THE SHROUD OF LAERTES AND PENELOPE'S GUILE

The story of Laertes' shroud, which Penelope weaves during the day and unravels at night, is the only narrative that is told almost verbatim three times in Homer (*Od.* 2.93-110, 19.137-56, 24.129-48).[1] Although this unique status should indicate its importance, Homeric scholars have strangely paid little attention to the story itself and focused instead on subsidiary questions. Analysts and Neo-analysts have tried to determine which of the three versions of the tale is original. There have been attempts to recreate a folk tale on which the story is supposedly dependent or to use the narrative to help reconstruct an earlier hypostasis of Penelope.[2] The episode has fared no better among Unitarians, who usually cite Penelope's weaving merely as an example of her guile. These critics do not attend to the two most important aspects of the story, the fact that Penelope is creating a shroud and that a process of making and undoing occurs. Since this tale is interpreted only as an instance of Penelope's artifice, any other deception she might have contrived would serve these scholars' purposes just as well: Penelope could have said she wanted to knit booties for Telemachos' future child, or she might have tricked the suitors by sending them on an impossible quest.[3]

[1] Different is Agamemnon's dream, first announced by Zeus to Oneiros, then spoken to Agamemnon, and finally reported to the *boulê* by Agamemnon (*Il.* 2.11-15 = 28-32 = 65-69, with 2.23-27 = 60-64). These repetitions retain the same meaning each time the story is told. On the other hand, three distinct speakers in divergent parts of the *Odyssey* choose to tell the tale of the web for wholly disparate reasons. Different too is the story of Agamemnon's return, related by Nestor, Menelaos, and Agamemnon himself in Books 3, 4, and 11 and 24 respectively: these narrators recount the tale in completely different words. Also, the narrative of Agamemnon's return serves as a parallel to events within the *Odyssey*, while the story of Penelope's weaving involves a major character of the poem. For recent studies of the function of the Agamemnon story, see Katz 3-53 and Olson 24-42.

[2] For a review of the scholarship, see Bona 107-22, Heubeck (1985) 33-35, Heubeck (1988) 374-75, and Goldhill 1-3. The most recent Neo-analysts to treat the subject are Kullmann and Krischer, the latter of whom employs the three versions of the tale to conclude that not only the *Telemachia* but also the Phaiakian episodes do not belong to the earliest stages of the *Odyssey*.

[3] While Papadopoulou-Belmehdi says little in her book about the shroud *qua* shroud, she does discuss the motif of weaving and unweaving (e.g., 56). Cf. Zeitlin

An interpretation of the story of weaving and unraveling must take into account the meaning of Laertes' shroud and the wider implications of creating and undoing one's work. Further, the problems in chronology and detail that have troubled both Analysts and Neo-analysts still deserve attention. For instance, Antinoos seems to suggest in his account that the shroud has been finished for some time, while Amphimedon, speaking a month later, asserts that it was completed just before Odysseus' return (καὶ τότε δή ῥ', 24.149). Also, both suitors assert that one maid informed them of Penelope's duplicity, while the queen herself attributes her betrayal to a number of attendants. In dealing with such apparent anomalies it is safer to search for elucidation within the text rather than to turn immediately to extra-textual explanations based on suppositions about the poem's early development.

A number of critics have recognized—and this advance is an important step in the interpretation of Penelope's weaving—that the divergences between the three accounts are often due to the individual speakers' different viewpoints and attitudes.[4] Further, the number of betraying maids and changing time-spans between the completion of the shroud and the return of Odysseus are important, not in revealing which version of the tale was composed first, but in showing the poem's masterful use of realism, characterization, and contextualization of traditional material.

The aim of this paper is not merely to reinterpret a tale that is important enough within the *Odyssey* to merit three tellings but also to study this narrative in terms of its repetition.[5] If we inquire into the function of a story that is told only once (e.g., Odysseus' description of the marriage bed in Book 23), we connect the details of that account with the motifs that are salient at that particular point in the poem. What happens, however, when the same story is related at the beginning, middle, and end of the epic? Must the meaning and function of the shroud story be necessarily vague because of its repetition, a narratological equivalent, for instance, to the repeated epithet περίφρων, or can the story fit into each of

411. The image of weaving and undoing one's work has played an important role in framing a feminist poetics (e.g., Heilbrun 105-11), but most of these analyses do not attempt to interpret the myth within its Homeric context.

[4] West (in Heubeck et al.) 137 and Heubeck (in Russo et al.) 374 make this point a rule in interpreting the differences. Bona is very good at ascribing the variations to the individual speaker's perspective. Cf. Papadopoulou-Belmehdi 37-38 and 92-93.

[5] For my earlier work on the thematic function of Homeric repetitions, see Lowenstam 59-244.

its three contexts as adroitly as the description of the bed in Book 23? The fact that there are differences in the three versions suggests the possibility of particular functions in each of its tellings, but only an analysis of the story in terms of its contexts can answer this question.

I

The first account of Penelope's weaving appears early in the poem, in Book 2 (93-110). In response to Telemachos' attack on the suitors' uninvited courtship of his mother and dissipation of his patrimony, Antinoos defends the suitors by blaming Penelope: not only has she encouraged her wooers, sending messages and making promises to each of them, but she has tricked them into waiting three whole years while she pretended to weave a shroud for the eventuality of Laertes' death. She wove by day but undid her work at night until the suitors learned of her deceit from one of her maids. Antinoos warns Telemachos that the suitors will continue to besiege his palace and consume his estate until Penelope, possibly with the help of her father, chooses a new husband.

Two elements in this story stand out. First, while the nightly unraveling provides Penelope a way to fend off the suitors for a protracted period, the act of weaving and unraveling presents a gauge by which Antinoos can judge the proximity of his (or another suitor's) wedding to Penelope. As the weaving progresses, the upcoming nuptials draw nearer; while, unbeknownst to him, the undoing of her work is driving the happy day more distant.[6] Though we are probably not meant to understand that Antinoos was allowed to see the progress of the weaving in the women's chambers upstairs, he could rejoice that the work was proceeding toward what he considered his success.

The object woven, a shroud, is the second distinctive element of the story. When Penelope has completed her work, she will have completed her duty to Laertes and his family, including Odysseus. In this sense, then, the shroud is an appropriate object for her to weave before her remarriage. But the shroud, as an article of death, has a more pertinent sense in the suitor's telling. Antinoos states that Penelope is acquiring great acclaim for herself by resisting her suitors (μέγα μὲν κλέος αὐτῇ / ποιεῖτ', 2.125-26); but with the web finished and a new husband inevitable, this fame

[6] Cf. Felson 27, Scheid and Svenbro 68.

and this way of life will come to an end. Antinoos and the suitors will have overcome the queen's resistance, and so in some sense the shroud that Penelope has completed will be her own, marking the end of her previous life and the victory of the suitors. Or so it would seem, for in Antinoos' telling, in contrast to the two repetitions later in the poem, it is not clear that Penelope must choose a new husband right away.[7] And this point is the very one Antinoos stresses to Telemachos: he will continue to exert pressure on his mother until she realizes that she must honor her promise to remarry upon the completion of the shroud.

II

Penelope herself provides the second report of the weaving, and although eighteen of the lines are repeated almost verbatim,[8] the story at this later stage of the poem leads to a different interpretation. In contrast to Antinoos' defensive response to the combative Telemachos in Book 2, in Book 19 Penelope relates the tale to the sympathetic stranger and in particular to the benevolent remarks he has just expressed about her far-reaching fame (κλέος, 19.108). And again in contrast to Antinoos, who had spoken of Penelope's increasing κλέος (2.125-26), she begins her response to the stranger by stating that she has lost her distinctive virtues (ἀρετὴν εἶδος τε δέμας τε, 19.124) but admits that her κλέος would increase should her husband return (μεῖζόν κε κλέος εἴη ἐμὸν καὶ κάλλιον οὕτω, 19.128). She then begins to explain the predicament in which she is caught and the necessity for her literally to weave wiles (ἐγὼ δὲ δόλους τολυπεύω, 19.137). It is at this point that Penelope repeats the eighteen core lines about weaving and unraveling Laertes' shroud, with one intriguing departure to be mentioned below. Penelope ends her speech by asserting that she can no longer avoid remarriage because she cannot devise another trick (ἄλλην / μῆτιν, 19.157-58): she feels pressure from everyone, including her parents and son.

The differences between this version of the story and Antinoos' are striking. Penelope makes it very clear that she cannot escape remarriage and must immediately choose a new husband. Her sense

[7] This sense of temporal isolation in Antinoos' relating of the weaving tale makes Krischer 1 call it denatured.

[8] 19.139-156 = 2.94-110, with 19.153 = 2.107a, mostly with minor modifications occasioned by change of person (except for 19.154-55 and 2.108-9, for which see below).

of urgency is reasonable: she has finished the shroud, and no one is encouraging her to wait any longer for Odysseus. On the other hand, Antinoos had expressed no expectation that she would select one of the suitors right away, and that response was sensible too. Penelope had done everything she could to avoid choosing a new husband, and she has not told the suitors what she has confided to the stranger, namely that she feels great pressure to remarry.

A second difference can also be ascribed to some sense of realism. Antinoos (like Amphimedon later) states that one of the maids divulged Penelope's trick of undoing her work at night (2.108 = 24.144). The two suitors must know which maid informed them but do not name her. Penelope, on the other hand, attributes her betrayal to "the maids" in general (δμῳάς, κύνας οὐκ ἀλεγούσας, 19.154). She knows that the suitors caught her unraveling her weaving but does not know who precisely gave her away.[9] Therefore she ascribes her exposure to a number of maids, an imprecise and incorrect conclusion.[10] Her supposition seems like a natural mistake, the type of error that people make,[11] and the poem interjects this wonderful note of realism where we might least expect it, in the midst of repeated lines. Further, from a thematic viewpoint, we can observe how adeptly the poet adapts each version of the weaving story to fit its immediate context.

The setting of this second narration of the weaving story elicits a different interpretation from that of the first telling. Antinoos was waging a battle against Penelope, and the completion of the shroud was to mark his victory over her. In some sense, then, the death garment was Penelope's; it marked the end of her independence from the suitors. For Penelope, however, as we see in Book 19, the shroud has a very different meaning. When she weaves, the shroud is for Laertes, his family, and most of all for Odysseus. As she is working on the shroud and drawing nearer to remarriage, it is as if she is burying Odysseus; but when she is unraveling her web, she is reviving her husband and her commitment to his family. This very fluctuation in the progress of

[9] Büchner 133 suggests that the suitors made the identity of the betrayer unclear so that Penelope could not discover who it was.

[10] The poem makes it clear that not all of Penelope's attendants were informers or traitors; Eurukleia asserts that only twelve of the fifty maids did not honor Penelope (22.420-25).

[11] Marquardt 152 points out that Penelope had earlier chastised the whole lot of maids for not informing her of Telemachos' departure from Ithaka (4.729-31). Hence, this feature of blaming all the maids for unexpected reverses may be part of the poem's characterization of Penelope.

the weaving also reflects Penelope's wavering about which course she should adopt. As she will soon explain to the stranger, she has received signs that Odysseus is still living and will rescue her from her predicament,[12] but she has a grave distrust of such omens. Further, she feels caught between her commitment to her husband, which she feels harms her son, and her duty to Telemachos, which in her view requires that she forsake Odysseus (ὡς καὶ ἐμοὶ δίχα θυμὸς ὀρώρεται ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα,/ἠὲ μένω παρὰ παιδὶ...ἢ ἤδη ἅμ' ἕπωμαι Ἀχαιῶν ὅς τις ἄριστος, 19.524-28).[13] The weaving and unraveling of the shroud (ἔνθα καὶ ἡματίη μὲν ὑφαίνεσκον μέγαν ἱστόν,/ νύκτας δ' ἀλλύεσκον, 19.149-50) mirror these doubts and worries, her feeling closer to Odysseus and then more distant, her desire to stand by her husband but then her conviction that she must relinquish him for Telemachos' sake.

Penelope's course of approaching and distancing herself from remarriage through weaving and unraveling also echoes the very meandering of Odysseus' return home. As the audience knows by Book 19, after the war Odysseus zigzagged towards home and away. He had come as close as actually seeing Ithaka, but then his companions opened the bag of winds and drove them far away (10.28-49). When Odysseus was with Circe, Penelope was far from his mind (10.467-74), but his days with Kalypso were spent pining for home (1.57-59). So, like Penelope, he alternates between feeling close to his mate and distant. It is in the last third of the *Odyssey* that the similarities between Penelope and Odysseus gain emphasis (e.g., in their trickery, restraint, endurance, commitment, and skepticism). Perhaps this affinity becomes clearest at the climax of the poem when Penelope and Odysseus embrace after their reunion and a simile compares her joy at regaining her husband to a sailor's excitement at reaching land after a shipwreck, the very experience Odysseus had undergone in Books 5 and 12 (23.233–40).[14] Both Odysseus and Penelope experience a rhythm to and fro, towards each other and away, and Penelope's weaving and unweaving marks this very vacillation.

In sum, the story of the shroud, when first told, had limited significance and associations but, when retold by Penelope seventeen books later and placed into a new context, gains greater resonance by tapping into important motifs of the poem. The most

[12] For the signs and omens, see Page 123-24 and Finley 7-8.

[13] See further Lowenstam 233-34 for Penelope's dilemma (19.512-34).

[14] For the importance of Penelope and Odysseus' ὁμοφροσύνη, see Austin 214-21, Lowenstam 218-19, Goldhill 1-8. For the shipwreck simile, see Foley.

important aspects of the story, the woven object and the alternation between weaving and unraveling, acquire meanings that were absent when Antinoos related the same incident. Now in Penelope's telling it is clear that in something akin to sympathetic magic the shroud Penelope was weaving signifies the death of Odysseus, and that in undoing her work she was drawing Odysseus nearer to home. Further, the process of weaving and unraveling not only parallels Odysseus' path home but reflects her own doubts about whether he will ever return. And if Odysseus is dead, then Penelope herself does not wish to live any longer (20.61-65).[15] Within this context the shroud mourns the whole family of Odysseus. These changes from the first version are impressive, and yet the third telling of the tale will encourage still another interpretation.

III

Near the end of the poem Amphimedon repeats the tale of Penelope's shroud for the last time, after Agamemnon questions the type of calamity that could have consumed so many young men entering Hades. The dead suitor immediately responds that, while Penelope never refused remarriage, her intention all along had been to destroy the suitors (24.126-27; cf. 1.249-50 = 16.126-27). Then Amphimedon repeats the by now standard weaving story with eighteen lines from Antinoos' speech (24.128-146 = 2.93-110 + 107a with minor changes).[16] For the first time, however, we hear a continuation of the tale: Penelope, forced to complete the shroud, exhibited her handiwork, and it "shone like the sun or moon." But then, the suitor continues, an evil god (κακὸς ... δαίμων) returned Odysseus to Ithaka, who with his son contrived the suitors' destruction and with exceptional deviousness bade Penelope arrange the archery contest. The result is that all the suitors have perished in Odysseus' palace and remain there unburied and unwept. Agamemnon responds with the famous speech in which he calls Odysseus blessed and asserts that Penelope's κλέος will

[15] See Papadopoulou-Belmehdi 121-32 for the interconnection of marriage, death, and weaving in the *Odyssey*.

[16] The only changes are ἀλλά in 24.128 for ἡ δέ in 2.93 and κῆται in 24.137 for κεῖται in 2.102. All manuscripts read κεῖται in 24.137 with κῆται only in *P. Ryl.* (cf. κῆται in 19.147 with almost no manuscript support); Stanford I 239 points out that the original texts would have read KETAI, which could represent either reading.

become immortal.[17]

One is again struck by the realistic effect produced by the contextualization of the narrative, in this case in the representation of Amphimedon's misinterpretation of Penelope's motives and the events leading up to his death. His conjecture that Penelope and Odysseus had conspired to kill the suitors is, under the circumstances, reasonable but incorrect.[18] Even Amphimedon's diction suggests his faulty conclusion about Penelope's collusion: he asserts that Odysseus and Telemachos fitted or wove (ἀρτύναντε) death for the suitors, as if they were involved in her weaving. This same verb is also used as an equivalent for ὕφαινε in the phrase δόλον ἤρτυε (11.439).

In this last telling of the weaving story, the completed shroud does not mark the end of Penelope's κλέος, as it seemed it would in Antinoos' narration. As Agamemnon states, her reputation as a loyal wife will never perish.[19] Nor does the shroud suggest Odysseus' death or failure to return home. Finally in the most literal sense the cerecloth does not connect with Laertes, who will soon regain his vigor and distinguish himself in battle when he slays Eupeithes, Antinoos' father. The shroud receives special attention at this point of the poem because this third telling of the story takes place in Hades. Death garments at this point of the poem seem more appropriate to the suitors than to Laertes or his family. Amphimedon, like the two previous narrators, reports how Penelope had requested time to weave a shroud so that at his death Laertes might not lie without proper graveclothes (αἴ κεν ἄτερ σπείρου κῆται πολλὰ κτεατίσσας, 24.137). At the very moment that Amphimedon is relating this story, however, he and the other suitors are suffering that very embarrassment ([sc. ἡμέων] ἔτι καὶ νῦν/σώματ' ἀκηδέα κεῖται ἐνὶ μεγάροις Ὀδυσῆος, 24.186-87). Although on the surface the poem has always identified Penelope's weaving with Laertes, the thematic implication of the story in Amphimedon's recounting is that the finished shroud marks the death of the suitors.[20]

From the perspective of Amphimedon's version of the weaving

[17] Katz 25-26 observes that the stressed aspect of the word κλέος changes in the three accounts of Penelope's weaving, shifting from gossip or public talk, to glory or fame, to heroic song.

[18] Cf. van Leeuwen 646, Stanford 418, and Goldhill 6-7.

[19] For a discussion of whose κλέος is denoted and to whom οἱ refers in 24.196, see Katz 20-29.

[20] Cf. Woodhouse 71, Austin 127, Papadopoulou-Belmehdi 40 and 171.

story, we now realize that at a deeper level the shroud has always been destined for the suitors. As Penelope wove, their death came closer, and as she undid her work their lives were extended. By forcing Penelope to finish the shroud, the suitors have, from the viewpoint of the story in Book 24, ironically instigated their own deaths. Amphimedon states that some unknown god (δαίμων, 24.149) returned Odysseus at the very moment she finished and displayed her work; and it was Penelope who had said that some divinity (δαίμων, 19.138) had inspired her with the weaving trick. Throughout his account Amphimedon sees the assistance of the gods in the death of the suitors (24.149, 164, 182; cf. 2.125 in Antinoos' version).

There is a motif of culmination that intimates that the completion of the shroud has led directly to the suitors' deaths. Penelope had stated in her version that she executes deceits (ἐγὼ δὲ δόλους τολυπεύω, 19.137): the word τολυπεύειν means not only to wind wool for weaving but also to finish or complete something, as is clear from the formula πόλεμον τολύπευσε.[21] The question was always whether Penelope would complete her weaving. Penelope had asked the suitors to wait until she had finished her work (ἐκτελέσω, 2.98 = 19.143 = 24.133) before pressing her to marry, and ultimately she was forced to complete the shroud (ἐξετέλεσσα, -ε, 2.110 = 19.156 = 24.146) after much time had passed (ἐτελέσθη, 24.143). But, as Amphimedon says, Penelope kept refusing to marry one of the suitors (γάμον οὔτε τελεύτα, 24.126), and the whole affair led to their demise (ἡμετέρου θανάτοιο κακὸν τέλος, 24.124). Completion of the shroud and marriage (τέλος θαλεροῖο γάμοιο, 20.74), which the suitors kept pressing for, are intimately bound to their own end (τέλος).[22] The very diction of the tale, centering around the *tel-* family of words, associates the three key elements that frame the weaving story.

Finally, one last detail in Amphimedon's story demands attention. The suitor says that when the web was displayed, it shone like the sun or moon, a suggestive image (24.148-49):

[21] For the definition, see the *Suda*: τολυπεύω· ἐξεργάζεσθαι. The formula πόλεμον τολύπευσε (-α) occurs five times in the *Odyssey*.

[22] The later association between τελευτή and marriage (e.g., γάμου πικραὶ τελευταί, Aes., *Ag.* 745) seems already present in the *Odyssey*, where the noun appears only in the lines ἡ δ' οὔτ' ἀρνεῖται στυγερὸν γάμον οὔτε τελευτὴν / ποιῆσαι δύναται (1.249-50 = 16.126-27; cf. 24.126). The final phrase can denote to "end (the suitors' attention)" or "marry" (LSJ[9], s.v. τελευτή, supplies γάμου, "make the accomplishment of marriage"), both translations relating to the same action; cf. West (in Heubeck et al.) 106.

ἡ φᾶρος ἔδειξεν, ὑφήνασα μέγαν ἱστόν,
πλύνασ', ἠελίῳ ἐναλίγκιον ἠὲ σελήνῃ.

The shroud had been woven during the day, when the sun would shine, and unraveled at night, the time of the moon, but ironically the web, contrived during the day, represents night or death, and the undoing at night connotes day or life. This reversal is what the suitors did not understand, pressing Penelope during the day to finish her deathly task. In the past the shroud was like the moon, which waxes and wanes, but now it is like the sun, steadfast and splendid.[23] The description of this object that appears glorious to the living is described in the dark land of the dead. Although there is no exact parallel to the phrase ἠελίῳ ἐναλίγκιον ἠὲ σελήνῃ, and no counterpart to Laertes' shroud, an analogous formula occurs when Peisistratos and Telemachos enter Menelaos' palace (4.43-46):

οἱ δὲ ἰδόντες
θαύμαζον κατὰ δῶμα διοτρεφέος βασιλῆος.
ὡς τε γὰρ ἠελίου αἴγλη πέλεν ἠὲ σελήνης
δῶμα καθ' ὑψερεφὲς Μενελάου κυδαλίμοιο.

The same image occurs when Odysseus first sees the palace of Alkinoos (4.45 = 7.84).[24] In both cases, there is a sense of the wondrous and divine, and this suggestion is wholly appropriate to the web: it has proven a portentous and extraordinary instrument associated with gods, the δαίμων mentioned by Antinoos, Penelope, and Amphimedon.

To return to a point mentioned earlier: the timing of the events in the tale of the web has stirred controversy. Antinoos provides no intimation that the shroud had just been finished before his narration, whereas Amphimedon states that the return of Odysseus and slaughter of the suitors (the events of the last half of the *Odyssey*) soon followed the completion of the shroud (καὶ τότε δή ῥ', 24.149). In one sense, we should not be concerned with such apparent inconsistencies. After all, we are wrapped in mythic time; if three years passed and the suitors never realized that it was taking an inordinate amount of time to finish a single shroud, then the length of the interval between the completion of the

[23] Cf. van Leeuwen 521 ad 19.138-50 and Russo 82.

[24] Even comparison to the sun alone provides this same connotation. Nestor compares Rhesos' horses to the rays of the sun (*Il.* 10.547), and Hera's κρήδεμνον receives the same description (*Il.* 14.185).

weaving and the return of Odysseus does not wholly matter. On the other hand, I have been pointing to a number of realistic aspects in the shroud story, and therefore we should consider whether a practical explanation is at hand.

A desire for verisimilitude might in fact help to explain the seemingly different time sequences in the story of the shroud. Antinoos, who is characterized as impatiently waiting for Penelope to choose a new husband, would have been even more restless if she had not chosen a new mate a month or more after she had completed the shroud.[25] She has already fooled them, and Antinoos has no reason to believe that she will ever willingly select a suitor. For, as he says, she is gaining acclaim by this very procrastination. Amphimedon, on the other hand, could look at the whole sweep of events, and his statement about an "immediate" return might include an interim period of as long as six months or even a year.[26]

Nevertheless, I do not think we should ascribe the different time sequences to a sort of psychological realism but rather to dramatic exigency. The reason that Antinoos seems to imply that the web has been finished for some time while Amphimedon indicates that Odysseus' return immediately followed the shroud's completion is that the scenes in which the stories are told have different functions within the poem.[27] At the council in Book 2 Antinoos wishes to make it absolutely clear that the suitors will never leave Penelope alone until she chooses a new husband. He asserts that, while it is true that the suitors have been devouring Telemachos' patrimony, it is not they that are responsible but Penelope. Antinoos' harshness and recalcitrance show Telemachos that he will find no help in Ithaka and that therefore he should

[25] Combellack 34 asserts that the suitors would grant Penelope a fortnight after the completion of the shroud to choose a husband, and Wender 35 thinks Penelope would have a month. Obviously we have no idea how long she would have had, and, more important, the poet sees no reason to tell us.

[26] Again, exact figures are out of the question; we are discussing a work of fiction. The question is the length of time denoted by καὶ τότε δή ῥ' (24.149). Woodhouse 71 translates the phrase as "at that very hour," maintained also by Stanford I 239, while Bona 110, citing *Od.* 24.144, states that a wider gap of time is possible; cf. Goldhill 2. Combellack 34 believes that Penelope finished the shroud "at most only a week or two ... very possibly a few days" before the opening of the *Odyssey*. Wender 34 judges the period to be about a month. Heubeck (1985) 38 and 43, n. 26, speaks of weeks or months. But Woodhouse 70 describes the period as "a good while," as does Page 121 (Woodhouse is speaking of the impression given by Antinoos). Kullmann 36 intimates that the web was completed a year before Antinoos' speech in Book 2, while Wehrli 230-31 suggests an even greater period.

[27] Cf. Goldhill 5.

follow Athene's behest to seek word abroad about his father (1.272-86). So Antinoos' speech helps to launch the *Telemachia*. If on the other hand Antinoos had stated that Penelope had just finished her weaving a week or month before, his speech would have lost its impetus. Antinoos would have had to say, "Well, Telemachos, your mother has just completed her web, and so she should soon be choosing a new husband, at which time we'll all leave. So don't be too vexed at the moment." And of course in that case Telemachos would not have been in any rush to plan his departure.

When Penelope relates the weaving tale in Book 19, the dramatic motivation is the pressure she feels from the suitors to choose a new husband, driven in part by the recent plots on her son's life (also there is the narratological fact that the suitors have been waiting for nineteen books[28]). It does not matter whether she has completed the shroud recently or not. In either case, she feels under duress, and her speech offers no suggestions as to how much time has elapsed since she finished the web. The urgency she feels, indicated by the shroud's completion, justifies her choice to hold the archery contest on the very next day.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, Amphimedon's speech provides a full sweep of the events and omits all sense of whatever delays might have occurred, details that would be of little interest at this point of the story. Furthermore, in Amphimedon's telling the near simultaneity of the completion of the web (ἐξετέλεσσε) and the slaughter of the suitors (τέλος) serves to connect these events and to suggest that the finished shroud marks the death of the suitors. Hence, the successive narrators seem to increase the speed of the tale, decreasing the intervals between events and making the completion of the web seem more and more recent; the reason is that there is a different perspective and overall motivation in the plot each time the story is told. Although Antinoos' narration precedes Amphimedon's by a month, the latter speaker makes the completion of the weaving seem closer, merging logical and temporal sequence and, once again, demonstrating how adroitly the poet adapts and contextualizes each version of the repeated tale.

IV

We have found that the narrative of Laertes' shroud has not one explanation but three, a distinct meaning each time the story is

[28] For the concept, see Eco 49-73.

told. The differences between these three interpretations reveal the type of complexity that Homer's simple narration always seems to belie. Homeric style seems too plain, too literal-minded, to contain anything as intricately embedded in the text. An analogous episode occurs when Helen and Menelaos conduct an esoteric and veiled private argument revealing all the recriminations the couple have felt for the past ten years, while their guests Telemachos and Peisistratos listen wholly unaware of the quarrel; and in fact the text itself never explicitly states that an altercation is taking place.[29] The Homeric poems excel not least in their subtlety.

The disparities of detail and time sequence, as shown above, are internally explicable, and there is no need to resort to extra-textual theories of composition. As a result, the present analysis has found no evidence to determine the order in which the three accounts of Penelope's weaving were composed (other than as they appear in this unified telling of the myth). Nevertheless, some idea about the origin of the tale as a whole might be possible, and it is worth pausing a moment to consider whether the common metaphor of weaving wiles has in some way inspired the whole episode.

At 19.137-39 Penelope states:

> οἱ δὲ γάμον σπεύδουσιν· ἐγὼ δὲ δόλους τολυπεύω.
> φᾶρος μέν μοι πρῶτον ἐνέπνευσε φρεσὶ δαίμων
> στησαμένῃ μέγαν ἱστὸν ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ὑφαίνειν....

She declares first that she weaves tricks and then immediately begins to recount her weaving tale. In the *Odyssey* Penelope literally weaves a wile. Although τολυπεύω does not exactly denote to "weave" but, to quote LSJ[9], to "wind off carded wool into a clew for spinning," it is clear that Penelope is not speaking of

[29]First discussed by Anderson 3-4 and subsequently by many critics, most recently by Goldhill 20-24 and Olson 83-85 (both with added bibliography). Beye 174 compares the finesse of the tacit exchange between Menelaos and Helen to that between Nausikaa and Odysseus in Book 6, another nice parallel to the ingenuity of the weaving tales. All such passages pose problems to explicators because, however obvious the interpretation may seem to some, explicit evidence is lacking. As a result, most classicists, for example, seem to agree that Menelaos and Helen are quarreling in Book 4 but not that Penelope recognizes Odysseus in Book 19 (for the latter thesis, see Harsh 11-21; cf. Heilbrun 106-7).

rolling a trick for spinning, as LSJ[9] itself confirms.[30] Penelope's ἐγὼ δὲ δόλους τολυπεύω is a loose variation of the common metaphor δόλον ὕφαινε, which itself possesses many variations.[31] It is not surprising that Penelope does not say ἐγὼ δόλον ἄλλον ὑφαίνω (cf. *Il.* 6.187) or some such expression right before she explains her trick of φᾶρος...ὑφαίνειν, because Homer usually shuns the immediate repetition of a word that occurs in a fixed phrase.[32]

Homer likes to actualize a regular formula, as demonstrated here with Penelope literally weaving a wile. Another instance occurs at the beginning of the *Iliad* with the literal use of the formula λοιγὸν ἀμῦναι, when there is need for someone to cure the plague, although this formula is usually employed figuratively in the sense of driving away misfortune. In a similar vein, Achilleus appears in the *Iliad* not only as the metaphorical but also the literal healer of the army.[33] Upon looking at these instances, one wonders whether some of the stories in the Homeric tradition evolved from the particularization of fixed formulas. Penelope would have been an especially appropriate weaver of wiles if the folk etymology of her name in the epic period was "Weaver" or even "Weaving-unraveler," as Paul Kretschmer has suggested.[34] Another possibility, although less likely, is that the metaphor is

[30] Our passage (19.137) is cited under lemma II, "wind off, achieve, accomplish," with the note "with a play on the literal sense." Woodhouse 69 translates the phrase as "I wind a skein of wiles," as do some later critics.

[31] Despite the frequency of the metaphor, it is surprising how little the actual diction is fixed. The only formulas in the text marked by repetition are ὑφαίνειν ἤρχετο μῆτιν (*Il.* 7.324, 9.93) and μῆτιν ὕφαινον (*Od.* 4.678, 13.303, 13.386), expanded at *Od.* 9.422 to δόλους καὶ μῆτιν ὕφαινον. Other phrases belonging to this family include ὑφαίνῃσιν δόλον (*Od.* 5.356), δόλον ἄλλον ὕφαινε (*Il.* 6.187) and μήδεα πάσιν ὕφαινον (*Il.* 3.212). Related is δόλον ἤρτυε (*Od.* 11.439).

[32] Lowenstam 33-35.

[33] *Il.* 11.505-7, 828-36. See Lowenstam 103-4.

[34] Cf. Russo 80-81. For "Weaving-unraveler," see Kretschmer, especially 82-83. Didymus, according to Σ HPQ ad *Od.* 4.797, derived the name from working on a robe or mantle (παρὰ τὸ πένεσθαι τὸ λῶπος), alluding to the shroud story. Eustathius ad *Od.* 1.344 repeats this explanation and adds another interpretation: παρὰ τὸ πηνίον ἑλεῖν ("grasping the bobbin"). That all such etymologies are folk, not genuine, is most probable linguistically. Frisk, s.v. Πηνελόπεια and πηνέλοψ, states that the name Penelope is probably derived from πηνέλοψ, "duck," as Solmsen believed, but notes Kretschmer's suggestion that the name evolved from πήνη and ὀλόπτω. Cf. von Kamptz 275-76. Chantraine, s.v. Πηνελόπεια, on the other hand, believes that only the derivation from πηνέλοψ is viable and concludes "Toutes les autres explications de Πηνελόπεια sont ruineuses." The Ancients had already speculated on the connection between Penelope and πηνέλοψ (Eustathius ad *Od.* 1.344). For possible thematic associations connecting the πηνέλοψ with Penelope, see Levaniouk.

derived from Penelope's weaving trick.[35] The precise relationship between the tale of Penelope's devious weaving and a formula like μῆτιν ὕφαινον will clearly never be known, but it is likely that the Homeric audiences enjoyed the enlivening of what must have seemed like dead metaphors. In the case of the three accounts of Penelope's weaving a wile by weaving a shroud, the significance, artistry, and vitality are beyond question.[36]

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[35] A similar problem occurs with Cretan stories: does Odysseus identify himself in his lying tales as a Cretan because Cretans were known as liars (Epimenides, DK 68B1), or were Cretans called liars in an allusion to the epic tradition of Odysseus' lies? The metaphor of weaving wiles is probably older than the story of Penelope's weaving. Although the trope cannot be shown to be Indo-European, the correlation between weaving and artful words (such as in poetry) does date to the earliest period (Schmitt 300). For the nexus between weaving, Athene (god of handicrafts and frequent attendant to Penelope), and trickery, see Detienne and Vernant 132, 230-33, and 284. Cf. Papadopoulou-Belmehdi 41-48 and 149-65.

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