Penelope weaving the (F)e-mail: texting and sexting

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Abstract

In the advent of new media technologies, the Greek poet Koula Adaloglou rewrites the Penelopean myth, engaging among other things a laptop instead of a loom. Penelope may this way *text* her "Messages to Odysseus". Although it remains open whether each message is sent, discarded or saved as a draft, Penelope reveals the aesthetics and politics of her contemporary self through a texting project. Having woven different *text(u)s*[1] on the loom, on music scores, on canvas, on stage, and other media during an ongoing post-Homeric tradition, by texting her thoughts to the absent addressee Penelope demonstrates part of the intermedial reproducibility of her myth, while she implicitly communicates her self within a *sexting* activity. This article explores a (*ré)écriture féminine* of a classical myth which once again returns updated – that is remediated in terms of postmodern communicational schemes – in contemporary Greek literature.

Keywords: Comparative literature and media studies, *écriture féminine*, sextual performance, Modern Greek, Homer.

1. Introduction

This is a common story: getting acquainted with the use of new media technologies demands patience, similar to one's first tries in needlework. These activities may not be regarded as unrelated to each other, in that the digital might not be considered as an exclusive invention of modernity, and weaving may well contribute to our comprehension of the electronic *world wide web*.[2] Reflecting on patience and weaving in terms of classical literature, one of the most prominent weavers in antiquity (and its reception in post-classical contexts) is the Homeric Penelope, the "chaste wife" of Odysseus, "caring mother" of Telemachus, and "constant" Queen of Ithaca, who spent her nights unravelling what she had woven by daylight at her loom. Although Athena and the Moirai, Arachne and Philomela, as well as Helena, Arete, Medea and Ariadne are also popular mythical hand-women, it is Penelope's repeated weaving / unweaving activity in order to constantly avoid a forced marriage to any of the suitors courting her during Odysseus' absence that made her an exemplum of feminine virtue in centuries of literary criticism. Apart from her patient efforts, however, Penelope's

unique virtuous quality explicitly praised in the *Odyssey* remains in large silenced or even ignored: her intelligence. For the only attributes accompanying Penelope in the *Odyssey* are ἐχέφρων and περίφρων, meaning prudent, thoughtful, careful to a high degree.[3]

Along these interwoven associations, considering intelligence and patience, weaving and Internet modalities, Penelope stands for more than a personification of patriarchally imposed stereotypes. For, what is more, among her many skills, Penelope makes use of the "oldest digital machine", i.e. the loom, a weaving tool which requires a lot of reflection in dyadic arithmetic and in the logic of spatial construction.[4] This assumption, by calling into question the activity of weaving as a technically "mindless work" done by passive housewives, brings Penelope to the frontline of challenging intellectual endeavours. To speak so, the argument that the loom is considered to be the first computer (even much earlier than the Joseph-Marie Jacquard's punch-card-controlled loom)[5] may after all lead one to regard Penelope as a female premodern skilled IT user. This assumption foregrounds in turn the two elements of the updated Penelopean myth, which this article deals with: *texting* and the *female*.

The medial shift from the loom to the laptop and the like, invites to a closer reading of this (post)modern rewriting of Penelope's myth. *Penelope* has often been invoked in literature, arts, and theory foremost as a metonymy for text(ile) creation and highly praised female qualities. Reconsidering the *eternal return* of both Penelopean *mythemes*, weaving as *texere* (Latin, "to weave"), and idealisation of a faithful wife's constant attitude, this article examines Penelope's texting activity in terms of new media technologies, and aspects of her female self inscribed within her texts. Under the premise that a medium shift in the tradition of a text means a relevant impact on the communicated message, Penelope's intermedial activity correspondingly does affect the critical reading of her texts.[6] Therefore, focusing on conventions of a *(ré)écriture féminine*, one could regard Penelope as a cultural semantic agent of feminine poetics. Consequently, in Penelope's contemporary *texting*, that is *texere re*-appropriated as modern electronic creative writing, this article will examine the *sexual / textual* politics that lie in the poetics of her texts. Bridging these two angles of view, *sex* and *text*, I therefore regard Penelope's writing activity as a performance of contemporary literary *sexting*.[7]

The concept about Penelope taking advantage of modern texting technologies is prominently deployed in Koula Adaloglou's poetical collection *Οδυσσέας, τρόπον τινά* ("Odysseus; somehow", Adaloglou, 2013)[8]. Other than expected, the lyric *I* belongs to Penelope, whereas Odysseus may only be present as the addressee in Penelope's various texts. The first part of the collection is accordingly named after this texting activity of Penelope as "Μηνύματα στον Οδυσσέα" ("Messages to Odysseus"), and may in turn be divided into two sections, which correspond to considerably different texting media and different *voices* of Penelope's different selves.

This article focuses on the *meantime* ("μεσοδιάστημα") between Odysseus' latest departure and his long desired return (which is implied in the second section of this part of the collection), during which Penelope takes advantage of new media and

composes two longer texts explicitly written on a laptop, entitled "Πρώτη γραφή" ("First Text") and "Δεύτερη γραφή" ("Second Text")[9], and minor untitled texts which may well be read as different types of messages, may they be SMS, post-it notes, fictive messages spontaneously written down in a notebook or Penelope's secret diary.[10] Penelope has therefore the chance to voice herself, and thus manifest the various aspects of her reappropriated self. Nevertheless, as long as the female appears as still defined within a binary system with reference to the male, Penelope has not yet managed her emancipation from patriarchal discourse, anticipating her restrainment within patriarchal ideology. Adaloglou's Penelope most likely seems to oscillate between autonomy gained while working in terms of new media and the need of *him* to reconstruct *her* otherwise decayed sexual identity. This intersection of autonomy and subordination becomes evident in Penelope's different needs, wishes and definitive nuances, mostly often in reference to Odysseus. For there are texts in which Penelope (a) asks for affection, the male being the only source to satisfy her emotional and corporeal *pending* needs, while in other texts (b) she demonstrates her emancipation and independence from male-relevant skills concerning, for instance, the operation of computational technologies:

> (a)
> Τι σου ζητώ, ένα χάδι, ένα χαμόγελο.
>
> [What am I asking you for, a caress, a smile.] (Adaloglou 2013, 15)
>
> (b)
> Οδυσσέα Dear,
> ελπίζω να περνάς καλά με την αντροπαρέα σου.
> Και να σου πω ότι, παρά την άρνησή σου για βοήθεια,
> βρήκα τους αριθμητικούς συσχετισμούς που με βασάνιζαν.
> Ευελπιστώ, λοιπόν, να ολοκληρώσω το υφαντό που σχεδιάζω.
> Με άλλα λόγια, τα καταφέρνω και χωρίς εσένα!
>
> [Odysseus Dear, / I hope you are having fun with your guys. / And let me tell you that, despite your refusing help, / I found the numerical correlations that have been torturing me. / I therefore hope to complete the texture I am planning. / In other words, I can make it even without you!] (Adaloglou 2013, 15)

2. Tex(t)ing: Weaving the e-mail
2.1. Tex(t)ere 2.0

The key to understand Penelope also as a contemporary poet of a *text(u)s* is to comprehend the semantics of *texting* terminology (and its synecdoches) engaged in her *texts* in(to) which the myth returns. One needs to reflect namely on the connection between the Homeric Penelope's most typical activity, its Latin equivalent *texere*, and, *texts* and *contexts*, familiar "passepartouts" in our contemporary intellectual culture.

To begin with, the weaving motif is one of the most prominent metaphors (within Indo-European literature) that describe any intellectual process as poetics in

material terms. In the Western literary canon, the analogy between any intellectual process and textilisation / textualisation appears already in Homer, so that poetics and weaving appear ever since intermingled with each other.[11] On that account, *text(u)s*, as the final product of *texere* ("to weave"), signify the end product of poetics, attributing to any a *text* the quality of *textuality*, that is coherence, continuity, completeness. The historical semantics of *textus* are found in a wide range of sources within various fields of arts and sciences, and its continuities and discontinuities are accordingly approached in rather different ways by the different disciplines.[12] Consequently, *text* as textile and relevant metaphors of weaving, embroidery, recently even quilting, along with mythical hand-women, have become commonplaces of contemporary female literary criticism too,[13] and particularly Penelope weaving at her loom has the last decades quite often played a crucial role in rereading the meta-poetics of the *Odyssey*. In line with this tradition, Michel Serres most aptly theorises Penelope's *textilising* endeavour as a *textualising* one, when he says about the Ithacan queen that:

> [she] is the author, the signatory of the discourse; she traces its graph, she draws its itinerary. She makes and undoes this cloth that mimes the progress and delays of the navigator, of Ulysses on board his ship, the shuttle that weaves and interweaves fibers separated by the void, spatial varieties bordered by crevices. She is the embroideress, the lace-maker, by wells and bridges, of this continuous flux interrupted by catastrophes that is called discourse. In the palace of Ithaca, Ulysses, finally in the arms of the queen, finds the finished theory of his own myth.[14]

Penelope, therefore, as a meta-poet herself, seems to reweave in various texts a relevant aesthetics concerning her own myth in her post-Homeric tradition. It is therefore no surprise that Penelope in Adaloglou's poetical collection does still *text* Odysseus, and in digital script. For among the different *text(u)s* Penelope has so far woven, she has also been literally related to text production, considering oral or written discourse. Although fictive prosopopoeia (mixed with the love-letter discourse) traces its roots much earlier than the Ovidian epistle addressed by Penelope to Odysseus, it is since then that Penelope has often been given the word and has been expected to speak for herself, within the realm of her mythical tradition.

2.2. The Loom 2.0.

Considering the various intermedial re-contextualisations of the narrative lying upon its classical *text(u)s*, the *Odyssey*, in the advent of computational and digital technologies, has consequently been adapted to technologically advanced permeated systems. In this aspect, particularly in line with a significant turn in the history of information and (tele)communication also affecting production, distribution, and consumption of literature, this article focuses on Penelope's modern laptop, otherwise termed as a *notebook computer*. Taking also into account Penelope's *textus* / text relation, this very medial shift within the long *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of the Penelopean myth is less unexpected.

Focusing on the "First Text" and "Second Text", already interwoven with each other, as their titles may suggest, the ambiguity of their leitmotif demonstrates

Penelope's most prominent identity, as a *text(u)s* weaver.[15] In modern terms, an Internet connection, alluding to Penelope's Homeric looming, facilitates the verbal communication with Odysseus: the threads of the loom, that used to create the woven textile are transformed into a network of interwoven data, so that electronic messages can thus be diffused from the looming source to meet Odysseus. According to the classical Homeric version of the myth, the two partners though apart do "communicate" by sharing a like-mindedness described under the stunning ideal of ὁμοφρονέοντε *νοήμασι* ("oneness of heart", *Od*.6.183). A new communication schema is therefore constructed within the realm of the contemporary electronic *world wide web*, marking the transition from "texting" on the loom to texting on a notebook.

Beyond that, not merely Penelope's weaving as such is creatively appropriated, but her cunning plan too, as soon as Penelope "types" the final line (upon completion?) of her "First text":

Επιλογή: Delete

[Option: Delete.] (Adaloglou 2013, 10)

as well as the final line of her "Second text":

Δεν ξέρω αν θα στείλω το e-mail.

[I don't know if I will send the e-mail.] (Adaloglou 2013, 11)

Both texts as never ending and self-consuming weaving projects are left open-ended, since Penelope is considering deleting the first one, while she shows ambivalence about mailing the second one. It would not be groundless to assume though that the first text has indeed been deleted, since Penelope continues to write an explicitly *second* one. Nevertheless, it remains uncertain and still unknown, whether these e-mails are finally sent or discarded, or saved as drafts, since the composition of a new text to follow is implied in both of them.

Thus, the metaphor lying in the probable "Delete" of her first text, alluding to the Odyssean Penelope's cunning plan, that is every night undoing the shroud she has been weaving all day long, in order to keep the suitors away, sheds light anew upon Penelope's alleged indeterminacy, undecidability and hesitation as typical qualities of hers who manipulates e-narrative(s) now as well. For it has been argued that the regular cancelation of the *textus* she had woven so far does manipulate the plot of the *Odyssey* itself.[16]

In a further reading, Penelope's weaving / texting with no final formation may offer fruitful ground to reflect on the technical transformations of knowledge, especially considering Penelope's knowledge of her own self.[17] For her modern agency as a composer of fragmentary e-mails alludes not only to the communication systems that constantly shape various data into legible information, but she thus *informs* her ideology and identity as a female poetical *I* too. What is interesting under this light is to trace and critically approach significant elements that demonstrate how this medial shift does most probably affect the communicated message lying in the new text.

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3. Weaving the (f)e-mail

In terms of feminist poetics, the motif of weaving has been theorised as a self-making metaphor. This part of our article discusses the concept of Penelope constructing her feminine self, while handling the absence of the Other by undertaking the creative activity of texting on a laptop, while left home alone.

Since initially weaving, and then writing as such, has been interpreted as a founding experience of constructing the self, and since Penelope writes situated at home, it occurs that the patriarchally defined topos of Penelope's classical realm of agency, the house ("οἶκος"), may also be interpreted as the topos of a founding experience of her self. What is striking is that although the laptop signifies the possibility of mobility, as to be discussed below, it seems that Penelope has not yet dared to step outside, in order to seek for her *self*. She most likely keeps in line with the tendency that it is only "à huis clos", by distancing, where one may get prepared to afterwards perceive the world. Penelope's spot as Odysseus' non-place ("οὐ τόπος") is after all the *room of her own* where she can realise the creation of her own self, using either threads or words, though signified with reference to *his* absence. Thus, Penelope finally manages to construct the *she-I* of herself opposite to Odysseus' constantly absent *he-Other*, implied by the (masculine) appellative *you*.[18]

The meta-poetical character of Penelope's creative activity is still evident, calling nevertheless for further question. Beyond meta-poetics, why should Penelope be writing now? The answer may be found in terms of *écriture féminine* broadly regarding writing and discourse production as a form of resistance to phallogocentrism. A more concrete answer may also come from Penelope herself, uttered as a theory on writing in existentialist terms, and summarised in one rhetorical question as follows: *What would Penelope do without writing?*

> Γράφω
> ημερολόγιο
> γράφω μηνύματα
> γράφω.
> Τι θα 'κανε η Πηνελόπη χωρίς γράψιμο;
> Μ' αυτό παλεύει τη φθορά, τον χρόνο,
> τη λαγνεία, τον φόβο, την απόγνωση.
> Τα υφαντά τελειώνουν κάποτε,
> το γράψιμο κρατάει όσο κι η ζωή μας.
> Πρόσεξε πώς διαβάζεις τα μηνύματά μου.

[I write / a diary / I write messages / I write. / What would Penelope do without writing? / This is how she wrestles with the wear and tear, the time, / the lust, the fear, the despair. / Texts come some time to an end, / writing keeps as long as our own life. / Pay attention to how you read my messages.] (Adaloglou 2013, 19)

Penelope writes relentlessly, repeatedly, as if writing were a ritual for forgetfulness, which she enjoys as such. It is indifferent whether Odysseus may reply or not; writing is rather a *rite of passage* from stillness to Logos in order to secure *her* own existence. Weaving as a metonymy for any housework is read as a fatal web in which any existence meets its end,[19] so that Penelope rejects any other banal housework, and writes, accomplishing a first step outside her otherwise still identity. The laptop bought by Odysseus for Penelope, (most probably) before his *nostos*, but still after the slaughter of the suitors,[20] may be regarded from different aspects.

> Αγαπημένε μου Οδυσσέα,
> γράφω στο λάπτοπ που μου πήρες.

> [My beloved Odysseus, / I am writing on the laptop you bought me.] (Adaloglou 2013, 11)

Apart from establishing a power relationship in economical terms, in that the male is the one buying gifts to the female, the laptop as a gift itself also signifies Penelope's *possibility* to *mobilise* herself. In this very act of gift giving lies on the one hand the donation of mobility towards Penelope's journey to *her* self. Reading beyond the obvious, though, the laptop may also be regarded as an obscene metaphor, considering the etymology of the word, which indicates its use "on top of one's lap". Although in Modern English the substantive "lap" does not bear any sexual connotations, a *lap* literally meant the "female pudendum" in Middle English, while the word (often in plural, *lappes*) is found as a euphemism to denote the vagina from the 15th to the 17th century, as used, for instance, by Shakespeare.[21] Under the light of obscenity, therefore, Penelope *texting* on top of her lap does indeed manage a turn to the self, during Odysseus' absence.

Questioning at this point the importance of love letters as such in the erotic life of Penelope, one may compare with the confession of another *Penelope*, as put in the homonymous chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*, at the breaking dawn of mythical modernity. It occurs that Molly Bloom's "only satisfactory period of her life", has been her courtship by Harold Bloom, whose "mad crazy letters" led her even to masturbate, whereas since her marriage, Molly has been in an epistolary desert.[22] Therefore, a written text addressed to the beloved Other, as Penelope's "Messages to Odysseus" are, may indeed function as an allusion to sexual activity too.[23]

3.1. Sexting: Fragments of an *écriture feminine*

With regard to classical weaving, modern texting, and sexual performances within and concerning new media, we are about to discuss concrete instances of *sexting*. In line with literary theory and critical discourse analysis we adopt the term to describe compelling questions concerning the construction of a sexed composition of written texts, looking into how individual sex identities or socioculturally constructed genders may be discursively represented. Consequently, in the close readings that follow, aesthetic reflections of sexuality that shape the feminist or masculinist ideology are taken into consideration, while the feminine sexuality is still strikingly prescribed by – thus not yet liberated from – male figureheads of the Western socioliterary reality.

Penelope under discussion cleverly bridges a tradition breach with progress. The *oikos* discourse, for instance, wherein Penelope is traditionally situated, along with all the crafting within its realm, is often read as a gender projection. Penelope is at times mostly in line with the feminine aspect of the *oikos*, at others she most strikingly rejects its phallogocentric (*sic*) substance, not neglecting though her husband's delight, shortly before she departs for "the women's congress":

> Το ταξί σταμάτησε απότομα.
> Ο άντρας πετάχτηκε έξω βιαστικά.
> Χάζευα απ' το μπαλκόνι αμήχανα.
> Να 'σουν εσύ; Γύρισες μήπως με προλάβεις
> πριν φύγω στο Συνέδριο Γυναικών;
> Πετάρισε η καρδιά.
> Μπα, έφερνε ο ξένος στο σουλούπι σου.
> Anyway, θα τα πούμε όταν γυρίσω.
> Γι' αυτό σου αφήνω αυτό το μήνυμα.
> Σου 'χω μαγειρέψει – ψυγείο και κατάψυξη.
> Ζέστανε, όπως ξέρεις, στο φούρνο μικροκυμάτων.
> Μ' ένα φιλί σε αναμονή,
> Πηνελόπη.

[The taxi stopped suddenly. / The man popped out in hastes. / I kept staring from the balcony, puzzled. / Could that be you? Maybe you came back to catch me / before I leave for the Women's Congress? / The heart fluttered. / Nah, the stranger had your build. Anyway, see you when I am back. / That's why I am leaving you this message. / I've cooked for you – fridge and refrigerator. / Heat up as you know, in the microwave. / With a kiss on hold, / Penelope.] (Adaloglou 2013, 14)

It occurs that to be a feminist, denying to be "just a part of Adam's side", makes a woman no less willing to show affection to her man or to confess her need of *him*. From this point of view, the fact that Penelope discerns between duties traditionally ascribed to the male and/or those ascribed to the female communicates a message of a particular balance: all deeds and qualities useful for people and society are equally relevant.

In the two following sections we undertake a closer reading of Penelope's e-mails in form of a fragmented documentation of Penelopean *sextual performances*.

3.1.1 First Text

The composition of the "First Text" takes place right after the *mnesterophonia*, during which Odysseus did not kill all suitors, but only some of them. Odysseus' profile is thus protected from being stigmatised as a mere cold blood killer, in contrast to what seems to be the reason for his rejection by Penelope in post-war rewritings of his homecoming. In this case, Penelope's despair is being displaced from the fact that Odysseus has committed multiple crimes, to the realisation that there is no suitor left, so that he could flatter her, or better put, so that she could be flattered by him:

έφυγαν όλοι οι μνηστήρες,
άλλους τούς τέλεψες και κάποιοι λάκισαν.
Ούτε ένας, να κολακευόμουν έστω.

[My beloved Odysseus, / all suitors are gone, / some of them you finished
off and some others quit. / Not even one left, so I could be flattered at least.]
(Adaloglou 2013, 10).

The vanity implied in these opening lines, along with the implied jealousy
uttered with pejorative characterisations to describe a certain mistress of Odysseus,
ascribes to Penelope negative qualities concerning weaknesses traditionally attributed
to women:

Δώδεκα χρόνια έγλειφες τις γόβες της
κοντή κι αλογομούρα

[For twelve years you were licking her shoes – / horse-faced and short.]
(Adaloglou 2013, 10)

Besides the long time of Odysseus' absence, the emphasis on the alteration as
depression of her own body demonstrates Penelope's still vanity-relevant worries
about transience, i.e. her getting older. The ultimate corporeal deterioration characterised
as "a pillage" introduces a discourse concerning Penelope's objectification opposite
to a man's conquering force:

Στο μεταξύ μεγάλωσα,
σαν μεταλλάχτηκα,
κάθισε η περιφέρεια,
γιάγμα η κορμοστασιά μου.

[Meanwhile I grew old; / once I was transmuted, / the hips got lower, / my
stature, a pillage.] (Adaloglou 2013, 10)

Penelope's confession about her owing Odysseus a favour, for him still desiring
her, does therefore imply that Odysseus is thus doing her a favour as well, in that he is
offering her the only chance to enjoy her otherwise unsatisfied lust. A certain sexual
power relation is constructed upon Penelope's surrendering to Odysseus' desire for
reasons of need, as she is reduced – or better, she reduces herself – to a mere object of
male lust:

Γυρνάς και θέλεις γούστα.
Κι εγώ η μεταλλαγμένη υποχωρώ,
σχεδόν χρωστώ και χάρη.

[You come back and ask for pleasure games. / And me, the transmuted one,
I succumb; / I almost owe a favour in addition.] (Adaloglou 2013, 10)

The oedipal scenario goes further, while Penelope shows herself as the object
to motivate a possible rivalry between Odysseus and another man: by previously
characterising Odysseus' concubine in such pejorative words, Penelope does confirm
the stereotype of the jealous female partner, who is nonetheless conscious of this

weakness of hers; therefore, she wishes there were at least one suitor left, so that she could punish Odysseus only via another man, depending indeed upon his masculine power. This thought of hers about punishing Odysseus' for reasons of adultery may indeed be considered as a progressive step that Penelope dares, in contrast to the Homeric Penelope who allegedly supports her fidelity by all means, most likely entrapped within a reading of her myth according to certain moral principles.

Nevertheless, although this intention for punishment could be interpreted as a dynamic and decisive turn within the 21st century, taking into account feminist movements of all kinds, Penelope may still be regarded as subordinate, in that she needs the help coming from the outside, most significantly from a male subject. What is more, the sort of punishment is not explicitly described: is adultery committed by Penelope implied or would Penelope be equally satisfied, if the mere presence of a suitor would suffice in order to cause Odysseus' jealousy? From one point of view, Penelope does once again sexually objectify herself on her own, in that she implies a sort of adultery not in terms of a pure passionate love or a platonic flirt, neither an accident nor a fault or a sin, as usual in premodern literature, but she most probably admits consciousness of commitment.

From another point of view, Penelope is again foregrounded as a stereotypically weak female who finds delight in inferior instincts such as causing jealousy by fictive scenarios. In any case, Odysseus remains unpunished, and the *ex definitione* strong male may once again triumph over her, even with no defence.

3.1.2. Second Text

In her second text, Penelope regards Odysseus as a crafty "man of many ways", with respect to his many ways to seduce her, she accordingly admits the female sexually surrendering to the male, and verifies all in all the sexual power relation evident also in the "First Text": the male is capable to preserve his desire for the female (on his own), for which *she* is grateful to *him*.

> Ξεγλιστράς, δεν χάνεις ευκαιρία.

> [You slink, you miss no chance.] (Adaloglou 2013, 11)

Considering corporeal representations in the visual arts, the body normally shows what it is capable of. Nevertheless, Penelope describes the picture of her body even weaker, as time goes by, thus verbalising the transformation of hers into a figure of lower aesthetic value, far beyond the stereotypes of beauty that the Western patriarchal discourse might praise[24]:

> Όμως
> ήσουν εδώ σαν ξέσπασε η μπόρα.
> Το τεθλασμένο σώμα μου το λάτρεψες
> τη σουρεαλιστική μου μορφή ασπάστηκες
> αξιέπαινα συντήρησες τον πόθο.

> [Yet / you were here, when the storm broke out. / My crooked body you adored / my surrealistic figure you kissed / remarkably you conserved the desire.] (Adaloglou 2013, 11)

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Penelope, conscious of her body, achieves to verbalise what the observer of hers may possibly sense, and creates a kind of virtual reality to communicate to Odysseus, by verbally picturing her bodyscape. The need to create a virtual presence occurs in line with a noticeable pictorial turn in digital tele-communications (MMS, sexting, video-call, snapchat, and the like), which started to flourish in the first decade of the zeroes. In contrast to the contemporary use, however, instead of taking advantage of the pictorial facilities which her new medium is offering her through the application of various "filters", Penelope prefers to most honestly verbalise the image of hers, breaking the rules against the stereotypes of ideal beauty that circulate in such media channels. It seems so, that Penelope uses her verbalised version of the MMS as an honest *image de conscience*[25].

4. Conclusion

Albeit with no trace of nostalgia for the ancient myth, but rather emphasising a contemporary facet of Penelope who returns updated, Adaloglou adds to the Penelopean myth in a way that breaks down the treatment of Penelope as the passive weaver of a mortifying shroud. Nevertheless, Adaloglou's Penelope does not seem to represent any radical feminism either.

This (post)modern Penelope rather manages through her words and overall attitude towards language and representation, that foregrounds her way to knowledge of the self, to shed light upon the on-going relationship with the (absent) beloved Other. Though undermining the *Odyssey* as "a love story for happily married middle-aged people", this Penelope manages reconciliation between phallogocentric tradition and antimasculinist progress. Most carefully humanised, the mythical heroine, follows the trends of contemporary times, and may now be considered something more than an attractive persona to the contemporary reader, by providing the possibility of emotional plausibility. [For] Penelope returns as an active, clever, intellect woman who does keep up to date and may thus keep on communicating her messages to the beloved Odysseus(es) through her new media, making the best out of her new herself.[26]

Notes

1. Written in form of a word play, the term emphasises the linguistic connection between a woven *textus* (a woven texture, a textile in Latin) and contemporary concepts of a *text*. The terms *tex(t)ere* and *tex(t)ing* should be read in the same way.
2. cf. φρυκτωρία (Greek for "phryctoria"), the most ancient organised system for the diffusion of information, may be regarded as an ancestor of our contemporary internet (work).
3. On Penelope's idealisation as a virtuous woman in post-Homeric tradition in antiquity and the middle ages, until the early modern era, see Stenmans (2013, especially 42-62; 66-91). For further relevant bibliography on Penelope in antiquity, Mactoux (1975), Katz (1991), Felson (1994), Papadopoulou-Belmehdi (1994), Zeitlin (1996), Clayton (2003).
4. On challenging the connection of weaving and programming practices, regarding the ancient loom as a digital machine that most likely motivated the development of mathematics, see Harlizius-Klück (2008; 2014).
5. Cf. Plant (1998, 23-25).

6. On how reformatting or remediating a text may affect rereading, see Plate (2011, 46), and Bouvier (2014, 706).

7. *Sexting* in popular contemporary media culture means to send sexually explicit photographs or messages. It all started with mobile phones, however, snapchats and short messaging applications are also available for tablets, laptops, even for desktop computers. On *sextual performances* in literary and cultural studies see Moi (1985) and Plate (2007).

8. Unless otherwise stated, the English translations are mine. As far as contemporary Greek literature is considered, Penelope, explicitly associated with new media technologies, is also found in the short story "Η Κατασκευή της Πηνελόπης" ("The Construction of Penelope"), in Kastrinaki (2002, 27-45).

9. Adaloglou (2013, 10-11). I have translated the Greek *γραφή* as *text*, for metapoetical reasons: In the Greek γ|ραφή lie already, at least visually, both the art of writing (γραφή) and weaving (most adequately "sewing", ραφή). The English equivalent mostly appropriate to interpret both terms can only be *text* (*n.*), literally signifying the written text, as well as the allusion to the Latin *textus* (cf. n. 1).

10. It is important to notice that the constellation of the poems does also reflect the new media reality as fragmentary and emphasises the contrast with traditional formalities in written communication. On a comparative reading of old and modern communication practices and conventions, see Simonis (2008, 430-431).

11. On *textus* as a symbol in literature see Scheid and Svenbro (1994), Nünlist (1998), Greber (2002; 2012), Wagner-Hasel (2006), Kuchenbuch and Kleine (2006). For a thorough elaboration on the metapoetical understanding of *weaving* in antiquity see Nünlist (1998), all relevant bibliography provided in Nagy (2017, esp. in §1), and Papadopoulou-Belmehdi (1994; 2016) in relevance with the Penelopean weaving, Harich-Schwarzbauer (2016), and Harlizius-Klück and Fanfani (2017).

12. On the main approaches to *text* studies see Kammer and Lüdeke (2005, esp. 9-21).

13. See Kruger (2001, esp. "The Greek Web: Arachne and Philomela, Penelope and Helen of Troy").

14. "[Pénélope] est l'auteur, la signataire du discours, elle en trace le graphe, elle en dessine le parcours. Fait puis défait ce tissu qui mime l'avance et le recul du navigateur. D'Ulysse à bord de son navire, navette qui lace et entrelace des fibres séparées de vide, des variétés bordées de crevasses. Brodeuse, dentellière, par puits et ponts, de ce flux continu coupé de catastrophes, qui se nomme lui-même discours. Au palais d'Ithaque, Ulysse enfin dans le bras de la reine, trouve la théorie finie de son propre μῦθος." (Serres 1977, 197)

15. See n. 9.

16. cf. "άλλα σου τα στέλνω, άλλα σβήνω, άλλα φυλάγω στο προσωπικό μου αρχείο" ["some of them I send to you, others I delete, some others I save in my personal archive"] (Adaloglou 2013, 11). On the meta-poetical function of Penelope's undecidability see Katz (1991).

17. See Bouvier (2014; 2016).

18. cf. Barthes (1977, 19-20).

19. cf. Moirai as spinners of destiny, and the function of Penelope's web in the *Odyssey*.

20. For the significance of the *mnesterophonia*, i.e. the slaughter of the suitors, as a terminus *post quem* see below, section 3.1.1.

21. See *s.v.* lap(pes) in Kuhn (1970); see also Rubinstein (1984).

22. Smurthwaite (2006, 82).

23. I would like thank Dr. Milan Herold (University of Bonn), who made me look into possible obscene implications of these passages.

24. Corporeal representations challenging concepts of beauty are elsewhere uttered: "Η Ελένη έκανε μαστεκτομή./ […] με τσαλακωμένο μπούστο, φαλακρή./ Τι να ερωτευτεί ένας Πάρις;" ["Helen had a mastectomy./ […] with a scrunched bosom, bald. / What should a Paris fall for?"] (Adaloglou 2013, 21).

25. Cf. Smurthwaite 2006, 79.

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