

Language Stratification: A Critical Reading of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* According to Mikhail Bakhtin's Concept of "Heteroglossia"

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Abstract—The present paper aims at investigating the effectiveness of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* in displaying the transcription of language according to the critical views of Mikhail Bakhtin, especially his view about what he calls "heteroglossia." The main argument, thus, is that heteroglossia is one of the key concepts that the reader should take into consideration in order to reveal the hidden and implied meanings of Atwood's *The Penelopiad*. The paper considers language's stratification as a meaningful and a remarkable context for Atwood's style. In order to prove the main argument of the paper, the researchers discuss three key Bakhtinian concepts; that is, heteroglossia, and two other related terms; dialogism and form and content, and attempt to apply them on Atwood's *The Penelopiad*. The paper shows how Bakhtin celebrates the genre of the novel for its amplitude to include verified and multiple meanings, a celebration that locates its coordinate in Atwood's novel due to the novel's heteroglot nature in chapters' titles and in Penelope's and the maids' recognition of modern time. The paper shows how Atwood's *The Penelopiad* is a dialogic novel because of its foregrounding of dialogic relations between its heteroglot structure, the narrators' voices, and the social interaction of the authorial context. Finally, the paper dwells on Bakhtin's concept of form and content and discusses the chorus line in details to prove the inclusive nature of the novel compared to its prequel version, *The Odyssey*.

Index Terms—Bakhtin, heteroglossia, language stratification, dialogism, discourse, *The Odyssey*, hybrid text

I. INTRODUCTION

The present paper aims at investigating the effectiveness of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* in displaying the transcription of language according to the critical views of Mikhail Bakhtin, especially his view about what he calls "heteroglossia," a term he introduced in 1934 in a paper entitled "Discourse in the Novel." "Heteroglossia" emphasizes the existence of different meanings within the same language due to the *dialogic* nature of language. This paper examines some instances of the communicative actions used by primitive people as a means of recording past events and experiences. In the field of discourse analysis, this standard of language involves the semiotic aspect of communication. In other words, it sets forth the concept of discourse in representing people's utterances to figure out the features that make those utterances appear the way they do.

II. METHODOLOGY

Focusing on discourse as a "meaningful symbolic behavior" (Blommaert, 2005, p.2), the researchers examine language as a social phenomenon rather than an abstract and synchronic (unhistorical) system. In order to achieve this objective, this paper discusses three key Bakhtinian concepts; that is, heteroglossia, dialogism, and form and content, and attempts to apply them on Atwood's *The Penelopiad* to come up with some incites that might help in a better understanding of the novel. The main argument, thus, is that heteroglossia is one of the key concepts that the reader should take into consideration in order to reveal the hidden and implied meanings of Atwood's *The Penelopiad*.

III. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The novel according to Mikhail Bakhtin is "a diversity of social speech types" ("Discourse in the Novel," 2004, p.674). Bakhtin considers the modern novel to be the best literary form to represent heteroglossia, dialogism and form and content. Atwood extends the distinctive features of the novel into her own work. Her style depends on such features that illustrate the stratification of language. This paper elucidates Penelope's narration of *The Odyssey*'s version of the story from a Bakhtinian viewpoint, a narration that introduces a different Penelope. Thus, a different reading is expected as a result of Penelope's new standpoint that differs from Homer's Penelope.

Atwood's *The Penelopiad* explores another Penelope that introduces new imagined facets in order to provide a modern version of Homer's *The Odyssey* which was composed near the end of eighth century. Atwood's framework breaks the traditional frame at that time which mainly aims at telling a heroic story. As a result, Margaret Atwood creates her own sense of the novel. Her novel is not affected by the traditional forms; on the contrary, she tries to be innovative and to come up with her own form. By doing so, she paves the way for a different pattern and propounds a new genre. Atwood's title indicates unprecedented expectations in rewriting the traditional form of *The Odyssey* to enrich it with a new interpretation. She reconnoiters an art that is governed by rules without following the traditional practices of the past. According to Sharon Wilson (2000), "Atwood has used mythology in much the same way she has used other intertexts like folk tales, fairy tales, and legends, replaying the old stories in new contexts and from different perspectives – frequently from a woman's point of view – so that the stories shimmer with new meanings" (p.215).

To begin with, *The Penelopiad* has a tactile frame which distinctly denotes the multiplicity of voices and interactions of its characters rather than the self-centered monologue used in other novels. Throughout the novel, the reader will visualize and hear different voices whose impacts are envisaged onto different layers. It sounds distinctly as if the author has no voice because of the narrative's division between the two narrators, Penelopiad and the maids. *The Penelopiad* has a prominent framework that rejects a single narrative voice. Unlike Homer's epic, this novel is remarkable for its diversified planes. Throughout Homer's epic, Odysseus is viewed as a cunning man trying to make his way home from the Trojan War. With patience and faith, his wife, Penelopiad, avoids the numerous suitors and awaits her husband's return. Therefore, this story is composed of one plane only and omnisciently told by Homer within a monologic context. Unlike Homer's epic, *The Penelopiad* is distinguished by a frame of multiple voices that the reader can recognize all throughout the novel.

A heteroglot novel according to Bakhtin is "a structural stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author amid the heteroglossia of his epoch" (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 1981, p.300). So, the story in the novel is not told by the author; instead, the events of the plot are outlined by two narrators within the framework of a story within a story. Atwood constructed the framework in a way that will distinguish every frame and at the same time include all other characters. The frame narrator Penelopiad begins her story by recognizing her state as a dead woman in "the gloomy halls of Hades," known as "Dark Death" (Atwood, 2005, p.15). This frame recounts her birth in Sparta, her conflict with Helens, and her arranged marriage. The maids are the second and the inner narrators who narrate their story, their circumstances and the observed events of the suitors.

Having a frame of different planes or layers of narrative that clash with each other is a clear designation for heteroglossia in the novel. Each narration recognizes a new world in Hades different from the earlier one in *The Odyssey*. This interaction of narration that one finds in this novel creates a combination that permits what Raman Selden (1997) calls "a multiplicity of social voices and their individual expressions" (p.42). Such a combination is what differentiates the heteroglot novel from any other novel. In a heteroglot novel, argues Selden (1997), "the context defines the meaning of the utterance" (p.42). In other words, the meaning of an utterance is recognized and determined relatively and certain conditions govern the production of meaning in all discourse. One can argue that Atwood achieves the context of heteroglossia in *The Penelopiad* by using three criteria: chapters' division, Penelope's recognition of external modern world, and the maids' recognition of the same world.

Chapters' division in the novel is the first criterion Atwood used to achieve heteroglossia. These titles contribute to the reader's perception of the content of the novel. However, such titles are not easily digested. They work in a heteroglot way, and the title of each chapter is defined by two contexts, that of Penelope and that of the twelve maids. In "A Low Art," for example, one can hardly tell Penelope's perspective and intention in reading the first few lines of the first chapter. Precisely, she demonstrates her purpose for such wording in the last few lines of the chapter. She wants to have her own identity by narrating her own story in which she says "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. I've had to work myself up to it; it's a low art, tale-telling" (Atwood, 2005, pp.3-4). Such categorization will enable the reader to easily digest the significance of her story within a heteroglot reading. It can also be perceived in other titles such as "My Childhood" (p.7), "The Scar" (p.39), "The Shroud" (p.109), and "News of Helen" (p.127).

In addition, other chapters' titles demand the reader's imagination and contribution to relate them to the novel's sequence of events and arrangement. In chapter nine "The Trusted Cackle-Hen" (p.55) for example, the reader can tenaciously visualize the connection of the chapter's title to its content where Penelope portrays her voyage with Odysseus from her home in Sparta to Ithaca. "Brought back as a noble bride," Penelope sheds light on her position as "a stranger among strange people" (Atwood, 2005, pp.56-57). The fact that Penelope is a stranger enables the reader to have his/her own possible reading of the title in relation to its content. The title refers to Penelope's new stature in Ithaca where she is brought as a hen "for having children" to multiply (Atwood, 2005, p.24). Significantly speaking, Penelope was renamed by her father as a "duck" since she was rescued after "her father ordered to be thrown into the sea" (Atwood, 2005, p.7). Moreover, her mother harangues her a lesson drawn from nature to act as water since she is a water spirit:

Water does not resist. Water flows. When you plunge your hand into it all you feel is a caress. Water is not a solid wall, it will not stop you. But water always wants to go where it wants to go, and nothing in the end can stand against it.

Water is patient. Dripping water wears away a stone. Remember that, my child. Remember you are half water. If you can't go through an obstacle, go round it. Water does (Atwood, 2005, p.41).

Therefore, the title ironically points out to Penelope being the one who cackled at without having the sense of trusting in others since she is among strangers. Alongside Actoris' death, Penelope's "wedding present ... from [her] father," Penelope is belied by her mother-in-law who "sit silently and say nothing while [Penelope] made a fool of [herself], a tight little smile on her face (Atwood, 2005, p.56). Her most frequent expression to [Penelope] was, "you don't look well" (p.62).

Permeated with the twelve maids' narration, the structure becomes notable for its way in breaking Penelope's narration to achieve a heteroglot novel coherently. Their narration resembles the sword's two edges which interrupts the chronological sequence of Penelope's narration and, at the same time, plays a fundamental role in reserving the novel's structure as one unit. Such unitary in language, says Bakhtin, is "not only in its shared, abstract, linguistic markers but also in its forms for conceptualizing these abstract markers, is itself stratified and heteroglot in its aspect as an expressive system, that is, in the forms that carry its meanings" ("Discourse in the Novel," 2004, p.675). The form of the maids' narration in which a titled chorus line is interwoven with social stratification generates a heteroglot aspect.

The chapter entitled "If I was A Princess, A Popular Tune" (p.51) evokes the picture of the maids' lives at King Odysseus' court wishing to be princesses. They recount the social injustice of the time in which "hard work is [their] destiny, death is [their] fate!" (Atwood, 2005, p.52). They have to "fetch", "carry" and to "hear and obey. It's Yes sir and No ma'am the whole bleeding day" (p.52) with a smile. This title tackles and defines the context of the maids' utterances indicating their wish to be princesses "with silver and gold, /And loved by a hero ... always beautiful, happy, and free! (Atwood, 2005, p.51). Regretting their oppressed lives, the maids in "Kiddie Mourn, A Lament by the Maids" (p. 13) reflect their double ordeals as slaves and as "dirty girls" (p.13). Thus, the title suggests the maids' bemoaning of being treated as tools in terms of work and of sexual entertainment.

The combination of Penelope's structure and the chorus' structure of the maids is absorbed chronologically and the events of the novel are designed following a specific form. This form, say Guang-hui Lu and Ya-mei Chen (2011) "allows for other alternative voices or opinions and can either be dialogically contractive or ideologically expansive" (p.52). It stresses the ability to connect linguistic forms and social relations. i.e. heteroglossia. Most of the story is narrated directly to the reader by Penelope. The maids draw a second narrative frame and their remarks are also full of subjective interpretations and intrusion with the consciousness of both other characters and the reader himself/herself. At the same time, Penelope enables others to palpate her intervention with the consciousness of others, mainly the reader. Her narrative style, then, highlights the role of the reader in leaving impacts on his/her consciousness. Thus, this style provides another piece of evidence to prove the main argument of the present paper regarding the multiplicity of voices that one can find in *The Penelopiad*. This multiplicity is engendered as a result of the reader's diversified interpretations to originate a heteroglot novel.

Similarly, the maids' chorus is noticeably eminent by their subjective version of the story to manipulate the reader's consciousness. In "The Birth of Telemachus, An Idyll" (p.65), the maids seek justice and sympathy from the reader. They compare their birth to that of Telemachus', Penelope's son. They "beached at the same time as he was, struck by the hostile air,/ Infants when he was an infant, wailing just as he wailed/ Helpless as he was helpless, but ten times more helpless as well" (Atwood, 2005, p.66). They inquire equality where they were "brought, traded, captured, kidnapped from serfs to strangers" (p.66). Therefore, they demand their rights even after a period of time that lasts more than three thousand years. Treated like "pets", "toy thing" and "tiny companions" (p.68), the maids are hanged by Telemachus, the one with whom they usually play.

Therefore, the consciousness of the two narrators emerges to contribute to the reader's comprehension of a heteroglot novel through its chapters' divisions. Alongside with chapters' division, *The Penelopiad* attains its distinctive heteroglot features felicitously in Penelope's and the maids' recognition of the external modern world. Due to the fact that they reestablish and re-invite *The Odyssey's* sequence of events, Penelope and the maids are aware of their current circumstances as dead women among dead people in Hades. Their version of the story empowers the reader's role in acknowledging the context; that is of Penelope and of the maids. They are able to seek their own way in propounding a new heteroglot novel after a long period of time.

Precisely speaking, Penelope's story-making is conceived, says Selden (1997), by "the production of meaning in discourse" (p.42). Though "[she] believed [Odysseus] from time to time, [she] knew he was tricky and a liar, [she] just didn't think he would play his tricks and try out his lies on [her]" (Atwood, 2005, p.2). Ultimately, she tackles the story within a modern context. She is attentive to the technological progress of the twenty-first century. Indeed, she realizes how her classical world differs from the modern one in which "the technology of crafts to girls has fallen out of fashion now" [(p.8). Though she is "very interested in the invention of the light bulb, for instance, and in the matter-into-energy theories of the twentieth century" (p.19), she expresses how she is lucky enough for not having such things in "[her] day" (p.8). As a result, such recognition of her status as a witness of both times, classical and modern, alternates the reader's evaluation of the story. Certainly, the frame of the story is doubtlessly eminent and the context helps the reader to better understand the story. The reader is left with a novel that is "ideologically prosaic, anti-romance, anti-epical, and anti-mythical; its multivoiceness or heteroglossia, argues Paul De Man (1989) postulates distinct and antagonistic

class structure as well as the celebratory crossing of social barriers" (p.108). Therefore, it is the role of the reader to grasp such frame within a modern context.

The Penelopiad imposes another heteroglot feature through the maids' perception of their current status in the modern world which is filled with alternative voices and opinions. Thus, their utterances mutate ideologically to fit the new context of the twenty-first century. Such recognition plays an important role in both the reader's understanding and his/her subsequent connection to the real world in articulating his/her utterances. Actually, the maids are fully conscious of the modern reader and address him/her directly in more than one occasion. In "An Anthropology Lecture" (p.163), for example, they preside the reader to sympathize with the maids' conditions at that time. Addressing the reader as "the educated mind," the maids try to involve the reader closely enough in their situation (Atwood, 2005, pp.163,165,168). In fact, they already involve the audience while they recite their "An Anthropology Lecture" in terms of questions. They raise many questions and answer them at the same time. One of these questions is: "there are twelve apostles, there are twelve days of Christmas, yes, but there are twelve months, and what does the word month suggest to the educated mind?" (Atwood, 2005, p.163). Their acting is highly significant; they ask questions and answer them while taking two roles, the role of the chorus and the role of the audience at the same time, like when they provide information about months and where they come from: "Yes? You, Sir, in the back? Correct! Month comes from moon, as everyone knows" (Atwood, 2005, p.163).

The maids seek justice from the reader by having their own context that is close enough to the modern reader. They create a heteroglot feature, says Michael Holquist (2002), in the "way of conceiving the world as made up of a roiling mass of languages. Each of which has its own distinct formal markers" (p.67). They endeavor to comprise the educated minds of the twenty-first century by assuming a previous knowledge of the modern time and mentioning some of the modern terms in their narration. For instance, they recognize the educated reader and list some of his/her modern devices as "Anthropology" (p.163), "theories" (p.165), scientific notions as "lunar months" (p.165), and modern technological devices as "videotape" (p.184). Moreover, they speak to the reader as if they share the same knowledge without any restrictions.

The main argument about *The Penelopiad*, thus, is that it has a dialogical structure, rather than a monological one. Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist (1984) consider the novel as a "great instrument for exploiting and simultaneously strengthening heteroglossia" (p.291). This dialogical structure inspires the reader to alter his/her view point about many important issues raised in the novel. Therefore, the reader will come across manifold standpoints instead of one indispensable point of view. The impersonation of heteroglossia is unparalleled in the novel genre in particular because of the novel's capability to put diversified languages into dialogic interactions, which Bakhtin calls the dialogized heteroglossia. Barbara Green (2000) explains Bakhtin's concept of the "dialogized or dialogic," by saying that "the utterances are shaped not only by the author/speaker, but also by the reader/listener" (p.205). Throughout *The Penelopiad*, the posited author's story and the narrators' version of the story are placed dialogically. Such kind of tension among the narrators' versions of the story causes some type of dialogic conflict in the novel's two layers. Bakhtin convincingly argues:

The posited author and teller[s] assume a completely different significance where they are incorporated as carriers of a particular verbal-ideological linguistic belief system. ... The author manifests himself and his point of view not only in his effect on the narrator, on his speech and his language but also in his effect on the subject of the story – as a point of view that differs from the point of view of the narrator. (*Dialogic Imagination*, pp.312, 313, 314).

Bakhtin sees such dialogic conflict as a distinguished feature of the novel. It is what makes the representation of heteroglossia unique by putting diverse languages in the novel's capacity into interactions. The novel depends on both the authorial context and the narrator's in order to fulfill a dialogized heteroglot novel.

Paul De Man (1989) considers the novel to be a "conversation with many voices rather than as a contest with winners and losers" (106). *The Penelopiad*'s dialogic context can be conceived within three different layers; Atwood and her readers, Penelope and her listeners, and the maids and their listeners. Raman Selden (1997) argues against the single voice which "may give the impression of unity and closure," the utterance, he maintains, "is constantly (and to some extent unconsciously) producing a plentitude of meanings, which stem from social interaction (dialogue)" (42). Monologue for Selden (1997) is "a forcible imposition on language, and hence a distortion of it" (p.42).

The reader witnesses Atwood's voice in *The Penelopiad* dialogically, especially when the characters are involved in a dialogue together. According to Alexander Georgakopoulou and Dionysis Goutsos (1997), dialogue is "a major involvement strategy in conversational narratives of cultures," it creates the illusion that both teller and audience certificate the events (137). Thus, Atwood's idea is never given directly to the reader, but refracted among the two layers; that of Penelope and of the maids. Unlike the omniscient narration, Atwood's style of narration is highly plenteous. According to Paul De Man (1989), one can see how "the heteroglot voices create the background necessary for [the author's] own voice" (112).

In *The Penelopiad*, then, Atwood is able to achieve a dialogized heteroglossia. The novel, says Ruth Coates (2004), "wages war against the tyranny of the unitary language, incorporating into itself a multitude of different languages and organizing them artistically, that is, bringing them into contact with each other" (107). In other words, the reader can touch upon and hint at Atwood's intention and voice depending on her creativity in bringing contact with the reader. She seeks to construct a solid ground with a shared language between her as a sender of the message and the reader as a

receiver. Thus, she sends “messages of rapport and intimacy to the [readers] inviting their involvement with them and with the events which are so vividly recreated” (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos, 1997, p.137).

Dialogue might also refer to communication which does not necessarily take place face to face. Guy Cook (1994) says that dialogue can be understood “in a broader sense, meaning not only direct, face to face, vocalized verbal communication between persons, but also written communication in which sender and receiver are not face to face” (p.48). In *The Penelopiad*, Penelope and the maids evince a dialogical framework in order to effectively transmit their messages to the reader. Actually, Penelope and the maids demonstrate dialogue as a “well-established expressive [device] in narrative” within two levels, internal and external (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos, 1997, p.142). As for the internal dialogue, Penelope and the maids enumerate some incidents of their lives by remembering and recounting certain dialogues. The external dialogue, on the other hand, reflects Penelope’s and the maids’ messages to the reader himself/herself through “a sequence of connected sentences by which a sender communicates a message to a receiver” (Renkema, 1993, p.32).

In many internal dialogical contexts, Penelope re-narrates some episodes to the reader to draw his/her attention to the unmentioned contexts in *The Odyssey*. In “The Trusted Cackle-Hen,” for example, Penelope reports her dialogue about her hidden door into the heart with Odysseus. She asks “Do I have a hidden door into my heart? And have you found it. At this Odysseus only smiled. ‘That is for you to tell me’ he said” (Atwood, 2005, p.58). In other parts, Penelope retells occurrences to the reader where she directly constructs an external dialogue with the reader’s consciousness without any obstacles. Her aim is to unfold things that might be wrongly comprehended by the reader. Indeed, she admits to the reader the fact that she did identify her husband, while only feigning she had been taken in by his disguise because “it’s always an imprudence to step between a man and his own cleverness” (Atwood, 2005, p.137). Moreover, she accosts to the reader immediately and confesses, for instance, the reason why she pulled down her veil when Odysseus “asked [her] if [she] was going to Ithaca with him of [her] own free will or did [she] prefer to remain with [her] father” (p.49).

To some extent, the maids also point out to the importance of dialogue as “one of fundamental structuring principles of all discourse, written and spoken alike” (Cook, 1994, p.51). They concentrate on dialogue in variegated and diversified ways in order to gain the reader’s sympathy in judging their position as hanged girls in Hades. Therefore, their dialogue, mainly external, aims at tracing their real circumstances in all possible ways. They recite their chorus line in various forms as “A Popular Tune” (p.51), “An Idyll” (p. 65), “A Ballad” (p.125), “A Drama” (p.147), “An Anthropology Lecture” (p.163), “Videotape” (p.175) and “A Love Song” (p.191). Declaiming the reader straightway, the maids load the reader with part of the responsibility of their current position and keep saying “you” and “the educated mind” (Atwood, 2005, p.163-168). They parallel the reader with the role of the judge to attain their justice. In the last few pages, they address the reader saying:

You are our last hope! We implore you to inflict punishment and exact vengeance on our behalf! Be our defenders, we who had none in life! Smell out Odysseus wherever he goes! From one place to another, from one life to another, whatever disguise he puts on, whatever shape he may take, hunt him down! Dog his footsteps, on earth or in Hades, wherever he may take refuge, in songs and in plays, in tomes and in theses, in marginal notes and in appendices! Appear to him in our forms, the forms of our pitiable corpses! Let him never be at rest! (Atwood, 2005, p.183).

The maids require justice from the reader by giving him/her both the judge and the attorney positions for the defense of the twenty-first century court. They admit to both the reader and the judge their actual circumstances, without bodies but just “symbols” (p.168). Therefore, they can’t avenge upon Odysseus and demand help from the judge’s wisdom. For the maids, this wisdom is disguised by the reader’s insight with his/her educated mind to exact retaliation on their behalf. They equate the role of the reader with the judge’s role.

The reader, thus, will deconstruct his/her viewpoint because of the maids’ realization of his/her role in rewriting the story one more time by modified perspectives. Subsequently, the novel obtains its dialogical frame in both Atwood’s voice and the narrators’ voice within two layers, external and internal, as mentioned earlier. Such frame illustrates Bakhtin’s unique form of discourse called dialogized heteroglossia. In such discourse, says Bakhtin, “there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions” and heteroglossia serves “another’s speech in another’s language” (*Dialogic Imagination*, 1981, p.324).

Therefore, and after entrenching the novel, heteroglossia, says Utku Tuglu (2011), becomes “a represented speech expressing authorial intentions, but these intentions are refracted in varying degrees in the represented speech of the characters” (p.23). The author’s version of the story and the narrators’ version are brought together, and they are coordinated in such a harmonized way that is conceivable to look at both of them separately and /or mutually. In this way, the reader locates himself/herself among different voices and visions. These separate voices, in fact, bisect each other to obtain an opposed dialogical context.

Penelope’s vision of life in the modern world diverges from Odysseus’ vision in the classical one. She recognizes her role in radically questioning Odysseus’ version of the story. Actually, she doubts ‘the available forms of representation and the available mode of knowledge within culture’ [qtd in Monica Bottez, 2012, p.51]. When she realizes that she is turned into a story, Penelope decides to open her mouth. She concedes that it is her own time to “contradict” and to open her eyes after “[she] turned a blind eye” (Atwood, 2005, p.3). While she is alive “[she] wanted happy endings in those days, and happy endings are best achieved by keeping the right doors looked and going to sleep during the

rampages” (p.3). However, the main events unfold themselves to become less legendary in Hades. Thence, she “realized how many people were laughing at [her] behind [her] back- how they were jeering, making jokes about [her], jokes both clean and dirty; how they were turning [her] into a story, or into several stories, though not the kind of stories [she] would prefer to hear about [herself]” (Atwood, 2005, p.3). The story she narrates is both similar and different to her husband’s story. Yet, she has to wait for a long time to provide a strong defense and to avoid being guilty.

By deconstructing Odysseus’ story, Penelope acknowledges in a vicarious way the contradictory nature of her husband’s story. Bravely enough, she admits to both the reader and the people down in Hades many official stories, like the veil incident, for instance. She avows her real motive for pulling down the veil. This act of pulling the veil, in fact, is done consciously to hide the fact that she is laughing (Atwood, 2005, p.49). This act is also interpreted as an answer that silently bespoke her husband’s desire.

Another new detail that Penelope credits in her recounted version is the fact that she did recognize her husband from the very beginning. She pretends, with her husband’s return, that she has been taken by his disguise “as a dirty old beggar” because “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” [5] (Atwood, 2005, p.36-137). Moreover, Penelope re-invites her wedding night and she confesses how she is schooled by Odysseus. In re-narrating the story, Penelope gives the true account of her scream at the wedding night. She also explains how she is schooled in the art of pretending by her husband, Odysseus:

Forget everything you have been told, he whispered, I’m not going to hurt you, or not very much. But it would help us both if you could pretend. I’ve been told you’re a clever girl. Do you think you could manage a few screams? That would satisfy them – they’re listening at the door – and they’ll leave us in peace and we can take our time to become friends (Atwood, 2005, p.44).

In this way, Penelope is aware of her role as a story teller in deconstructing what is already known to bring her own remarkable version. Indeed, she seeks the “[reader’s] attention” (p.144) in charging the new facets the old outdated version.

Penelope witnesses both the classical and the modern time and questions her husband’s version of the story. In this recognition, she is conscious of the reader’s role in parodying her version as she did in parodying her husband’s to deconstruct a sequel from a prequel version. With her husband’s return home, she avows while exchanging stories with her husband:

The two of us were – by our own admission – proficient and shameless liars of long standing. It’s a wonder either of us believed a word the other said.

But we did.

Or so we told each other. (Atwood, 2005, p.173)

Consequently, the reader hints the truth value of the narrators. Practically, she highlights the unreliability of their enumerations. Moreover, she describes her husband’s version, when they reciprocate stories, as “the nobler versions” (p. 172). Thus, Penelope becomes aware to the fact that she might become a sequel of another prequel version since she herself is a sequel of a classical work. Her awareness of this fact explains why she contradicts her version of the story at the end to indicate how she herself may be an unreliable narrator.

Since it is told by the voice of minority, unreliable ones, *The Penelopiad* is a hybrid text. Because of Atwood’s inventive writing, it deconstructs the norm. It is recounted from the other’s perspectives, the excluded ones in *The Odyssey*. Instead of Homer’s omniscient context, the novel is enhanced by the existence of other genres in its structure. Alongside heteroglossia and dialogism, this new protruded structure contributes to the literary language’s stratification, and thus to its own specific characteristics.

The genre of the novel, according to Bakhtin, is a genre that permits what he calls many “plastic possibilities” (*Dialogic Imagination*, 1981, p.3). One can argue that Atwood’s *The Penelopiad* is one of the best novels to represent such possibilities. The discussion so far in this paper reveals how this novel has a flexible skeleton that permits many possibilities, it can create any desired shape beyond its original one, and it will not limit itself to the brittle skeleton of Homer’s epic. Atwood’s novel is permeated with a chorus line of maids belonging to several genres. Penelope’s first narration is interwoven with ten chapters delivered by a chorus line, “eight written in various lyrical forms and two in dramatic form” (Bottez, 2012, p.49).

Thus, new patterns are expected to emerge to reveal the inner lives and the new aspects in *The Penelopiad* that differ from its prequel, *The Odyssey*, with its diversified and inclusive nature. This extraordinary feature is what Barbara Johnstone (2008) hints at as “breaking the conventions” of a discourse to create an “effective move, because it can serve to remind people in the situation what the usual expectations are” (p.140). The chorus plays a fundamental role in the incompleteness nature of the novel. The maids recite their chorus in a modern genre while rejecting the classical form of the expected environment of the chorus’ appearance. They include both classical and modern ways of narrating and performing their voices to participate in the novel’s distinguished diversity while maintaining its unique identity. The chorus mutates in its style and form and the maids perform an idyll in “The Birth of Telemachus, An Idyll” (p.65). In other chapters, they play the role of other characters as Penelope and Eurycleia, the nurse, in drama version like as in the chapter entitled “The Perils of Penelope, A Drama” (p.147). Moreover, they break the conventions by singing a song in Ch XXVIII “We’re Walking Behind You, A Love Song” (p.191) to celebrate their pursuit of happiness in

hunting Odysseus and they sing “We’ll never leave you, we’ll stick to you like your shadow, soft and relentless as glue. Pretty maids, all in a row” (Atwood, 2005, p.193). Ironically, they solemnize, to a certain extent, what they could not achieve while they are alive. In this variation and deviation of discourse, the maids’ form of narration hints at their ability to preserve their identity in various forms to capture the essence of their lost identity. In fact, Atwood is looking for such diverged discourse. Atwood preserves the novel’s identity by ingesting the identity of others, the maids, in its shattered and distributed forms throughout Penelope’s first narration. By using this kind of discourse, Atwood effectively illustrates Bakhtin’s propositions in this regard, especially when he says:

The novel permits the incorporation of various genres, both artistic (inserted short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic scenes, etc.) and extra artistic/everyday, rhetorical, scholarly, religious genres and others). In principle, any genre could be included in the construction of the novel...Such incorporated genres usually preserve within the novel their own structural integrity and independence, as well as their own linguistic and stylistic peculiarities (*Dialogic Imagination*, 1981, p.320-321).

Bakhtin welcomes such an orchestration of different types of genres in order to break the standard of one generic form which permits diversity in form since the content is differentiated by its narrators. In other words, the outcome will be a novel with a multiplicity of different genres. As a result, a homogenous novel, a novel that is composed of one pure genre, is rejected. This diversity of other genres is associated with “different voices or different frames” (Johnstone, 2008, p.140). Therefore, reorganization is made between “form and substance, in one hand, and between content and expression, on the other” (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos, 1997, p.10).

Besides form, *The Penelopiad* has a structure that combines both the novel’s and epic’s time and, as a result, changeable styles might flourish. The maids’ narrative style intersects Penelope’s style, first person narration, to engage the volatile content and form. In the chapter entitled “Dreamboats, A Ballad” (p.125), for instance, the maids perform collectively a ballad as one voice. They experience sleeping as their ultimate happiness that will enable them to “sail the waves in golden boats” through their dreams. Through their collective voice, they use the pronoun “we” and draw attention to their life and project their real conditions. This collective voice can be heard in other chapters as in “A Rope- Jumping Rhyme” (p.5), “Kiddie Mourn, A Lament by the Maids” (p.13), “The Birth of Telemachus, An Idyll” (p.65), “The Wily Sea Captain, A Sea Shanty” (p. 93) and “Envoi” (p. 195).

The maids use the same style in another chapter entitled “The Perils of Penelope, A Drama” (p.147) where the voice of two other maids is heard individually. In it, two of the maids disguise as Penelope and her nurse, Eurycleia. They recount Penelope’s conspiracy in giving up her maids and blaming them for the whole circumstances of Odysseus’ absence. Consequently, the maids account their suppressed tongue in defending themselves by letting two of the maids bespoken Penelope’s betrayal of the maids and thus replaying to such betrayal collectively. Indeed, at the end of this chapter, they advocate themselves in tap- dance shoes saying:

Blame it on the maids!/ Those naughty little jades!/ Hang them high and don’t ask why-/ Blame it on the maids! Blame it on the slaves!/ The toys of rogues and knaves!/ Let them dangle, let them strangle-/ Blame it on the slaves!/ Blame it on the sluts!/ Those poxy little scuts!/ We’ve got the dirt on every skirt-/ Blame it on the sluts! (Atwood, 2005, p.151-152).

In this chapter, the maids express in their own words how they were seen by Penelope as “jades, slaves, rogues, knaves, sluts, and little scuts.” Since they are dead with Penelope in Hades, the maids seek justice in a neutral way and play Penelope’s role in her infidelity of the maids with their remarks of this situation at the end of the chapter. To a certain extent, they demand equality from the reader by giving him/her the truth value of their previous conditions.

Likewise, in “The Trial of Odysseus, as Videotaped by the Maids” (p.175), the maids incorporate a deviated and a defamiliarized form through a videotaped court. In this chapter, other characters, besides the twelve maids, are engaged as attorney for the defense and the judge. Therefore, the reader can grasp a patterning in form and style through such classical and modern features’ germination. In fact, Johnstone (2008) asserts how such features are essential to a comprehensive understanding of genre knowledge (p.31-33). It contributes to the reader’s understanding of the nature of the novel as a genre which attempts to parody other genres and expose “the conventionality of forms and their languages” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p.5). Thus, the novel encourages other genres to change while preserving its own identified features.

Enhanced by the existence of other genres, the structure of the novel is not “synonymous with form but may refer to the organization or articulation of both form and content” (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos, 1997, p.11).. Such structure plays an essential role in promoting, condensing and stratifying the diversity of the novel’s language. This unique structure is an indispensable precondition for the genre of the novel. Projected into different forms, the novel’s structure, says Johnstone (2008), maintains its cohesive nature through the use of language “to construct and project a coherent, more durable personal identity” (p.155). Therefore, the structure portrays the social identity of its narrators into different forms.

Since Atwood’s *The Penelopiad* presents the voice of the minority, Penelopiad and the maids, the novel’s structure is defamiliarized to parallel others’ identity. Atwood tackles the novel in a distinguished way and each part re-invites and/or reconstructs certain episodes in *The Odyssey*. Each part is entitled differently to indicate ironically or directly its content. Significantly, each chapter stands alone in its remarkable story-making; which can be seen in certain chapters like “My Childhood” (p.7), “Asphodel” (p.15), “My Marriage” (p.23) and “The Scar” (p.39).

Actually, the sense of defamiliarization is perceived by having different parts with different representations. To articulate this technique of defamiliarization, Atwood re-invites Homer's epic into chapters, some are written in paragraphs while others are recited by the chorus. Consequently, this defamiliarization leads to what Cook (1994) calls "discourse deviation" (p.197). Cook (1994) indicates how this deviation causes "patterning at the linguistic and text-structural levels" and each pattern at one level affects other patterns at other levels (p.198). Atwood demonstrates her point of view in rewriting *The Odyssey* by presenting different contexts with two frames of narration as opposed to the single context of Homer's epic. However, it was Atwood's creative writing that puts such a structure in a unique configuration.

IV. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the analysis of Atwood's *The Penelopiad* according to Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia, dialogism, and form and content reveals that it is a dialogized heteroglot novel with a varied and versified structure. It is one of the best novels that represent the stratification of the literary language, a stratification that proves to be a meaningful and a remarkable context originated by Atwood to provide the reader with a heteroglot novel that enables him/her to better understand the novel and to put it in its modern context as opposed to the classical context of the *The Odyssey*. Atwood provides the reader with a novel that best illustrates Bakhtin's celebration of the novel as genre characterized by its amplitude to include verified and multiple meanings. The novel, according to both Bakhtin and Atwood, exhibits language as a social phenomenon rather than as an abstract system.

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