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Women and Intertextuality: On the Example of Margaret Atwood's The Penelopiad

The aim of the study is to consider feminist retellings of myths and legends. As an example, Margaret Atwood's book *The Penelopiad* is analyzed. The interpretation is situated in a broader context of intertextual practices characteristic of the feminist vision of literature. I present the ideas which Atwood shares with authors engaged in women's movement. Among these there is Atwood's understanding of intertextuality (noticeable especially in *The Penelopiad*). Bibliographical basis of the study comprises books which are fundamental to feminist and gender criticism (e.g. *Poetics of Gender*, ed. by N. Miller, New York 1986; S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven and London 1984). What is more, the study refers to the books which allow considering the notion of intertextuality (G. Allen, *Intertextuality*, London and New York 2010, J. Clayton, E. Rothstein (eds.), *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, Wisconsin 1991) and connecting the interpretation with the problems crucial to contemporary literary studies (L. Hutcheon *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*, New York and London 1988, B. Johnson, *A World of Difference*, Baltimore and London 1989).

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Margaret Atwood's novel *The Penelopiad*¹ inspires to reflect upon the relationship between women's writing and intertextuality. Therefore, I will argue that the book could be situated in the perspective of feminist literary criticism. What is more, some strategies employed in *The Penelopiad* encourage us to analyze the very notion of intertextuality. Thus, the feminist reading will be combined with methodological observations. I will also concentrate on the comic features of the novel which are, in my opinion, crucial in attempting to characterize the concept of intertextuality presented in the *The Penelopiad*.

To begin with, I would like to mention the aspects of intertextual theory which will be useful in further analysis. The term "intertextuality" refers to the interaction between (or within) texts.² The consequence of this interaction is a situation in which "meanings in one kind of discourse are overlaid with meanings from another kind of discourse" (Cuddon 454). In other words, as Julia Kristeva presents it, intertextuality is the "transposition of one (or several) sign-

¹ All citations come from the edition listed in the Works Cited section and are marked by the abbreviation "P" with a page number.

² Writing about Stéphane Mallarmé's poetry, Barbara Johnson differentiated the play between texts from the play within texts: "Mallarmé internalizes intertextual heterogeneity and puts it to work not as a relation between texts but as a play of intervals within texts" (121; emphasis original). However, in the broad perspective on intertextuality which I would like to present, these two modes of textual interaction can be combined.

system(s) into another” (Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language” 111).³ In fact, many theorists claim that “any one literary text echoes, or is inescapably linked to, other texts” (Abrams 200). Bearing that in mind, I would like to consider Atwood’s novel as an intentional exploration of the potential of intertextual writing (and reading) strategies. It would also be useful to recall Wanda Rulewicz’s remarks on the types of intertextual references. (Rulewicz 232–33).⁴ In the analyzed book intertexts “concern the story which already appeared in prior texts” (Rulewicz 232) and add “new dimensions” to the novel (Rulewicz 232).⁵

Intertextuality can also be treated as a “theoretical framework” which is “both hermeneutic and formalistic” (Hutcheon 127) and, therefore, enables one to place literary texts in various contexts. Because of that, Atwood’s novel can be analyzed in textual and semantic terms.⁶ What is more, intertextuality is a strategy which settles the book in a broader perspective since through its “critical relation to the ‘world’ of discourse” the critical relation “to society and politics” (Hutcheon 140) is possible too.⁷ It is also worth mentioning that in the presented case the differentiation between the notions of intertextuality and influence is not necessary.⁸ Furthermore, I believe that the emphasis on the subjective aspect of the writing (telling) process and the revaluation of the agency are connected with the feminist background of the novel. As a consequence, intertextual strategies present in the novel are reformulated by “questions of gender” (Johnson 124) and represent a broader view on intertextuality in which the problems of gender roles and sexual identity are considered⁹ (Clayton and Rothstein 26).

At this point some more theoretical specifications are necessary. My observations will refer mainly to Penelope, who is the main performer of the narrative. Unlike in most studies written from the feminist perspective (e.g. in the theory of “arachnology,” cf. latter part of the present text), the reflection upon the author will be replaced with the reflection upon the narrator. This issue will be developed in the latter part of the study. Proceeding to a more detailed analysis of the novel, I would also like to stress that within its narration both segments of the term “intertextuality” are tightly interwoven. As a consequence, they determine their meanings reciprocally. In order to present my ideas clearly, I will begin with the analysis of the dialogical aspect of the book and its relational location.

First of all, it is worth noticing that in the Introduction the author admits, and at the same time stresses, that the novel is indebted to other texts, which enabled Atwood to create a new story:

³ I owe this reference to remarks presented by Henryk Markiewicz in the text “Odmiany intertekstualności” (see: Markiewicz 199).

⁴ Such typologies are to be found in many works which take up the problem of intertextuality. Although it would be impossible to refer to all of them, I would like to mention the remarks of Michał Głowiński who argues that intertextual references could be considered as a structural element of a particular text, a relation to the literary genres or a problem of literary evolution (Głowiński 33). Similar conclusions were presented by Julia Kristeva in *Séméiotikè: recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris, 1969).

⁵ In the second type of intertextual strategies “certain elements” and “motifs” from other texts are “freely developed,” while in the third group “intertexts are abstracted literary kinds, styles and various types of aesthetics” (Rulewicz 233).

⁶ As Głowiński emphasizes, an intertextual relation requires treating the reference to the prior text as an element of a semantic construction of the new text (Głowiński 13).

⁷ In other words, it allows us “to see intertextuality as the mutual displacement of the literary and the historical or social by each other” (Rajan 63).

⁸ Friedman argues that: “The discourse of intertextuality blends and clashes with the discourse of influence” (154).

⁹ Clayton and Rothstein associate this perspective with “two schools, *Rezeptionsästetik* and critics associated with Michael Foucault” (26). Here, the second one is the most important since it combines intertextuality theory with questions of “race, class, and in its most recent manifestations, gender” (26).

Mythic material was originally oral, and also local – a myth would be told in one way in one place and quite differently in another. I have drawn on material other than *The Odyssey*, especially for the details of Penelope's parentage, her early life and marriage, and the scandalous rumours circulating about her.¹⁰ (Atwood, Introduction xiv)

It is therefore possible to pose the question of how the novel places itself in the history of literature (Kristeva, "Problemy strukturowania tekstu" 246). Such a reinterpretation of Penelope's story could be described in terms of female writing strategies. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar associated this procedure with "assaulting and revising, deconstructing and reconstructing . . . images inherited from male literature" (Gilbert and Gubar 75). The tendency to "revise" and "deconstruct" the official narration could be ascribed to the idea underlying the novel, which is to retell the story of the twelve maids hanged by Telemachus:

The maids form a . . . Chorus which focuses on two questions which must pose themselves after any close reading of *The Odyssey*: what led to the hanging of the maids, and what was Penelope really up to? The story in *The Odyssey* doesn't hold water: there are too many inconsistencies. I've always been haunted by the maids and, in *The Penelopiad*, so is Penelope herself. (Atwood, Introduction xv)

Many other passages are also aimed at reformulating Penelope's story, whose main subject are private feelings of the main character:

And what did I amount to, once the official version gained ground? An edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women. . . . *Don't follow my example*, I want to scream in your ears – yes, yours! . . . Now that all the others have run out of air, it's my turn to do a little story-making. I owe it to myself. (P 2-3; emphasis original)

The same can be observed in the following fragment of the novel, which stresses the role of the character's individual perspective too (this issue will be raised in the further paragraphs):

The songs say I didn't notice a thing because Athene had distracted me. If you believe that, you'll believe all sorts of nonsense. In reality I'd turned my back on the two of them [Odysseus and Eurycleia] to hide my silent laughter at the success of my little surprise. (P 140-41)

The passages quoted represent the feminist idea of "retrieving" (Gilbert and Gubar 75) the lost and forgotten history of women's participation in culture. A theoretical concept is thus inserted in the literature (Gilbert and Gubar 75). As a consequence, the tragedy, considered as a genre dominated by male authors and characters, is reinterpreted from the female perspective, which is due not only to Penelope, but also to the role other women play in the novel (see e.g.: the maids' chorus, Eurycleia).

I would like to stress that Penelope reminds the reader that her version is one of many possible presentations of the story. She seems to treat history in general and myth and legends in particular as forms of narration – subjective and prone to transformations. It can be noticed in many metanarrative phrases (see e.g. P 49: "It's said that in answer I pulled down my veil, being too modest to proclaim in words my desire for my husband . . . There is some truth to this story"). What is more, by comparing the narration with acting, the narrator emphasizes the fictionality and artificiality of the story: "All of this was play-acting: the fiction was that the bride had been

¹⁰ In the "Notes" (P 197) Atwood refers to Robert Graves's *The Greek Myths* and the authors mentioned by him (e.g. Herodotus, Pausanias, Apollodorus, Hyginus). Still, the basis of *The Penelopiad* is Homer's *The Odyssey*.

stolen, and the consummation of a marriage was supposed to be a sanctioned rape” (P 44). The metanarrative perspective is enhanced by expressions which, apart from enabling us to place the text in a broader intertextual context, incite reflection upon the literary quality itself. This observation refers to the parts in which the collage-like quality¹¹ of literature is exposed. A particular work is thus considered to be a compilation of other literary texts:

He [i.e. Odysseus] too appeared in the songs and I relished those moments. . . . Needless to say, the minstrels took up these themes and embroidered them considerably. They always sang the noblest versions in my presence – the ones in which Odysseus was clever, brave, and resourceful, and battling supernatural monsters, and beloved by goddesses. (P 81-82; 84)

Also, the final chapters, especially the ones in which “the trail of Odysseus” is described (“XXIV The Chorus Line: An Anthropology Lecture,” 163-68, “XXVI The Chorus Line: The Trail of Odysseus, as Videotaped by the Maids,” 175-84), present the story from “the outside.” Thus the narration becomes an object of reformulations and changeable interpretations (see e.g.: “I understand the interpretation of the whole Trojan War episode has changed. . . . Now they think you were just a myth” (P 187). These strategies question “the relation of language to reality” (Hutcheon 141) and thus, function as a way of deconstructing the official version of Penelope’s story.

Adding personal themes to the narration serves as another mode of deconstruction within the text. Penelope does not hesitate to stress her individual perspective:

What can I tell you about the next ten years? . . . Only sometimes did I think of it [the sun] as the flaming chariot of Helios. . . . We had news of how the war with Troy was going . . . I waited only for news about Odysseus. When would he come back and relieve my boredom? (P 81)

She also devotes some parts of the narration to constructing a description of her relationship with the son, Telemachus. Those parts are humorous and – what is particularly important – based on ordinary activities and rooted in everyday experience:

I resolved to have a word with him [Piraeus] later, and speak to his parents about letting him run so wild. Theoclymenus was a stranger. He seemed nice enough, but I made a mental note to find out what could be his ancestry, because boys the age of Telemachus can so easily get into the wrong company. [/] Telemachus wolfed down the food and knocked back the wine, and I reproached myself for not having taught him better table manners. Nobody could say I hadn’t tried. (P 129)

The act of evoking casual behaviours and problems may be treated as an intertextual signal which connects the novel with the tradition of female writing.¹² Also, the emphasis on personal perspective links the novel with some of the theories of intertextuality elaborated by feminist literary criticism. Nancy Miller’s “arachnology” could be the basic point of reference since it “reintroduces” the woman writer (here: the narrator)¹³ into the text (Friedman 158) and presents

¹¹ This issue is crucial to the problem of intertextuality. Kristeva argues that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the ‘absorption and transformation of another’” (Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel” 37).

¹² Elaine Showalter argues that this tendency is typical of “female realism,” defined as “a broad, socially informed exploration of the daily lives and values of women within the family and the community” (29). Although Showalter associated this trend with the nineteenth century novel (29), many of its features can be found in contemporary female writing, including *The Penelopiad*. My reference to Showalter was inspired by Kraskowska (21).

¹³ Although Miller’s theory refers to the situation of the author, as already mentioned, the specificity of Atwood’s novel allows one to replace the term “author” with the term “narrator.”

intertextuality as a writing practice “centered in an embodied and gendered agent” (Clayton and Rothstein 29).

Thus, as I have already mentioned, feminist writing and reading strategies seem to be the basic source of intertextual references in *The Penelopiad*. Apart from the issues analyzed in the preceding paragraphs, a few important themes should be mentioned. First of all, the act of choosing Penelope’s story as the basis for the novel is, as Gilbert and Gubar would see it, aimed at reaching “toward the woman trapped on the other side of the mirror / text” and helping “her to climb out” (16).

Secondly, the reinterpretations of *The Iliad* and, more importantly, *The Odyssey* lead to the reinterpretation of the epic and the tragedy as literary genres. It is thus to be noticed that one of the types of intertextuality is applied here – namely, the strategy based on references to particular literary styles and forms (Sławiński 219).¹⁴ This process could also be treated as “the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards” (Gilbert and Gubar 73). The epic is evoked e.g. by the mythological subject of the story, the coexistence of the two dimensions of the action (the world of gods and the human world) and the episodic character of the narration (Sławiński 138–39). The reference to the tragedy is to be noticed e.g. in the significant role of the chorus¹⁵ and the composition of its lines (Sławiński 586). The transformation of the genres traditionally considered as forms typical of “classical humanism” (Kristeva, *Word, Dialogue* 50) is also of great significance. Therefore, by reinterpreting motifs borrowed from official discourse of culture, Atwood’s novel “not only revises the male tradition, but also invites the male tradition to re-vision itself” (Johnson 133). In the book one may also find references to some well-known and still relevant forms of popular writing.¹⁶ Therefore, intertextual strategies present in female writing in general, and in Atwood’s novel in particular could be seen as important factors which influence the broadly defined literary canon.¹⁷

“Feminist critical method” (Friedman 158) is also to be revealed in a detailed textual analysis. It is worth noticing that the motive of the shroud woven by Penelope can be associated with Miller’s “arachnology.” It is to be noticed in the following fragment:

Here is what I did. I set up a large piece of weaving on my loom, and said it was a shroud for my father-in-law, Laertes . . . All day I would work away at my loom, weaving diligently, and saying melancholy things. (P 112-13)

Furthermore, Penelope evokes a fantasy of “enclosure,” which is also a popular motive associated with female writing (Showalter 33):¹⁸ “I spent the whole days in my room – not the room I used

¹⁴ According to Głowiński, references to some literary and social styles are an important intertextual strategy too (Głowiński 8).

¹⁵ See: “The Chorus, too, should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole and share in the action” (Aristotle 25).

¹⁶ A comprehensive exploration of the issue is to be found in Mikhail Bakhtin’s works. See: “the system of popular-festive images was developed and went on living over thousands years. . . . But in its basic line this system grew and was enriched; it acquired a new meaning, absorbed the new hopes and thoughts of the people. It was transformed into the crucible of the people’s new experience. The language of images developed new and more refined nuances.” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 211).

¹⁷ Thus, as Johnson noticed, intertextuality “can teach us to rewrite its history all over again from the beginning” (133).

¹⁸ See also: “women writers had explored and extended these fantasies of enclosure. After 1900 in dozens of novels . . . the secret room, the suffragette cell came to stand for a separate world” (Showalter 33).

to share with Odysseus, no, I couldn't bear that, but in the room of my own in the women's quarters" (P 109).¹⁹

The strong relationship between Penelope and the maids is presented as a bond of sisterhood: "We were almost like sisters" (P 114). This bond is opposed to the official, patriarchal narration: "We told stories as we worked away at our task of deconstruction" (P 114). The process of "assaulting and revising" (Gilbert and Gubar 75) this type of narratives is also manifested in the lexis employed by the author. This is the case with the title of one of the chapters, "Odysseus and Telemachus Snuff the Maids" (P 157), which could be considered as a feminist strategy of "overreading" the text (Miller 288; see also: footnote 19).

What is more, intertextual strategies are also likely to be found in the narrations of all subjects which are "different" and "marginalized" within the "official" literary canon (Hutcheon 130; 134).²⁰ Therefore, women writers, who have traditionally been included in the group of the excluded, "use and abuse" (Hutcheon 134) conventions borrowed from the canon. In consequence, a monological narration is replaced with a dialogue (Allen 161).²¹ Dialogic, and thus intertextual,²² structure of the text becomes a mode of "exploring the manner in which the writing of women, along with other marginalized groups, is always a mixture of available discursive possibilities" (Allen 160). In *The Penelopiad*, then, the feminist strategies enable Atwood to construct a specific kind of "the ironic intertextuality" which allows the writer to "set up and challenge male traditions in art" (Hutcheon 134) and reinterpret Penelope's story.

Nevertheless, the relation between the novel and the feminist literary criticism is by no means that of a simple adaptation. In fact, the references to feminist writing and reading strategies are based on critical reflection. One may actually observe an intertextual dialogue with some ideas of feminist literary criticism. The attitude towards Miller's theory is a good example. Instead of stressing her "attachment" to the text,²³ the narrator expresses her reluctance to be "entangled" in the process of writing, practically directly referring to the feminist reflection upon the literature:

The shroud itself became a story almost instantly. 'Penelope's web', it was called . . . I did not appreciate the term *web*. If the shroud was a web, then I was the spider. But I had not been attempting to catch men like flies: on the contrary, I'd merely been trying to avoid entanglement myself. (P 119; emphasis original)

One may also find many conscious references to various literary contexts in the book (cf. Introduction and Notes). It could be read as an opposition to Miller's call for writing and reading "as it had never been read, as if for the first time" (274).

¹⁹ It is also worth noticing that the quoted phrase refers to Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own* – a text of great significance for feminist literary theory.

²⁰ See: "the different comes to be defined in particularizing terms such as those of nationality, ethnicity, gender, race, and sexual orientation. Intertextual parody of canonical American and European classics is one mode of appropriating and reformulating – with significant change – the dominant white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, Eurocentric culture" (Hutcheon 130).

²¹ See: "Both female character and feminist reader question the monological discourse dominant in society and articulated by specific characters, and thus move . . . to an exposure of resistant, un-official, alternative discourses and subject positions" (Allen 161).

²² "The resistance [to patriarchal monologism] centres on a recognition of 'othering' which is clearly connected to notions of intertextuality and the double-voiced discourse" (Allen 162).

²³ See: "The goal of overreading, of reading for the signature, is to put one's finger – figuratively – on the place of the production that marks the spinner's attachment to the web" (Miller 288).

These issues indicate the role of the “textual” aspect of the strategies present in the novel. The emphasis on the “textuality” is to be noticed in the passages which can be described as autothematic or at least metatextual: “One story has it that I was the payment for service Odysseus had rendered to Tyndareus. . . . But I have another idea, and here it is. . . . Whatever was behind it, Odysseus cheated and won the race” (P 36–37). Such phrases indicate that the text creates the meanings of the story since there is no simple relation between the narration and the reality. A similar function could also be ascribed to “the chorus lines” (see e.g.: “The Chorus Line: If I Was A Princess, A Popular Tune”; “The Chorus Line: The Birth of Telemachus, An Idyll”) – the chapters written as songs to be sung by the twelve maids. I suggest considering these parts of the book as signals of the carnivalesque play with the text, an issue which is to be analyzed in the next paragraphs.

What is more, the dialogue present in the novel is mainly a dialogue with other texts. The use of the feminist idea of deconstructing “the mirror of the male-inscribed literary text” (Gilbert and Gubar 15) is a good example. In other words, “the ‘world’ in which these texts situate themselves is the ‘world’ of discourse, the ‘world’ of texts and intertexts” (Hutcheon 125). Because of that, it seems more appropriate to concentrate on analyzing the utterances given by Penelope as a narrator instead of, as Miller does, “introducing” the author into the novel. In fact, Penelope herself becomes the author defined as “a gendered agent” (Clayton and Rothstein 29) who “breaks into” the myth (Allen 156) to mark her individual perspective. However, referring to Mikhail Bakhtin’s and Kristeva’s remarks, I would like to stress that the texts of the novel is rooted in “cultural” and “social textuality” (Allen 36) too. These categories prevent us from separating *The Penelopiad* from its historical and social context (Allen 36). Kristeva describes this relations as „an ideologeme” (Allen 37) – that is: a function “which connects the individual utterance with other texts (Kristeva, “Problemy strukturowania tekstu” 247).²⁴ This observation enables the combination of textually and socially orientated interpretation.

The role of the textual aspect of the narration and the reference to feminist context are two features which characterize intertextual strategies present in *The Penelopiad*. However, what is specific to the book is its comic character. This feature is to be noticed in the novel’s humorous elements, which allow us to connect it to Bakhtin’s works again. At this point one should recall Bakhtin’s theory of intertextuality since it is an important background to many feminist presentations of the problem.²⁵ I have already referred to the role that the dialogical orientation of the text plays in these theories. This preference for the dialogue may have been inspired by Bakhtin (Allen 159–64). What is more, the dialogue allows for granting the voice to “the others.” One of the personifications of “the other” in Western culture is the carnivalesque Fool, a figure of prime importance in Bakhtin’s interpretation of the popular-festive forms. In feminist literary criticism there is a tendency to treat the Fool as a “naïve” character who is in the same position as

²⁴ It is also important that an ideologeme is to be found on the different planes of the text (Kristeva, “Problemy strukturowania tekstu” 247).

²⁵ Apart from the issues described in the paragraphs above, another question raised both by Bakhtin and feminist critics is the problem of agency and subject’s dependence upon the world of discourses. See: “A return to Bakhtin recovers the possibility of honoring . . . the power of discourses that inhabit the writing subject, while also recognizing that discourses develop and clash within history and that the act of writing requires the exercise of dominion over contending discourses” (Draine 325).

the female characters (Allen 161).²⁶ In this case the humour meets with the dialogue and the feminist context.²⁷

As previously mentioned, there are many comic motives in the book. Apart from the scenes presenting parental cares of Penelope, the character's ironic comments on figures and stories described in myths also serve as a good example. The following passage contains some humorous remarks on Odysseus' tricks:

I didn't let on I knew. It would have been dangerous for him. Also, if a man takes pride in his disguising skills, it would be a foolish wife who would claim to recognize him: it's always an imprudence to step between a man and the reflection of his own cleverness. (P 137)

Penelope's attitude towards the world of gods is ironic too:

All the rest was just copulation of various kinds . . . , with gods who said they were shepherds and with shepherds who said they were gods. Occasionally a goddess might get mixed up in it too, dabble around in perishable flesh like a queen playing at milkmaids, but the reward for the man was shortened life and often a violent death. (P 23)

According to Bakhtin, laughter was a factor which deconstructed the seriousness of an epic (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 23). In Atwood's novel the same kind of reformulating the traditionally legitimized literary genres is to be observed. What is more, Bakhtin noticed that laughter reduces the distance between the text and the reader, to whom the world is presented as something familiar (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 23). The same function could be ascribed to the humorous passages of *The Penelopiad*, describing everyday life of Penelope and her surroundings. However, such a vision does not imply a well-ordered world. The deconstructive power of laughter "abuses" (Hutcheon 134) the stereotypical views on the real world.²⁸ The world presented in the novel is thus diverse and "pluralistic" (Steele 285), which places the book in the opposition to the monologism of the classical epic and tragedy too. What is more, the humour replaces "pity and fear" evoked by a tragedy (Aristotle 9). This transformation is to be noticed particularly in the chorus lines which, by combining comic elements with macabre descriptions, create a tragicomic whole.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the intertextual strategies present in *The Penelopiad* refer to various contexts. These contexts include many theories of intertextuality. Amongst them those introduced by feminist literary criticism play a significant role. What is more, feminist background situates the book in a broader (social and cultural) perspective. However, all the references are transformed and adapted to the structure of the narrative. Therefore, the strategies in question, including the dialogue with literary tradition, become a basic element of the novel's construction to be found in the text's realm. In fact, intertextuality provokes a reflection upon the processes of both writing and communicating with the reader. The significant role of humour and laughter indicates that the observed play with the text is intended to give us pleasure. And it is the intertextuality that enables the writer and the reader to combine

²⁶ Graham Allen refers to the works of Mary Russo and Dale M. Bauer (161).

²⁷ See: "for those characters who are alienated and 'confused' by society, who find themselves in the position of the carnivalesque 'Fool', it becomes crucial to interpret that discourses and discursive structures which others in positions of power take as monologically unquestionable" (Allen 161).

²⁸ Here, Bakhtin's description of the perspective called "the mirror of comedy" is worth quoting: "Abuse reveals the other, true face of the abused, it tears off his disguise and mask. Abuse is death, it is former youth transformed into old age, the living body turned into a corpse" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 197).

pleasure with “critical relation to the world” (Hutcheon 140). In *The Penelopiad* these two qualities are perfectly harmonized.

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