JOURNAL OF NARRATIVE AND LANGUAGE STUDIES | ISSN: 2148-4066
Journal of Narrative and Language Studies – December 2017, Volume 5 – Issue 9

A Foucauldian Response to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: The Subaltern Can Speak in *The Penelopiad*

Banu Akçeşme[1]

Assistant Professor Dr., Faculty of Letters, Erciyes University
banu_akcesme@hotmail.com

Özlem Sayar[2]

Research Assistant, Faculty of Letters, Erciyes University
ozlemsayar@erciyes.edu.tr

APA Citation:
Akçeşme, B., Sayar, Ö. (2017). A Foucauldian Response to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: The Subaltern Can Speak in *The Penelopiad*. *Journal of Narrative and Language Studies, 5*(9), 19-33.

Abstract

This paper intends to analyse how Penelope in Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* deconstructs *The Odyssey* with specific references to Gayatri C. Spivak's "Can The Subaltern Speak?" from a Foucauldian perspective. Spivak has been criticized by many critics and writers because of her insistence on the impossibility of the subaltern to speak. This paper aims to display how the subaltern, unlike what Spivak has suggested, can speak, show resistance and take the initiative in the process of reconstructing their identities in *The Penelopiad* in the light of Foucault's ideas on power, resistance and discourse. Although Penelope has been established as a submissive, subordinate and chaste wife, she proves to be a practical and pragmatic woman and creates her own opportunities to reject her imposed subalternity to assert herself through her voice and action. In this sense, Atwoods's novel can be read as the deconstruction of Homer's *Oddyssey* and Spivak's theory about the impossibility for the subaltern to be heard and recognized. Foucault's theory on the relation between power and subject is more inspiring and promising for the subaltern.

Key Words: Subaltern, power, resistance, discourse, deconstruction

Margaret Atwood, a Canadian writer, critic, environmentalist and satirist, is mainly concerned with defending not only human but also environmental rights as well as deconstructing patriarchal myths. Her works generally include gothic, supernatural and fantastic themes and elements (Cooke, 2004, p. 11). She is a prolific writer and her works on poetry, fiction and literary criticism are included in the postcolonial, feminist, gender and Canadian studies. In the early years of her writing, she is mostly interested in the history of Canada and makes use of Canadian literature to shed light on the Canadian heritage, traditions and culture (Howells, 2008, p. 19).

[1] Erciyes Universitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Melikgazi, 38039, Kayseri, Turkey
[2] Erciyes Universitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Melikgazi, 38039, Kayseri, Turkey

Atwood has explored a new direction in literature, which highly features her as a worldly-known writer. This direction takes her to myth-making which involves the deconstruction of grand-narratives to create new versions of contemporary myths. Spivak (2013), who translates Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, suggests that "Deconstruction does not say there is no subject, there is no truth, there is no history. It simply questions the privileging of identity so that someone is believed to have the truth. It is not the exposure of error. It is constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced" (p. 27). In this sense, Atwood can be considered postmodernist with her suspicion of metanarratives, her creative use of deconstruction to challenge the established ideas and cultural teachings regarding genders, nation and nature, and her blending different genres and modes in the form of postmodern pastiche. "Atwood welcomes the challenges of genre writing but always infuses those genres with a political slant that offsets the 'conventions' and boundaries that the genres initially suggest" (Macpherson, 2010, p. 25).

In 2005 Canongate publishing house came up with a project of publishing rewritten versions of one hundred myths by the year 2038. Atwoodwrote *The Penelopiad*: *The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus*for this project and it was published in 2005 in*The Myths* edited by Karen Armstrong.*The Penelopiad* was written as a deconstructive parody of the ancient myth as narrated in Homer's *The Odyssey,*andit can be given as an example for postmodern piece of writing. Hilda Staels (2009) takes this novella as an example of the "contemporary parodic and burlesque transformations of classical myths" (p. 100). Bottez (2012) suggests that Atwood makes use of a "postmodern hybrid structure" and produces a "mythographic metafiction" in *The Penelopiad* (p. 51). The postmodern aspects of *The Penelopiad* includes parody, metafiction, deconstruction of myths and playfulness. Atwood creates a polyphonic novel in a multi-styled narrative by rejecting the conventions of monologic epic. The characters challenge not only the heroic characterization of the male protagonists but also the generic conventions of epic by bringing different genres, styles and modes together. Atwood, in *The Penelopiad,* subverts and transgresses the constitutions of the characters as the subject and object, and master and slave in the established power relations in the classical myth.In her attempt to rewrite the myth of Penelope, she not only liberates "the text from generic constraints" but also liberates "the protagonists from the boundaries and limitations of the ancient epic story world" by "using parody and burlesque travesty as transformative narrative tool" (Staels, 2009, p.101).As Linda Hutcheon (1985) states, parody is "the paradoxical postmodern way of coming to terms with the past" (p. 14). Whoever are represented as marginalized, disenfranchised and oppressed in the past are empowered, centralizedand foregrounded in the postmodern present. Widdowson (2006) also sees revision "as part of the process of restoring a voice, a history and an identity to those hitherto exploited, marginalized and silenced by dominant interests and ideologies" (pp. 505-6). In her essay "Descent: Negotiating with the Dead. Who makes the trip to the Underworld and Why?", Atwood (2002) reflects on this metaphorical journey from the present to the past:

All writers must go from now to once upon a time; all must go from here to there; all must descend to where the stories are kept; all must take care not to be captured and held immobile by the past. And all must commit acts of larceny, or else of reclamation, depending on how you look at it. The dead may guard the treasure, but it's useless treasure unless it can be brought back into the land of the living and allowed to enter time once more, which means to enter the realm of the audience, the realm of the readers, the realm of change. (pp. 178-79)

Similarly, Adrienne Rich (1972), in her famous essay on re-vision, defines "re-vision" as "an act of survival" consisting of "looking back", "seeing with fresh eyes", "entering an old text from a new critical direction" (pp. 18-30, qtd. in Çelebi, 2016, p. 21).Atwood, by subversively reconstructing the classical myth, invalidates the truth value of the past which is always open to revisions to offer different versions of the events and characters. "Myths have become subjects of revision, their alleged timeless truthfulness has been denounced, while a creative surge has been injected into literary criticism by looking for the other side of the story" (Çelebi, 2016, p. 22). Çelebi (2016) takes rewriting as "re-building and consolidating new definitions that include new possibilities" (p. 25). Similarly, Peter Widdowson (2006) suggests that re-visioncan be "achieved by the creative act of 're-writing' past fictional texts in order to defamiliarize them and the ways in which they have been conventionally read within the cultural structures of patriarchal and imperial/colonial dominance" (p. 505).Atwood also retells "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" (Wilson, 2003,p. 215).

Most of Atwood's novels are centered around the problem of female identity. Atwood's exploration of female subjectivity ranges from the female as a "victim to representations of the dissembling, monstrous female" (Macpherson, 2010, p. 22). Atwood's women appear "in the process of becoming, rather than finalizing, a series of identities through masquerade, role-play and experimentation" (Macpherson, 2010, p. 30). As a postmodern text, *The Penelopiad* does not claim for the revelation of reality since postmodernism "remains fundamentally contradictory, offering only questions, never final answers" (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 118).In *The Penelopiad*, Penelope sets out to reveal the story about Odysseus, the maids and herself from her own point of view while the maids try to deconstruct both Odysseus's and Penelope's accounts of the events that lead to their undeserved execution.When different versions of the story are offered, because of the continuous deconstruction in the narrative, this story telling seems to have no signified to be pinned down but a chain of signifiers floating in the air. Thus, as a reader, we suspect, we doubt, we get confused but we can never be sure about the truth.

Atwood challenges the meta-narratives in mythology, and she introduces *The Penelopiad* as a different and contemporary rewriting and reinterpretation of the original myth. As she claims, in the context of myths, there is not just one truth. Since the myth is orally and locally created and transmitted, it can differ from one teller to another because the teller's culture and subjective point of view highly affect the content of the myth. "Mythic material was originally oral, and also local – a myth would be told one way in one place and quite differently in another" (xx) says Atwood (2006) in the introduction part of *The Penelopiad.*For instance, the author of *The Odyssey* is Homer who, with his male perspective, created the male character Odysseus as the main character while all the female characters are backgrounded and passivated. While Odysseus is presented as a brave, wise and an active hero going through many adventures and hardships, his wife Penelope is constructed as a loyal, dutiful, chaste and submissive wife waiting for him for years in the palace. Besides the main characters, there are maids who are befriended to Penelope in the years of Odysseus's absence; yet, when he returns, they are found guilty for getting sexually involved with the suitors as a result of Penelope's secret plan to keep the suitors away from herself. The maids are hanged in the end without being permitted to speak up to defend themselves. Thus, in *The Odyssey,*Odysseus is constructed with an active agency whereas both Penelope and the twelve maids are reduced to the status of the subaltern who are subordinated, made voiceless and unheard by the male agents. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak(1994) statesthat the subaltern are gendered: "The woman is doubly in shadow" (p. 84)in her influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?".Subalternity and agency are intrinsically related. Subalternity can be characterized by the lack of agency and "the recognition of agency,

in Spivak's understanding, always already moves us away from subalternity" (Bracke, 2016, 847). Agency here refers to institutionally validated action.

The term "subaltern" has been employed with different definitions. It has been ambiguously used to refer to different groups of people who are oppressed, otherized, marginalized, pushed to the periphery and silenced. Thus, the subaltern is characterized by silence, voicelessness, otherness, oppression, absence of subjectivity, and agency and lack of or no access to power. Spivak (1994),in her essay "Can Subaltern Speak", limits the definition of the subaltern to the colonial context and defines the subaltern as the person who is removed from class mobility and who fails to constitute herself as a subject with a voice that can access power (pp. 81, 83, 98, 103).That is, the subaltern is deprived of access to all public resources that would allow for upward movement, which leads tonot only poverty but also political and economic invisibility.

Antonio Gramsci (1995) usedthe word subaltern to mean "of inferior rank" to refer to groups like minorities and women who are oppressed by the hegemony of the dominant ruling classes. So, Gramsci's subalternity is not defined by class relations only but by an interplay of race, class and gender. According to Gramsci (1995), the subaltern can be anyonewho is "subordinated in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (p. xiv). The meaning of the term has been broadened by the Subaltern Studies historians group to include all oppressed groups – working class, peasantry, women, tribal communities etc. In this sense subalternity is accepted as the general attribute of subordination. "The subaltern refers to various forms of domination and marginality that were grounded in exclusion from the political economy of industrialized capitalism – an exclusion that could not be accounted for by the logic of class only" (Bracke, 2016, p. 845).

However, for Spivak (1994) "subaltern is not just a classy word for "oppressed", for [the] Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie" (p. 45). Spivak, rather than the definition of the subaltern, is more concerned with the conditions and mechanisms that keep people in the position of subalternity. Spivak points out to the socio-historical, cultural circumstances and political and ideological structures that function to hinder the possibility of speaking of the subaltern. According to Spivak (1994), there are different reasons that lead to subalternity which may result from race, gender and the economic state: "Clearly, if you are poor, black and female, you get it in three ways" (p. 90). Widely speaking, reasons that lead to subalternity can be listed as the social hierarchy, the denial of access to public resources, strict restriction for upward social movement, social and economic inequality, and limited or no access to authorized political speech or institutional validated language.

Spivak also reveals the problematic side of giving a voice to the subaltern in "Can the Subaltern Speak?". Subalternity is very much entangled with the question of power and representation (Bracke, 2016,p. 846). Spivak's subaltern can only be spoken about or spoken for but cannot speak because of their lack of access to institutionally, politically and socially authorized and validated language. Thus the subaltern cannot represent themselves but they must be represented.As the subaltern are denied an access to the language, speech and discourse, Spivak (1994) considers intellectuals as the mediators and a means of institutional access for the subaltern (p. 70). Thus, without the help of intellectuals, the subaltern cannot speak, even when they speak, they are not heard in the institutional discourse. The state of female as a subaltern is worse, Spivak (1994) claims: "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (pp. 82-3).

However, Spivak highlights Deleuze's assertion that "the oppressed, if given the chance…can speak and know their conditions" (Spivak, 1994, p. 283). Hence the problem is not that the subaltern cannot speak but cannot be heard since they are not recognized as a

speaking subject. It is the question of audibility and legibility rather than silence or voicelessness. In other words, what creates subalternity is not the impossibility of speaking but the refusal of the non-subaltern to listen. The speech of the subaltern is not heard or recognized by patriarchal institutions. Speaking or giving a voice does not mean anything unless it is heard and recognized in social and political arenas. The subaltern can speak only when they speak in a "language that is already recognized by the dominant culture of the West" (Maggio, 2007, p. 431). In *the Penelopiad*, Atwood does not only give a voice to Penelope and the maids but also creates a position and conditions where their voice can be heard and recognized.

In Homer's myth, what make Penelope subaltern aremainly her gender, patriarchal structures and religion.She is a female subaltern firstly because she is a daughter, then she is a wife, lastly because she is a mortal woman before Gods. The maids are also subaltern because of both their gender and social class. "The maids undergo a double oppression: social oppression as slaves and gender oppression in a patriarchal society" (Bottez, 2012, p. 54). Along with Gramsci and the Subaltern Studies group, Spivak sees the impossibility for upward social mobility as one of the conditions of subalternity. Not only a voice but the right to defendthemselves and the execution of justice are also denied to the maids who suffer from double victimization.

According to Suzuki (2007), "Atwood's most striking innovation in *The Penelopiad* is to bring to the center the maids of Odysseus who were executed by their master upon his return" (p. 217). Atwood explains in the *Introduction* that she has always been "haunted by the hanged maids; and, in *The Penelopiad*, so is Penelope herself" (2006, p. xv). Penelope does not let the husband know that the maids have just followed her instructions to spy on the suitors by employing "enticing arts they could invent" (2006, p. 115) to keep them under control. Penelope even lets the maids "say rude and disrespectful things about me and Telemachus, and about Odysseus as well, in order to further the illusion" (p. 117). However, with her silence, she causes the deaths of 12 maids: "It was my fault! I hadn't told her of my scheme" (p. 160). The ghosts of the maids also accuse Penelope of passivity and complicityin their deaths. The maids clearly indicate that Penelope has manipulated the whole situation to make them the target of Odysseus's revenge to silence them since only they have witnessed Penelope's true face.Although Penelope acknowledges the fact that being raped for the maids is a part of the palace life, what troubles Oddysey is that they get raped without the permission of their master. Like in the case of Medusa, the victims are treated as if they were guilty. In *The Penelopiad*, the maids are transformed into owls, which in fact empowers them. Staels (2009) explains that the owl is a symbol of Athene, a sacred protector of Athens and closely associated with the Great Goddess Athena who is the embodiment of the power of wisdom and who helps Odysseus kill the suitors who raped the maids (p. 110).

What Atwood tries to do is to deconstruct the patriarchal constructions of male and female identities and their subjectivities. The deconstruction starts in the title, *The Penelopiad* in which the female character is foregrounded, centralized and thus made visible instead of depicting the heroic adventures of the male character in *The Odyssey*. The narrators of *The Penelopiad* are Penelope herself and the twelve maids who function as the chorus so that the reader can read the same story from two different female perspectives. What is more, Atwood deconstructs the conventional language of Homer's myth by employing irony and figurative language. She also deconstructs the chronological, linear time order and presents past and present together. Penelope tells about what happened thousands years ago while also telling about the present world of Hades. Atwoodchallenges Homer by making his myth be judged in the "twenty-first-century court of justice" and by defending the twelve maids, which critically calls the reliability and credibility of Homer's myth into question. From this perspective, Howells (2008) regards this novel as a feminist attempt to deconstruct the male-dominant fiction. Ruan Nunes (2014)

states that "By choosing to write a novel, Atwood is able to expose the conventionality of not only the epic, but also of the other genres used by the maids in their chorus line" (p. 231), which indicatesthat Atwood attacks the conventionality in literature.

Atwood's parodic epic offers a counterpart to the traditional epic which follows a "threefold structure" (Frye, 1957, p. 187): the birth of hero, hic actions, and reward. In Atwood's text, the male quest is replaced by a female quest, which is "to keep Odysseus's kingdom prosperous in the first place and then also whole and safe from the suitors' greedy wish to appropriate it" (Bottez, 2012,p. 52). Religion is also challenged by Penelope who "also treats the gods with little respect and even confesses to sometimes doubting their existence" (Bottez,2012, p. 54).

As Peneau (2012) states, "Women are prisoners of their own accord and they are partly responsible for their doom. Instead, they should embrace art and use it as a way to express their own voice and resist patriarchal discourses" (p. 260). When analyzed from a broader perspective, this is what Atwood wants to do in *The Penelopiad*. Penelope and the maids reject the way they have been represented or spoken for. Penelope expresses her dissatisfaction with the "slanderous gossip that has been going the rounds for the past two or three thousand years" (p. 26), accusing her of sleeping not only with Amphinomus but also with all of the suitors, and giving birth to the god Pan in spite of the myth which established her as a faithfully, virtuously, patiently and chastely waiting wife. The subaltern is silenced by epistemic violence which is one of the constitutive elements of subalternity. What Spivak means by epistemic violence is that those who are in power such as western intellectuals assume that they have the knowledge of the Other of the society, and they regard themselvesas entitled to speak for and about the Other by forming knowledge, which leads to essentializing and muting the Other.Spivak argues that knowledge can never be innocent, impartial or disinterested; on the contrary, it expresses the interests of its producers. Both Penelope and the maids show resistance to their constitution as effects of patriarchal discourse, and knowledge andthey set out to liberate themselves from "an imprisoning history" (Çelebi, 2016,p. 128). Penelope refuses to drink the water of forgetfulness in order to shape the future since whoever controls the past can control the future.Barbara Dell'Abate Çelebi (2016) maintains that Penelope makes use of her memory to deconstruct and destroy the image of Odysseus as a hero and to resist against the male-dominated discourse.

Odysseus is a contradictory figure. Some regard him as a "clever, brave, resourceful" man, "battling supernatural monsters and beloved of goddesses" (p. 84) while others depict him as a simple sailor who is addicted to drinking and women. "Odysseus is not more the brave and crafty hero described by Homer but instead an unscrupulous adventurers and a liar, perpetrator of the cruel slaughter of the young suitors and the unjust hanging of twelve innocent maids" (Çelebi, 2016, p. 129). By drawing attention to these contradictions, Penelope calls into question Odysseus's heroism in Atwood's text. Although Penelope is aware of her husband's weaknesses, flaws and lies in Homer's text as well, she never exposes them and makes them publicly known:

Of course I had inklings, about his slipperiness, his wiliness, his foxiness, his… unscrupulousness, but I turned a blind eye. I kept my mouth shut; or, if I opened it, I sang his praises, I didn't contradict, I didn't ask awkward questions, I didn't dig deep. I wanted happy endings in those days, and happy endings are best achieved by keeping the tight doors locked and going to sleep during the rampages (*Peneloiad*, 2006, p. 37).

Penelope strategically keeps alive the memory of Odysseus for twenty years by protecting the house and the throne of her husband. Only after thousands of years, Penelope confesses that Odysseus' fame is not based on real deeds and events but on the exaggerated or falsified versions of his so-called heroic and legendary adventures. Penelope decides to offer her own version of her-story by challenging hi[s]tory after over three thousand years: "Many people have believed that his [Odysseus'] version of the events was the true one" (2006, p. 122). With this confession, she undermines his greatness: "Odysseus had been in a fight with a giant one-eyed Cyclops, said some; no, it was only a one-eyed tavern-keeper, said another" (p. 83); "Odysseus was the guest of a goddess on an enchanted isle, said some ... no, said others, it was just an expensive whorehouse, and he was sponging off the Madam" (pp. 83-84). His fight with and victory over the giant Cyclops is in fact a simple fight with a one-eyed tavern-keeper. His encounter with the cannibals is just a fight with "ear-bites, nosebleeds, stabbings and eviscerations" (Bottez, 2012, p. 51). The tempting Madam in the whorehouse Odysseus attended is presented as Goddess (pp. 83-84). Neither Penelope nor the maids, nor Helen presents or recognizesOdysseus as the idealized version of a man who is glorified for his manly virtues. On the contrary, he is looked down on for his not-manly-enough physicality and rustic manner. The emphasis is put on his trickster nature. When he comes back to his palace as a beggar, he wins the contest not because he is superior to others but because "he mixed the wine of the other contestants with a drug that slowed them down, though not so much as they would notice" (pp. 35-36).

The legend created about Penelopealso does not reflect her true self at all and it turned into a "stick used to beat other women with" (*Penelopiad*,p.2). Penelope exercises power in her attempt to recontruct the knowledge of the past by creating her own body of discourse.As Foucault suggests, the formation of subjectivity and claiming agency is very much dependent on discourse. Agency is linked to the act of speaking and forming discourse, and speech and resistance show the performative nature of agency.Penelope, by undertaking the act of story-telling, takes the initiative to establish herself as the central character anda speaking agent who constructs the counter-discourse to transform herself from the object of the patriarchal knowledge into the producer of new and alternative knowledge. Peneloperejects her seeming passivity and subordination, andby her strong agency and subjectivity, she defies her imposed docile self and as a resisting subject she transgresses the existing power structures to gain her voice and identity. For example, Penelope tells the reader how she has used the patriarchal marriage institution to her advantage to fightagainst patriarchal dominance, and when Odysseus leaves for the Trojan War, she takes the opportunity in the absence of male subject to exercise power by acting as an administrator of the state and the owner of the castle. She proves that she hasenough wisdom to manage affairs and people. She also gives importance to formingfemale solidarity and working in cooperation with the maids in this process.Additionally, it is not only the patriarchal but also the religious discourse that becomes the target of attack for Penelopewho, in her death, finds a chance to speak and deconstruct the religious discourse of Gods. She claims Gods have not always been fair, moral and honest towards the female mortals.

In the case of Penelope who, as a female subaltern, struggles against the patriarchy, male dominance and religion in *The Penelopiad*, Spivak's thesis collapses. The resistance and struggle of the subaltern can be explained by Foucault's ideas. In *The Subject and Power* (1982), Michel Foucault describes two kinds of subject: the first one is a docile, self-regulating subject and the second one is self-constituting and resisting subject. Additionally, "there are three types of struggles: either against forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious); against forms of exploitation that separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against

subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission)" (p. 781) as Foucault describes. Furthermore, he also states that power can be exercisedonly if there is freedom and struggle, and this is the core point of ever-changing power relations. Power exists only when and where there is a possibility of resistance: "in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations" (p. 780). Without freedom, struggle and resistance, power cannot exist; it becomes "slavery" (p. 790) which is not regarded as a power relationship.

In this context, Foucault (1982) gives a clear definition of power and relates it to the action and freedom of the subjects:

When one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others, when one characterizes these actions by the government of men by other men-in the broadest sense of the term-one includes an important element: freedom. Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized. (p. 790)

The power is a way of action that directs and controls the actions of the others; however, freedom opens the path of several ways for the oppressed to react, and it gives an opportunity to the subaltern to develop a strategy of resistance because "Every power relationship implies, at least in potential, a strategy of struggle" (1982, p. 794). Foucault concludes his work by declaring that what constitutes a power relationship between two subjects or groups are the domination, freedom and resistance between two sides:

But what makes the domination of a group, a caste, or a class, together with the resistance and revolts which that domination comes up against, a central phenomenon in the history of societies is that they manifest in a massive and universalizing form, at the level of the whole social body, the locking together of power relations with relations of strategy and the results proceeding from their interaction. (p. 795)

Spivak (1994) argues that to consider the subaltern to be capable of resisting is to romanticize them, which she insists must be strongly avoided. In fact, Spivak does not make a claim for the impossibility of resistance for the subaltern; rather, she dwells on the problem of how the resistance of the subaltern goes unrecognized. Neither agency nor the resistance of the subaltern is recognized by the domianant power structures, cultural and economic production mechanisms or authorized discourse. However, Foucault, whom Spivak blames for romanticizing the subaltern, is more optimistic than Spivak. Since power can be applied over the free individuals, they can freely determine their strategies as to how to resist against that power. If the existence of power brings the possibility of resistance and struggle, then the subaltern must look for the ways of having a voice and getting heard.

Foucault's theory provides an insight into what Penelope does. Atwood's *Penelopiad* does not offer "stories of pain and trauma" or "sexual violence" (Macpherson, 2010, p. 51). Because of her capacity to fight back and resist, Penelope never ends up as a tragic figure. First of all, she challenges patriarchy by getting married and moving to another country to break freefrom her father's domination. Secondly, she rules the state so efficiently in the absence of Odysseus that she proves and establishes her authority, and lastly, she takes the advantage of being deadto speak against Gods and defends her rights against them. Thus, by challenging the theory of Spivak, Penelope emergesas a Foucauldian subaltern who resists against patriarchal institutions and oppression by claiminga voice in the end thanks to her strategies.

Spivak defines subalternity not as an identity but as a position where there is oppression and a lack of access to power (Morris, 2010, p. 8). Bracke also understood subalternity as a problem

of space: "Subalternity is the structured place from which the capacity to access power is radically obstructed" (Bracke, 2016,p. 846). He asserts that subalternity is a position without identity: "Subalternity is a profoundly relational, rather than ontological, identity" (p. 846). In this sense, the subaltern points out to an outside, outside the discourse, outside the power structures, outside the center, outside the dominant culture, and cultural and economic modes of production.Since subalternity is a position of the non-speaking and non-represented. The gendered subaltern was pushed to the periphery with no connection to the centre. Spivak (1994) also supports Foucault's idea that"To make visible the unseen can also mean a change of level, addressing oneself to a layer of material which had hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognized as having any moral, aesthetic, or historical value" (p. 81).Since subalternity is very much related to the positionality, the position the death and Hades' underworld provide for the subaltern is quite liberating. Death helps Penelope and the maids to transcend their subaltern position.

Penelope experiences subalternity firstly in her childhood as the daughter of a king who misinterprets an oracle and commands the servants to drown her in the sea. However, Penelope's resistance as a subaltern starts at this point as it is in her nature. Her mother isa Naiad and thus water is her constitutive element; that is why she cannot be drowned. As a sign of resistance, she mocks the patriarchal intelligence of her father in this respect because the king both misinterprets the prophecy and ignores the fact that she cannot be drowned. In the first stage of theawareness for self-identity and struggle, Peneleope "learned early the virtues – if such they are – of self-sufficiency. I knew that I would have to look out for myself in the world" (p. 11). In her childhood, she experiences the violence and oppression of the father, which empowers heragainst him. She recognizesher self-sufficient nature which enablesher to seek every opportunity to struggle for her freedom and identity.

Patriarchy plays an important role in the arranged-marriage between Penelope and Odysseus as well. Penelope draws attention to the importance of having a son in the patriarchal society as a source of pride and achievement: "If you had daughters instead of sons, you needed to get them bred as soon as possible so you could have grandsons" (p. 25).Sons are important to secure to have a big and thus powerful family as well. If one has a daughter, the best thing to be done is to arrange a profitable marriage for her. That is why, without receivingthe consentof Penelope, a ceremony is organized to choose the best suitor for Penelope by a contest. She expresses her complaints on this issue:"Through my veil, I studied the young men milling around down below, trying to figure out who each one was and – a thing of no practical consequence, since it wasn't up to me to choose my husband – which one I preferred" (p. 30). She suggests that the competition among the suitors to marry her "was more as if they'd failed to win an auction for a horse" (p. 41). Penelope is aware of the fact that she is commodified and treated as an object or a prize to be obtained by a man as a result of the victory over other men.Penelope acknowledges the fact that women in this patriarchal society are no better than animals.So, after the wedding, though her father wants them to stay with him in the palace mainly because their gain from the wedding would be his,she decides to depart with Odysseus to Ithaca. Penelope's self-assertion becomes more evident with her decision to accompany the husband to Ithaca, which establishes her as a modest, dutiful and self-sacrificial wife. However, her decision to accompany Odysseus is an act of resistance to challenge the authority of the father and an expression of her readiness and willingness to seek her independence and autonomy. This is, at the same time, her way of taking revenge from the father for underestimating her. She confesses that while her father is begging her to stay, she is laughing under the veil:

There's some truth to this story. But I pulled down my veil to hide the fact that I was laughing. You have to admit there was something humorous about a father who'd once tossed his own child into the sea capering down the road after that very child and calling, 'Stay with me!'

I didn't feel like staying. At that moment, I could hardly wait to get away from the Spartan court. I hadn't been very happy there, and I longed to begin a new life. (p. 49)

No matter what the true reason is for this, the father recognizes and treats her as an individual for the first time. At this point, she rejects her imposed subalternityby questioning the deeds and motives of her father and byreducing him to an object of ridicule. Penelope is wise enough to take this opportunity to act as an active subject. Since she is entrapped in patriarchal structures, ironically enough for her emancipation there seems to be no better alternative other thanmarriage, another male-dominated institution, to fight againstmale oppression.In other words, marriage becomes an invaluable opportunity for her to get rid of her father's oppressive chains.

Even though she gets away from her father's subjugation, she now has to figure out how to exist herself in Ithaca as a wife. Since she is now the queen, she feels more liberated when compared to her father's palace. Although marriage has enabled her to liberate herself from patriarchal oppression, she is faced with problems generated from gender issues in her marriage life. In Ithaca, what disturbs her is gender discrimination.Odysseus occupies the central position and receives all the attention even though she is as clever as him as she claims.

Gender discrimination is obvious in Odysseus's affairs with women. On his way to return from the Trojan War, Odysseus has been involved with different women and Goddesses. However, hehas warned Penelope to stay loyal to him and threatened Penelope with terrible consequences in the case of adultery: "he would know I'd been sleeping with some other man, and then he said, frowning at me in what was supposed to be—a playful way—he would be very cross indeed, and he would have to chop me into little pieces with his sword or hang me from the roof beam" (p. 74). It isa disgrace and abasement for a man to be betrayed by a wife. However, he ignores Penelope's honor and dignity and even after his marriage,he still makes inquiries about Helen, which makes Penelope feel inferior and humiliated.

When the Trojan Warerupts, Odysseus leaves her and the son, and this departure marks another crucial moment for Penelope in constructingher self-identity. The whole management of the estate and the care of the son have been left to Penelope alone after the husband left for the Trojan war and the father-in-law moved to the countryside. She gains the control over the country and becomes the head of the palace. She has maintained her authority for years when Odysseusfails to return. Yet, as a lonely woman, to manage a country and bring up a son is not so easy for Penelope. Although the power Penelope holds is never stable but very delicate and fragile, she manages toprove successful, competent, able and efficient in ruling over the country and managing people around untilOdysseus returns.

My policy was to build up the estates of Odysseus so he'd have even more wealth when he came back than when he'd left more sheep, more cows, more pigs, more fields of grain, more slaves. I had such a clear picture in my mind Odysseus returning, and me with womanly modesty revealing to him how well I had done at what was usually considered a man's business. (p. 89)

Although in the literary tradition the representation of Penelope tends to swing from one extreme to the other, from the pure incarnation of faithfulness to the worst of libertines (Çelebi, 2016, p. 16), Penelope remains a model of marital faithfulness, cleverness, modesty, morality

and wisdom throughout history. She has served as the embodiment of "the wise and thoughtful woman and wife" (Çelebi, pp. 19, 127).

Yet, Penelope is not presented as the idealized version of womanhood, the emphasis is not placed on her physical beauty or feminine charm. On the contrary, her mental capacity and intellect is more foregrounded. Thus she does not represent the body but the mind. Penelope can be characterized by the qualities which are culturally and historically associated with males: "I was smart, though: considering the times, very smart. That seems to be what I was known for: being smart" (p. 61). She has gained the "reputation as a smart bargainer" and as a clever person.

Rather than what Penelope has said, what she has done reveals her true nature and intention more obviously. Her action is a clear indication and manifestation of what she is capable of doing. She subverts strongly established gender roles by carrying out the manly tasks. Bottez (2012) maintains that she has achieved success in her undertaking by "emulating man's qualities and expertise: she proudly describes herself as a successful administrator of the estates – learning how to make inventories, how to bargain and acquiring knowledge of goat-breeding" (p. 52). She has displayed her wisdom, competence and ability in her tasks, which fosters a new self-image nourished by self-confidence and self-esteem her achievement and success bring.

Penelope is so pragmatic that she does not hesitate to employ a Machivellan approach to deal with the thorny issues to keep herself away from danger, disgrace and trouble. By asserting herself in the male-defined realm in the absence of Odysseus for years during the war, she destabilizes cultural stereotypes concerning gender roles and identities. She successfully handles both the country and the suitors for a long time thanks to her astuteness and cooperation with the maids. She uses the maids as the scapegoat to keep herself pure and intact. The maids are alleged for being sexually involved with the suitors although they claim that they have been raped while fulfilling the task assigned to them by Penelope. Penelope here comes out as a victimizer.

How Penelope uses the examples of the shroud and the bed demonstrates her playful and calculating nature. Penelope surpasses even her husband in weaving schemes and tricks. The acts of reweaving and unravelling expose her artful skill to constructartifices and stratagems. Penelope tricks the suitors by keeping them waiting in order to delay her decision to pick a husband by weaving a shroud for Laertes which she secretly undoes with the maids at night since when she completes the shroud, she has to announce her decision: "if the shroud was a web, then I was a spider. But I had not been attempting to catch men like flies: on the contrary, I'd merely been trying to avoid entanglement myself" (p. 74). Being "fooled by a woman" (p. 118) makes the suitors angry but by putting the shroud plan into action and delaying the suitors till Odysseus turns back to Ithaca, she also evidently shows that a female can be more strategic andcrafty.Moreover, this weaving has earned her more respect by reinforcing her image as a good wife.

She can preserve her public face by hiding her cunningness under the mask of faithfulness. "Hadn't I been faithful? Hadn't I waited, and waited, and waited, despite the temptation almost the compulsion to do otherwise?" (p. 2). Her privacy is a key here since she does not let anybody get to know her intimately except for the maids who are silenced before they expose the truth.

She can use shrewdness and trickster abilitiesso effectively (Bottez, 2012, p. 52) by acting like water since she is the daughter of a Niamad.

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 (p. 41).

Çelebi states that Penelope, as an archetypal literary woman,has functioned as a "model of subservience and silence" (p. 21). However, Penelope's passivity is self-imposed and self-crafted rather than inflicted by the male domination.Bracke (2016) suggests that resilience is a feminine mode of survival (p. 850). When Odysseus comes to the palace, Penelope returns back to the status of subalternity. Her seeming submissiveness, lack of action or initiative is a strategy she has employed self-consciously and her secretiveness and reticence become the tools of power. Penelope knows how to survive in a cruel, man-dominated world since she has to learn to be self-sufficient and resourceful at a very young age when she is abandoned by her mother who prefers swimming to the care of a baby. The father also gives the order of her murder when she is only a child: "I could see that I would have to look out for myself in the world. I could hardly count on family support" (p. 11).

There are many examplesin the story that refer to her wisdom and intelligence. She is wise enough to choose the maids from among the youngest and more inexperienced, so they do not question her motives and they have a greater capacity for showing loyalty and devotion since they spend all their life with her. When Odysseus comes back under the disguise of a beggar to seek revenge, she immediately recognizes her husband but keeps quiet about it: "As soon as I saw that barrel chest and those short legs I had a deep suspicion, which became a certainty when I heard he'd broken the neck of a belligerent fellow panhandler" (p. 15).She is smart enough not to expose the weakness and failure of the husband since "If a man takes pride in his disguising skills, it would be unwiseto act otherwise: it's always an imprudence to step between a man and the reflection of his own cleverness" (p. 16). She lets him believe he is in control and she is the object of his gaze although she is the one who is functioning as the panoptican eye keeping eveybody under her constant observation and surveillance. That the other characters are not aware of the fact that she is in fact aware of what others are doing around empowers her by putting her at an advantageous position. Thus her knowledge of the others helps her to manipulate the people and situations.

Since she knows that only Odysseus can string his old bow, she proposes that the suitors hold a contest by using the bow and the axes. Only after her famous trick of the nuptial bed, she pretends to recognize him. She offers the bed and the bow contest to remove all the possible suspicion the husband may have for her on his return. Çelebi (2016) also states that "the bed was a calculated trick to make *him* wait, for once, and also to reassure him of her reliability and seriousness" (p. 134).Her success is so clear and unquestionable that after returning from war, Odysseus stays for a short period of time in Ithaca and leaves the country again for a journey. After all is said and done, Penelope proves herself to be a good administrator and a free subject who can act, speak and be heard.

At last but not least, Penelope criticizes religion and tries to deconstruct the absolute power of Gods. As a female, she is fighting against the male supremacy. Once she is dead, she

also feels liberated from God's cruelty since she cannot be hurt by Gods anymore.She mocks them and declares that even when she was alive, she had doubts about their existence.

The gods wanted meat as much as we did, but all they ever got from us was the bones and fat, thanks to a bit of rudimentary sleight of hand by Prometheus: only an idiot would have been deceived by a bag of bad cow parts disguised as good ones, and Zeus was deceived; which goes to show that the gods were not always as intelligent as they wanted us to believe. I can say this now because I'm dead. I wouldn't have dared to say it earlier. […] It's true that I sometimes doubted their existence, these gods. (pp. 39-40)

She can now clearly see that gods are not any different from or better than ordinary human beings. On the contrary, they can be idiots and deceived even by mortals: "There was something childish about the gods, in a nasty way. I can say this now because I no longer have a body, I'm beyond that kind of suffering, and the gods aren't listening anyway" (p. 24). Gods are not always right, innocent or fair. She is critical of Gods since they look down on human beings and they take delight in man's suffering. Penelope criticizes Gods' perversity and immorality as well by referring to the birth of Helen, whose mother was raped by Zeus in a swan's form.Moreover, in Hades' world, Penelope attacks Gods since Helen went unpunished although she caused a war and deaths of lots of people when alive. That is why Penelope takes up a position against Gods and questions their understanding of justice.

She feels frustrated by the silence and indifference of Gods to her prayers about the return of her husband from the war. Her ironical and sarcastic attitude towards Gods is obvious while praying for Odysseus' return: 'Which prayer shall we answer today?' they ask one another. 'Let's cast dice! Hope for this one, despair for that one, and while we're at it, let's destroy the life of that woman over there by having sex with her in the form of a crayfish!' I think they pull a lot of their pranks because they're bored" (p. 135). Additionally, she adds that Gods do not always provide exact and true prophecies because "the gods often mumble"(p. 8) and "our suffering, is what they love to savor" (p. 124).

To conclude, in Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, the female characters take their "turn to do a little story-making" (p. 3). Homer's *The Odyssey* is challenged and deconstructed by *The Penelopiad* and the same story is told by the once-subaltern women. In *The Odyssey*, both the writer and the narrator are male, representing a male-dominant world; on the contrary, in *The Penelopiad*, both the author and the narrators are female. Penelope and the twelve maidstransgress their status ofsubalternity by constructing their own discourse through which they establish their version of knowledge and truth. This empowers them to show resistance since in a Foucaldian sense the exercise of power always includes the possibility of counterattact and resistance. Power and resistance in any power relationship are inseparable. As Foucault claims, the subaltern can reject docility and get access to power, resistance and discourse, as can be clearly seen in *The Penelopiad*. Penelope, even when still alive,is able to struggle against her domination and subjugationfirst in a patriarchal family structure and then in her marriage. She successfully turns upside down the institutions of fatherhood and marriage to build her identity as a free, acting and speaking female subject. However, death has liberated her more since she does not have to act strategically to protect herself because no harm can be given to her any more.

WORKS CITED

Atwood, Margaret. (2006). *The Penelopiad*. Great Britain: Canongate.

Atwood, Margaret. (2002). *Negotiating with the dead. A writer on writing.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bottez, Monica. (2012). Another Penelope: Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*. *University of Bucharest Review, vol. XIV, 1*,49-56.

Bracke, Sarah. (2016). Is the subaltern resilient? Notes on agency and neoliberal subjects.*Cultural Studies, vol. 30, 5*, 839-855.

Cooke, Nathalie. (2004). *Margaret Atwood: A Critical Companion*. Westport: Greenwood.

Çelebi, Barbara D. (2016). *Penelope's Daughters*. University of Nebreska.

Devadas, Vijay and Nicholls, Brett.(2002). Postcolonial interventions: Gayatri Spivak, three wise men and the native informant.*Critical Horizons,3,*73-101.

Foucault, Michel. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry, vol. 8, 4*,777-795.

Frye, Northrop.(1957). *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gramsci, Antonio.(1995). *The Southern Question.* (P. Verdicchio, Trans.). Berkley CA: Bordighera Press.

Hengen, Shannon. (2008). Staging Penelope: Margaret Atwood's changing audience. In Sarah A. Appleton (Ed.), *Once upon a time: myth, fairy tales and legends in Margaret Atwood's writings*(pp. 47-57). Cambridge Scholars.

Howells, Coral A. (2008). 'We can't help but be modern': *The Penelopiad*. In Sarah A. Appleton (Ed.), *Once upon a time: myth, fairy tales and legends in Margaret Atwood's writings* (pp. 57-73). Cambridge Scholars.

Howells, Coral Ann. (2006). *The Cambridge companion to Margaret Atwood*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Hutcheon, Linda. (1985). *A theory of parody. The teachings of twentieth-century art forms*. London and New York: Methuen.

Hutheon, Linda. (1988). *A poetics of postmodernism. History, theory, fiction.* London and New York: Routledge.

Macpherson, H. S. (2010). *The Cambridge introduction to Margaret Atwood.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Maggio, J. (2007). 'Can the subaltern be heard?': Political theory, translation, representation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Alternatives, 32,*419–443.

Morris, R.(Ed.). (2010).*Can the subaltern speak?: Reflections on the history of an idea.*New York: Columbia University Press.

Nunes, Ruan. (2014). Looking into Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*: Appropriation, parody and class issues. *Palimpsesto, vol. 18, 13,* 228–240.

Peneau, Emilie. (2012). 'Strong myths never die': Margaret Atwood's subversion of myth in *The Tent*. In Jose M. L. Goya and Marta Ochoa(Eds.), *Myth and subversion in the contemporary novel* (253–265). Cambridge Scholars.

Rich, Adrienne. (1972). When we dead awaken: writing as re-vision.*College English,vol. 34, 1,* 18-30.

Spivak, Gayatri. (2013). *The Spivak Reader: Selected works of Gayati Chakravorty Spivak*. Routledge.

Spivak, Gayatri. (1994). Can the subaltern speak? In P. Williams and L. Chrismas. (Eds). *Colonial discourse and postcolonial theory*(pp. 66-111). Columbia University Press: New York.

Staels, Hilde. (2009). *The Penelopiad* and *Weight*. Contemporary parodic and burlesque transformations of classical myths. *College Literature, vol. 36, 4,* 100–118.

Suzuki, Mihoko. (2007). Rewriting the 'Odyssey' in the twenty-first century: Mary Zimmerman's 'Odyssey' and Margaret Atwood's 'Penelopiad.' *College Literature, vol. 34,* 263–278.

Widdowson, Peter. (2006). Writing back: Contemporary re-visionary fiction.*Textual Practice, vol. 20, 3*,491-507.

Wilson, Sharon Rose. (1993). *Margaret Atwood's fairy-tale sexual politics*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press.

Wilson, Sharon Rose. (2003). *Margaret Atwood's textual assassinations: Recent poetry and fiction*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.