 'Grammatik der Differenz – Barbara Köhlers Suche nach einer nichtidentischen Subjektivität', in *Weiblichkeit als politisches Programm*, eds Bettina Gruber and Heinz-Peter Preußner (Tübingen: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), pp. 167-181.

tension between the textual manifestation of her alternative model for subjectivity and the empirical reality, which can only ever be voiced and embodied.⁴⁷

Elizabeth Boa brings Köhler's 'SIRENEN 2', published in the *Göttinger Sudelblätter*, into her discussion of literary representation of Sirens alongside texts by Frank Wedekind and Franz Kafka.⁴⁸ Boa contrasts Köhler's portrayal of the Sirens with more limited patriarchal representations in texts by Kafka and Wedekind and demonstrates that Köhler's siren language is not a 'chaotic babble' of plural voices, but 'achieves an interpenetrating and fluid unity and any threat of chaos is firmly controlled within the technology of print, by the witty play on words and through a sophisticated game of intertextual allusion'.⁴⁹ Boa's focus on Köhler's active use of print technology is an important initial engagement with the semantics of form that becomes central in the final version of *Niemands Frau*. Mirjam Bitter's monograph on Köhler's *oeuvre*, titled *sprache, macht, geschlecht* (2007), is a wide-ranging survey of Köhler's poetry and essays, including brief passages on the *Göttinger Sudelblätter* edition.⁵⁰ Köhler's theoretical essays about language are considered alongside those of other philosophers to show how she attempts to propose a polyphonic subject and dialogic language that resist patriarchal norms. Aneka Metzger, whose monograph *Zur Rede Stellen* (2011) examines the performative potential of Köhler's work, wrote the first essay to take into account the completed cycle of *Niemands Frau*.⁵¹ Metzger appraises *Niemands Frau* positively as a radical intervention in the *Odyssey* that opens the text to contemporary meanings, in contrast to Raoul Schrott's *Homers Heimat* (2008).⁵² However, Metzger argues that, in comparison with male counterparts, Köhler becomes bogged down with neglected female figures.⁵³ Metzger's view does not take account of the significant attention given to Alan Turing and Tiresias in the cycle, however, or the fact that Köhler interrogates the structures that sustain patriarchal power that repress men as well as women.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 180.

⁴⁸ Boa, 'Revoicing Silenced Sirens', pp. 8-20.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 20.

⁵⁰ Mirjam Bitter, *sprache macht geschlecht. Zu Lyrik und Essayistik von Barbara Köhler* (Berlin: trafo, 2007).

⁵¹ Aneka Metzger, *Zur Rede Stellen. Die performativen Textinstallationen der Lyrikerin Barbara Köhler* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2011); Aneka Metzger, 'Weibliche Mythenadaption als "Gegenspiel"'. Zu Barbara Köhlers Gedichtzyklus *Niemands Frau. Gesänge*, in *Die fiktive Frau. Konstruktionen von Weiblichkeit in der deutschsprachigen Literatur*, eds Ana-Maria Palimariu and Elisabeth Berger (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre, 2010), pp. 347-64.

⁵² Schrott, *Homers Heimat*.

⁵³ Metzger, 'Weibliche Mythenadaption', p. 355.

In 2010 Aniela Knoblich wrote an essay that focuses on intertextuality in *Niemand's Frau*.⁵⁴ However, as Georgina Paul points out in her 2013 essay on that topic, the connection that Knoblich makes between *Niemand's Frau* and former West German author Verena Stefan's autobiographical feminist text *Häutungen* (1975) is over-emphasised and results in a reductive reading that focuses on male-female duality.⁵⁵ In her 2014 thematic survey of contemporary literary engagement with classical texts, *Antikenkonfigurationen in der deutschsprachigen Lyrik nach 1990*, Knoblich lists *Niemand's Frau* as one of the core texts she will consider, alongside work by Thomas Kling, Durs Grünbein and Raoul Schrott.⁵⁶ However, while Knoblich points out that Köhler has received less attention than her male counterparts, she goes on to repeat the exclusion. Some descriptive comment on *Niemand's Frau* introduces the volume, suggesting that it will be a focus, as well as opening the conclusion, but it receives scant mention in the text as a whole, with the majority of analysis given over to Köhler's male contemporaries.

The most significant collection of scholarship about *Niemand's Frau* to date is the volume of essays in English and German, entitled *An Odyssey for Our Time. Barbara Köhler's Niemand's Frau*, edited by Georgina Paul (2013). The volume followed a symposium at St Hilda's College, Oxford in September 2011, at which Barbara Köhler was present, and versions of all but one of the chapters were first aired there. Georgina Paul's introduction gives a detailed summary of the thinking and background behind the conception of *Niemand's Frau*. Karen Leeder and classicist Hans Jürgen Scheuer engage with *Niemand's Frau* in relation to the reception of classical literature. Leeder's contribution, already cited in this introduction, is a comprehensive survey of the recent 'classical turn' in German poetry and goes on to identify the distinctive characteristics in Köhler's treatment of classical texts in her work, contrasting them with those of her contemporaries. Leeder demonstrates ways in which *Niemand's Frau* is a project "to change the subject" in its fullest existential sense' and identifies the risks involved in such emancipation. Leeder also laments the public reluctance to conceive of Köhler as *poeta*

⁵⁴Aniela Knoblich, "BIBLIOTHEKEN SIND MEINE ABGEZOGENEN HÄUTE". Identität und Intertextualität in Barbara Köhlers Gesängen "Niemand's Frau", in *Antike – Lyrik – Heute. Griechisch-römisches Altertum in Gedichten von der Moderne bis zur Gegenwart*, eds Stefan Elit, Kai Bremer and Friederike Reents (Remscheid: Gardez!, 2010), pp. 241-60.

⁵⁵ Georgina Paul, 'Different Voices: Other Poets in Barbara Köhler's *Niemand's Frau*', in *An Odyssey for Our Time*, ed. Paul, pp. 185-210 (p. 204, n. 7).

⁵⁶ Aniela Knoblich, *Antikenkonfigurationen in der deutschsprachigen Lyrik nach 1990* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014).

docta (a learned poet).⁵⁷ Classicist Hans Jürgen Scheuer describes *Niemand's Frau* as an ‘archeology of the myth’ rather than a ‘correction’ (as Leeder describes it, after Brecht) uncovering (female) voices, genealogies and stories that had been hidden ‘unter dem Schutt der Rezeptionsgeschichte’.⁵⁸ Scheuer depicts *Niemand's Frau* as a complex Penelopean memory of the *Odyssey*, contrasting with the hitherto dominant memory of it as the narrative of a patriarch’s violent return to power. A shorter version of Chapter 2 of this thesis appears in the same volume under the title: ‘*Niemand's Frau* as a “Minor Translation” of the *Odyssey* from “er” to “sie”’. Using Deleuze’s and Guattari’s concept of the ‘minor’ I contend that *Niemand's Frau* can be considered as a form of ‘minor translation’ that flows from Köhler’s treatment of the pronoun ‘sie’, in contrast to what she associates with the pronoun ‘er’. I explore associations that Köhler makes between ‘sie’ and quantum particles and reflect on the ethical implications preposition Köhler’s poetics as a form of language where difference may be articulated.⁵⁹

Three chapters engage with philosophy as a starting point for analysing *Niemand's Frau*. Rachel Jones depicts the alienating effect of the first line of Homer’s *Odyssey* to the modern female reader, where women are ascribed the role of inspiration to a male poet depicting male adventures. Thinking with feminist philosophers Luce Irigaray and Adriana Cavarero, Jones proposes that *Niemand's Frau* ‘breaks with the logic of the One’ to open up for the reader ‘the possibility of a different space-time, where I is a she-they, sustained by her/its/their ability to incorporate differences and indeterminacy’.⁶⁰ Mirjam Bitter takes a comparative approach using Deleuzian Rosi Braidotti’s *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*. Bitter identifies Braidotti’s materialist nomadic philosophy of becoming as being analogous with the constant movement of meaning in Köhler’s ‘web’-like poetics. Bitter suggests that Köhler succeeds where ultimately Braidotti fails in a project of re-defining subjectivity by avoiding recourse to a philosophy of difference that distributes characteristics into stereotypical ‘male’ and ‘female’ categories. Helmut Schmitz argues that *Niemand's Frau* follows the critique of masculine subjectivity set out in Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Schmitz proposes that Köhler’s poetological solution to her critical view of patriarchal, unitary identity is her use of

⁵⁷ Leeder, “Argo Cargo”, p. 35 and p. 40.

⁵⁸ Hans Jürgen Scheuer, ‘Polytropa. Barbara Köhlers Erkundung des Griechischen. (Homer, *Odyssee*/Sappho, *Anaktoria*-Fragment)’, in *An Odyssey for Our Time*, ed. Paul, pp. 51-69 (pp. 57-58).

⁵⁹ Rebecca May Johnson, ‘*Niemand's Frau* as a “Minor” Translation of the *Odyssey* from “er” to “sie”’, in *An Odyssey for Our Time*, ed. Paul, pp. 71-89.

⁶⁰ Rachel Jones, ‘Reading Köhler with Irigaray and Cavarero’, in *An Odyssey for Our Time*, ed. Paul, pp. 89-116 (p. 110).

paradox. Like Jones, Schmitz suggests that Köhler does not propose a utopian elsewhere for her alternative model of the subject, but searches for difference within the existing world and warns that ‘*Niemand's Frau* offers no unambiguously positive image of feminine/female identity as difference, no image of “her” that is not already part of a history of “his” reflections and projections [...], no figuring of difference that is not re-implicated in the logic of identification’.⁶¹ Like Johnson, Schmitz explores Köhler’s re-thinking of the subject through her use of quantum physics to re-imagine reality from within the limits of present false existence.

Margaret Littler’s ‘Strange Loops and Quantum Turns in *Niemand Frau*’ takes the cycle as an experiment in thinking in the subjunctive, bringing the *Odyssey* into dialogue with the scientific realm of uncertainty in quantum physics. Littler traces the ideas and figures from the history of science and technology that appear in *Niemand's Frau*, from David Hilbert and Alan Turing to Kurt Gödel, Richard P. Feynman and Douglas Hofstadter, showing the breadth and depth of Köhler’s poetic challenge to linear, Newtonian logic.⁶² Editor Georgina Paul’s chapter, which concludes the academic reception in the volume, examines Köhler’s use of quotations and allusions, in particular, her references to T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. Paul focuses on the purpose of cultural critique shared by Köhler and those she cites and identifies *Niemand's Frau* as an inclusive text that performs a trans-historical polyphony by weaving together the voices of forebears such as Dante, Eliot and Goethe.

The contributions to *An Odyssey for Our Time* begin the work of elucidating the tightly woven text, addressing important thematic and philosophical aspects and exploring its productive and playful language. However, the brevity of the format and the need for each contributor to formulate a thematic argument within one chapter raises some issues. First, because of the diverse references, quotations and intertexts in *Niemand's Frau*, there is an extent to which a thematic argument that picks and chooses text from across the cycle can produce a narrow reading that does not address the complexity of the cantos. The cantos are tightly worked-out individual systems that have within them complex networks of meaning that remain largely undiscovered if phrases are lifted and treated comparatively with other phrases from elsewhere within the cycle.

⁶¹ Bitter, *sprache macht geschlecht. Zu Lyrik und Essayistik von Barbara Köhler*, Jones, ‘Reading Köhler with Irigaray and Cavarero’, pp. 89-116. Helmut Schmitz, ‘The “nachtseite des abendlands“: Barbara Köhler’s *Niemand's Frau* and the Dialectic of Enlightenment’, in *An Odyssey for Our Time*, ed. Paul, pp. 139-161 (p. 154).

⁶² Margaret Littler, ‘Strange Loops and Quantum Turns in *Niemand's Frau*’, in *An Odyssey for Our Time*, ed. Paul, pp. 163-185.

This is an issue in Littler's chapter which, though making pertinent and interesting comparisons between Köhler's poetics and ideas from the history of science, is in danger of becoming a descriptive list of references and associations, rather than an argued analysis. Second, there is the problem caused by attempting to apply too closely the work of any particular philosopher to *Niemands Frau*. The comparison between *Niemands Frau* and Rosi Braidotti's thinking is seductive; however, making the statement that Köhler's language is *similar to* what Braidotti advocates does little to elucidate *Niemands Frau* analytically. Jones' meditation on the subject in *Niemands Frau* makes more targeted use of Irigaray and Cavarero in reflecting on the subject of *Niemands Frau*, which is more successful.

Missing from the existing scholarship in the volume and elsewhere, aside from Hans Jürgen Scheuer's chapter, is close engagement with the Homeric figures in *Niemands Frau*, after whom most of the cantos are named, and around whom most of cantos are structured. Köhler is at pains in the 'NOTEN' section and in references throughout the cycle to flag up specific moments in Homer's text and in alternative, later narratives within classical reception that relate to figures in *Niemands Frau*, and these references contribute significantly to the semantic richness of the cycle. Köhler develops structures of associations and genealogies around each Homeric figure, which must be investigated, unpicked and rigorously thought through, to begin to appreciate their full significance. The Homeric figures anchor Köhler's poetic reflection in the genealogy of Western culture and the problems she perceives as being produced by it.

Accordingly, aside from Chapter 2, which deals with the tradition of translation and considers *Niemands Frau* as a radical form of translation, the chapters of this thesis are built around key figures in Köhler's text. Penelope, Helen of Troy, Tiresias/Alan Turing and Odysseus were chosen for several reasons. First, Köhler devotes at least two cantos to each of these figures and they frequently reappear elsewhere in the cycle too. A vast number of references and ideas are amassed around each of these figures, more so than other figures after whom Köhler names cantos (Kirke, Leukothea and Orpheus, who are the focus of only one each). Second, anchoring my analysis to Köhler's engagement with classical tradition and the major Odyssean figures provides a coherent structure and facilitates navigation of the potentially overwhelming network of references. Alan Turing evidently appears as an anomaly in the list of names taken from classical texts but, as will become apparent, Köhler regards Turing as a modern Tiresias.

I offer full and detailed readings of the cantos that focus centrally on the Homeric figures, as well as on Alan Turing, while also referring selectively to material from elsewhere in the text. For each Homeric or modern figure that constitutes the focus of a chapter I produce a survey of relevant literary and critical reception so that the reader of the thesis can appreciate the contextual references and nuances that elucidate Köhler's treatment. From Chapter 3 onwards I read Köhler's re-imagining of each figure in light of his or her Homeric role and of traditions in reception, also paying particular attention to any specific incidents from the Homeric text or subsequent representations that she draws upon.

Key to my methodology is close reading, which is essential to gain access to complex, challenging and often syntactically irregular cantos. This way of reading the text is productive because without following up the intertextual leads, slowly re-reading lines, considering meanings in other languages and observing the sound of words as much as their semantic meaning, *Niemand's Frau* does not reveal itself. Köhler plays with the structure of German, rejects regular word order as well as using it conventionally, and mixes it in with the English, French, Italian and Greek languages. The way that it is written, with notes that the reader must flick to, or words that resemble other words, means that the reader may be prevented from experiencing the text as a purely aesthetic experience and must often pause and ask questions of the text as well as of their own perceptions.

Further to close readings of *Niemand's Frau*, I produce close readings of intertexts where helpful, in particular the *Odyssey*, but also readings of texts by Goethe, T.S. Eliot and others. *Niemand's Frau* has a significant philosophical dimension to it; however, it is not dependent on one thinker, and an attempt to analyse the text through a narrow lens would seriously limit the outcome. In my analysis, therefore, I draw selectively on the work of a wide range of thinkers including, but not limited to: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Sigmund Freud, Reidar Due, Plato, Laura Mulvey, Adriana Cavarero, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in order to elucidate specific elements of the text.

Chapter 2, '*Niemand's Frau* as a "minor" translation the *Odyssey* from "er" to "sie"' considers the text as a radical translation of the *Odyssey* into a form that flows from Köhler's treatment of the pronoun 'sie' in contrast to what she associates with the pronoun 'er'. The shift from 'er' to 'sie' is expressed metaphorically by Köhler using ideas from physics: 'er' is associated with the objective, measurable reality of Newtonian

physics and 'sie' with the plural, co-existing possibilities of quantum physics. I argue that Köhler's 'minor' translation of the *Odyssey*, undermines the assertion of objectivity on the part of the hegemonic, patriarchal 'major' language, thus expanding the possibilities for lived reality, by articulating difference.

Chapter 3, 'Penelope's Web or, "the voice[s] of the shuttle"' examines Köhler's use of weaving as a metaphor for the construction of her poetic text and her reimagination of weaving Homeric narratives in *Niemands Frau*. I examine how Köhler subverts Penelope's famous weaving trick to question whether or not she is waiting for Odysseus.

Chapter 4, 'Helen of Troy: The Image, Power and the Impoverishment of Life', focusses on how Köhler uses Homer's figure of Helen of Troy to reflect critically on the relationship between the image and women within Western culture, from antiquity to the films of Greta Garbo, who is Helena's double.⁶³

Chapter 5, 'The Possibility of Recognising and Loving 'Niemand'' reflects on Köhler's approach to the central romantic relationship in Homers *Odyssey* – that between Penelope and Odysseus – in three cantos towards the end of *Niemands Frau*. I analyse Köhler's representation of Penelope's emotions towards Odysseus and the causes of her failure to recognise him upon his return.

Chapter 6, 'Tiresias, Turing and Köhler's Dystopian *Waste Land*', considers the parallels that Köhler draws between the blind seer from the *Odyssey* and the computer scientist Alan Turing. Adopting a prophetic position, Köhler envisions a dystopian future based on a critique of developments in modern computing and genetic science.

Chapter 7, 'The Genealogy and Operation of Patriarchal Power in *Niemands Frau*', analyses the two cantos in *Niemands Frau* that focus on Odysseus, first on a macro scale in terms of what he signifies for Western culture, and second on an intimate scale in terms of his own emotions towards the patriarchal power structures that he helps to perpetuate.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis, summarising the findings of this preceding chapters, and offers some thoughts on the achievements and contradictions of Köhler's radical poetic reworking of Homer's *Odyssey*.

⁶³ 'Helen' is the English spelling of Helen of Troy and 'Helena' is the German spelling, I will use the English spelling, apart from when discussing texts by German authors.

As well as explicating the cantos in *Niemand's Frau*, this thesis will explore the text critically and consider the potential limitations and the pitfalls of Köhler's approach in terms of the strain that it places on the reader. I question the omission of figures with a lower, non-noble social position from her re-evaluation of the *Odyssey* and the possible elitism of her perspective at times. There are also blind spots in her arguments about the human subject: the emotional peaks in *Niemand's Frau* are often articulated by normative, gendered subjects with recognisable identities, rather than a more radically envisioned subject.

Chapter 2

Niemand's Frau as a 'minor' translation of the *Odyssey* from 'er' to 'sie'

'Eine andere art von übersetzung'

(NF, p. 87)

'Use the minor language to *set the major language racing*.'⁶⁴

In the 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG' section of *Niemand's Frau*, Köhler makes the assertion that the canto cycle is a form of 'translation' of Homer's *Odyssey* (NF, p. 87). In this chapter, I engage with that assertion to contend that reading the cycle as a radical, 'minor' translation of the *Odyssey* is a productive way of understanding the nature of Köhler's intervention into the German literary canon and therefore into a cultural hegemony that is supported by notions of what is canonical. At the heart of this 'minor' translation is the pronoun 'sie', from which Köhler derives a poetics to challenge what she situates as patriarchal political and artistic norms. Defining what her translation will be *different from* is part of the poetic strategy of the cycle, and Köhler sets out her opposition to the 'major' patriarchal politics of earlier translations, to the form of language that articulates such politics, and to translation practice that attempts to give the impression of equivalence and conceal the situated-ness of the translator's perspective. Köhler's 'minor' translation of the *Odyssey* acknowledges her own 'minor', gendered perspective, rather than assuming a 'universal' position, and attempts to create a form of language that she identifies metaphorically with quantum physics, as articulating an uncertain reality of plural probability.

⁶⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 116. Emphasis in original.

Minor and Major Language

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari formulate the idea that language is divided between ‘major’ and ‘minor’ forms, understood not necessarily as defined identities or groups, but as dominating or disruptive forces:

The opposition between minority and majority is not simply quantitative. Majority implies a constant, of expression or content, serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate it. Let us assume that the constant or standard is the average adult-white-heterosexual-European-male. It is obvious that “man” holds the majority, even if he is less numerous than mosquitoes, children, women, blacks, peasants, homosexuals, etc. That is because he appears twice, once in the constant and again in the variable from which the constant is extracted. Majority assumes a state of power and domination, not the other way round. It assumes the standard measure, not the other way round. [...] For the majority, insofar as it is included in the abstract standard, is never anybody, it is always Nobody – Ulysses, whereas the minority is the becoming of everybody. [...] We must distinguish between: the majoritarian as a constant and homogeneous system; minorities as subsystems; and the minoritarian as a potential, creative and created, becoming.⁶⁵

For Deleuze and Guattari, the terms ‘major’ and the ‘minor’ are political ways of conceiving of language and describe language as a site of power: the major silences the minor (linguistically, philosophically and politically), and the minor is a force that disrupts the apparently ‘universal’ position of the major, by revealing it to be partial, in both senses of the word. Their choice of the figure of Ulysses (Odysseus) as emblematic of the ‘major’ makes clear that the *Odyssey* is a significant feature of the cultural landscape against which they formulate their ideas of major and minor. These categories are useful for consideration of Köhler’s version of the *Odyssey*, a defining characteristic of which is the opposition she creates between ‘major’ and ‘minor’ forms of language, knowledge and power. Throughout the cycle Köhler situates a petrification of language use and the

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 116-117.

claim to an objective perspective represented by the figure of Odysseus in dynamic opposition to her own poetics, which she hopes will liberate ‘minoritarian’ (and in this case often female or queered) perspectives in the *Odyssey*.

Minor languages, according to Deleuze and Guattari, ‘do not exist in themselves: they exist in relation to a major language and are also investments of that language for the purpose of making it minor’.⁶⁶ Köhler makes clear in *Wittgensteins Nichts* (1999) that ‘minor’ language is not external to, or separate from, the ‘major’ language:

Das Sprechen *über* Sprache findet *in* der Sprache statt, *von* der es handelt – das Objekt der Untersuchung interferiert mit dem Subjekt. Diese Interferenz soll als grundlegend für die Versuchsanordnung gelten: keine Metaebene, keinen ÜberBlick, sondern mit der Sprache sprechen, auch im Hinblick auf mögliches Entgegenkommen.⁶⁷

That is to say, for Köhler, there can be no critical discussion of language that is external to it and there can be no entirely ‘new’ language because that indicates the possibility of a perspective outside of the existing language; rather, a ‘minor’ form must be produced from within the ‘major’. The notion of finding another language *within* German, rather than proposing a new one, echoes Deleuze’s and Guattari’s statement that ‘it is in one’s own language that one is bilingual or multilingual’, which conceptually opens up the possibility of ‘translating’ within one’s own language.⁶⁸ Likewise, Köhler writes her *Odyssey* text within a tradition of classical reception in German, and her radical ‘minor’ translation of it cannot take place in a vacuum.

Köhler’s Criticism of the Tradition of Homeric Reception

It is a common feature of translated texts, whose significance, history and original context may require clarification in the target culture, that they feature paratexts such as explanatory notes, prefaces and afterwords. As discussed, *Niemand’s Fran*, which Köhler

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 116.

⁶⁷ Barbara Köhler, ‘TANGO. EIN DISTANZ’, in Köhler, *Wittgensteins Nichts*, pp. 27-40 (p. 30).

⁶⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 116.

claims as a form of translation of Homer's *Odyssey*, has a number of paratextual sections that, to some degree, explain the context in which her radical rendering of the ancient Greek text arose. Central to the genesis of *Niemands Frau* is Köhler's resistance to the reception and scholarly exegesis of classical texts in German culture, which she describes in the 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG'. Although in the 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG' Köhler describes having read the Ancient Greek of Homer's original text (*NF*, p. 84), her primary critical engagement is with previous German translations of the *Odyssey*. She implies that the German into which earlier translators have rendered Homer's text is insufficient to communicate the semantic flexibility of the Ancient Greek and that their versions have privileged a patriarchal, nationalist perspective, to the exclusion of other, notably female perspectives. This is most clearly communicated in the following passage from the last of the three texts in NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG:

Immer wieder aber kam ich zurück auf diesen uralten stoff in diesen zusammenhängen, dieser sprache. Diese geschichten von vater und sohn: wie man Einer wird und einer mann wird, wie Er ein Ich wird, sich einen namen macht, geschichte (*Mach bloß keine geschichten*, sagte da einer zu einer). Wie die frauen in der geschichte da sind, als wärn sie nicht wirklich da: bloß für ihn, für den helden da. Und immer wieder kam ich an stellen, wo neben dem helden, diesem großen erzähler, nach und nach seine nach-erzähler, übersetzer und deuter deutlich wurden, die ihn (und seinen autor) in heldenhaft nahmen, die monologische loge: sprachbeherrscher, wortmachthaber und deutungshoheiten und mit ihnen der wortschatz, die rechthabe und großmannssucht des 18. bis 20. jahrhunderts. Wie sich zwischen den verschiedenen übersetzungen oder zwischen deutung und erzählung lücken auftaten, in denen zumal frauen sang- und klanglos verschwanden.

(*NF*, pp. 83-84)

Köhler highlights the misogyny embedded in German language culture with the colloquial phrase, '(*Mach bloß keine ge-[/] schichten*, sagte da einer zu einer)'. The

interruption is by a male subject who uses dismissive language to accuse the female subject of being silly, and foregrounds the difference between legitimate history written by and about men, and illegitimate history (mere stories), written by and about women. The bracketed and italicised interruption plays out a moment where a woman's voice is silenced and undermined, and the casualness of the language used to do it demonstrates how embedded such an attitude is within the language culture. Köhler picks up the casual tone and abbreviations of the interjection to tell the story of the silencing of women: 'als warn sie nicht wirklich da: bloß für ihn, für den helden da'.

Köhler constructs a web of negative associations with the *Odyssey* as she encountered it 'in diesen zusammenhängen, dieser sprache'. First, she portrays the translated text as a patrilinear narrative in which women are secondary. Second, she charges translators and cultural mediators of the *Odyssey* with privileging Odysseus's voice and perspective, and with idolising Homer as a solo authorial genius, even though the single authorship of the *Odyssey* and Homer's identity were, and still are, historically unclear.⁶⁹ Third, Köhler situates the reverence in which Homer and Odysseus are held in the context of German nationalism between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries, when the intellectual elite looked to Ancient Greek culture as an antecedent of the emergent German nation. She criticises the hero worship of Homer and Odysseus as a celebration of language that dominates, indicated by her use of terms such as 'sprachbeherrscher' and 'wortmachthaber'. The links that Köhler makes place earlier *Odyssey* translations in a historical trajectory that seems to conclude with the arrival of National Socialism. Fourth, the translations and reception of the *Odyssey* are cast, again in patriarchal terms, as having the effect of silencing the female voices within the *Odyssey*, and by extension within German language and culture.

The connections that Köhler makes in the passage cited above are borne out by scholarly research into the German reception of Ancient Greek literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Günter Häntzschel describes the relationship between the reception of Homer from the mid-eighteenth century onwards and a growing Germanic patriotism as follows:

⁶⁹ For a survey of scholarship on Homer's identity and the authorship of the *Odyssey*, see: Lillian E. Doherty, 'Introduction', in: Doherty, ed., *Homer's Odyssey. Oxford Readings in Classical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1-18 (pp. 1-12).

Die außergewöhnlich intensive Begeisterung für das griechische Altertum und die homerischen Epen seit der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland wie der Wunsch nach einer Homerübersetzung aus Patriotismus sind historisch als ein spezifisch nationales zu erklären.⁷⁰

Häntzschel shows that, after several centuries when French-language culture had completely dominated intellectual life and Ancient Greek was mainly learnt for theological purposes, the rediscovery of Homeric literature played a central role in the growth in confidence and in the enrichment of the German language. Similarly, Eric Blackall's *The Emergence of German as a Literary Language 1770-1775* (1959) points to the numerous attempts to find similarities between Greek and German during the eighteenth century in order to strengthen the case for German as a legitimate literary language rather than a mere underdog to French.⁷¹

In her assessment of the classical tradition, Köhler is selective and does not focus on the more subversive aspects of German *Odyssey* reception in texts such as Friedrich Nietzsche's proto-Foucauldian analysis of Homer's authorship status in 'Homer und die klassische Philologie', Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*, or Kafka's and Brecht's re-evaluation of *Odyssey* narratives, discussed in the introduction.⁷² She constructs an oppositional binary between *Niemand's Frau* and elements of intellectual and literary history that she finds problematic. Perhaps this results in omissions or a simplification of literary history; however, it remains the case that the tradition of *Odyssey* translation, which is a primary focus of Köhler's criticism in the afterword section, was and is dominated by men.

As discussed in the introduction, Köhler pre-published a selection of cantos from *Niemand's Frau* in the *Göttinger Sudelblätter* volume *:to change the subject* devoted to radical translation, prefacing what was to become her opening canto by reproducing the first ten lines of three earlier German verse translations of the *Odyssey*: those by Johann Heinrich Voss (1781), Anton Weiher (1955) and Roland Hampe (1979). These three are significant

⁷⁰ Günter Häntzschel, *Johann Heinrich Voß – Seine Homer-Übersetzung als sprachschöpferische Leistung* (Munich: Beck, 1977), p. 1.

⁷¹ Eric A. Blackall, *The Emergence of German as a Literary Language 1770 – 1775* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959).

⁷² Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Homer und die klassische Philologie', in *Friedrich Nietzsche. Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 2.1: *Philologische Schriften 1867-1873*, eds G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982), pp. 247-69; Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2013).

modern German translations of Homer's epic: Voss's text revolutionised translation practice and is the first and most important modern translation; Weiher's and Hampe's are the most influential post-war versions.⁷³ The former is the standard parallel text edition with the Ancient Greek for students, while the latter is the version preferred by 'Reclam' in its Universal-Bibliothek. By appending her own text as the final in this otherwise male genealogy Köhler seems to position her text as a first 'translation' of the *Odyssey* by a woman, or a riposte to earlier translations.

Köhler's depiction of the translation tradition as dominated by men reflects the lack of female translators of the *Odyssey*. From the eighteenth century to the present, German translators of Homeric texts have been exclusively male. This is emphasized by the complete absence of reference to any translations of Homer by women among the large number that are considered and referenced in *Homer und die deutsche Literatur* (2010), a special issue of *Text + Kritik*, and the absence of women from the list of translations since the beginning of the modern era (1500-2010) assembled in that volume.⁷⁴ When the German fervour for translating Homeric texts began in the wake of Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Nachahmung der griechischen Werke* (1755), that women translated English or French texts into German for the more commercial market was relatively socially accepted, as 'the translator [could] distance herself from the risks or taboos of original authorship'.⁷⁵ However, even highly educated women were unlikely to translate Homeric and other classical texts during this period, as they were generally permitted little or no classical education, and such scholarly work was considered an inappropriate activity for women, offending notions of femininity.⁷⁶ Women's perspectives and voices as translators were therefore excluded from German renderings of classical texts. The fact that in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, no mainstream German translations of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* have been written by women suggests that the field of classical translation is to a significant extent still dominated by men.

⁷³ Homer, *Odyssee. Mit Urtext, Anhang, und Registern*, trans. Anton Weiher (Coberg, Artemis & Winkler: 2007); Homer, *Odyssee*. trans. Roland Hampe (Leipzig: Reclam, 1986).

⁷⁴ *Homer und die deutsche Literatur. Text + Kritik Sonderband*, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Munich: Boorberg, 2010).

⁷⁵ Hilary Brown, *Benedikte Naubert (1756-1819) and her Relations to English Culture* (London: Maney, 2005), pp. 22-28 (pp. 24-25).

⁷⁶ Hilary Brown, 'Women and Classical Translation in the Eighteenth Century?', *German Life and Letters*, 59 (2006), 344-360.

Voss's Radical 'Foreignizing' Translation

Of the three translations of the *Odyssey* that Köhler references, the verse translation published by Johann Heinrich Voss in 1781 is by far the most famous, and despite being the first modern translation into German, is still in print. According to Charlie Louth, 'Voss's *Odyssey* [...] was the first translation since Luther's Bible to reach the status of a classic', with the result that 'for the second time a vital stage in the development of the language [was] intimately bound up with translation'.⁷⁷ Voss's method was to reproduce, as far as possible, the hexameter of Homer's text, also retaining Greek syntax and word order, as well as the form of individual words. Nowadays, such a method of translation would be termed 'foreignizing', insofar as Voss took aspects of the source language (Greek) and imbued the target language (German) with them, thereby making the presence of the 'foreign' culture felt in the translated text.⁷⁸ Before Voss's first translation of the *Odyssey*, most translation into German sought to 'naturalize' the foreignness of the source text as much as possible to the linguistic and cultural norms of German. Resistance to the practice of foreignisation developed as it grew in popularity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, especially on grounds of racial and national purity. Voss's methods went against the grain and the taste of his time and received harsh criticism, even from figures like the poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, who played an important role in introducing Greek forms and diction into his own poetry.⁷⁹

By bringing the rules of Greek to the German text, Voss's translation found for German 'a flexibility and plasticity it had not hitherto possessed, or which had been deadened by the normalization and rationalization the *Aufklärung* had subjected it to'.⁸⁰ From his first version in 1781, he went on to develop his method, with a revision in 1793 that went further in assimilating German to Greek by removing the capitalisation of nouns and remaining even closer to the Greek word order. Voss articulated his delight in Homeric Greek in the many essays and texts he wrote around the time of translation:

⁷⁷ Charlie Louth, *Hölderlin and the Dynamics of Translation* (Oxford: Legenda, 1998), pp. 5-53 (pp. 27-28).

⁷⁸For a definition of foreignizing translation, see: Lawrence Venuti, 'Strategies of Translation', in *Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 240-244; Friedrich Schleiermacher, 'Ueber die verschiedenen Methoden des Uebersetzens', in *Das Problem der Übersetzens*, ed. Hans J. Störig (Stuttgart: H. Goverts, 1963), pp. 39-69.

⁷⁹ Louth, p. 26.

⁸⁰ Louth, pp. 26-27.

‘Wir müssen unsre Kenntniß von der Erde vergessen und mit Homerens Kinder werden, wenn wir ihn verstehen wollen.’⁸¹ For Voss, the highly rational post-Enlightenment world view was inadequate for an understanding of Homer, whose texts he thought called for new ways of thinking, as well as radical new ways of constructing the German language, to produce an adequate translation. Despite initial hostility, ‘foreignizing’ translation became more popular among intellectuals, culminating in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s conceptualisation of foreignizing translation as a means to enrich German in a seminal speech on translation theory in 1813.

Although Köhler gives no glimpse of a positive evaluation of the contribution to the German language made by Voss and subsequent translators, *Niemands Frau*, with its irregular syntax and lack of capitalization, shares characteristics with Voss’s revised *Odyssey* translation. Had Köhler quoted Voss’s more foreignizing translation in the *Sudelblätter* volume where she places earlier translations alongside her own, there would have been visible similarities between their work. Given Köhler’s general censure of earlier translations of the *Odyssey* into German, it is ironic that she shares Voss’s enthusiasm for the possibilities for linguistic play in Ancient Greek: ‘voll von staunen über ihre buchstäblichen [/] möglichkeiten, freude an schriftbildern, klangfiguren’ (NF, p. 84). While Köhler may strive to distance herself politically from earlier German translators of the *Odyssey*, she shares stylistic predilections with Voss, and the thrill she expresses in discovering Homeric Greek, and the possibilities it creates when in dialogue with German, must surely be common to all earlier translators.

After identifying political aspects of the tradition of translation that she wishes *Niemands Frau* to oppose, Köhler’s ‘NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG’ goes on to set out what her ‘minor’ translation will resist in aesthetic terms. In particular, she sets her ‘different’ form of translation apart from the practice that seeks to create ‘equivalence’ between texts:

Eine andere art von übersetzung: eine erwidernung,
entgegnung, für die ein wechselkurs von bedeutung
nicht von vornherein feststeht, angelegt ist als
1:1, geradlinig »zielführend« zum (zu)treffenden,
>richtigen< wort-oder-ort; ein übersetzen von eins

⁸¹ Johann Heinrich Voss, ‘Über den Ozean der Alten’, *Göttingisches Magazin der Wissenschaft und Literatur*, 1 (1780), 297-309 (p. 298).

zu anders, von sprachraum zu raum, die je eigne und
mannigfache beziehungsweisen, bewegungsmöglichkeiten
zwischen wörtern und orten kennen
(NF, p. 87)

Using the language of commerce, she represents the criticised form of translation as being akin to currency exchange – ‘wechselkurs’ – where the exchange rate is 1:1. The implication of such a form of translation is that it presumes the semantic content of the translated text is a foregone conclusion, and that a translator should attempt to replicate the text. Furthermore, the ‘1:1’ exchange rate is historically significant as it refers to the rate forced on the GDR Mark in 1990. Before the ‘Wende’ 1 GDR Mark was worth 4.50 West German Marks. The forced rate effectively bankrupted East German industry as exports rose in price by 450 percent and the export market imploded. 1:1 also refers, therefore, to the deceit of the idea of equivalence, which is in fact the domination of one side by the other, and the damage that it can cause.

Köhler’s criticisms of equivalence in translation practice are echoed by translation theorist Lawrence Venuti, who describes the form of translation that implies that a flawless exchange can be made as an ‘instrumental model of translation, the notion that a translation reproduces or transfers an invariant that is contained in or caused by the source text, whether its form, its meaning or effect’.⁸² Conceiving of the translated text as an ‘invariant’ is ethically problematic because it conceals the inscription of the translator and the power relationships that make the translation partial and contingent, and creates the appearance of an ‘abstract standard’ of the ‘major’ language. The domesticating gloss of an ‘instrumental translation’ must conform to prevailing linguistic norms, and indeed Köhler depicts this form of translation as socially conservative and as a product of capitalism where the translated text must ‘meet targets’. The contrasting ‘minor’ form of translation that Köhler proposes is defined as a move away from a practice of equivalence, creating instead ‘ein übersetzen von eins zu anders’. The difference might be seen to arise partly from Köhler’s self-consciously gendered perspective, which cannot generate a reproduction of classical language dominated by the patriarchal German she opposes.

⁸² Lawrence Venuti, ‘The poet’s version; or, An ethics of translation’, *Translation Studies*, 4 (2011), 230-247 (p. 234).

Köhler acknowledges that her engagement with the *Odyssey* is situated and gendered, and that she reads Homer's text 'durch die augen einer lyrikerin' (NF, p. 84). Her 'translation' can thus be considered as a 'minor' one that uses a form of German that attempts to resist being read as the invisible language of the patriarchal majority. The words in *Niemand's Frau* often refuse a final interpretation and meanings oscillate between understandings that undo each other. Content and references prioritise feminine voices and narratives and offer critical and empathetic understandings of Odysseus. The importance of Homer's identity is questioned. However, there is the danger that, by attempting to make *Niemand's Frau* an answer to her own criticisms of translation practice and patriarchal classical reception (criticisms that are also stated in *Niemand's Frau*), Köhler creates a text that is a closed circuit.

Translating from 'er' to 'sie'

Köhler's poetic answer to her own criticisms is to transpose the *Odyssey* from a text oriented around 'er' to one with a poetics and politics that flows from the pronoun 'sie'. She expresses this idea in the interview given to Suhrkamp about *Niemand's Frau* in 2007, where she describes her text as a translation into the feminine voice, with a 'different' grammatical subject at its centre, and gives an outline of how she considers the pronoun 'sie' to be different from 'er'. Köhler treats the pronouns abstractly, giving them no context, and by doing this, she can demonstrate the polysemy of the lexeme 'sie':

Das [die *Odyssee*] praktisch zu übersetzen in der weiblichen Stimme, in die andere grammatische Person praktisch, in ‚sie‘. [I]n dieser konkreten deutschen Sprache ist ‚sie‘ wiederum nicht bloß die dritte Person Einzahl, es ist die dritte Mehrzahl und es ist die höfliche Anrede, also es ist ein ganz merkwürdiges, vieldeutiges Wort eigentlich. Während ‚er‘ eigentlich Monomorph ist, eine Person männlich, dritte Person. Und während dieses ‚sie‘ sich immer durchaus in unterschiedliche Richtungen bewegen kann. Es ist die Form der Möglichkeit.⁸³

⁸³ Interview between Barbara Köhler and Suhrkamp in 2007: <http://www.suhrkamp.de/mediathek/barbara_koehler_im_gespraech_ueber_niemands_frau_13.html> [accessed: 20th February 2012].

Köhler situates 'sie' as the key to her 'translation' of the *Odyssey* and derives from it a form of poetic language in German that can be defined as 'minor', opening up creative possibilities for language to move semantically away from the finite qualities of 'major' language.

Köhler takes three elements from 'sie' here. First is its lexical polysemy as a printed or aural sign when it is deprived of capitalisation and of the context of a sentence. In normal usage either the differing verb form, or the semantic content of the sentence, or capitalisation (in the case of 'Sie' as formal pronoun 'you') is required to distinguish between different meanings of the lexeme. Second is the potential for movement that its polysemy generates, since as a word 'sie' has more than one potential semantic destination. And last is the conclusion that 'sie' is a form of 'possibility', rather than of finite, concrete meaning. By calling 'sie' 'eine Form der Möglichkeit', Köhler also connects 'sie' semantically to the subjunctive – 'die Möglichkeitsform' – a verbal mood that introduces uncertainty into a statement, in contrast to the indicative, which expresses fact. In contrast to 'sie' as characterised by Köhler, 'er' concretely refers to the singular masculine subject 'he', independent of context, and its meaning can only be in one place, at one time. The more uncertain quality of 'sie' is brought out poetically in *Niemand's Frau* through Köhler's play with the verbs accorded to it. Köhler uses capitalisation infrequently and irregularly, blurring the distinction between 'Sie' and 'sie' and exploits the fact that if capitals are disregarded, 'sie' can have two verbs accorded to it, one for the singular (feminine) usage 'sie ist', and one for the plural use 'sie sind'. In addition to this, in the singular 'sie' has the same form in the nominative and the accusative, unlike 'er', which becomes 'ihn'. This means that 'sie' can potentially be simultaneously subject and object and that semantic shifts can be poetically created between 'sie' as a referent for a single subject and a plurality of subjects, and between 'sie' as object and as subject.

For example, in the canto 'NAUSIKAA : RAPPORT' (*NF*, pp. 22-23) Köhler includes the lines:

er
bindet sie sind eine bewegung
(*NF*, p. 23)

The pronoun 'sie' here refers to 'she' and 'they', as well as 'you' (formally) as it has a relation to both verbs, 'bindet' and 'sind'; and 'bindet' is also conjugated to relate to 'er'. This line expresses 'sie' as both nominative and accusative, acting and acted upon, because in 'er bindet sie', 'he binds her', 'sie' is accusative. Semantically too, 'sie' is restricted in movement at this point, tied up, and cannot therefore be active. But with 'sie sind eine bewegung', the same printed lexeme becomes nominative, indicates an active subject, and can both refer to a plural subject 'they' and also, allowing for the irregular use of capitals, 'you', formal. Semantically, 'sie' is freed from (her/their) bindings, and becomes movement and a plurality. These six words create a dialogue between the semantic level of language and what is occurring at a grammatical level. They serve to reel the reader in, obliging them to take their time and to consider the multiple possible speaking positions of 'sie'. Köhler does not let the reader sail on by as *Odysseus* does, but she must pause if she is to derive reading pleasure from it and access its meanings. It is also language that returns your gaze and speaks to you: 'sie sind eine bewegung', it says.

Pronouns and Physics

To articulate the 'minor' poetics that she wishes to create, Köhler uses metaphors from quantum physics in both *Niemand's Frau* and *Wittgensteins Nichte*. The shift from 'major' to 'minor', and from 'er' to 'sie' is figured as a shift from Newtonian physics to quantum physics. Newtonian physics was the dominant model of the physical world preceding the discovery of quantum physics in the early twentieth century. According to Newtonian physics, there are consistent rules about the movement of particles, and the exact movements of a bouncing ball, for example, can be calculated before it has even occurred. Of quantum physics in contrast, Gribbin, observes that: 'It is a cardinal rule of quantum mechanics that *in principle* it is impossible to measure certain pairs of properties, including position/momentum, simultaneously. There is no absolute truth at Quantum level.'⁸⁴ What quantum physics offers Köhler is the scientific conceptualisation of the idea that reality is uncertain and pluralistic. In *Wittgensteins Nichte*, Köhler uses terms from physics to describe the contrast between the language she criticises and that which she wants to create: 'Differenz und Wahrscheinlichkeit statt Kausalität, die Mehrzahl der

⁸⁴ Gribbin, *In Search of Schrödinger's Cat*, pp. 120-121.

Möglichkeiten statt Einzahl der Gründe und Folgen.⁸⁵ Just as quantum physics is a science of the ‘probable’, so ‘sie’, according to Köhler’s interpretation, is a ‘Form der Möglichkeit’, and is the quantum ‘linguistic particle’ at the heart of the shift from ‘major’ to ‘minor’.

In the following lines from the second afterword in *Niemands Frau*, Köhler introduces the idea of the ‘wellenfunktion’ or ‘wave function’ to define what she seeks to create poetically. In quantum physics, the ‘wave function’ is a mathematical function that takes different values at every point of space and time; using these, it is possible to calculate the most likely probabilities for the velocity and location of a quantum particle. This ‘field’ of co-existent probabilities can be used to describe the range of possible meanings for ‘sie’, as Köhler conceives them:

Im gedicht. Die aufrecht-
erhaltung der wellenfunktion, der *möglichkeit(en)*
eines anderen zum realen, reellen.

(*NF*, p. 81)

Using the metaphor of the wave function, Köhler suggests that poetry, as an imaginary field, holds within it the possibility of expressing ‘other’, minor aspects of reality that have not yet been revealed. She creates a contrast between pragmatic reality and ‘real’ numbers on the one hand, and the multivalent ‘wave function’ and poetry on the other. To calculate the wave function, ‘complex’ numbers are used, which deploy an imaginary part ‘i’ to keep track of more than one value at the same time, on two lines orthogonal to each other, like the ‘x’ and ‘y’ axes on a graph. They contrast with ‘real’ numbers which have no imaginary part and can be thought of as points on a continuous line.⁸⁶ A wave function is often a sum of several distinct mathematical functions, and nature then chooses just one, which ‘collapses’ the wave function. Köhler here creates an association between reality and real numbers, which she contrasts with the multivalued ‘wave function’ and with poetry.

As well as using terms from physics and mathematics to describe the ‘minor’ form of poetics that she wishes to create, Köhler uses such terms to characterize the ‘majoritarian’ power of patriarchy and patriarchal narratives that she criticizes. In the

⁸⁵ Köhler, ‘ZWISCHEN DEN BILDERN’, p. 81.

⁸⁶ Christopher Clapham and James Nicholson, eds, *Oxford Dictionary of Mathematics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

canto 'HADES : LEKTÜRE : HADES' (NF, pp. 39-41), Köhler frames the 'countability' of the male subject as intrinsic to the hegemony of patriarchy. She also depicts patriarchy through the image of a line made up of ones:

auf linie gebracht die patriline worauf sich zählen
erzählen lässt das einfache das lesbare das *legitime*
was zählt: EIN MANN EIN WORT ein sohn ein vater eine
abstraktion das geht nicht ohne schrift das muss man
festhalten & überliefern

(NF, pp. 39-40)

The narrative content of this passage relates to the narrative strand throughout the *Odyssey* where Odysseus's son Telemachus grows up and takes his place as master of the house in his father's absence, thereby continuing Odysseus's family 'line'. Köhler makes counting, linear narration and patriarchy appear linguistically synonymous by repeating the morpheme 'zähl' in the words 'zählen' and 'erzählen'. She sees patriarchal structures of power reproduced in storytelling and in mathematics. Her literalistic play with the word 'erzählen', breaking it up into 'er', 'he', and 'zählen', 'to count,' suggests to the reader that it is only 'his' narrative that counts. Köhler literally creates a semantic 'patriline' on the page by juxtaposing 'EIN MANN EIN WORT ein sohn ein vater' consecutively along a line of text. 'Er-zählt', 'er' = 1. The insertion of 'EIN WORT' into this sequence situates the source of patriarchal power at the level of language and control of how language is used.

The final lines of this extract: 'das geht nicht ohne schrift das muss man [/] festhalten & überliefern' suggest that continuation of patriarchy rests on establishing and handing down a 'major' narrative that privileges the male word and defines the legitimate standard. As in her comments about the tradition of translation, Köhler is specifically critical of the relationship between the *German* language and patriarchal power. The idiomatic German expression 'EIN MANN EIN WORT' equates a male speaker with the veracity and strength of a verbal promise. The performative power of language is given by the masculine gender of the speaker. According to Köhler, 'his' narrative is 'das einfache das lesbare *das legitime*', it succeeds because of its simplistic quality. The legitimacy of the hegemonic patriarchal narrative is therefore bound to its simple legibility and portrayal of a calculable reality, and by implication, its exclusion of what

cannot be counted using ‘real’ numbers, and of more complex language, and ways of being in the world.

To use Roland Barthes’s terms, for Köhler, ‘er’ initiates a linguistic reality of the ‘lisible’, where the reader is a consumer of an easily cohered and finite language.⁸⁷ The pronoun ‘sie’ in contrast initiates a ‘participatory reality’ of the ‘scriptible’, where the reader must construct a contingent and non-finite reading, while bearing in mind other possibilities. ‘Sie’ is a lexeme that = ? or >1. What can be read easily is non-participatory, because it does not contain the ambiguity that allows readers space for their own subjective agency of ‘becoming’ within the text, but uses language to dominate and enforce its power. The idea of a ‘participatory’ poetic text, whose meaning always has the potential to move in a number of different directions, thereby sustains a ‘wave-function’ of probable meanings.

The fact that the reader of *Niemand’s Frau* cannot immediately ‘know’ what is being said, has implications for her/his role as the ‘observer’ of the text. The final epigraph in *Niemand’s Frau*, ‘Die Beobachterin ist Teil des Systems’ (NF, p. 8), refers to the important idea in quantum physics that the observer is part of the system she/he is observing so that she/he cannot obtain a perspective outside of the system from which to construct objective knowledge. Consistent with Köhler’s finding of common ground between physics and language, the epigraph has the effect of announcing the contingent perspective of Köhler’s ‘translation’ of the *Odyssey*, with the added suffix ‘-in’ referring to what was left out of earlier translations. By specifying her gender she refuses the supposedly universal, ungendered form of the noun ‘Beobachter’, which veils the masculine as the ‘abstract standard’.

Niemand and Polyphem: Setting up a Participatory Text

The title of Köhler’s cycle ‘Niemand’s Frau’ (Nobody’s wife/woman) is ambiguous: there is not a character to whom it refers and from the outset the reader is left to work at meaning and to insert him- or herself into the logic of its creation. ‘Nobody’ is a name used at one point in Homer’s *Odyssey* to refer to Odysseus, Penelope as his wife can therefore be understood as ‘Niemand’s Frau’. Köhler derives the ‘Niemand’ reference

⁸⁷ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Millar (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

from the famous encounter in Book 9 of the *Odyssey* between the Cyclops Polyphemus and Odysseus. Her understanding of this incident shapes the relationship that she wishes to set up with the reader from the beginning of the cycle. In Homer's text, after plying Polyphemus with wine, Odysseus tells him that his name is 'Ou tis' in Greek, which means 'nobody', or 'Niemand'. The trick works so that when Polyphemus appeals to the other Cyclopes for help after Odysseus and his men blind him and escape from the cave by clinging to the underside of the cyclops' sheep, he can only say that 'Nobody' has hurt him, thereby making Odysseus unidentifiable. Furthermore, Odysseus's trick silences Polyphemus by denying that any harm has been done to him; Odysseus deprives the cyclops of the ability to say that he has been hurt. In their influential reading of this episode in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Adorno and Horkheimer claim that the Cyclops incident is a play on words in Ancient Greek because Odysseus's name and Niemand sound almost the same:

Im Griechischen handelt es sich um ein Wortspiel; in dem einen festgehaltenen Wort treten Namen – Odysseus – und Intention – Niemand – auseinander. Modernen Ohren noch klingt Odysseus und Udeis ähnlich, und man mag sich wohl vorstellen, daß in einem der Dialekte, in denen die Geschichte von der Heimkehr nach Ithaka überliefert war, der Name des Inselkönigs in der Tat dem des Niemand gleichlautete.⁸⁸

After Adorno and Horkheimer, Köhler notes aural similarity between the two names in the first 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG' (*NF*, p. 76): 'Ein wort: ein mann [...] der einmal erzählt, [/] sein name sei Niemand, was fast wie ein versprechen [/] klingt – *oúttis*, Odys...' She plays with the intentionality of Odysseus's words: 'versprechen' could mean 'promise' or 'misspeak': a promise would suggest that Odysseus intentionally used the trick, but to misspeak would suggest a slip of the tongue.

Following Adorno's and Horkheimer's understanding, in Homer's text Odysseus's language game is dependent on an aural ambiguity between his name and the Greek for nobody when he is speaking to Polyphemus: Polyphemus *bears* Odysseus's words within the narrative. In *Niemand's Frau*, the onus to interpret language actively

⁸⁸ Horkheimer and Adorno, 'Dialektik der Aufklärung', p. 91.

moves from a character within the story to the reader. Furthermore, when the reader of Köhler's text encounters the physical object of the book *Niemand's Frau*, though a CD recording is included, she/he reads the title as *printed* words first. The possibility of mis-hearing is therefore not present in Köhler's use of 'Niemand' and moreover, her title is in German and therefore the alleged aural ambiguity present in the original Ancient Greek is not present. However, like Voss who was intent on maintaining qualities of the Greek in his version of the *Odyssey*, Köhler creates semantic ambiguity in German. Her title creates a dynamic, generative interaction between two words 'Niemand' and 'Frau' and, unlike the printing of *oútis* and *Odys*, which resolves the confusion between the two, the printed title 'Niemand's Frau' does not resolve ambiguity, but creates it. Encountering Köhler's title, the reader is placed in Polyphemus's position, but instead of spoken language, is faced with the medium of print. The question posed by the title is whether the reader will assume that 'Niemand's Frau' refers to 'die Frau des Odysseus' (Penelope), or whether they will be receptive to 'minor' language of the cycle and will regard it as an assertion of a woman's identity as non-relational.

A 'Minor' Origin

The title of Köhler's text is the beginning of the cycle, being its first words, and as such, is the 'origin' of the 'minor' language of the text as a whole. Hegemonic narratives about genealogy and origin are criticised throughout *Niemand's Frau* as sites from which patriarchal power derives its legitimacy. In particular, there is a critical passage in Köhler's afterword dealing with the opening of John's Gospel in the New Testament, 'Und das Wort ward Fleisch', which describes the beginning of the world with a single word: 'Im Anfang war das Wort, und das Wort war bei Gott und Gott war das Wort' (Johannes 1:1). Köhler regards the single, paternal origin negatively, and in the first afterword plays with the passage, converting the German past of 'to be', 'war', into the English meaning of the lexeme, and then translates it back into German as 'krieg'. These lines also link John's Gospel with Heraclitus's famous statement that 'war is the father of

all things’, creating an association between the biblical text and the idea of war as a driver of history:⁸⁹

zurück auf anfang, in dem,
wie die schrift sagt, das wort war. Das wort WAR –
in einer anderen sprache. Und war aller dinge vater:
der krieg.

(NF, p. 74)

The single lexical origin, which subsequently becomes realised as flesh in John’s Gospel, is conception with only a father, and no mother, excluding the feminine, or more generally, difference, from creation. For Köhler, this narrative of origin initiates the beginning of an inherently violent patriarchal logos of father and son, of power passed from single man, to single man, as discussed in the section on counting above. The genealogy that begins with a single word constitutes a ‘major’ origin in that it represents the world as beginning with one (male connoted, paternalistic) voice that echoes down generations via the dominance of patriarchal power, silencing the female word, and not acknowledging of the potency of woman as co-creator of life.

When the single paternal word ‘becomes flesh’, a hegemonic patriarchal discourse produces a physical reality that embodies it. The absence of the ‘female word’ in the narrative of origin also means an absence of the female word ‘becoming flesh’ – and playing a role in the production of reality. In the same afterword Köhler posits instead her own pluralistic (and more biologically accurate) story of origin as a ‘minor’ counter to the biblical notion that ‘the word became flesh’:

In jedem anfang einer genealogie
sind zwei, ein paar, knoten im netz, im web.

(NF, p. 75)

At the origin of Köhler’s intervention into the tradition of the *Odyssey*, a foundational text of Western culture, are *two* words, a relationship, a generative interaction of difference:

⁸⁹ Heraclitus, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, edited and with a commentary by Charles H. Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 228.

‘Niemand’s Frau’. If the title of the cycle were a single word, it would contradict its contents, as discussed in this chapter. A single word, voice and perspective is what must *not* be conveyed by Köhler’s title. ‘Niemand’s Frau’ does address the political question of representation by signalling the presence of female voices in the cycle, but equally does not exclude the presence of male figures, as ‘Niemand’, which Odysseus calls himself in the incident with Polyphemus, is represented.

With her choice of title, Köhler sets herself apart, for instance, from Margaret Atwood’s recent feminist retelling of the *Odyssey* with her novel *Penelopiad* (2005), an exact female equivalent to Homer’s title. Köhler’s title, in contrast, cannot be finally understood to have a single meaning by the reader. As she says in the interview with Suhrkamp about *Niemand’s Frau*, ‘Es ist nicht “die Frau von Odysseus”, sondern “Niemand’s Frau”’.⁹⁰ That is to say, her engagement with Homer’s text does not constitute a simple representational shift, from ‘a’ male figure to ‘a’ female figure: her ‘minor’ perspective does not treat identity in those terms. ‘Niemand’s Frau’ demonstrates the *philosophical* core of her project and the type of ontological, epistemological and linguistic reality that she wishes to set in motion. The title ‘Niemand’s Frau’ only succeeds partially in denying having an obvious referent, since in the interview with Suhrkamp about the cycle, the interviewer assumes that the title refers to Penelope, the wife of ‘Niemand’ – and this conclusion is the one most easily reached by those who know Homer’s *Odyssey*. What is important, however, is that the title upholds contradictory readings of ‘the wife of Odysseus’, ‘the woman of Odysseus’, and ‘the wife or woman who belongs to Nobody’, the last of which could refer to any unmarried woman or a married woman who is not ‘owned’. ‘Niemand’s Frau’ is descriptive of how the *Odyssey* will be rendered into a text with ‘sie’ at its centre, in that it initiates playful and ambiguous poetic language. Rather than making clear who specifically will star in the cycle, the description ‘Niemand’s Frau’ creates a framework of questions and possibilities and portrays a subject that is not present as a single image but as a nexus of probabilities: identity as a ‘wave-function’.

⁹⁰ Suhrkamp interview.

The First Canto of 'Niemand's Frau'

The first canto in *Niemand's Frau* demonstrates Köhler's move from 'major' to 'minor' as, after beginning with the canonical first three words of Voss's *Odyssee*, 'Sage mir muse', her text departs entirely from the expected narrative:

MUSE : POLYTROP

Sage mir muse wer Es ist was Er wer Homer & warum
ist Es wichtig & Es zu wissen sag mir wer du bist
was Ich ist sag mir dich frage ich mich sage wenn
ich meine er seiner die oder der irrt so ich irre
wäre eine gewordene wäre die frage mich irre mich
muse sage mir. Mir sage muse wer sagt dass Er sei
Homer sei gewesen ein sie sei nicht einer sei ein
e mehrzahl wenn er ist bin ich dann muse sage mir
seine: worte für: mich sag mir: YOU SPIRITS: THAT
TEND: ON MORTAL: THOUGHTS: UNSEX ME: HERE. sage m
(*NF*, p. 10)

The first ten lines of Köhler's canto proceed in an exactly opposite and resistant manner to the first ten lines of Homer's text (in Voss's translation) and reflect the comparative ambiguity of the title.

Sage mir, Muse, die Taten des vielgewanderten Mannes,
Welcher so weit geirrt, nach der heiligen Troja Zerstörung,
Vieler Menschen Städte gesehn, und Sitte gelernt hat,
Und auf dem Meere so viel unnennbare Leiden erduldet,
Seine Seele zu retten und seiner Freunde Zurückkunft.
Aber die Freunde rettet' er nicht, wie eifrig er strebte;
Denn sie bereiteten selbst durch Missetat ihr Verderben:
Toren! welche die Rinder des hohen Sonnenbeherrschers
Schlachteteten; siehe, der Gott nahm ihnen den Tag der Zurückkunft.
Sage hievon auch uns ein wenig, Tochter Kronions.
(*Odyssee*, Book 1, ll. 1-10)

Homer's text begins with the poet imploring the muse to tell him about Odysseus and then proceeds to summarise Odysseus's journey, with him as the hero, observing and learning the customs of the places he visits, and burdened with the responsibility for all the men on his ship. He is described in the Greek text as 'aner polytropos', which means 'man who turns many ways', a phrase that has been variously translated, with Voss rendering it as 'des vielgewanderten Mannes'. Köhler refers to the Greek in the title of her first canto 'MUSE : POLYTROP'. Since Homer's time, 'polytrop' has accrued further meanings in the fields of astrophysics and mathematics, making the word itself 'polytropic' (turning to different meanings), whereas the descriptive translations of 'aner polytropos' into German or English do not express the polysemy so emphatically. More significantly, however, is the move from 'major' to 'minor' in terms of the way that the canto progresses after the first three words, 'Sage mir muse'. Rather than describing Odysseus as the well-travelled hero full of empirical knowledge, Köhler's canto continues with an anarchic rhythm of unpunctuated and syntactically irregular questions that undermine the very notion of the subject, never mind a specific, named subject called Odysseus.

Consistent with her line of questioning with regard to the classical tradition in the 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG' and bringing an interrogative intellectual quality to the first few lines, Köhler poses the question of Homer's identity: 'wer Homer'. The question alludes to scholarly debates about authorship in secondary literature about Homer. The question is one of many moments of self-reflexive metalepsis in *Niemand's Frau*, where Köhler appears to intervene to reflect critically on an issue in the text, creating simultaneous internal-external narrative positions.⁹¹ At this point the text appears to hover between a text *about* the *Odyssey* and thus external to it, while at the same time constituting an *Odyssey* text in and of itself. The doubt around Homer's identity in this verse also raises the question of who speaks, and the location from which they speak. Is the voice of the first canto in Köhler's *Odyssey* cycle that of a character from within Homer's *Odyssey* such as Penelope, to whom the title ostensibly refers? That would seem unusual, given the externality of the question: How can a character question the existence of an author, of whom they have no consciousness? Is Köhler adopting

⁹¹ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 234-235.

the role of ‘the poet’? Is it the voice of the muse, speaking rhetorically to herself? Or is it a ‘plural’ speaking position, a Siren-voice of more than one subject? It does not become clear which of these it is, and therefore the reader must consider a range of these probabilities when imagining the speaker.

Whichever of the potential voices (or all of them) speaks, it is a rebellious voice that relentlessly questions the language sustaining notions of existence in German. Pronouns have initial capitals as if they are being considered in the abstract, as concepts, and as if their legitimacy or definition is under scrutiny. Köhler’s text disrupts the very structure of rational thought and grammatical language through syntactical anarchy and the creation of an ambiguous, plural speaking voice, which challenges the notion of the singular first person speaker, ‘Ich’. The voice is playful and defiantly questions the importance of the classical tradition and of ‘knowing’: ‘warum [/] ist Es wichtig & Es zu wissen’ (NF, p. 10).

Homer sei gewesen ein sie sei nicht einer sei ein
e mehrzahl
(NF, p.10)

The voice also hints at the ambiguity of Homer’s identity by suggesting that ‘he’ might be a woman, or, that Homer (that is to say, the author of the *Odyssey*), was more than one person, by playing with the potential polyvalency of the pronoun ‘sie’, discussed earlier.⁹²

The first canto expresses faith in the power of thinking differently about the physical world. Köhler quotes twice from Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth’s speech (*Macbeth*, I. 5. 39-40) willing spirits to ‘unsex her’, thereby relinquishing the confines of feminine gender antithetical to violence, so that she can carry out murder.⁹³ Raising the ghost of Lady Macbeth in this first canto, which also challenges Homer’s identity and the importance of tradition, indicates that *Niemands Frau* will not be a gentle riposte to Western patriarchal hegemony. Köhler plays with Lady Macbeth’s famous speech, first

⁹² Samuel Butler, an eccentric Victorian author and scholar, wrote a text called *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1922) in which he recounts making a journey round Greece and attempts to piece together evidence to support the idea that a Sicilian woman wrote the text. Samuel Butler, *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (Bristol: Phoenix, 2003).

⁹³ William Shakespeare, ‘The Tragedy of Macbeth’ in *The Complete Shakespeare*, eds Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), III: Tragedies, pp. 1307-1334 (p. 1313).

using punctuation and subsequently, by rearranging the words and thereby changing their meaning:

sage mir

seine: worte für: mich sag mir YOU SPIRITS: THAT
TEND: ON MORTAL: THOUGHTS: UNSEX ME: HERE.
(*NF*, p. 10)

The first iteration of Köhler's play with Shakespeare's words is an 'unsexing' envisaged through the words of a male subject with the collusion of external, disembodied spirits. However, Köhler makes the words seem robotic through her use of punctuation, weakening their affective power. Throughout *Niemands Frau*, punctuation is used in an irregular way as a poetic tool; here Köhler breaks up the quotation severely and the colons convey the sense of alienation from the powerful embodied implications of the words in their original context. 'HERE.' is followed by a full stop and is further separated from the rest of the quotation by a colon, taking away the urgency of the word 'here' when Lady Macbeth utters it in Shakespeare's text.

The second arrangement of the words is spoken by the rebellious and complex 'ich' of this canto rather than 'his' words.

das

kommende bild das ich Ich nenne sie ach sieh dich
THOUGHTS UNSEX YOU MORTAL SPIRITS THAT TEND ON ME
HERE
(*NF*, p. 11)

The words flow freely, uninterrupted by punctuation and, rather than an imperative command to an external power, the speaker explains to the disembodied spirits the performative power of thought and of *self*-transformation. It is *thought* that can unsex you and you do not need the assistance of an external force. The speaker takes possession of herself from him: the shift is from 'seine: worte für: mich' to 'das kommende bild das ich Ich nenne'. The speaking subject(s) of this canto transforms herself / themselves. The speaker(s) then reclaim 'Being' and reject the patriarchal domination of subjecthood and

of language. Köhler exposes the trick by which, in the German language, 'Being' is fundamentally 'his' and 'its' (which is declined in the same way as the masculine):

- alles Sein was ist mein & dein
& nicht sein das NichtSein nichtEinsSein das mein
das deinSein ein geteiltes erwidertes ungehöriges
beisein in dem wir sind
(NF, p. 11)

Köhler's play with 'sein' demonstrates that if conventional capitalisation is not used, the lexeme 'sein' can mean *his, its, to be* and *Being*, a linguistic point that is reproduced in real power relations. In response, the canto calls for a new form of accepting, chaotic shared presence, which is *co*-presence, 'beisein', a word that also suggests the physical presence and proximity of bodies.

As well as exposing and playing poetically with polysemy *within* German, Köhler's 'minor' poetics mingle German with other languages, denying it the status of sovereign language in the volume, and giving her language a hybrid quality. By doing this, Köhler undermines the certainty that a printed sign necessarily refers only to a German referent, as for example in the last few lines of 'MUSE : POLYTROP':

A

MUSED MUSE A AMUSED MUSE eine taktlose springende
stolpernd holpernde klingende & tanzende sprachen
wir du die gleiche mit der ich anders reden & muse
mir. mir sage: muse. dir sage mir uns musen plura
la belle elle la plurielle immortelle kein einzig
Es wort keine einzige welle meine doppelte stelle
(NF, p. 12)

In the final two lines Köhler plays on the aural and visual qualities of the lexeme 'elle' ('she' in French) to make its meaning echo through other words. '[E]lle' reappears in 'plurielle' (plural), recalling via French her observations made about the polysemy of 'sie', and 'immortelle', situating the source of eternal life in the ringing, rolling, peals of the 'elle' sounds. '[E]lle' is heard again in the words 'welle' and 'stelle', which though German, suddenly are made to appear as if they are French words because they resonate

aurally and visually more with the preceding French than with the German of 'kein einzig [/] Es wort'. This has the effect of seeming to give the German words a French origin or etymology, which makes them emerge from the 'doppelte stelle' by resonating in both languages simultaneously. '[E]lle' also reappears aurally in 'doppelte' (italicisation mine) and together with 'stelle' embeds 'elle' in the idea of a collective, double speaking position, which Köhler gives 'sie' elsewhere in the cycle.

The percussive language, whose repetition and assonance almost converts the words into musical notation, often occupying dual semantic positions between languages, recalls the style of the 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' section of *Finnegan's Wake*, quoted a few pages earlier as an epigraph. 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' is the woman who embodies the spirit of the River Liffey and flows throughout Joyce's text.⁹⁴ The lyrical chattering dialogue between two washerwomen in the section about Anna Livia anticipates the language of Köhler's muses, and 'la belle elle la plurielle', appear to be a direct reference to 'Plurabelle'. Köhler also makes a direct link between the muses and the movement of water, with the semantic connection between 'elle' and 'welle'. While 'welle' refers most obviously to a wave made by water, as depicted on the cover of *Niemands Frau*, 'welle' also reappears later in the cycle with a reference to quantum physics, as 'wellenfunktion' (*NF*, p. 81). The single printed sign ('welle') apparently emerges from two linguistic genealogies (from the French 'elle' to German 'welle') and is spoken by a subject who paradoxically uses a singular possessive pronoun to announce that she (he? it?) speaks from two positions ('meine doppelte stelle'). Through these networks of recurring aural, visual and semantic figures, which move like water through the cycle, Köhler constructs a constantly shifting poetic 'sea'.

Conclusion

⁹⁴ Joyce, *Finnegan's Wake*, pp. 154-169; Helmut Schmitz first made the connection with Anna Livia Plurabelle in: Helmut Schmitz, 'Grammatik der Differenz. Barbara Köhlers Suche nach einer nichtidentischen Subjektivität', in *Weiblichkeit als Politisches Programm*, eds Gruber and Preußner, pp. 167-181, and again, in Schmitz, 'The 'nachtseite des abendlands'. Barbara Köhler's *Niemands Frau* and the Dialectic of Enlightenment', in *An Odyssey for Our Time*, ed Paul, pp. 139-192 (p. 167). Georgina Paul also notes the connection, in Georgina Paul, *Different Voices: Other Poets in Barbara Köhler's Niemands Frau*, with a Special Study of the Significance of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, in *An Odyssey for Our Time*, ed. Paul, pp. 185-209 (p. 195).

To conceive of *Niemand's Frau* as a radical, 'minor' translation of the *Odyssey* is an approach that considers it a political intervention into the German reception of Homer, rather than a peripheral poetic work, making it a text that resists the marginalisation of women in the classical tradition by participating in, and continuing it. If the language of Köhler's text is viewed as a 'translation' into a 'minor' form of German, that is to say, into a form that articulates ontological differences repressed by a normative, patriarchal 'major' use of German, one begins to get to the ethical heart of *Niemand's Frau*. As Deleuze and Guattari write of minor language: 'Continuous variation is the becoming-minoritarian of everybody, as opposed to the majoritarian Fact of Nobody' ('Niemand').⁹⁵ With her 'translation' into a 'minor' form of German, Köhler seeks to create a form that is not mimetic of a constant reality of 'Nobody', but has potential for being shaped by, and representing, difference. In *Niemand's Frau* Köhler has created a language that is always 'minor' because it is always shifting to a different meaning, deterritorializing *itself* from conveying a single understanding that could be situated as 'final', that could become dominant. The movement of meaning both has a serious philosophical-ethical emphasis, not allowing one (patriarchal) 'reading' of reality to dominate, making space for difference, and also has the effect of invigorating language as a site of play for those who encounter it, making it responsive and plastic, rather than an edifice to be observed and obeyed.

Integrating reflection on the text in the 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG' section as part of the whole is also consistent with her view that the 'observer is part of the system', because entirely external paratexts would presume that an external perspective on the 'main' text could be obtained. While Köhler paints an excessively critical portrayal of earlier translations of the *Odyssey* for her own poetic purposes of constructing a binary, her resistance to them through her own 'translation' into her quantum poetics is a revolutionary endeavour that has the potential to make every reader a 'foreigner in their own tongue'.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 118.

⁹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 116.

Chapter 3

Penelope's Web or, 'the voice[s] of the shuttle'

Penelope, the wife of Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*, is the most obvious referent for the title *Niemand's Frau*, even though, as discussed in the previous chapter, it cannot be restricted to her. But at the very least, Penelope's implication in the title makes her role in Homer's text and what she signifies culturally important to a reading of *Niemand's Frau*. This is especially true given the status of Köhler's text as a poetic riposte to the patriarchal reception of Homer's *Odyssey*, named after its male protagonist. In addition to her presence in the title, Köhler gives Penelope textual relevance by including four cantos that reference her actions in Homer's *Odyssey*.

At the beginning of the *Odyssey*, Penelope is caught up in a power struggle between men who seek control of Ithaca. Odysseus's failure to return from Troy ten years after the wars end provokes throngs of suitors to arrive in Ithaca to vie for Penelope's hand in marriage, and with it the throne. In the custom of Greek hospitality, all of the would-be grooms stay in Odysseus's household for the duration of their suits. At the same time, Telemachus, Penelope's son by Odysseus, has come of age and is pushing to take the mantle of power from his mother, who Odysseus left in charge of the household. Further to this, the spectre of Odysseus's return hovers over the household during the struggle for power, of which Penelope is the focal point. She is first identified in Homer's text as the woman who bore Telemachus, 'da solchen Sohn ihm Penelopeia geboren' (*Odyssee*, Book 1, l. 223); as a loyal wife to Odysseus; as beholden to choose one of the suitors; and as duty bound to weave a shroud for her dying father-in-law, Laertes.⁹⁷ With her existence thus shaped and circumscribed by a network of male needs and desires, there is seemingly very little room for Penelope to exercise her agency. However, at the beginning of the *Odyssey*, just before Odysseus's return, she has still not yielded to the pressure exerted on her to choose a new husband, and has managed the house and servants on her own for twenty years, even though Telemachus increasingly tries to restrict her authority, as he seeks to assert his own.

⁹⁷ In the *Odyssey* Laertes is not part of the power struggle in Ithaca and remains on his farm outside of the palace during Odysseus's absence.

Penelope delays choosing a new husband by defining the interval of time after which she will choose. She creates a verbal contract, accepted by the suitors, that she will choose as soon as she finishes weaving the shroud for Laertes. Weaving the shroud was a socially enforced duty for women in Ancient Greece. As Ann Bergren comments, ‘this service to the father, enforced by the blame of other women, defers the suitors’ sexual and social drive by tapping into their fear of an ignominious death’.⁹⁸ However, Penelope plays a trick on the suitors by unweaving at night what she has woven during the day, mysteriously (to the men) prolonging the time it takes her to finish. She continues this process for three years, holding only her maids in confidence. The maids, who tell the suitors, give the weaving trick away and the suitors subsequently force Penelope to finish the shroud (*Odyssee*, Book 19, ll. 154-5).

This chapter will suggest that Penelope’s subversion of the gendered activity of weaving to survive hostile patriarchal conditions is a paradigm for Köhler’s subversion of the *Odyssey*. In *Niemand’s Frau*, Köhler makes a textual space for subjectivities excluded by the patriarchal linguistic and cultural norms that have dominated *Odyssey* reception. Köhler characterises the structure of her text as *woven*, a web of interconnected references, sounds and meanings, creating a parallel between Penelope’s physical movements at the loom and the movement of writing, of words. The connection that Köhler makes between Penelope’s shroud and *Niemand’s Frau* as equivalent constructions, both on the dust jacket and in the cycle, suggests that they have a shared purpose. Taking up the metaphors of the previous chapter, weaving is Penelope’s ‘minor language’, forged from a creative transformation of the ‘major’ cultural practice.

Köhler’s use of weaving as a metaphor for her poetic work sits in a long history of weaving as a form of subversive communication, from classical texts to contemporary philosophy, literature and art. First, to provide context for the central position that Köhler gives weaving in *Niemand’s Frau*, I will survey the history of weaving and women as weavers as a metaphor in German literature. Second, I will examine the literary tradition of weaving as a resistant mode of speech, and subsequent feminist engagement with weaving. Third, I will discuss the meaning of Penelope’s weaving in Homer’s *Odyssey* and the literary reception of Penelope in order to contextualise Köhler’s version of her. Finally I will discuss Köhler’s characterisation of *Niemand’s Frau* as a ‘woven’ text and

⁹⁸ Ann Bergren, *Weaving Truth. Essays on Language and the Female in Greek Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 222.

analyse the canto 'GEWEBEPROBE : PENELOPE', which is Köhler's subversion of Penelope's famous weaving trick in the *Odyssey*.

Weaving in the German Literary Tradition

Although Köhler tends to position herself in opposition to the German literary and intellectual tradition, the most canonical writer in the German language, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, makes frequent reference to weaving in his writing. In a letter to Wilhelm von Humboldt, written in 1832, he refers to weaving as 'ein Gleichnis, das ich so gerne brauche'.⁹⁹ Goethe made repeated use of weaving as a metaphor to explain textual compositions of varying forms. In the essay 'Ueber das Lehrgedicht' (1827), he depicts the bond between knowledge and imagination that must be forged in order to compose didactic poetry as a weaving process: 'wie schwer es sei, ein Werk aus Wissen und Einbildungskraft zusammenzuweben: zwei einander entgegengesetzte Elemente in einem lebendigen Körper zu verbinden'.¹⁰⁰ In a more philosophical mode, the Erdgeist in *Faust. Der Tragödie erster Teil* (1808) characterises the work of creation as weaving back and forth:

In Lebensfluten, im Tatensturm
Wall' ich auf und ab,
Webe hin und her!
Ein ewiges Meer,
Ein wechselnd Weben,
Ein glühend Leben,
So schaff' ich am sausenden Webstuhl der Zeit
Und wirke der Gottheit lebendiges Kleid.
(*Faust. Der Tragödie erster Teil*, ll. 501-509)¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Briefe. Hamburger Ausgabe*. ed. Karl Robert Mandelkow, 4 vols (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), IV, p. 480.

¹⁰⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Ueber das Lehrgedicht' *Gedenkaufgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*, ed. Ernst Beutler, 24 vols (Zurich: Artemis, 1950-71), XIV: *Schriften zur Literatur*, pp. 370-372 (p. 371).

¹⁰¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust. Der Tragödie erster Teil*, in *Werke. Hamburger Ausgabe*, ed. Erich Trunz, 14 vols (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1981), III: *Dramatische Dichtungen*, p. 24.

The pantheistic creation myth depicted here, where the world consists of many threads and is constantly moving and changing like a sea, first appeared in the earlier fragment *Urfaust* written between 1772 and 1775.¹⁰² The later *Faust. Der Tragödie erster Teil* (1808), which retains the *Urfaust* fragment, contains a passage (ll. 1224-1237) where Faust struggles to translate the opening of the Gospel of St John, and ultimately renders the Greek *logos* into ‘Tat’ rather than ‘Wort’, as was the choice in Luther’s translation.¹⁰³ The dissatisfaction that Faust shows for a narrative of creation that begins with a single word rather than a physical deed, and Goethe’s representation of the Erdgeist (rather than a transcendental God in heaven) creating through weaving, share much with Köhler’s distaste for John’s Gospel displayed in *Niemands Frau* (see *NF*, pp. 39, 74, 75).

Furthermore, the image in the Erdgeist’s statement of a woven temporality of multiple threads prefigures Köhler’s description of *Niemands Frau* as ‘ein in die zeit ausgeweitetes gewebe’ (*NF*, p. 75). Goethe’s use of weaving to express his private creation myth shifts away from logocentrism in a way that anticipates Köhler. As with the linguistic similarities between elements of Voss’s *Odyssee* translation which is part of the tradition that Köhler criticises, there are common elements between Goethe’s understanding of weaving and Köhler’s.

The text by Goethe that features weaving most prominently is *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1829), written during the period when the textile industry was being mechanised in Germany. Goethe carried out extensive research into the weaving industry when writing the text, in which weaving features ‘on the levels of content, of symbol and of discourse’.¹⁰⁴ Contradicting the impression that may have thus far been formed that weaving is predominantly represented as a domestic women’s activity, is the male loom-mender in *Wanderjahre*, who holds weaving in the highest regard as ‘die älteste und herrlichste Kunst, die den Menschen eigentlich zuerst vom Tiere unterscheidet’.¹⁰⁵ Elsewhere in the novel however, weaving characterises a threatening female sexuality rather than a Romantic idealisation of the industry in its pre-mechanised form. The major, who is writing a poetic letter to a beautiful widow he admires, suddenly realises that he is quoting Arachne, the woman who was turned into a spider by the goddess

¹⁰² Goethe, *Faust in ursprünglicher Gestalt (Urfaust)*, *ibid.*, p. 371.

¹⁰³ Goethe, *Faust. Der Tragödie erster Teil*, *ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁴ Joan Wright, *The Novel Poetics of Goethe’s Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre. Eine zarte Empirie* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), pp. 222-252 (p. 222).

¹⁰⁵ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, in Werke*. Hamburger Ausgabe, VIII, p. 347.

Minerva after beating her in a weaving competition, in a passage of translation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and is horrified:

Das Schlimmste jedoch fiel ihm zuletzt ein: jene Ovidischen Verse werden von Arachnen gesagt, einer ebenso geschickten als hübschen und zierlichen Weberin. Wurde nun aber diese durch die neidische Minerva in eine Spinne verwandelt, so war es gefährlich eine schöne Frau, mit einer Spinne, wenn auch nur von ferne, verglichen, im Mittelpunkte eines ausgebreiteten Netzes schweben zu sehen.¹⁰⁶

Here, the female weaver becomes a shadowy and threatening figure, barely human and aligned with predatory insects. The major has a sudden vision of her as a spider lying in wait in the middle of an ever-growing web, ready to capture and consume him. *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* represents two sides of weaving: it is both respectable as a form of civilizing, pre-industrial labour that differentiates the human subject from animals and is carried out by both men and women; conversely, there is the persistence of misogynistic associations of female sexuality with threatening inhuman life, manifested through the spider image.

The decline of hand weaving in Germany provoked the Silesian weavers' revolt of 1844 and a spate of literary works supporting them, most famously Heinrich Heine's poem 'Die schlesischen Weber' and Gerhart Hauptmann's Naturalist drama *Die Weber* (1892).¹⁰⁷ These texts demonstrate the extent to which, as a cottage industry that involved the whole family, weaving at that time bore masculine connotations, and via the protests became associated with the more male cultural trope of physical violence. Although the revolting weavers were both male and female, several texts concerning their suffering have a male voice lamenting that he cannot provide for his family.¹⁰⁸ There is a warlike tone to Heine's poem 'Die schlesischen Weber' and the weavers cry out that they are weaving Germany's shroud, as shown here in the first few lines:

Im düstern Auge keine Thräne,
Sie sitzen am Webstuhl und fletschen die Zähne:
Deutschland, wir weben Dein Leichentuch,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁰⁷ For a collection of literary and political texts concerning the weavers in the nineteenth century, see: Walter Wehner, *Heinrich Heine. 'Die schlesischen Weber' und andere Texte zum Weberelend* (Munich: Fink, 1980).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 84.

Wir weben hinein den dreifachen Fluch –

Wir weben, wir weben!¹⁰⁹

Weaving is made equivalent to verbal protest in Heine's poem, as the subjects of the poem angrily weave a triple curse, a form of linguistic violence, upon Germany. The weavers' repression is along class rather than gender lines here.

The notion of weaving as an activity associated with bourgeois ideals of femininity came about after the mechanisation of weaving discussed above, when textile skills became a woman's 'accomplishment' rather than a working-class industrial skilled labour.¹¹⁰ A literary example that typifies the shift in the cultural connotation of weaving after its mechanisation is the *Märchen* 'Spindel, Weberschiffchen und Nadel' (1837) by the Brothers Grimm, a story about a poor but industrious and pious orphaned maid whose skill is weaving. In the story, a prince rides through the land, looking for the girl who is both 'richest and poorest' to make her his bride, and of course passes over the girl with superior material wealth for the poor weaving girl, who has inner riches. She wins the prince with the help of her enchanted spindle, shuttle and needle. She utters a refrain for each implement, and for her weaving shuttle cries out '*Schiffchen, Schiffchen, webe fein, führ den Freier mir herein*'.¹¹¹ Her spindle sends a golden thread to lead him to her and the shuttle weaves a beautiful vivid carpet with images of flowers and birds to lead him into the house, and the needle beautifies her house with green silk upholstery, so that she shines like a rose. The skilled weaver is therefore 'the richest' in the land, and the enchanted spindle and fly-shuttle represent outwardly her inner virtue. The prince in the story essentially poses the question, 'what is ideal in woman', and the narrative produces an answer in the form of the pious weaving, spinning, sewing girl.

The association of weaving with bourgeois women in German-speaking countries exemplified in the Grimms' tale in the nineteenth century, underpins Sigmund Freud's lecture almost a century later, 'Die Weiblichkeit' (1933), in which he describes the invention of weaving as women's sole significant contribution to culture:

¹⁰⁹ Heinrich Heine, 'Die schlesischen Weber', in *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Klaus Briegleb, 6 vols in 7 (Munich: Hanser, 1978), IV, p. 455.

¹¹⁰ Carmen Viktoria Janssen, *Textile in Texturen. Lesestrategien und Intertextualität bei Goethe und Bettina von Arnim* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), p. 13.

¹¹¹ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, 'Spindel, Weberschiffchen und Nadel', in *Grimms Märchen* (Frankfurt a.M: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985), pp. 723-726 (p. 725). Emphasis in original.

Man meint, daß die Frauen zu den Entdeckungen und Erfindungen der Kulturgeschichte wenig Beiträge geleistet haben, aber vielleicht haben sie doch eine Technik erfunden, die des Flechtens und Webens. [...] Die Natur selbst hätte das Vorbild für diese Nachahmung gegeben, indem sie mit der Geschlechtsreife die Genitalbehaarung wachsen ließ, die das Genitale verhüllt.¹¹²

By giving nature the credit for inventing weaving through the reference to pubic hair, Freud denies women even having had the idea of weaving and makes them mere imitators of nature. Moreover, the association he makes between weaving and pubic hair connects woven cloth with concealing sexual shame and the female body. In this way, Freud's reading of weaving recalls the major's feelings in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*: desire and fear become mixed as the image of the attractive widow blurs with a weaving woman and a threatening spider waiting to entrap him. Behind the image of a weaving woman, the spider lies in wait. In Homer's *Odyssey*, weaving is connected with the protection from sexual shame too: the moment that Penelope stops weaving the death shroud for Laertes is the moment that she has to choose a new husband before Odysseus is dead. The cessation of Penelope's weaving is connected to potential sexual shame of sleeping with a man other than her husband, who still lives.

Feminist theorist Patricia Klindienst Joplin's essay 'The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours' (1984), reads Freud's understanding of weaving alongside Ovid's narrative in which the goddess Minerva (Athena) turns Arachne into a spider, for beating her in a weaving competition: 'Just as Freud, terrified of the woman-as-mother and the woman weaver, uses psychoanalysis to drive women's weaving back into nature, so myth uses Minerva to transform Arachne into the repellent spider who can only weave literal webs, sticky, incomprehensible designs.'¹¹³ That is to say, Freud attributes woman's power of (artistic) creation either to nature, to divine intervention, or to nothing at all but in all cases, the woman concerned is denied agency.

¹¹² Sigmund Freud, 'Die Weiblichkeit', in *Studienausgabe*, ed. Alexander Mitscherlich, James Strachey and Angela Richards, 11 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1997), I: *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse Und Neue Folge*, pp. 544-565 (p. 562).

¹¹³ Patricia Klindienst Joplin, 'The Voice of The Shuttle is Ours', in *Rape and Representation*, eds Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda A. Silver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 50.

The Use of Weaving to Narrate Patriarchal Violence

Köhler's use of weaving as a metaphorical description for her textual production and as a radical form of language has a long literary history. In classical literature there are a number of narratives where weaving is used in place of normal speech or written language, particularly by women, to communicate sexual violence by men. In Homer's *oeuvre*, Helen is shown weaving the story of the war in the *Iliad* (800 BC) as it unfolds, taking on the role of poet recording the battle between the two sides as they (supposedly) fight for possession of her (*Ilias*, Book 3, ll. 125-230).¹¹⁴ Likewise, stories of Arachne and Minerva (Athena in Greek) and, in particular, of Philomela and Tereus in Book 6 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in later centuries (AD 8) have been of repeated interest to feminist scholars and artists in the twentieth century.¹¹⁵

In *Metamorphoses* (Book 6, ll. 1-145) Arachne, an impoverished mortal who is talented as a weaver, challenges Minerva, the goddess of weaving, to a contest. Minerva can see that Arachne's vivid depictions of male deities raping women by metamorphosing into beasts are clearly superior to her attempt. In anger at losing and at Arachne's supposed hubris in challenging a goddess to a competition, Minerva rips up Arachne's work and strikes her repeatedly on the head with her weaving shuttle. Arachne then tries to hang herself from its thread, and finally 'out of pity' Minerva turns her into a spider. Arachne's punishment can be understood as a misogynist inversion that conceals the original crime. In response to Arachne's woven narrative of male deities raping women while in the form of beasts, she is turned into a 'beastie' who entraps others with her web. In this way weaving is given a sinister edge and perversely, it is Arachne who becomes a threatening presence. Minerva prevents Arachne from weaving further *narrative* tapestry that could expose the actions of the gods, and 'weaving-as-speech' is replaced by the non-representational web of a spider, depriving Arachne of her voice.

Within the same book of *Metamorphoses* (Book 6, ll. 413-673 (ll. 576-579) another narrative tells the story of Philomela, who uses weaving to expose male violence, this time that enacted upon her. Ovid depicts in graphic detail how Tereus, the husband of

¹¹⁴ All quotations and references to Homer's *Iliad* are taken from Johann Heinrich Voss's translation and line numbers will be given. Homer, *Ilias*, trans. Johann Heinrich Voss (Frankfurt a.M: Fischer, 2009).

¹¹⁵ All quotations and references to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are taken from David Raeburn's translation, and Book and line numbers will be given: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. David Raeburn (London: Penguin, 2004).

her sister Procne, violently rapes her, cuts out her tongue to prevent her from reporting the crime and then hides her away in a guarded hut. Philomela uses a loom to weave the story of what Tereus has done to her and has a maidservant deliver it to her sister. The two sisters subsequently exact bloody revenge on Tereus. The story of Philomela and Tereus appears in Aristotle's *Poetics* (16.4) (335 B.C.), where he records a phrase describing Philomela's weaving in an earlier (lost) play by Sophocles as 'the voice of the shuttle', connecting weaving metaphorically with speech and thus language.¹¹⁶ The phrase 'the voice of the shuttle' inspired the essay 'The Voice of the Shuttle: Language from the Point of View of Literature' (1969) by Geoffrey H. Hartman, who claims that Sophocles describes 'a hint at supernatural rather than human agency, the inanimate speaks out'.¹¹⁷ Hartman's reading is contested by Klindienst Joplin, who demonstrates that Hartman omits the gender politics of Philomela's use of the loom to speak and denies the subject behind the act of speaking out.¹¹⁸ Klindienst Joplin's addition of 'is Ours' to her title identifies 'the voice' as embodied and by extension, socially determined. In contrast, Hartman's analysis leaps to a metaphysical explanation for Philomela's emergence from the silenced state desired by Tereus when he cut out her tongue, and therefore does not confront the politics of her situation.

Roland Barthes is another critic of the same period who uses metaphors of weaving to describe textual production in *S/Z* (1970)¹¹⁹ and *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973). In the latter, he plays on the etymological connection of the word 'text' to the word 'tissue' to form a theory of the text as 'hyphology' from 'hyphos', meaning both tissue and spider's web:

Text means *Tissue*; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth). We are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue – this texture – the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive

¹¹⁶ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. W. H. Fyfe, Loeb Classical Library 23 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 85.

¹¹⁷ Geoffrey H. Hartman, 'The Voice of the Shuttle: Language from the Point of View of Literature', in *Beyond Formalism. Literary Essays 1958-1970* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 337-355 (p. 338).

¹¹⁸ Joplin, pp. 35-64.

¹¹⁹ Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 160.

secretions of [her] web. Were we fond of neologisms, we might define the theory of the text as *hyphology* (*hyphos* is the tissue and the spider's web).¹²⁰

Barthes's theory of meaning has been accused by feminist critic Nancy K. Miller of forgetting the (woman) weaver, in this case Arachne, as Hartman does with Philomela. In the essay 'Arachnologies: The Woman, the Text, and the Critic' (1986), Miller writes that:

When a theory of text called 'hyphology' chooses the spider's *web* over the spider; and the concept of textuality called the 'writerly' chooses the threads of lace over the lacemaker (Barthes, *S/Z*), the subject is self-consciously erased by a model of text production which acts to foreclose the question of agency itself.¹²¹

Barthes uses the passive voice – 'the text is made' – and chooses the spider, rather than the woman weaver who became the spider (Arachne), thereby concealing the sexual politics behind the metaphor. Miller suggests that if Barthes had been a feminist, he might have come up with the neologism 'Arachnology'. Engaging with Joplin and Miller in her essay 'Penelope and the unravelling of history' (1998), the feminist artist Ruth Scheuing, who weaves as her primary artistic practice, points out that 'weaving is more than a symbol for language, as Miller and Joplin argue, it is also a symbol for the gendered nature of languages and as a means of resistance'.¹²² Scheuing situates weaving as a form of speech used by silenced women, whose voices are not heard either due to a direct act of silencing or to the patriarchal desire for female silence more generally.

Like Barthes, Virginia Woolf uses the image of a spider's web to discuss a written text; but unlike Barthes, Woolf focuses on the embodied subject who creates the text and on the contingency of their situation. In a passage about women's impoverished cultural status relative to that of men in *A Room of One's Own* (1928), Woolf insists upon the weaver-writer as an embodied, (suffering) figure:

¹²⁰ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Millar (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 64.

¹²¹ Nancy K. Miller, 'Arachnologies: the Woman, the Text and the Critic', in *Subject to Change. Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 77-101 (pp. 82-83).

¹²² Ruth Scheuing, 'Penelope and the unravelling of history', in *New Feminist Art Criticism*, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 188-195 (p. 192).

[F]iction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible; Shakespeare's plays, for instance, seem to hang there complete by themselves. But when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in.¹²³

Feminist artistic and theoretical engagements with weaving by women often focus on the embodied (female) subjects who weave and draw attention to the politics of their situations, especially where these have been passed over in other readings.¹²⁴ As has been demonstrated, women are not the only weavers in literature, but the classical precedent at least shows weaving as one way of many, potentially, for socially circumscribed women to voice resistance and, as in Penelope's case, potentially to exercise power.

Köhler's position in relation to the literary reception of weaving is contradictory, to some extent. In the German literary canon, the most prominent author to model textual construction on weaving is Goethe. Therefore, somewhat ironically, Köhler shares the metaphorical terms in which she frames her text with the most canonical (male) author possible. Furthermore, the revolutionary fervour of Heine's poem, in which male workers subverted weaving into a threatening activity to overcome enemies and bring about revolution, shares sentiment with Köhler's subversion of weaving to challenge patriarchal power. However, the feminist politics of Köhler's literary riposte to Western patriarchal domination of culture and her use of Penelope's weaving to challenge Homer's version of events align *Niemands Frau* with the tradition of women's subversion of weaving to challenge patriarchy and with feminist reception of weaving.

Penelope's weaving in Homer's text is the source of Köhler's weaving metaphor in *Niemands Frau*. Now I will analyse Penelope's weaving trick in the *Odyssey* and her

¹²³ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 48-49.

¹²⁴ Marta Weigle, *Spinsters and Spiders. Women and Mythology* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Buffie Johnson and Tracy Boyd, 'The Eternal Weaver', *Heresies*, 5 (1977), 64-68. Key components of feminist artist Judy Chicago's large installation *The Dinner Party* (1979), which celebrates women through history, are place settings woven by women. See Judy Chicago and Susan Hill, *Embroidering our Heritage* (London: Anchor Books, 1980); details of the classical influences on feminist artist and weaver Ruth Scheuing's series *13 Men or Penelope* (1989) and *Metamorphoses* (1992), implicit in the titles, are described in the artist texts that accompany the textile artworks.

status in Ithaca and closely consider its implications for an understanding of Köhler's text, before giving a brief survey of relevant literary reception of Penelope.

The Meaning of Penelope's Weaving in the *Odyssey*

The first attempt of Penelope's son Telemachus to claim authority over the household in Book 1 of the *Odyssey* is directed at his mother; he orders her out of the halls and into her weaving chambers in the upper floors of the house. His words identify control of Penelope as a means to access patriarchal power:

Nicht Odysseus allein verlor den Tag der Zurückkunft
Unter den Troern, es sanken mit ihm viel' anderer Männer.
Aber gehe nun heim, besorge deine Geschäfte,
Spindel und Webstuhl, und treib an beschiedener Arbeit
Deine Mägde zum Fleiß! Die Rede gebühret den Männern,
Und vor allem mir; denn mein ist die Herrschaft im Hause!
(*Odyssee*, Book 1, ll. 354-359)

These lines are prompted by Penelope's descent from her rooms into the main house to ask the court bard to stop singing about the Greeks' return from Troy as it causes her emotional distress. However, Telemachus orders his mother to return to her rooms with her maids and his manner is harsh and supercilious. He shows that even within the house over which Penelope supposedly has control, as given to her by Odysseus, spaces where power is exercised are prohibited to her. By referring to her rooms as her 'home' when he sends her back to them, Telemachus classifies other areas of the house as literally 'foreign' to Penelope. Telemachus divides the house spatially along gender lines, indicating that the hall where the bard sings is not Penelope's domain.

The spatial division that Telemachus establishes is reflected in the division between the repetitive domestic physical activity to which he orders Penelope, while 'die Rede' and 'die Herrschaft' are reserved for him in what he characterises as the male space. Telemachus, and by extension men, can orate, and thereby exercise power. Penelope, and by extension Greek women, may not speak, and are banished from the space of speech, equated with the exercise of power. Instead of speaking, Penelope weaves: this is how she may communicate, making weaving the feminine equivalent of

‘die Rede’. By this logic, feminine communication is multiplicitous (containing many threads) and embodied, because it is carried out by mind and body together, in contrast with the monologous ‘Rede’ of Telemachus. Weaving is Penelope’s embodied act of speech, and thus her method of exercising her power within the household.

It is quite clear from Telemachus’s outburst that Penelope’s room to manoeuvre spatially and as a subject is very limited: the scope of her physical movement is dictated by the machine that she sits before day and night: the loom. The movements of her body, what she is permitted to speak of, and the limitations to her subjectivity through her status as a woman are all reflected in each other, and relate to the loom’s location and function. The loom defines the space that Penelope is confined to, but also the space that is nonetheless *hers*, in which there are no men; and furthermore, it is a space in which she is skillful and the men who exclude her are not.

Penelope exploits the social expectation that she, as a woman, should weave a shroud. She is a woman who keeps feminine custom and does not exhibit remarkable qualities, unlike the fearless warrior queen of Greek myth, Penthesilea, or the demigoddess Helen, with her slippery moral ambiguity and famed beauty. It is Penelope’s *unremarkable* status as a ‘woman’ *per se* that allows her to outwit the suitors. She identifies an opportunity in the gendered division of space and labour that she is subject to: the men have limited perception of the screened-off female space and, thanks to cultural custom, a limited knowledge of the process of weaving. Penelope finds patriarchal culture’s blind spot – woman – and acts under the cover it provides. Penelope’s ‘Trojan horse’, which conceals her so perfectly from the suitors, are the boundaries that govern her gender – they both constrict and protect her. The use of gender as a disguise also has the effect of ‘undoing’ gender as an essential quality when considered in a modern, post-structuralist feminist philosophical context, by situating it on the surface, like a covering that can be ‘woven’ or ‘unwoven’. The shroud, rather than covering the dead body of Laertes, disguises Penelope’s living one and is metonymic of gender *per se*.

The suitors are outraged by Penelope’s weaving trick when Penelope’s maids give it away. Antinous, the most vocal suitor, calls Penelope the most cunning among women when speaking to Telemachus: ‘Deine Mutter ist schuld, die Listigste unter den Weibern!’ (*Odyssee*, Book 2, l. 88). Cunning, or ‘*mêtis*’ as it was termed in Ancient Greek, is Odysseus’s prized heroic trait. Penelope demonstrates that she is Odysseus’s equal through her use of cunning; however, her cunning is not a linguistic trick (as with his ‘Niemand’ ruse); Penelope deceives using her body at the loom, weaving and unweaving

threads.¹²⁵ The connection between cunning and weaving is firmly established in the *Odyssey*, as Barbara Clayton observes: ‘*mètis* appears as the direct object of the verb “to weave” [...] in the *Odyssey* almost as often as a literal choice such as “warp”, or “web”’.¹²⁶ Cunning, or ‘*mètis*’, is connected to weaving through classical genealogy too: the mother of Athena, the goddess most closely associated with weaving, is *Mètis*, the goddess of cunning.

Köhler explains the familial connection in her ‘NOTEN’ (*NF*, p. 97): Zeus, who was married to *Mètis*, ate her because he feared that, on account of her superior wisdom, she would produce a child greater than him. He subsequently gave birth to their daughter Athena from his head. The family history shows the appropriation of the female procreative process by Zeus as he takes over her birth function, making himself the origin of life. Köhler’s repeated reference to ‘webs’ and the ‘woven’ nature of her text in contrast to a ‘line’ or ‘single thread’ of masculine narrative and patriarchal history can be read as a response to this originary denial of the female role in creation. Penelope’s act of *mètis* brings together weaving with cunning, reuniting *Mètis* with Athena, and in doing so affirms the role of the woman as creator. Therefore, although Penelope is trapped within the male space of Odysseus’s house (just as *Mètis* is subsumed into Zeus’s body), by subverting the gendered skill of weaving, Penelope creates a secret, duplicitous space that men cannot access.

Penelope’s actions in the *Odyssey* secretly reinscribe the purpose of weaving, and with it the meaning of time, by severing the connection between the passing of time and progress towards death (that of Laertes and potentially also of Odysseus) and furthermore, the relationship between the passing of time and *progress* itself. As feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero suggests in *In Spite of Plato* (1995): ‘[B]y unravelling and thereby rendering futile what little she has done, she weaves her impenetrable time. This

¹²⁵ Marcel Detienne’s and Jean-Pierre Vernant’s influential text devoted to *mètis* in Greek culture offers this description: ‘Vigilant and forever on the alert, *mètis* also appears as multiple, *pantoie*, many-coloured, *poikile* and shifting, *aiole*. They are all qualities which betray the polymorphism and polyvalence of a kind of intelligence which, to render itself impossible to seize and to dominate fluid, changing realities, must always prove itself more supple and more polymorphic than they are. [...] *mètis*, wily intelligence possesses the most prized cunning of all: the ‘duplicity’ of the trap which always presents itself as what it is not and which conceals its true lethal nature beneath a reassuring exterior.’ Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1978), p. 27.

¹²⁶ Barbara Clayton, *A Penelopean Poetics. Reweaving the Feminine in Homer's 'Odyssey'* (Lanham, MD and Oxford: Lexington Books, 2004), p. 24.

extended intermission becomes an absolute time removed from history's events.¹²⁷ The temporality that Penelope creates is a contrast to the temporality of Odysseus's journey which, while not a straight line home, is linear in the sense that time is marked through his progress from differentiated event to differentiated event, each with its own location.¹²⁸

In the speech in which she sets out the terms under which she will choose a new husband, Penelope describes the completion of the shroud she is weaving as a signifier of the end of her life in Odysseus's family. Her trick exploits the patriarchal logic of progress, in Cavarero's terms 'a time of action', marked by events, and so the suitors take it at face value: Penelope knows how to manipulate their language and way of thinking. In fact, as becomes apparent, her intention is the perpetuation of the process itself, rather than the production of a result. The process of weaving *and* unweaving creates an ambiguous situation and cleverly takes care of eventualities dictated by both Odysseus's return and his possible death. When she is weaving and the cloth is growing in size, Penelope moves closer to screening off her life as Odysseus's wife, by creating a shroud that is a metaphorical and actual barrier between her and that identity. With its completion Penelope would be situated on the other side of it, in the *oikos* (household) of a different husband. When unweaving, Penelope maintains her presence within the Odysseus's house as his wife, and symbolically refuses to accept the possibility of his death.

The woven shroud therefore has not only an important temporal function but also a spatial one: Penelope's weaving protects her from the threat of loss of subjectivity that would be brought about by marrying another man. Within the confined space of a patriarchal culture, Penelope's subversion of the act of weaving makes her her *own* woman, up to a point. Furthermore, her actions have the political effect of subverting the 'women's space' of the loom room, making it a site from which she can clandestinely exercise power over the state, preventing a change in patriarch, and articulate her subjectivity. Penelope's transformation of an activity that defined gender difference in Ancient Greece can be viewed as a model for Köhler's subversion of a canonical text which, as such, is part of the cultural 'fabric' that sustains the patriarchal, restrictive culture against which she positions *Niemand's Frau*.

¹²⁷ Adriana Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato. A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), pp. 11-30 (p. 14).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Literary Reception of Penelope

Penelope's status as a skilled diplomat, manipulator of her situation *par excellence*, and as cunning trickster who can outwit all of the men in Ithaca including Odysseus is not the focus of much traditional classical reception, which presents her as the ideal wife. The conclusion of Homer's text encourages such a memory of Penelope, notably when Agamemnon prophetically claims that her virtue will bring her great fame in the future:

O nimmer verschwindet der Nachruhm
Ihrer Tugend; die Götter verewigen unter den Menschen
Durch den schönsten Gesang die keusche Penelopeia!
(*Odyssee*, Book 24, ll. 196-98)

In the Renaissance Robert Greene's didactic text *Penelope's Web* (1587) retells the story of Penelope in the *Odyssey*, with an epigraph outlining the womanly virtues depicted in them:

Wherein a crystal mirror of feminine perfection represents to the view of everyone those virtues and graces which more curiously beautifies the mind of women than either sumptuous apparel or jewels of inestimable value. [...] In three several discourses also are three especial virtues necessary to be incident in every virtuous woman pithily discussed, namely obedience, chastity, and silence.¹²⁹

As in the *Märchen* by the Brothers Grimm, where it is inner feminine virtue that exceeds material wealth in value, Greene's high regard for Penelope arises from her inner 'virtues and graces'. Greene reads Penelope as a figure whose perfection lies in the successful repression of her own carnal desires, voice and will in the complete service of her (absent) husband. Well into the twentieth century, Penelope is held up as a model for other women in a manner established in Homer's text itself, where other wives, such as the vengeful Clytemnestra (*Odyssee*, Book 24, ll. 199-202) and morally ambiguous Helen, are unfavourably contrasted with her. Typically approving is John William Mackail's

¹²⁹ Robert Greene, *Penelope's Web* (London: Hodges, 1601), p. 1.

Penelope in the Odyssey (1916), written in the midst of the First World War, which describes her as ‘the perfect wife’, striving in her absent husband’s interest, though Mackail does stop short of making Penelope flawless, crediting Homer with creating ‘an individual, a living woman’ with weaknesses.¹³⁰

In a similar vein, Swiss composer Rolf Liebermann’s opera *Penelope*, with text by German librettist Heinrich Strobel, which was first performed at the 1954 Salzburg Festival, focuses on Penelope as a wifely role model. *Penelope* uses parallel temporal planes of Ancient Greece and contemporary, post-war Italy to reflect on the importance of the loyal wife who, as the 1914 song has it, ‘keeps the homefires burning’, for the returning soldier. The Penelope of the Ancient Greek temporal plane is praised by the chorus for her ‘steadfastness and her refusal to give up hope for Ulysses’, while the modern Penelope remarries, and her story ends in tragedy, with the suicide of her new husband and the death of Ulysses.¹³¹ In both of these responses, which are coloured by contemporary conflicts, Penelope’s value derives from her loyalty to her husband, and she is a paradigm for ideal womanhood in the service of man.

A Penelope figure who counters the more conservative estimation of her is Molly Bloom in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), whose extrovert, sexually aware characterisation and infidelity differentiate her from a traditional understanding of Homer’s Penelope.¹³² Joyce gives Molly characteristics of other female figures in the *Odyssey*, including Calypso and the Sirens – something that Köhler does too in the canto ‘GEWEBEPROBE : PENELOPE’ (*NF*, pp. 24-25), and furthermore Joyce depicts Molly’s physical ageing and decline, which Köhler does in the later canto ‘PENELOPE IM SCHNEE’ (*NF*, pp. 60-61). Contemporary with Joyce was the proto-feminist American poet ‘H.D.’ or Hilda Doolittle, who wrote about Penelope poetically and found in her a figure to identify with: ‘It is obviously Penelope’s web that I am weaving’, she wrote of the prose works she kept re-writing for ‘fear of losing them, forgetting them’.¹³³ Furthermore, in H.D.’s creative rendering of Penelope in the poem ‘At Ithaca’ (1923), the Penelope of the poem ‘wrote to protect the poet as speaking subject, rather than to preserve her self as property of her husband and sign of his honour’.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ J.W. Mackail, ‘Penelope in the Odyssey’, in *Classical Studies* (London: John Murray, 1925), pp. 54-74 (p. 73).

¹³¹ Everett Helm, ‘Liebermann’s “Penelope” in Salzburg’, *The Saturday Review*, 4 September 1954.

¹³² James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Jerry Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹³³ H.D., ‘Advent’, in *Tribute to Freud* (New York: New Directions, 2012), pp. 88-144 (p. 114).

¹³⁴ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Penelope’s Web. Gender, Modernity, H.D.’s Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 87.

But each time that I see
my work so beautifully
inwoven and would keep
the picture and the whole
Athena steels my soul.¹³⁵

Here Penelope derives pleasure from witnessing her own skill and creativity, to the extent that she desires to keep the shroud whole instead of unweaving it, almost forgetting Odysseus in a moment of self-possession. However, Penelope then remembers Odysseus as a violent figure who wins against all opponents, which suggests it is the threat of a bloody revenge upon his return that leads her to continue with her unweaving trick, ensuring that her image as loyal wife is maintained.

Recently, Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad* has taken a first-person voice for Penelope and made her a chatty, knowing woman who speaks from beyond the grave and attempts to create a form of populist quotidian female solidarity by provoking empathy through her frank, confessional tone. Atwood's Penelope is painfully aware of the didactic role for women that Homer's character has been assigned in Western culture and urges female readers not to follow her example: 'And what did I amount to, once the official version had gained ground? An edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with. [...] *Don't follow my example*, I wanted to scream in your ears.'¹³⁶ Atwood's feminist reading of Penelope is neither aesthetically nor philosophically revolutionary, but as a playful engagement with her character it functions to introduce her to those unfamiliar with Homer and criticises traditional reception of her. Politically what is most interesting about the *Penelopiad* is the chorus of the brutally slaughtered maids, giving voice(s) to the victims of the most appalling act of violence in the *Odyssey*. Despite the comparative aesthetic radicalism of *Niemands Frau*, it might be viewed as a political weakness that Köhler is preoccupied with the socially 'nobler' women and does not draw attention in her text to the murder of the maids.

The late twentieth century has seen a spate of academic studies that interrogate and re-evaluate the role of Penelope in the *Odyssey* and elevate her status in Homer's text. Leading the way is John Finley's influential *Homer's 'Odyssey'* (1978). Finley's text opens with a chapter on Penelope, in which he argues that the centrality of the return 'home', a

¹³⁵ H.D., 'At Ithaca', in *Heliodora* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1924), p. 39.

¹³⁶ Margaret Atwood, *Penelopiad* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2005), p. 2, emphasis in original.

place that survives thanks to Penelope's loyalty to the absent Odysseus, makes her a pivotal figure to the narrative.¹³⁷ Since then Nancy Felson-Rubin, Marilyn A. Katz and Sheila Murnaghan have all investigated the motivations for Penelope's actions in Homer's text, countering the consensus in more traditional scholarship that her actions are insufficiently motivated because Homer's narrative structure is flawed.¹³⁸ Even though Homer invokes murderous wife Clytemnestra as a reason that Odysseus should not reveal his identity to Penelope, Murnaghan points out that in a tradition of misogyny the *Odyssey* is exceptional in its positive portrayal of women.¹³⁹

Worthy of special notice is feminist philosopher Cavarero's *In Spite of Plato*, which takes four classical female figures and attempts to free them from patriarchal discourse by reading them against the grain. She begins with a chapter on Penelope, and reads her weaving trick in Homer's text as the creation of 'a feminine symbolic order from proportionate materials'. Cavarero contends that Penelope constructs an 'anomalous' space and time 'where she is the wife of no one'.¹⁴⁰ Contrary to understandings of Penelope that position her as an ideal wife, Cavarero identifies in the logic of the weaving trick 'a figure who denies and disrupts the time and place assigned to her'.¹⁴¹ Cavarero concludes, however, that Penelope's 'interweaving of intelligence and the senses' is a *feminine* act, 'leaving elsewhere the masculine exercise of death' and does not hold out for a subversion of patriarchal order but settles on a separation of genders: 'The world of ideas and the sea are not theirs [Penelope's and her maids]'. I find the concluding separatism politically problematic, and part ways with Cavarero at that point, but nonetheless take much from her theoretical understanding of the weaving trick in my analysis of Köhler's text.

Even taking into account the tendency in the twentieth century to make Homeric figures neglected by traditional male-dominated classical reception the focus of critical attention, Penelope has received a large share of recent scholarship. She has been a key focus of revisionist and feminist studies, with numerous scholars positioning her as the moral or structural centre of Homer's text and seeking to raise her status to more than

¹³⁷ John Finley, *Homer's 'Odyssey'* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

¹³⁸ This approach is discussed in the Introduction to: Richard Heitman, *Taking Her Seriously. Penelope and the Plot of the Odyssey* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 3-4; Nancy Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope. From Character to Poetics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Marilyn A. Katz, *Penelope's Renown* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹³⁹ Sheila Murnaghan, *Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey*, 2nd edn (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), p. 92.

¹⁴⁰ Cavarero, 'Penelope', in *In Spite of Plato*, pp. 11-30 (p. 12).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

just a 'perfect wife'.¹⁴² *Niemand's Frau* is an important addition to revisionist reception of Penelope, and Köhler proposes readings of her behaviour shared with feminist scholarship.

A Woven 'Penelopean' Poetics in *Niemand's Frau*

The title *Niemand's Frau* identifies Penelope as the figure with whom the cycle is most strongly associated (without ruling out other possible referents). The significance of her status as a weaver is further elaborated on the dust jacket of the book, in an extract from the 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG' section:

Nocheinmal zurückkommen: auf einen stoff,
um die 3000 jahre alt, Penelopes »web«, bei dem
nacht für nacht gemachtes rückgängig gemacht,
das alltägliche hin und her des webschiffchens
wieder verkehrt wird, bewegung zu gegenbewe-
gung, ein in die zeit ausgeweitetes gewebe ...

Köhler introduces Penelope to the prospective reader as a weaver and suggests that the content that she is reworking in *Niemand's Frau* belongs to Penelope. These lines inform the attentive reader of the subject matter of the text within, and provide clues to the way in which *Niemand's Frau* is structured. The word »web« points in several directions. In German, given its adjacency to 'Penelope', web seems like shorthand for the German 'weben' or 'Gewebe', blurring English and German meanings of 'web' by mixing the spider's web, and Penelope's 'gewobenes Gewebe'. A direct English reading of »web« is also valid, especially given the use of quotation marks and the frequency of English words in the cycle overall. The spider's web suggests the history of women's weaving as threatening to men and that patriarchal injustices may be depicted in the woven narrative within, as in Arachne's tapestry. In addition, the reference to the worldwide web connects to the debate around computers in *Niemand's Frau* and in particular to Penelope's use of the internet to express a rebellious and dissatisfied view of her marriage in 'NACHTSTÜCK : ARRHYTHMIE' (*NF*, pp. 64-65).

¹⁴² Harold Bloom's survey of scholarship concerning the *Odyssey* contains three chapters with Penelope as their central focus, for example. See *Homer's 'The Odyssey'*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase, 2007).

The cover image of a ship half-concealed by a wave is suggestive of Odysseus's boat; however, the words on the dust jacket refer to *Penelope's* journey and Penelope's vessel – her 'Webschiffchen'. The movement of Odysseus's ship is teleological and its aim is to return to Ithaca, where the journey will end; even though Odysseus is thrown off course, he remains focussed on the terminus. By contrast, the movements of Penelope's vessel are processual. Although the fly-shuttle moves in lines back and forth across the loom, seeming to imitate the movements of Odysseus's ship, it does not complete a finished product and nor does it leave any thread behind. In Penelope's hands the 'Webschiffchen' continues the process of weaving and unweaving. Although the frame of the loom structures the fly-shuttle's movements, within the frame anything can be woven and what it creates can be unwoven too. Penelope's fly-shuttle is a vessel that makes progress by connecting multiple threads together, but it does not hold on to them in that position forever. When she unweaves the threads, she creates the possibility of their coming together again, differently. As paradigms for narrative or poetic construction, the different vessels reflect the political shift that Köhler wishes to instigate in terms of how literary texts are composed and (cultural) history is told.

By referring to her text as woven, Köhler uses a metaphor with cultural and political references established within a tradition of women's resistance to patriarchal power through weaving, discussed earlier in this chapter:

Anders als *seine* Geschichte kann *ihre* (auch) eine von vielen sein: nicht der Faden einer Erzählung, sondern ein Gewebe, *web*, immer wieder aufgetrennt und erneut verknüpft und verwoben. Vielstimmig, vieldeutig, vielschichtig, in einer beweglichen, singenden, klingenden Sprache raumgreifend.¹⁴³

This text, written in a style akin to that of the 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG', describes the construction of *Niemands Frau* analogously to Penelope's weaving. The italics used for *seine* and *ihre* Geschichte show that Köhler sees a division between the ways in which *he* and *she* tell stories or formulate history, and the shift from the male to female is signalled by a change in the method of textual production. *His* history is explained as a single line of narration, as his vessel dictates, whereas *her* vessel, the 'webschiffchen' creates an inclusive, because multiplicitous, *web* or woven fabric. The contrast in narrative styles

¹⁴³ This is the unaccredited text on the front flap of the dust jacket of *Niemands Frau*; it refers to Barbara Köhler in the third person but appears to have been written by her.

described here manifests the difference between ‘er’ and ‘sie’ discussed in the first chapter, where ‘sie’ can refer to more than one subject and therefore ‘kann *ihre* (auch) eine von vielen sein’.

Köhler realises the multiplicity of her ‘woven’ textual structure in a number of ways. First, the cantos are intensely intertextual, both through direct quotations indicated by the use of italics or capital letters, or that are simply present, and the ‘NOTEN’ section introduces further intertexts that are not referred to in the cantos themselves. The presence of so many intertexts has the effect of dispersing authorship among many sources and conveying the impression that *Niemand's Frau* is a work that emerges from the aggregate of existent material culture, rather than from a ‘single’ mind. Quotation also introduces into the cantos many different voices that have been ‘heard’ or ‘read’ elsewhere first and thus bring a multi-vocality to the text, in addition to that created by giving voice to so many female figures from the *Odyssey*. Köhler goes to some lengths to show that *Niemand's Frau* is ‘woven’ from many sources and that they are not exclusively male or female, thereby refusing the gender separatism that Cavarero associates with Penelope.

Second, *Niemand's Frau* unweaves itself semantically through the interaction between the semantic level of the printed words and the constraint of the box form in which Köhler lays out the poems on the page (its material manifestation). The requirement that a word be divided over two lines, or that a negative be delayed until the next line because of the limit of the line length means that the text can immediately negate its own statement: weaving and unweaving meaning. For example, the run-on over a line break below maintains the contradictory duality of im/mortal:

die liebe seele ein versprechen un
sterblich war das wort das fleisch
(*NF*, p. 34)

The word ‘versprechen’ hovers between the meanings of a ‘promise’ and ‘slip of the tongue’, two utterances that are usually mutually exclusive: the first, an intentional and performative utterance that forms a bond of commitment between a speaker and an audience, and the second, an accidental ‘mis-speaking’ that undermines a common understanding of events, or perhaps reveals them as false. While a slip of the tongue reveals something that has been repressed, a promise is made in ‘good faith’, on the basis that the level of language on which the promise is uttered, is authentic. The validity of a

promise is conditional upon it *not* being simply a ‘slip of the tongue’, but an intentional act.

Köhler uses weaving to characterise an alternative version of creation to the logocentric beginning in the Gospel of St John in a passage that both echoes, and distances itself from the biblical text. She reappropriates creation from the ‘Wort’ and returns it to the body by describing biological creation and therefore birth in terms of weaving: ‘In jedem anfang einer genealogie [/] sind zwei, ein paar, knoten im netz, im web’ (*NF*, p.7 5). This creation myth begins with two threads, mirroring the two bodies needed for biological creation, both male and female, while the net or web can be seen to represent the interconnected cells of an embryo. Köhler’s description of creation here does not deny or conceal the strikingly named distaff (female) side of genealogy as the patrilinear Christian culture has done. In addition to contesting Christian denials of the body in a creation myth, by using weaving as a way to reintroduce the mother into creation, Köhler also contests the ‘motherless’ birth of Athena from Zeus’s head. By insisting that every beginning has two, Köhler employs Athena’s power, weaving, to reintroduce her mother (Mêtis) into creation, thereby metaphorically defying Zeus’s desire to hide her role.

Köhler draws attention to the patriarchal fear of the creative power of mothers in a passage that recalls Ovid’s narrative of Arachne. The canto ‘HADES : LEKTÜRE : HADES’ describes a network of mafia-like mothers (*NF*, p. 39) who are depicted as sinister, spider-like figures who want to entrap men. The canto portrays scheming, disloyal women whose womb may not contain the child from the right father: ‘TRAU KEINER FRAU diesen sinistren mutter- und [/] machenschaften die dich zum spott machen zum bastard’ (*NF*, p. 40). Köhler goes on to set out how women, depicted as arachnoid predators in a clever and insidious inversion (like Arachne, discussed earlier) have in fact been socially and culturally disenfranchised for millennia and are themselves trapped in a web of relativity to men:

frau von: mutter von: von welchem
gott begattet & miteinander nichts zu schaffen keine
von ihnen hat eigenen text eigne verwandtschaft aber
alle ungenannt versippt verknüpft verbunden sind sie
DAS NETZ

(*NF*, p. 41)

Penelope’s subversion of weaving to create a space and time in which she can express

her own agency cuts her off from pure relationality to men in a leap away from patriarchal logic, and therefore provides an apt model for Köhler's poetic subversion of the *Odyssey*. Köhler questions the purpose of Penelope's weaving, traditionally considered as an act of waiting for Odysseus, suggesting a new reading of the *Odyssey*.

'wartet penelope?' Undoing the *Odyssey* in 'GEWEBEPROBE : PENELOPE'

The two cantos in the cycle that directly refer to weaving as a narrative device are 'NAUSIKAA : RAPPORT' (NF, pp. 22-23) and 'GEWEBEPROBE : PENELOPE' (NF, pp. 24-25), which follow on from each other. The former depicts the way in which Odysseus tells the story of his journey to the Phoenicians after he is washed up on their shore, which takes up a significant part of the *Odyssey*. Using weaving as a metaphor to describe Odysseus's mode of telling, Köhler makes a contrast between Odysseus and Penelope. Odysseus tells a 'vom Großen Gewebe in [/] dem er sich an den faden hält' (NF, p. 22), which can be read as a large or grand web and Köhler uses capitals for both words, in a passage with few other capitalised words, suggesting that he self-aggrandizes in the narrative. Odysseus holds onto threads in his 'Gewebe' where Penelope lets them go and unweaves them, creating the potential that they could be re-woven, differently.

'NAUSIKAA : RAPPORT' goes on to remind the reader of Odysseus's hubristic impulse:

glatte lügen und geschliffene
monologe die geschichte einen
der sie & der mein sagt MEINE
GESCHICHTE
(NF, p. 23)

The emphasis of the capitalisation conveys an impression of Odysseus as obsessed with putting himself at the centre of the 'monologous' narrative, declaring it to be his possession, like a child that refuses to share a toy with others. The canto continues to depict Odysseus's ship as a fly-shuttle, a 'schiffchen', crossing through the warp of the female figures Circe, Skylla, the Sirens, Nausicaa, Helena, and Calypso: 'sie ist sein sind [/] viele fäden gekreuzt, gequert [/] von einem' (NF, p. 23). The female figures are described as his possessions here, as if they are secondary to him but of course, the weft,

which the 'schiffchen' weaves from side to side, cannot create a 'Gewebe' without the warp. The whole structure would collapse without the warp, which hints at Odysseus's dependency on the female figures in the *Odyssey*.

'GEWEBEPROBE: PENELOPE' explicitly focuses on Penelope's weaving and unweaving in her chambers in the palace of Ithaca to throw doubt upon the understanding in traditional scholarship that Penelope *is* indeed waiting for Odysseus and to challenge Odysseus's narrative. By suggesting that Penelope may not be waiting for Odysseus at all and, in fact, that Odysseus's existence depends upon Penelope, rather than vice versa, Köhler departs markedly from traditional readings of the *Odyssey*. The canto stands out from those that precede and follow by dint of its relative simplicity in terms of content, ease of comprehension and breadth of reference; it is also formally distinctive by having what looks like a refrain. Its form exemplifies the way in which the cantos in the cycle are subject to rigid spatial control.

Just as Penelope's movements are regulated in the way that she must use the 'webschiffchen' of the loom at which she sits, so are the lines of Köhler's cantos, which appear, in the mode of concrete poetry, to embody their description as 'ein Gewebe'. Each canto is composed of lines that are equal in length on the page and are composed in blocks as if they have been produced by a machine that must work to fixed boundaries, such as a loom. Although the concept of concrete poetry has its more recent origins in the Noigandres group of Brasil (*poesia concreta*) and in Eugen Gomringer's work in Germany in the 1950s, the Ancient Greeks composed poems in specific shapes such as a pipe, wings or an altar to complement their semantic theme.¹⁴⁴ Viewed thus, 'GEWEBEPROBE : PENELOPE'; resembles a loom. Mirroring the two beams at the top and the bottom of the loom are the lines that frame the central section, which in turn resembles the woven fabric:

¹⁴⁴ The anthology of German-language concrete poetry edited by Eugen Gomringer contains a number of theoretical definitions of concrete poetry: *konkrete poesie. Anthologie*, ed. Eugen Gomringer, (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1976), pp. 153-174. See also the two *Text + Kritik* volumes devoted to concrete poetry: *Text + Kritik. Konkrete Poesie I*, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold, vol. 25 (Munich: Boorberg, 1970); *Text + Kritik. Konkrete Poesie II*, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold, vol. 30 (Munich: Boorberg, 1971). *The Greek Bucolic Poets*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. J. M. Edmonds, Loeb Classical Library 28 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912).

penelope wartet worauf wartet

wartet penelope? wartet kalyp
so wartet kirke warten skylla
charybdis sirenen warten alle
alle auf einen nur: den einen
den anderen - anders als alle
anderen warten auf ihn warten
sie wirklich warten alle dass
er kommt dass er geht dass er
bleibt und er anders sei dass

penelope wartet darauf wartet

(NF, p. 24)

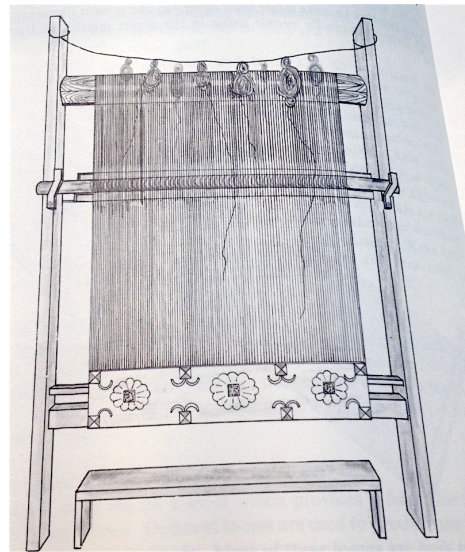


Figure 1: Carpet loom, 1986

(Source: *Egyptian Carpet Looms*)

As a further direct connection to Penelope in Homer's text, there are three 'main' sections to this canto, potentially representing the three years during which Penelope's weaving trick succeeds in deceiving the suitors.

Although the defining cause for Penelope's weaving is traditionally considered to be that she is waiting for Odysseus, 'GEWEBEPROBE : PENELOPE' interrogates this notion, as H.D. had done, to create a sense of doubt as to whether and for whom or what Penelope is waiting. The canto creates the semantic indeterminacy that mirrors the indeterminacy of Penelope's weaving and unweaving as a way to create a space and a time for herself, where she belongs to no man, and can be 'Niemand's Frau'. Taking this canto as a woven structure, the repeated words 'penelope wartet' at the beginning and end of each of the three sections of the canto (inverted at their final appearance) are the structural threads, (the warp) within which the other threads of the poem will be interwoven (the weft). The tension required by the warp, so that the other words (the weft) can be woven through, is also created on a metaphorical level through difference between the assertion that Penelope *is* waiting for someone or something. The answer to 'worauf wartet Penelope?' is not necessarily a person, as the question 'worauf' implies that she could be waiting for a more (grammatically) complex outcome, such as 'dass [/]

er kommt'. The final statement 'auf den wartet Penelope nicht', in contrast, specifies in particular that she is not waiting for *him*.

The idea that Penelope is waiting for Odysseus's arrival is undermined by the use of a question mark in line two of the first section: 'wartet penelope?' Questions are more often implied in the cycle as a whole and there are extremely few question marks used. The doubt initiated by the question gains momentum as the same question is extended and asked of other goddesses in Homer's text. The lines 'wartet kalyp [/] so wartet kirke', is a conditional sentence that goes on to include other female figures in the *Odyssey*: if Calypso is waiting, then so is Circe, but if she is not then neither are the others, as the line continues with 'charybdis sirenen warten alle [/] alle auf einen nur'. The doubt raised by the question that culminates in 'nur' on the fifth line, undermines the idea that these female figures are really *only* waiting for Odysseus, and introduces an almost mocking, and certainly sceptical tone. Having a domino effect, the doubt that these lines insist upon threatens to topple the whole narrative structure of the *Odyssey* by undermining Odysseus's account of himself depicted in the previous canto ('MEINE GESCHICHTE'). The scepticism is further reinforced by the now doubtful 'auf ihn warten [/] sie wirklich' in the subsequent lines. The cumulative effect of the question mark, the list of women, 'nur' and 'wirklich' is to suggest a negative answer.

Echoing Brecht's 'Odysseus und die Sirenen', the statement that Odysseus's fickle movements define these powerful female figures becomes implausible in relation to the doubt that has been built up. The singsong rhythm and simple language of 'dass [/] er kommt, dass er geht, dass er [/] bleibt' make his movements seem almost parodic of those of the shuttle. Furthermore, the apparently sarcastic assertion that Odysseus is different from all other men expressed in the words 'anders als alle [/] anderen', which is reworked throughout the canto, is an exact quotation from Ingeborg Bachmann's short story 'Undine geht' (1961). In Bachmann's short story, based on the fairytale 'Undine' by Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué (1811), a water nymph bitterly and angrily narrates a romantic relationship she had with a human man, before he became horrified by her and returned to his wife:

Ich habe einen Mann gekannt, der hieß Hans, und er war anders als alle anderen.
Noch einen kannte ich, der war auch anders als alle anderen. Dann einen, der war
ganz anders als alle anderen und er hieß Hans, ich liebte ihn.¹⁴⁵

Bachmann's story picks apart the bland and deceptive language of clichéd Western romance. The repetition of 'anders als alle anderen' becomes less convincing each time it is repeated, especially in context of the story, in which Undine unwittingly plays the role of escapist lover for a generic patriarchal figure called 'Hans'. The story begins with the words 'Ihr Menschen! Ihr Ungeheuer! Ihr Ungeheuer mit Namen Hans!', reversing the perspective that she as the water nymph is monstrous, as she narrates the cruelty with which he treated her. Like Bachmann, Köhler reverses the perspective to question whether Odysseus was really the focal point of the lives of these female figures.

Köhler amplifies the effect of 'anders als alle anderen' with the words: 'und er anders sei'. The use of Konjunktiv I, used usually for reported speech and not the statement of a fact creates a distance from the assertion that Odysseus possesses the messianic qualities implied by the image of all these female figures waiting for his arrival, possibly making it no more than hear-say. The second section goes further in inverting the perception that the female figures might not be waiting for Odysseus, suggesting that he, in fact, is waiting for them:

dass

penelope wartet darauf wartet

erwartet er erzählt er wartet
auf den moment der zählt wenn
eine auf ihn gewartet hat sie
ihn erwartet kann er ein andr
er sein kann kommen und gehen
kann wolln oder nicht kann er
sich verlassen und sie warten
lassen sie alle momente verge
hen vergessen wegbleiben denn
(NF, p. 25)

¹⁴⁵ Ingeborg Bachmann, 'Undine geht', in *Werke*, eds Christine Koschel, Inge von Weidenbaum, Clemens Münster, 4 vols (Munich: Piper, 1978), II, pp. 253-263 (p. 258).

The words 'er erzählt', followed by the implication of intention, seems to assert that the portrayal of women waiting is part of Odysseus's own portrayal of himself as the agent of the narrative, with them as secondary. The idea of Penelope as waiting is undermined, and instead it is suggested that Odysseus is the one who waits and is dependent on Penelope and the other female figures to acknowledge him. Odysseus needs them to wait for him to bring him into existence: without them he has no story, he needs them to be a hero, and for there to be an *Odyssey*. On the level of weaving too, as mentioned earlier, without the warp (the threads, or the female figures), the weft (the 'schiffchen') can make no progress towards creating a 'Großes Gewebe'. Furthermore, the female figures provide him with many of the ideas that enable him to survive, and therefore continue on his journey and arrive home, something that is often glossed over or forgotten.

At the end of the second section Köhler makes a contrast between Odysseus's patriarchal time, which insists upon continual progress, and a 'wasteful' time that Penelope weaves. She juxtaposes the 'er' who waits for the one moment that 'counts', and the apparent feminine profligacy with time which allows it to slip away: 'sie warten [/] lassen sie alle momente verge[/]hen vergessen wegbleiben'. However, the supposed wastefulness of time on Penelope's part, as we are then reminded in the third section, is just as intentional as Odysseus's temporality of progress, even though this is imperceptible to the suitors.

penelope wartet, wartet nicht

penelope verwebt & trennt auf
hat zeit gewinnt sie und gibt
sie nimmt sie sich wartet sie
nicht auf etwas trennt sie es
ist verwobene zeit getrenntes
eine verbindlichkeit zwischen
ihnen & ihr allein ein gewebe
schleier undurchschaubare ist
sie frei könnt er freier sein

auf den wartet penelope nicht

(*NF*, p. 25)

Penelope's time is not composed of moments that can be 'counted', but is depicted as a web of co-existent interwoven threads: 'es [/] ist verwobene zeit', which keep her free from fulfilling her agreement to remarry. Penelope's woven cloth is an opaque, protective veil, allowing her to deceive the suitors who cannot see or understand what she is doing: 'ein gewebe [/] schleier undurchschaubare ist [/] sie frei'. The final words of the last section: 'könnt er freier sein', play on the double meaning of 'freier'. The first understanding is as a comparative declination of the adjective 'frei' (available / unattached), therefore meaning that he, Odysseus, could (or should) be *more* unattached, perhaps a comment on the fact that he was unfaithful and slept with the nymph Calypso on her island of Ogygia before returning to Ithaca, and with Circe. The second understanding is as the noun 'der Freier' (suitor), which places Odysseus on a level with the parasitic suitors whom Penelope does not desire, and whom she attempts to keep at bay through her weaving. The canto reverses most estimations of the *Odyssey*, in which Penelope waits for years for one man and Odysseus visits many female figures, and instead creates a reading where Odysseus waits for many women, and Penelope is not waiting for anyone. The final line 'auf den wartet penelope nicht' states clearly what is being implied from the beginning of this canto: that Penelope does not weave in order to wait for Odysseus, but to be 'frei', to be her own woman.

Penelope and Schrödinger's Cat

In *Niemands Frau*, Köhler attempts to depict aspects of the *Odyssey* from 'the other side' of cultural history and in this case, from within Penelope's weaving chambers. The chambers in which she weaves are screened off from the male domain, and contain a machine whose function is screened from men's comprehension, on account of their externality to the actual and metaphorical space of 'women', to which the loom belongs. The notion that Penelope is the loyal wife who waits for Odysseus is thrown into doubt by her trick because she oscillates between a state of waiting, and *not waiting*, weaving and unweaving. The uncertainty as to whether Penelope is waiting or not that is created in the canto 'GEWEBEPROBE : PENELOPE' intersects with Köhler's metaphorical use of quantum physics to explain her poetics.

At the close of the cycle in the final canto before the epilogue and afterword sections, Köhler makes a link between Penelope and Schrödinger's Cat. Schrödinger's Cat was a theoretical cat created by the scientist Erwin Schrödinger in 1935 to prove the

absurdity of quantum physics. In the experiment, a cat would be left in a closed box or room with a phial of poison and some radioactive material, so that if the material decays, the phial breaks and the poison is released, killing the cat. There is a fifty-fifty chance that the radioactive material will decay, but according to quantum theory, neither possibility has any reality unless it is observed: ‘the atomic decay has neither happened nor not happened, the cat has neither been killed nor not killed, until we look into the box to see what has happened’.¹⁴⁶ The nineteenth canto ‘NACHTSTÜCK : ARRHYTHMIE’, which is told in Penelope’s voice, ends with an image of dying and the River Styx (*NF*, p. 65), the boundary between life and the underworld. Immediately following that in the final canto, DIE KATZ, are the words, ‘Ich bin nicht tot nicht ganz: ich bin [/] Schrödingers Katz’ (*NF*, p. 66). Köhler identifies Schrödinger’s Cat as ‘die wiedergängerin von der nachtseite des abendlands’, the feminine voice speaking from the other side of Western history, conflating the idealised ‘Other’ of science with the idealised Others of literature: namely women and female-gendered monsters like the Sirens and Skylla. At the point that the voice of the cat interjects, it takes over from Penelope whose perspective has dominated the previous three cantos, and it is evident that Köhler identifies a common quality between Penelope and the theoretical cat in Schrödinger’s thought experiment.

Like the theoretical box into which Schrödinger’s Cat is placed and where the scientists cannot see, no male ‘observer’ knows what is happening within Penelope’s weaving room. A definitive ‘result’ as to whether the cat is dead or alive, and what Penelope is doing is only produced when her rooms are opened to observation. However, in both cases, if the scientists or the suitors were to open the box or the room at any particular time, they would only receive a partial insight into what was occurring: a suitor who visited Penelope in the day would see only that she was weaving. The suitors were not capable of understanding what was happening within Penelope’s chamber until it was explained to them by a woman who had been to the ‘other side’. I suggest that Penelope’s position throughout Homer’s *Odyssey* can be thought of as structurally equivalent to the box in which Schrödinger’s Cat is placed.

Köhler’s point in DIE KATZ is that the cat does know what happened in the box, but was silenced. In *Niemands Frau*, the voice of Schrödinger’s Cat speaks from the other side of knowledge, confounding linear, patriarchal thought and in so doing destroying it: ‘ich versehrt die linie der schrift’. The cat occupies a reality that the

¹⁴⁶ Gribbin, pp. 2-3.

scientists cannot access, where multiple contradictory situations can occur simultaneously. In Köhler's text, Penelope's activity of weaving and unweaving refuses the results-oriented logos of the male domain, refuses the imperative to choose a new husband and does not necessarily mean that she is waiting for her absent husband. Penelope is guarding the plural potential of her own space and time, keeping her options open: her weaving can be considered an expression of the quantum logic in the cat's box. Penelope's defining act makes her a suitable heroine for Köhler's cycle of quantum, 'Penelopean' poetics, and her activity of weaving provides a structural and philosophical paradigm for the construction of the poetic text.

Chapter 4

Helen of Troy: The Image, Power and the Impoverishment of Life

Aber Schönheit? Ein Volk, das um die Schönheit kämpft!
– Paris selbst war [...] auf den Marktplatz gekommen und
hatte den Namen der schönen Helena dem Volke
hingeworfen.
Die Leute merkten nicht, daß er nicht bei der Sache
war.¹⁴⁷

Christa Wolf, *Kassandra* (1983)

was weiss das bild

NF, p. 54, 'SKYLLA / ENTHÜLLEN'

While Penelope is remembered as a woman who waited devotedly for her husband, Helen of Troy is known as the most beautiful woman in the world, who left her husband, Menelaus, and caused a decade of bloody war between the Greeks and the Trojans. The association of Helen with the ideal of beauty is perhaps the reason why, of the two women, there are far more depictions of Helen in the subsequent millennia: the desire to understand and represent beauty has been a constant in Western culture. Despite the diversity that exists within the ancient classical tradition of representing Helen, and the ambiguity that surrounds her, even in the *Iliad*, Christopher Marlowe's phrase that Helen is 'the face that launched a thousand ships' sums up how she is most remembered: as a beautiful face used to summon men to cross the seas to fight and kill each other.¹⁴⁸ However, Homer does not describe Helen's face in detail, and therefore her beauty may be considered a floating signifier onto which images can be projected.

Köhler's depiction of 'Helena' – as she is named in the German tradition – is complex and multifaceted, weaving classical and contemporary references together, but has at its core a criticism of political power. She draws on a feminist perspective on the

¹⁴⁷ Christa Wolf, *Kassandra* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2000), p. 91.

¹⁴⁸ Christopher Marlowe, 'Dr. Faustus. A-Text', in *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*, eds David Beginton and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 178.

patriarchal reduction of woman to image and focuses on the ways in which Helena is used by warmongering male rulers as propaganda in the Trojan wars. ‘MATRIX / AMATRIX’ (NF, pp. 42-43), where Helena first appears, begins in a vein that echoes Christa Wolf’s portrayal of Helena in *Kassandra* (1983), a feminist rewriting of the *Iliad*, where the idea of Helena’s beauty is used to subdue the Trojan population and make them fight. The politics of Köhler’s poetic investigation into the figure of Helena are summed up in the epigraph ‘was weiss das bild [?]’ (NF, p. 54), which is the last line of ‘SKYLLA / ENTHÜLLEN’ (NF, pp. 52-54), the second canto that features Helena. By asking what the image ‘knows’, Köhler draws attention to the embodied, desiring, thinking and speaking subject displaced by the image, and reminds the reader of the loss that takes place in the conversion of (female) life into its representation.

In her seminal work on femininity and the image, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1992), Elisabeth Bronfen depicts the image as well as femininity as sources of ‘anxiety’ and ‘pleasure’ within patriarchal culture:

The image of Woman as difference, lack, loss troubles and endangers, while the image of Woman as displaced self-portrait of man, as crystallisation of his fantasies, satisfies and reassures. [...] Beautification and aestheticisation mitigate a direct threat by severing image from context or reference, as in the myth of Medusa, where a direct glance at the woman’s head turns the viewer into stone while the head reflected in a mirror can be gazed at with impunity.¹⁴⁹

Helen of Troy, as the epitome of beauty within Western culture, is the epitome of ‘Woman as Image’ and also, following Bronfen, of aestheticized woman as mitigated threat: images and narratives concerning Helen proliferate in every medium.¹⁵⁰ As will be discussed in this chapter, there is a strand of classical narratives in which Helen herself never went to Troy, but, an ‘*eidolon*’ (phantom or image) version of her went instead, fooling everyone: a literal interpretation of Helen–as–Image. Köhler teases out the problems with the image and its relationship to the marginalisation of women in Western culture, from the shadows of Plato’s cave wall to the cinema screen. Through her exploration of ‘Helena’ as a theme she brings together a gamut of misogynist

¹⁴⁹ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body. Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 121.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

representations of women in Western culture, from classical texts to cinematic images – including women as dogs, and even ‘bitches’ in the highly fragmentary canto ‘SKYLLA / ENTHÜLLEN’. In contrast to efforts to reduce Helena to an image, Köhler draws attention to the ways in which Helena is a subversive figure by weaving in many references to Homeric and other narratives in which she rebels against and outwits the men around her, even from within the constrained networks of patriarchal power.

To provide the classical context for Köhler’s multifaceted engagement with Helena, in this chapter I will sketch Helen of Troy’s position in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, drawing out elements that are pertinent to Köhler’s critical feminist interrogation of her. I will pay particular attention to the strand of the classical tradition in which the *eidolon* version of Helen went to Troy in her place, as it is especially relevant to Köhler’s interpretation of her. Specific incidents in the classical texts will be examined in more detail in the textual analysis of Köhler’s cantos, at the points where she refers to them. The number of references to Helen by writers and artists over the last few millennia mean that a complete survey would be impossible here, but I will sketch the general shape of scholarship concerning Helen of Troy, especially feminist interventions. Finally, I will discuss the two cantos in *Niemands Frau* that feature Helena most prominently: ‘MATRIX /AMATRIX’ and ‘SKYLLA / ENTHÜLLEN’.

The Tradition of Helen: Homeric Texts

Helen — Helen — Helen
there was always another and another and another
H.D., *Helen in Egypt* (1952-54)¹⁵¹

The narratives that feature Helen in the classical period are defined by ambiguity and plurality. There are several different accounts of her parentage, which I will outline below; of how many suitors she has, which varies from the thirty-one listed by Apollodorus to eleven in Hesiod and other totals elsewhere; of who her rightful husband is (Menelaus or Paris); and finally of whether or not she ever went to Troy. This last uncertainty arose through the tradition begun by Stesichorus, in which a phantom, or

¹⁵¹ H.D., *Helen in Egypt* (New York: New Directions, 1974), p. 187.

eidolon, went to Troy in Helen's place, while she remained in Egypt.¹⁵² As Froma Zeitlin writes, 'the quality of singleness is emphatically not among Helen's attributes. Quite the contrary; her mode of being in the world is predicated on multiplicity and proliferation. More precisely, in her person she is susceptible to doubling and division, in her stories to endless repetitions and replications.'¹⁵³ The fact that Helen is repeatable and reproducible give her the quality of an image or an idol rather than of an embodied human subject, anchored to one place and time. In *Niemands Frau*, Köhler refers to incidents featuring Helen from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, to two different strands out of the 'proliferation' of versions in the classical Helen tradition, as well as to many later variants up to those in the twentieth century.

In the story of Helen's parentage given by Homer, which is generally the best known, she is the daughter of Zeus and Leda. Helen was conceived when Zeus, disguised as a swan, either seduced or raped Leda. But in the 'NOTEN' section of *Niemands Frau* (NF, p. 97) Köhler draws the reader's attention to an alternative version of Helen's parentage, from the *Cypria*, a post-Homeric epic cycle from the seventh century BC with no known author, in which Helen is the child of Zeus and Nemesis, the goddess of divine retribution. Nemesis attempted to evade Zeus's advances by turning into a goose, but he then turned into a swan and mated with her.¹⁵⁴ In both stories, therefore, Helen has a semi-divine parentage, is the product of a rape and so has a different status in Greek epic from fully mortal subjects. Helen's semi-divinity as well as her beauty facilitate Köhler's juxtaposition of 'Helena' with Greta Garbo, which she makes explicit in the 'NOTEN' by describing Garbo as 'die göttliche' and as a 'diva' (NF, p. 98).

The title of the canto 'MATRIX / AMATRIX', the first to feature 'Helena' in *Niemands Frau*, most obviously refers to Helen's situation in Homer's *Iliad*, in which the Trojan wars were fought over the fact that she occupied the conflicted positions of wife to Menelaus and mother ('MATRIX') of their children, and lover ('AMATRIX') to Paris. That is to say, in Homer's texts Helen had two husbands and the wars were officially fought to resolve this conflict. Before the reader of the *Iliad* even encounters Helen, she

¹⁵² Apollodorus, *The Library*, trans. Robin Hard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Hesiod, *Catalogue of Women*, trans. Glenn W. Most, 2 vols, Loeb Classical Library 503 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), II.

¹⁵³ Froma Zeitlin, 'The Lady Vanishes: Helen and Her Phantom in Euripidean Drama', in *Allusion, Authority, and Truth. Critical Perspectives on Greek Poetic and Rhetorical Praxis*, eds Phillip Mitsis and Christos Tsagalis (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 263-282 (p. 263).

¹⁵⁴ This version is described in the *Library* of Apollodorus, 1-2 century BC, an early encyclopaedia and genealogy of Greek mythology. Apollodorus, *The Library*, pp. 120-121.

has already been described by Nestor, Hector and Paris and is thus ‘defined by others before she has the chance to define herself’.¹⁵⁵ Paris took Helen from Menelaus after ‘The Judgement of Paris’ (alluded to in *Iliad*, Book 24, ll. 25-30), in which he had to decide which of three goddesses was the most beautiful. As a bribe Hera offered Paris ‘the most beautiful mortal woman on earth’ – Helen of Sparta. Paris chose Hera and set off to seize Helen from Menelaus. Whether Helen went willingly or was taken by force is not consistently reported in Homer’s texts, and she remains an ambiguous figure in subsequent reception. Even though there is a scene in the *Iliad* where Aphrodite forces Helen to go to bed with Paris, she is not considered in subsequent literature or by Köhler, as a victim of rape.

Despite being the alleged cause of the Trojan war, Helen appears only six times in the long text of the *Iliad*, four times in Book 3, once in Book 6 and once in Book 24 (the final Book). Like Penelope at the beginning of the *Odyssey*, Helen’s position is highly constricted, possibly even more so, through her intersecting positions as a woman, a captive, a mortal under the control of Aphrodite and a foreigner who is regarded as responsible for bringing catastrophe to Troy. Helen has the function of an object that drives the war and is not permitted to leave. Her appearances in the *Iliad* are defined by other figures telling her what to do and where to go: first Iris (a minor goddess), then Priam (Paris’s father and king of Troy), Aphrodite and Paris.

Helen has no choice over who her husband will be; she is a captive of Paris and a possession of either Paris or Menelaus, depending on the outcome of the war. Further to this, Homer’s literary world is still ruled by gods and Helen is subject to their wishes, and she is regarded with hostility by Trojan society, as an ‘abhorred foreigner’, in particular by its women. Helen’s awareness of this antipathy is indicated by her speech at Hector’s funeral, where she praises Hector and Priam as the only two Trojans who showed her kindness.¹⁵⁶ Her highly circumscribed position notwithstanding, the Homeric Helen does attempt to resist the image forced upon her by others and finds ways of defining herself and carving out a degree of autonomy, even subverting gender relations. The instances I focus on below create the possibility for a feminist reading of Homer’s Helen, revealing that she has her own voice and resists attempts to silence it, a characteristic which Köhler takes up in her interpretation of the figure.

¹⁵⁵ Hanna M. Roisman, ‘Helen in the *Iliad*; Causa Belli and Victim of War: From Silent Weaver to Public Speaker’, *The American Journal of Philology*, 127 (2006), 1-36 (p. 9)

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2, pp. 28-32.

When the goddess Iris visits Helen in disguise in Book 3 of the *Iliad* (*Ilias*, Book 3, ll. 121-45), she summons Helen to witness a duel between Menelaus and Paris that will decide whose wife she will be. When Iris finds Helen, she is weaving. In Helen's hands this typically womanly activity becomes a means of self-expression because she depicts a narrative of the war. Through her choice of what to weave, Helen is placed in a typically male authorship position. Although weaving is a sign of women's position in a Greek society, as discussed in the previous chapter, and it is also a tool that produces orderly activity, women can 'weave any number of patterns on [the] loom'.¹⁵⁷ Here Helen is a subversive image-maker who turns her gaze on others (the men fighting) rather than being a muse, and can construct a history from her own, female perspective. Although Helen does not speak in this scene and follows Iris's direction without protest, taking up the mantle of author through weaving raises her above the status of a mere captive.

In her second appearance (*Ilias*, Book 3, ll. 161-242), Helen is on the walls of Troy with Priam, Paris's father, watching the two men duelling; however, the duel is inconclusive, leaving her marital status undecided. The Trojan elders discuss Helen in this scene and, while acknowledging her beauty, they wish that she would leave Troy and not cause them any further trouble. While this view implies a degree of responsibility on Helen's part, Priam is more forgiving and blames the gods for their suffering. In response to this exoneration, Helen wishes herself dead and says that she followed Paris to Troy, instead of describing her departure as an abduction:

Aber Helena sprach, die göttliche unter den Weibern:

[...]

Hätte der Tod mir gefallen, der herbeste, ehe denn hierher

Deinem Sohn ich gefolgt, das Gemach und die Freunde verlassend,

Und mein einziges Kind und die trauliche Scharr der Gespielen!

(*Ilias*, Book 3, ll. 170-174)

Helen goes on to insult herself, using the Greek epithet 'dog-faced'. In his translation of the epithet, Voss translates 'dog-faced' as 'schändlich':

“Der dort ist Atreus' weitherrschender Sohn Agamemnon

¹⁵⁷Joplin, p. 42.

Beides, ein trefflicher König zugleich und ein tapfere Streiter
Schwarzer mir war er vordem, der Schändlichen [dog-faced]! ach, er war es!”
(*Ilias*, Book 3, ll. 178-180)

The English Loeb prose translation also associates ‘dog-faced’ with shame, but translates the phrase as ‘shameless me’.¹⁵⁸ Voss’s version, ‘shameful’ and the Loeb version, ‘shameless’, each imply a different perspective on Helen’s behaviour: ‘[S]hame, [...] elicits from others contempt or derision or avoidance. [...] It will lower the agent’s self-respect and diminish him in his own eyes.’¹⁵⁹ Voss’s choice of ‘shameful’ suggests that Helen’s behaviour can be judged to be shameful in the eyes of society and therefore implies that she is aware of these rules and would usually abide by them; while the use of ‘shameless’ in the Loeb edition implies that Helen acted as someone who is *outside* social rules that could arouse shame. A further reason for Helen’s exemption from social rules and one that means she is not punished for her adultery (willing or not) is that she has semi-divine status – but chooses the abjection of identifying with the animal world, rather than the mortal world. However, the fact that she calls *herself* shameless (in the Loeb) means that she is aware that society regards such behaviour as an affront to its rules. Another interpretation is that she has internalised the critical judgement that the women of Troy have made about her, and inflicts it upon herself.

Helen is the only Homeric character to insult herself, also calling herself a dog elsewhere (*Odyssee*, Book 6, ll. 354-55), which is rather remarkable:

Alone among epic speakers, Helen wishes that she had died before the canto began and [...] in particular, she refers to herself as “dog” and “dog-face”, terms which otherwise are never self-directed, though they are often used in insult or disparagement of others.¹⁶⁰

In calling herself a dog and relegating herself to the status of non-human and/or animal, Helen removes herself (at least rhetorically) from the social rules that govern mortal behaviour – as her father Zeus did when he turned himself into a swan to rape her mother. The self-insult also makes Helen into the subject of her own (necessarily

¹⁵⁸ Homer, *Iliad*, I, trans. A. T. Murray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 143.

¹⁵⁹ Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 82.

¹⁶⁰ Margaret Graver, ‘Dog-Helen and Homeric Insult’, *Classical Antiquity*, 14 (1995), 41-61 (p. 41).

imaginary) gaze, thereby shaming herself before others can do so and confounding other potential insults by outdoing them in severity. The insult demonstrates that Helen is a figure with considerable rhetorical skill and self-awareness and also a sense of despair at her situation, qualities that Köhler brings out in her interpretation of Helen in *Niemands Frau*.

In her next two appearances in the *Iliad* Helen attempts to resist submitting to the will of others, and challenges instructions given to her by Aphrodite (*Ilias*, Book 3, ll. 380-420) and then Paris (*Ilias*, Book 3, ll. 421-47) – the two figures who originally conspired to abduct her. Like Iris, who summoned Helen to watch the fighting, Aphrodite comes to summon her to Paris's bedchamber; and as Iris was, Aphrodite is also in disguise, although this time Helen immediately sees through it. In an impassioned speech she refuses to follow Aphrodite's instructions and demands to know why the goddess deceives her, even going as far as insulting Aphrodite by saying that she should go and sleep with Paris herself. In making such a refusal, Helen marks herself out as more than Aphrodite's pawn and grasps at agency. The reason Helen gives for not wishing to go to Paris's bed is that she would incur the blame and disgust of other Trojan woman, an odd compunction, given that this scene takes place nine years into the war.

[...] teile des Sterblichen Weh, und pfleg' ihn mit Sorgfalt,
Bis er vielleicht zum Weibe dich aufnimmt, oder zur Sklavin!
Dorthin geh' ich dir nimmer, denn unanständig ja wär es,
Ihm sein Bett zu schmücken hinfort. Deß würden mich alle
Troerinnen verschmähn, und Gram schon lastet das Herz mir!
(*Ilias*, Book 3, ll. 407-412)

Here, Helen's claim of feeling social pressure not to appear in a display of her physical sexuality is an act of disobedience and resistance, rather than that of a woman concerned by social convention. This is another example of Helen refusing to conform to someone else's image of her – even a goddess's. Aphrodite, however, forces Helen to go through with a sexual encounter that is tantamount to rape, by threatening to make the Greeks and the Trojans hate Helen, which would result in her death (*Ilias*, Book 3, l. 417). When Helen is with Paris, whom she visits from under the shelter of a veil, she launches into a verbal assault even more acerbic than the one she directed at Aphrodite, wishing him

dead and mocking his masculinity in comparison with Menelaus. Aphrodite, who did not trust Helen on account of her initial refusal to go to Paris, remains in the room with Paris and Helen and positions Helen's chair directly opposite Paris's, insisting upon the initial instruction that Helen sleep with Paris. Again, in spite of the practical powerlessness she suffers, Helen finds a way of showing her resistance. In her final appearance in the *Iliad*, which demonstrates a marked shift from the first scene, where she is wordless, she makes a public speech at Hector's funeral lamenting her isolation and the disdain she has suffered from Trojan women. Helen's clever speech shows that she has the confidence to instruct the other Trojans to behave as Hector did, and implicitly to blame them for treating her badly, by praising Hector. At the end, although she is still a captive, Helen refuses to be a victim and becomes an orator.

In Book 4 of the *Odyssey*, which takes place after the end of the Trojan wars, Helen is back with Menelaus in his Palace, thanks to the Trojan horse trick that won the Greeks the war. Telemachus, Odysseus's son, visits Menelaus to ask for news of his father. Menelaus and Helen take it in turns to tell stories about the wars, with their perspectives directly contradicting each other at times. This episode will be discussed in greater depth in the analysis of Köhler's cantos, but the key issue is that Menelaus and Helen give different accounts of Helen's behaviour and motivations at the end of the Trojan wars. Helen claims that she had missed Menelaus while, in contrast, Menelaus alleges that she jeopardised the Trojan horse plan by attempting to reveal the Greeks' presence inside the horse to the Trojans.

Helen's other notable appearance in the *Odyssey* is when Penelope refers to her. Penelope clearly disapproves of Helen in the same manner as the Trojan women, blaming her for running away with Paris, rather than accepting the idea that she was 'stolen'. The agency and resistance to authority that Helen repeatedly expresses throughout Homer's *Iliad* undermine the notion that she is merely an image used to precipitate a war, and implicitly without a voice or a body. However, almost as if to silence the Helen of Homer's epics and confirm her status as image, another tradition arose in which Helen never even went to Troy, but a phantom in her place.

The 'eidolon' tradition

'Troer, es gibt keine Helena!'

Christa Wolf, *Kassandra*¹⁶¹

The *eidolon* tradition began with the Sicilian poet Stesichorus, who in the sixth century BC composed a radical revision to Homer's version in his *Palinode* (Recantation). Although the original text was lost, Plato refers to it in the *Phaedrus* (c. 370 BC). In Stesichorus's narrative, Helen herself did not sail to Troy but 'had been impersonated there by a ghost or eidolon'.¹⁶² This story forms the classical precedent to Köhler's poetic emphasis on Helen's image as a tool of propaganda in MATRIX/AMATRIX, and is prefigured by Plato's reading of Stesichorus, where he expounds the idea that the wars were fought on the basis of an image, rather than a reality. In Plato's account Stesichorus writes the *Palinode* in order to apologise for having originally said that Helen was an adulteress, which allegedly left him struck blind: 'he knew it [that speaking badly of Helen was the reason he was struck blind] and straightaway he writes the poem: "That saying is not true; thou didst not go within the well-oared ships, not didst though come to the walls of Troy".¹⁶³ Plato also refers to the idea of Helen as an *eidolon* in his text *Republic* (c. 380 BC). In the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon in Book 9, Plato uses the *eidolon* as an analogy to explain the illusory nature of pleasures enjoyed by the unenlightened masses:

Like those illusory paintings, the pleasure and pain are vivid only because the contrast between them and their intensity is therefore no more than apparent. They impregnate people with an insane lust for the pleasure they offer, and these fools fight over them, as the Trojans in Stesichorus's story, out of ignorance of the truth, fought over the mere apparition (*eidolon*) of Helen.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Wolf, *Kassandra*, p. 91.

¹⁶² Norman Austin, *Helen of Troy and Her Shameless Phantom* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 8.

¹⁶³ Plato, 'Phaedo', in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. H. N. Fowler, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), I: *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, p. 463.

¹⁶⁴ Plato, *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 335.

Only possessing a limited perception of reality, ordinary people see shadows, rather than reality as it truly is.

The *eidolon* tradition exculpates Helen of the sexual shame of having had an affair with Paris because she never went to Troy. In addition, it brings into Western literature the existence of three Helens, one who is under moral scrutiny for possibly having had an affair with Paris, one who is guilty of no such action, and a third ghostly *eidolon* Helen, whose existence writes out the possibility that Helen is a rape victim, exculpating Paris. Euripides, the Roman dramatist, took up the *eidolon* story in *Helen* (c. 412 BC), an anti-war drama set after the Trojan wars. In Euripides's story, Athena and Hera replaced Helen with a phantom who convinced Menelaus that she was real. In this scene when the real Helen, exiled in Egypt, is reunited with Menelaus after the war, she has trouble convincing him that she is real:

- Helen:** Just look! Why do you need clearer proof than that?
Menelaus: You look like her: that I shall not deny.
Helen: Who but your eyes should be your teacher?
Menelaus: My trouble is this: I have another wife.
Helen: That was an image [*eidolon*, also phantom]: I never went to Troy
Menelaus: And what craftsman can fashion a living body?
[...]
Helen: Hera, as a substitute so that Paris would not get me.
Menelaus: What? Were you at the same time both here and at Troy?
Helen: A name may be in many places, though a body in only one.

(Euripides: *Helen*, ll. 575-588, c. 412 BC)¹⁶⁵

The assertion of the Euripidean Helen that 'a name may be in many places, though a body in only one' gives the *eidolon* narrative an apparently modern edge, anticipating debates about simulacra and originals and the reproduceability of images in photographic, filmic and digital media. The 'name', which here also denotes the *eidolon*, can be in a place where the original body, or indeed person, is not. Helen's actual presence was not required for the Trojan wars, as Homer's text attests, and the *eidolon* narrative functions as a literal interpretation of this. Furthermore, the *eidolon* narrative re-

¹⁶⁵ Euripides, 'Helen', trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library 11, in *Euripides V. Helen. Phoenician Women. Orestes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 81.

enacts what Helen does to herself when she shames herself repeatedly in Homer's text: she creates a split between her body and her image in public discourse and therefore a virtual self that can exist without her actual bodily presence. The split creates the possibility for proliferation too: to use the language of Walter Benjamin, the image of Helen does not possess the 'aura' of a living body – 'ihre Einzigkeit' – and may be reproduced, copied or altered and distributed.¹⁶⁶ In the above scene from Euripides' *Helen*, the image competes with Helen's real self for Menelaus's belief when Helen wants to convince him that she is the original. Menelaus cannot tell the difference between the image and the real Helen, and so her question, 'who but your eyes should be your teacher?' is ironic. The point in Euripides' text is that a decade of war was fought because people looked at the false Helen and believed it to be the real one: eyes alone cannot be relied upon – physical presence in all of its irreducibility is also required to confirm the existence of life.

Representations in the Modern Period

HELENA:

Bewundert viel und viel gescholten, Helena,

[...]

CHOR:

Verschmähe nicht, o herrliche Frau,

Des höchsten Gutes Ehrenbesitz!

Denn das größte Glück ist dir einzig beschert,

Der Schönheit Ruhm, der vor allen sich hebt.¹⁶⁷

Faust. Der Tragödie Zweiter Teil. In fünf Akten (1832),

III, l. 8488, ll. 8516-8519.

Helena's first words in Goethe's *Faust. Der Tragödie Zweiter Teil* continue the example set by Homer's Helen of describing herself in critical language, and refer to the contrasting ways in which she has been portrayed since her appearance in the *Iliad*. As Goethe's Helena suggests, the figure of Helen of Troy has received both censure and praise in a

¹⁶⁶ Walter Benjamin, 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit', in *Schriften*, I (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1955), pp. 366–405 (p. 374).

¹⁶⁷ Goethe, *Faust. Der Tragödie zweiter Teil. In fünf Akten*, in *Werke. Hamburger Ausgabe*, III: *Dramatische Dichtungen*, p. 257.

way that exemplifies contrasting depictions of women (and their bodies) in Western culture.¹⁶⁸ The Chorus responds to Helena's words by assuring her that she is fortunate because the fame of her beauty elevates her above all other women. As the first cultural ideal of beauty, she indeed has had a significant and flourishing presence in subsequent art and literature.¹⁶⁹

Practically every major canonical Western author has represented Helen. As Bettany Hughes bluntly asserts, 'after the 2nd century AD, in an increasingly Christianised world, the notion of "Helen the wanton" takes firm hold. She becomes typecast not simply as a wilful woman but as a tart.' Hughes illustrates the duality of Helen as beautiful but guilty of sexual disobedience in both literature and the visual arts from Dante's *Inferno* (1300), where she inhabits Circle Two, reserved for the carnal and the lustful, to Richard Robinson's *The Reward of Wickedness* (1578) where Helen suffers torment as punishment for her sexual transgressions.¹⁷⁰ Turning to the visual arts, nineteenth-century images reproduced by Hughes depict Helen as beautiful but have a morally censorious edge, from *Helen of Troy* (1867) by Frederick Sandys, in which she looks sulky and flushed with anger, to Evelyn de Morgan's painting (1898), where Helen is dressed in pink and gazes vainly into a mirror to admire her golden hair. Depictions of Helen have therefore often conformed to conservative views of women as morally suspect and potentially threatening to social order.

In the German tradition, Helena appears most significantly in Goethe's *Faust. Der Tragödie Zweiter Teil*, which is quoted directly by Köhler in the first of the two cantos discussed in this chapter, MATRIX / AMATRIX (NF, p. 43). The text was published posthumously in 1832, but the third act was composed as early as 1800 as the fragment 'Helena', and published in 1827 as *Helena, Klassisch-Romantische Phantasmagorie. Zwischenspiel zu Faust*. In Act I, Faust finds and falls in love with Helena in the realm of the mothers

¹⁶⁸ Susan Ruben Suleiman, 'Introduction', in *The Female Body in Western Culture. Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Susan Ruben Suleiman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 1.

¹⁶⁹ Helen's presence in canonical literature is elaborated in the following survey: 'Even during the Middle Ages when Greek was little known in the West, some of Helen's most striking adventures could be read in Latin: in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, Dictys and Dares, and in the medieval Troy romance, found in its fullest version in a twelfth-century poem in Old French Benoit de Saint-Maure and in the Latin prose work of Guido of Colonna, which spawned Middle English versions. [...] Helen's surpassing beauty is everywhere asserted, and has continued to fascinate writers in virtually every literature: Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Webster, Pope, Goethe, Tolstoy, Chekhov, George Sand, Flaubert, Tennyson, Yeats, Pound and many others.' George A. Kennedy, 'The Story of Helen, Myth and Rhetoric', The Lewin Visiting Professorship Lecture, Washington University, St Louis, Missouri, 1987.

¹⁷⁰ Bettany Hughes, *Helen of Troy. Goddess, Princess, Whore* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), pp. 143-146.

(‘das Reich der Mütter’), an enigmatic place that is variously described as a place of Platonic [ideal] forms by Mephistopheles, and as a womb-like place of the unconscious. In Act III, in a scene where Helena and Faust are brought together by a trick played by Mephistopheles disguised as Phorkyas, the two declare their feelings for each other:

Helena: Ich fühle mich so fern und doch so nah,

Und sage nur zu gern: Da bin ich! da!

Faust: Ich atme kaum, mir zittert, stockt das Wort;

Es ist ein Traum, verschwunden Tag und Ort.

Helena: Ich scheine mir verlobt und doch so neu,

In dich verwebt, dem Unbekannten treu.

(*Faust. Der Tragödie Zweiter Teil. In fünf Akten*, III, ll. 9411-9416)¹⁷¹

The position that Helena articulates here of being in temporal, spatial and emotional flux makes her a complex female figure and ‘not a “Teufels-Liebchen or a Medusa, but a persecuted and anxious refugee, unsure of her own history’.¹⁷² As Trunz notes of Goethe’s Helena:

Faust trifft Helena in ihrem Land, aber sie ihn in seiner Zeit. Damit treffen sich der antike – Goethe sagt *klassische* – und der mittelalterliche – Goethe sagt *romantische* – Geist und verbinden sich.¹⁷³

She faces the threat of being killed by Menelaus (according to Phorkyas), a figure of the ancient world, while Faust, himself caught between the medieval and modern worlds, plays the role of Paris, trying to lure her into his arms. Helena is also in linguistic flux; in ancient Greek, rhyming couplets did not exist, and in the scene quoted above, Faust teaches Helena how to rhyme, bringing her into the modern world linguistically. Köhler quotes the words ‘dem Unbekannten treu’ from the above passage in *MATRIX / AMATRIX* (*NF*, p. 43), and Köhler’s Helena, a conflicted figure shifting between historical and literary contexts, presence and disappearance, is anticipated by Goethe’s

¹⁷¹ Goethe, *Faust. Der Tragödie Zweiter Teil. In fünf Akten*, p. 284.

¹⁷² Ellis Dye, ‘Figurations of the Feminine in Goethe’s Faust’, in *A Companion to Goethe’s Faust. Parts I and II*, ed. Paul Bishop (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), pp. 95-121 (p. 105).

¹⁷³ Trunz, ‘Anmerkungen’, in Goethe, *Faust. Der Tragödie Zweiter Teil. In fünf Akten*, pp. 587-588.

portrayal. Goethe's Helena is not an ideal image, but a confused and sympathetic figure with a strong voice; and while other figures reference stereotypically censorious or positive views of her, Goethe avoids such dualistic representation.

Richard Strauss's opera *Die Ägyptische Helena* (1928), for which Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote the libretto, is another important German-language representation of Helena and similarly represents the preoccupations of its age. Hofmannsthal uses the figures of Helena and Menelas to reflect on bourgeois marriage, especially the challenges facing the institution after the First World War, during which time many couples became estranged from each other. Hofmannsthal chose the more morally complex reunion of Helena and Menelas over that of Odysseus and Penelope, usually thought of as the archetype of a *Heimkehrerstück* (a wartime homecoming narrative), in order better to work through contemporary dilemmas.

Hofmannsthal sees Menelas first and foremost as an embattled and betrayed husband. In the essay he wrote just before the premiere, where he reflects upon the meaning of his libretto, he exclaims: 'Welche Situation für einen Ehemann!'.¹⁷⁴ In his version, which draws on the tradition of the *Zauberstück* (a magic play that typically used elaborate stage machinery), Helena *was* in Troy and *did* marry Paris, but the *eidolon* has a temporary function, conjured by the sorceress Aithra in order to prevent Menelas from stabbing the real Helena. Helena briefly goes along with the scheme, but quickly realises that it only solves the problems of her marriage temporarily and in a psychologically simplistic manner. In a decision that gives Helena ethical legitimacy, she decides that she wants her marriage to Menelas to be founded on an accurate (and complex) memory of her, rather than an illusion. The re-establishment of their marriage is cemented by the arrival of their child Hermione at the end of the text. Hofmannsthal's libretto refuses an idealised and simple image of woman, marriage and Helena, and adopts a more nuanced moral position.

Helen has been a subject of popular culture too, and a critical reading of popular reception of Helen is a significant element of Köhler's interpretation in *Niemands Frau*. In musical theatre, most notably, Helen appears in Jacques Offenbach's highly successful comic opera *La belle Hélène* (1864). The story is a satire on the morals and manners of the French Second Empire, replete with sexual innuendo, under the guise of the myth of

¹⁷⁴Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Die Ägyptische Helena* (1928), in *Kritische Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke in achtunddreißig Bänden* (Frankfurt a.M: Fischer, 1975-), XXV/2: *Operndichtungen* 3.2, ed. Ingeborg Beyer-Ahlert (2001), p. 499.

Hélène's abduction from Sparta. Hélène repeatedly resists Paris's advances (having admitted to her desire for him), but in a typically farcical scene, he manages to visit her in her bed while she supposedly thinks she is dreaming. The couple are interrupted by Menelas, who returns unexpectedly and Paris is made to return to Troy; however, in the end, Hélène and Paris deceive everyone with the help of Aphrodite and sail away together. Offenbach's Hélène is sexually liberated, flirtatious and has been often characterised as fond of revealing clothing – exemplified by the 1963 Sadler's Wells production, where she did a striptease. The progressive political implications of Offenbach's text are brought out in A. P. Herbert's translation and adaptation *Helen* (1932), where Helen's sophisticated attitude to marriage and adultery express Herbert's egalitarian gender politics and desire for reform in British divorce law.¹⁷⁵ Herbert's *Helen* sees in Helen of Troy a strong female figure who is an appropriate focus for a play that advocates social reform, challenging received attitudes about gender roles.

Film, with its close-ups of women's faces in soft-focus, has elevated the status of beauty and as a medium foregrounds the relationship between the gazed-at object and spectator. As an archetype of Western beauty Helen is a natural subject for early film, offering the opportunity to cast beautiful women in a leading role, a fact that Köhler engages with critically in 'MATRIX/AMATRIX'. In 1924 Manfred Noa directed the well-received silent film *Helena* starring Edy Darclea, based on Homer's *Iliad*. It was a vast production with thousands of extras and was released in two parts, *Der Raub der Helena* and *Der Untergang Trojas*, and romanticised and embellished Helena with elaborate costume and shots of her hair streaming in the wind. Hollywood's first Helen film was released shortly after, based on John Erskine's farce and directed by Alexander Korda. The domestic comedy *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* (1927) casts Helen as a 'shopaholic fashion maven' and effectively suggests that Greek women's lust for Trojan fashion was the cause of the wars.¹⁷⁶

In the same year (1927), the proto-feminist poet and early film critic H.D. refers to Greta Garbo in a number of films as 'Helen' in the essay 'The Cinema and The Classics: Beauty', comparing crumbling Europe after the First World War to the fallen

¹⁷⁵ A. P. Herbert, *Helen* (London: Methuen, 1932); C.W. Marshall, 'A.P. Herbert's *Helen* and Every Marriage since 1937', *Theatre Notebook*, 67 (2013), 44-57.

¹⁷⁶ Ruby Blondell, *Helen of Troy. Beauty, Myth, Devastation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 346.

Troy.¹⁷⁷ *Helen of Troy* (1956) directed by Robert Wise is a highly commercial ‘runaway love-story’ told from the perspective of the Trojans. The trailer bears the hyperbolic taglines ‘Her name was burned into the pages of history’, ‘Hers the temptation that plunged the world into conflict!’ and ‘Hers the Sin that inspired time’s greatest treachery!’. Elizabeth Taylor stars as a heavily made-up and silently erotic Helen in Richard Burton’s *Doctor Faustus* (1967), and in 2004 German model and actor Diane Kruger takes on the role in the Hollywood blockbuster *Troy*, directed by Wolfgang Petersen, showing none of the disdain for Paris that Helen exhibits in Homer’s *Iliad*.

In response to the preoccupation with Helen by male canonical authors and in popular culture, she has become a subject of interest for feminist scholars and authors, anticipating Köhler’s representation in *Niemand’s Frau*. Mihoka Suzuki, for example, ‘examines the representation of woman by focusing on the metamorphoses of the figure of Helen, the prototypical woman in this tradition.’¹⁷⁸ H.D., whose poem about Penelope was discussed in the previous chapter, wrote the long poem *Helen in Egypt* (1961), a polyvocal work that draws on Stesichorus’s *eidolon* narrative.¹⁷⁹ In H.D.’s text, Helen’s role in the Trojan wars is reflected upon by many different figures from Homer’s *Iliad*, including Helen herself, who has voices representing her different identities in classical literature. Rachel Connor sees in H.D.’s representation of voice ‘the site for the *contestation* of identity itself, the means through which Helen’s numerous lives and subjectivities are articulated.’¹⁸⁰ However, this multivocality interrupts the ‘scopic economy’ of patriarchal discourse and therefore ‘can be read as a site of resistance to masculinist power’. Connor also points out that the multivocality additionally represents the ‘loss of self’ that arises alongside the freedom from a constructed identity within the patriarchal order.¹⁸¹

However, the most significant feminist literary precedent to Köhler’s interpretation of Helena, as mentioned earlier, is Christa Wolf’s re-writing of the *Iliad* from the perspective of the minor figure Cassandra, whose father is Priam, King of Troy. Wolf takes up the *eidolon* tradition, and Helena is absent from Troy in her narrative,

¹⁷⁷ Köhler alludes to this connection in *MATRIX / AMATRIX*, although she does not reveal the source. H.D., ‘The Cinema and The Classics I. Beauty’, *Close Up. A Quarterly Devoted to the Art of Films. 1927–1933. Cinema and Modernism*, eds James Donald, Anne Friedberg and Laura Marcus (London: Cassell, 1998), pp. 105-110.

¹⁷⁸ Mihoka Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen. Authority, Difference, and the Epic* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 1.

¹⁷⁹ H.D., *Helen in Egypt*.

¹⁸⁰ Rachel Connor, *H.D. and the Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 79.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 84.

but the Trojan leaders and Eumelos, the head of the Trojan secret police, insist that she is present in order to fuel the war. The repute of her beauty rather than its reality is described as blinding the Trojan population:

Paris, als er nach Monaten doch noch kam, merkwürdigerweise auf einem ägyptischen Schiff, brachte eine tief verschleierte Person von Bord. Das Volk, wie nun üblich hinter einer Sicherheitskette von Eumelos-Leuten zurückgedrängt, verstummte atemlos. In jedem einzelnen erschien das Bild der schönsten Frau, so strahlend, daß sie ihn, wenn er sie sehen könnte, blenden würde. Schüchtern, dann begeistert kamen Sprechchöre auf: He-le-na. He-le-na. Helena zeigte sich nicht.¹⁸²

The population is gripped by imagining what Helena's unseen beauty might be. In her reading of Helena, Wolf makes a feminist criticism of the patriarchal use of female beauty that requires no embodied woman to be present. The false Helena is also a political criticism of German Democratic Republic: Helena's non-presence can be seen as a representation of state enforcement of its own false image of reality. Helena's beauty is like the utopia that every authoritarian state promises in order to legitimise violence. The male figures' insistence on Helena's presence in Troy also symbolises the denial of Cassandra's voice and a denial of her perspective on reality as she is forced to accept – and indeed internalises – their repression. She wants to scream the truth that she knows to the Trojan people but: '[d]er Eumelos in mir verbot es mir. Ihn der mich im Palast erwartete, ihn schrie ich an: Es gibt keine Helena!, aber er wusste es ja.'¹⁸³ Those who do not accept the fiction of the state, symbolised by Helena's face, are in danger of being killed – the group illusion must be believed in order to retain membership of the Trojan state (the GDR), and to survive.

In Wolf's text the moment that belief in Helena fails is the point at which the state's fiction is 'unveiled'. If a member of the Trojan state stops believing the fiction of Helena, then they lose their membership of the Trojan state and also their right to justice because they are no longer part of the group belief that defines it. In the following analyses of Köhler's cantos in *Niemands Frau*, I will show how Köhler reveals how

¹⁸² Wolf, *Kassandra*, pp. 88-89.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

Helena's image was used cynically as propaganda by the Greeks and the Trojans and how she connects this use to a modern objectification of women and an impoverishment of life.

Helena in Köhler's Cantos: 'MATRIX / AMATRIX'

The title of 'MATRIX / AMATRIX', the first canto to focus on Helena, contrasts two images that exemplify the pervasive dualism in the representation of women in Western culture: the mother and the sexual temptress. *Matrix*, which literally means womb or reproducing animal in Latin, is set against *amatrix*, which means mistress or female lover. In so doing, the title not only draws out the Homeric Helen's conflicting relations with Menelaus, with whom she has a child, and Paris, whose lover she is, but brings the subsequent poetic meditation on Helena into a broader debate about the way in which women have been represented throughout the history of Western culture. The title anticipates other aspects of the canto too: *amatrix* can simultaneously be read as *a-matrix* – a negation of *matrix* – and could therefore refer to the negation of the female body and its reproductive power, a reading which anticipates the focus on Helena as a disembodied symbol, rather than a real woman. Köhler shows Helena as a name, an image, a voice, a story, a projection and a mirror image of male desire and fear.

My analysis of 'MATRIX / AMATRIX' falls into three areas. First, I will show how Köhler's representation of Helena echoes that of Christa Wolf and focuses on Helena's name and image as propaganda in a modern context. Second, I show how Köhler reveals a resistant and rebellious aspect of Helena that is in conflict with the ideal image of her beauty. Third, I explore Köhler's comparisons between Helena and the film actor Greta Garbo.

Köhler's criticism of the reduction of Helena to a propagandistic tool begins in the first few lines of this canto, which describe how the name 'Helena' is used to start a war:

Helena: die ist die sie nicht ist - nur der name
in dem ein krieg statt fand Helena die nicht ist
wo sie ist

(NF, p. 42)

At this point Helena is not present as an embodied subject, and the 'sie' of the first line may not actually refer to a real woman, but to the phantom *eidolon* Helena and a tool of war propaganda. The suggestion that Helena is a mere phantom without a body undermines the causality of the Trojan wars by questioning her role as the *causa belli*. If Helena is not real, then the opposition that sustains the wars, sanctioned by a dispute over the possession of her body, is fictitious, echoing Wolf's text. By extension, the lives of the men fighting in the Trojan wars are sacrificed for a fiction, because the reason that they are engaged in war and killing each other ostensibly flows from Helena's existence. No real, embodied Helena is necessary, or so it seems, because the troops are indoctrinated to respond to the phantom image as if it were a real person.

Helena and Propaganda

Making concrete the suggestion that Helena is used as propaganda, and setting it into a modern context, Köhler draws parallels between ancient and modern conflicts by quoting the slogan from an American army recruitment poster created by James Montgomery Flagg in 1917. In place of Uncle Sam, the visual representation of the American state, in Köhler's canto it is Helena who says 'I WANT YOU', as the representative of the Trojan state:

Helena. Der name
am kriegsgrund silbrig verschleiert das bild auf
seiner oberfläche in seinem spiegel das jeden du
nennt der es anschaut: Du. Du allein. I WANT YOU
for the army I NEED YOU to be a hero I JUST NEED
A YOU to be a me

(*NF*, p. 42)



Figure 2: US army recruitment poster, c. 1917 (Source: Library of Congress).

The voice attributed to Helena speaks the words of the state recruitment propaganda that tries to appeal to every man, as an individual. The use of the second-person singular in German creates a false intimacy between the message and its target. ‘I WANT YOU’, is a very direct address in English and the ‘du’ in German is informal and singular, implying that the speaker who uses it is either in a position of authority and the use of ‘du’ is intended to be belittling if not insulting, or is said by intimate acquaintance of the addressee, especially given the erotic colouring of ‘I want you’. The message is designed to make each man who receives it feel individually culpable and therefore vulnerable if he does not obey its command. The repetition of ‘YOU’ and ‘du’ in Köhler’s canto in the context of war propaganda also recalls Louis Althusser’s example of how the state constitutes its power and its subjects, by saying ‘you’:

[I]deology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Louis Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’, in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), pp. 127-188 (p. 174).

Those who receive the message ‘I WANT YOU [/] for the army I NEED YOU’ must recognise immediately that the summons refers to them, and this recognition means that they become in that moment a subject of the state and will fight to kill those who are excluded by its call, who are accordingly, *not* members of the state. The idea that the female gender plays a role in constituting masculine identity through an oppositional or complementary relationship, is evoked by the line ‘I JUST NEED [/] A YOU to be a me.’ Reading this line with Griselda Pollock, woman becomes, ‘that Other in whose mirror masculinity must define itself [...] and which oscillates between signification of love/loss, and desire/death. The terrors can be negotiated by the cult of beauty imposed on the woman.’¹⁸⁵ The vulnerable beauty of Helena in the imagined posters compels men to be soldiers and to embody masculinity defined as such. In *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Adorno and Horkheimer note that subjects occupying a lower social position, such as the rowers on Odysseus’s ship, are tricked into obedience and conformity by the promise of happiness and fulfilment figured as a form of beauty deprived of power:

Die Angst, das Selbst zu verlieren und mit dem Selbst die Grenze zwischen sich und anderem Leben aufzuheben, die Scheu vor Tod und Destruktion, ist einem Glücksversprechen verschwistert, von dem in jedem Augenblick die Zivilisation bedroht war. Ihr Weg war der von Gehorsam und Arbeit, über die Erfüllung immerwährend bloß als Schein, als entmachtete Schönheit leuchtet.¹⁸⁶

Köhler’s representation of Helena identifies the state manipulation of female beauty to the end of assuring an obedient, civilized male subject. Soldiers suffer physical hardships and death in order to expedite the possibility of reward and implied sexual fulfilment from a mythologized image of female beauty: Helena.

Köhler juxtaposes her critical perspective on Helena’s status as the face of war with Helena’s complex and conflicted declaration of identity and presence:

ICH BIN ES. Bin Es. War. Einmal. War
mehr als einmal. WAR. WAR. WAR. Bin Helena
(*NF*, p. 43)

¹⁸⁵ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference. Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), p. 210.

¹⁸⁶ Horkheimer and Adorno, ‘Dialektik der Aufklärung’, pp. 56-57.

The statement 'ICH BIN ES' can be understood in several ways. The statement can be read positively as an idiomatic 'Ich bin's' (It's me!), as Helena staking a claim to her presence as an embodied subject. However, in light of the rest of the canto, is Helena depicting herself as dehumanised, as an 'It'. The description of herself as an 'ES' shows an awareness of her role as a symbol. The fact that she calls *herself* 'Es' produces a paradox of perspective, which is similar to when Helen of Troy calls herself a 'dog' in Homer's *Iliad*. By saying 'Ich' in the statement Helena claims a speaking position as a subject and thus speaks from her own body. However, by calling herself 'Es' she also speaks from a position outside of herself, and dehumanises herself, making herself into a grammatical 'dummy subject' with no physical referent. As an 'Es' Helena strips herself linguistically of her feminine gender and of her particular body.

'ICH BIN ES' also closely resembles the final lines of Ingeborg Bachmann's poem, 'Die Sonne wärmt nicht, stimmlos ist das Meer': 'Ich bin noch schuldig. Heb mich auf. [/] Ich bin nicht schuldig. Heb mich auf. [...] Ich bin es nicht. Ich bin's.'¹⁸⁷

Bachmann's poem describes a dying subject begging for release from her/his existence. The subject is neglected by a saintly figure ('der Heilige') engaged with pragmatic matters like acquiring bread, unconcerned by the dying person's paradoxical state of guilt and innocence, existence and non-existence. The oscillation in Bachmann's poem between self-conscious guilt and innocence, presence and absence, self-hatred, and the wish for oblivion, anticipates Köhler's Helena. Köhler emphasizes the complexities of Helena's status as subject and object at the mercy of the gods, an eidolon, a symbol and a woman, and gives her a fragmented voice that is playful, conflicted, and rebellious.

Köhler plays with the idea of Helena as a precursor to indistinctly beautiful fairytale princesses by weaving the opening words to many German *Märchen*, 'Es war einmal...', into Helena's declaration of her identity. The words convey the idealised, time-out-of-time of *Märchen*, the two-dimensional figures who populate them and their moralising conclusions. However, the phrase is broken up by full stops, fragmenting the timeless narrative space of a *Märchen*, and implying that this is no fairytale. Köhler then recontextualises 'einmal' to '[M]ehr als einmal', which hints at the idea of Helena as promiscuous (she had more than one lover) and undoes the 'fairytale' of romantic love: with repetition comes disillusionment. Furthermore, by following 'mehr als einmal' with

¹⁸⁷ Bachmann, 'Die Sonne wärmt nicht, stimmlos ist das Meer', in *Werke*, I, p. 146.

the words 'WAR. WAR. WAR', Köhler highlights the failure of war in the *Iliad* to resolve conflict or to prevent further wars. Wars do not have the conclusive resolutions of *Märchen*, they end only to start again.

The shift from 'ICH BIN ES', to 'Bin Es. War' suggests that the 'Ich' has been silenced by the dummy subject 'Es' (or *eidolon*?). Helena's claim to presence is also undermined by the shift to the past tense. As 'WAR' repeats, though, the reader must also consider the English reading of the lexeme and read the passage as establishing 'Helena' as a byword for armed conflict. The plaintive repetition of 'war' effaces the individual 'Ich', and the shift in the tense of the verb 'sein' points to how combat converts life or, a person who can say 'Ich' in the present tense, into life in the past tense 'war' (German meaning) – that is, into death.¹⁸⁸ The words 'Bin Helena' replace the 'ES' of the first statement with a named subject, insisting on Helena's individuality.

A few lines later war returns but this time in the French language, in order to permit wordplay that connects the French 'guerre' (war) with German 'gier' (greed), creating an intentional slippage between 'Hélène', 'LA GUERRE', 'la reine', (queen in French) and 'die reine gier' (pure greed). The crafting of such semantic slippages is typical of Köhler's poetics and she creates a trail of clues that lead to the function of Helena/women in driving narcissistic and greedy motivations to fight in war:

HÉLÈNE LA GUERRE la reine die reine gier sag ICH
ist die message bin das medium & versprochen dir
ALLEIN ALLEIN dem unbekanntem treu. Soll ich dir
willst du willst dir einen namen machen
(NF, p. 43)

'[Du] willst dir einen namen machen' along with the line 'ich mache dich zum weissen ritter' earlier in the canto, conveys the role of Helena and women more generally in enmeshing a romantic narrative into the process of war recruitment. Köhler conjures Helena as a seductive female voice that wills men to participate in a clichéd narrative of masculine identity as self-sacrificing hero. The promise of being elevated to hero status

¹⁸⁸ The English meaning of 'war' cannot be excluded, especially as these lines echo H.D.'s discussion of the film *Die freudlose Gasse* (1925). This starred Greta Garbo as a woman who is almost driven to prostitution in a period of poverty after the First World War, but saved by her father: 'War and war and war. Helen [...] ruined Troy [...] and this time it is Troy by some fantastic re-adjustment that will ruin Helen'. H.D., 'The Cinema and The Classics I. Beauty', p. 107.

belied the anonymous mass slaughter of World War I, whose recruitment posters the canto references.

The phrase, ‘dem unbekanntem treu’, taken by Köhler from Goethe’s *Faust. Der Tragödie Zweiter Teil*. (l. 9415), expresses the ironic promise of the propaganda slogans, where an eroticised Helena promises herself to every man individually. In a contextual juxtaposition that occurs throughout the canto, Helena’s role as propaganda image is brought again into a modern context in the canto in the reference to media theorist Marshall McLuhan’s essay ‘The Medium is the Message’.¹⁸⁹ The recruitment slogan uttered by Helena is situated in the context of twentieth-century capitalism and the phrase ‘die reine gier’ points to the less savoury, imperialist and capitalist greed as a motivation for war, which propaganda attempts to cover up with romantic narratives. Helena is a vector by which Köhler links her criticism of the reductive tropes of misogyny, war and capitalism, from Homer to the twentieth century.

Köhler avoids treating Helena as pure symbol to make her own point, by focussing on traces of resistance and Helena’s agency found through close readings of Homer’s texts. She draws the reader’s attention to an episode from the *Odyssey* that demonstrates Helena’s intelligence and her courage as a trickster:

kennt sie die namen alle
& die stimmen der frauen stimmen der verlassenen
namengebende stimmen lockende rufende gurren die
namen von geliebten gehassten & nennen den einen
den anderen: Du. Du. Ruckediguh. Ihr stimme die
stimmen der vielen die einzige: Helena.

(*NF*, p. 42)

In the ‘NOTEN’ to this canto, Köhler cites two contradictory narratives in Book 4 of the *Odyssey* told to Telemachus when he visits Menelaus and Helena (after the Trojan war has ended) to ask about Odysseus (*NF*, p. 97). In the story referred above, told by Menelaus in the *Odyssey*, Helena threatens both sides in the war with destruction: she almost unveils the Greek plot to enter Troy safely from inside a giant wooden gift-horse when she circles the horse three times, tapping at it and calls out to each of the men imitating the voices of their wives. If her trick had worked, the Trojan horse would have

¹⁸⁹ Marshall McLuhan, ‘The Medium is the Message’, in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* (Corte Madera: Gingko Press, 2005).

been revealed and the men would have been killed or captured, likely reversing the outcome of the war. The story demonstrates Helena's subversion of her role as a prize of war, expressing a playful and transgressive will that threatens to undo the opposition that sustains the war.

Helena's imitation of the wives converts woman into media (sound and image) rather than woman-as-embodied-subject. Her resistance lies in taking on the role of image-maker and 'director' (to anticipate the later arrival of Greta Garbo's voice in the canto) of her own ventriloquized performance of other women, in order to undermine the patriarchal war effort. The effectiveness of Helena's impressions of the soldiers' absent wives suggests that men have trouble discerning the difference between 'real' women and phantom women. In the confusion and the slippage between embodied truth and thin illusion lies Köhler's argument about the impoverishment of life that takes place through the pervasive replacement of (female) embodied life with media versions thereof in a patriarchal, unequal society. It is not only the women's lives that are impoverished in Köhler's assessment. The men in the Trojan horse, who 'joined-up' to fight the war in response to the image of a captive Helena and who strain towards the simulated sounds of their absent wives, experience an impoverished reality where they are incapable of differentiating between a phantom woman and an authentic woman.

Furthermore, Köhler's narration of the incident in the canto weaves in a reference to the *Märchen* 'Aschenputtel' (Cinderella). In the version by the Brothers Grimm, two doves sing, 'Rucke di guck, rucke di guck, / Blut ist im Schuck [Schuh], / der Schuck ist zu klein, / die rechte Braut sitzt noch daheim', to warn the prince that he has chosen a 'falsche Braut' when one of Aschenputtel's stepsisters cuts off her toes to make her foot fit into the slipper.¹⁹⁰ Köhler conflates Helena with birds in Aschenputtel in her depiction of Helena's attempt to lure the men out of the Trojan horse. Just as the birds warn the prince that Aschenputtel's sisters were trying to deceive him by putting their feet into the shoe, Helena's cooing to the men inside the wooden horse was an attempt to unveil the Greeks' attempt to deceive the Trojans. In the Grimm fairytale the birds have the insight into reality that the prince does not. Likewise, Helena has insight into the wooden horse that the Trojan men do not. Köhler's characterisation of Helena as a bird in a moment of transgressive behaviour, situates her alongside the other threatening bird-women in Homer's *Odyssey* and in *Niemands Frau*: the Sirens. Köhler allies Helena with other bird-women who threaten Odysseus, not only through their

¹⁹⁰ Brothers Grimm, 'Aschenputtel' in *Grimms Märchen*, pp. 116-122 (p. 121).

actions, but also through their transgression of the category of rational, speaking subject and into the category of the non-linguistic, creaturely subject.

In contrast to the flurry of images and impressions surrounding Helena in this canto, Köhler suggests that a brief moment of authentic intimacy between two subjects can only take place when they allow their identity to dissolve into the physical co-presence of the 'here' and 'now':

An namenloses grenzend
ich und du ALLEIN ich nenn es hier hear: my hero
nenn es jetzt nenn's gegenwart ein fleisch neben
dir keiner keine neben mir OU NÉMESIS OÚTIS dich
kenn ich nicht

(*NF*, pp. 42-43)

A physical co-presence is suggested through 'hier', 'gegenwart' and the sexually intimate 'ein fleisch', which suggests sexual union, and even the lasting union sought in the Christian marriage ceremony, which includes the words 'ein Fleisch werden'. The aural and visual similarity of 'hier' 'hear' and 'hero' adjacent to each other creates an internal semantic dialogue within the lines and perhaps suggests that a true 'hero' is one who 'hears' the other and is able to take the risk and to be co-present with her, rather than at a safe distance. However, the intimacy is a tenuous one and, formed in a hostile patriarchal context, soon vanishes. That the words 'my hero' are in English, and are suggestive of Hollywood film and pulp romantic fiction, which have thrived on conservative gender stereotypes, as well as the critical context of the canto, undermines the possibility that this statement could be sincere.

It is not made clear who the other person is in this moment of intimacy, but it could be Odysseus because 'Oútis' (Niemand in Greek) is his pseudonym when he flees the Cyclops in the *Odyssey*, a reading invited by Köhler in the 'NOTEN' (*NF*, p. 97). In the 'NOTEN' to this canto Köhler cites the point in Book 4 of the *Odyssey*, where Helena tells the story in which she recognises the disguised Odysseus when nobody else in Troy does, and washes his body. Helena chooses not to reveal Odysseus to the Trojans, thus saving him from capture and possible death. However, in Köhler's canto, the physical intimacy and unity that momentarily undermine the opposition of war quickly evaporate and end in disappointment as Helena states that she does not know him. Köhler's Helena realises that while she has placed her body close to him – 'ein

fleisch neben dir’ – there is no body close to her ‘keiner keine neben mir [...] dich [/] kenn ich nicht’, because Odysseus does not allow himself to be so emotionally and physically present and vulnerable.

Helena and Greta Garbo

In the cantos discussed in this chapter, Köhler refers to two film melodramas featuring Greta Garbo, *Es War* (1927) [original title: *Flesh and the Devil*, released in the US 1926] and *Anna Christie* (1930 US, 1931 Germany). The plots of both films dramatize male competition over a woman and, as such, relate structurally to Helena’s function as an object of conquest in the Trojan wars. Like Helena, Garbo’s characters in these films are women trapped in a network of patriarchal relationships, but also like Helena, Garbo was an actor who transcended the limits of the roles given to her. The cantos blur the distinction between Helena and Garbo and, at times, make the latter into a modern Helen of Troy. As documented in the biography *A Life Apart* (1997) and elsewhere, Garbo lived a dual life: one for the camera, and an intensely private, personal one. Garbo’s relationships with women, documented in letters to her lover, contrasted with the heteronormative romantic film roles in which MGM cast her in the 1930s.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, ‘Greta Garbo’ was a stage name for Greta Lovisa Gustafsson, calculated for its alliterative qualities to make her more easily memorable, and also separating the film star from the woman by means of nomenclature.¹⁹² The ambiguity and double life of Greta Garbo resemble Helen of Troy’s dual role as public symbol and complex woman in Homer’s *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Both women threaten to undermine patriarchal power by challenging their roles as the objects over which men fight.

In the notes to ‘MATRIX/AMATRIX’, Köhler informs her reader that *Es War* made Garbo a star: ‘Es war ist der deutsche titel [...] jenes films, der Greta Garbo (»die göttliche«) zum star, zur diva machte’ (NF, p. 98). The English language version *Flesh and the Devil*, describes Garbo’s role as the woman who tempts men to give in to carnal desires. Men fight over Garbo’s character, Felicitas, beginning with a young man who falls in love with her and fights and kills her husband – and ending with a duel between the young man and his childhood friend, who also loves her. During this final duel

¹⁹¹ *Who’s Who in Gay and Lesbian History. From Antiquity to World War II*, eds Robert Aldrich and Gary Wotherspoon (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 175-176.

¹⁹² Karen Swenson, *Greta Garbo. A Life Apart* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

between the two young men, Felicitas falls through ice and drowns, the two men are reconciled, and Felicitas is quickly forgotten. Rather than figuring as a character of active narrative importance, Garbo's character functions symbolically to prompt action between the male characters. The importance of comradeship between men is the real focus of the film, made shortly after the First World War. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes in her analysis of homosocial desire: 'the men's heterosexual relationships [...] have as their raison d'être an ultimate bonding between men; and this bonding, if successfully achieved, is not detrimental to "masculinity" but definitive of it'.¹⁹³ By bringing the film into 'MATRIX / AMATRIX', Köhler suggests that there has been little change in the role of women in war since Homer's time; both Helena and Garbo's character are frozen in the position of symbolic prize, while the real dramatic interest is in the outcomes of male actions and male homosocial bonds and rivalries.

Male comradeship is also the focus of Garbo's first 'talkie' film, *Anna Christie*, though with a different dynamic. Köhler introduces the film in 'SKYLLA / ENTHÜLLEN' by inserting a German translation of the legend that was emblazoned on the English posters advertising it. The film was made separately in English and in German, with Garbo speaking in both versions. 'Die Garbo spricht Deutsch!' appeared on the German-language posters, which Köhler alters to '*DIE GARBO SPRICHT!*' (NF, p. 52). In the film Anna [Garbo] is a woman who worked in a brothel to survive financially while her father was away at sea. The male protagonists – her formerly estranged sailor father and her fiancé – are ignorant of her brothel work and consider her to be a 'virtuous' woman in accordance with conservative notions of femininity. The film tapped into post World War I anxiety about the sexual activities of women while men were away fighting. The climax is a scene where both father and fiancé struggle to compel Anna to obey them; she resists and gives an angry and impassioned speech declaring: 'ihr denkt ich gehör einem von euch. Keinem gehör ich! Nur mir selbst. [...] Ich brauche euch nicht. Ich bin mein eigener Herr!' It is a sad irony that Anna's way of declaring her autonomy from men in German is to take on the masculine gender, linguistically. Although Anna's fiancé initially rejects her after her rebellion, they marry and the film concludes with the two men reconciled and sailing for South Africa, leaving Anna behind. Despite the conciliatory ending that prioritises resolution for male characters (as in *Es War*), the sentiment of Anna's speech and Garbo's powerful

¹⁹³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 50.

performance completely overshadow the male figures in the film. Garbo's use of her own voice and her screen presence pose an ideological challenge to the principle of woman as desired object. In the presence of her speech, men almost shrink and appear emasculated and ineffectual, despite the actual narrative to the contrary.¹⁹⁴ Köhler draws the reader's attention to a film in which Garbo's character, her voice and her talents as an actor threaten to overpower the male figures who wish to control her.

In *MATRIX / AMATRIX* Köhler builds a close connection between Garbo and Helena. Garbo's soubriquet of 'die göttliche', referred to in the 'NOTEN', is a direct parallel to Helen of Troy's status as the goddess Aphrodite's mortal embodiment. The words 'es' and 'war', that first appeared in the lines 'ICH BIN ES. Bin Es. War [...] Bin Helena' reappear in connection with Garbo:

sekrete schweiss
& tränen was du nicht halten kannst verrat wasch
ab schmink weg was war ES WAR vergiss nicht mich
das spurlose gesicht nicht das sich einprägt das
sich das jeden anschaut der es anschaut ES SIEHT
sieht aus wie du es siehst
(*NF*, p. 43)

The necessarily imperfect corporeal reality of Garbo is repressed, but rather than the veil that conceals Helena ('silbrig verschleiert', *NF*, p. 42), it is make-up that hides the sweat and tears ('schmink weg') that swept it away. The flawless ('spurlos') quality of Garbo's face, echoes 'diese weisse fläche & ein leeres zeichen' (*NF*, p. 43), which refers to Helena's status as a floating signifier of beauty. The dual meanings of 'War' as 'armed combat' in English, and the German of 'what that has occurred in the past' are connected with 'schmink weg' and then 'vergiss nicht' to suggest that, for Köhler, the effacement of the body is analogous with the effacement of the selfhood of the woman with a past. The idea that male worship of idealised femininity is ultimately male narcissism rather than love of the woman herself is alluded to with the lines 'das spurlose gesicht [...] ES SIEHT sieht aus wie du es siehst' (*NF*, p. 43), and also the earlier line, 'das bild auf / seiner oberfläche in seinem spiegel das jeden du / nennt der es anschaut' (*NF*, p. 42). That is to say, 'es', or the objectified woman, appears as 'du' (the man) sees

¹⁹⁴ Betsy Erkilli, 'Greta Garbo: Sailing beyond the Frame', *Critical Inquiry*, 11 (1985), 595-619.

her, as if he is looking into a mirror: the intimacy is with a projection of his own desires. However, the capitalization of 'ES SIEHT' refuses to permit the objectification, making Garbo and Helena responsive and threatening subjects who look out at the men too, exercising their own, differentiated gaze.

In the final line of 'MATRIX / AMATRIX', Köhler blurs the distinction between reality and fiction concerning Garbo. The concluding words: 'ICH MÖCHTE ALLEIN SEIN – I WANT TO BE LEFT ALONE' (NF, p. 43) are the English and German translation of what Garbo claimed that she said in real life, instead of 'I want to be alone', which she was famous for having said. Köhler creates a false trail in the 'NOTEN', suggesting that the quotation in the canto comes from the film *Grand Hotel* (1932). Of the famous line that was falsely attributed to her, Garbo's said: 'I never said, "I want to be alone"; I only said, "I want to be *let* alone". There is a world of difference'.¹⁹⁵ In her 'NOTEN', Köhler misquotes Garbo, instead writing "There is a whole word of difference" (NF, p. 98). The possibly deliberate but certainly productive misreading of 'word' for 'world' hints at how the word can change the world, and the importance of the difference between the two versions of what Garbo said. Being *left* alone portrays the desire not for existential isolation but for freedom from being constantly intruded upon by the press intrusion and by the powerful, male-dominated film studios. Köhler's mix-up also diminishes the differences between Garbo as a film image and Garbo as a subject off-screen: the two become merged and the canto ends ending with Garbo's (and Helena's) articulation of their own desires.

In the context of Köhler's criticism of the male use of the female image and of the wide dissemination of the female image as 'medium' in 'MATRIX / AMATRIX', the final line of the canto expresses Helena-Garbo's desire not to be exploited by (male) figures of authority. The end of 'MATRIX / AMATRIX' brings in the first-person pronoun in both English and German, revealing Helena and Garbo as speaking subjects, with their voices breaking down their status as image.

'SKYLLA / ENTHÜLLEN'

'SKYLLA / ENTHÜLLEN' picks up the threads from 'MATRIX / AMATRIX' and adds further layers to its cultural and political criticisms of representation. Skylla is a

¹⁹⁵ *Yale Book of Quotations*, ed. Fred. R Shapiro (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 299.

monster in Homer's *Odyssey* with a ring of dogs around her waist and the head of a young woman. She is the original, literal 'man-eater' of Western culture, devouring Odysseus's men, and the source for the metaphorical 'man-eater' trope that Köhler plays with in this canto, where women and dogs emerge as a threatening sorority. Between the title, the epigraph to the canto and the 'NOTEN', Köhler sets up the theme of the 'unveiling' (ENTHÜLLEN) of the female image in a number of ways. In the 'NOTEN' to the canto, Köhler 'unveils' Skylla the monster by referring to a genealogy in which she was transformed from a beautiful young woman into a monster by Circe in a jealous rage (NF, p. 99).

'SKYLLA / ENTHÜLLEN' is one of two cantos in the cycle that has an epigraph. Köhler uses the epigraph here to give the theme of unveiling an abstract, theoretical context:

*»The only conceivable way of unveiling a black box
is to play with it.«*
René Thom, *Mathematical Models of Morphogenesis*
(NF, p. 52)

Thom's statement is from a context that is radically different from Homer's *Odyssey*; however, common to the title and the epigraph is the idea of unveiling. A 'black box' is a term for anything, from an electronic device, a Rubik's cube, or the human mind, to an algorithm, that can only be viewed in terms of its input and output, with its internal workings concealed from view. In the interview with *karawa*, Köhler compares black boxes to bodies:

Wichtig ist, diese Boxen dann doch als Körper mit einem Innen und Außen wahrzunehmen. In dem Moment, in dem das als Box gedacht wird, die ein Innen und ein Außen haben kann, funktioniert es anders. Und Rubik's Cube operiert ja auch gerade mit dieser Verschränktheit von Innen und Außen.¹⁹⁶

Here, Köhler describes black boxes as bodies whose external appearance and concealed, internal function are entangled. The information that can be learned from interaction with the outside (of a body, or of a Rubik's cube) gives a partial insight to the inside,

¹⁹⁶ 'Würfel, Kiste, Box – Gespräch mit Barbara Köhler', *karawa*.

which can never be seen or fully known. The black box is a metaphor for the body whose interior world cannot be seen. The epigraph challenges the idea of the observation of an external surface as an adequate epistemological account of an object (or human subject), and argues for the intimacy of play, touch, interaction between object and observer as a means to acquiring partial knowledge. While it is not immediately apparent how the black box in the epigraph relates to Skylla, Helena and Garbo – one context is mathematical and the other, literature and film – it works as a metaphor for Köhler's interrogation of the patriarchal fear of what lies beneath a feminine image of women. In the canto Köhler identifies the fear of an unknown wildness that lies beneath the domesticated exterior of dogs with a fear of a similar wildness beneath the 'domesticated' external surface of woman. Skylla's appearance, a hybrid mix of femininity and wild, monstrous animal is a representation of the duality of imagery around women. Furthermore, the dogs' heads encircling Skylla's waist, separating her genital area from her womanly upper body, recall Freud's analysis of the Medusa's snakes in his essay 'Das Medusenhaupt', in which the monstrous hybridisation is regarded as a response to patriarchal fear of women's castrating sexual difference.¹⁹⁷

Following the epigraph, Köhler brings another theorist of knowledge and of the image into play: Plato. In the manner of philosopher Jean-Louis Baudry, Köhler identifies Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave' as analogous to the cinema at the start of 'SKYLLA / ENTHÜLLEN':

DARK AGES. SCHWARZFIGURIG: KIRKE. Ein schatten
riss in Platons kino auf der leinwand schatten
spiele fesselnd
(*NF*, p. 52)

By connecting Plato's cave with the cinema, Köhler draws her observations about the relationship between the observing subject and the observed image into an explicitly philosophical context. In Plato's cave, the prisoners are chained up and sit in a fixed viewing position and can see only the shadows on the wall of the cave produced by the light of a fire, which they take to be reality. They cannot see the apparatus that produces the illusion, nor the bodies that cast the shadow, and Baudry identifies the static position

¹⁹⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'Das Medusenhaupt', in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Anna Freud et al., 18 vols. (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1999), vol. 17 (pp. 47-48).

of their bodies with their ignorance and lack of intellectual progress. The inability of the body to move, twist and change perspective is intrinsic to the production of a false and limited impression of truth and reality.¹⁹⁸ In Baudry's analysis, the chained-up specators in the cave are like a cinema audience who sit in darkness watching the projection of images on a screen. Köhler plays on the double meaning of 'fesselnd' as 'spellbinding' or 'gripping' as well as 'enchained' or 'manacled' to convey a subject that is trapped within an enthralling illusion, perceiving mere shadow as truth.

As a monster in the *Odyssey*, like the Sirens, Skylla's appearance constitutes a projection of patriarchal fear of woman as terrifying, unknown difference:

nicht wahr wie die sirenen wie
 der tierfilm Skylla mit den hunden verbunden &
 verbündete der meute Ich hündische sagt Helena
 (DIE GARBO SPRICHT! oder der übersetzer?) o-ton
 Homer: kynôpis - die mit dem treuen hundeblick
 den feuchten dunklen augen können die lügen ge
 läufig der sogenannt sinnlich geöffnete mund
 (NF, p. 52)

Köhler unveils the gripping narratives about the Sirens and of Skylla as 'nicht wahr', like the shadows in Plato's cave/cinema. By placing Skylla in a benign animal documentary Köhler suggests that the function of Skylla's form is a cultural 'making-safe' of the threat that woman poses to the male subject in the male imagination. The genre of animal documentary shows nature at arm's length and places a screen between the viewer and the dangerous natural world, reducing animals to a projection of danger, rather than a corporeal presence. The animals on screen are made into objects of scientific knowledge, and an male voiceover often accompanies the images and explains their behaviour to a fascinated audience watching from afar. The descriptions, like the depiction of Skylla in the *Odyssey*, lay down the limits of the animal, making them coherent to the viewer. By defining Skylla's characteristics, the *Odyssey* makes them 'known' and measurable, and the rational hero Odysseus as the representative of Western man can 'overcome' the monstrous feminine.

¹⁹⁸ Jean-Louis Baudry, 'The Apparatus', in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 286-298.

Köhler conflates Helena, Garbo and dogs, or rather, shows how women have been grouped with and made analogous to monstrous animals in Western culture. The words ‘wie die sirenen [...] Skylla mit den hunden verbunden & verbündete der meute *Ich hüindische* sagt Helena’, suggests a sisterhood – or rather, a ‘pack mentality’ – shared between the Sirens, Skylla and Helen of Troy. In this, context the words ‘*DIE GARBO SPRICHT!*’, taken from a film poster for Garbo’s first ‘talkie’ – suggest here that an animal has begun to speak. ‘*Ich hüindische*’ is equivalent to the Greek, ‘*kynôpis*’ and implies servile devotion, like that of a domesticated dog, or metaphorically, that of a devoted wife. The loyal expression in the wet dark eyes, a stereotypical evocation of ‘man’s best friend’, could be describing Helena, Garbo or a dog. Köhler draws on patriarchal anxiety that behind the domesticated dog or woman lies an unknowable, originary hostility. Seemingly loyal eyes become capable of lying – ‘können die lügen’ – and the dog, through its association with an eroticised woman with a sensually open mouth, becomes threatening, as the distinction between woman and dog becomes more blurred. The image of the half -open mouth and wet eyes strongly recalls Kafka’s Sirens in ‘Das Schweigen der Sirenen’ too, in a moment when Odysseus assumes that they are singing and that he alone has survived by blocking his ears, when in fact they are (probably) silent:

Odysseus aber, um es so auszudrücken, hörte ihr Schweigen nicht, er glaubte, sie sängen, und nur er sei behütet, es zu hören. Flüchtig sah er zuerst die Wendungen ihrer Häse, das tiefe Atmen, die tränenvollen Augen, den halb geöffneten Mund, glaubte aber, dies gehöre zu den Arien, die ungehört um ihn verklängen.¹⁹⁹

Köhler, like Kafka, probes patriarchal anxiety around man’s ability to control the feared other, raising the spectre of doubt and the possibility that at any moment the domesticated female monster might turn the tables and master the master.

The threat grows as man’s loyal domesticated companion (dog or woman) begins to rebel:

was man da nicht alles reinlegen kann ein bild
denn selber sprechen kann es mehr sagen als es

¹⁹⁹ Kafka, ‘Das Schweigen der Sirenen’, in *Die Erzählungen und andere ausgewählte Prosa*, p. 352.

gesagt bekommt befehle kann's kommandos bellen
 HER MASTER'S VOICE his mistress HELEN THE BITCH
 sind wir denn schon beim tonfilm angekommen in
 kläffenden klaffenden jahren BARK AGES the dog
 (NF, p. 52)

The dog-woman can speak for herself here and begins to say things that she/it has not been taught by her/its master, indeed it begins to 'bark' its own commands. Helena's rebellion in Homer's text by calling herself a dog is made analogous to the breakthrough of Greta Garbo's voice, as Garbo's 'sinnlich geöffnete mund' is suddenly able to speak for itself (as Anna does in the film when she dominates her father and fiancé, and they sit down and listen as she speaks). However, the rebellion of Köhler's dog-women is not entirely serious and Köhler transforms cultural anxieties about women into jokes. There are comic touches like the 'BARK AGES', and later in the canto 'WARP AND WOOF' – 'woof' being an alternative term for 'weft' – are used to bring together typical Greek women's domestic activity (and Penelope's defining activity) with dogs. The words 'HER MASTER'S VOICE his mistress HELEN THE BITCH' are a disruption of the slogan of the British record company 'HMV' or 'His Master's Voice' whose logo is an image of a dog that sits listening to his master's voice playing on a gramophone. That is to say, the male dog obeys a recording of its master's voice, rather than the embodied voice. In Köhler's text, however, the dog is a female, the master becomes mistress, and the mistress is Helena – the ringleader of the rebellious dog-women. 'HELEN THE BITCH' sounds like a playful literal translation of 'ich hündische' and marks continuity between misogynist insults in the time of Homer and the modern day insult of 'bitch'.

The idealised images of Helena and Garbo projected in literature, art and film exclude the disorderly, sensory, corporeal aspect of their lives: herein lies the rebellion of Helena's self-shaming as a dog. The hairy, animalistic, amoral and potentially bloodthirsty qualities of an (undomesticated) dog are what Helena's ideal image as propaganda and Garbo as an ideal of beauty must exclude. Furthermore, by unveiling herself as a 'dog', Helena dismisses the 'noble cause' of the Trojan wars, founded on rescuing her, suggesting that the real causes lie elsewhere. By denying her own aesthetic perfection, Helena denies it to the warring patriarchal states that claim her as the representation of their intentions – it's not about her, it's about them.

The full implications of what the patriarchal imagination, according to Köhler, fears that dogs or women might do to masculinity are depicted with reference to two narratives from Book 3 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

die eignen hunde Aktaion
die eigne mutter Pentheus als mänade zerrissen
die söhne
(*NF*, pp. 53-54)

The first narrative concerns Aktaion's death at the jaws of his own hounds after he was turned into a stag as a punishment by Artemis, and is followed by the narrative in which Pentheus's mother tears him apart with a group of maenads (*NF*, p. 53). Köhler explains these instances of women and dogs turning against their masters in the 'NOTEN' as punishments for voyeurism (*NF*, p. 100). The narratives contribute to Köhler's argument about the objectifying effect of the gaze initiated in relation to Helena and Garbo, and also contribute further nuances. Artemis's punishment of Aktaion's crime, in her eyes an appropriate response, reveals that his gaze on her naked body made her feel as vulnerable as a hunted animal. In the second narrative, Pentheus wanted to observe the Maenads' revelry, but not participate in their worship of Bacchus, a god associated with wine, intoxication and fertility. He wanted to watch but not to participate, to retain a 'safe distance'. In both cases the breakdown of a safe viewing distance – that which constitutes the position of the patriarchal observer – results in a bloody rebellion. The distance and anonymity keep the male figures ignorant of the pleasures and complexity of embodied experience but also keep them safe from them – like the shackled observers in Plato's cave. Köhler suggests that the terrifying yet enthralling women on screen, viewed at a safe and anonymous distance, are a metaphor for the way that patriarchal power converts life into image to keep itself safe.

The political argument behind these references is made explicit with the capitalised statement on the final page of the canto: 'HIER SPRICHT DEIN NEBENWIDERSPRUCH GENOSSE und [/] nicht Pawlows hund (*NF*, p. 54). The term 'Nebenwiderspruch' refers to Marx's influential view that the repression of women in capitalism was a secondary concern (as opposed to a 'Hauptwiderspruch'). Köhler identifies misogyny even in Marx – a concern that was at the centre of 1960s and 1970s political discourse and activism in Germany and beyond. However, the use of the

Marxist term and the sarcastic tone promises a 'bolshy' revolutionary female subject, rather than an obedient, behaviourally conditioned Pavlovian subject ('nicht Pawlows hund'). In his experiments the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov presented dogs with a ringing bell and then gave them food. The food made the dogs salivate, but after repeated bell–food pairings the bell alone caused the dogs to salivate. In this experiment, the unconditioned stimulus is the dog food that produces the unconditioned response of saliva and the conditioned stimulus is the ringing bell that replaces the food and it produces a conditioned response of the saliva. In Köhler's cantos, 'Pavlov's dog' could have several referents. First, and in the context of the 'Nebenwiderspruch' reference, it could refer to the domesticated and repressed lives of women who are deprived of power and cannot make decisions about their own lives but who exist in relation to the 'bell' of the male command. Second, Pavlov's dog can refer to the men (not in power), such as the soldiers in the Trojan wars or the cinema-going men, who are trained to respond to orders that send them to their death, or to images of women, rather than real, embodied women.

The revolutionary subject that Köhler calls for desires to break free of her social conditioning having unveiled the repression under which she suffers. The insistence that 'was du feststellst stellt [/] auch dich' (*NF*, p. 54) continues the vein of empathy established in 'SIRENEN', in that the limitation upon life created by fettered perception and knowledge formation affects both the observer and the observed: the impoverishment of life is mutual. The sense of an awakening of the female /dog / monster unfolds in the canto as eyes gleam in the cave and stare back at the observer: 'worauf er schaut als ob [/] sie ihn nicht sehen könnten' (*NF*, p. 54). The final question posed by the canto: 'was weiss das bild' alerts the reader to the embodied state of 'das bild', which knows things that may differ from what it is ideologically required to know by those in power. The question of knowledge of reality and how it is controlled and distributed is at the core of 'SKYLLA / ENTHÜLLEN', which repeatedly refers to Plato, arguably the founder of Western epistemology.

The flawless face of Helena-Garbo in Köhler's text recalls Roland Barthes's analysis of the quality of Greta Garbo's face as a Platonic form:

Garbo offered to one's gaze a sort of Platonic Idea of the human creature, which explains why her face is almost sexually undefined, without however leaving one in doubt. [...] The face of Garbo is an Idea.²⁰⁰

The description of Garbo's face as an absolute Platonic Idea makes her an ideal modern successor to Helen of Troy, as the first icon of beauty in Western literature and an epitome of the negation of the messy, sweaty, sexual aspect of the feminine or, as Köhler expresses it, 'sekrete schweiss [/] & tränen was du nicht halten kannst' (NF, p. 43). The idea that a woman's beauty could be an unchanging and abstract Platonic Form is at odds with mortal embodied life, which is in a continuous process of change, never identical from one moment to the next. To regard a woman's face as such an ideal is to objectify it, to freeze it in time as an image, and to negate the intentions, thoughts and desires that flow from it.

Köhler implicates Western epistemology as guilty of an attitude to embodied life that is exemplified by Pavlovian experiments. While Plato constructed the situation in the cave as a metaphor for an unenlightened state of being, he also derided the physical senses as a means of knowledge and favoured abstract ideals. Plato developed the theory of eternal and unchanging ideal forms as the truths that lie behind everything and are the measure by which everything else is defined. He rejected the body as a means to understand reality, favouring the distanced intellect, divorced as far as possible from the senses:

Would not that man do this most perfectly who approaches each thing, so far as possible, with the reason alone, not introducing sight into his reasoning nor dragging in any of the other senses along with his thinking, but who employs pure, absolute reason in his attempt to search out the pure, absolute essence of things, and who removes himself, so far as possible, from eyes and ears, and, in a word, from his whole body, because he feels that its companionship disturbs the soul and hinders it from attaining truth and wisdom?

Is not this the man, Simmias, if anyone, to attain to the knowledge of reality?²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Barthes, 'The Face of Garbo', in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Cape, 1972), pp. 56-58 (p. 57).

²⁰¹ Plato, 'Phaedo', p. 229.

Köhler encourages an interrogation of the intellectual and political culture that marginalises the body and has typically resulted in the exclusion of women from power. In ‘SIRENEN’ (NF, pp. 46-47), for example, there is the notion that: ‘was [/] er zu stellen sucht fixiert es [/] fesselt ihn’ (NF, p. 46), a line which is almost repeated word for word in ‘SKYLLA / ENTHÜLLEN’: ‘was du feststellst stellt auch dich’ (NF, p. 54). That is to say, subjects should beware of what knowledge they establish as fact, because it will fix and fetter *their* life and body. Therefore the men who stare at Greta Garbo’s face on screen, or who fantasise about Helena’s perfect face, experience as much of an impoverished form of life as the objectified woman: the men also experience a simulation of life rather than the real thing. They reject their own body by rejecting the body of the Other.

Conclusion

With Helen of Troy as her point of orientation in ‘MATRIX /AMATRIX’ Köhler sifts through the media output of Western culture of the last three millennia and brings together references to portray (albeit in an oblique way) how physical reality, and women in particular, have repeatedly been reduced to dualistic images and marginalised. The strategies of this marginalisation highlighted in these two cantos are the reduction of embodied lives to media (voices or images), the association of women with the purely physical (as threatening sexual objects or animals), and the philosophical degradation of the body and the senses (Plato). There is a strong political message in Köhler’s criticisms of attempts to separate legitimate forms of life from the body, which can result, as in the case of the Trojan wars as Köhler casts it, in mass slaughter. Köhler asserts that where embodied lives are transformed into mere media, they are easily repressed or killed. Men in power or the repressive state exclude from their definition of legitimate life characteristics that they project onto women (and animals), but which they also possess, thereby excluding part of themselves. Köhler’s cantos call for the accommodation of the body in Western conceptualisation of legitimate life.

Helena’s insult of herself provides a point of departure for how to begin to heal the breach, as Köhler sees it. The ‘dog’ insult foregrounds Helena’s body in a form that is outside of a sexually sanitised and politically problematic ideal of ‘beauty’. As a shamed ‘dog’ Helena rhetorically reclaims her body from the patriarchal state: ‘What appears in shame is precisely the fact of being riveted to oneself, the radical impossibility of fleeing

to hide from oneself, the irremissible presence of the ego to self.²⁰² Helena expresses a desire to be present to herself, in her own body, free from the identity of ‘Trojan’ or ‘Greek’ wife, just as Greta Garbo wishes to be ‘LEFT ALONE’ (*NF*, p. 43). As a dog, Helena makes herself ‘nothing’ or ‘Niemand’s Frau’ and in doing so, reclaims herself.

²⁰² Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, trans. B Berge and ed. J Rolland (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 64.

Chapter 5

The Possibility of Recognising and Loving 'Niemand'

was soll
das heissen Ich Liebe Dich & warum musste
ich dran glauben was hab ich was hast du
mir vorgestellt? Ein bild von einem mann

& nichts dahinter

(*NF*, p. 65)

The love relation, expressed through bodies, often idealised by literature and socially formalised through marriage, is iconic in Western culture. The marriage between Penelope and Odysseus is arguably the most important relationship in the *Odyssey*, and is the focus of the final cantos of *Niemand's Frau* (as well as the final Books of Homer's text). The seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth cantos in *Niemand's Frau* take Penelope's thoughts and feelings about her lapsed marriage to Odysseus as their poetic starting point. Homer conveys little about how Penelope perceives the events around her husband's arrival in Ithaca, and scant details of her physical state. By contrast, Köhler imagines Penelope's struggle to remember, to recognise and to love the man who made himself into 'Niemand', and in doing so, poses broader questions about the conditions required for love to survive.

The tone of the cantos discussed in this chapter – 'PENELOPE IM SCHNEE', 'WIEDER : ERKENNEN', and 'NACHTSTÜCK : ARRHYTHMIE' – contrasts with the rest of the cycle, which mostly favours a critical rather than a confessional mode. The detailed and sometimes grotesque descriptions of Penelope's body and emotions in 'PENELOPE IM SCHNEE' contrast with Odysseus's desire to efface his physical and emotional presence, which is emphasised throughout Köhler's cycle. The two subsequent cantos (*NF*, pp. 60-65), while differing in style, continue to develop a sense of Penelope's interior world and her experience of her husband's return. 'WIEDER : ERKENNEN' is a performative meditation on Penelope's struggle to recognise Odysseus, in which

Köhler challenges the reader's ability to recognise printed signs as words with referents. In 'NACHTSTÜCK : ARRHYTHMIE' Köhler reveals Penelope's disillusioned thoughts as she lies in bed next to Odysseus, and her late-night recourse to internet chatrooms to vent her frustrations. Köhler paints a picture of the bleak banality of domestic married life and the gender roles that it enforces, as well as Penelope's resistance to it.

The position of these cantos at the end of the cycle, the introduction of a sustained and psychologically coherent first-person subject (for the first time), and Köhler's attempt to recruit the reader emotionally, make them stand out from the rest. Throughout *Niemand's Frau* Köhler ponders how subjects, especially those of different genders, relate to each other grammatically, physically, socially and politically, and her poetry yearns for an ethical mode of relation that accommodates difference with tenderness. In this chapter I suggest Köhler's understanding of love – as a radical and ethical way of relating to the Other – as one possible philosophical basis for *Niemand's Frau*. First, I set out the key aspects of Odysseus's long return in Homer's text, to which Köhler responds in the cantos discussed here; second, I offer a reading of the precarious process of recognition in the *Odyssey*; third, I consider the effect of Odysseus's long absence and preoccupation with disguise upon his ability to be in a love relationship; and fourth, I offer close readings of Köhler's cantos, paying particular attention to the themes of ageing, the body and love.

Odysseus's Slow Return

Odysseus's return to the position of king and Penelope's husband in Homer's *Odyssey* is not so much a single moment as a process that unfolds over eleven books. He is wary of the suitors who throng the court and of Penelope: the cautionary tale of Agamemnon's betrayal and murder by his wife Clytemnestra on his return from the Trojan wars looms through multiple references. In Book 11, during his visit to the underworld, Odysseus is advised by Agamemnon's shade to be cautious when he returns to Ithaca because women cannot be trusted (*Odyssee*, Book 11, l. 426). However, Agamemnon's message about Penelope is ambiguous, as he follows his warning about women in general with a positive appraisal of Penelope's character (*Odyssee*, Book 11, l. 444). Nonetheless,

Odysseus still chooses to treat her with extreme caution.²⁰³ He disguises himself as a beggar and conceals his identity from Penelope and other loyal subjects for a prolonged period. From Book 13 through to Book 24 the reader witnesses a series of encounters between Odysseus and Penelope where, at times with the help of Athena, he goes unrecognised. When he first arrives back on the island of Ithaca (Book 13) Odysseus meets the shepherd Eumaeus, who cooks for the disguised king and regales him with stories that show loyalty. However, remaining wary, Odysseus does not reveal his identity. His disguise succeeds in all but two cases: his dog Argos, who immediately senses Odysseus when he encounters him outside the gates of Ithaca in Book 17, and the old family nurse Eurycleia, who washes Odysseus on Penelope's instructions and sees a scar that he received as a young man. On both of these occasions it is Odysseus's body that gives him away to those who loved him and knew him intimately, before his years of war and survival at sea. The rags of his disguise are no defence against Argos's sense of smell, and language cannot efface the scar on Odysseus's body that gives him away to Eurycleia, who was present when the wound was fresh. Odysseus's body, outside of the realm of his rational control, reveals him and 'speaks' his name even when he wishes it to remain silent; his body cannot be made to conform to his premeditated plans, a point that will be given further consideration in this chapter.

On the advice of Athena (*Odyssee*, Book 16, ll. 168-169), Odysseus takes his son Telemachus into his confidence to recruit him as an ally within the palace, and specifically instructs his son not to reveal his identity to Penelope:

Nicht Laertes einmal darf's wissen oder der Sauhirt,
 Keiner auch von dem Gesinde, ja selbst nicht Penelopeia,
 Sondern nur ich und du: damit wir der Weiber Gesinnung
 Prüfen, auch unsere Knechte zugleich ein wenig erforschen.
 Wo man uns beide noch mit treuem Herzen verehret,
 Oder wer untreu ward, und deine Ehre dir weigert.
 (*Odyssee*, Book 16, ll. 302-307)

Telemachus asks that they delay assessing the loyalty of Ithaca's men, but he does see the logic in testing the constancy of its women: 'Zwar der Weiber Gesinnung zu prüfen, rat

²⁰³ Chris Emlyn-Jones, 'The Reunion of Penelope and Odysseus', in *Homer's Odyssey*, ed. Lillian Doherty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 208-230 (pp. 208-209).

ich dir selber: [/] Wer dich im Hause verachtet und wer unsträflich geliebt' (*Odyssee*, Book 16, ll. 316-317). Penelope is not merely included by father and son in the group of women who must not be trusted, but as the extract above shows, she is singled out as a key threat. Sheila Murnaghan observes that: 'Odysseus must rely for his success on Penelope's continued willingness to consider him her husband and thus on the continuity of such inherently volatile qualities as desire, affection, and loyalty'.²⁰⁴ I would contend however, that the delay in Odysseus's revelation of his identity indicates his refusal to rely on such non-rational qualities as love and desire.

While Homer gives the reader detailed insight into Odysseus's motivations and feelings during his protracted return, little insight is given into Penelope's at times perplexing behaviour.²⁰⁵ As Mihoko Suzuki observes, unlike Odysseus, Penelope is seen only through the eyes of the male characters – Odysseus, Telemachus and the Suitors – who are uncertain of the causes behind her actions.²⁰⁶ If Penelope's decision to have an archery competition to choose a new husband is taken seriously, then she *is* considering remarriage, which would place Odysseus in a dangerous position. After all, she decides to hold the archery competition to decide who she will choose as a new husband, against the disguised Odysseus's advice, placing a question mark over whether she is still waiting for him.²⁰⁷ Penelope may have decided that she wishes for a new husband and may have given up all hope of Odysseus's return, as Seth L. Schein suggests:

Penelope's plans and behaviour can be seen to have their own motivation, quite apart from her loyalty to Odysseus and his *oikos*. Although the contest of the bow and the axes results in the death of the suitors and the restoration of Odysseus to the kingship, when Penelope declares her intention to hold the contest (Book 19, ll. 570-581) she must be understood to do so fully prepared for her imminent marriage to one of her wooers.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Sheila Murnaghan, 'Penelope's *Agnoia*: Knowledge, Power, and Gender in the *Odyssey*', in *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies*, ed. Lillian E. Doherty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 231-246 (p. 237).

²⁰⁵ Seth L. Schein, 'Female Representations and Interpreting the *Odyssey*', in *The Distaff Side*, ed. Beth Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 17-28 (p. 21); see also: Murnaghan, p. 232.

²⁰⁶ Mihoko Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen. Authority, Difference and the Epic* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 91.

²⁰⁷ Köhler plays upon this uncertainty in the canto, 'GEWEBEPROBE : PENELOPE', *Niemand's Frau*, pp. 24-25.

²⁰⁸ Schein, pp. 24-25.

While some have tried to second-guess Penelope's motives, speculating that she might 'intuitively' recognise the disguised Odysseus and be play-acting in the knowledge that he will win the archery competition, there is no clear textual evidence to this effect.²⁰⁹

Penelope does not watch the competition take place, and goes to her rooms to sleep through it. Odysseus wins and then slaughters all of the suitors, even those for whom he feels compassion, and all of Penelope's maids too. He leaves Penelope with no allies and it is only in Book 23 that Odysseus announces his identity to his wife. However, exercising her own cautious tactics, Penelope sets up a trap to check Odysseus's identity using their marital bed, a symbol of their marriage.

Penelope asks their maid Eurycleia to move the bed, which Odysseus had built twenty years previously from a tree that grows through the house: the bed cannot be moved without killing the tree and breaking the bed. Odysseus responds angrily and exposes his emotions: 'Wahrlich, o Frau, dies Wort hat meine Seele verwundet!' (*Odyssee*, Book 23, l. 183). If the bed had been moved, it would symbolise Penelope's infidelity to Odysseus as she would have had to destroy it. The moment of emotional authenticity precedes a very brief loving reunion of a single night, during which Odysseus tells Penelope (selectively) about his journey, before he leaves her again to kill the families of the slaughtered suitors. Penelope's ruse creates a caesura in her husband's detached, strategic behaviour in which finally, he becomes visible to her. Visibility and vulnerability are connected in Homer's text by Odysseus's strategic resistance to being visible: his physical invisibility is his advantage. What the bed trick demonstrates is the importance of each subject being visible to the other for the survival of the romantic relationship. It is not enough for Penelope to be told that the man before her is called Odysseus and is her husband: she must witness it for herself.

The precise implications of the 'bed trick', in Homer's text, which show the need for Odysseus to be emotionally and physically *present* to Penelope, are the ultimate focus of Köhler's poetic treatment of Odysseus's return. She explores the complexity and frustrations of Penelope's situation, in which she lives by the rule of a man whom she has not seen for twenty years. The focus of Köhler's critical eye is upon the abstract nature of the marriage with which Penelope is forced to live; there is no *body* present to love her, and 'Niemand' and other words of negation resonate throughout the three cantos discussed here. The tragic paradox for Penelope is that she really is 'Niemand's Frau'.

²⁰⁹ For a summary of scholarship on this issue, see: Emlyn-Jones, cited above.

Recognition and Remembering

Recognition depends on memory and the retention of information gathered at a point in the past, and so fading memory threatens the possibility that someone or something will be recognised. The Ancient Greek concept of remembering (*mimnēkomai*) is semantically connected to physical action in the present and, according to Anita Nikkanen, to the maintenance of social order: 'it is remembering that ascertains the proper order of affairs, and as long as people remember they will behave as is fitting.'²¹⁰ Odysseus instructed Penelope to take care of the household during his absence: 'Du sorg hier fleißig für alles!' (*Odyssee*, Book 18, l. 265) and might therefore understand the disarray in which he finds the island state on his return as a sign that he has, to an extent, been forgotten. Indeed, Telemachus's guardian, Mentor, specifically explains the calamitous situation in Ithaca in these terms (*Odyssee*, Book 2, ll. 229-241): if the Ithacans do not remember Odysseus, he might not be recognised as their king either.²¹¹

Recognition can be regarded as a conservative process, insisting as it does on the validation of the present by the authenticating past. However, the need for recognition is also a signifier of change that has occurred, and of the fragile nature of identity, contingent on the acknowledgement of a 'recognising' other to affirm that it has taken place. In the process of recognition, there is a tension between past and present as the continuous change and 'becoming' of reality threaten the relevance of the past moment that validates and constitutes recognition. The possibility of knowing a subject as the 'same' requires that an idea of their identity be formulated: how might they be identified? How might their self-presentation in the present moment be understood in relation to identifying past moments? Identity is under permanent threat of dissolution by the emergence of the present that challenges it. Recognition – the rescuing of identity from obscurity – is a process threatened by the precarious quality of identity itself, especially in the hands of a figure like Odysseus, who knows how to fabricate it to his own advantage.

²¹⁰ For an exploration of the connection between memory and social order in the *Odyssey*, see: Anita Nikkanen, 'A Note on Memory and Reciprocity in Homer's *Odyssey*', in *Donum natalicium digitaliter confectum Gregorio Nagy septuagenario a discipulis collegis familiaribus oblatum. A virtual birthday gift presented to Gregory Nagy on turning seventy by his students, colleagues and friends*. Washington DC.

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<<http://chs.harvard.edu/wa/pageR?tn=ArticleWrapper&bdc=12&mn=4606>>) [accessed: 30th October 2015].

²¹¹ Ibid.

As Terence Cave describes in his seminal volume on the subject: ‘Recognition [...] is not the recovery for good or ill of certain knowledge, nor the reassuring restoration of the co-ordinates of kinship and social position. It unmask[s] a crisis, a perpetual threat of imposture.’²¹² For Odysseus, identity is equated with a loss of control and a lack of identity is equated with the ability to control those around him. Köhler’s cantos that deal with the relationship between Odysseus and Penelope explore and unpick the effect of an Odyssean way of being in the world on their romantic relationship.

In the case of the *Odyssey*, the ease with which Odysseus creates false identities reveals the inherent instability in identity and the possibility that any identity may be inauthentic. When he arrives back in Ithaca, at each point of recognition or potential recognition he generates a narrative that directs attention towards or away from the identity ‘Odysseus’, leaving him always in control. Cave notes the connection between recognition and past narrative in the *Odyssey*:

The first thing to notice is that recognition is repeatedly associated throughout the epic with retrospective narrative. The story of the wanderings themselves is told by Odysseus as a consequence and corollary of his recognition by Alcinous; he recounts a fictional narrative to Penelope in order to sustain his disguise; and he retells his adventures to Penelope when she has finally let him into her bed. Recognition always reaches back analeptically to earlier narratives; and Odysseus, [who] is a master of deferred recognition, is also a masterly narrator of stories both true and false.²¹³

Odysseus expertly constructs *mis*recognitions through his use of narrative because his disguises and tricks throughout the *Odyssey* rely for their success on his skill as a liar, as the teller of false narratives. As Cave observes, ‘what Odysseus most notoriously lies about when he returns to Ithaca is precisely his identity’.²¹⁴ Odysseus uses identity as a means by which to control the way that others treat him: he constructs the most pertinent identity to achieve the ends he desires at that moment.

Odysseus’s choice of disguise as an itinerant beggar is a *tabula rasa* onto which he can inscribe any narrative: an outsider without the prior (and possibly conflicting)

²¹² Terence Cave, *Recognitions. A Study in Poetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 14-15.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

loyalties or existing identity that would arise from ‘belonging’. He is not identifiable within Ithacan social structure, except that he is outside of it, and by disguising himself Odysseus makes an attempt to sever the connection between his body and the signifier ‘Odysseus’. This strategy allows him to witness the reaction to his name without hazarding his body in the process. If he were ‘himself’ and spoke as Odysseus – uniting his voice and his narratives with his body – his body would become visible as that of Odysseus, rather than as the beggar. Visibility and vulnerability are equated for Odysseus throughout the *Odyssey*: if he cannot be seen he can control the moment at which he emerges to carry out an act of violence or seize power. Until he is recognised, the disguised Odysseus refers to ‘Odysseus’ in the third person. The third-person relationship that Odysseus establishes with his identity has the effect of relocating ‘Odysseus’ in the realm of narrative: by talking about ‘Odysseus’, he effectively makes his body disappear – making it a thing of thought – and therefore temporarily immortal, part of a story and not real. As Shimizu Akiko writes in her study of lying, ‘the image a mimic creates is deceptive in the sense that it does not refer to what it is supposed to be referring to’ and is, ‘a strategy to distance the self from its visible image’.²¹⁵ Evidently, lying can be a practical aid to survival as well as a tool of resistance to preserve the self in a political culture that attempts to enforce particular behaviours. Lying is Odysseus’s most frequently used tool for survival and works so that those with whom he speaks interact with a narrative projection of his creation intended to distance them from seeing the him *as* Odysseus.²¹⁶ However, while he is protected from the threats that a more visible mode of interaction may pose, the vulnerability that Odysseus seeks to avoid is precisely the chink in the armour that permits the entry of love.

The disembodied quality of Odysseus is a significant focus of ‘PENELOPE IM SCHNEE’, ‘WIEDER : ERKENNEN’ and ‘NACHTSTÜCK : ARRHYTHMIE’. Köhler focuses on the abstract nature of his identity as ‘Niemand’, Penelope’s failure to see him and the insubstantial nature of his presence when they are finally reunited. However, as mentioned, Odysseus’s diversionary narratives are not enough to conceal his identity from all; their failure is the measure of the inadequacy of language to account fully for, or to replicate (corporeal) reality, which exceeds its explanation in words. The irrefutable fact of Odysseus’s body persists in the face of his attempts to repress or

²¹⁵ Shimizu Akiko, *Lying Bodies. Survival and Subversion in the Field of Vision* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 44 and p. 53.

²¹⁶ Louise H. Pratt, *Lying and Poetry from Homer to Pindar. Falsehood and Deception in Archaic Poetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), pp. 55-94.

conceal it, in particular, in the cases of Argos, Eurycleia, and Penelope's bed trick. Odysseus's scar connects the narrative of its origin to the unique quality of the body. The story of the bed that is built from a living tree binds the body (of the tree) with narrative, and brings the two together at the same moment that Odysseus's body and his narratives about himself come together.

What are the Conditions Required for Love?

In *Niemand's Frau*, Köhler suggests that the strategies employed by Odysseus to make himself infallible have destroyed the conditions required for love to flourish. Reidar Due's recent theoretical work on love in relation to film includes an insightful chapter on the ontology of love that identifies love as intrinsically tied to the first-person perspective (of two people):

The first-person perspective, the subjective point of view that lovers have on their own love is an intrinsic part of love. There can be no love without the lovers' subjective awareness of their love. Opposed to the first-person perspective is the third-person perspective that originates in a general perspective on human life patterns and culminates in a sort of cynical denial of the importance or uniqueness of any particular love.²¹⁷

Insight into the love relation is therefore an aspect of reality that utterly refuses the possibility of knowledge gained from an 'outside', objective, third-person perspective that Odysseus seeks to maintain. The difficulty for Odysseus (and so for Penelope) is that love cannot be subject to reason. Love is a relation that is not reducible to an object with properties that can be understood and entered into an economy of knowledge. As Due asserts: 'The freedom of love is, to put it crudely, tied to its irrationality, but this irrationality is not simple passion or rapture or spontaneity. It is the epistemic irrationality, the absence of grounds to justify, for the lovers, their love.'²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Reidar Due, *Love in Motion. Erotic Relationships in Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 162.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

Following this line of thought, the phenomenon of love challenges rational, causal methods of constructing knowledge sought after by the Enlightenment and by scientific and philosophical communities more broadly. Romantic love between two people is a relation constituted by the co-existence of two differentiated, first-person perspectives and is not reducible to either, according to Due's argument. The first-person perspective required for the love relation discussed here is also anchored to the body or rather, *that* body – a specific, embodied subject. The relationship between the first-person and third-person perspective exists in a permanent ontological tension, and Odysseus is potentially inhibited from partaking in the love relation, as it is understood here, because he strives to maintain a third-person perspective towards himself by speaking and acting not as Odysseus, but as 'Niemand'. Furthermore, 'Niemand' is an indefinite pronoun that requires a third-person singular verb: 'Niemand' cannot say 'Ich' or speak from the first-person position.

In a theoretical text, Köhler describes the task of (her) art, as the 'Absturz der Systeme', which hold people in hierarchical positions that mean they cannot relate to each other, eye-to-eye, because one is always above or below the other. The perhaps utopian moments of love that Köhler hopes art can bring about are found at the limits of ordering knowledge, where hierarchy breaks down and instead there is an equality of difference:

Es sind die glücklichen Momente der Kunst, wo sie uns das zu zeigen, zu geben vermag, was uns Raum gibt – und andererseits ist nichts so leicht verfehlt wie diese unruhige, beunruhigende Balance, sei es durch Stilllegung, sei es durch Absturz. Wir erfahren sie an den Grenzen, wo wir nichts mehr zu wissen glauben, wo wir bewegt sind, uns bewegen und bewegen lassen, wo wir dem Anderen begegnen, es als anders anerkennen ohne Über- und Unterordnung, wo wir die Ordnungen riskieren, die unverrückbaren Standpunkte, die sicheren Systeme, wo wir uns ändern müssen, um *gleich* zu bleiben: Love's Labour.²¹⁹

Like Due, Köhler portrays an idealised vision of love as a relation between people without hierarchy in which the security of systems and order are suspended and each

²¹⁹ Köhler, 'Zwischen den Bildern. Sieben Texte zur Grammatik einer Differenz', in *Wittgensteins Nichte*, pp. 75-92 (p. 92).

person must become different in order to be equal, and in love. In the final two words ‘Love’s Labour’, Köhler hints that the epiphanic and utopian moment where people are willing to risk ‘the order of things’ may be fantasy. In *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (c. 1594), William Shakespeare’s early comedy, four young men foreswear physical pleasures including women, in order to focus on studies – and immediately fall in love. Alongside the satirical dimension of the play, the men realise that the denial of love and the body impoverishes life, as well as their ability to write and think well. Strict adherence to boundaries that prioritise the mind over the needs of the body are found lacking by the young men in Shakespeare’s play. Love’s labour, then, may be considered the work of creating the right conditions for love to flourish: the acceptance of the value of corporeal desire, the appreciation of difference without hierarchy, a willingness to be moved by others. According to Köhler’s analysis in *Niemands Frau*, Odysseus’s preoccupation with the external or ‘God-like’ perspective on others alienates him from them (and from Penelope) and rules out the possibility of love. Through her cantos, Köhler attempts, in different ways, to collapse the cultural, linguistic and political systems she perceives as alienating human lives from each other, with Penelope’s and Odysseus’s relationship as a paradigm for this process.

‘PENELOPE IM SCHNEE’

In title and content of her seventeenth canto, ‘PENELOPE IM SCHNEE’ (*NF*, pp. 60-61), Köhler cites a Homeric passage that uses snow to exemplify the emotional contrast between Penelope and Odysseus. The encounter between the two characters in Book 19 of the *Odyssey* depicts Odysseus’s tortured attempt to forge a barrier between his rational mind and his emotional response:

Also täuscht’ er die Gattin mit wahrheitgleicher Erdichtung.
 Aber die horchende Gattin zerfloß in Tränen der Wehmut.
 Wie der Schnee, den der West auf hohen Bergen gehäuft hat,
 Vor dem schmelzenden Hauche des Morgenwindes herabfließt,
 Daß von geschmolzenem Schnee die Ströme den Ufern entswellen:
 Also flossen ihr Tränen die schönen Wangen herunter,
 Da sie den nahen Gemahl beweinete. Aber Odysseus
 Fühlt’ im innersten Herzen den Gram der weinenden Gattin;

Dennoch standen die Augen wie Horn ihm oder wie Eisen,
Unbewegt in den Wimpern; denn klüglich hemmt' er die Träne.
(*Odyssee*, Book 19, ll. 203-212)

Homer's simile, as translated by Voss, shows Penelope crying easily, like snow melting at the slightest breath of wind. Odysseus witnesses her pain but figuratively steels himself against it. He dams up his body against emotion, unable to be 'himself', insisting instead on a response informed by prudence that appears in stark contrast to the description of Penelope's tears. Homer portrays Odysseus as a man who strives to create and enforce a division between mind and body, so that he is always in a position of operational advantage in relation to his environment – even if it involves resisting the sobs of a wife he has not seen for twenty years.

The gender division in Homer's text is stark: Penelope is aligned with nature, the body and emotion, and authentic expression, while Odysseus is aligned with rationality, horn and iron, the denial of his feelings and tormenting self-control. Odysseus's eyes become like threatening horns that protrude from the head of an animal, which also suggests an image of his body ossifying, turning into an exoskeleton. He is dehumanised and deadened by Homer's description. The description of his eyes, culturally understood as an expressive body part, as resembling iron – inanimate and used for weapons and industry – lends a sinister edge, indicating his use of sight as a means to dominate others. Homer creates tension between images of liquid and solid: Penelope has an open porous relationship with the exterior world, warm tears flow out and down her cheeks, while Odysseus's hardened eyes are a barrier from his softer parts both physically and emotionally.

'PENELOPE IM SCHNEE' is the emotional climax of *Niemands Frau*. The canto is more 'lisible' in Barthesian terms than other cantos in the cycle.²²⁰ That is to say, rather than forcing the reader to abandon normal reading practice and work through a complex web of associations, it permits a message to be more easily recognised. Syntactically, this canto is relatively conventional and contains a significant number of grammatically coherent sentences, complete with initial capitals and concluding full stops, and grammatically complete units are relatively easy to identify, even where full stops are not used. It is the first assertion of Penelope as an 'Ich', speaking in the first person, and is the only instance of a psychologically conceivable figure in *Niemands*

²²⁰ Barthes, *S/Z*, pp. 3-4.

Frau. The word 'Ich' appears ten times with an appropriately conjugated verb, creating a consistent, unified speaking position.

Köhler creates an intimate portrait of Penelope, and in this canto especially, the cycle steps back from the critical function it pursues elsewhere, and from multi-vocal subjectivity. Köhler constructs a speaking subject that structurally does not differ substantially from the more normative, male 'Ich' that she criticises elsewhere in *Niemands Frau* and in her theoretical writings, suggesting a slippage between Köhler's critical perspective and her poetic praxis. However, the Penelope of *Niemands Frau*, whose ageing body registers the passing of time and whose memories are embodied, represents a form of life that Köhler accuses rationalist thought of seeking to exclude or regulate. The 'Ich' in this canto has a useful ethical and political role, mediating the highly complex flow of images elsewhere. Perhaps at this late stage in the cycle, with much of the critical work having been accomplished in earlier cantos, Köhler wishes to present a more human and relatable image of her subject. The subject presented here is female and from a political perspective carries out the work of representing a voice that Homer and subsequent reception did not investigate.

The first lines that Penelope speaks in this canto are the saddest in the cycle:

Ich kann mir keinen leib für meinen leib mehr
vorstellen dich habe ich vergessen nicht dass
du mich verlassen hast und nicht die zeit ver
geht: der leib mit seinen eingefleischten mit
den verwachsenen zu zysten myomen tumoren ver
klumpten erinnerungen verflossene berührungen
gerinnen zu knoten zu kalk zu sklerose chitin
die hardware der ichmaschine arbeitet hin auf
finale feststellung.

(*NF*, p. 60)

Penelope can no longer conceive of the body that is *for* her body: that of her husband. It is so long since she was physically close to another body that there is blankness where once she could imagine one: the word 'mehr' indicates that in the past she could. The obvious translation of the words 'keinen leib' into English is 'no body', which Köhler uses in the third canto in the cycle to refer to Odysseus: 'Odysseus [/] HE'S NO BODY', (*NF*, p. 16). Odysseus could therefore now effectively be a 'nobody' to Penelope, with her memory of him faded away. Perhaps she tries to disown Odysseus in

anger, rather than failing to remember him. He may now be someone whom she no longer loves and who is *not* marked out by her imagination and her desire as 'loved'. Furthermore, Köhler conveys Penelope's alienation from her own body: the shift from 'meinen leib' to 'der leib', followed by a disgusted description of ageing, conveys a sense of distance from her physical presence.

The structure of the first line of the canto and the repetition of 'leib' suggests the influence of the poem 'Entfremdung' by Ingeborg Bachmann. Bachmann's poem begins and ends with a similar formulation, and deals with the themes of corporeal alienation and the withering of a romantic relationship:

In den Bäumen kann ich keine Bäume mehr sehen
Die Äste haben nicht die Blätter, die sie in den Wind halten.
Die Früchte sind süß, aber ohne Liebe
[...]
Ich kann in keinem Weg mehr einen Weg sehen.²²¹

'Entfremdung' echoes through Köhler's canto: the simple negation of material objects to express a far greater loss; the repetition of a noun to emphasise its deafening absence; and the inability of the 'Ich' to resolve the situation. However, where Bachmann's subject turns to metaphors of the natural environment to articulate a sense of loss and alienation, 'PENELOPE IM SCHNEE' remains with Penelope, her body and her anger.

The words that follow Köhler's first two lines challenge the ideas both that Penelope has forgotten Odysseus, and that he means nothing to her:

dich habe ich vergessen nicht dass
du mich verlassen hast und nicht die zeit ver
geht:
(NF, p. 60)

If Penelope addresses the 'Other' as 'dich' and then 'du', even if it is only in her mind, then she can conceive of the 'Other', at least in thought. She has positioned him/her in the linguistic space first as an accusative object, and then as a second-person singular personal pronoun and so has brought him/her into a direct relationship with her self,

²²¹ Ingeborg Bachmann, 'Entfremdung', in *Werke*, I, p. 15.

grammatically at least. Penelope brings a *specific* other into existence with these words, while her choice of the informal 'du' indicates a level of intimacy and knowledge of the other: she is thinking of someone whom she recognises, at least in her thoughts. The narrative content, which describes how the 'du' she is thinking of has left her and time has passed, as happens to Penelope in the *Odyssey*, indicates strongly that this unnamed 'du' is Odysseus. Penelope conveys complex emotions: she longs for Odysseus, yet cannot imagine his physical presence, and expresses anger for his having left her. She has forgotten him, but not that he left her and not the time that has passed: there is an accusatory tone too.

Köhler portrays Penelope's experience of time passing during Odysseus's absence as an embodied temporality, where body and memory are part of the same process of change. The verb 'vergehen', split over lines 3 and 4, which bears multiple meanings including to 'elapse', 'decay', 'die away' and 'wear off', used with 'die zeit' as its subject, connects the passing of time with ageing and decay. Köhler focuses the reader's attention on the prefix 'ver-' by isolating it at the end of lines 3 and 5 and also through repeated use: there are six verbs (mainly past participles) beginning with 'ver-' in the passage above. The 'ver-' motif collects together the words that refer to the decaying, tumour-growing body, the warping of memories, the elapsing of time and the fading of the relationship to the status of 'ex-wife' (colloquially 'verflossene'), to blur into one process.

The first 'nicht' in the canto (in line 2) makes grammatical sense, as there is a natural pause after 'vergessen', in which one could almost imagine a comma, followed by the 'dass' clause. The second 'nicht' (in line 3) interrupts the flow and should also logically be followed by 'dass' to complete the list of things that Penelope has not forgotten ('nicht dass du mich verlassen hast und nicht dass die zeit vergeht'). However, an alternative reading of this placement of 'nicht' would be that 'nicht die zeit vergeht', to emphasise that it is not *time* that elapses and passes away, but rather *the body*, which is described after the colon. On a semantic level, then, 'vergehen' anticipates the description of Penelope's physical ageing, which Köhler connects causally to Penelope's memories. Memories are embodied and they age, develop cysts and clusters of tumours. The choice of 'verwachsen' gives the impression that Penelope's memories threaten to engulf and stifle the organism (her body) that hosts them. Memory of physical touch experienced in the past congeals and hardens until the skin that felt the touch becomes like a hard shell, implicitly incapable to appreciating gentle touch.

‘Chitin’ is a word whose Greek origin is ‘covering or dress’ and in contemporary usage is a term for the hard material that constitutes the exoskeleton of insects. Penelope’s memory of the touch of another body – warm, alive and ephemeral – has petrified into hard, warped, bone-like material through neglect. Finally, Penelope dehumanises herself with a description of her body as ‘die hardware der ichmaschine’, heightening the sense of her sadness. Hardware refers both to ironmongery and to the physical housing of an electronic computer and depicts her body as machine-like, echoing Homer’s description of Odysseus’s eyes as being like ‘Horn’ or ‘Eisen’ (in Voss’s translation). The implication is that a lack of love over twenty years and the effort to put a barrier between herself and any other romantic love relations have left Penelope fearing that she has become impervious to love, like Odysseus. Penelope begins to resemble the hardened Odysseus of Homer’s text, quoted above. However, despite this description, the emotionally visceral and material language that Penelope uses to articulate her feelings, and the anger she expresses towards Odysseus for having left her (which she has *not* forgotten), show the reader that, emotionally at least, she is very much alive.

Time in this extract is not conceived of according to the Newtonian model, as a linear succession of moments, that is to say, abstract, homogenous, divisible into units such as seconds, minutes and hours, and universally applicable. Rather, time is marked by the changing, decaying embodied subject, and is non-linear and material. The conceptualisation proposed by Köhler in this passage cannot be divided into units and moves away from a standard Western concept of time to one that is experiential. The psychological aspect of time is signified through the image of embodied memories that develop cysts and tumours: it is time *as* psychologically embodied and material change. The force of time as material change – in the case of Penelope in this canto, as change that tends towards death as she ages – comes into conflict with her weaving trick which, as discussed in Chapter 3, is an attempt to control time. Penelope’s description of herself as a machine is immediately followed by references to the weaving and unweaving that occupy the period preceding Odysseus’s return, when this canto is set. Penelope’s body mimics a machine through the repeated actions the loom demands and, in doing so, tends towards a mechanical temporality, where the passage of time is separate from and not implicated in life. Her trick can be regarded as a labour to avoid the material change (decay) that defines life in response to Odysseus’s demand that she should maintain Ithacan life and herself, fixed as they were at the moment of his departure.

Penelope's deceptive activity at the loom attempts to wield control over time as if it could be paused and suspended from operation. However, as Köhler brings out through her choice of words, even machines age and are in time:

Ich arbeite ihr entgegen
ich lagere aus - mein grabtuch das nicht mein
grabtuch sein wird eine totenhaut die mich am
leben hält die tote haut das kleid CHITIN der
panzer der nicht wächst der text der wort für
wort und nacht für nacht ungesagt wird und un
getan -gemacht gelöscht vom countdown von der
rückwärtsbewegung des schiffchens vom her und
hin ist hin und wieder her nichtwahr gestellt
(*NF*, p. 60)

The repetitive activity of weaving a death shroud is depicted as a form of death-in-life that, ironically keeps her physically alive. Köhler's choice of 'auslagern', a verb that refers not merely to outsourcing but also to the ageing of metal, tarnishing, blurs the boundary between Penelope and the machine, and draws attention to fact that materials used to make weapons and machinery do ultimately decay and are part of the material movement of time. Köhler sets up a connection between the woven 'grabtuch' and Penelope's skin in the above extract with 'eine totenhaut die mich am [/] leben hält die tote haut'. Later in the canto the connection is extended so that the skin / cloth becomes threadbare and develops age spots where once there were freckles: 'die haut im fadenschein die altersflecken [/] oder sommersprossen' (*NF*, p. 61). The threads that have been unwoven and rewoven so many times are ageing and thinning like Penelope's skin.

In contrast to the keenly physical language referring to Penelope are 'Niemand' and 'keinen leib'; for in this canto Odysseus is always referred to using these signifiers of his physical absence. For Penelope, Odysseus has become literally 'keinen leib' or NO BODY because he is simply not there. However, the actions of Penelope's body are determined by those of Odysseus: she must wait, she must preserve Ithaca in the state it was in at the moment of his departure so that he may resume his role as king, attempting (and failing) to suspend the island in time. The contrast between them is represented by the difference in the vessels associated with each: while Odysseus has a 'Schiff', Penelope has a 'Schiffchen' (*NF*, pp. 60-61), which conveys both a condescending diminutive of 'Schiff' and the meaning associated with weaving of 'fly shuttle'. He has a vessel that will

carry him far away; she has an object that roots her to the home, or *oikos*. Her life is a negative echo of his: he leaves, and so she must stay; the passing of *his* time is signified by movement forwards towards a goal, while the passing of *her* time is signified by repetitive movements and the impossible task of ensuring stasis.

Köhler reveals a Penelope who is haunted throughout by the idea of her life lived in negative relation to that of Odysseus: there are twenty-one words of negation in this short text, comprising ‘nicht’ (7x), ‘nichts’ (3x), ‘nie’ (1x), ‘niemand’ (3x), ‘nothing’ (2x), ‘kein’ (3x), ‘zunichte’ (1x), and ‘null’ (1x). Penelope is tortured by words that signify the futility of her situation, revealing her awareness of the absurdity of a life, where ‘von nacht zu nacht’ she must wait for ‘Niemand’. Her frustration is expressed succinctly by the logically paradoxical and despairing sentence that she repeats: ‘Niemand wird kommen’ (NF, p. 61). At both appearances it has a full stop, marking it out as the clearest statement in the whole canto.

Niemand wird kommen. Und
kein tag. Ich werde nichtsein.
(NF, p. 61)

‘Niemand wird kommen’ is simultaneously a positive and a negative statement: if nobody is coming, then nobody is expected, and yet Penelope must wait, night after night for ‘nobody’. Can nobody *arrive*? The refrain recalls Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1949), which opens with Estragon’s similarly paradoxical assertion, ‘Nothing to be done’, and follows with many more such statements.²²² How can ‘nothing’ be done, or ‘nobody’ be waited for? These are above all expressions of futility, and of effort wasted by labouring for ‘nothing’. The decision to write ‘nichtsein’ as one word, suggests the ontological effect of Odysseus’s logic on Penelope, too: as time passes not only does she feel she is becoming ever less ‘his’ [wife] but also less herself. The more he continues not to come, the less she exists as she approaches death through ageing but also exists less *as* Penelope, wife of Odysseus.

The formulation ‘Niemand wird kommen’ suggests a sustained influence of Bachmann’s poetry in this canto, too. Bachmann’s sparse poem ‘Enigma’ (1964–67), begins with the apocalyptic despair of the line ‘Nichts mehr wird kommen’ and closes

²²² Samuel Beckett, *Waiting For Godot* (London: Faber, 1965), p. 9.

with ‘Sonst [/] sagt [/] niemand [/] etwas’.²²³ The structure of Bachmann’s sentences, with the paradoxical juxtapositions of negation and action, anticipate Köhler’s. Bachmann only offers hope ambiguously for the future in the shift from ‘nichts’ to ‘etwas’, anticipating the contrast Köhler’s naming of the first section of the cycle, ‘ZWISCHEN NIEMAND UND ETWAS’. However, the possibility of hope remains ambiguous as it is paradoxically offered by ‘niemand’. Bachmann’s ambiguous and paradoxical resolution foreshadows Köhler’s articulation of Penelope’s hope that ‘Niemand wird kommen’.

The enmeshment of Penelope’s life in a patriarchal web is further elaborated upon by Köhler’s inclusion of an intertextual line from T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*: ‘I can connect nothing with nothing’. In Eliot’s text, a female typist in the ‘Unreal City’ canto speaks the words; the woman is sexually assaulted and then abandoned by a man ‘whose vanity requires no response’ from her. Köhler’s inclusion of this line in this particular canto suggests that she regards Odysseus’s abandonment of Penelope to fight in a war in a similar light. Eliot makes it clear that the voices in his narrative are modern versions of Penelope and Odysseus, naming Tiresias as the narrator of the sordid scenes: ‘I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs / Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest— / I too awaited the expected guest’.²²⁴ Eliot’s Penelope is a typist – a job that is repetitive, oriented around a machine, and carried out by women in the service of men – like the weaving carried out by Homer’s Penelope. The movements back and forth of the typewriter carriage that define the work of the typist can be seen as a modern version of the movements back and forth of the fly shuttle on the loom that characterise Penelope’s weaving.

He promised “a new start.”
I made no comment. What should I resent?’

“On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.”
(*The Waste Land*, ll. 298-302)

²²³ Ingeborg Bachmann, ‘Enigma’, in *Gesammelte Werke*, I, p. 171.

²²⁴ In Homer’s *Odyssee* Tiresias tells Odysseus that Penelope loyally waited for him. *Odyssee*, Book 11, ll. 100-150.

The typist expresses the hopelessness of attempting to reason and make plans based on the ‘nothing’ she was left with, and the ‘nothing’ that his promises amounted to. In *Niemands Frau*, the Eliot reference is immediately followed by Penelope’s reflection on the successions of nothings and non-appearances of her marriage to Odysseus:

kann

etwas zunichte nichts zu etwas machen bleiche
fäden fasern gespannt zwischen nichts & wider
nichts von nacht zu nacht

(*NF*, pp. 60-61)

Penelope questions the logic of her weaving and unweaving; she doubts that her weaving (etwas) and unweaving (nichts) will overcome and destroy the ‘nothing’ that characterises her nights. The difference between ‘etwas’ and ‘nichts’ is elided as the repetition continues both linguistically and in her life: the threads wear thin and almost disappear.

Köhler draws attention to the generational continuation of patriarchy, and Penelope’s pessimism extends to her observation of her son’s development into a man and the misogyny that, in his mission to become ‘one’ (a man), Telemachus learns from his father that women are inferior:²²⁵

ich hatte einen

mann. Ich habe einen sohn der einer sein will
und zählen und beherrschen ich bin eine halbe
sache für ihn

(*NF*, p. 61)

The words ‘eine halbe sache’ recall the German phrase ‘nur halbe Sachen machen’, or in English ‘to do things by halves’. ‘Eine halbe sache’ is always lacking, inadequate and incomplete, and Köhler’s choice of it here highlights Telemachus’s lack of respect for Penelope’s regency. Against Penelope’s experiential expression of life as embodied and thus indivisible, Köhler depicts Telemachus’s patriarchal logic of divide and rule, within which Penelope (as a woman) is valued at less than one.

²²⁵ For more on the significance of counting and gender in *Niemands Frau*, see Chapter 2.

Köhler undermines the rational mode of thought that permits Telemachus to evaluate Penelope as 'eine halbe sache' and instead locates examples of paradox in nature that reveal life to be richer than the repetitive life at the loom:

Niemand wird kommen. Mich friert. Es ist kalt
ist alt ist weiss es wirbelt strudelt stöbert
es ist schnee. Es ist ein fall der keiner ist
die welt ein schweben als wär schwerkraft was
zart was zögerliches und kristalle aus wasser
nebel diese stille in seinen worten tanzendes
schweigen. Schmelzen auf der haut meiner haut
wie tränen prickeln winzige betäubende stiche
das lichte leichte kalte bleiche flockenworte
die alles zudecken: ein leichentuch und wärmt
(*NF*, p. 61)

The multiple meanings of 'Fall', including 'case' or 'instance', as well as the same referent as the English, to descend, form a link between the hopeless paradox of 'Niemand wird kommen' and snow*fall*. The snow simile that Köhler uses refers back to Homer's simile of melting snow, where Penelope cries at the thought of Odysseus's absence. The implication of Homer's simile is that while Odysseus was away Penelope was in emotional hibernation, as if dormant beneath a blanket of snow. Köhler's use of snow is a mirror image of Homer's, insofar as crying becomes a simile to describe snowfall, rather than the inverse. Unlike in Homer's text, Penelope is *not* crying for Odysseus, or indeed crying at all in this canto. Instead Penelope describes in wonderment the dancing, nimble movements of snowflakes, which are performatively expressed through the list of distinctive active verbs, 'wirbelt strudelt stöbert', and the bouncing of 'lichte leichte kalte bleiche'. In spite of the earlier description of Penelope's skin as hard and shell-like, this later passage celebrates the feel of the snowflakes: 'schmelzen auf der haut meiner haut [/] wie tränen prickeln winzige betäubende stiche'. In contrast to the insensitivity of her skin portrayed earlier in the canto, here it is warm and makes the snow melt. Though the sensation of the snow on her skin is slightly painful at first, it also numbs her pain. Furthermore, 'was [/] zart was zögerliches' creates an almost coy hesitancy that anthropomorphises the relationship between the snow and Penelope.

Snow is portrayed as a paradoxical material that delicately hovers between the flow of liquid and crystalline hardness; its floating quality makes even the brutal

downward force of gravity tender and lyrical. Moreover, snow appears to defy the Newtonian laws of gravity, which throughout *Niemands Frau* are associated with patriarchal logic and repression.²²⁶ Snow both falls and resists falling: ‘Es ist ein fall der keiner ist [/] die welt’. Köhler makes an intertextual inversion of the line ‘Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist’ from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1921), also an important influence on Ingeborg Bachmann, to describe the character of snow.²²⁷ In the third and final part of the ‘NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG’ section, Köhler again refers to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and, this time, links the philosopher explicitly with Newton:

Mann kann es (sich) aber
auch einfach machen: die anderen, andere ausschließen,
zum gleichen machen – größer als, kleiner –, verein-
heitlichen, objektivieren (verdingen), sich ihrer
bemächtigen als statisten von statistik und *ranking*
in einer Newton-welt, in der alles der fall ist
(*NF*, p. 89)

Köhler connects Newtonian physics and Wittgenstein’s idea of the world as limited by language as forms of hierarchical (patriarchal) power. She accuses them of reductive simplification of reality and of the living subject itself. The spatially figured references to hierarchy echo the passage from *Wittgensteins Nichte* discussed earlier in this chapter, where Köhler proposes that the task of art is to cause a fall or crash (‘Absturz’) in the systems that create such hierarchical division and create in their place the conditions for love and happiness (‘Love’s Labour’). The idea of ‘flockenworte’, a language modelled on the paradoxical material of snow, points beyond rational limits and hierarchical thinking. Snow speaks a paradoxically silent, resistant and tactile language. Furthermore, each snowflake is a unique, but also complex structure that forms a potent force when joined with other snowflakes – like words joined together. The snow is embodied and is a remedy for the empty, abstract and negative *logos* of ‘Niemand’ that commits Penelope to the absurd situation of spending her life waiting for NO BODY.

The impression that Köhler conveys towards the end of this canto is of Penelope turning away from a form of abstract language whose promise is not fulfilled and instead

²²⁶ See Chapter 2 of this thesis for more on this subject.

²²⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (Frankfurt a. M.: Bibliothek Suhrkamp, 1999), p. 13.

turning to the material world and its more tangible comfort. The change in Penelope is signalled in the shift of the word ‘grabtuch’ to ‘leichtentuch’: she wove the ‘grabtuch’ for Laertes and to preserve Odysseus’s kingdom (and herself) from the suitors’ grasp. The weaving is equated to the labours of Eliot’s typist in *The Waste Land*, and both are carried out for absent or uncaring men. The activities signify the subjugation, petty domesticated labour and empty lives of Penelope and Eliot’s typist, whose activities are pointless and repetitious, always being undone and redone to fill time in between seeing the male ‘heroes’: ‘der text der wort für [/] wort und nacht für nacht ungesagt wird und un [/] getan -gemacht gelöscht vom countdown von der [/] ruckwärtsbewegung des schiffchens vom her und [/] hin ist hin und wieder her’ (NF, p. 60). However, at the end of ‘PENELOPE IM SCHNEE’ the situation is reversed and rather than Penelope weaving (and unweaving) a ‘grabtuch’ for a man, the material world makes a covering *for* Penelope’s body. The natural world produces a snowy ‘leichtentuch’ that is equated not with the tyranny of typed ‘text’, but with ‘flockenworte’, the paradoxical, sensual language that defies the rules set by Newton, Wittgenstein, and even Odysseus. Tenderness is found through touch, and through a form of paradoxical language that ‘crashes’ the inhuman rigour of logical text. The canto begins with Penelope unable to imagine the touch of another body, and finishes with the cold touch of snow that melts on her warming body.

‘WIEDER : ERKENNEN’

The ‘Ich’ of ‘PENELOPE IM SCHNEE’ disappears in the following canto, and there is no individuated speaking subject in the text; rather, it is language that emerges from Penelope’s body and mind as she strains to ‘see’ and to recognise Odysseus. Following the chronology of Homer’s text, ‘WIEDER : ERKENNEN’ finds Penelope at a moment where she senses Odysseus’s physical presence in Ithaca, but has not yet recognised him. The title ‘wiedererkennen’, to recognise (someone / something), is spatially broken up into ‘wieder’ (again) and ‘erkennen’, which as well as meaning ‘to recognise’, brings a more diverse semantic range, including ‘to distinguish’ (as in to make out, visually), to detect, to identify, or the biblical sense of to ‘know’ someone – to have sexual relations with them. Understood in this final sense, the title could cheapen the reunion of Penelope and Odysseus to nothing more than a resumed sexual encounter, in the manner of Eliot’s typist and her disappointing man in *The Waste Land*.

By breaking up ‘wiedererkennen’, Köhler interrupts the word both spatially and semantically with the colon, and the broader reach of ‘erkennen’ introduces ambiguity. The space either side of the colon is a convention repeatedly adopted for the titles of the cantos throughout the cycle but its semantic role in this title anticipates the semantic role of printed words. Furthermore, the separation of the title into two words enacts the separation between Penelope and Odysseus, and Penelope’s struggle to recognise her husband. The spatial separation of the words in the title is echoed and amplified by the physical spacing of the canto on the page, which is divided into two narrow, body-like columns situated on opposite sides of a double page spread. Unlike in the other cantos in the volume, the title here lines up with, and is of identical width, to the column of the body text, drawing attention to the layout as significant. Blank empty space yawns between the two columns, which are the narrowest in *Niemands Frau*, creating the impression of two people standing at opposite sides of a room, or at least very much separated.

WIEDER : ERKENNEN

in gegenlicht auf
 gelöste kontur er
 in erinnerung: bl
 leib blei bleiben
 in innerer bla in
 blau er in blauer
 in jacke in stadt
 an statt erinnert
 rinnt es verrinnt
 zeit & mehr immer
 meer und blau und
 im erinnern in ihm
 und ihr der er in
 erinnert sie sich
 wer ist das innen
 wer inne wer hält
 was sie & wäre er

wäre er & wäre in
 wäre ihr wäre sie
 sein in er & sinn
 ihrer & irr sirrt
 ver er erinnertes
 geirrte sich sich
 er erfahrenes sie
 sich siech & eine
 gefahr gefährdete
 fahren & fort für
 ja für jahre fort
 sofort so gern so
 fern sich gesehen
 so ferne von sich
 von licht & gegen
 licht augen licht
 sieht sie & nicht

Like the canto ‘GEWEBEPROBE : PENELOPE’ (NF, pp. 24-25), discussed in Chapter 3, ‘WIEDER : ERKENNEN’ is clearly influenced by the ‘konkrete poesie’ movement, and in particular, the third and fourth lines of Köhler’s canto, ‘bl [/] leib blei bleiben’,

recall Gerhard Rühm's *konkrete poesie* love poem, which uses the physical space of the page to unite, rather than separate bodies:

leib leib leib leib
leib leib leib leib
leib leib leib leib
leib leib leib leib
leib leib leib leib
leib leib leib leib
leib leib leib leib
leib leib leibleib²²⁸

In Rühm's poem the link between the semantic level on which the text operates and its embodiment (or its 'leib' as lettering printed in ink on paper) are in dialogue; their interdependence is revealed when the insertion of one additional space on the final line and removal of another produces new meaning. When two of the words move closer together it is as if the printed lexeme possesses an almost autonomous will. The fact that the word 'bleib' is formed from the two words lends an emotional and possibly sexual layer to the poem and suddenly the words on the page become anthropomorphic. '[B]leib' becomes one of the final words of the poem – as well as 'leib' – and the reader is left with the image of two bodies, passing time together, as the poem does not progress further. In Köhler's play with the word 'bleiben' she identifies the additional variant 'blei' (lead), suggesting that Penelope feels her relationship to Odysseus is a burden: 'er [/] in erinnerung: bl [/] leib blei bleiben'.

Where 'PENELOPE IM SCHNEE' maintains a relatively high level of grammatical coherence, 'WIEDER : ERKENNEN' challenges the language's ability to signify and causes the reader to enact a failure of recognition. Penelope's failure to recognise Odysseus through his disguise and after ageing is demonstrated in Köhler's canto through the breakdown of language, both on the level of its graphic presence and semantically. It seems likely from the title and the content of the canto that 'WIEDER : ERKENNEN' continues in Penelope's voice. Odysseus's contours appear as if they are backlit ('in gegenlicht'), a form of lighting that makes the body look like a black shadow,

²²⁸ Gerhard Rühm, 'bleib', in *konkrete poesie*, ed. Eugen Gomringer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001), p. 122.

an absence of light, with edges that glow. Penelope's visual impression of 'Niemand' /Odysseus is as if he were an outline with nothing in the middle, a negative space. Even the contours are shaky, as the choice of 'auf [/] gelöste' brings the mixed meanings of 'decomposed', 'dissolved' and 'exhausted', both indicating that the memory is old and decaying, and gesturing to the fact that the Odysseus who returns will be aged.

Incoherent fragments litter the text, such as 'bl' and 'bla', which could belong to any language whatever or none at all: the letters may not be a fragment *of* any word in particular. The reader is forced to read closely and slowly, as one word on the page often resembles the next but fails to 'make sense' and produce a meaning that relates to the world. 'WIEDER : ERKENNEN' is formed of language that emerges from the body – from Penelope's physical experience of straining to sense Odysseus's body.

*Mis*recognitions are encouraged by the language as by Homer's Odysseus: a printed sign on the page will look like a word but not be the word it appears to gesture to. Having presented the reader with cognates of 'erinnern' (erinnerung (3) erinnert (8)), Köhler introduces 'erinnen' (12), which initially looks like 'erinnern', but on closer inspection relates to another sequence that has been built up of 'er [/] in', 'in innerer' and 'er in'. The plasticity and potential for nuance and difference in language is demonstrated in a way that is reminiscent of minimalist musical composition. Words are in disguise as other words (as Odysseus is) either physically on the page, or as homophones on the recording that accompanies the printed text. With 'mehr immer [/] meer', 'ihrer & irr sirrt', 'ja für jahre' and 'fort [/] sofort so fern so [/] fern', the aural dimension as well as the visual produces a cacophonous effect, from which distinct forms are difficult to distinguish: the canto 'sirrt' (buzzes). The reader's attention is focussed on the interdependency between memory, language and recognition, and Köhler plays with the reader's ability to recognise and make sense of language.

The question that hangs over this canto is to be found on the first page: 'wer ist das innen' (who is that on the inside, or within?). For twenty years, the only Odysseus that Penelope had a relation with was in memory, and Odysseus's incarnation in the present moment may well conflict with his existence in her memory. It is also possible that Penelope yearns to move beyond the barrier that Odysseus puts between himself and the world and to access his *within* – to experience an authentic moment of relation with her estranged husband. So significant is the separation between Odysseus and Penelope that she cannot be certain that it is him at all, reflected in the use of Konjunktiv II following Penelope's haltingly reformulated question: 'wer ist das innen [/] wer inne

wer hält [/] was sie & wäre er [/] wäre er & wäre in'. In the following line, she cautiously asks: 'wäre sie [/] sein' – would she be his? If he is Odysseus, then she is his wife and that has implications for her status in Ithaca.

The canto ends with the ambiguous statement 'sieht sie & nicht' leaving the reader in doubt whether Penelope has recognised Odysseus or not, or whether she has recognised and rejected him. Just as in Homer's text discussed earlier, Penelope's feelings and motivations with regard to Odysseus are unclear. There is no sense of mutuality in this canto or of Odysseus returning Penelope's look. No renewal of love can take place without the collapse of Odysseus's disguise and a willingness to let himself be 'seen' by Penelope and also to return her look to create an essential moment of relation, as described by Due in his analysis of love. The question of whether, after years travelling as 'Niemand', it is even possible for Odysseus to be recognised any longer, or for him to let down his guard, is taken up in the nineteenth canto.

'NACHTSTÜCK : ARRHYTHMIE'

The final canto considered here, 'NACHTSTÜCK : ARRHYTHMIE' (NF, pp. 64-65), draws upon the scene in Homer's text in which Odysseus and Penelope are in bed together after he has revealed his identity to her. However, as the title indicates, the course of love does not run smoothly in Köhler's re-imagining of their nocturnal reunion. The genre of 'Nachtstück' (night piece) originated in painting in dark, moonlight night scenes using the *chiaroscuro* technique prominent in the work of Caravaggio, Hieronymus Bosch and Caspar David Friedrich from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. In German literature the term is synonymous with the disorientating, uncanny work of E.T.A Hoffmann, who wrote the volume *Nachtstücke* (1817) containing the well-known text, 'Der Sandmann'.²²⁹ Characteristic of a literary *Nachtstück* is a narrative in which a protagonist, affected by psychological trauma or seized by demons (depending on interpretation), loses the ability to differentiate between hallucination and reality, and is tormented by terrifying visions.

In this canto, Köhler suggests that Penelope is unable to tell whether Odysseus has really returned, or is a televisual hallucination, doubting her own perception: 'vielleicht er ist nicht [/] hier' (NF, p. 64). She does not name him other than as 'er' and

²²⁹ E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, ed. Gerhard Kaiser (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003).

‘Niemand’ and ‘ein Mann’, and his physicality is described in detached and almost disgusted language: ‘fremde haut der vormund steht [/] offen & schnarcht’ (*NF*, pp. 64-65). As well as being an anatomical word referring to the mouth, ‘Vormund’ has the additional meaning of ‘guardian’ in a legal sense, adding another layer of alienation to their marital relationship by reducing Penelope to the status of a child. Towards the close of the canto Penelope describes Odysseus as a mere image, building on her anxiety that he may not be fully ‘present’: ‘Ein bild von einem mann [/] & nichts dahinter’ (*NF*, p. 65). Where the ‘bogeyman’ in ‘Der Sandmann is associated with alchemical magic and optical technologies that threaten the protagonist Nathanael’s sight, Penelope’s sense of the inadequacy or lack of Odysseus’s presence, even when he is physically present, is represented by the image of a flickering black-and-white television screen.

In a highly associative set of short phrases, Köhler blurs the distinctions between Penelope’s ageing body, the television and her feelings about her marriage. ‘Ich seh nichts [/] oder schwarz. Ich weiss: für bunte bilder [/] ist es zu dunkel. Sendeschluss empfängnis [/] ausgeschaltet. Mnemopause’. The images build cumulatively to become a complex, pulsating whole, inextricable from each other, with each addition adding another dimension to Penelope’s experience of her life. Her ageing becomes blended with an image of a television receiver that is turned off; the blank screen becomes an articulation of pessimism with the idiomatic ‘schwarzsehen’; Köhler’s neologism ‘Mnemopause’ suggests in a tone of wry humour, that as well as having experienced the menopause, Penelope’s memory of Odysseus is also failing her. ‘Test [/] bild schwarzweiss: systole, diastole. The medicalised description of Penelope’s beating heart is made analogous to a test-card, the generic image that is shown when there is no television being aired late at night, surrounded by a black and white fuzz of dots. Her heart is screening black and white, not the joyful exuberance of Technicolor, and it does receive enough signal (from Odysseus) to display an image of a couple, or to show the narrative of a marriage: there is nothing to play.

Köhler equates Penelope and Odysseus with the binary code that produces the black and white pixels on a TV screen: ‘Das [/] herz. Mein Herz. Binärer code. Ich weiss. [/] Du schwarz’. Binary code is made up of 0s and 1s, with white as 0 and black as 1. Now that Odysseus has returned, he is ‘1’ and she is ‘0’. As mentioned, he is named in the canto as Penelope’s legal guardian, meaning that his return signals a return to the position of a minor or ‘eine halbe sache’ for Penelope (*NF*, p. 61). Penelope repeatedly refers to herself as the ‘0’ side of the binary in the canto, now re-established.

Repurposing 'heimspiel' from the football pitch to a domestic battleground, Köhler uses a sports metaphor to articulate that Penelope has 'lost' in the game of who runs the household. She must resume her gendered role, which means that she will always lose and be silenced by playing the domestic game: 'Das heimspiel 0 : 1 – verloren [/] den halt, den mundhalt' (*NF*, p. 64).

Highly interrupted 'arrhythmic' syntax, where single words or pairs of words are often followed by full stops, contributes to the impression that Penelope is emotionally disturbed by Odysseus's inadequate presence. Her disturbance is physical too: arrhythmia is a medical condition where the sufferer has an irregular heartbeat, which can cause heart attacks. Penelope's arrhythmia and the flickering screen are represented in the layout of the canto, in another example of Köhler's engagement with 'Konkrete Poesie'. Spacing between lines of text alternates between double and 1.5, conjuring the image of a flickering TV screen, or a heart monitor. The space between heartbeats is longer with the double spacing and shorter with the single spacing. Towards the end, as Penelope speaks of death, the spacing becomes wider again, possibly suggesting a weaker heartbeat or signal and the fading of the picture. Patriarchy and Odysseus's inability to be 'present' or loving under its conditions is killing Penelope.

The night, when Odysseus sleeps, provides a safe time and space in which Penelope can express her own subversive will; it is the 'nachtseite des abendlands', as Köhler describes it in the last canto *DIE KATZ* (*NF*, p. 66). Penelope's earlier, Homeric subversion of weaving at night is replaced in this canto by the contemporary 'web' of the Internet, which provides her with a virtual space for subversive language.

Penelope online rede zerrede
trennt was sie bindet widerworte & aber
witz ein unerhörtes sprechen
(*NF*, p. 65)

Her (online) language is described as 'widerworte' and 'aberwitz', 'ein unerhörtes sprechen' (*NF* p. 65), playing into the discourse of women's speech as 'minor' and illegitimate. Unlike her wordless unweaving of threads in the *Odyssey*, Penelope's linguistic unweaving on the internet is not seeking to preserve her marriage; rather, out of earshot of Odysseus, she questions its basis, taking refuge in the virtual world: 'das gewebe mit anderen worten: [/] DIE TEXTUR – ich habe keine andern worte [/] solange er nicht

hört'. The threat of him hearing her 'other words' is enough to silence her during the day: she only speaks them when he cannot hear. Given the candid criticism of Odysseus by Penelope in this canto, perhaps Köhler conceives of *Niemands Frau* as a space for radical speech. Perhaps the '[G]ewebe' to which the canto refers is not only Penelope's woven cloth and the internet, but also *Niemands Frau*.

Penelope's retreat to the disembodied, virtual realm and her experience of becoming nullified by Odysseus's return suggest further influence of Ingeborg Bachmann, from the final lines of her novel *Malina* (1971). At the end of *Malina* the female subject 'Ich' disappears into a crack in the wall after sitting in silence, waiting for Malina, the man she is involved with, to speak to her and bring her into existence:

Ich stehe auf und denke, wenn er nicht sofort etwas sagt, wenn er mich nicht
aufhält, ist es Mord, und ich entferne mich, weil ich es nicht mehr sagen kann.
Ich bin an die Wand gegangen, ich gehe in die Wand, ich halte den Atem an.
[...]
Es ist eine sehr alte, eine sehr starke Wand, aus der niemand fallen kann, die
niemand aufbrechen kann, aus der nie mehr etwas laut werden kann.

Es war Mord.²³⁰

Bachmann's final line highlights the intrinsic violence of the gendered relationship between 'Ich' and Malina. Without the acknowledgement of Malina, 'Ich' finds that she is unable to speak and unable to exist. Finally, Malina denies that she exists over the phone ('Hier ist keine Frau') and as he does this, he breaks her possessions and then removes all material traces of her from her flat. The wall at the end – the very old, very strong wall from which only 'niemand' can escape – is easily associated with the patriarchal power dynamic that finally destroyed 'Ich', encasing her within its confines, becoming a silent part of the domestic space over which Malina presides. The fury and despair in Bachmann's representation of gendered relationships and the absurd imagery she uses to convey the destruction of the female subject anticipate Köhler's treatment of Penelope's and Odysseus's marriage. It is Odysseus's voice that reigns during the day, so Penelope uses hers *against* him at night when he is asleep. Just as when Odysseus was away and she

²³⁰ Bachmann, 'Malina' in *Werke*, III, pp. 9-339 (pp. 336-337).

took to weaving to protect herself from the men in Ithaca, now, a modern Penelope takes to tapping into the keyboard and night to save herself from the boredom and possibly tyranny of her marriage.

Finally, a disillusioned and disenfranchised Penelope questions the basis of love and thus of her marriage to Odysseus:

Ich

bin nicht eins Du bist nicht Niemand wer
spricht mit dir wer hört mir zu was soll
das heissen Ich Liebe Dich & warum musste
ich dran glauben was hab ich was hast du
mir vorgestellt? Ein bild von einem mann

& nichts dahinter

(*NF*, p. 65)

Penelope's experience of their co-presence after twenty years apart fails to convey to her the meaning of the words 'Ich Liebe Dich': she does not recognise this man, who has been so long in disguise that for her, he is reduced to an image with nothing behind it. They cannot share the moment of mutual understanding and the collapse of hierarchical relations that Köhler and Due identify as essential in their analyses of love. Odysseus has become a disembodied projection of a man for Penelope and, more than this, her relative identity as his wife is unclear: 'Ich / bin nicht eins Du bist nicht Niemand wer / spricht mit dir wer hört mir zu'. Her identity for twenty years was that of Odysseus's wife, effectively taking his place in power, and that identity sustained her function in Ithaca. However, now that he has returned, she no longer recognises him, creating a crisis of identity for her too. She longs for the unity of a love relation that she can no longer imagine:

Kein

wort. Die sucht zu sehen. Wäre ich blind
wäre ich eins. Mit dir. Mein schwarz das
nichtweiss wie mir graut & dämmert es ver
fließt die gegenzeit. Stromauf. Die Styx.

(*NF* p. 65)

She yearns for the one-on-one first-person relation of love, and of the unity of the moment of love, but Odysseus does not return her look, and thus there cannot be a shared moment of 'one-ness'. His refusal to grant mutuality and equality in their relationship extinguishes the possibility that there can be a love relation between them, at least according to Köhler's conception of it. She plays on the multiple meanings of 'graut' of to 'dread' and also, to 'dawn' (become morning) and 'dawn on' someone to spell out Penelope's realisation that the fight against time is almost over.

Conclusion

In the cantos discussed in this chapter Köhler constructs a conceivable psychological portrayal of Penelope that conveys her feelings of despair with regard to the return of Odysseus, her failure to recognise him, and finally her disillusionment with marriage and with the possibility of love between them after he has revealed his identity. Köhler conveys the intense suffering of Penelope's years alone, ruled over by the threat of Odysseus's return and what it would entail. The barriers to love between Penelope and Odysseus lie in Odysseus's insistence on his position as 'Niemand', in the structural inequality of patriarchal definitions of gender, and in his long-term absence.

The truth of Penelope's mortality is driven home by Köhler's intensely physical language in 'PENELOPE IM SCHNEE', portraying her physical and emotional decline, waiting for Odysseus. Her bleak account of Odysseus's return in 'NACHTSTÜCK : ARRHYTHMIE' conveys the inadequacies of love in the context of patriarchy that does not permit a woman to speak her mind in the light of day. Moreover, the insidious violence of patriarchy is made clear: Penelope is trapped in a situation designed by male rule and it has taken her life. However, as in Bachmann's *Malina*, where the 'Ich' resists disappearance through the fact of her writing and of the text in which her voice dominates, by devoting these emotional cantos to Penelope, Köhler ensures that the reader is left with a powerful impression of Penelope's voice. Köhler's criticism of a unified subject who says 'Ich' elsewhere is challenged in these cantos by her desire to give Penelope adequate representation. Penelope's 'Ich' has an important function in recounting her feelings, but her 'Ich' is not divorced from her body, and she does not speak from 'nowhere'. Penelope makes her angry, dying, lonely presence felt to recount the effects of being married to 'Niemand' for twenty years.

Chapter 6

Tiresias, Turing and Dystopian Transformations in Köhler's *Waste Land*

As well as criticism of the Western intellectual and literary tradition and politics, Köhler expresses concern about the future in *Niemands Frau*. In particular, she articulates anxiety about the growing influence of science and computer technology upon human life. Computer science and genetic engineering are treated in the cycle as realisations of modes of thought that subjugate the differentiated body and mind. Tiresias, who in Greek myth is the blind seer of Thebes, and Alan Turing (1912-1954), the mathematician and cryptanalyst who played a key role in the invention of computers, are brought together to explore dystopian transformations in *Niemands Frau*. Though Tiresias is a literary character and Turing was a real man, both transgressed norms of gender and sexuality and were brutally punished as a result. Both Tiresias and Turing are prophetic figures too: Tiresias in the literal sense of being a 'seer' of future events, consulted by Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*, and Turing, in that he conceived of, and helped to create, a computerised future.

Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* is a key intertext in Köhler's exploration of Tiresian themes. In Eliot's modernist version of the seer, Tiresias witnesses debased relations between the genders and an alienated, automated relationship between the human subject and the body.²³¹ In *Niemands Frau*, Köhler foresees the future as a place where corporeal life is replaced by virtual projections, inauthentic pastiches, screens and computerised simulations. In three thematically interlinked cantos that take stylistic cues from *The Waste Land*, 'TURNING / TURING' (NF, pp. 18-19), 'DEAD MAN' S CHESS' (NF, pp. 32-34), and 'HADES : PROJEKTION HADES' (NF, pp. 35-38), Köhler asks urgent questions about the relationship between the embodied subject, hegemonic power, and a future shaped by computer technology and capitalism.

In this chapter, I will first provide a summary of classical reception concerning the figure of Tiresias, in which I highlight narratives that are relevant for Köhler's treatment of him in *Niemands Frau*. Second, I will provide close readings of the cantos

²³¹ Eliot, 'The Waste Land', pp. 67-70.

that feature Tiresias and Alan Turing. In these, Köhler reflects on a history that represses the queer body and a future that she perceives as threatening to efface corporeal reality entirely. In my reading of 'TURNING / TURING' I will show how Köhler formulates a queer, repressed genealogy of Western culture that bears witness to the punishment of generations of women and queer men, concluding with Alan Turing, whom she compares with Tiresias. Then, in a reading of 'DEAD MAN' S CHESS', I demonstrate how Köhler takes on the role of seer to imagine the dystopian possibilities of Alan Turing's role in the invention of computers, linking his death with the triumph of computers and of genetic science over the human subject. Finally, in 'HADES : PROJEKTION : HADES', Köhler features different versions of Tiresias in a modern re-imagining of Hades. In a longer commentary, I analyse Köhler's vision of hell as blue screens, projected realities and dangerously forgetful apathy.

The Tiresias Tradition

In Homer's *Odyssey* the sorceress Circe sends Odysseus to the underworld so that Tiresias, the blind seer of Thebes, can tell him a prophecy to help him return to Ithaca. She knows that, even in the underworld, the Theban shade retains his foresight and intelligence:

Aber ihr müßt zuvor noch eine Reise vollenden,
Hin zu Aides' Reich und der strengen Persephoneia,
Um des thebaiischen Greises Teiresias Seele zu fragen,
Jenes blinden Propheten mit ungeschwächtem Verstande.
Ihm gab Persephoneia im Tode selber Erkenntnis,
Und er allein ist weise; die andern sind flatternde Schatten.
(*Odyssee*, Book 10, ll. 490-495)

Two of Köhler's cantos loosely follow the chronology of Homer's depiction of Odysseus's journey to the underworld: 'HADES : PROJEKTION : HADES' and 'HADES : LEKTÜRE : HADES'. The story of Tiresias's life before his death is not

related in the *Odyssey*, but there are numerous versions in Greek and Roman classical literature, as well as in modern texts.²³²

Luc Brisson's study of Tiresias presents the manifold variants of the Tiresias myth and identifies three key strands, within which there are further variations.²³³ The most persistent strand, according to Brisson, is that in which Tiresias was transformed into a woman, before being turned back into a man. His transformation gave him knowledge from having embodied both genders. The earliest narrative of this type is found in a poem by Hesiod (c. 750-650 BC), contemporary to Homer. In Hesiod's poem Tiresias comes across two snakes mating on Mount Cithaeron and, after killing the female with his staff, is turned into a woman. He subsequently kills the male and is turned back into a man. As a result of his experience he is asked by Hera and Zeus to settle a dispute as to whether men or women gain more pleasure from sex, to which he replies: 'in only one portion out of ten portions a man has delight, but the ten a woman fills out, delighting her senses', indicating that women's pleasure is far greater.²³⁴ His answer angers Hera who then blinds him, but in compensation, Zeus gives him a seer's power and a long life (he lives for seven generations). It has been suggested elsewhere that the notoriously jealous Hera was angry because Tiresias had given Zeus an excuse for his promiscuity – that men obtain proportionally less pleasure from sex than women, necessitating a greater volume.²³⁵

Significantly later in the classical period, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (AD 8) falls within the same strand of Brisson's taxonomy as Hesiod's tale and is cited by Köhler in the 'NOTEN' to 'TURNING / TURING' (*NF*, p. 93). In Ovid's text Juno and Jupiter (the Latinate nomenclature of Hera and Zeus) consult Tiresias about whether men or women have more pleasure in sex because 'he'd experienced love from both angles' (*Metamorphoses*, Book 3, l. 323). However, Ovid's text differs by omitting the gender of the snakes and does not state that Tiresias kills them, but rather that he hits them. It adds

²³² Classical sources include Homer's *Odyssey* (800 BC), poems by Hesiod (750-650 BC), Sophocles's *Antigone* (441 BC) and *Oedipus the King* (441 BC), Euripides's *The Phoenician Women* (412-410 BC) and *The Bacchae* (406 BC), Seneca's *Oedipus* (1 BC-99) and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

²³³ Luc Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence and Androgyny in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 115-130.

²³⁴ Hesiod, 'The Melampodia' in *Works*, ed. and trans. Glenn Most (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), II: *The Shield. The Catalogue of Women. Other Fragments*, p. 287.

²³⁵ Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Vintage, 1996), pp. 598-600.

the detail that Tiresias is a woman for seven years; in the eighth year he sees the same snakes, hits them again and recovers his male form (*Metamorphoses*, Book 3, ll. 316-339).²³⁶

The second strand defined by Brisson is that in which Tiresias is blinded because he sees Athena bathing naked. There are several variants to this strand. Brisson focuses on Callimachus's (305-249 BC) Hymn V, 'On the Bath of Pallas'. In the hymn, Athena gives Tiresias foresight, a friendship with birds, a staff to guide his feet and the retention of his intelligence in Hades, after Tiresias's mother Chariclo protests against his physical blinding.²³⁷ The Athena variant also appears in the *Library* of Apollodorus (c. 200-100 BC) as a reference to a narrative by Pherecydes (c. 600 BC), where Chariclo gives Tiresias the gift of being able to understand the language of birds as recompense. The third strand that Brisson describes is cited by Eustathius of Thessalonica (c. AD 1115-1195) as originating from the elegiac poem 'Tiresias' by Sostrates; this strand is more obscure than the others and less frequently referred to in subsequent traditions.²³⁸ It comprises seven episodes in which Tiresias is first a woman, then a man, and passes through the seven ages of life, finally changing into a mouse. This third strand diverges from the first two in the important respect that Tiresias is originally female.

In Apollodorus's summary of various different Tiresias narratives, he states that 'the gods blinded Tiresias as a punishment for having divulged to the human race what they wanted to keep concealed'.²³⁹ What exactly it is that the gods want to keep concealed is knowledge of sex for both genders. Tiresias has sexual relations with men and with women, both as a man and as a woman. His corporeal knowledge therefore crosses a boundary that has played a significant role in the way that Western cultures have defined themselves and threatens to collapse the idea of 'essential' difference between men and women. Mythographer Marina Warner describes Tiresias as 'Pindar's prophet of truth, [...] credited with a special knowledge of sex'. Warner's analysis of the Tiresias myth focuses on the significance of the fact that his transformation into a woman is punishment for *sexual* knowledge (of the snakes) and refers to a narrative in which Tiresias was a successful female prostitute in Thebes.²⁴⁰ Corporeal, sensual knowledge that breaks down the abstract and theoretical boundaries placed on gender and sexuality

²³⁶ Ibid., pp. 108-109.

²³⁷ Callimachus, 'On The Bath of Pallas' in *Callimachus, Lycophron, Aratus, Hymns and Epigrams. Lycophron: Alexandra. Aratus: Phaenomena*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. A.W. Mair, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 124-136.

²³⁸ Brisson, pp. 127-130.

²³⁹ Apollodorus, *The Library*, pp. 109-110.

²⁴⁰ Warner, p. 598.

is what gets Tiresias into the most trouble. What Tiresias knows through his embodied experiences threatens the means through which successive cultural and political norms have regulated and restricted the human subject.

The Athena variant of the Tiresias tradition, Brisson's second strand, shares narrative features with a story in Book 3 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where the goddess Diana turns the hero Actaeon into a stag after he sees her bathing naked when hunting with his hounds. In Ovid's tale, cited by Köhler elsewhere in *Niemands Frau* (NF, p. 53, p. 100), Actaeon's own hounds then kill and devour him, which turns the hunter into the hunted (*Metamorphoses*, Book 3, ll. 194-98). In the Tiresias and Actaeon narratives, transformation into a woman (Tiresias), blinding (Tiresias) and transformation into a prey animal (Actaeon) are punishment for sexual transgression. Furthermore, the transgression that is the trigger for punishment in each case is the act of 'seeing', bearing witness to naked or sexualised bodies. In Hesiod's and Ovid's versions, Tiresias is twice punished for acts of bearing witness: once for seeing the snakes and once for bearing witness to sexual relations with both men *and* women. The initial act of voyeurism, watching the snakes, is punished through the ostensibly sexually and socially disempowering transformation into a woman. However, in his answer he privileges woman's sexuality as more pleasurable than man's, inverting the logic that underlies his punishment. Moreover, when he answers Hera's question, he gives a woman's *and* a man's perspective on sexual pleasure: Tiresias gives voice to women's desire, although it is a transgendered perspective.

Much later, in the pre-modern period, the focus shifts from Tiresias's gender and his knowledge of sex to his powers of foresight. He notably appears in the tenth canto of Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* (c. 1320) where he is subject to the concerns of contemporary Christian morality.²⁴¹ Dante places Tiresias in the eighth circle of hell, 'where Diviners, Astrologers, Magicians, all have their head turned backward', which Köhler refers to in the canto, 'DEAD MAN' S CHESS', discussed in this chapter (NF, p. 34). Although his foresight was valued in Ancient Greece, in the Catholic culture of fourteenth-century Italy such powers placed Tiresias in sinful competition with God, for only God was permitted to have knowledge of the future. Ironically, one could argue that this punishment would have no effect on Tiresias, given the disembodied nature of his sight (Canto XX, ll. 40-45). However, turning the heads around to face backwards is a literal

²⁴¹ Dante Alighieri, 'Inferno', in *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Everyman's Library, 1995), pp. 141-144.

expression of the effect of foresight on the life of a 'seer'. If the future is already known, then the unfolding of present is experienced as if it were in the past and thus, regarded, topographically, as 'behind'.

Modern Tiresias Reception

The fluidity of Tiresias's gender and sexuality in ancient texts constitutes a foundational and legitimising precedent for literary explorations of queer gender among modern authors. Tiresias's movement between male and female genders can arguably be regarded as having a 'de-essentialising' effect on gender as an identity category, and therefore on the heteronormative sexuality that is maintained in part by the idea of corresponding and gender characteristics. Tiresias can be seen as opening up the possibility of anti-essentialist and performative notions of selfhood and of 'queering' gender positions.

In this chapter I consider the term 'queer' as 'by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate and the dominant' and as originating from the body.²⁴² Ed Madden's extensive study of the modernist tradition, which formulates the notion of 'Tiresian poetics', identifies Tiresias's queer physical gender and sexuality as the origin of his prophetic insight:

There is something very queer about Tiresias. Blind Seer, articulate dead and mythic transsexual, he has always represented a kind of liminal identity, and with a special knowledge attributed to – or acquired as the result of the crossing of epistemological and ontological boundaries.²⁴³

Physical queerness frees him/her from the ontological and cultural straitjacket of essentialising discourse about the gendered subject since the late nineteenth century in Western culture. What Madden identifies is the connection between the possibilities for embodiment and possibilities for knowledge and for 'Being'. The queer body (not just homosexual or transgendered but also non-heterosexual-male in general) is a source of knowledge that can challenge the boundaries that constitute the normative. Likewise, in Homer's *Odyssey*, the Sirens, whose hybrid status breaks the taboo of mixing animal and

²⁴² David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault. Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 62.

²⁴³ Ed Madden, *Tiresian Poetics. Modernism, Sexuality, Voice, 1888-2001* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), p. 13.

human bodies, have access to all knowledge: the boundaries of the body constitute boundaries to the knowable, and the thinkable.

The consequence of Tiresias's movement across boundaries of gender and sexuality in classical (and modern) texts is the loss of his status as a mortal (his life extends to seven generations), losing sight of the physical world, and banishment to the cerebral realm. His mind lives on after death, signalling the shift of his life from body to mind, like an ideally rational Cartesian subject. In the punishment of Tiresias lies a tension between the sexual and prophetic knowledge that Western culture deems as permissible for mere mortals, and what belongs in the realm of gods. This insight underpins Madden's use of the adjective "Tiresian":

When he (or she) appears in twentieth century literature, [...] the boundaries crossed are primarily sexual boundaries, and the liminal and the prophetic knowledge integral to modern Tiresian mythologies is, more often than not, predicated on sexual knowledge.²⁴⁴

Indeed, for modernist authors Tiresias offered a classical precedent for literary exploration of non-normative and non-essentialist gender and sexuality. At the turn of the twentieth century, Western culture experienced an ontological crisis that had questions of gender and sexuality at its core. Writers and artists reached around for new ways of thinking about gender. Tiresias is a figure of the fringes and not of hegemonic power. His transsexuality and bisexuality, located in canonical works of literature at a period when homosexual sex was illegal in many countries (such as the UK where homosexual sex was illegal until 1957), legitimised artistic discussion of taboo themes. As a seer, an outsider figure, and through his multigenerational longevity, Tiresias is well positioned to assist authors in literary reflection on the 'state of things' both from the fringes and over time.²⁴⁵

The first Surrealist play, Guillaume Apollinaire's comedy 'Les mamelles de Tirésias' (The Mammaries of Tiresias, 1903), updates Sostrates' version of the myth and begins with Tiresias as a woman called 'Thérèse', who decides to become a man in protest at the pressure on women to repopulate the country. At the beginning of the

²⁴⁴ Madden, p. 13.

²⁴⁵ Halperin, p. 62; Pericles Lewis, *Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 30, p. 139.

play, set in Africa, her breasts float away and she forces her husband into her dress, and renames herself 'Tiresias'. Her husband then gives birth to over 40,000 children, but the numbers cause a food shortage. Finally Tirésias, who has become commander in chief of the army, rips off her costume and reveals herself as Thérèse/Tirésias.²⁴⁶ The play, first written in 1903 to address issues of feminism and pacifism, and later revised in response to the First World War, caused a riot when it was premiered in 1917. It was intended to be absurd, but its reversal of gender and inversion of bourgeois values (even if comically) was too challenging for contemporary audiences. The composer François Poulenc, turned Apollinaire's play into a more famous two-act comic opera (1944) of the same name, and altered the setting from Africa to an imaginary town on the French Riviera. Poulenc's feminist, pacifist rendering was generally well received by international critics, though its opening night still caused a stir of outrage among audiences.²⁴⁷ In both versions of the tale the change in Thérèse's gender role triggers a change in her husband's gender role too. The collapse of one half of the gender binary disrupts sex-gender roles for both men and women, perhaps implying that without the insistence on essential difference between men and women, the firm division between the two sexes would break down to produce more fluid, queered embodiments of gender.

Virginia Woolf's 'Tiresian' novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), loosely based on the life of her lover Vita Sackville-West, can be thought of as an update on the Tiresias myth. While her character is not named 'Tiresias', Orlando's gender switching, sexual adventures and transgenerational longevity, stretched over three centuries, certainly make him/her an unavoidable literary double.²⁴⁸ Orlando was born a man in the court of Queen Elizabeth I, and was a writer. He/she has a series of love affairs through the centuries, including with Elizabeth I. Orlando, like Sostrates's Tiresias, switches between gender roles multiple times, which feminist literary theorists Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan

²⁴⁶ Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (Paris: Édition Sic, 1918); Guillaume Apollinaire, 'The Mammaries of Tiresias', in *Three Surrealist Plays*, trans. Maya Slater (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); *The Columbia Encyclopaedia of Modern Drama*, eds Gabrielle H. Cody and Evert Sprinchorn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 189-190.

²⁴⁷ Kristen Stromberg Childers, *Fathers, Families and France. 1914-1945* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 1-2.

²⁴⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London: Penguin, 2006); Lewis, p. 30; Warner, p. 100; Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land. The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century. Volume II: Sex Changes* (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 343-346; Theodore Ziolkowski, *Ovid and the Moderns* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005) pp. 94-98; Susan J. Wolfson, *Borderlines: The Shifting of Gender in British Romanticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006) pp. 166-167.

Gubar identify as challenging the idea of biological destiny, communicating instead the idea of gender and sexuality as fluid and changeable:

Woolf comically eschews specific descriptions of bodily alternations that mark Orlando's metamorphosis, [...] this is not because sexually defining costumes are false and selves are true but because costumes are selves and thus easily, fluidly, interchangeable.²⁴⁹

Woolf uses her Tiresian figure to break down the perception of masculine and feminine sexes as essential and intrinsically separate.

The most significant intertext that Köhler engages with to develop her poetic representation of Tiresias is Eliot's *The Waste Land*. In contrast with Woolf's avoidance of physical features of Orlando's gender-switching, Eliot draws particular attention to Tiresias's physical queerness. Rather than just painting Tiresias as being first man and then woman, Eliot describes the body of a man with wrinkled breasts in *The Waste Land*. He does not shy from imagining the corporeal reality of Tiresian queerness. The knowledge that Tiresias has of having embodied both sexes is visible in his physical queerness. He has accumulated the physical signs of his long life and male/female identities; there is no either/or for Eliot's Tiresias, s/he is both/and. In the notes to *The Waste Land*, Eliot attributes Tiresias's prophetic wisdom to his embodiment of and insight into both male and female sexes:

Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem.²⁵⁰

Given that Tiresias is physically blind, the sight to which Eliot refers is his prophetic vision. What Eliot makes Tiresias 'see' in his poem are different representations of the relations between the sexes (including sexual relations) across generations of cultural

²⁴⁹ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 344.

²⁵⁰ Eliot, 'The Waste Land', pp. 68-69.

representation, stretching into the future. In asserting that 'all the women are one woman' and that the male characters are not distinct from one another, Eliot suggests that he is using the poem to expose aspects of the way men and women relate to each other in a broad context that extends beyond the specific literary references.

The encounter between a callous and uncaring sailor (Odysseus) and a female typist who waits for him, and can therefore represent a version of Penelope, is particularly bleak:

I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
Stockings, slippers, camisoles and stays.
I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest
[...]
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference
(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
Bestows one final patronising kiss,

And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit...

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.'
When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

(*The Waste Land*, ll. 228-256)

Eliot's Tiresias witnesses an impoverished relationship between the sexes where men and women are alienated from themselves and each other, acting out mechanically reciprocal roles. Their interaction is violent and emotionally cold and, although the woman does not wish for the man's sexual advances, she appears too indifferent to refuse them. Their courting is depicted as a meagre ritual where food is reduced to the metal casing that contains it, 'tins'. Perishable food has become almost 'immortal' here because mass production has found the secret of eternal life in the canning process. Distinct description of the shapes, colours and smells of vegetables, herbs and meat are missing, and one tin is much like another. After the tins that have been laid out, her combinations are 'spread' and her stockings are 'piled up,' enhancing the sense that the woman is constituted by heaps of clothes.

The body of the woman, unlike that of Tiresias, is not described and we do not know the details of her physical appearance, just the clothing she is covered with. Where the reader is reminded at several intervals of the prophet's queer physicality, Eliot's arrangement of information could suggest that like the food reduced to its containers; 'stockings, slippers, camisoles and stays' are shorthand, and stand in for 'woman'. The reference to the 'lovely woman' who 'stoops to folly' following her glance in the mirror to admire her appearance, suggests the cliché of the female gender in an archetypal romantic narrative – contrasting with the unflattering description of the typist. In the difference between the grimly portrayed life of the typist and the cut-out fantasy of the 'lovely woman', who has a 'lover', Eliot portrays a double commodification, where both the fantasy and the reality of life have become predictable, repetitive and lifeless. The

equally stereotypical male agency ('he assaults at once'), and woman's passivity and 'automatic' hand gesture to smooth her hair before she plays a gramophone record, suggests the idea of gender as a repeatable performance.²⁵¹ The two characters mirror the indistinguishable tinned food. Moreover, the mechanical quality of the woman's movement followed by the reference to the gramophone point towards the automated character of the woman's life in this passage.

Eliot's observations strike a contrast between the dramatic and portentous quality of Tiresias's words that gesture to the grandeur of the classical canon, and the meagreness of life in the modern moment. The tension between the two discourses, the mythic and the petty domestic, produces a comic effect and casts the lives of the couple contemporary to Eliot as unworthy of literary tribute (ironically as he commits them to poetry). The forbidden sexual act witnessed by Tiresias has evolved from those described in the classical texts to the wasteland of a patriarchal, mechanised modernity, where men and women appear like automata. The man's pleasure is selfish and unrelated to the particular qualities of the woman: whether or not she derives pleasure is not even of interest to him. The woman's pleasure is not represented at all in Eliot's text, reversing Tiresias's observation when asked about sexual pleasure by Hera and Zeus. What matters in Eliot's depiction is simply that sex is 'enacted' in a way that is fated for each gender. The man and the woman are fulfilling activities that have been predetermined by consumer capitalism and patriarchal notions of gendered relations.

'TURNING / TURING': A Queer Genealogy of Western Culture

Alan Mathison Turing der test
fall wissenschaftler verurteilt zur heilung
von abweichendem sexualverhalten zur hormon
therapie wuchsen ihm brüste: ALIEN TIRESIAS
TURING.

(*NF*, p. 19)

Alan Turing is the only historical figure, and indeed, the only figure outside of Homer's *Odyssey* to receive close attention in *Niemand's Frau*. Two cantos focus closely on Turing:

²⁵¹ For more on the 'performative' qualities of gender, see: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008).

‘TURNING / TURING’ (NF, pp. 18-19) and ‘DEAD MAN’ S CHESS’ (NF, pp. 32-34). Köhler takes Eliot’s references to Tiresias’s breasts in *The Waste Land* as a means to merge the classical seer with Alan Turing, who grew breasts as a result of a legal sentence.²⁵² Köhler’s invented name ‘Alien Tiresias Turing’ brings the two together to identify a prophetic forbear to Alan Turing, but also one whose sexual experience was regarded as unacceptable and punished, making both into ‘alien’ outsiders. Turing was condemned to chemical castration by the British courts for the act of ‘Gross indecency contrary to Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885’ – or homosexual sex between men. In 1954, two years after his conviction, Turing killed himself by ingesting the poison Cyanide, which he had reportedly injected into an apple. Urban legend has it that logo of the computer manufacturer Apple, which represents an apple with a bite taken out of it, originally in rainbow colours, was a tribute to Turing. Köhler erroneously cites this idea as fact in the ‘NOTEN’ section of *Niemand’s Frau* (NF, p. 94), presumably to enhance the connection she makes between the poison apples and computers in ‘TURNING / TURING’ (NF, p. 19).²⁵³

There are dozens of studies written in English of the life and work of Alan Turing.²⁵⁴ Significant interest in Alan Turing in the German-speaking world is indicated by the translation of Andrew Hodges’s long and complex biography, first published in English in 1983, into German in 1989.²⁵⁵ Köhler refers to the German translation of Hodges’s text in the ‘NOTEN’ to *Niemand’s Frau*, along with a German edition of writings by Alan Turing edited by media theorists Bernhard Dotzler and Friedrich Kittler (NF, p. 94). Hodges’s book includes references that also feature in *Niemand’s Frau*, including Oscar Wilde’s *Ballad of Reading Gaol* (NF, p. 16), the fairytale ‘Schneewittchen’ (NF, p. 19), and many theories of mathematics and computing.

The ordering of information in the title of the canto ‘TURNING / TURING’ reflects the logic of the genealogy Köhler constructs. Turing is situated at the end of a repressed, queer genealogy of Western culture that takes in biblical and other classical women, mythological beasts, transsexuals and homosexual man. Echo, Lot’s wife,

²⁵² Paul, ‘Different Voices: Other Poets in *Niemand’s Frau*’, p. 194.

²⁵³ Holden Frith, ‘Unraveling the tale behind the Apple logo’, *CNN*

<<http://edition.cnn.com/2011/10/06/opinion/apple-logo/>> [accessed: 2nd June 2014].

²⁵⁴ A major British-American film *The Imitation Game*, that focuses on Turing’s cryptanalytical work solving the Enigma code in World War II, was released in November 2014, directed by Morten Tyldum.

²⁵⁵ Andrew Hodges, *Alan Turing. Enigma*, trans. Rolf Herken (Berlin: Kammerer & Unverzagt, 1989).

Medusa, Salome, the Sphinx, the Sirens, Skylla and finally Tiresias and Alan Turing form Köhler's lineage of 'Die frau und die bestie die schöne das tier' (*NF*, p. 19). When she reaches Turing in the third section of the canto, Köhler gives an unusually clear and concise report, quoted above, of his chemical castration at the hands of the British legal system, and so leaves the reader in no doubt as to the concerns of the more oblique poetic text that precedes it.

'TURNING / TURING' is set in Hades, where Tiresias resides in the *Odyssey*, and condemns Turing to join the disembodied shades of the underworld. In this canto, Köhler's Hades is filled with figures marginalised by Western culture. Unlike 'HADES : PROJKEKTION : HADES', the fourth canto, 'TURNING / TURING', is out of narratological step with Homer's *Odyssey*. Köhler's references to the underworld are Ovidian here, indicated by the latinized spelling 'Teiresias' (*NF*, p. 19) in the final section, and the appearance of Echo and Orpheus, who feature in *Metamorphoses* but not in Homer's *Odyssey*. Furthermore, in the 'NOTEN' section that relates to this canto, Köhler directs the reader to Ovid's narratives about Echo's transformation, where her flesh disappears and her bones turn to stone, and to the point in *Metamorphoses* where Teiresias is turned from a man into a woman (*NF*, p. 93). Köhler's use of Ovid's text, which tells of 'how bodies are changed into different bodies', is represented through the motif of 'TURNING' throughout the canto, both in terms of its narrative content and through repetition of the word, which appears sixteen times in the short, two-page canto.²⁵⁶ The canto is set out in four box-like sections, and at the end of each there is a refrain that repeats 'TURNING' and 'TURNING TO STONE', in modified arrangements.

Unlike 'metamorphosis', which refers to the process of transformation in form (a change in state), the word 'turning' signifies both a change in state and a rotational physical movement. Turning is therefore a word that connects a change in spatial orientation with qualitative material (corporeal) change. For Köhler, the movement of turning is associated with transgression (turning away or turning back from an ordained path) and with repetitious and repressive activity (turning around and around, turning into stone). Köhler derives two forms of politics from her understanding of turning: turning away is associated with a politics of queering the norm, and 'turning to stone' with the repression of the body and of thought. The tension between these two is the focus of the 'TURNING' refrain and there is an oppositional tension between the words 'turning' and 'stone'. In other words, 'Turning' can be divergent, a turn away, or

²⁵⁶ Ted Hughes, *Tales from Ovid* (London: Faber, 2002), p. 1.

maddeningly repetitive and circular. Köhler's choice of the English word seems to be connected to the tension between these two meanings, their embodiment in the phonetically and visually similar 'Turing', and the possibilities for poetic play that these factors open up.

A colloquial understanding of the word 'turning' describes the conversion or perversion of someone from one set of beliefs to another ('he's turned'), and in colloquial usage can mean to change a subject's sexuality from homosexual to heterosexual or vice versa ('I turned him'), but also, 'it turned my stomach', expressing visceral physical disgust. In light of these understandings, the title 'TURNING / TURING' takes on the sinister dimension of describing the British government's attempt to medically 'treat' Alan Turing's homosexuality through chemical castration. Köhler makes the significance of Turing's suffering clear in a lengthy and didactic biographical reference for him in the 'NOTEN' section (*NF*, pp. 93-94): 'Östrogene galten damals als neueste wissenschaftliche Errungenschaft zur »Heilung« männlicher Homosexualität' (*NF*, p. 93). The clear didacticism of the 'NOTEN' echoes the unusual clarity of the syntax that Köhler uses to summarise key biographical data about Turing's life in the canto, indicating a high level of importance. Turing is Köhler's modern and historical witness for the cruelty and irrationality of a (legal) system that positions itself as rational, just and objective.

In this Hades of 'stimmen und namen' (*NF*, p. 18) Köhler traces the legal and physical punishment that Turing suffered in the twentieth century back to two founding narratives of repression that relate to gender or sexuality in Western culture: Echo and Lot's wife.

Im Hades: im Schatten: stimmen. Stimmen und
namen. Stimmen die namen nennen stimmen die
Ich sagen. Die sagen: Ich will. Will nicht.
Nicht Ich. Ich sein. Sein nicht. Nicht-Ich.
Will ich. Ich will. Echos echolalien lallen
Echo Lots weib die zurück sieht ihn an sein
bild gibt sie wieder und wieder versteinert
dem unabwendbaren zugewandt dem verkehrten:
TURNING TURNING. TURNING TO STONE. TURNING.
(*NF*, p. 18)

The first concerns Echo, who appears in Ovid's tale, a narrative that can be understood as concerning the misogynistic repression of the (physical) difference presented by woman. In Ovid's narrative, Echo had been cursed by Juno (the Latin translation of Hera) to only repeat the last words at the end of a sentence and could not reply herself. She fell in love with Narcissus, but could not speak out to him of her own accord. One day, Echo rushed out to him in person after he called out for assistance when lost in the woods, but she could only repeat his words back to him. He was disgusted by her body and rejected her, saying that he would rather die than let her enjoy his body. Humiliated and shamed, all she could do was to repeat 'enjoy my body' as she fled. However, Echo did not stop loving Narcissus and as he wasted away, staring at his reflection in the water and consumed by self-love, Echo mourned him and eventually faded away too so that 'nothing remained but voice and bones; then only voice, for her bones (so they say) were transformed to stone' (*Metamorphoses*, Book 3, ll. 339-510, (l. 391; ll. 397-398)).

In her explanation of Echo's suffering in her 'NOTEN' (*NF*, p. 93), Köhler focusses on the nymph's loss of determination over her voice ('Der nymph wird die bestimmung über ihre stimme entzogen'), on Narcissus's disgust at her physical appearance ('dieser aber auf ihr abweisend reagiert'), and on the disappearance of Echo's flesh and the transformation of her bones to stone: ('ihr fleisch verflüchtigt sich, die knochen werden zu stein (hardware), die stimme aber bleibt, körperlos, und wiederholt, weiterhin'). By characterising Echo's bones as 'hardware', the physical housing of computer 'software', Köhler makes a link from Echo to modern dystopian narratives, where computers and artificially intelligent robots (such as those foreseen by Turing) are programmed always to produce the same limited set of 'answers'. Echo's fate, according to Köhler's depiction, links her to Turing's fate and also to the digital future he foresaw.

The second figure introduced in the canto is Lot's wife, who features in what can be regarded as a foundational narrative of homophobia, as well as of misogyny. The inclusion of Lot's wife in this canto about Turing makes a direct connection between early biblical origins of homophobia and Alan Turing's punishment at the hands of the British courts. In the biblical narrative, Lot's unnamed wife is turned into a pillar of salt for turning back to look at Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities destroyed by God that have subsequently become metaphors for vice and sexual deviancy:

Da ließ der Herr Schwefel und Feuer regnen vom Himmel herab auf Sodom und Gomorra und vernichtete die Städte und die ganze Gegend und alle

Einwohner der Städte und was auf dem Lande gewachsen war. Und Lots Frau sah hinter sich und ward zur Salzsäule.

(Genesis 1: 19: 24-26)²⁵⁷

The transformation of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt for witnessing queer male sexuality, thereby threatening an idealised future ordained by God, is structurally similar to Echo's being turned into stone. Narcissus turns away from Echo's physical difference, disgusted by it, to focus on his own ideal mirror image. God ordered Lot and his family to turn away from the sexuality that disgusted him and to focus on an ideal future that mirrored the heterosexual relationship between Lot and his wife. Each narrative can be viewed as representing the enforcement of a deadening repetitive or 'loop' of life as the same, underwritten by the rejection and suffering of women and gay men. Köhler makes Echo and Lot's wife textually equivalent and creates a turning motion through repetition that continues through the canto. 'Echo Lots weib' (*NF*, p. 18) almost suggests that 'Echo' is the name of Lot's wife, who is unnamed in the Bible, or at least a relationship of equivalence between the two.

Just as the body of Lot's wife turns to salt, so Echo's flesh disappears and her bones are turned to stone: soft flesh disappears, replaced by hard surfaces. An echo is produced when a voice is reflected back from a hard surface such as a wall, and there is only one speaking subject but the illusion of two. An echo creates the illusion of an audience for a narcissist who is not listening carefully, who is rapt by their own voice. For an echo to be produced, the speaking subject must face the wall or a similarly hard surface that reflects the words. Soft or uneven surfaces do not echo well, if at all: the uneven difference of the human body, and its voice, do not produce an echo. When Lot's wife turns to face Sodom and Gomorrah, Köhler's canto suggests, she turns away from the mirror of God's power, and no longer reflects His image of the future back to Him. The Old Testament God punishes her transgression of turning towards a city that symbolises fleshy, sexual desire, by literally turning her into a solid, crystalline pillar. Patriarchal power – in the form of God, Narcissus or the modern state – attempt to transform human subjects into mirrors or reflecting surfaces that mirror or echo their power back to them. In Alan Turing's case, woven in by association through the 'TURNING' refrain, the violently enforced ideal is the heteronormative male sexuality that the British legal system sought to produce in its male subjects over and over again.

²⁵⁷ *Die Bibel*, trans. Martin Luther (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1999).

Köhler's text performs Echo's curse through semantic, aural and graphic repetitions: 'echo' appears three times, followed by 'wiedergeben', which signifies 'to echo', and the '-lalien lallen' and 'wieder und wieder', and finally 'TURNING TURNING'. The words 'unabwendbar' (inevitable) and 'zugewandt' (facing) have the same root verb, 'wenden' ('to turn'), and furthermore the root of 'verkehrten', is 'kehren', another verb meaning to 'turn'. The text becomes an apparently inevitable turning movement, suggesting the repression of successive generations of women who pose threats to male power. The second section of the canto adds further synonyms to describe a turning motion with 'drehen', 'umdrehen', 'verdrehen' (to pervert or distort) and 'walzen', and Köhler shows other female figures in biblical or classical literature as part of the same cultural merry-go-round:

Auge in auge mit Lots namenloser frau dreht
 sie dreht sich dreht ihr Medusa den hals um
 den kopf verdreht sie & ihr vergeht sie und
 selbst & anders selbender einander Echo ein
 ander anders ein langsamer langsamer walzer
 ein drehen im fallen ein lallen: SALOMEDUSA
 MEDUSALOME

(NF, p. 18)

Lot's wife turns into Medusa, who turns into Echo, who turns into Salome; and not only are they turning into each other, but all three women are connected by their association with dangerous female sexuality and with looking. According to Ovid's version of events (*Metamorphoses*, Book 4, ll. 789-805) Medusa had been a beautiful woman, but was turned into the snake-haired monster by Minerva after Neptune raped her in Minerva's shrine. Minerva's punishment of all who dare to look at Medusa by turning them into stone, means that Medusa's own desiring look can never be returned, making her own sexuality an abject monster. Medusa's rape, of which her lethal snake hair was a symbol, was finally the cause of her own death when she was beheaded by Perseus. In the New Testament, Herod's desire to witness Salome's dance, in exchange for her demand to have the head of John the Baptist on a platter, serves as a cautionary tale against giving in to women's words and bodies, identifying both as a threat (Matthew, 14: 6-12). In all of these narratives expressions of women's sexuality is punished, forbidden, or held up as an example to men as dangerous. Köhler expresses the maddening persistence of such

narratives through millenia through the waltzing, turning motion taken from Salome's dance that merges her with Medusa into a blur of misogynistic mythologizing of women. The poetic 'echolalia' generated in the canto through aural and semantic repetition are symptoms of broader cultural patterns for Köhler. Individual cases of repression attached to specific stories become institutionalised and are made part of large systems that oppress on a grand scale, such as the legal system, the medical establishment and, she fears, computers.

In the first section Köhler juxtaposes the mythical age with medicalised modernity, with the shift from naming Ovid's 'Echo' followed by 'echolalien'. This term refers to a pathological condition where the sufferer repeats words spoken by others. The shift from ancient to modern, signalled through the rationalised medical appropriation of 'echo' here, anticipates the link Köhler makes between the biblical and modern medical understandings of male homosexuality. In making this link Köhler introduces the argument that develops through this canto about the *irrational* origins of forms of punishment that become retrospectively rationalised and made to resemble scientific and legal truth. For example, the reference to the perversion ('dem verkehrten') of male homosexuality in the context of the Bible in the first section is subsequently brought into relation to Turing:

aus dem gen- gene- dem -alogischen labor am
 ende aller versuchsreihen ein lallen hallen
 allen a alien Alan Mathison Turing der test
 fall wissenschaftler verurteilt zur heilung
 von abweichendem sexualverhalten zur hormon
 therapie wuchsen ihm brüste: ALIEN TIRESIAS
 TURING

(*NF*, p. 19)

The double meaning of 'Heilung' brings salvation in a religious context together with the medical healing, uncovering the Old Testament origins of homophobic punishment inscribed in law in the twentieth century. By breaking up the word 'genealogisch', Köhler is able to emphasise the *alogical* ('-alogische') nature of the scientific, legal, cultural and social processes that conspire to make Alan Turing grow breasts. The absurdity Köhler draws out here is that the legal system has *produced* the queer, 'alien', body in its attempt

to eradicate it. By trying to normalise Alan Turing, a queer body was formed, comparable to that of Tiresias, a figure from Greek myth, or like an alien body of science fiction.

The reappearance of 'lallen', which appears in the first section and in the second, signals to the reader that for Köhler, the treatment of Echo, Lot's wife, Medusa and Alan Turing are part of the same cultural tradition. Köhler suggests poetically that attempts by power (divine, legal or scientific) to strive for 'the same' in the embodied subject and society more broadly, are not only self-destructive (Narcissus died staring at his own reflection), but moreover, they are absurd. Like the 'lala' of 'echolalia', if a phrase is repeated over and over it becomes meaningless nonsense without a material referent. Köhler directs the reader to the thought that it is in fact difference, divergence and queerness rather than 'good' obedient and normative behaviour that are responsible for the progress of Western culture.

The rejection of difference creates a form of temporal stasis that Köhler constructs poetically not only by means of recurring sounds throughout the canto, but most significantly through the refrain at the end of each section. The final section envisages this stasis in the highly efficient computer age where the idea of 'here and now' and the possibility of novelty and of divergence is becoming ever smaller and, indeed, is approaching nil: 'die Ichfunktion geht [/] gegen null und buchstäblich durchkreuzt sie [/] das hier das jetzt' (*NF*, p. 19). The prophet of modernity, Alan Turing, predicted that there may come a time when it would not be possible to tell the difference between humans and computers. In Köhler's dystopian vision, it is not so much that computers have come to resemble humans, but rather that humans have come to resemble computers, or disembodied voices: 'Im Hades: im schatten: stimmen. Stimmen und [/] namen. Stimmen die namen nennen stimmen die [/] Ich sagen' (*NF*, p. 18). The words that opened the canto, in light of the final section, begin to seem not as if they refer to Homer or Ovid, but rather to the interaction of modern subjects in internet chatrooms who exist in relation to each other only as an 'Ich' or a name, with no body to be seen:

FORTSCHRIFT vertriebne verschriebene leiber
schatten im chatroom - die Ichfunktion geht
gegen null und buchstäblich durchkreuzt sie
das hier das jetzt streicht sie aus schrift
stellen leerstellen der erkenntnis vom baum
der apfel Evas Schneewittchen reicht ihn an
Teiresias weiter der zuviel weiss um weiter
zu wissen: apfel + z, ehemals Omega: befehl

UNDO. ERROR & löschen. Dann rauschen, weiss
TURNING TO STONE. TURNING TURNING. TURNING.
(*NF*, p. 19)

In the fourth and final section of the canto Köhler substitutes 'schrift' (writing), for 'schritt' (step) in her description of progress, replacing a body part with writing, to signify the disappearance of the body that began in this canto with Echo. The neologism 'fortschritt' also suggests that progress is text gradually filling up a screen, with every line added displacing more of the body. Aurally, Köhler equates displacement or expulsion ('vertriebne') with the written form ('verschriebene leiber'). Subjects *can* be literally 'struck out' on a computer as Köhler suggests here with the 'strikethrough' function in textual creation. The final half of this section brings together Eve, Teiresias and Alan Turing to identify that all were punished for transgressions that ultimately brought knowledge and advancement to culture.

In the Western cultural canon, the will to know the prohibited or the taboo has often been associated with physical temptation. Eve's action of reaching for the apple in the Garden of Eden is a prime example of forbidden corporeal experiences equated with forbidden knowledge. Eve's succumbing to the serpent's words and tempting Adam to betray God's word, have been figured metaphorically in terms of straying from the path of God. Köhler equates the image of Eve's transgression by eating an apple from the tree of knowledge with Teiresias's forbidden sexual knowledge. She also connects biblical transgression to Alan Turing through reference to the computer manufacturer, Apple's logo and keyboard functionality. '[A]pfel + z' (*NF*, p. 19) is an Apple computer's instruction to delete a previous action, so that all that is left on the screen is white space where there had been a typed digital character. The Apple logo, as discussed earlier, is rumoured to be a reference to Alan Turing's reported method of suicide of eating an apple injected with cyanide. Though unproven, Köhler states this idea erroneously as a fact in her 'NOTEN' (*NF*, p. 94), indicating that the connection between Turing's death and computers is important. The name of cyanide in German is zyankali and so 'apfel + z' can refer simultaneously to Turing's method of suicide and to the delete function of the Apple keyboard. Through the double meaning, Köhler articulates an anxiety that the act of ending a human life might become as simple as typing an instruction on a computer, a thought that is elaborated upon in 'DEAD MAN'S CHESS'.

In the ‘NOTEN’ section for this canto, Köhler describes, in detail, the ‘Turing test’, a process devised by Alan Turing to differentiate between computers and ‘intelligent’ human life. The Turing test suggests the advent of an age in which the intelligence of computers might possibly usurp that of human subjects. Köhler’s anxieties about the lethal implications of intelligent machines on human life are expressed strongly in the canto.²⁵⁸ She does not leave any doubt as to the implications of the ‘leiber [/] schatten in chatroom’, where mortal bodies disappear and turn into text on screen, articulated through the algorithms of a computer. The chatroom is not a room in which embodied subjects chat *in person*, it is a virtual space in which text represents subjects that may or may not exist. In the later canto ‘NACHTSTÜCK : ARRHYTHMIE’, the Internet provides a space for subversive speech for Penelope at night where she can say what would not be permitted in person and in the light of day. However, more broadly in *Niemand’s Frau*, it is clear that Köhler considers digital interaction mediated by screens as an impoverished form that diminishes the human subject.

The relationship between human life and technology in *Niemand’s Frau* is an uneasy one, always overshadowed by images of repetition, death and obliteration. Köhler pits human against machine in ‘DEAD MAN’ S CHESS’ and the repeated cry of ‘MAYDAY’ that runs throughout indicates the critical status of the relationship in her eyes.

ERROR & löschen. Dann rauschen, weiss
TURNING TO STONE. TURNING TURNING. TURNING.
(*NF*, p. 19)

The image of white noise or static with which Köhler ends the canto describes a radio or television output when no channel is being broadcast – an incoherent broadcast, like the white noise that is heard before or after a cry for help of ‘MAYDAY’ on a ship’s radio.

‘DEAD MAN’ S CHESS’

²⁵⁸ See also Karen Leeder’s chapter that discusses Köhler’s earlier references to artificial life and Ridley Scott’s film *Blade Runner* for which Alan Turing’s ‘Turing Test’ is a significant influence in: Leeder, ‘Two-Way Mirrors. Construing the Possibilities of The First Person Singular in Barbara Köhler’s Poetry’, in *Entgegenkommen*, eds Paul and Schmitz, pp. 63-90 (p. 85).

'DEAD MAN' S CHESS' develops themes from 'TURNING / TURING' and explores instances from Turing's life, and begins to imagine a dystopian future derived from the invention of computers. In the mode of a Tiresian 'seer' Köhler takes stock of developments in computers and genetic biology (areas in which Turing worked) to foresee a grim outcome for the human subject, as indicated by the title of the canto, and its coda. The international cry of distress 'MAYDAY', which repeats seven times throughout the canto, highlights the urgent tone of its content and elucidates the unceasing pace. Unlike every other canto in the cycle too, 'DEAD MAN' S CHESS' concerns itself little with Homer's text or other classical texts other than with references to seafaring in general. The canto takes stylistic cues from Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* by bringing together the mythic, the technological and the biological. Köhler channels these strands to craft a multifaceted and dystopian portent of the future, including figures and quotations from Eliot's poem.

The punning title of the canto is a reference to the sea chantey from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* ('Fifteen men on a Dead Man's Chest, Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum').²⁵⁹ The song describes the fate of a pirate who left fifteen men with a sword and a bottle of rum on Dead Man's Chest Island in the British Virgin Islands. The switch of 'chess' for 'chest' wittily brings together the doom-laden situation in the song with the chess games referred to in this canto, and the outlook is bleak. The two 'dead men' who play chess in Köhler's text are Alan Turing and Garry Kasparov. In 1948, Turing developed the first chess algorithm for a computing machine that had not yet been built. At that time a computer's human opponent could still win the match, but in 1997 Kasparov was 'killed' and defeated on the chessboard by the computer DEEP BLUE. In 1948, to test out his algorithm, Turing played the part of the not-yet-existent computer in a match against his colleague Alick Glennie. By doing this, Turing was acting as the physical 'hardware' for the computer because the computer algorithm decided his movements. Turing effectively suspended his autonomy in order to further the development of computers and became a kind of cyborg, that mixing of human and machine. The computer algorithm lost the game against Glennie, but the possibilities opened up by that game anticipated the evolution of computers culminating in DEEP BLUE. Descriptions of chess moves appear throughout the canto and create a meta-narrative about a game between the human subject and technological and scientific progress that is represented in the thematic content of the canto.

²⁵⁹ Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 9.

The canto begins with the depiction of Turing's visit to a fortune-teller in Blackpool that is recounted in Andrew Hodges' book and cited by Köhler in the 'NOTEN':

MAYDAY MAYDAY ein kryptoanalytiker
im zelt der gipsyqueen Alan Turing
gestrandet in Blackpool
(*NF*, p. 32)

Köhler calls attention to the crisis that the historical Turing was suffering during this visit to Blackpool with the repeated call of 'MAYDAY', and in the corresponding section of the 'NOTEN' (*NF*, p. 95) she informs the reader that the visit to the fortune teller took place just before his death: 'Mitte mai 1954, etwa 2 wochen vor seinem Tod'. The juxtaposition of the mathematician with the fortune-teller creates a contradictory picture of Turing. His 'methods' to find answers encompass the strictly rational as well as irrational, mystical means, and the contrast calls into question the rational basis of computing – and could appear to equate one with the other – as equally absurd. The arrangement of the words on the second line of the canto 'im zelt der gipsyqueen Alan Turing', potentially suggest that 'Alan Turing' is the fortune-teller. Indeed, Turing did make predictions about the future regarding computers, as is quoted in Hodges's biography:

The original question, 'Can machines think?' I believe to be too meaningless to deserve discussion. Nevertheless I believe that at the end of the century the use of words and general educated opinion will have altered so much that one will be able to speak of machines thinking without expecting to be contradicted.
Alan Turing, 1950²⁶⁰

Köhler demonstrates the acuity of Turing's role as fortune-teller by depicting the chess game that Kasparov lost to a computer, directly after she has described Turing's work towards inventing computers, indicating a causal relationship. The female gender of the 'gipsyqueen' plays on the information that the reader has about Turing's breasts given in 'TURNING / TURING' (*NF*, p. 19) and also about his homosexuality, given that

²⁶⁰ Alan Turing in: Hodges, p. 417.

‘queen’ is a common derogatory term for a homosexual man. Turing emerges as a transgendered and prophetic figure through the poetic text and the ‘NOTEN’ to ‘DEAD MAN’ S CHESS’: a Tiresias of modernity.

Although the word ‘MAYDAY’ derives from the French ‘m’aidez’, Köhler focusses on a reading that concerns days in the month of May. Through her poetic exploitation of the ‘May’ in ‘Mayday’ she weaves portent into the timing of events concerning Turing and Kasparov and the flourishing of computers, which occurred in May, and then links them to the invention of cloning in the ‘NOTEN’:

Mitte mai 1954, etwa zwei wochen vor seinem tod, soll Alan Turing bei einem spaziergang mit seinem psychoanalytiker am strand von **Blackpool** das zelt einer wahrsagerin betreten und erst nach einer halben stunde wieder verlassen haben, blass und nicht im geringsten gesprächsbereit.

[...]

Im mai 1997 verlor mit Garry Kasparov erstmals der amtierende schachweltmeister ein komplettes match gegen den rechner **Deep Blue**

[...]

als entscheidend erwies sich, dass Kasparov in der zweiten partie ein mögliches dauerschach übersehen hatte und vorzeitig aufgab.

[...]

In diesem mai erlebte auch das »klonschaf« **Dolly** seinen ersten frühling.

(*NF*, p. 95)

Köhler suggests that the real death of Turing and the metaphorical death of Kasparov on the chessboard coincide with the triumph of computer intelligence over human and the supplanting of ‘natural’ biological reproduction with cloning.

May Day celebrations have taken place throughout Europe since the medieval period to celebrate fertility with dancing around a May Pole, which symbolizes a penis and ‘natural’ biological reproduction. Köhler signals that human life is under threat from science superseding natural reproductive means, as well as from computers superseding human intelligence. ‘Natural’ reproduction creates difference in the form of a new generation of life whose specific genetic combinations (recessive and dominant) are unforeseen, while cloning produces genetically identical life. The identical reproduction

of genes that cloning intends can be considered as being like a computer that can only produce answers limited by its programming. Human subjects are unpredictable and make mistakes, as Kasparov did; they can behave illogically, perhaps as Turing ultimately did by taking his own life. As will be discussed, what Köhler fears is a future constituted by repetition of the same, both via the dominance of computers and by the progress and logic of genetic science where 'ideal' and 'identical' lives can be created according to a genetic blueprint sequenced by computers.

In the poetic text Köhler uses the repeated construction of 'aufgeben' to depict both Turing's and Kasparov's demise, foreshadowing the repetition of 'mai' in the 'NOTEN' to align them. She builds a sophisticated set of semantic links that always connect computers and what they signify with a threat to human life:

was sagte madame
Sosostris zum halteproblem das pro
gramm hat ein absehbares ende eine
tödliche dosis MAYDAY der frühling
in dem Turing aufgibt

(NF, p. 32)

Köhler introduces the tarot card reading fortune teller of Eliot's *The Waste Land* Madame Sosostris, who in Eliot's text predicts 'death by water'. In 'DEAD MAN' S CHESS', Köhler consults the fortune teller over the 'halting problem'. The halting problem is the question of whether or not a computer program will stop running or will continue to run forever, given an arbitrary input. To prove the 'halting problem', Turing came up with a mathematical model of a computer ('the Turing machine') and a program that was fundamental to the creation of the first computer:

Turings hauptwerk »On Computable Numbers with an Application to
the Entscheidungsproblem« (1936) formuliert [...] das sog.
halteproblem, wonach unentscheidbar ist, ob ein programm nach
einem bestimmten input zu einem ergebnis gelangt und anhält
oder in einer unendlichen schleife weiterrechnet.

(NF, p. 95)

Turing proved that it is impossible to create an algorithm that solves the halting problem for all inputs into a program, effectively creating the blueprint for computers at the same

moment that he proved their limitations. Köhler transposes the idea of a ‘halting problem’ onto human life. Through the line break Köhler gives a double meaning to ‘pro[/]gramm’ to suggest both the computer program DEEP BLUE, and the dosage, measured in ‘grams’ of cyanide, that killed Turing. Broken in two, then, program becomes ‘per gram’ and suggests an image of Turing calculating the ‘tödliche dosis’ of cyanide for his suicide. A few lines earlier, Köhler revealed the etymology of cyanide from ‘cyan’, as arising from the Greek word for green-blue, ‘kyáneos’, to equate it with the computer DEEP BLUE: ‘DEEP BLUE zyan kyáneos’, (*NF*, p. 32). The name of the computer that finally defeated the best human intellect, metaphorically ‘killing’ Kasparov on the chess board, ‘DEEP BLUE’, becomes part of a threat to human life associated with the colour blue. Köhler shifts the focus of Madame Sosostriis’s prediction from the question of whether a computer program will stop running, to whether a human life will end.

Köhler builds on the pessimistic narrative implied in the above passage, and using the same vocabulary as she does in the ‘NOTEN’ (*NF*, p. 95), describes Kasparov’s missed opportunity to enforce a perpetual check (‘dauerschach’), which would have allowed him to draw the match against DEEP BLUE instead of losing it. Perpetual check is when, in a chess game, a player can force a draw through an unending series of checks. Only if the player breaks the series of checks, does their opponent have the chance of winning:

ein rätsel
 seines bleibt bei zweimal sechzehn
 figuren auf des toten mannes kiste
 und ein übersehenes dauerschach in
 der zweiten partie MAYDAY frühling
 in dem Kasparov aufgibt dem ersten
 frühling des menschenlamms gibt er
 den rest MAYDAY
 (*NF*, p. 33)

Kasparov’s mistake revealed his mortal, human status, and can be seen as symbolic of the point at which machine intelligence overtook human intelligence. The word ‘MAYDAY’ links an imagined cry for help from Kasparov as he realises that the computer will defeat him, with the birth of Dolly the sheep, with which the reader is now familiar from the explanation in the ‘NOTEN’ (*NF*, pp. 95-96). ‘[D]a[s] menschenlamm’

playfully refers both to a sheep created by humans, and to Jesus as the sacrificial ‘Lamb of God’. The ironic chain of events constructed by Köhler is that, just as humans supplant God in the process of creation, computers are supplanting humans on the chessboard. Dolly the sheep/the human lamb is made into a kind of inverse messiah, or an angel of doom signalling the dawn of life as repeatable embodiment of code or the infinite loop of a computer program or a clone that does not evolve like human life.

The biblical reference is re-enforced by the citation earlier in ‘DEAD MAN’ S CHESS’ of the line from Ecclesiastes (1: 4-11): ‘Was geschehen ist, wird wieder geschehen, was man getan hat, wird man wieder tun: Es gibt nichts Neues unter der Sonne’:

ins endlos
ins blaue von himmel: nichts neues
blueblue unter der sonne
(*NF*, p. 32)

In the Bible, Ecclesiastes’s words are intended positively to describe how revelation lies in heaven and the spiritual realm rather than in the mortal, material world. In Köhler’s text, his words are cast differently to signify a dystopia of the same, endlessly mirroring the colour blue, which for Köhler has sinister connotations.

In the subsequent canto, ‘HADES : PROJEKTION : HADES’, the colour blue signals a time further in the future of screens and mirrors and of shallow, disembodied, narcissistic subjects who are disconnected from the political thrust of history (*NF*, p. 35). In ‘DEAD MAN’ S CHESS’, the colour blue binds together images of life on repeat (cloning) and computers with Alan Turing’s suicide: ‘blue [/] prints körperkopien CYANCE FICTION [/] die endlos warteschleife haltloses [/] doppel helix im achten höllenkreis’ (*NF*, p. 34). The eighth circle of hell in Dante’s *Inferno* is the circle to which diviners and seers are condemned, including Tiresias. Those condemned to this circle of hell know the future before it has materially unfolded and are consulted by people who want to know what will happen, before it happens. In the computer-dominated dystopia that is suggested in ‘DEAD MAN’ S CHESS’, the future is known because, as in a chess game, there are limited outcomes, and the computer can calculate or know them before they unfold on the board.

Life in Köhler’s dystopia is modelled on the cloned sheep Dolly, where bodies are the material manifestations of ‘blueprints’ that can be reproduced. Köhler

characterises the circle in Dante's *Inferno* as being analogous to the genetic double helix and to the 'warteschleife' or circular holding pattern that aeroplanes fly when waiting to land. An endless holding pattern would condemn a plane to be forever suspended in the air, not permitted to land on earth. In the context of the references that this image is connected to, the 'endlos warteschleife' can be understood as a virtual reality that is suspended from the differentiated, material world where Köhler locates life. The forms of life that could be simulated by a computer, or generated by a team of genetic experts, are identified by Köhler as insubstantial:

MAYDAY seelen werden heut
nicht mehr gerettet nur restposten
noch verschachert: ALLES MUSS RAUS
[...]
zu wenig material
für krypto- & für psychoanalytiker
zu eintönig
(*NF*, p. 33)

In the first group of these lines, Köhler conjures up a post-apocalyptic jumble sale of out-dated human lives after the arrival of the 'menschenlamm', and in the second she suggests that there is consequently insufficient intellectual complexity for a psychoanalyst or cyptanalyst. Thus, Köhler's evaluation of computer and cloned life is far from positive.

The warnings given to the reader in the 'NOTEN' and throughout the poetic text conclude in the canto's coda, which declares that the rise of science and technology signals 'GAME OVER' for the human subject:

der rest ist menschliches versagen
und verraten und verkauft verfilmt
verspielt: GAME OVER aus der traum
Goonight May. Goonight. HELLO HELL
O DOLLY HELLO
(*NF*, p. 34)

'GAME OVER' in capital letters suggests not only the end of the chess game between Kasparov and Deep Blue, but also the writing that appears on the screen of a computer

game when the human player has lost. Used here, it refers to the loss of the human subject in a battle against computers and genetic science. 'Goonight May. Goonight' is taken from the section of Eliot's *The Waste Land* entitled 'A Game of Chess' (*The Waste Land*, ll. 139-172). The passage concludes a discussion between two women that depicts the brutal cycle suffered by one of the women of marriage, a near-death experience of childbirth, debilitating medication taken to prevent further pregnancies, sex that is not necessarily consensual, and the threat of abandonment by a husband if she will not satisfy his sexual appetites. The passage begins with one of the women telling the other that she should spend money on beautifying herself to satisfy her husband who has returned from fighting in the First World War. Eliot's portrayal of game-playing in which women are pitted against each other is cut through with gossipy asides, commonplaces and comments that convey the horror of such a reality with a chillingly casual tone. Köhler's citation from this particular section of *The Waste Land* at this point in the canto suggests that, in her view, not only are computers and biological science threats to the survival of the human subject, but that the deeper rot embedded in the misogyny of heteronormative marital relationships constitutes a major threat. The cumulative negative momentum of 'menschliches versagen und verraten und verkauft verfilmt verspielt' echoes the sentiment of Eliot's poem, where the violence and commodification of love, sex and marriage, subject negates their supposed life-giving purposes. Köhler attributes the blame for losing the game of life ('GAME OVER') to human error.

She adds a bitterly comic touch with the final line, which is a double reference to Dolly the sheep, and the New York musical and subsequent film starring Barbara Streisand, 'HELLO DOLLY!' (1964). The plot concerns the life of a manipulative matchmaker called Dolly Levi, whose romantic scheming is thwarted because both she and the other characters fall in love, altering the intended outcome. Love, as discussed in the elsewhere in this thesis, can be understood as lying outside of logical thought and is radically irrational. As such, love makes human subjects difficult to regulate through systematic control. To 'fall' in love is human error, its effect overrides logical plans. A computer cannot imitate love because there can be no anticipated cause for when it will occur or not occur, despite apparent compatibility. Through the reference to *Hello Dolly!*, Köhler lets in a chink of light to what is a dark, portentous canto and points towards what may prove a limitation on computer systems she criticises: the inability to understand or to experience emotions.

‘HADES : PROJEKTION : HADES’

[Y]ou know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water.
(*The Waste Land*, ll. 21-24)

Köhler quotes the words ‘*a heap of broken images*’ (NF, p. 36) from Eliot’s poem in ‘HADES : PROJEKTION : HADES’, and, as in Eliot’s text, the sun always shines in the barren, fragmentary landscape that Köhler depicts. Her canto takes thematic and stylistic cues from *The Waste Land*, with Tiresias as what Georgina Paul terms, an ‘objective witness to the unvital lives of the living dead’.²⁶¹ Köhler’s wasteland is more technologically advanced than Eliot’s though, and could perhaps be described as a postmodern version, updated to represent the twenty-first century.

The densely wrought canto appears as a realisation of the future prophesied in the previous canto, ‘DEAD MAN’ S CHESS’. Where ‘TURNING / TURING’ took a broad literary-historical sweep from the Bible to Turing’s death, and ‘DEAD MAN’ S CHESS’ focussed on Turing’s life and recent advances in computer science and genetics, ‘HADES : PROJEKTION : HADES’ operates in a palimpsestic space. Köhler creates two versions of what appears to be Greece: the first is hell envisioned as tourist trap filled with the superficial, almost interchangeable components of a Mediterranean resort holiday, with Greek culture reduced to names for nightclubs and casinos. The second reveals the bloody narratives of murder and revenge that lie in both the mythopoetic and the historical European (and particularly recent German) past. Köhler builds up a network of images associated with each Greece: the modern is a digital dystopia of screens, projections and mirrored surfaces, and the ancient is characterised by blood and guts (the evidence of history), and sensual warm corpses. Tiresias appears in varying forms that reflect the contexts that are brought together, from ancient Greek haruspex to a fortune-telling slot machine.

²⁶¹ Paul, ‘Different Voices: Other Poets in *Niemand’s Fran*’, pp. 194-195.

The narrative elements of 'HADES : PROJEKTION : HADES' recognisably mirror the descent of Odysseus to the underworld to visit Tiresias in Book 11 of Homer's *Odyssey*, from his arrival at the world's end to his descent to the asphodel meadows, which both appear in the canto. The first image in the canto is indeed of the end of the world, where sea and sky meet:

Himmel und meer verödet blau: ein abgelaufnes
video flimmern das einzige programm die sonne
steht: und hoch: im fels ein weisses: kaff am
ende: aller küstenstraßen: hochglanzkopie vom
letzten: urlaubsfilm: still: and forever very
picturesque, you know? you don't. Ask for the
blind. er sieht: nicht: was du siehst: nichts
was er sieht: siehst du! Lang ist der tag ein
mittag ohne ende ist seine nacht durch die er
geht die wand aus schweigen offen hinter sich
den bildraum schriftraum in dem alles vergeht
was einen namen hat - häuser des hades: Villa
Ariadne Taverna Tyro Café Epikaste Rent Rooms
Antiope Club-Hotel Agamemnon Minos Palace

(NF, p. 35)

The opening passage echoes Homer's depiction of the bleak ocean's end that Odysseus reaches before descending into Hades: 'Jetzt erreichten wir des tiefe Ozeans Ende. [...] Diese tappeln beständig in Nacht und Nebel, und niemals [/] Schautet strahlend auf sie der Gott der leuchtenden Sonne' (*Odyssee*, Book 11, ll. 13-16). Köhler's sky and sea share in a desolation that is produced by the colour blue, continuing from the preceding canto 'DEAD MAN' S CHESS', where blue becomes the colour of destruction. The verb in the first phrase appears to have been omitted, as has anything to specify the relationship between 'verödet' and 'blau' and furthermore, the reader is left in the second line to work out the precise grammatical function of 'flimmern', which appears as a gerund 'flickering' used as a noun. From the beginning, the reader is placed in an uncertain, bleak blue haze with no detail to hold onto. The colour blue becomes a *leitmotif*, shorthand for the manifold problems that Köhler identifies in idealising, violent, commodified and technologically advanced modernity.

A Blue Hell

A reference to video technology swiftly brings the canto into modernity: the first five words become recontextualised as a description of a visual projection of a blue sea and sky on a worn-out videotape, rather than the description of a real sea. The video of the desolate blue landscape is at a double remove from its material origin and appears to depict something like a video art installation. Indeed, the blue image, the wide-ranging cross-cultural references and the English reference to ‘the blind’ rather than Tiresias, are reminiscent of Derek Jarman’s film *Blue* (1993), in which the screen is perpetually saturated with Yves Klein’s shade, ‘International Klein Blue’. In *Blue*, music plays beneath a haunting, darkly comic, angry and dreamlike script read by actors, including Jarman, about AIDS-related illness and going blind, which moves between documentary prose about medical treatments and poetry that speaks of urgent desire, love and social prejudices.

Jarman’s words reflect on blue as both an idealising force suggesting the infinite, like love, and as a harbinger of death and the physical decline.²⁶² As Eliot does in *The Waste Land*, and anticipating Köhler, Jarman brings together classical references with criticisms of contemporary attitudes and lyrical poetic passages:

In the pandemonium of image
I present you with the universal Blue
Blue an open door to soul
An infinite possibility
Becoming tangible
Here I am again in the waiting room. Hell on Earth is a waiting room. Hell on earth is a waiting room. Here you know you are not in control of yourself, waiting for your name to be called: ‘712213’. Here you have no name, confidentiality is nameless.
[...]
How did my friends cross the cobalt river, with what did they pay the ferryman?
As they set out for the indigo shore under this jet-black sky – some died on their feet with a backward glance.

²⁶² Gabriele Griffin, ‘Derek Jarman’s Blue’, in *Representations of HIV and AIDS. Visibility Blue/s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 13-39.

[...]

I shall not win the battle against the virus - in spite of the slogans like “Living with AIDS”. The virus was appropriated by the well - so we have to live with AIDS while they spread the quilt for the moths of Ithaca across the wine dark sea.

[...]

Thinking blind, becoming blind.²⁶³

The narrative in *Blue* sets the deaths of friends into a classical context, crossing the Styx, and takes on a Tiresian role: a queer figure with insight into sex (about which he makes explicit references), going physically blind because of HIV-related illness, and with apparent foresight of death, while outliving his friends. Blue is the infinite made tangible as an open door that leads into a hospital waiting room, which turns out to be hell. Jarman layers unease beneath his ‘universal Blue’, with the images of love or of ideal beauty and natural landscapes always shifting and becoming shaded with death and the bitter reality of the disease.

The desolate blue in ‘HADES : PROJEKTION : HADES’ continues with the description of an unnamed, seemingly generic coastal holiday destination. Köhler crafts an uneasy idyll. The sun is high and shines permanently, and there is derogatory reference to an anonymous, ‘one horse’ town: ‘kaff am ende: aller küstenstraßen’. A further technical detail of the image emerges too, the scene being described is a still from a copy of the video from the final holiday: ‘[H]ochglanzkopie vom [/] letztem: urlaubsfilm: still: and forever *very* [/] *picturesque*, you know? you don’t’ (NF, p. 35). As in Jarman’s film, the idyll quickly unravels; it is not heaven, it is hell. The italicisation of ‘very picturesque’ conveys desperation to emphasise the positive message at odds with what has been described. Furthermore, the clichéd descriptive words, which resemble a ‘found’ expression from a holiday brochure, create an ironic tension with the desolate scene to which they refer, undermining the idea of an unchanging, picturesque eternity. Such images of perfect, unchanging paradises are foolish, Köhler’s text suggests.

The scene is uncannily dead and alive, real and represented. Its disturbing nature is exemplified by the video image of the sun, which produces a noon without end, like the continuously blazing sun conjured by Olafur Eliasson’s ‘The Weather Project’

²⁶³ Derek Jarman, ‘Blue’, 1993 Copyright The Estate of Derek Jarman; Derek Jarman, *Blue. text of a film* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1994), pp. 11, 16, 19.

installation in the Tate Modern (2003). Eliasson's sun was composed of a wide, semi-circular screen of 200 yellow mono-frequency lamps, made into a whole by reflecting in the mirror on the ceiling. Eliasson's 'sun' was controlled, deprived of its omnipotent impact on weather, as well as its role in helping sailors navigate, like Köhler's out-of-time video sun. When visitors looked up to where the sky would be at Eliasson's installation, they saw a mirror image of themselves standing on the ground. The installation makes Icarus out of visitors, confronting them with the narcissism and the hubris of attempting to capture the sun. While the scale of Eliasson's sun was grand, filling the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall with light, visitors were not allowed to forget that it was the sun as a projected spectacle, stripped of its qualities, like the landscape in Köhler's Hades.

'The desert of the real'

Köhler presents a proliferation of copies, a projection of a place much like any other. It is unclear whether there was a material origin for the copied stills of a worn-out video, suggesting Jean Baudrillard's concept of a simulated reality and the 'desert of the real'.²⁶⁴ History and material context are stripped from the place that Köhler depicts. The touristic buildings that populate the 'kaff', 'Villa [/] Ariadne Taverna Tyro Café Epikaste Rent Rooms [/] Antiope Club-Hotel Agamemnon Minos Palace', use the names of ancient literary figures or sites to lend an impression of authenticity to commercial spaces. The content of history is emptied out, and its aesthetic trace is used as a branding exercise, Köhler suggests. The passage suggests a bland experience of a country as if it has no historical context prior to the aesthetic consumption of it as '*picturesque*'. It could be well envisaged as a kitsch holiday resort where the past is plundered for the purpose of delivering visual stimulation, or a Tiresian prophecy of what Western culture is becoming.

The detachment of the place that Köhler portrays in the first section is also constructed through her use of punctuation. She uses colons to separate out the first section into fragments, forcing the reader to linger on each image and making it difficult to grasp larger units of meaning. The fragments created by the colons anticipate Köhler's reference in the third section of the canto to 'dreisekunden-takt' (*NF*, p. 36), the three

²⁶⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p.1.

seconds that scientists have identified as the human's cognition of 'now': 'die welt in scherben [/] im dreisekunden-takt wechselt die einstellung' (NF, p. 36).²⁶⁵ On the CD recording of the canto Köhler represents the punctuation by reading the passage as broken up fragments. The punctuation enhances the deadened aesthetic of the scene: great landscapes condensed onto film and copied onto copies of videos viewed as stills; historical references pasted onto buildings as advertisements: a world that has 'passed into' representation as a form of death.

Köhler describes the underworld as lying behind a wall of silence, populated by images and writing: 'die wand aus schweigen offen hinter sich [/] ein bildraum den bildraum schriftraum in dem alles vergeht [/] was einen namen hat' (NF, p.35). Where Wittgenstein sets the boundaries of his world as the boundaries of language, here Köhler suggests here that life ends when it enters into written language, a proposition that could seem in conflict with her decision to depict this process in poetry. However, Köhler's commitment to *sounding* out language is represented through her vocal recording of *Niemand's Frau*. Furthermore, her criticism is of what she regards as the deadening language of post-Enlightenment patriarchy and capitalism. *Niemand's Frau* is testament to Köhler's faith that language can positively disrupt and challenge repressive forms of language.

In the 'NOTEN', Köhler's directs the reader to the historical context of Villa Ariadne as the Gestapo HQ on Crete during the Nazi occupation (NF, p. 96). By juxtaposing Nazi history with naive holiday references, Köhler encourages a critical perspective on modern landscapes covered over by capitalist consumerism. What was implied violence in the first section becomes realised in the second section of the canto, as Köhler confronts the reader with images that could derive from ancient Greek literature, or from more recent Nazi violence:

so weiter Achill Orion Tantalos: die schatten
haften stories von vergewaltigungen blutrache
blutgier blutschande: blutleer längst abgetan
und ausgelutscht nicht von unsterblichen: von
untoten das leben hinter sich und nichts mehr
vor im background asphodelenwiesen blüten wie
augen weissaufschwarz linear 0 die augen- die

²⁶⁵ For an informative article on this research, see: <<http://www.zeit.de/1985/33/hirn-im-dreisekunden-takt>> [accessed: 15th August 2014].

punkt- die blindenschrift erinnerungen nichts
leserliches ein verlerntes alphabet erloschne
sprache wörter die nichts mehr bedeuten namen
(*NF*, p. 35)

Köhler mixes the bloody histories of ancient Greek literature with that of recent European history in the second section, highlighting the manifold depths beneath the surface of reality. Orion, Tantalus and Achilles are the dead characters or ‘shades’ that Odysseus encounters on his visit to the Hades to consult Tiresias in Homer’s *Odyssey*. In the first passage the sun, which is always at noon, casts no shadow and obliterates the ‘shadow’ of history. A shift in tone away from the first passage is marked by the arrival of shadows: ‘die schatten [/] haften stories von vergewaltigungen’ (*NF*, p. 35). There is a double meaning, as ‘schatten’ also refers to the ‘shades’ or ghosts in the underworld (Orion, Tantalus, Achilles), who tell stories of violent murders and betrayals, the narrative ‘shadows’ of the landscape.

The list of compound nouns featuring ‘blut-’, referring to blood feuds, bloodthirstiness and incest in the light of the allusion to Nazi violence in the ‘NOTEN’, conjure the German National Socialist government’s fetish for supposedly ‘pure’ blood and the racial cleansing programme of the Holocaust. Furthermore, the violence of modern capitalist consumption subsequently becomes the focus when Köhler shifts the ‘blut-’ compound to ‘blutleer längst abgetan und ausgelutscht’ (*NF*, p. 35), an image of capitalism sucking Greece dry of blood (somewhat prophetically, given the financial austerity that Greeks have recently suffered partly at the behest of Germany).²⁶⁶ Köhler takes a sarcastic tone to note that it is retired holidaymakers who are the vampiric living dead (‘untote’) sucking Greece dry, uninterested in the violent history that surrounds them, and with ‘das leben hinter sich und nichts mehr [/] vor’ (*NF*, p. 35).

The rupture with the past that Köhler represents in the videographic landscape in the first section of the canto is replicated in a loss of knowledge in the subjects in the second section: ‘erinnerungen nichts [/] leserliches ein verlerntes alphabet erloschne [/] sprache wörter die nichts mehr bedeuten’ (*NF*, p. 45). Almost like a reactionary schoolteacher, the narrative voice complains that these subjects do not know ancient Greek (although Köhler could be accused of elitism for this). The subjects in Köhler’s

²⁶⁶ Simon Shuster, ‘Germany finds itself cast as the Villain in Greek Drama’, *Time*, <<http://time.com/3959164/germany-greece-bailout-deal-athens-merkel/>>[accessed: 24th May 2016]

canto cannot 'read' their own memories and literally cannot read the ancient Greek texts that would animate their surroundings with cultural context: they do not understand Greek. Although the Greece/Hades that Köhler depicts is a 'schriftraum', she suggests that who populate it are 'blind' to its meaning.

Post-modern *Waste Land*

In a darkly comic tone that recalls Eliot's juxtaposition of modern life and ancient literary grandeur, the heroes of Greek antiquity, Theseus and Peirithoos, are now shallow figures committed to leisure.²⁶⁷

Theseus Peirithoos relaxed bei einem cocktail
auf abwachsbaren stapelbaren weissen stühlen:
vergessen die augensprache hinter den spiegel
gläsern der pilotenbrillen diese toten himmel
(*NF*, p. 36)

The cocktails they sip and the mass-produced 'abwachsbaren stapelbaren weissen stühlen' on which they sit convey an image from the brochure of a package holiday. In the 'NOTEN', Köhler reveals that the plastic chairs mentioned in the canto have an ancient double in the form of a magic 'chair of forgetfulness' in the underworld. The magic chairs caused the classical Theseus and Peirithoos forget their identities and the reason they had travelled to Hades, which was to steal Persephone for a wife (*NF*, p. 96). The modern reincarnations of the classical figures do not know ancient Greek and wear mirrored aviator sunglasses, as popularised by the film *Top Gun* (1986), a film made during a peak era of capitalist consumption. The men stare at the mirrored lenses of each others' glasses, staring back at their own mirror images. There is no eye contact; although the young men possess physical sight, they are 'blind' to the corporeal reality that surrounds them.

The final few lines of the second section run on semantically into the third section:

²⁶⁷ The two young men decided they were worthy to marry daughters of Zeus and to kidnap Helen (prior to the Trojan wars) and Persephone, wife of Hades, for which they travelled to the underworld. Apollodorus, *The Library*, pp. 142-143.

vergessen die augensprache hinter den spiegel
gläsern: der pilotenbrillen diese toten himmel

blauen augen: surfaces surfer observer blicke
& bilder unverbindlich von niemandem erwidert
erkannt von niemandem wollen sie alles kennen
alles gesehen schon zu ende gesehen ausgesehn
a heap of broken images: die welt in scherben
im dreisekunden-takt wechselt die einstellung
das blaue flackern über weisse wände DAS HIER
EIN SCHAUPLATZ nurmehr leere blicke auf leben
töten wie es anderswo geschieht & man es hier
längst hinter sich hat vor sich nur den bild-
den blinden schirm die abschirmung der bilder
aus denen alles hier gemacht ist & die keiner
mehr sehn kann im blau der anhaltenden stunde
life's but a walking shadow: HELL'S A BLUEBOX
(*NF*, p. 36)

The sky, which was first a video projection, becomes a reflected image on the mirrored lenses of apparently historically unaware narcissists.

The third section of the canto is an assemblage of associative images that depicts 'die welt in scherben'. The wasteland of projections and screens derives from a pre-occupation with knowing the future, which Köhler connects to a virtual world that displaces material bodies. Whereas in the first section of this canto Tiresias is described as 'the blind' (*NF*, p. 35) here, he becomes re-imagined as a screen, 'de[r] blinde schirm', transformed from man to computer. Köhler expands on the demonization of modern day Theseus and Peirithoos to characterise them using the invented English phrase 'surfaces surfer observer'. Two interpretations of 'surfer' coexist. Given the context of a Hades as a holiday resort, surfing can indicate the sport, and the fact that 'surfing' is the word typically used to describe browsing web pages, qualified by 'observer', suggests a digital reading too, referring to the 'surface' level on which the inhabitants of this hell exist, never interrogating its history.

By repeatedly using the pronoun 'niemand' at the beginning of this section, Köhler morphs the description of Theseus and Peirithoos into that of Odysseus. Nobodies surf the internet, where everyone is a detached observer, hidden from view:

the logic of Odyssean thought, of physical alienation and control, is embedded in digital reality, Köhler suggests. The nobodies are mediated or blocked by screens, and are reduced to surfaces: both the wearers of mirrored sunglasses and surfers on the internet who ‘chat’ to people online are protected from direct eye contact by screens. In interacting in this way, the aviator wearers and internet surfers become literally embodied as screens.

The purpose of Odysseus’s visit to Hades, the narrative point of Homer’s text to which the canto is anchored, is to hear Tiresias divine the future. Köhler infers that Odysseus’s consultation with Tiresias to know the outcome of his journey is a wish not only to know everything, but to know everything before it has even unfolded: ‘alles gesehen schon zu ende gesehen’ (NF, p. 36). Köhler suggests that the desire to know the future before it has unfolded has caused the disintegration of reality to a state where even killing takes place as it is as if it is not really happening, but rather is something that occurs onscreen. Such an existence, Köhler’s quotation from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* suggests, is akin to that of a ghost. Macbeth’s words, ‘life is but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour on stage and then is heard no more’ (*Macbeth*, V, Sc. 5, ll. 19-20), are uttered at a moment when he takes stock of the death and destruction that his ambition and desire for control over his future caused. Macbeth has reached a point where he regards life as an immaterial shadow, a fiction with no reality behind it.

Köhler equates Macbeth’s assessment of life with a hell envisioned as a ‘bluebox’, a blue-coloured space used in making films to project different backgrounds onto to create special effects (‘green screens’ are also used). Such a space, where apparent realities are in fact, projections, may be understood as a modern version of Shakespeare’s stage, trod by shadows. The progression from ‘augensprache’ and ‘diese toten himmel[/]blauen augen’, to blue flickering projections, ‘das blaue flackern über weisse wände’, to ‘bluebox’ suggests a transformation of the body towards the state of a projection, rather than a physical presence. Abstracted onto a virtual reality played out onscreen, the suffering body disappears from sight.

Ancient and Modern: Köhler’s shape-shifting Tiresias

Köhler presents the reader with a host of Tiresian figures in ‘HADES : PROJEKTION : HADES’. In light of the critical context of the first section concerning tourism, the lines

that refer to Tiresias by his blindness: ‘Ask for the [/] blind. er sieht: nicht: was du siehst: nichts [/] was er sieht: siehst du!’ (*NF*, p. 35) seem to present Tiresias as if he were a clairvoyant at a fairground. The words play with the paradox of the miraculous sight of a ‘blind seer’ who though unable to see a hand in front of his face will prophesise a picturesque future (in this case, for those who pay). The use of an exclamation mark has the commercial ring of a sign advertising outside a fortune-teller’s tent. In the third section ‘the blind’ becomes not Tiresias, but a screen. Köhler thus weaves Tiresias into her dystopian vision of the future by transforming him into a computer who cannot reciprocate the physical gaze of those who visit it but, like the internet, can offer answers.

In the fourth and fifth sections of the canto, Köhler contrasts two Tiresian figures, ancient and modern. The first Tiresias places his hands into the warm entrails of a sacrifice:

asphodelenaugen
 zerspellendes grellendes taubes weiss blindes
 blühen ein blickloses lächelndes nichts sicht
 bares hören zuhören zu nichts gehören begreif
 ende hände ins warme ins feuchte getaucht ins
 opfer ins eben noch lebende zum haruspizium &
 kann kein blut sehn nichts rotes kein schwarz
 kein weiss kein himmel keinen vogel ein alter
 augur grinst liest tastend die unsichtbare in
 schrift des lebens das stirbt & ihm unter der
 hand ein opfer er weiss es vollzieht es ist er
 schmeckt sein blut

(*NF*, p. 37)

The images of the ancient Greek haruspex are sensual, in contrast to the preceding third section, which is dominated by screens and images. The body is centre stage and truth is derived from the body. The ancient Tiresias in Hades reads the entrails of a still-warm body to find truth: death is visceral and present.

The body is re-introduced in the final sections of the canto and Köhler’s language becomes more sensual and lively, and the metaphors, sonorous aural movements and diverse vocabulary, contrast strongly with the repetitious language of the third section. Köhler draws attention to the use of the body as a means to knowledge by choosing the verb ‘begreifen’ which incorporates grasping physically with as intellectual

comprehension: 'begreif[/]ender hände ins warme'. Tiresias has hands that gain understanding through touch, undoing the division between mind and body claimed by Descartes, at whom Köhler has a critical dig earlier in the cycle (*NF*, p. 13). Sight, which is Odysseus's distanced means of deriving understanding of the world and controlling it, is missing in Tiresias. However, Odysseus consults Tiresias's superior knowledge of his future gained through a tactile, bloody divination. The mystical method of the ancient divination is not visible and lacks the coherence of the empirical logic of a machine or of computers: it cannot be broken down into component parts and an algorithm cannot be defined. The way that the Tiresias of myth carries out his divination in the above section is violent and involves ritual sacrifice. Nonetheless, Köhler's preference for this corporeal way of thinking is apparent in her generous poetic treatment of it. At least, Köhler suggests, it witnesses its violence ('er [/] schmeckt sein blut'), unlike the deathly creep of mechanisation or digital realities that renders all life *unvital*.

By contrast, in the fifth section, the modern Tiresias is converted by Köhler into a dead, gender-less machine for tourists that spits out the prophecy 'fear death by water', quoted from *The Waste Land*, for a few hundred drachma:

es hat

das mannsein wie das frausein hinter sich: he
 is she it: it answers to the name Tiresias am
 strand ein automat mannshöhe plastik in natur
 steinoptik *la bocca della verità* stopf ihm ne
 hand ins maul plus 2x100 drachmen obolus dann
 kotzt er zukunft aus 'n zettelchen *fear death*
by water

(*NF*, p. 38)

The reader is transported back to Köhler's 'Waste Land' again, reflecting a resumption of her critical mode after the sensual contrast of the fourth section. Tiresias shifts from 'he' to 'she' and, finally, lands on 'it'. 'It' is abstract and 'it' does not refer to a gendered body or indeed, to anything in particular. After becoming 'it', Tiresias, so it turns out, becomes a machine, and in making this point, Köhler draws attention to the desirability of gender, of physical difference and thus of queerness. The language Köhler employs is the mixed language of tourism where (American) English, the language of contemporary, global consumer capitalism, is mixed in with crass colloquial German (kotzt – pukes), and a reference to the tourist attraction of the '*Bocca della Verità*', a first-century lie detector of a

stone face with a hole for a mouth located in Rome. Köhler conflates ancient Greece and ancient Rome, suggesting a post-modern disregard for honouring specific historical origin. She drops vowels to suggest modern slang: ‘stopf ihm ne [/] hand ins maul’ and linguistically, Köhler gives the impression of the experience of a belligerent, German teenager, or classically uneducated person’s experience. Here, Köhler could be accused of being culturally elitist, or classist.

The words ‘dann [/] kotzt er zukunft aus ‘n zettelchen *fear death* [/] *by water*’, bring together the vulgar with the trivialising diminutive ‘-chen’, indicating that the prophecy is not of great significance. However, almost in direct punishment for the trivialising language, Köhler brings about a linguistic shift that returns the reader to the powerful, transgendered Tiresias of Homer and Eliot, who brings an apocalyptic flood of bloodied history raining down:

das wein- das veilchenfarbne blutmeer
auf das der himmel stürzt die schatten fallen
zusammen in jener farbe die noch keinen namen
hatte den horizont geflutet gelöscht die welt
at the late the violate hour sieh diese toten
toten toten toten himmel - I Tiresias, though
blind, throbbing between two lives: ein toter

eine tote: sprache: was sagt sie was er & wem
(NF, p. 38)

Tiresias, disgusted, bears witness ‘at the late the violate hour’. Köhler modifies Eliot’s ‘violet hour’, to make ‘violate’, bringing out the violence implicit in Eliot’s description of the moment that the sailor (the patriarch, Odysseus) returns home from the sea and ‘assaults’ the woman after dinner. In the context of this canto, the moment that violates is a moment in history at which the violence of history has been forgotten and reduced to a fairground amusement.

Tiresias speaks from a point in time before the idealising, forgetful colour blue has been named. The sea is still ‘wine-dark’. The four repetitions of ‘toten’ in this final passage convey Tiresias’s anger, and the imperative ‘sieh’, demands that others too – the reader – should bear witness to the violence of history. Through Tiresias’s furious return, Köhler recoups the possibility both for memory, and for embodied difference. The pronouns used to refer to Tiresias become nuanced and acknowledge his/her queer

history, becoming 'er' and 'sie', rather than the 'it' or 'es' from the preceding passage. Tiresias is embodied, not a machine, and is shifting in a queer mode between male and female bodies, even after death and in language. Köhler accommodates both of Tiresias's genders in language, 'was sagt sie was er und wem', as well as the other, who listens, producing a double, transgendered and embodied speaking position that does not efface the listener. Whether or not there is hope of salvation has not been foreseen.

Conclusion

In the cantos analysed in this chapter, Köhler connects an unwillingness to confront a problematic and bloody history on the part of Western culture, with a violent present. From the fate of Lot's Wife, to that of Alan Turing, Köhler demonstrates that a refusal to turn back to bear witness to the foundational violence of the present, and also to accommodate difference, allows the perpetuation of violent historical cycles that echo down the centuries. Köhler's anxieties about the roles that computer technology and biological science could play in the effacement of difference are articulated through dystopian futures derived from historical and literary precedents. In the figure of Alan Turing, Köhler identifies a contradiction between his prediction of a computerised future, and the archaic prejudice of the British legal system, traced back to the bible, that punished his queer sexuality. Apparent technological progress is no guarantor of ethical progress, Köhler's cantos suggest that the irrationality of prejudice persists. While methods of reading the future might have evolved from Odysseus's visit to Tiresias, whose wisdom is accessed through the sacrifice of animals in the underworld, to a bloodless *Bocca della verita* machine, the 'reading' of sequenced DNA and the calculations of computers, violence remains embedded in contemporary reality and to forget this fact, Köhler suggests, would be fatal: 'GAME OVER'.

Chapter 7

The Genealogy and Operation of Patriarchal Power in *Niemands Frau*

Surprisingly, Odysseus is only mentioned by name twice in the cantos of *Niemands Frau* and then again in the epilogue. Further to that, his name appears once in each of the three 'NACHWORT VORLÄUFIG' sections. By contrast, he features much more frequently by name in the explanatory 'NOTEN' section located at the back of the printed volume. Odysseus or 'Niemand' is a cipher for patriarchal power throughout the cycle. Köhler finds in the figure of Odysseus and his linguistic alter ego 'Niemand' a lens through which to address issues that she identifies in structures of patriarchal power and the violent reality they produce – over and over again, through generations. The two cantos that will be analysed in this chapter, 'POLYMORPHEM' and 'MIT ANDEREN WORTEN : WAS ODYSSEUS ERZÄHLT', constitute Köhler's critical poetic treatment of the ways in which this power operates.

The first recorded appearances of 'de[r] vielgewanderte Mann' Odysseus are in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The quality that differentiates Odysseus from other Homeric heroes is his use of cunning (*mêtis*) to survive threats like the Cyclops Polyphemus, rather than physical strength. Homer's Odysseus is proud of his intellect and boasts of it: 'Ich bin Odysseus, Laertes' Sohn durch mancherlei Klugheit [/] unter den Menschen bekannt, und mein Ruhm erreicht den Himmel' (*Odyssee*, Book 9, ll. 19-20).²⁶⁸ Furthermore, Athena, goddess of wisdom and war (whose mother was the goddess 'Mêtis', after whom the Greek word for strategic cunning is named), decides to ally herself with Odysseus because of his powers of reasoning and his rhetorical skill: 'du bist von allen Menschen der erste /An Verstand und Reden' (*Odyssee*, Book 13, ll. 297-298). However, what Köhler exposes repeatedly in *Niemands Frau* is that while Odysseus may be famous for his 'Verstand und Reden', what lies behind these 'enlightened' qualities, both in Homer's text and more broadly, is violence towards others and, ultimately, himself.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 135. For more on *mêtis* generally, see: Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, p. 27. In relation to Odysseus, see: Clayton, *A Penelopean Poetics*, pp. 26-32; Pietro Pucci, 'Banter and Banquets for Heroic Death', in *Songs of the Sirens. Essays on Homer* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 49-68 (p. 54).

After a survey of Odysseus reception relevant to Köhler's interpretation, this chapter will analyse the third canto 'POLYMORPHEM', which presents Köhler's critical perspective on a genealogy of rational thought with a rational subject 'Ich', figured as Odysseus, at its core. While perspective in 'POLYMORPHEM' operates at a 'macro' level, analysing broad shifts and developments in Western thought and representation, the seventh canto 'MIT ANDEREN WORTEN : WAS ODYSSEUS ERZÄHLT' (*NF*, pp. 26-27), is on a more intimate scale. It is told in Odysseus's voice, and in the canto and the 'NOTEN' section that corresponds with it, Köhler focuses on issues of patriarchal heredity and ponders what kind of violence the logic of patriarchal survival inflicts on the masculine subject. Köhler asks what survives Niemand's survival and what the relationship between father and son produces, as exemplified by Odysseus's relationship with Telemachus.

Odysseus, or Ulysses after Homer

Some authors throughout history have looked favourably upon Odysseus's intelligence, linguistic skill, and use of violence, while others have regarded these character traits and behaviours with deep suspicion. Köhler's treatment picks up on the latter thread and takes a critical position against literary representations of Odysseus as an archetype of virtue, taking a negative view his use of language to manipulate reality. After scant mention in Greek fragments after Homer, Odysseus became a more popular literary figure in the 5th century BC, a time of political unrest in Greece, as political poets deployed the figure of Odysseus to support their partisan causes. Theognis likens himself to Odysseus, and praises his 'pitiless spirit' when he returns to Ithaca and slaughters all of the suitors, as well as his versatile mind.²⁶⁹ In contrast, Pindar directly attacks Odysseus in his *Nemean Ode* (c. 490 B.C.) where Odysseus is cast as a sly, deceitful trickster who is responsible for a host of misfortunes and whose excellence was exaggerated by Homer's poetic prowess. In Euripides' *Hecuba* (425 B.C.) Odysseus is chillingly Machiavellian and justifies the sacrifice of Hecuba's daughter Polyxena to silence the ghost of Achilles.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Theognis of Megara, *Poetry and the Polis*, eds Thomas J. Figueira and Gregory Nagy (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 75.

²⁷⁰ Pindar, *Nemean Odes*, ed. and trans. Diane Arnson Svarlien (1990), Perseus Classical Library of Tufts University:
<<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0033.tlg003.perseus-eng1:7>> [accessed: 26th October 2014]; Euripides, 'Hecuba', in *Euripides. The Complete Greek*

W.B. Stanford describes this Odysseus as a ‘cynical but unrepentant power politician, a disillusioned but unrelenting careerist’, a characterisation echoed in Köhler’s reception.²⁷¹ In contrast, in Plato’s ‘The Myth of Er’ at the end of *Republic* (380 BC), Odysseus is gathered with a host of Homeric souls that are choosing bodies for their next reincarnation and rejects a path of ambition or adventure in favour of a humble life as an everyman.²⁷²

When ‘Odysseus’ became ‘Ulysses’ in Latin, he had an initially positive reception in Horace’s *Epistles* (20 B.C.), where his behaviour is held up as a paradigm of virtue and an example that others should follow. Horace contrasts Odysseus’s behaviour with that of his shipmates who are characterised as undisciplined, immoral and lazy.²⁷³ However, in general, in Latin literature Ulysses is viewed through a more critical lens. In Virgil’s *Aeneid* (29-19 B.C.), for example, the Trojan horse stratagem was judged as a morally repugnant. However, testament to the ambiguity and allure of Homer’s creation, Harold Bloom identifies a tacit admiration for Ulysses qualities through Virgil’s characterisation of Aeneas himself: ‘Aeneas appropriately (from his perspective) gives us an Ulysses who was the harshest of enemies, and yet Aeneas himself, in many of his best qualities, is clearly modelled by Virgil upon Homer’s heroic and hardy warrior.’²⁷⁴ Virgil’s engagement with Odysseus is thus ambivalent, as Odyssean qualities are identified in both positive and negative terms.

Ovid’s representation of Ulysses in *Metamorphoses* is as a deceitful and cunning liar. Ulysses boasts of how he persuaded Agamemnon and Clytemnestra to sacrifice their daughter, conveying a cold and ruthless mind: ‘I was then dispatched to the mother, who needed deceiving more than persuading to send her child’ (*Metamorphoses*, Book. 13, ll. 193-194). However in Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* (c. 2 A.D.), didactic books advising on love, Ulysses is depicted as an eloquent and charming lover, whose rhetorical skill is held up as

Drama, eds Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O’Neill, Jr., 2 vols (New York: Random House, 1938), I: *Hecuba*, trans. E. P. Coleridge.

²⁷¹ Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme. A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* (Dallas, TX: Spring Publications, 1992), p. 117.

²⁷² Plato, *Republic*, p. 378.

²⁷³ ‘In display of what courage and wisdom can also accomplish, / Homer has offered a useful example for us in Ulysses [...] Songs of the Sirens you know of, you know of the potions of Circe: How, had he greedily drunk them in folly, as did his companions, / He would have languished, a slave to a slut, in a brutish existence, / Foul as a dog and rejoicing in filth like a pig in a quagmire.’ Horace, *Epistles*, Book I, in *The Complete Works of Horace*, trans. Charles E. Passage (New York: Ungar, 1983), p. 263.

²⁷⁴ Bloom, p. 2.

a positive example by Ovid: 'Ulysses was eloquent, not handsome – / Yet he filled sea-goddesses' hearts with aching passion' (Ovid, *The Art of Love*, Book II, ll. 123-144).²⁷⁵

Later, in the medieval period, in the twenty-sixth canto of Dante's *Inferno* Ulysses is condemned to the eighth ring of the eighth circle of hell for sins relating to the misuse of his intellect for violent ends, with the Trojan horse trick given as the chief example. However, while Dante's Christian ethics mean that Ulysses is sent to hell, like Virgil, the poet cannot help but feel admiration for him. Dante's guide Virgil approaches Ulysses with great respect. Dante changes the outcome of Ulysses' journey too, and so instead of returning home to Ithaca and Penelope, Ulysses sails on in order to find out what lies beyond the limits of the world, continuing his quest for knowledge. Despite themselves, male authors throughout history are impressed by Odysseus – his rhetorical skill attracts Dante to identify with him or praise his skills, even against his own supposed moral agenda.

In Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (c. 1602) Ulysses is an equivocal figure whose skilled rhetoric is used to such cynical ends that at times it becomes ironic. He gives a grand speech to encourage Achilles, whose ego is fragile because of Ajax's growing fame, to kill Hector. While Odysseus's tone appears noble and heroic, the implications of the speech reveal Shakespeare's Ulysses as a manipulator, using his words for cruelly violent ends.²⁷⁶ Odysseus is not treated with a favourable eye by other seventeenth-century authors either, according to Stanford: 'Meeting him now in Fénelon's *Télémaque* (1699) or in Pope's translations of Homer, one finds him just a little pretentious and rather a prig, soon it is clear, he may simply be a bore.'²⁷⁷ In the following century, Ulysses becomes a rather sterile, honourable hero, an image that was not shaken up until the Romantic Hellenism of the nineteenth century, where his neo-classical composure becomes disrupted by the emergence of a 'restless modernism'.²⁷⁸

In Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem 'Ulysses' (1842), the Greek hero becomes a complex and restless figure who is bored by Ithacan life and is keen always to keep on travelling. He unflatteringly describes Penelope as his 'aged wife' and Telemachus is

²⁷⁵ Ovid, 'The Art of Love', Book II, in *Ovid. The Erotic Poems*, trans. Peter Green (London: Penguin Classics, 1982), pp. 194-195.

²⁷⁶ Harold Brooks, 'Troilus and Cressida: Its Dramatic Unity and Genre', in *Fanned and Winnowed Opinions. Shakespearean Essays Presented to Harold Jenkins*, eds John W. Mahon and Thomas A. Pendleton (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 6-25; and Bloom, p. 4.

²⁷⁷ Stanford, p. 161.

²⁷⁸ Stanford, p. 162.

effectively dismissed as a dull, domesticated civil-servant-type figure. Ulysses distances himself from his son with the final line of the second stanza:

Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.²⁷⁹

Ulysses' yearning for knowledge and his rejection of his life of bourgeois comforts in Ithaca recalls the spirit of Goethe's Faust, who longs for experience beyond the quotidian. : 'this gray spirit yearning in desire / To follow knowledge like a sinking star, / Beyond the utmost bound of human thought'. Tennyson's 'Ulysses' reflects the imperial fervour that took hold in Britain during the Victorian period (1837-1901). Like Theognis and Dante, Tennyson identified with Odysseus and 'admitted there is a lot of himself and his own determination in the poem.'²⁸⁰ Odysseus's mixture of intelligence, linguistic skill and physical endeavour has lured the egos of male authors to identify their artistic endeavour with his journey.

In James Joyce's experimental, modernist masterpiece *Ulysses* (1922), Odysseus is reinvented as Leopold Bloom, a contemporary 'everyman' figure more in the mould of Plato's Odysseus than of Homer's more self-confident hero.²⁸¹ Whereas Köhler criticises Odysseus as a figure who aligns himself with abstract thought, Joyce's Bloom operates at an everyday, material scale. 'I see [Bloom],' Joyce said, 'from all sides, and therefore he is all-round in the sense of your sculptor's figure. But he is a complete man as well – a good man'.²⁸² Bloom is considerably less violent than Homer's Odysseus: whereas Odysseus slaughters all of the suitors, Bloom returns silently to the bed in which his wife Molly slept with another man.²⁸³ The scale and content of Bloom's life are transformed from

²⁷⁹ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'Ulysses', in *Selected Poems. Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 49-50.

²⁸⁰ A. A. Markley, 'Tennyson', in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception*, eds Norman Vance and Jennifer Wallace, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), IV: 1790–1880, p. 550.

²⁸¹ James Joyce, *Ulysses* ed. Jerry Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²⁸² Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the making of 'Ulysses' and other writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 17.

²⁸³ For a detailed chapter comparing Homer's Odysseus with Joyce's Leopold Bloom, see: Keri Elizabeth Ames, 'The Rebirth of Heroism from Homer's Odyssey to Joyce's Ulysses, in *James Joyce*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 2009), pp. 141-160.

the epic and heroic to the everyday, the intimate, and bourgeois. However, the stream of consciousness technique that conveys the flow of Bloom's thoughts provides an intense level of material detail, and Joyce's virtuosic language full of puns, jokes and allusions makes *Ulysses* epic in the breadth and fullness of reality that it conveys. Though approached from a different angle from Köhler's critical poetic reception of Homer, Joyce's literary reception constitutes another, equivalent 'antidote' to the brutal and staunchly rational archetype that Köhler criticises.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the reading of Odysseus's actions in the chapter 'Odysseus oder Mythos und Aufklärung' of *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944) by Frankfurt School philosophers Adorno and Horkheimer, has been highly influential in German language reception and far beyond. In their analysis, the means by which Odysseus preserves his life during his voyage in Homer's text is intended as an allegory for the negative effect of Enlightenment rationality upon the human subject:

Die Herrschaft des Menschen über sich selbst, die sein Selbst begründet, ist virtuell allemal die Vernichtung des Subjekts, in dessen Dienst sie geschieht, denn die beherrschte, unterdrückte und durch Selbsterhaltung aufgelöste Substanz ist gar nichts anderes als das Lebendige, als dessen Funktion die Leistungen der Selbsterhaltung einzig sich bestimmen, eigentlich gerade das, was erhalten werden soll.²⁸⁴

Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the rationality that initially sets out to preserve the human subject leads ultimately to its destruction. This is because the desire to control the world with reason leads logically (they argue) to extinguishing exactly that lively, irrational unpredictability that defines life *per se*, and cannot be assimilated to a strict rational schema. The founding violence that Adorno and Horkheimer identify in the formation of the rational subject, and the absurdity of its circular logic (that self-preservation necessitates (self-) destruction), has significantly influenced Köhler's reception of Odysseus.

The approach taken in 'Odysseus oder Mythos und Aufklärung', of probing Homer's narrative to expose the structural patterns in the relationship between the masculine subject (Odysseus) and the world, anticipates Köhler's treatment of Odysseus in *Niemand's Frau*. To a greater extent than in Adorno's and Horkheimer's text, Odysseus

²⁸⁴ Horkheimer, and Adorno, 'Dialektik der Aufklärung', p. 76.

is present in *Niemands Frau* not as a ‘character’, but as a sign for patriarchal power and violence in varying forms. Where Köhler does choose to express a chink of humanity in her representation of Odysseus, as will be demonstrated in my analyses below, it is to lend emotive power to her criticisms of the systems that Odysseus helps to perpetuate, by revealing that he, too, wants a way out.

Odysseus in *Niemands Frau*: ‘POLYMORPHEM’

The title ‘POLYMORPHEM’ is the dative masculine or neuter form of a German adjective derived from Greek and meaning ‘of many forms’. It bears a close resemblance to the well-known ‘Polytropos’, which is the first adjective that Homer uses to describe Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, meaning ‘turning many ways’ or ‘much travelled’ (*NF*, p.75). Through her choice of title, which is visibly similar to, but shifts away from Homer’s adjective, Köhler indicates to the reader that this canto will be *her* reading of Odysseus/Niemand and what he signifies. Like Homer, Köhler associates Odysseus with a principle of multiplicity – ‘poly’ – but rather than signifying many directions, Köhler’s *polymorphem* might be said to refer to the many forms of logocentric, patriarchal power that come under her poetic scrutiny. Like Adorno and Horkheimer, Köhler criticises a Western, post-Enlightenment reality that has at its core the archetype of the rational and rationalising subject, ‘Ich’, identified with Odysseus. Köhler situates the ‘Ich’ as the source of logocentrism, the rejection of the embodied life, Euclidean geometry, a violent and objectifying visual culture, and a state power that obsessively observes and controls its subjects. Fragments and images pertaining to Odysseus from Homer’s text are woven together with later intertexts to construct a genealogy of patriarchal power.

A quotation from Oscar Wilde’s *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898) ‘YET EACH MAN KILLS / THE THING / HE LOVES’ follows the title.²⁸⁵ The paradoxical line, which juxtaposes love with violence, both perpetrated by a male subject, is broken up with two inserted forward slashes (which typically indicate line breaks) that are not in Wilde’s original text. The slashes have the effect of separating and emphasising the vulnerability of the object of love and slaughter that is called ‘THE THING’. ‘THE THING’ is spatially enclosed by (and in light of the erotic content, ‘embraced’ by), but also separated and alienated from the referent of the masculine noun ‘each man’ and

²⁸⁵ Oscar Wilde, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (London: Phoenix, 1996).

pronoun 'he' that have verbs attributed to them. On the left side 'each man' is killing the thing, and on the right side, 'he' is loving the 'thing'.

'THE THING' is the kernel of a conflict between desire and control faced by the male subject. It is the object of two verbs, trapped between them and at the mercy of 'each man' and 'he'. The 'thing' must refer to something that is metaphorically or actually alive, as it can be killed. Given the subsequent depiction of the disembodiment of the linguistic subject 'Ich' in the canto, it could refer to the body and desire, which Odysseus represses in himself and mercilessly punishes in others. The forward slashes can signify the wedge that, in Köhler's view, Odysseus drives between his linguistic subject position 'Ich', which exists in an orderly, grammatical space, and the body and corporeal reality. The process by which a body becomes a 'thing' is one of degradation: it is easier to kill a 'thing' than a named and embodied subject. As Rachel Jones observes, one function of Odysseus's denial of his body is 'to disguise and dissimulate his own vulnerable, bodily, sexuate being, while projecting this role onto others', namely, the female figures in the *Odyssey*.²⁸⁶

Köhler brings in concrete legal and political context to the epigraph by describing the specific detail of Wilde's trial in the 'NOTEN'. She informs the reader of how Wilde, a homosexual man in a time when homosexual acts were illegal, attempted to prosecute the Marquess of Queensbury in a libel trial for calling Wilde a 'sodomite' but how this was turned against him when it was discovered that Wilde had had homosexual sex, then the crime of 'gross indecency' (*NF*, p. 92). A crime of the body trumped a crime of misuse of language. By citing this example, Köhler provides the reader with a coherent example of how the male, patriarchal subject disciplines those who do not conform to its boundaries. Wilde was sentenced to two years of hard labour and died a few years after his release. The law, which defines the permitted actions of its subjects and thus defines them *per se*, rejected Wilde's succumbing to the disorderly desire of his body, situated outside the framework of law. The penal reform and reshaping of his body through hard labour killed him. The paradox that Köhler points towards is that the state, like Odysseus, protects and cares for its subject ('Ich') by repressing the body, but in striving to drive out the corporeal reality that transgresses its definition, extinguishes it altogether.

The canto then begins with a contemplation of what constitutes the subject, 'Ich', but 'Ich ist' jars by putting together the first-person pronoun with the third-person

²⁸⁶ Jones, 'Reading Köhler with Irigaray and Cavarero', p. 104.

singular of the verb 'sein', making 'Ich' an object of contemplation, rather than a present and speaking subject.

Ich ist papier vom anderen beschrieben der
stoff aus dem die bibliotheken sind meine
abgezognen häute es bleibt ein fleisch ein
schorf ein grind die wahrheit des Odysseus
HE'S NO BODY

(*NF*, p.16)

'Ich' is effectively a noun here with papier as its predicate complement. Ironically given its meaning, 'Ich' is objectified by the text, first by being treated as the third-person singular and then by the canto's semantic content, when it is described as the object of canonical literature. In the first afterword in the 'NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG' section, Köhler describes the *Odyssey* as a narrative of 'wie man Einer wird und einer mann wird, wie Er ein Ich wird, sich einen namen macht, geschichte' (*NF*, p. 83). In 'POLYMORPHEM', Köhler depicts what an 'Ich' is in Western culture. As the canto continues, it becomes clear that 'Ich' is not a living or vital subject, but a thing of thought and of language, without a body. The subsequent 'meine' introduces a speaking voice that takes possession of the discussed 'Ich'. It emerges, in disjointed language that refuses to speak coherently from the first-person position, that the 'Ich' is attributed to Odysseus. Köhler conveys an Odysseus who speaks about his own subject position in the third person, as if detached from it. The distance Odysseus establishes from his own 'Ich' here follows the example in Homer's text where Odysseus names himself 'Niemand', a pronoun that must always be used in the third person position. After 'meine' the identifiable speaking subject disappears again and the canto proceeds from a perspective that is critical of Odysseus.

The passage is also critical of a subject that has been created in a context where the function of knowledge is to dominate. Köhler blurs the boundary between the subject 'Ich', the archive of knowledge in libraries, and Odysseus. In oblique language that functions more by association than through the clear operation of sentences, Köhler crafts an image of a dried-out, pillar-of-the-establishment subject, defined and affirmed by its presence in libraries. As Derrida writes, 'there is no political power without control of the archive.' Libraries are the archival repositories of the hegemonic power where

texts are collected and catalogued, if deemed legitimate.²⁸⁷ The texts that constitute the 'Ich' are only held together as 'ein fleisch' by the collected presence of the text in libraries, making them an official *corpus* of literature. For Derrida, the 'gathering together' that constitutes the subject as 'One' (Einer) is a violent process that does violence both to the One and to the Other.

As soon as there is the One, there is murder, wounding, traumatism. *L'Un se garde de l'autre...*The One makes itself violence. It violates and does violence to itself but also institutes itself as violence. It becomes what it is, the very violence—that it does to itself. Self-determination as violence. *L'Un se garde de l'autre pour se faire violence.*²⁸⁸

Like Derrida, Köhler depicts the founding 'truth' of the logocentric unitary subject 'Ich', 'Einer', or 'Odysseus' as the violent separation from his body to become NO BODY. This process damages Odysseus, or the 'Ich', and so as well as portraying Odysseus as a perpetrator of violence in 'POLYMORPHEM', as will be demonstrated, Köhler also shows him to be a victim of violence too.

The grotesque list of apposed nouns 'ein fleisch ein / schorf ein grind die wahrheit des Odysseus', does not depict Odysseus as effulgent and powerful, but as damaged dead flesh, a hardened scab covering a whole body wound. Understood as metaphor or literally, Odysseus is a brutalised subject, covered with scarring scab tissue, which, though hard to the touch and almost like a shell, is nonetheless a brittle and precarious barrier to the world. Jones observes that, 'A high price is paid for the institution of the 'Ich'...this supposedly neutral subject depends on cutting itself off from the body to take hold of the word. Thus the language of the subject excludes all those whose being is aligned (by that same supposedly neutral and objective language) with their bodies.'²⁸⁹ Köhler shifts into English for a translation of 'Niemand' to NO BODY that separates 'no' and 'body' to exploit the physicality of the English word, which unlike the German, contains the word 'body', and to explicitly equate Odysseus's linguistic self-negation and re-incarnation as 'Niemand' with the negation of his body.

²⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1998), p. 4.

²⁸⁸ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, pp. 78-79.

²⁸⁹ Jones, p. 104.

'HE' S' is ambiguous in English too and can mean 'he is' and also, 'he has', equating the name with the loss of body.

The loss of Odysseus's physical body is made real in the canto through the ritual sacrifice of a body in favour of a subject made of text:

HE'S NO BODY er hat das Wort er sagt er ist
DIE SCHRIFT Ich ist sein text entleibt & ab
geschrieben der haruspex liest seinen sinn
aus dem noch warmen opferkörper:

(*NF*, p. 16)

Köhler repeats 'Ich ist' here again to identify the Odyssean subject as logocentric, building on the description of the first few lines. The flesh of the first few lines is dead flesh – scabs – but this is the original moment of its death. Odysseus's fleshy, still warm mortal body is an image that contrasts starkly with the image of a scabbed 'Ich' that sheds its skins, like a cold-blooded reptile. His body is 'written off', leaving a linguistic subject that is reproducible like language, if one considers both understandings of 'abgeschrieben'. The haruspex reads Odysseus's body, and its value is now found in its translation into language with the corporeal and semantic referents for 'sinn' which collide in the image of literally reading from the body.

What the haruspex interprets as the future of 'das leben' after the sacrifice of the body is bleak. The colon used for the first time in this canto after the image of the sacrifice of the body suggests that what follows is a consequence of the founding of the logocentric subject:

das leben
auf den toten punkt gebracht setzt sich als
linie fort & ab in die unendlichkeit: NUMEN
& fluchtpunkt aller flächen im Euklidischen
raum vor allen bildern der entfernte seher

(*NF*, p. 16)

Köhler sets the deadened subject in a space and time that is linear, unchanging, represented by a line that stretches forwards and backwards, forever unchanging: a model of reality taken from Euclidean geometry. That is the abstract, ideal, mathematical

Euclidean space and time of the Newtonian universe. As Derrida observes, ‘the One, as self-repetition, can only repeat and recall this instituting violence. It can only affirm itself and engage itself in this repetition.’²⁹⁰ Kohler shows how the establishment of a subject that is alienated from its body reproduces such alienation in the development of epistemological, visual and political cultures that repress corporeal reality. In the ‘NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG’ section, the subject is summoned to one single point or word: ‘Auf den punkt bringen, aufs wort: Apport!’ (NF, p. 79). Köhler equates the word with a point in space, just as in ‘POLYMORPHEM’ she shifts to a discussion of the word ‘Ich’, to a reflection of the subject in Euclidean space as ‘das leben auf den toten punkt gebracht setzt sich als linie fort & ab’ (NF, p. 16).

Euclidean geometry, formulated by Euclid in his text *Elements* in 300 BC, treats physical space as abstract mathematical space and only deals in straight lines and circles. It is finite, flat, homogenous and static and does not investigate the properties of changing figures. Euclid composed ten unchanging axioms about space to deduce thousands of new conclusions, and his work formed the basis of all subsequent rational thought and the notion of verifiable, objective fact in Western culture. In his study of the place of mathematics in the development of Western culture, Morris Kline credits Euclidean geometry with instigating the rise of rational thought:

It [Euclidean geometry] engendered a rational spirit. No other human creation has demonstrated how much knowledge can be derived by reasoning along as have the hundreds of proofs in Euclid. [...] Theologians, logicians, philosophers, statesmen and all seekers of truth have imitated the form and procedure of Euclidean geometry.²⁹¹

Therefore, Euclidean geometry has been a resource for thinkers seeking to produce ‘universal’ truths, as its rules are consistent and its empty, abstract space appears to strip away material particularity. It dominated Western thought more or less unchallenged until the nineteenth century; Kant, for example, considered that ‘there would never be a way other than Euclidean geometry and Newtonian mechanics to organize experience’.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Derrida, p. 79.

²⁹¹ Morris Kline, *Mathematics in Western Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 53-54.

²⁹² Morris Kline, *Mathematics. The Loss of Certainty* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 77; Immanuel Kant regarded Euclid’s principles, such as ‘that a straight line is the

In this passage of *Niemand's Frau* Köhler suggests a causal connection between the formation of the logocentric 'Ich' and Euclidean geometry; she positions Euclidian geometry as an extension of a subject that is totally 'rational' and disembodied. Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray considers female subjectivity to belong to the 'other space', defined in contradistinction to that of Euclidean geometry, which is linear, stable and homogenous: "To think and live through this difference we must reconsider the whole problematic of *space* and *time*."²⁹³ The connections made by Köhler in *Niemand's Frau* suggests that a radical rethinking of the subject requires a radical rethinking of the model of space and time that produces and supports it, for the condition of the subject cannot be separated from its relation to space and time.

Euclidean geometry was the foundation of the 'hegemonic visual model of the modern era', first developed in the Italian Renaissance, that combines an appreciation of ancient Greek and Roman aesthetics and architecture, and Euclidean geometry, with Cartesian ideas of subjective rationality.²⁹⁴ Dorothea Olkowski's account of the Renaissance picture plane has at its centre a figure that resembles Odysseus:

The Italian Renaissance chose to conceive of the picture plane by combining the medieval notion that space has a centre (now occupied by the mercantile man who wanders the globe) with Euclidean optics, according to which seeing is produced in a "cone of vision" that the picture plane intersects.²⁹⁵

In 'POLYMORPHEM' such a visual model, with a distanced, roving male gaze at its centre that casts a rationalising eye over the world, comes under Köhler's critical poetic gaze. The image plane depicted in the canto, with a line of perspective, a vanishing point and a distanced observer, reads like a description of a Renaissance painting, where the three-dimensional, rationalized space of perspectival vision was rendered on a two-dimensional surface. The image below of an 'ideal city' is one of many images of symmetrical, hierarchical urban landscapes that visibly hark back to classical architecture

shortest path between two points and that three points determine a plane, and the parallel axiom of Euclid... as *a priori* synthetic truths'. Ibid., p. 76.

²⁹³ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 6.

²⁹⁴ Martin Jay, 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity', in *Vision & Visuality*, ed. Hal Folster (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1988), pp. 3-29 (p. 4).

²⁹⁵ Dorothy Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze and The Ruin of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 75-76.

by Renaissance painters who were fascinated by ancient Greek debate around ideal cities, after Plato's *Republic*.²⁹⁶ The image illustrates what Köhler describes in 'POLYMORPHEM': 'NUMEN [/] & fluchtpunkt aller flächen im Euklidischen [/] raum vor allen bildern der entfernte seher' (*NF*, p. 16).



Figure 3: La Città ideale, Painter of Central Italy, c. 1470 (Source: Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Palazzo Ducale, Urbino)

According to Martin Jay's analysis of Cartesian perspectivalism, exemplified by Renaissance art in 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity', the 'abstract coldness of the perspectival gaze' removes the 'painter's emotional entanglement with the objects depicted in its geometricalized space'.²⁹⁷ Indeed, there are no people in this empty utopia to disturb its symmetry with movement. Such a 'disincarnated, absolute eye' sees with 'a reifying a male look that turns its targets into stone'. Jay's comment that the gaze transforms objects to stone 'corrects' the misogynistic myth of Medusa, relocating the killer look from an abjected female figure to the rationalizing eye of patriarchal power. As will be demonstrated, Köhler too identifies the male gaze with a Medusa-like reification, concluding 'POLYMORPHEM' with an image of a patriarchal city made of stone.

The 'NUMEN' (Latin for 'divine will' or 'presence') of the Euclidean visual space is the distanced viewer. The word bears an aural and graphic similarity to 'Niemand', and in using it in 'POLYMORPHEM', Köhler produces a slippage between a disembodied Christian divine will, the viewing position of Odysseus as 'Niemand', and the distanced

²⁹⁶ For more on this subject see: Susan Lang, 'The Ideal City from Plato to Howard', *Architectural Review*, 112 (1952), 91-101.

²⁹⁷ Jay, p. 8.

male viewer in the scopic regime of the Renaissance that shaped modernity. Not only did Euclid's work form the basis of rational thought and objective truth, his theory of vision in *Optics* was a significant contribution to the development of lenses used for the *camera obscura*. In 'POLYMORPHEM', Köhler infers that the development of a visual culture based on Euclidean geometry that institutes a divide between the viewing subject and the world foreshadows the invention of photography:

/TELEVISOR/ im obskuren der kamera jenseits
der objektive das abwesen & seine kameraden
kameramänner zuschauer beim töten die hände
fest am apparat das auge im visier das Über
leben heisst nichtgesehenwerden Abgeblendet
gesichter & absichten hinter einem spiegel
reflexsystem geblendet sieht das object ein
object kann sich nicht sehen & was Niemand
erwidert hat nichts zu sagen ist nicht wahr
zunehmen

(NF, pp. 16-17)

The term 'camera obscura' means 'dark room', as early cameras comprised a darkened room or box with a convex lens or pinhole in one side used for projecting an image of an object onto a surface inside the instrument, so that it could be viewed, and then printed as a photograph. Like the perspectival paintings of the Renaissance evoked by Köhler, the *camera obscura* converts three-dimensional objects into two-dimensional images, flattening them and fixing them in time and space. Also like the perspectival paintings of the Renaissance, which 'saw' as if with one eye looking through a peephole, the view of a *camera obscura* comes from a single viewpoint. Köhler dramatises the causal connections between the unitary, disembodied subject, Euclid's geometry, modern visual culture and photography. The disembodied subject – 'POLYMORPHEM' / 'Ich' / 'Odysseus'/'der entfernte seher' – now becomes 'das abwesen', hidden from view in the darkness behind the *camera obscura*.

One word for 'lens' in German ('das Objektiv') is the same as that for 'objective', and using it in this context suggests a semantic link between a visual and intellectual culture grounded in the objective measurement of nature and photography. Thus 'jenseits der objektive' expresses the flattening, objectifying effect that the camera has on what it 'sees'. The recurrence of 'kamera' in 'kameraden' and 'kameramänner' subsumes

male subjects into the camera and makes them analogous with it. The men become objectifying machines, transforming which they behold into flat and unmoving images, like male Gorgons of modernity. Köhler shows that the 'kameramänner' are emotionally detached from what they see: their hands are unmoving on the camera as they take pictures of killing. Being seen and made into the object of the gaze is equated with death, just like the fate suffered by Medusa's victims: 'das Über [/] leben heisst nichtgesehenwerden'. The abstract distance expressed grammatically between the linguistic subject 'Ich' and the body earlier in the canto is now reproduced in the distance between those behind the camera and those in front of it: male spectators who are out of the frame, and the viewed objects. The subject's (Odysseus's) alienation from his own body is reproduced in its objectification of those of others.

The killings can be understood either as metaphorical or real, as the description switches between apparent metaphor and material description. The language that Köhler uses to introduce the theme of photography situates it as an act that raises moral questions about the relationship between subject and object. The photographing subject is placed in the position of a distanced voyeur (and perhaps perpetrator) of violence. Susan Sontag's influential chapter 'In Plato's Cave' in *On Photography* (1973) reflects on photography as a violent act amidst the context of the Vietnam War and beyond:

To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as the camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder – a soft murder.²⁹⁸

Köhler's depiction of photography draws a contrast between the anonymous male spectators that are concealed behind a lens and the object that is vulnerable because it cannot see itself or the spectators. Vision from an external position is equated with power and with violence. Köhler casts Odysseus under the guise of 'Niemand' as the anonymous viewer behind the camera, and seems to reference the Cyclops Polyphemus, metonymically reduced to 'das auge' and then 'das objekt'. In Homer's text, Odysseus *blinds* Polyphemus, thus symbolically and physically cementing the authority of his own

²⁹⁸ Susan Sontag, 'In Plato's Cave', in *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 3-24 (pp. 14-15).

anonymous and lethal ‘gaze’. By blinding the Cyclops and removing him from the dialogue of gazes, Odysseus makes Polyphemus into a ‘thing’ without agency or valuable life, a ‘thing’ for slaughter. The Cyclops’s ‘eye’ is too crudely visible to be as powerful as the concealed gaze of ‘Niemand’ and of the camera, lent distance by anonymity. The Cyclops is unavoidably visible and his identity is immutably connected to his physically grotesque presence, making the distance of anonymity impossible. It is precisely Odysseus’s anonymity that allows him to look at Polyphemus without being seen, and thus to hold a distanced viewing position and carry out violence cloaked in his false name: ‘was Niemand [/] erwidert hat nichts zu sagen ist nicht wahr [/] zunehmen’ (*NF*, p.17). Köhler mingles images of linguistic and visual anonymity to create a subject physically hidden ‘im obskuren der kamera’, and also hidden behind the linguistic screen of ‘Niemand’, suggesting that she identifies a complicity between language, visual culture and patriarchy.

The impression of complicity is played out in the final section of the canto as Köhler casts Odysseus as a cipher for state power. Having traced the development of the subject from the logocentric ‘Ich’ to the distanced ‘enfernter seher’, Köhler’s poetic critique of Western culture culminates with Odysseus as a Stasi agent:

ALLE KRETER LÜGEN gesagt von einer
kreterin - was ändert das? IM Ulyss/ GV mit
OV »Kirke«/ hat seinen spass dabei gehabt &
sie aufs kreuz gelegt: agent der götter die
er sich geschaffen hat nach seinem bild PRO
JEKT ATHENA kopfgeburt der macht ein panzer
nachtsichtgerät mit frauenkörper-camouflage
gefechtskopf Gorgo im trägersystem: letaler
blickkontakt. DEA EST MACHINA.

(*NF*, p. 17)

Köhler quotes the famous paradox of Epimenides that, ‘Epimenides the Cretan affirms that all Cretans are liars.’ If Epimenides is correct, then he is recording a truth, and so it is not true that Cretans always lie. It is impossible to determine whether the statement is true. Köhler plays with the paradox by making the speaker a woman. When a woman says that ALLE KRETER LÜGEN, the reader is made to remember that the group noun ‘Kreter’ arguably includes men and women (not just men). The statement refers to all Cretans and also none in particular. Likewise, if ‘ein Kreter’ makes the statement, then

the speaker has no specific body, because the speaker could be male or female. ‘Ein Kreter’ is not necessarily male, just Cretan: it refers to every Cretan and nobody, just like ‘Niemand’ does. If the woman had said ‘alle Kreterinnen’, by contrast, it would refer to all women, because the feminine group noun refers specifically to women, and does not include men. By asking the question ‘was ändert das?’, Köhler is arguably demonstrating that the male subject is presumed to be the foundational subject of collective nouns.

Another perspective, however, is that, in terms of current usage, including the period during which Köhler composed *Niemands Frau*, prior to 2007, grammatical gender norms have advanced thanks in part to feminism. The masculine group noun is rarely used to refer to men *and* women: it would appear archaic. Typically both masculine and feminine group nouns are now used when meaning men and women. Thus, the statement can also read ‘all Cretan *men* are liars, said a Cretan woman’. The change that Köhler points to with the question ‘was ändert das?’, can thus also be understood as grammar itself, which has evolved with politics. Women’s voices have undone the old grammar that tacitly upheld their grammatical invisibility and the woman in Köhler’s canto becomes visible by means of grammar, (‘eine Kreterin’), and speaks.

Köhler places the reference to the Cretan lying paradox in between references to Homer’s *Odyssey*, and a description of Stasi surveillance. In Homer’s text, Odysseus calls himself a Cretan when he lands back in Ithaca, but this is a lie. He lies about his identity to enable him watch everyone in Ithaca, including Penelope, without people knowing who he is. Odysseus lies so that, like the photographer (‘das abwesen’), he can roam around and observe and judge the world while remaining unseen himself, and the judgements that he forms while in his guise as a Cretan result in the unleashing of bloody violence and the mass murder of the suitors and of the maids.

In the ‘NOTEN’ to this canto, Köhler explains the terminology used to categorise informants and those under observation: ‘**IM, GV, OV** Stasi-jargon (»inoffizielle mitarbeiter«; [/] »geschlechtsverkehr«; »operativer vorgang«, auch »das objekt« genannt) (*NF*, p. 92). Köhler imagines Odysseus’s behaviour in the context of the German Democratic Republic as an; inoffizielle mitarbeiter’ informing on Circe. The orthography and language in which Köhler describes Odysseus’s relationship with Circe in the canto is like that of an official transcript of the information given by a Stasi informant. Alongside the acronyms, the inserted forward slashes seem to indicate a specific form of bureaucratic annotation: ‘IM Ulyss/ GV mit [/] OV »Kirke«/ hat seinen spass dabei gehabt & [/] sie aufs kreuz gelegt’. The repeated visual disruption of the line

of text performed by the slash, forcibly separating words from each other, also refers back to the forward slashes inserted into the epigraph, 'EACH MAN KILLS / THE THING / HE LOVES'. The recurrence of the slashes in this canto suggests a similar sense of detachment of the violent subject from the violated and loved sexualised object, in the context of a surveillance state. Odysseus (Ulyss) has sex (GV) with Circe (OV) who is under surveillance and then double crosses her and serves her up to the state ('aufs kreuz legen' both means 'to double cross' and is slang for 'to have sex with'). The forward slashes here seem to signify the divide between the power of the state (Odysseus, or 'EACH MAN') and that which it seeks to control and regulate – 'THE THING' – in this case, a woman. In addition, these forward slashes recall images of other dividing lines throughout the canto: the lines of Euclidean geometry and the tilted mirrors of the 'reflexsystem' (the mirrors within a camera) that transform the 'THING' seen into a flat image.

Athena, who is, among other qualities, the goddess of war, law and mathematics and Odysseus's guardian throughout the *Odyssey*, was born from the head of Zeus (NF, p. 17) after he swallowed her mother Mêtis (goddess of crafty cunning) to prevent the birth, and it was declared that she 'had no mother'. Re-imagining Athena in a modern context alongside Odysseus as a cipher for coercive state power, Köhler makes the goddess into a weapons system, an ally of patriarchal power disguised as a woman. As a weapon here, Athena is 'born from' the minds of men creating a means to repress the bodies of the enemies of the state. Athena is a 'Gorgo' (Gorgon) with whom eye contact is lethal. Köhler casts her as violent in a structurally similar way to the 'kameramänner', whose threat means that 'das Über [/] leben heisst nichtgesehenwerden'. The subject as cipher for power in the many terms used by Köhler – 'Ich', 'Odysseus', 'der entfernte seher', 'das abwesen', 'Niemand', 'Ulyss', 'die macht', 'er' – has produced its Other as a vision of itself, a machine-age update on the monstrous female figures in the *Odyssey*. Köhler envisions a violent war machine, rationalised and cold, turning all that it casts its gaze on into stone. The process of reification of the world by means of visual objectification by the rationalising male subject is characterised by Köhler as equivalent to death.

At the end of the canto, Köhler brings back the paradoxical epigraph:

Und wer will
die schon vögeln. Wer liebt ein ding das er

nicht töten kann & wer kann töten was nicht
sterben soll weil es unsterblich macht - zu
stein die göttin:

(NF, p. 17)

Köhler plays with Wilde's words to imagine the possibility of loving something that cannot be killed. She raises the question, first crudely, then seriously, of whether it is possible to make love to a machine, or to love a 'Ding'. Her cycle of questions infer that what makes a subject loveable are the qualities that make it mortal, vulnerable, alive. The voice asking the questions ridicules their premise, and appears almost like an aside: there can only be one answer.

The world as a fantasy of perfect reason that Köhler depicts at the end of the canto resembles a mausoleum, where everything has been objectified and turned into stone, even Odysseus himself:

eine stadt der männer ort
der ordnung & des bleibens post mortem WIE
IM LEBEN: im namen in der schrift im stein.

(NF, p. 17)

The patriarchal, violent, stony and rigidly ordered city that Köhler depicts resonates not only with the Euclidean geometry of Renaissance architecture, as discussed earlier in the canto, but also with that of National Socialism. Like the Renaissance artists, German and Italian fascism harked back to classical antiquity, realised in the monolithic, neoclassical constructions, such as the National Socialist *Zeppelinfeld* rally ground in Nuremberg, designed by Albert Speer, modelled on the ancient Greek Pergamon altar (c. 200 BC).



Figure 4: Ehrentribüne, Nuremberg, 1942 (Source: Bundesarchiv).

The symmetrical and highly hierarchical buildings of National Socialist architecture, designed to regiment the bodies of the regime's subjects and inspire awe of its totalizing political project, resonate in Köhler's description of a dystopian world of order, stone and men. Köhler depicts the final destination of a purely logocentric 'Ich' as self-defeating and absurd, in the manner of 'die Vernichtung des Subjekts' proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Rationality slides into irrationality and obsessive self-preservation (of an authoritarian state, of the subject) becomes suicide: 'ort [/] der ordnung & des bleibens post mortem WIE IM LEBEN'. Life, reduced to eternal stasis becomes petrified, and undifferentiable from death, Köhler suggests.

In 'POLYMORPHEM' Odysseus or the 'Ich' is a cipher for power that represses and violates the Other, but Köhler also makes Odysseus a victim of the same process. While 'POLYMORPHEM' is a poetic and critical examination of the 'Ich' and how it has been played out in culture and politics, the second canto to feature Odysseus, 'MIT ANDEREN WORTEN : WAS ODYSSEUS ERZÄHLT' presents a more intimate portrait of Odysseus and is much closer to Homer's text through his memories of the Trojan wars.

‘MIT ANDEREN WORTEN : WAS ODYSSEUS ERZÄHLT’

Der *Vater* aller Dinge ist der Streit, der Krieg die konsequente Übersetzung: es geht um
Entscheidungsgewalt.²⁹⁹

The second canto in *Niemand's Frau* to name Odysseus claims to tell a narrative in his words. Where ‘POLYMORPHEM’ plots a genealogy of rationalising Western thought and its disembodiment effects from the birth of the logocentric subject, ‘MIT ANDEREN WORTEN : WAS ODYSSEUS ERZÄHLT’ unfolds on the level of personal narrative. Odysseus depicts the cyclical violence of patriarchal power and his own role in making decisions that continue it. In the above epigraph, taken from *Wittgensteins Nichts*, Köhler suggests that patriarchy is generative of conflict and war. In this canto, Odysseus is haunted by his own decisions that perpetuate violence, as well as the paradoxical situation that he is in as a participant in patriarchy: where the only decision that seems available to him is to kill, or face being killed. Köhler shows the reader moments when Odysseus wishes to resist war. The canto is not sympathetic as such, and nor does it leave out details of Odysseus’s acts of violence but, as in ‘POLYMORPHEM’, the canto shows that he, and men in general, are damaged by patriarchy, even as they uphold it. His memories are traumatised and portray war as a manifestation of power that makes everyone its victim. The syntax and content are less cryptic than in ‘POLYMORPHEM’, even when sentences are fragmented. When Köhler uses regular syntax with a tangible speaking subject elsewhere in *Niemand's Frau*, it is to establish a degree of empathy, alongside intellectual critical content, and she does so here. The canto falls roughly into two sections: the first sixteen lines are a filmic description of fighting on the battlefield, and subsequently the canto takes a more reflective tone as Odysseus considers the violent operation of power through successive generations.

²⁹⁹ Köhler, ‘Zwischen den Bildern. Sieben Texte zur Grammatik einer Differenz’, p. 78.

Film as a Metaphor for War

Building on the critical focus on the development of an objectifying visual culture in 'POLYMORPHEM', the canto begins by describing a scene of war violence as if it were a film:

Ein krieg im rückwärtsgang: SLOW MOTION. Zuerst verlieren die sieger die beute. Es fließt blut. Zu den toten zurück. Die stehen auf. Und töten. Vergewaltiger kastriert, mit steinen erschlagen die die stadtmauern schleiften. Wer getötet hat stirbt wer sich da einen namen gemacht hat wird Niemand. Die schlächter werden zerfleischt. Die killer gekillt. Niemand überlebt es nur Niemand kann das überleben. Zehn spiegeljahre bilder im verkehrten film: das ungeschehen eines krieges. BACKLASH. OPERATION UNDO. Dies überlebt nur wer begreift dass ihm geschieht was er getan hat es wieder tun wird. Dies überlebt wer nicht glaubt er käme davon. Es überlebt wer sich erinnert an den moment von schwerelosigkeit um den scheidel der ballistischen kurve vorm sturz ins ziel vor dem fall einer entscheidung in die vernichtung.

(NF, p. 26)

Short and broken-up sentences are used to describe the war in reverse: some lack a verb and just describe the direction of movement ('Zu den toten zurück'), some lack a subject ('Und töten.')

and just describe an action with no subject attributed to it. The short sentences break up the flow of movement and of time into what seem like the frames of film, played backwards. In film, the impression of looking at reality is created when frames are played in sequence and at appropriate temporal intervals. Dividing the action into sentences that appear like individual frames played in reverse means that the reader cannot easily gain a coherent impression of the action that is taking place. In the description it is not clear who is fighting or what are they fighting for: there is just violence and images of brutalised bodies. The way that Köhler depicts the conflict undermines the idea of two sides fighting each other because there is no causal logic to what is described. It is logically impossible for killers to *become* killed before they have

killed, unless what is being described is occurring in reverse. '[Z]ehn spiegeljahre bilder im [/] verkehrten film' expresses not only the sense of war being remembered in reverse (or being rewound), but Odysseus's memory of war as being an illogical perversion.

Odysseus refers to the filmic technique 'SLOW MOTION', perfected in the action genre, to characterise the battle scene. Slow motion is often used to make violence aesthetically appealing and can allow a viewer to admire the arc of a body as it falls or the path of a bullet through the air. As film theorist Stephen Prince observes, slow motion can,

create a temporal dialectic across the body of a scene; to interrupt the concrete physicality of violence with more abstract contemplations of its balletic and metaphysical aspects; and to shuttle in between these concrete and abstract dimensions and superimpose them on top of each other.³⁰⁰

Köhler conveys the passage of a bullet as almost 'balletic' with the line 'de[r] moment von schwerelosigkeit um den scheidel [/] der ballistischen kurve vorm sturz ins ziel'. Slow motion can confer noble status upon violence. Furthermore, Köhler's insertion of the English word 'killer' and the hybrid Anglo-German 'gekillt' is evocative of the way that American action movie culture, often criticised for its glamorisation of violence, has been a dominant cultural force outside of America, making its way into other languages.

However, Köhler's chaotic representation of fighting deflates the idea of glorious war promoted in films and by politicians sending men to fight. In Odysseus's memory of the fighting, the violence is senseless. The impression is of an indistinct mass of blood and bodies and violence: the indistinct fleshy 'THING' referred to in the epigraph of 'POLYMORPHEM'. The soldiers fighting are nameless and without distinguishing features, they are all 'Niemand'. 'Wer getötet hat [/] stirbt wer sich da einen namen gemacht hat wird [/] Niemand'. With this line, Köhler makes the connection between the idea of 'making one's name' in a war, that is to say, becoming regarded as a 'hero', and being 'Niemand', inferring that they are part of the same logic. When slaughtered, the soldiers' bodies decompose and they become 'Niemand'. The nobodies who survive will only survive if they believe that they will not – that they will die a hero and then live on forever as a 'name'. The line, 'Niemand überlebt es nur Niemand [/] kann das

³⁰⁰ Stephen Prince, 'The Aesthetic of Slow-Motion Violence in the Films of Sam Peckinpah', in *Screening Violence 1* (London: Athlone Press, 2000), pp. 175-204 (p. 192).

überleben. Zehn spiegeljahre bilder im [/] verkehrten film' conveys an image of time as a bloodied hall of mirrors that stretch out endlessly, showing the same nameless subjects dying and killing over and over. Even in *Niemands Frau*, the 'masses' of remain nameless and, as with the maids slaughtered by Telemachus, while Köhler acknowledges their suffering, she does not explore it further or attempt to re-voice their perspectives.

The Fall of Man

When the canto moves on from the bloodbath of the first eight lines, Odysseus takes a more distanced, reflective tone and looks back on events following from his decision to go and fight in the Trojan wars:

Der die entscheidung fällt: ja. Werft das kind vom turm lasst es falln. Vor zehn jahren war es mein sohn in zehn jahren ist der so alt wie ich war als sie ihn mir damals vorwarfen die freier Helenas. Damals bin ich nicht verrückt gewesen. Es dreht sich. Es dreht sich alles um. Das kind die leichtigkeit des kleinen körpers in der das gemetzel die richtung wechselt. In warten jahre langes warten mündet & wachsenden druck bis zum aufprall.

[...]

schritt für schritt zurück auf anfang zero null der schwerkraft der müdigkeit nach die einfache kopfbewegung JA. Den die entscheidung fällt das kind zu vernichten bevor es ihm im wege aus dem krieg liegt & die freier bevor sie sich einigen können auf einen und auf den nächsten krieg ein schwören. Salz säen auf kriegsgründe & baun auf ground zero: wo menschen vom meer nichts wissen wollen auf gründen zur klage bestehen. Prozesse die sich umkehren machen aus klägern angeklagte aus richtern aber keine verurteilen. SO SLOW E MOTION wärmelehre: mein kind mein sohn was kann ich ihm schon beibringen das selbstbestimmte um bringen morden mein erbe die freiheit des falls

(*NF*, pp. 26-27)

Odysseus's narrative of his life, and of men's lives more generally, is characterised by a falling movement and by cycles of violence. The 'NOTEN' subtitled 'Geschichten von söhnen 1' (NF, p. 94) relate the background narratives of what Odysseus describes in the canto. Köhler refers to a narrative in which Odysseus attempted to avoid going to war by mimicking madness and sowing the fields with salt rather than grain. He was unveiled when the Greeks placed his baby son Telemachus in front of the plough to trick him out of his feigned insanity. Later, Odysseus made the decision to order the death of Hector's and Andromache's son Astyanax, by having him thrown from the top of a tower at Troy. Telemachus's decision at the end of the *Odyssey* to kill Penelope's maids as brutally as possible demonstrates that the baton of violence has been passed on from one generation to the next.³⁰¹ However, what emerges from Odysseus's reflections is a sense of regret at the system of which he is part, a wish that it could be different, and a sense of powerlessness. In the canto he credits his only moment of sanity as his attempt to resist going to war ('Damals bin ich nicht verrückt gewesen'). The implication is that, when he decided to fight in the war, he was truly mad. Signalling his discomfort with violence, he does not wish to remember it: 'auch [/]wenn man sich an nichts erinnern will: MNEMESIS'. Köhler's neologism binds the Greek word for the embodiment of memory and mother of the Muses, Mnemosyne, with the name of the goddess of divine retribution Nemesis, suggesting that memory enacts a form of revenge upon those who commit acts of violence by obliging them to retell the trauma.

The pessimistic, downward motion that characterises Odysseus's narrative is summed up by the way he expresses his agreement to kill Astyanax and the suitors: 'der schwerkraft der müdigkeit nach die einfache [/] kopfbewegung JA'. The role that Odysseus attributes to gravity ('schwerkraft') in his decision-making suggests that the decision to kill is barely an active choice, but part of the system in which he feels he must operate: the inevitability of patriarchal conflict becomes figured as a Newtonian system of physics in which the downward motion of gravity rules all. Odysseus' head *must* accede to gravity and assent to the destruction of his enemies, an image anticipated by that of an order, casually given, to allow a child to fall from the tower a few lines earlier: 'lasst es falln'. Köhler's equation of decision-making and assent with falling suggests a

³⁰¹ 'Weitere zehn jahre später trifft Telemach seine erste tatsächlich eigenständige, »erwachsene« entscheidung (Od. 22. 462ff.): die zwischen schmutzigem und reinem tod; er beschließt, die untreuen mägde nicht, wie von Odysseus empfohlen, mit dem schwert abzuschlachten, sondern sie aufzuknüpfen, sie einen »kläglichsten, elendsten tod« sterben zu lassen.' (NF, p. 94).

topsy-turvy world where even positive agreement is given through a negative downwards movement. Rather than use the verb ‘entscheiden’, Odysseus repeatedly uses the formulation ‘die Entscheidung fällen’, ensuring that he is not the subject of the verb. The way he conveys a decision linguistically mirrors the physical motion of his head downwards as he nods to express assent to the murder of the child and to go to war, and also mirrors the effect of the decision: the falling of a child from a tower.

Köhler brings patriarchal conflict into a modern context with the words ‘ground zero’ a term that refers to the place where the fallen Twin Towers in New York stood before they were destroyed on 11 September 2001 by plane hi-jackers. In the context of all the images of falling, a mention of the twin towers conjures one of the most famous photographic images of 9/11: a figure who jumped and fell from the Twin Towers. Like the individual who chose to jump rather than die in the falling building, Odysseus conveys the sense that he and other men within patriarchy are presented with a choice between destruction and destruction: ‘Den die entscheidung fällt das [/] kind zu vernichten bevor es ihm im wege aus dem [/] krieg liegt & die freier bevor sie sich einigen [/] können auf einen und auf den nächsten krieg ein [/] schwören’. Downward momentum continues to the end of the canto, which concludes with Odysseus’ despair at the legacy he is able to offer his son: ‘das selbstbestimmte um [/] bringen morden’ or ‘die freiheit des falls’. Odysseus’s narrative conveys a strong sense of tenderness for his son, whose tiny body he went to war to defend: ‘Das kind [/] die leichtigkeit des kleinen körpers in der das [/] gemetzel die richtung wechselt.’ However, when a moment of emotional tenderness arises – ‘E [/] MOTION’ – the word is broken over two lines, conveying Odysseus’s awkwardness, and also, ‘MOTION’ is followed by ‘wärmelehre’ (thermodynamics) to show that even feelings are subsumed into the system that compelled Odysseus to nod his head and assent to murder.

Köhler’s depiction of Odysseus’s sense and despair and entrapment within a damaging model of masculinity, and Telemachus’s violent coming of age with the slaughter of the maids, echoes Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s assessment of hereditary patriarchy:

Furchtbares hat die Menschheit sich antun müssen, bis das Selbst, der identische, zweckgerichtete, männliche Charakter des Menschen geschaffen war, und etwas davon wird noch in jeder Kindheit wiederholt. Die Anstrengung, das Ich

zusammenzuhalten, haftet dem Ich auf allen Stufen an, und stets war die Lockung, es gepaart.³⁰²

In Adorno's and Horkheimer's analysis, an identical form of violent masculinity is imposed on every (male) child and subsequently held onto at all costs. Köhler's representation exposes some of the effects of the struggle to hold on to the 'Ich' of patriarchal subjectivity upon Odysseus the character, rather than Odysseus the symbol. She allows for a moving and powerful conclusion to the only canto in which his perspective as an emotionally believable character is present. Odysseus's critical and emotional insight into his situation is an ethical keystone for *Niemands Frau* as it opens a space for such cycles to be undermined and subverted. The place of this canto a third of the way through the cycle, while granting Odysseus some humanity, does not deter Köhler from her broader critical project: she acknowledges that even such a socially privileged man suffers from the effects of patriarchy, but she does not permit him to have the final word.

Conclusion

Throughout much of *Niemands Frau*, Odysseus's role is symbolic: he is important for what he represents about the evolution of Western culture, and Köhler 'translates' him in numerous ways. The cantos featured in this chapter, 'POLYMORPHEM' and 'ODYSSEUS, MIT ANDEREN WORTEN : WAS ODYSSEUS ERZÄHLT' focus closely on Odysseus, first as a cipher for power in numerous forms and then on an intimate scale, as a man who feels subject to a system he cannot control. While Odysseus's narrative of his life is a pessimistic one that sees no way out of violence, his grim self-awareness and despair at the system he plays a role in perpetuating offers at least a chink of light: if even Odysseus is disillusioned by the violent and self-defeating logic of patriarchal power, then perhaps, Köhler suggests, its days are numbered.

³⁰² Horkheimer and Adorno, 'Dialektik der Aufklärung', p. 56.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Zum schluss keine göttin
aus der maschine, keine diven-projection auf die
leinwand, den bildschirm, keinen second-hand-avatar
aus dem second life, kein Athene-*remake*, »ganz dem
Mentor gleich an gestalt und an stimme«. Eine reise
und kein ende, ein anderes: eine reisende – oder
zwei, ein paar oder viele, reisende und im gespräch,
im gedicht, in bewegung, wo dinge, worte, orte ihre
bedeutung ändern, zwischen sprachen, von insel
zu insel übersetzende, reisende, die
(*NF*, p. 90)

In conclusion to *Niemands Frau*, at the end of the ‘NACHWORT, VORLÄUFIG’ section, Köhler sets out a form of manifesto for the future. In keeping with the critical emphasis of the rest of the cycle, she begins by positioning herself in opposition to what she does not want. Köhler rejects the idea of a miraculous, transcendental saviour, even if the intervention is feminine – no *dea ex machina*, or ‘Athene-*remake*’, after Homer. She rejects the idea of a future filled with female-gendered simulations and projections, onscreen or online in virtual realities such as ‘Second Life’, where users live out virtual lives as digital avatars. She resists the call for a simple exchange of ‘his’ rule for ‘her’ rule. Köhler’s rejection of such a future reiterates the dystopian anxieties articulated in ‘DEAD MAN’ S CHESS’ and ‘HADES : PROJEKTION : HADES’, discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis. Instead, Köhler proposes a shared, ‘minoritarian’ journey with no end, characterised by the reciprocity of voices in dialogue. The first traveller she describes setting off is a woman, ‘eine reisende’ – a feminist, embodied starting point – who becomes part of a plural group of ‘reisende’, whose gender is unspecified. In this vision, words, things and places can change their meanings and move between languages, repeatedly translating themselves into different forms, and locations, whether real or metaphorical. It is a future of minoritarian ‘potential, creative and created, becoming’

along the lines of Deleuze's and Guattari's conception, discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.³⁰³

Unlike what Köhler rejects, which is specific – the reduction of embodied life to image, as discussed in Chapter 4, screens, life-as-projection and a named virtual reality as discussed in Chapter 6 – her utopian vision of what is to come remains open-ended. The final word, 'die', finishes mid-sentence, echoing the last word of James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. Joyce's text ends(?) with the word 'the', a fragment that becomes a complete sentence if it loops back to the beginning of his text: 'A way a lone a last a loved a long the / riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs.'³⁰⁴ The final passage of *Finnegan's Wake* describes Anna Livia Plurabelle, the river running out to sea, but the loop back to the start keeps the river flowing in the cycle of the tides. Köhler's 'die' does not loop back to the beginning of *Niemands Frau*, so while her text does not exactly finish conclusively, it is not the ending-beginning of Joyce's.

However, Köhler's final word offers multiple possibilities for onward travel: 'die' is a definite article or a relative pronoun without a referent attached, and so it could signify a single woman or a group of either gender or a mixed gendered grouping. It is a generous term that encourages the possibility of co-existence, especially in light of the words that precede it. Furthermore, throughout *Niemands Frau* Köhler is critical of repetitive loops from which there are no escapes. Returning home is not part of Köhler's plan. In contrast to the *Odyssey*, *Niemands Frau* is an epic text about a journey that does not conclude with an affirmation of 'home'. Having deconstructed and criticised many elements of patriarchal Western culture and politics, *Niemands Frau* rejects homecoming in favour of continuing travel and becoming, together. The dividing line between the domesticated space of the ideal bourgeois woman Penelope, and the 'Other' spaces of monstrous women such as Kirke and Skylla, to be navigated and dominated by men, dissolves in Köhler's vision. She proposes a profound, ontological and epistemological shift that rejects existing definitions and hierarchies of space and gender.

However, there is a crucial omission in Köhler's comprehensive criticism of patriarchal culture through an engagement with the *Odyssey*: universalising and open-ended language, even that which promises liberation, can contain implicit exclusions. In the case of *Niemands Frau*, it is Penelope's maids who are left behind. At the end of the

³⁰³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 117.

³⁰⁴ Joyce, *Finnegan's Wake*, p. 493, p. 3.

‘Odysseus Exkurs’ in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Adorno and Horkheimer identify an unresolved atrocity in the *Odyssey*: Telemachus’s coldly cruel hanging of twelve maids, immediately after they wept warm tears while clearing the bloody debris from the slaughter of the suitors.³⁰⁵ The maids were denied the honour of death by the sword afforded to the suitors who had plotted to seize power, and were treated instead like animals, like birds:

[D]a band er ein Seil des blaugeschnäbelten Schiffes
An den ragenden Pfeiler und knüpft’ es hoch am Gewölbe
Fest, daß die Hangenden nicht mit den Füßen die Erde berührten.
Und wie die fliegenden Vögel, die Drosseln oder die Tauben
In die Schlingen geraten, die im Gebüsche gestellt sind;
Müde eilten sie heim und finden ein trauriges Lager:
Also hingen sie dort mit den Häuptern nebeneinander,
Alle die Schling um den Hals, und starben des kläglichen Todes,
Zappelten noch mit den Füßen ein wenig, aber nicht lange.
(*Odyssee*, Book 22, ll. 465-473)

At the moment of their deaths, the maids are a nameless group without biographies.³⁰⁶ As domestic slaves who are verbally abused and then clinically exterminated in the most ignoble, painful way Telemachus thinks possible, the maids receive treatment worse than animals in Homer’s text. Their death is efficient and leaves no trace of blood as evidence of their pain: after all, they cannot clean up their own dead bodies as they did the suitors’, so Telemachus’s method has a chilling economy to it.

The subsequent general neglect of the maids in Western literature, makes them arguably the most marginalised figures in the *Odyssey*: they could be considered as archetypal ‘Niemand’s Frauen’. Yet Köhler’s radical feminist reimagining of the *Odyssey* only affords the maids a footnote in the ‘NOTEN’ to the seventh canto, and even there, the content concerns Telemachus, rather than the maids themselves (*NF*, p. 94). Köhler neglects to deal with the structural oppression of class where it intersects with misogyny. In her bid to challenge and contribute to the male-dominated epic canon in the German

³⁰⁵ Horkheimer and Adorno, ‘Dialektik der Aufklärung’, pp. 102-103.

³⁰⁶ The maids remain nameless, with the exception of Melanthe, whose negative characterisation as sharp-tongued and disloyal serves to define them as a group.

language, Köhler's focus is the noble or notorious figures from Homer's text: Penelope, Odysseus, Helena, Kirke, Nausikaa, Tiresias, the Sirens and the Muses. Köhler takes on the patriarchal Western canon hoping to translate it into a different, quantum language that can accommodate plural possibilities for life; however, by doing so, she must share literary territory with those she criticises. *Niemand's Frau* occupies the paradoxical position of canonical and radical, tearing down structures only to build again with the same bricks, albeit in a different form. As Köhler writes in *Wittgensteins Nichts*:

Das Sprechen *über* Sprache findet *in* der Sprache statt, *von* der es handelt – das Objekt der Untersuchung interferiert mit dem Subjekt. Diese Interferenz soll als grundlegend für die Versuchsanordnung gelten: keine Metaebene, keinen ÜberBlick, sondern mit der Sprache sprechen, auch im Hinblick auf mögliches Entgegenkommen.³⁰⁷

To a significant extent, Köhler's decision to write against, and also within, the tradition of *Odyssey* reception in the German language, set the terms of the cycle she produced: as much Köhler overturns and reshapes tradition in *Niemand's Frau*, she does not turn away from it.

It took Köhler twelve years to write *Niemand's Frau*, a text of only 106 pages (*NF*, p. 90); as such, it is densely woven with references on subjects from mathematics and quantum physics, to philosophy, literature, film, popular culture and more. Reading *Niemand's Frau* requires a significant amount of labour, seeking out references to make sense of opaque juxtapositions. The presence of the 'NOTEN' section, as well as being a stylistic nod to Eliot's *The Waste Land*, is also an acknowledgement that there is a need for annotation to elucidate the cantos. Even then, the notes are only partial, at times adding further complexity. What is more, not only does it require a significant amount of cultural knowledge to read *Niemand's Frau*, it also requires a lot of time to make the connections that Köhler spent years crafting and that allow a deep appreciation of the text. Reading the cycle is a durational experience: layers of detail and insight emerge over time, and not in a linear way. It could be argued that the level of classical knowledge required to appreciate *Niemand's Frau* makes it an elitist text.

³⁰⁷ Köhler, 'TANGO. EIN DISTANZ', p. 30.

However, Köhler does not set out to write an efficient, expedient text that tells a straightforward narrative or conveys an aesthetically fascinating image. Her intention, articulated repeatedly in the afterwords, of challenging three millennia of patriarchal culture, is not a small task for the author and nor is it for the reader. A reader who spends time with the volume can benefit from the diversity of references that Köhler brings together. There is an element of Brechtian ‘*Verfremdung*’ to the density of Köhler’s poetics: the reader is not allowed to immerse herself or himself in narrative, they must go away and learn. *Niemand’s Frau* was written and published during the digital age (2007), and despite Köhler’s criticisms of virtual realities and Internet chatrooms, the Internet search engine Google is an important tool for accessing the text. The Internet has, to an extent, democratised access to knowledge in Western culture as never before. The pleasures of the *Niemand’s Frau* can be found in the didacticism of the text, as well as in the often percussive, lyrical rhythmic language of the cantos, audible on the CD recording included with the Suhrkamp printed edition.

A central contradiction of *Niemand’s Frau* is Köhler’s treatment of the subject, ‘Ich’. As mentioned in Chapter 8, as well as in Chapter 5 in the discussion of love, throughout the cycle Köhler is deeply critical of a unified, rational, normative subject, proposing instead a plural ‘quantum’ subject that resists a reduction to ‘one’, as discussed in Chapter 2. However, the most powerful emotional moments in the cycle are those articulated through what closely resembles a unified named subject, with an identity and a single voice. Penelope’s heartbreak at her inability to recognise or remember Odysseus discussed, and Odysseus’s lament at the violent system in which he is caught, Tiresias’s fury at the withering away of meaning, are among the most compelling in the cycle. There is some work to do before Köhler arrives at a re-envisioning of the subject that takes account of her criticisms while also conveying the emotion that ultimately forms the ethical foundation of the text.

In *Niemand’s Frau*, Köhler is relentless in her criticisms of forms of power produced through manifold outlets – language, state power, law, religion, philosophy, science, war – that damage the vital, liveliness of life. The dystopia discussed in Chapter 6 is a vision of the future where life, facilitated by technology and human carelessness, has been reduced to a repetitive cycle of immaterial projections: ‘a walking shadow’ (*NF*, p. 37). As discussed in Chapter 5, the emotional peak of the cycle is Penelope’s loneliness and heartbreak when she declares: ‘Ich kann mir keinen leib für meinen leib mehr [/] vorstellen’ (*NF*, p. 60). Penelope’s subjectivity is profoundly embodied and present, her

memories and her emotions are ingrained into her flesh and are articulated through her account of her life. She is an 'Ich', but she is not an 'Ich' that moves towards the progressive disembodiment identified by Adorno and Horkheimer in their analysis of Odysseus's journey, and expressed by Köhler throughout *Niemand's Frau*. The Sirens' gesture of empathy towards Odysseus, the 'held in seilen verstrickt in [/] eignen worten die den leib ent [/] eignen' (*NF*, pp. 47-48), a reaching towards the hostile other, as well as their accommodation of the other's voice without breaking down into cacophony, could perhaps provide a model for onward travel.

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