Intertextual *Agōnes* in Archaic Greek Epic: Penelope vs. the *Catalogue of Women*

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Abstract

Archaic Greek epic exhibits a pervasive eristic intertextuality, repeatedly positioning its heroes and itself against pre-existing traditions. In this article, I focus on a specific case study from the *Odyssey*: Homer's agonistic relationship with the *Catalogue of Women* tradition. Hesiodic-style catalogue poetry has long been recognized as an important intertext for the *Nekyia* of *Odyssey* 11, but here I explore a more sustained dialogue across the whole poem. Through an ongoing *agōn* that sets Odysseus's wife against catalogic women, Homer establishes the pre-eminence of his heroine and—by extension—the supremacy of his own poem.

Keywords

Odyssey – Catalogue of Women – Penelope – competition – intertextuality

Competition in Archaic Greek Epic

Ancient Greek culture was deeply rooted in competition. Contests dominated many aspects of Archaic Greek life, including war, athletics, and craftsmanship; but it is in the poetic sphere where this competitive impulse is felt most strongly.¹ In the *Works and Days*, Hesiod famously describes Strife spurring on poets as it does craftsmen and potters (24–26), and he later recounts his own poetic victory at a contest held during the funeral games for Amphidamas (654–659).² The Homeric poems are less explicit in this regard, but they still

1 Griffith 1990; Ford 2002: 272–293; Collins 2004; Barker 2009; Gostoli, Fongoni and Biondi 2017; Damon and Pieper 2019. On the competitive world of archaic epic, see Martin 1989; van Wees 1992; Scodel 2008; Allan and Cairns 2011; Bassino, Canevaro, and Graziosi 2017. On *Eris* in epic: Christensen 2018.

2 Notably, pseudo-Longinus redeploys Hesiod's words on Strife to justify literary *aemulatio* (*On the Sublime* 13.4). For the *Works and Days* itself as a contest song, see Peabody 1975: 268–272.

feature the bard Thamyras vying to compete against the Muses (*Iliad* 2.594–600) and Telemachus's claim that "audiences celebrate more the song that comes newest to their ears," a self-reflexive comment on Homer's own drive for novelty and success (*Odyssey* 1.351–352).³ The *Homeric Hymns*, too, exhibit a similarly eristic flavor: the sixth *Homeric Hymn* (to Aphrodite) ends by asking the goddess to "grant me victory in this competition" (δὸς δ' ἐν ἀγῶνι | νίκην τῷδε φέρεσθαι, 19–20), while the narrator of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* pictures the Ionians gathering for a festival "assembly" (or "contest": ἀγῶνα) with boxing, dancing, and singing (146–150) and shortly thereafter asks the Delian maidens to remember him as the "most pleasurable of poets" whom they "enjoy the most" and "all of whose songs are the best hereafter" (ἥδιστος ἀοιδῶν ... τέφ τέρπεσθε μάλιστα ... τοῦ πᾶσαι μετόπισθεν ἀριστεύουσιν ἀοιδαί, 169–173).⁴ Such assertions reflect a clear competitive spirit, a drive to be superlative and pre-eminent. Moreover, the narrator of the first *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* begins with a *synkrisis* of various traditions surrounding the god's birthplace, dismissing them all as false (ψευδόμενοι, A. 7), before settling on his own preferred option, Nysa (A. 1–10), an explicitly agonistic engagement with tradition. Even from this brief survey, we see that archaic epic was produced in an environment highly attuned to its competitive context.⁵

Building on such explicit markers, modern scholars have detected many cases of implicit agonism in archaic Greek epic. They have highlighted, for example, a polemical relationship between the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, centered especially on the underlying differences between the protagonists of each poem: Odysseus (the man of μῆτις) against Achilles (the figure of βίη)—an attractive, if at times reductive, dichotomy.⁶ And they have explored how both poems compete against a host of other traditions (if not poems), including the Theban war tradition, the exploits of Heracles, and other episodes of the larger Trojan war cycle.⁷ Homeric poetry emerges as "meta-epic," in the words of

3 Thamyras: Maehler 1963: 16–17; Brillante 1992; Wilson 2006. For Telemachus's claim as a self-reflexive comment on the *Odyssey*, see Danek 1998: 60; de Jong 2001: 38; Scodel 2002: 53–54. Demodocus's and Odysseus's various tales in Scheria can also be interpreted as a quasi-poetic competition, paralleling the athletic contest of *Odyssey* 8: Ford 1992: 114–118.

4 The language of the festival contest (146–150) reverberates in the narrator's boast, strengthening the agonism of his claims: ἀοιδῇ | μνησάμενοι τέρπουσιν, 149–150 ~ μνήσασθ', 167; τέρπεσθε, 170; ἀοιδαί, 173.

5 Cf. too our external evidence for the competitive performance of epic in the archaic and classical periods, especially at public festivals: Rotstein 2012; Martin 2015: 17–24; Tsagalis 2018.

6 Nagy 1979: 42–58; Thalmann 1984: 181–183; Edwards 1985; Cook 1995: esp. 28–32; King 1999; Wilson 2005; Currie 2016: 46 with n. 46; Grethlein 2017. Cf. too Lesser 2019 for a comparable rivalry between the Iliadic Helen and Odyssean Penelope (see below).

7 Homer and Theban myth: Barker and Christensen 2020. *Iliad* and Heracles: Martin 1989;

Margalit Finkelberg, able to supersede and deauthorize conflicting, alternative versions of myth.⁸ Hesiod, too, has been interpreted within this competitive matrix: in the *Theogony*, the Muses assert that they can speak “many lies like the truth” (27–28), a claim that has been interpreted as a polemical dig against the falsities of heroic Homeric epic.⁹ In addition, Hesiod’s short, brief, and successful voyage from Aulis to Euboea in the *Works and Days* has been read as a case of agonistic one-upmanship over Homer and the Trojan war tradition, a foil to the long and arduous toils of the Greek expedition (650–653).¹⁰ Within the wider context of Hesiod’s victory at Amphidamas’s funeral games (648–662), this final episode likely inspired the tradition of the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*: already in antiquity, audiences discerned a competitive relationship between these two subgenres of epic.¹¹ More generally, scholars have also highlighted how Homer exploits the self-interested and personalized narratives of his characters as a foil to emphasize the authority of his own Muse-inspired work.¹² In short, the agonistic context of archaic epic has inspired an attractive range of readings, allowing a deeper appreciation of the workings of archaic Greek poetics.

Some scholars, however, have questioned the degree of interpoetic agonism in early Greek epic and have argued that interpretations such as these are out of line with the original performance contexts of archaic poetry and go against the ethos and rhetoric of the ancient poems themselves. Ruth Scodel, in particular, has sounded the most significant note of caution, arguing that the internal evidence of the Homeric texts provides little support for such readings. She argues that Homeric heroes are generally respectful of earlier generations, refraining from challenging or competing with them—part of a larger pattern in both epics of former generations proving greater than those of the present. Heroic glory, she insists, is not a zero-sum contest, allowing the Homeric poems to

227–230. *Odyssey* and Heracles: Alden 2017: 173–184. Homer and the cycle: Barker and Christensen 2015; Finkelberg 2015; Marks 2017. Generally, cf. Epstein 2020.

8 “Meta-epic”: Finkelberg 1998: 154–155, 2003: 78–79, 2011: 202, 2018: 29–34. Cf. too Homer as “meta-cyclic”: Burgess 2006, 2009: 4, 66, 2012: 170; Tsagalis 2011b: 218–228; Finkelberg 2015. For the deauthorizing of rival epichoric variants, cf. Fredricksmeyer 1997: 494–495; Marks 2003; 2008: 96–111; Alwine 2009.

9 See Kambylis 1965: 63; Puelma 1989: 75; Arrighetti 1996. Contrast Nagy 1990: 45–47; Scodel 2001: 112–121.

10 Steiner 2005: 350, 2007: 182–186; cf. Nagy 1982: 66; Rosen 1990; Dougherty 2001: 21–25; Graziosi 2002: 169–171.

11 See Bassino 2019: esp. 5–7 on the influence of *Works and Days* 648–662; cf. Graziosi 2001.

12 Kelly 2008: esp. 198–200, considering these internal characters “a pointed and detailed allusion to his competitors and their methods” (199–200); cf. Kelly 2018.

position their heroes within a traditional canon that has room for them all. The overall ethos is one of deference to tradition, not dominance.¹³ In addition, Scodel has argued that such agonistic readings misrepresent the competitive context of archaic performance: “the poet’s real rival,” she suggests, “is the poet against whom he is competing here and now, or the poet from down the road who may be hired in his place.”¹⁴ On her view, it is misguided to explore epic engagement with woolly, vacuous traditions, detached from specific real world contexts.

These are significant criticisms of a major approach to Homeric studies—and they have not, as far as I am aware, been tackled directly. The issue inevitably engages with larger questions about the development of the Homeric texts and how they come to us in the form they do today. But even without getting drawn into such familiar and irresolvable questions, I feel that Scodel’s argumentation can and should be reassessed.

For a start, Scodel does not justify why we should only prioritize the initial hypothesized performance context of bard against bard rather than later receptions of these works. If we imagine these poems as transient one-off performances focused on the present, her emphasis on the poet’s real-world rivals makes sense. But this seems a reductive reading of the carefully crafted poems as we have them today, which are clearly invested in their own monumentality and the fame of their characters and stories. Most famously, Helen in *Iliad* 6 pictures herself and Paris as the subject of song in future generations (6.357–358), a self-consciousness that nods to the *Iliad*’s own role in preserving these events, while Odysseus too claims to the Phaeacians that his κλέος reaches the heavens—thanks in large part to this very poem which preserves his deeds (*Odyssey* 9.19–20). Such claims as these are themselves a competitive move, an assertion that these stories and songs will continue to be propagated amid a mass of alternative rival traditions. Moreover, Jonathan Ready has recently highlighted how even oral texts are “capable of outlasting the moment,” a process of “entextualization” that he already finds evidenced within the character speeches of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (2019: 15–74). These epics are evidently

13 Scodel 2004. For her further discussion of the competitive system of Homeric society, see Scodel 2008. Cf. too Sammons 2019: 59, who suggests that the *Little Iliad* and the *Nostoi* use the epigonal figure of Neoptolemus to assert that the epic tradition “was not a closed corpus.”

14 Scodel 2012: 501; cf. 2004: esp. 17. For similar skepticism, see too Burgess 2006: 165 with n. 43, 2009: 58, 2017: 116, 2019b: 138. Somewhat differently, Ready 2019: 75–97 stresses that “challenging” a source text is only one of various functions open to a mediating performer: they may also “replicate” it (exactly copy it) or “reentextualize” it (retell it in different words).

invested in their reception beyond the “here and now.” And such self-conscious reflection on poetic permanence proved a recurring aspect of the Greek literary tradition, as Henry Spelman has recently reminded us in the case of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (2018a) and Greek lyric more generally (2018b). Archaic Greek poems were not just ephemeral events but enduring artifacts that envisaged their future fame beyond the present. Poets were aware of this later reception and thus competed not only in a one-off contest with immediate rivals in the present but also against an entire canon of tradition to which they aspired to belong. Within such a broader perspective, an agonistic aspect to archaic epic’s engagement with tradition is natural, even expected.

In addition, although Homeric heroes may sometimes refrain from competing directly with past heroes, this is not always the case, and there are in fact instances where they claim or are said to outdo their predecessors. In the *Iliad*, for example, Sthenelus responds to Agamemnon’s rebuke of Diomedes by claiming that both he and Diomedes are “far superior” to their fathers (ἡμεῖς τοι πατέρων μέγ’ ἀμείνονες εὐχόμεθ’ εἶναι, 4.405) because they succeeded in sacking Thebes, even though they faced a greater wall with a smaller force (παυρότερον λαὸν ἀγαγόνθ’ ὑπὸ τείχος ἄρειον, 4.407). Diomedes promptly silences his companion’s boast, but these remarks invite us to compare and contrast the events at Troy with the great deeds of a former generation at Thebes, hinting at Homer’s efforts to surpass this alternative tradition.¹⁵ In the *Odyssey*, meanwhile, we could point to Athena’s celebration of Odysseus as “by far the best of all mortals in counsel and in speech” (βροτῶν ὅχ’ ἄριστος ἀπάντων | βουλῇ καὶ μύθοισιν, 13.297–298) and the dead Agamemnon’s *synkrisis* of Penelope and Clytemnestra in the Underworld, when he explicitly contrasts the fame which Penelope has secured through her fidelity and the hateful song which will remain attached to Clytemnestra’s name (24.191–202: see further below). Through these and other such episodes, the Homeric poems set their heroes against the characters of other traditions or poems, hinting at their superiority. There is a sense that the heroic drive to be *aristos*, to be pre-eminent, does indeed have an intergenerational aspect to it.

In the remainder of this article, I intend to substantiate this point further by exploring one particular case of epic agonism: the *Odyssey*’s relationship with the *Catalogue of Women* tradition. I aim to highlight an ongoing intertextual rivalry within the *Odyssey* centered around the figure of Penelope. This rivalry

15 See Sammons 2014; Barker and Christensen 2020: 47–89; Nelson forthcoming a: §1V.2.3. Cf. too *Iliad* 15.638–652: the Greek warrior Periphetes proves far superior to his father, Copeus, the former herald of Eurystheus. Could Homer be positioning his Trojan narrative here as superior to the Heracles tradition?

is signposted explicitly near the start of the poem, but it continues to reverberate throughout the whole epic, as the *Odyssey* poet asserts the superiority of his own poem and heroine. In what follows, I will describe this rivalry primarily in terms of “intertextuality,” building on recent studies that have reclaimed this term to describe early Greek epic’s interactions with other traditions within an oral framework.¹⁶ By using this term, I do not mean to suggest that the *Odyssey* is interacting with a “fixed” poem, a “written text,” or even a specific “oral text” (Ready 2019: 15–74). Rather, my focus is on how the *Odyssey* appropriates and repurposes the characters and themes of a rival oral tradition. This process could equally be framed in terms of “intertraditionality,” a more recent coinage (Tsagalis 2014b), but I retain “intertextuality” here to acknowledge the general continuity with the intertextual practices of later generations; even if the target of reference is different (“traditions” rather than “texts”), many of the competitive maneuvers are similar.¹⁷

The *Odyssey* versus the *Catalogue of Women* Tradition

Scholars have long recognized that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* presuppose earlier traditions of female catalogue poetry familiar to us from the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*. Margalit Finkelberg has argued that Ajax’s appearance in the list of Helen’s suitors (fragment 204.44–51 M-W) lies behind his entry in the Homeric catalogue of ships (*Iliad* 2.557–558);¹⁸ Lillian Doherty has proposed that the *Odyssey* and the *Catalogue* both employ the same story element of the “courtship idyll” (2008); and Ian Rutherford has highlighted various correspondences between the *Catalogue of Women* and other poems in the early epic tradition.¹⁹ In particular, Odysseus’s catalogue of heroines in the *Nekyia* (*Odyssey* 11.225–329) displays considerable overlap with the Hesiodic poem, especially visible in the case of its first heroine, Tyro, and her liaison with Posei-

16 Burgess 2006, 2012; Tsagalis 2008, 2011a, 2011b; Edmunds 2016. For earlier applications of “intertextuality” in Homeric studies, see Pucci 1987; Cook 1995.

17 As Barker and Christensen rightly note, “Homerists will frequently refer to the same phenomena with different language” (2020: 18). In this case, I suspect that my arguments and conclusions are compatible with most methodological and terminological frameworks. For a fuller discussion of my approach to early Greek intertextuality, see Nelson forthcoming a: § 1.2.

18 Finkelberg 1988. Though note the caution of Cingano (1990; 2005: 143–151), who sees both texts drawing on epic traditions of heroes and bridal contests and considers the Hesiodic *Catalogue* an expansion of the abridged Iliadic text.

19 Rutherford 2000: 93–96, 2012. Cf. too Zutt 1894: 13–23; Gazis 2018: 125–156.

don (11.235–259): the preserved words of several Hesiodic lines precisely parallel Odysseus's own account of the episode,²⁰ while the *Odyssey*'s comparison of surging water to a mountain as Poseidon conceals their lovemaking is also said to have occurred in the *Catalogue* (11.243–244, cf. Hesiod fragment 32 M-W).²¹ Despite the fragmentary state of the Hesiodic poem, there is a clear and strikingly close connection between these two passages.

What we make of these parallels depends in part on our theoretical preconceptions, but I am inclined to accept Rutherford's conclusion that the *Catalogue* narrative likely predated the *Odyssey*, even if the *Catalogue* as we have it is of a later date—a similar conclusion to that regularly drawn concerning the Epic Cycle.²² In that case, the surviving fragments of the *Catalogue* offer potential evidence for the kind of pre-Homeric traditions with which the *Odyssey* may have engaged. Of course, we must handle this evidence with considerable care and caution, since parts of the *Catalogue* as we have it may display some Homeric influence,²³ but even so, our surviving fragments still provide the best window onto the possible contours of lost pre-Homeric traditions. In the immediate context of *Odyssey* 11, I thus consider it plausible that Homer is evoking earlier female catalogue traditions that would later coalesce into our Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*.²⁴ As in later literature, so already in the *Odyssey*, the Underworld is a natural site for direct engagement with the poetic past.²⁵

However, this moment is not in fact the first time that the *Odyssey* engages with female catalogic tradition. The intertextual relationship is already signaled far earlier—and in a far more overtly agonistic manner—during the Ithacan assembly of book 2. Antinous, in his frustration at Penelope's devious tricks

20 καλὰ ῥέεθρα (fragment 30.35 M-W, cf. *Odyssey* 11.240); τέξεις δ' ἀγλαὰ τέκ]να, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἀποφύ[λαιοι εὐναί | ἀθανάτων· σὺ δὲ τ]οὺς κομέειν ἀτιτα[λλέμεναί τε (fragment 31.2–3 M-W, cf. *Odyssey* 11.249–250). Cf. too the presence of Chloris and her children to Neleus in both poems (esp. fragment 33a.12 M-W = *Odyssey* 11.286).

21 Note also the line following Poseidon's speech (*Odyssey* 11.253), which resembles fragment 31.6 M-W.

22 Rutherford 2000: 93–96; 2012: esp. 163. Cf. West 1985: 164–171: most genealogies in our *Catalogue* were “constructed not later than the eighth century.” On the Epic Cycle as both a source for pre-Homeric myth and an assemblage of post-Homeric receptions, see Burgess 2001; 2019a: 18–26.

23 See Ormand 2014: esp. 119–151 (Atalanta and Achilles; contrast Laser 1952), 152–180 (Amphitryon and Odysseus).

24 Thus Rutherford 2012: 161–164. On the *Nekyia* more generally as a literary-historical catalogue of the subspecies of *epos*, see Most 1992.

25 Cf. Aristophanes *Frogs*; *Gerytades* (fragments 156–190 Kassel-Austin); Callimachus *Iambus* 1 (fragment 191 Pfeiffer). See Currie 2016: 26–27n166. For Roman and later continuations of this tradition, see Hardie 2004; Deremetz 2005; Parkes 2010.

for delaying the suitors' advances, claims that she is unrivalled, even among women of a former age (*Odyssey* 2.115–122):

εἰ δ' ἔτ' ἀνιήσει γε πολὺν χρόνον υἱὰς Ἀχαιῶν,
τὰ φρονέουσ' ἀνὰ θυμὸν ἅ οἱ πέρι δῶκεν Ἀθήνη,
ἔργα τ' ἐπίστασθαι περικαλλέα καὶ φρένας ἐσθλὰς
κέρδεά θ', οἷ' οὐ πῶ τιν' ἀκούομεν οὐδὲ παλαιῶν,
τάων αἱ πάρος ἦσαν εὐπλοκαμίδες Ἀχαιαί,
Τυρῶ τ' Ἀλκμήνη τε εὐστέφανός τε Μυκίνη·
τάων οὐ τις ὁμοῖα νοήματα Πηνελοπείη
ἤδη· ἀτὰρ μὲν τοῦτό γ' ἐναΐσιμον οὐκ ἐνόησε.

But if she will continue to vex the sons of the Achaeans for a long time, mindful in her heart of the things which Athena has granted her above other women: knowledge of very beautiful handiwork, good sense, and cunning, such as we have never yet heard that any of the women of old knew, those lovely-haired Achaean women who lived long ago: Tyro, Alcmena and Mycene of the lovely garland—not one of them had thoughts similar to Penelope. But this at any rate she has devised improperly.²⁶

Antinous here compares Penelope with three women of the distant past: Tyro, Alcmena, and Mycene, all of whom occupy prominent positions in Greek myth as the ancestors of many of its most famous heroes. In giving birth to Pelias, Neleus, Aeson, Pheres, and Amythaon (*Odyssey* 11.254–259), Tyro in particular counts numerous heroes from the Trojan, Theban, and Argonautic sagas in her lineage, including Admetus, Adrastus, Jason, Melampus, and Nestor; Alcmena was the mother of Heracles, whose numerous affairs ensured a plentiful progeny; and Mycene (the eponymous heroine of Mycenae) was a significant ancestor in the Argive family tree as the mother of Argus, guardian of Io. By claiming that Penelope surpasses such eminent figures of the distant past, Antinous aims to criticize her unconventional “cunning” (κέρδεα, 118), a trait that he has already blamed for the current impasse on Ithaca (cf. 2.88).²⁷ But in

²⁶ All translations are my own.

²⁷ This unconventionality is reflected in Homer's language: *Odyssey* 2.117 seems to be a formulaic verse celebrating traditional female virtues (it reappears at *Odyssey* 7.111 of the Phaeacian women), but the enjambed κέρδεα are a unique addition: Katz 1991: 4; Sammons 2010: 60–61. On Penelope's intelligence in general, see Marquardt 1985; Murnaghan 1986.

so doing, he inadvertently praises Penelope's exceptionality and highlights her obvious appeal: on the basis of this comparison, whoever succeeds in wooing her will enjoy an illustrious and unsurpassed progeny—though as Georg Danek notes, this comparison also exposes the suitors' *hubris*: all three of these mythical women had divine lovers, so if Penelope surpasses them, she is completely out of the suitors' league (1998: 74).²⁸

Besides this ironic reflection on the suitors' situation, Antinous's direct contrast between Penelope and these other mythical women also activates a more allusive contrast between the *Odyssey* and female genealogical poetry. All three of Antinous's *comparanda* feature prominently in Hesiodic catalogue poetry: we have already encountered Tyro's presence in both the Hesiodic *Catalogue* and the Odyssean *Nekyia* (*Odyssey* 11.235–259; Hesiod fragments 30–32 M-W), while we can find Alcmena in both lists (*Odyssey* 11.266–268; Hesiod fragment 193.19–20, fragment 195.8–63 M-W = *Scutum* 1–56), as well as in the *Great Ehoiai* (fragments 248–249 M-W), where Mycene is also said to have featured (fragment 246 M-W).²⁹ Given the close combination of these women here, Antinous's words point towards pre-existing female catalogue traditions, just as Odysseus's do in the *Nekyia*. The likelihood of a reference to such traditions is further reinforced by the very nature of these lines: by listing the women in a miniature catalogue, Antinous repeats the compositional technique of *Ehoiai* poetry itself, while the word with which he introduces them, the relative pronoun *οἱα* (2.118), acts as a generic signpost, echoing the common introductory formula of such poetry (*ἣ οἴη*).³⁰ Antinous's comparison imitates the key features of Hesiodic catalogue poetry at the same time as he evokes some of its principal protagonists.³¹

The allusive nature of these verses is sealed, however, by their carefully marked framing: Antinous introduces these women by stressing their antiquity (*παλαιῶν*, 118; *πάρως*, 119) and gesturing to hearsay (*ἀκούομεν*, 118). The names of these women have reached him through transmitted tales, while their age

28 The irony is even stronger when we recall that Tyro was famous for warning her father not to contend with the gods (*οὐδ' εἶσκε θεοῖς* [*βροτὸν ἰσ*]οφραρίζειν, Hesiod fragment 30.27 M-W); Antinous too should heed this advice.

29 On the *Great Ehoiai* and its relationship to the *Ehoiai*: Hirschberger 2004: 81–86; D'Alessio 2005.

30 Skempis and Ziogas 2009: 234. The listing of three names in a single verse in *Odyssey* 2.120 (an “augmented triad”: West 2004) is also typical of hexameter catalogues: cf. Hesiod *Theogony* 338–345; fragment 33a.9–12 M-W; West 2007: 117–119.

31 Compare also *οὐ πῶ τι* (*Odyssey* 2.118) ~ *οὐ πῶ τις* (Hesiod fragment 195.17 M-W, see below), a parallel that further highlights the degree to which Alcinous appropriates the rhetoric of female catalogue poetry.

marks the venerability of these traditions and heightens the contrast with the present. Stephanie West remarks that “the antiquarian note” of these lines “is slightly strange” (1988: 139), but I suggest that these elements function here as intertextual markers, precursors of the “Alexandrian footnote.”³² Roman poets frequently present details familiar from other texts as the product of *fama* (“rumor”) and refer to traditional characters as *antiquus* (“ancient”)—self-conscious gestures that are usually considered the preserve of Hellenistic and later poets.³³ Yet already here, Antinous’s appeal to hearsay and his assertion of these women’s antiquity seem to act in a similar manner, signposting allusive engagement with catalogic tradition.³⁴ After all, as regular “auditors” of Phemius’s songs (ἀκούοντες, *Odyssey* 1.325–327), the suitors are themselves “aficionados of epic poetry” (Sammons 2010: 61n8); it is no surprise if Antinous derives his knowledge from older song traditions.

Given this evocation of Hesiodic catalogue poetry, Antinous’s comparison thus does much more than simply highlight Penelope’s desirability and objectionable craftiness. It also sets her Odyssean self against representatives of another rival poetic tradition, a significant agonistic move. Despite Antinous’s attempts to criticize her κέρδεα, this comparison is in fact very favorable when viewed against the poem’s broader ideological framework. Penelope’s exceptional κέρδεα make her a prime match for Odysseus, whose own unmatched κερδοσύνη (“cunning”) is repeatedly highlighted in the epic (especially 19.285–286; cf. 4.251, 13.297, 14.31; *Iliad* 23.709). In addition, the only other specific figures whose κέρδεα are mentioned in the *Odyssey* are the couple’s son, Telemachus (18.216, 20.257), and Odysseus’s divine patron, Athena (13.297, 299). Within the broader context of the poem, κέρδεα are valorized as the emblematic and unifying trait of Odysseus’s household: κέρδεα are “arguably a defining theme of the *Odyssey* itself” (Sammons 2010: 61).³⁵ By having Antinous assert

32 On the Alexandrian footnote, see Hinds 1998: 1–3; cf. Wills 1996: 30–31 (“external markers of allusion”).

33 *Fama*: for example, Ovid *Metamorphoses* 12.197 (*ita fama ferebat*, “so rumor had it”), 12.200 (*eadem hoc quoque fama ferebat*, “the same rumor reported this too”), looking to the Hesiodic *Catalogue*’s account of Neptune’s rape of Caenis (Ziogas 2013: 198–199). *Antiquus*: for example, *Aeneid* 12.347 (*antiqui ... Doloni*, “of old Dolon”), looking back to *Iliad* 10 (cf. too *quondam*, 12.349; Tarrant 2012: 177).

34 This is not the only plausible instance of such allusive devices in Homer: see, for example, Phoenix’s introduction of his Meleager narrative in *Iliad* 9 (οὕτω καὶ τῶν πρόσθεν ἐπευθόμεθα κλέα ἀνδρῶν | ἡρώων, 9.524–525; μέμνημαι τόδε ἔργον ἐγὼ πάλαι, οὐ τι νέον γε, 9.527); cf. Currie 2016: 140–143; Rawles 2018: 43 with n. 60; Nelson forthcoming a, forthcoming b.

35 Notably, this positive Odyssean assessment of κέρδεα contrasts with a largely critical evaluation elsewhere in early Greek epic: for example, Hesiod’s warning about the dangerous pursuit of profit in the *Works and Days* (κέρδος, 323; κερδαίνειν, κακὰ κέρδεα, 352), and

Penelope's superiority to catalogic women in these terms, Homer thus agonistically hints at the superiority of the tale in which she features: just as Penelope surpasses these women of the past, so too does the *Odyssey* trump the Hesiodic tradition of female catalogues.³⁶ Antinous's ensuing claim seals this agonistic one-upmanship: Penelope is winning great κλέος for herself—not just a “notorious reputation” but also “epic fame” (μέγα μὲν κλέος αὐτῇ | ποιεῖτ', 2.125–126).³⁷ As she surpasses the likes of Tyro and Alcmena, she too joins the ranks of those who are the subject of song in their own right.

The polemic of this comparison is heightened further when we consider how these Hesiodic women were themselves presented as unrivalled paragons of womanhood. The Hesiodic *Catalogue* explicitly sets out to list those women who were “the best at that time [and the most beautiful on earth]” (αἱ τὸτ' ἄρισται ἔσαν [καὶ κάλλισται κατὰ γαῖαν], fragment 1.3 M-W),³⁸ and both Tyro and Alcmena are further celebrated as flawless models of femininity in their own entries in the *Catalogue*: Tyro surpasses all female women in beauty (εἶδος | [πασάων προὔχεσκε γυναι]κῶν θηλυτεράων, fragment 30.33–34 M-W) and is praised for her beautiful hair ([ἐϋπ]λόκαμος, fragment 30.25 M-W, notably the same epithet that Antinous uses of the Achaean women of the past: ἐϋπλοκαμίδες Ἀχαιαί, *Odyssey* 2.119). Alcmena, meanwhile, receives a particularly lavish encomium (Hesiod fragment 195.11–17 M-W = *Scutum* 4–10):

ἦ ῥα γυναικῶν φύλον ἐκαίνυτο θηλυτεράων
εἵδεῖ τε μεγέθει τε· νόον γε μὲν οὐ τις ἔριζε
τάων ἃς θνηταὶ θνητοῖς τέκον εὐνηθεῖσαι.
τῆς καὶ ἀπὸ κρήθεν βλεφάρων τ' ἀπο κυανέων
τοῖον ἄθ' ὅλόν τε πολυχρύσου Ἀφροδίτης.
ἦ δὲ καὶ ὥς κατὰ θυμὸν ἐὼν τίεσκεν ἀκοίτην,
ὥς οὐ πῶ τις ἔτισε γυναικῶν θηλυτεράων·

Antilochus's reckless behavior in the chariot race of *Iliad* 23 (κέρδεσιν, 515), an act of “deception,” “guile,” and “cheating” (ψεύδεσσι, 576; δόλῳ, 585; ἡπεροπεύειν, 605). Cf. Roisman 1994; Dougherty 2001: 38–60; Tsagalis 2009: 152–154.

36 Cf. Sammons 2010: 60–62, suggesting that “Penelope's unprecedented cleverness” allows Homer to sustain a plot devoted to a single tale (as Aristotle admired), in comparison to the more episodic catalogic tradition.

37 Thus Sammons 2010: 61; cf. Clayton 2004: 34. For the association of κλέος and song, see Nagy 1974: 246–252.

38 Merkelbach's proposed supplements here and in fragment 30.34 reinforce my argument. But even if we leave the lacunae unsupplemented, these verses still display an emphasis on pre-eminence (ἄρισται, fragment 1.3) and physical appearance (εἶδος, fragment 30.33).

She surpassed the tribe of female women in beauty and stature; and as for her mind, no woman could rival her, out of all those whom mortal women bore after sleeping with mortal men. Such charm wafted from her head and dark eyelids as comes from golden Aphrodite. And she honored her husband in her heart as no other female woman has ever yet honored hers.

In part, these verses draw on traditional elements of epic encomium: εἶδος and μέγεθος are frequently combined in the praise, criticism, or description of an individual's physique, alongside other nouns such as δέμας and φύς.³⁹ The image of wafting beauty is paralleled elsewhere in the *Catalogue* (fragment 43a.73–74 M-W) and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (276). Yet the larger focus here on Alcmene's νόος and marital fidelity are uncommon in such descriptions: φρένες are sometimes picked out for comment,⁴⁰ and yet the only other mention of νόος in such contexts is Odysseus's negative dismissal, during the Phaeacian games of *Odyssey* 8, of Euryalus's "stunted mind" in comparison to his outstanding looks (εἶδος μὲν ἀριπρεπές, ... νόον δ' ἀποφώλιός ἐσσι, 8.176–177). The Hesiodic poet's emphasis on this attribute here in pointedly combative terms (οὐ τις ἔριξε, fragment 195.12 M-W) highlights Alcmene's exceptionality. So too does the "honor" which she pays to her husband (fragment 195.16–17 M-W), an expression that finds no direct parallel in the early Greek tradition,⁴¹ although there is perhaps an underlying touch of irony given her coming "affair" with Zeus during Amphitryon's absence.⁴² In any case, if these two traits (intelligence and fidelity) were particularly associated with Alcmene in early genealogical traditions, as the uniqueness of these lines may suggest, Antinous's use of her in the *Odyssey* as a foil to Penelope has even more point. Not only does Penelope surpass the best women of the past but she eclipses even her closest rival in wit and marital loyalty.⁴³ She remains faithful to her

39 *Iliad* 2.58; *Odyssey* 5.217, 6.152, 14.177, 24.253, 24.374; *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 275; *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 85. Cf. *Iliad* 23.66–67, where tradition is adapted to describe Patroclus's ghost (μέγεθος, ὄμματα, φωνή).

40 *Iliad* 1.115; *Odyssey* 4.264, 11.337, 14.178, 17.454, 18.249.

41 The only close parallel is the honor Alcinous shows to his wife, Arete, in Scheria (*Odyssey* 7.66–70), although here the genders are reversed.

42 Hesiod fragment 195.34–63 M-W = *Scutum* 27–56; cf. Diodorus Siculus 4.9; Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 2.4.8. An erotic context is evoked by the comparison to Aphrodite (fragment 195.15 M-W) and the mention of Alcmene's "dark eyelids" (βλεφάρων ... κυανέων, fragment 195.14 M-W); cf. Ibycus's description of Eros's "dark eyelids" (κυανέοισιν ... βλεφάροις, fragment 287.1–2 Davies).

43 This direct rivalry may even be asserted on a verbal level: note the similar phrasing of τάων

husband⁴⁴ and displays an unparalleled facility with κέρδεα. Penelope's intelligence is unsurpassed, which makes her the perfect match for Odysseus and—ironically—completely unsuitable for Antinous, whose very name betrays his hostility to sensible thought (ἄντι + νόος: “enemy of discernment”).⁴⁵

Antinous's words in *Odyssey* 2 thus position Penelope against key representatives of female catalogue poetry. Penelope proves superior even to the most intelligent and loyal women of this rival poetic tradition, a pre-eminence which reflects positively on the Homeric poet himself: his subject matter surpasses that of his predecessors. Near the start of the whole epic, Homer asserts the pre-eminence of his female protagonist and his own poetry, and he does so—rather ironically—through the ambivalent voice of a suitor. Although Antinous may attempt to criticize Penelope's cunning, his *synkrisis* in fact foregrounds her exceptionality and unwittingly proves how suitable she is not only as a match for Odysseus but also as an emblem for the poem itself.

Reverberations: The *Agōn* Continues

This assertion of Penelope's superiority is not a one-off passing reference. Antinous's words resonate and echo throughout the *Odyssey* with a similarly agonistic point. At key moments in the narrative, Penelope is praised for the same traits and in the same manner—through comparison with the women of the *Catalogue*. Antinous's inadvertent praise inaugurates an ongoing *agōn* that pervades the poem.

We have already mentioned the catalogue of heroines in the Odysean *Nekyia* (11.225–329).⁴⁶ Scholarship traditionally emphasizes how this catalogue is tailored to one particular member of Odysseus's immediate internal audience, queen Arete.⁴⁷ But for Homer's external audience, the catalogue also

οὐ τις ὁμοία νόηματα Πηνελοπείῃ | ἦδη (*Odyssey* 2.121–122) and νόον γε μὲν οὐ τις ἔριζε | τάων (fragment 195.12–13 M-W).

44 Cf. Winkler 1990: 151: Penelope's “superiority lies precisely in her unwillingness to be taken in by what might be merely a convincing replica, whether mortal or immortal, of her husband” (Poseidon disguises himself as Tyro's beloved, Enipeus, and Zeus as Alcmena's husband, Amphitryon). On Penelope's fidelity, cf. Foley 1995: esp. 103; Zeitlin 1995; Lesser 2017.

45 For this etymology, cf. Peradotto 1990: 107; Kanavou 2015: 132. The anacoluthon in Antinous's speech exemplifies his lack of νόος: after the εἰ of 2.115, we are left waiting for an apodosis that never arrives.

46 On this catalogue in general, see Pade 1983; Houlihan 1994; Steinrück 1994; Hirschberger 2001; Sammons 2010: 74–93; Larson 2014.

47 Büchner 1937: 107; Heubeck 1954: 33; Stanford 1959: 381; Wyatt 1989: 240; Doherty 1991, 1992:

establishes these women as *comparanda* for Penelope. Not only does it follow immediately after Odysseus's conversation with his mother, Anticleia, in which he hears of Penelope's enduring heart (11.181–183). It also begins by overlapping significantly with Antinous's previous catalogue: Tyro appears first in both lists (2.120, 11.235–259), while Alcmene also features prominently in each (in second and third place respectively: 2.120, 11.266–268). By frontloading this Underworld catalogue with two of the women whom Antinous had already compared to Penelope, Homer invites us to position all the others that follow against Odysseus's wife. Many are seduced and raped by a disguised god, especially Zeus (Alcmene, Antiope, Leda, Maera) and Poseidon (Iphimedeia, Tyro); others are killed or abandoned by their male partner (Megara, Procris, Ariadne); while others still remarry (Clymene), betray their husband (Eriphyle), or are possessed by an unnatural desire for their (step-)son (Epicaste, Phaedra).⁴⁸ Their unhappy loves and their various affairs stand in stark contrast to Penelope's enduring fidelity.⁴⁹ The majority, moreover, also feature in our extant Hesiodic fragments, and most of the rest likely featured in sections of the *Catalogue* that no longer survive.⁵⁰ Here too, Homer introduces representatives of catalogic tradition as a foil for Penelope. As elsewhere in Odysseus's *Apologos*, we are encouraged to look back (and ahead) to the situation on Ithaca.

This *synkrisis* with catalogic women is made even clearer in the second *Nekyia* at the end of the *Odyssey*, when Agamemnon talks to the dead suitor Amphimedon and explicitly compares Penelope and Clytemnestra, an episode that we have already noted in passing (24.191–202).⁵¹

168–169, 1995: 87–126; Tsagarakis 2000: 83; West 2012: 130; Barker and Christensen 2020: 153n77. Athena had encouraged Odysseus to win Arete's favor (*Odyssey* 7.75–77) and she is the first to respond when he finishes the catalogue (*Odyssey* 11.335–341).

48 For the stories of Maera and Procris, see Pherecydes fragment 170 and fragment 34 *EGM* respectively. The former was raped by Zeus and gave birth to Locrus, a companion of Amphion and Zethus; the latter failed her husband Cephalus's test of her fidelity and was later killed by him in a hunting accident, although West suggests that this is a fifth-century Attic tradition and that in the *Catalogue* she might have also been “the object of a god's desire” (1985: 106–107).

49 See esp. Alden 2017: 47–54, 103–112. Cf. too Walcot 1959; Northrup 1980; Danek 1998: 231; Barker and Christensen 2020: 131–171. Notably, four of the same women feature in Nestor's catalogue of problematic women in the *Cypria* (argumentum 4b *GEF*: Antiope, Epicaste, Megara, Ariadne); Sammons 2010: 91; Alden 2017: 48–49, 105–107, 110.

50 Thus Rutherford 2000: 93. Those who do not appear in our extant fragments all appear elsewhere in early Greek epic: see Appendix.

51 The authenticity of our ending of the *Odyssey* has been questioned in the past, but I regard it as an integral part of the poem's larger unity: cf. Moulton 1974; Wender 1978; Erbse 1972: 166–244; Kelly 2007: 384–387.

τὸν δ' αὖτε ψυχὴ προσεφώνεεν Ἀτρεΐδαο·
 “ὄλβιε Λαέρταο πάϊ, πολυμήχαν' Ὀδυσσεῦ,
 ἦ ἄρα σὺν μεγάλῃ ἀρετῇ ἐκτήσω ἄκοιτιν·
 ὡς ἀγαθαὶ φρένες ἦσαν ἀμύμονι Πηνελοπείῃ,
 κοῦρῃ Ἰκαρίου· ὡς εὖ μέμνητ' Ὀδυσῆος,
 ἀνδρὸς κουριδίου. τῷ οἱ κλέος οὐ ποτ' ὀλεῖται
 ἥς ἀρετῆς, τεύξουσιν δ' ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἀοιδὴν
 ἀθάνατοι χαρίεσσιν ἐχέφρονι Πηνελοπείῃ,
 οὐχ ὡς Τυνδαρέου κοῦρῃ κακὰ μήσατο ἔργα,
 κουριδίων κτείνασσα πόσιν, στυγερὴν δέ τ' ἀοιδὴν
 ἔσσετ' ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους, χαλεπὴν δέ τε φῆμιν ὀπάσσει
 θηλυτέρῃσι γυναιξί, καὶ ἢ κ' εὐεργὸς ἔησιν.”

Then the soul of Atreus's son answered him: “Blessed son of Laertes, Odysseus of many wiles, you truly obtained a wife of great virtue. How good of understanding was excellent Penelope, daughter of Icarus! How well did she retain the memory of Odysseus, her wedded husband! And so the fame of her virtue will never die, and the immortals will fashion a delightful song for those on earth in honor of prudent Penelope. Not so the daughter of Tyndareus, who plotted evil deeds and killed her wedded husband. Her song will be hateful among mankind, and she will bestow a dire reputation on the whole female sex, even on her who acts rightly.”

Agamemnon's ghost praises Penelope's “great virtue” (μεγάλῃ ἀρετῇ, 24.193, cf. ἀρετῆς, 197), the very trait which attracted all the suitors to compete for her in the first place (2.205–207), and he celebrates her in the same terms as Antinous had previously, applauding her “good understanding” (ἀγαθαὶ φρένες 194; cf. φρένας ἐσθλὰς, 2.117) and undying fame (24.196–197; cf. μέγα μὲν κλέος αὐτῇ | ποιεῖτ', 2.125–126). As in book 2, this Penelopean praise can be read metapoetically, reflecting the *Odyssey's* bid for poetic supremacy (Tsagalis 2008: 30–43), and here too it is secured through comparison with another woman of the mythical past: in this case, Agamemnon's own wife, Clytemnestra. It is well known that the *Odyssey* repeatedly engages with a well-established “Oresteia” tradition, establishing Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Orestes as parallels and foils for Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus.⁵² It is less commonly acknowledged, however, that this story also featured in the Hesiodic *Catalogue* (fragment

52 See D'Arms and Hulley 1946; Hölscher 1967; Olson 1990, 1995: 24–42; Katz 1991: 29–53; Felson 1994: 93–107; Marks 2008: 17–35; Tsitsibakou-Vasalos 2009; Alden 2017: 77–100.

23a.27–30 M-W). Just like Tyro, Alcmene, and Mycene, Clytemnestra stands as a representative of this rival tradition, who again proves inferior to Penelope. In this regard, it is worth noting a significant verbal overlap between the *Odyssey* and the Hesiodic *Catalogue*: in both poems, Orestes is said to have “killed” or “taken revenge” on πατροφονεύς Aegisthus (ἔκτανε πατροφονῆα, *Odyssey* 1.299, 3.307; ἐτείσατο πατροφονῆα, 3.197; ἀπε[τείσατο π]ατροφο[ν]ῆα, fragment 23a.29 M-W). These are the only four instances of πατροφονεύς (“father-murderer”) in extant Greek poetry, all in the same metrical *sedes*. The *Odyssey*’s abbreviated accounts of the “Oresteia” story may thus look in part to a specifically catalogic telling of the tale. In one of the poem’s final mentions of Penelope, Odysseus’s wife is here once more positioned against another woman of the catalogue tradition.

Such catalogic agonism also reverberates elsewhere in the *Odyssey* when characters assert Penelope’s superiority even without an explicit comparison to other named women. When Penelope speaks to the disguised Odysseus on his return to Ithaca, for example, she wants him to learn whether she is “preeminent among other women” for her “intelligence and prudent cunning,” thematically recalling the sentiment of Antinous’s past eulogy (δάσσει· εἴ τι γυναικῶν | ἀλλῶν περίεμι νόον καὶ ἐπιφρονα μήτιν, *Odyssey* 19.325–326). But it is especially Telemachus’s compliments before the bow contest in *Odyssey* 21 that resonate with Antinous’s earlier words (21.106–110):

ἀλλ’ ἄγετε, μνηστήρες, ἐπεὶ τόδε φαίνεται ἄεθλον,
οἷη νῦν οὐκ ἔστι γυνὴ κατ’ Ἀχαιῖδα γαῖαν,
οὔτε Πύλου ἱερῆς οὔτ’ Ἀργεος οὔτε Μυκῆνης·
[οὔτ’ αὐτῆς Ἰθάκης οὔτ’ ἡπείροιο μελαίνης]
καὶ δ’ αὐτοὶ τόδε γ’ ἴστε· τί με χρὴ μητέρος αἶνον;

But come now, you suitors, since this here is your prize before you: there is no other woman like her today throughout the Achaeian land, neither in holy Pylos, nor in Argos, nor in Mycenae. [Nor in Ithaca itself, nor on the dark mainland.] But you know this yourselves; what need have I to praise my mother?

Like Antinous’s former praise, these verses evoke key features of the Hesiodic catalogue tradition: the οἷη (21.107) nods to the formula of female catalogue poetry, like οἶα in book 2,⁵³ while the very context of these lines—the woo-

53 Nasta 2006: 63–64; Skempis and Ziogas 2009: 233–234.

ing of a woman and the idea of a woman as a prize (ἄεθλον)—resonates with many of the common themes of the catalogic genre.⁵⁴ Here too, Penelope is set against the traditions of the *Catalogue* and comes out on top. Yet these lines also have a closer connection with Antinous's earlier words than has been observed before. The initial trio of cities which Telemachus lists are all intimately linked with Antinous's own exempla: Tyro's descendants ruled Pylos (Neleus/Nestor); Alcmena was from Argos, while her son Heracles was frequently imagined as the ruler of the locality (cf. *Iliad* 15.29–30); and the city of Mycenae drew its name from Mycene herself.⁵⁵ Telemachus's words thus not only evoke traditions of female catalogue poetry but also map directly onto Antinous's list of three women, recalling the agonistic intertextuality of that earlier episode. After all, Telemachus ends by claiming that the suitors themselves “know” of Penelope's incomparability (καὶ δ' αὐτοὶ τόδε γ' ἴστε, 21.110), a remark that acknowledges their (and the external audience's) familiarity with Antinous's earlier words.⁵⁶ On the threshold of the *Mnesterophonia*, Homer's audience are pointed back to the start of the poem and to Antinous's initial encomium of Penelope. At this climactic point of the narrative, we are reminded that Penelope is completely out of the suitors' league; their impending deaths will be no surprise.

The initially signposted contrast with another literary tradition and its paradigmatic representatives thus continues to resonate through the whole poem. Both explicitly and implicitly, Penelope is presented as a foil for the women of the *Catalogue*. She surpasses them in her loyal fidelity and in her intelligence and cunning—a key trait that aligns her not only with Odysseus but also with the poet of the *Odyssey*.⁵⁷ Indeed, this conclusion complements Rachel Lesser's recent argument that the *Odyssey* positions itself against the *Iliad* through a direct comparison of Penelope and Helen, each character embodying the ethics and ideology of their respective epic (2019). In a similar way, we have seen here that Penelope lies at the center of another intertextual rivalry:

54 Cf. Skempis and Ziogas 2009: 234n59, whose examples include Atalanta (fragments 72–76 M-W), Mestra (fragment 43a.21 M-W), and Helen (fragments 196–204 M-W).

55 This interpretation may lend additional support to the deletion of *Odyssey* 21.109, which introduces Ithaca and the mainland, places which are unnecessary for the allusive back-reference. The line appears to be a “concordance interpolation”: it is absent in many manuscripts, seems to have been adapted from *Odyssey* 14.97–98, and is “out of place” after the mention of “the Achaean land” in 107 (Fernández-Galiano 1992: 158 on 21.107).

56 For the language of knowledge as a marker of intertextuality, see Nelson forthcoming a: § III.

57 Penelope and Odysseus: Foley 1978. Penelope and Homer: Winkler 1990: 129–161 (“Penelope's Cunning and Homer's”).

by repeatedly setting her against the myriad women of the *Catalogue*, Homer establishes her—and his own—pre-eminence.

However, there might be more at stake in this intertextual maneuver than a simple assertion of poetic superiority: Homer's insistence on Penelope's excellence may also be a polemical move in itself. We know from various later sources that Penelope was not in fact always as faithful as she appears in our *Odyssey*. Already in Herodotus, we hear that Penelope bore Pan to Hermes (2.145.4), a detail that is repeated by numerous later writers and seems to go back at least as far as Pindar (fragment 100 Snell-Maehler).⁵⁸ Duris of Samos offers an even more ignoble version of this story, in which Penelope bore the “goat-legged” god (τραγοσκελῆ) after “sleeping with all the suitors” (συνελθούσαν πᾶσι τοῖς μνηστήρσι), hinting at an etymological connection between Pan's name (Πάν) and her indiscriminate promiscuity (cf. πᾶν, “everything”: *BNJ* 76 F 21).⁵⁹ Various other later testimonia also claim that she succumbed to the suitors' persistent advances: Pausanias records a Mantinean tradition in which Odysseus accused Penelope of infidelity and sent her away (8.12.5–6); Lycophron's Cassandra predicts that Penelope will “empty out” Odysseus's house by “prostituting herself” (κασωρεύουσα κοιτανεῖ δόμους, *Alexandra* 772);⁶⁰ and the *Epitome* of Apollodorus's *Bibliotheca* refers to multiple traditions in which she was seduced by a specific suitor, including Amphinomus or Antinous (7.38–39). Moreover, already in the *Telegony*, Penelope marries Telegonus after he has killed his father, Odysseus, an uncomfortably Oedipal move (argumentum 4b; fragment 6 *GEF*).⁶¹

Of course, all of these accounts may be post-Homeric innovations, mischievous and counter-cultural reworkings of the *Odyssey*'s image of a loyal and loving spouse. But it has also been argued that they reflect earlier pre-Homeric

58 See Haldane 1968: 23–25, who sifts the conflicting testimony regarding Pan's paternity (cf. Roscher 1894) and follows Timpanaro's argument that Pindar specified Hermes, not Apollo (1957: 184–187 = 1978: 480–486; cf. Snell 1964: 94). Later mentions of this Hermes tradition include Theocritus *Palatine Anthology* 15.21.1–2, 15; Cicero *De natura deorum* 3.22.56; Apollodorus *Epitome* 7.38; cf. too Mactoux 1975: 219–230.

59 See Okin 1980: 105–107; cf. too scholia on Theocritus *Idyll* 1.3/4c, 7.109/110b–c; scholia on Oppian *Halieutica* 3.15; Servius Danielis on Vergil *Aeneid* 2.44; Pseudo-Nonnus, *Commentaries* 4.40. The same etymological connection is already evoked in the *Homeric Hymn to Pan*, although with a different explanation (Πάνα δέ μιν καλέεσκον, ὅτι φρένα πᾶσιν ἔτερψε, 19.47).

60 The scholia ad loc. gloss κασωρεύουσα as πορνεύουσα (“being a prostitute”). Cf. Hesychius ε 1257: ἐκασώρευον· περιεφοίτων, ἐπόρνευον. For the sexual connotation of φοιτάω, see *LSJ* s. v. 3.

61 For the *Odyssey*'s possible awareness of and engagement with the *Telegony* tradition, see Tsagalis 2008: 63–90; Arft 2019; Burgess 2019b.

traditions which the *Odyssey* itself is at pains to “de-authorize,” especially through the opening portrayal of Hermes as a critic of Aegisthus’s adultery and a firm ally of Odysseus, negating his role as a potential rival for Penelope.⁶² Such a suggestion can be no more than an attractive possibility on available evidence, but if we entertain it as such, we may be able to discern further point in Homer’s comparison of Penelope to the women of the *Catalogue*. Rather than simply signifying Penelope’s pre-eminence, this insistent celebration of her excellence may also attempt to suppress alternative traditions in which she was no such paragon of virtue. If so, Homer does not tackle such problematic traditions head-on but rather skirts round them by positioning Penelope against the infidelity and sexual transgressions of other mythical women. The intertextual *agōn* that we have been tracing here may thus in fact be formed of two separate competitive moves: on the one hand, Homer explicitly marks Penelope’s superiority to the women of the *Catalogue*; on the other hand, he may also implicitly silence and suppress uncomfortable Penelopean alternatives. Through these two complementary processes, the Odyssean Penelope’s excellence would resound all the more definitively.

Conclusions: The *Agōn* Expanded

We have seen how the poet of the *Odyssey* agonistically positions his poem against a larger tradition of other songs, asserting the primacy of Penelope and—by extension—his own poem that celebrates her. This agonistic posturing is not an isolated moment but rather recurs at key points throughout the epic, reinforcing Penelope’s superiority (and perhaps also pointedly suppressing alternative traditions of Penelopean infidelity). Over the course of the poem, the Ithacan queen almost becomes an embodiment of the *Odyssey* itself, as her intimate association with weaving and cunning aligns her closely with the poet’s own production of song (cf. Clayton 2004; Hernández 2008).

To close, I would like to expand this analysis in two further directions: first, to suggest that this intertextual *agōn* is not solely limited to the character of Penelope in the *Odyssey*; and second, to chart one aspect of its *Nachleben* in later Greek culture.

First, this intertextual *agōn* extends beyond Penelope and the women of the *Catalogue* to embrace its male participants. The Odyssean suitors are strongly

62 Marks 2008: 25–30; cf. Fredricksmeyer 1997: 494–495. See too Matoux 1975: 225 on the various parallels between Odysseus and Hermes.

associated with catalogic poetry themselves: they woo Penelope like Helen's suitors in the *Catalogue* (fragments 196–204 M-W) and are themselves frequently presented in list-form (*Odyssey* 16.245–253, 18.291–301, 22.241–243, 265–268, 283–284; cf. Sammons 2010: 197–204). Like the heroines of myth, they too stand as representatives of catalogic tradition. Yet just as Tyro, Alcmene, and Mycene cannot compete with Penelope, so too do the suitors ultimately prove no match for Odysseus and his household by the end of the poem. Indeed, the suitors' inferiority may also be telegraphed earlier in the epic through their leader's less successful engagement with catalogic tradition. We have already noted Antinous's limited grasp of the implications of his catalogic reference in *Odyssey* 2, which is far less skillful than Telemachus's veiled and allusive back-reference in *Odyssey* 21. But even at a more basic level, his access to such traditions is inferior to Odysseus's own: Antinous relies on distant and indirect hearsay for his knowledge of these catalogic women (ἀκούομεν, 2.118), whereas Odysseus sees them and talks with them directly in the *Nekyia*. Indeed, the verb ἵδον (“I saw”) repeatedly punctuates Odysseus's account, almost a direct replacement for catalogue poetry's repeated generic tag of ἢ οἷη (*Odyssey* 11.235, 260, 266, 271, 321, 326, 329). Within epic poetry's broader prioritization of direct autopsy over indirect transmission (cf. Ford 1992: 57–67), Odysseus's eye-witness encounters set him above Antinous in his mastery of tradition.⁶³ Odysseus outdoes the catalogic Antinous just as Penelope outshines the catalogic women. Both the men and the women of Odysseus's family ultimately surpass the emblematic representatives of the *Catalogue of Women*. Crucially, as we have seen, they are all united by their possession of κέρδεα.

Secondly, we should note that this agonistic strategy had a long afterlife in antiquity, as fictional and real-life women continued to be compared with exemplars of the mythical past. In the post-Homeric tradition, however, Penelope transitioned from the tenor to the vehicle of such comparisons, acting as a recurring model of female excellence in a wide variety of genres.⁶⁴ Richard Hunter has highlighted how Penelope “could function as a kind of shorthand for commemorating the merits of a dead wife” in sepulchral epigram, where she is repeatedly invoked as a paradigm and foil (2018: 7; cf. Peek 1965). So, for exam-

63 Odysseus's privileged knowledge also aligns him with epic poets, whose relationship with the Muses provides access to information beyond mere hearsay; see Bakker 2013: 8–10 for the connection between Odysseus's catalogue of heroines and the *Iliad*'s catalogue of ships. Cf. esp. *Iliad* 2.485–486: the Muses' knowledge is derived from their physical presence (πάρεσσε), like Odysseus's in the Underworld; and without the Muses, “we only hear rumor” (κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν), like Antinous (ἀκούομεν, 2.118).

64 See, for example, Harrison 1988 on Horace *Odes* 3.7; Nelson 2020 on Theocritus *Idyll* 2.

ple, a certain Severa from imperial Nicaea in Bithynia will prove “more sung about than Penelope of old” (τῆς πρὶν Πηνελόπης ... ἀοιδότερην, *Palatine Anthology* 15.8.6 = 09/05/08 Merkelbach-Stauber), a claim that reworks Agamemnon’s Underworld prediction of Penelope’s promised fame (*Odyssey* 24.192–198) and asserts Penelope’s priority (πρὶν), as Antinous did that of his female *comparanda* (παλαιῶν, πάρος, 2.118, 119). To Hunter’s examples, we should also add an imperial epigram from second-century CE Carales, modern-day Cagliari (6.58–67 Cugusi = 2005.22–31 Peek):

μηκ[έτ]ι Πηνελόπην] μηδ’ Ε[ὐά]δν[ην κελαδεῖτε
 τῇ[ν ποτε σὺν Καπα]νεῖ φ[λογ]μὸν [ἐσαλαμμένη]ν,
 μηδ’] ἔτι [Λαοδάμεια]ν, ἔβ[η .] ἀκόλο[υθος ἀπ’ οἴκ]ων
 υἱ[ῶ τῶ Ἰφικλέο]ς μ[υρ]αμένη [δάκρυσιν·
 σιγάσθ[ω] δ’ [Ἄλ]κη[στ]ις, ἐφ’ ἣ λῖνα προ[.....]αν
 αἰ δις [ἐ]π’ Ἀδμ[ήτ]ω ν[ή]ματ[α κ]λωσά[μεναι·
 τ]ὰς πο[λ]υθρυλ[ήτο]υ[ς] ἡρῶ[ίδα]ς, ἃς ὁ π[αλαιός
 αἰ]ώ[ν] ἀθανά[τοι]ς ἐ[γκατέ]γραψε χρόνοις,
 ὕ[μν]ον ἐν ὁ[ψι]γόν[οισιν Ἀ]τίλια, ἣ [π]ρὸ Φιλίπ[που
 ἀνδρὸς [ς ἀ]πιστ[ο]τάτ[η]ν μοῖρ[α]ν ἐπευ[ξ]αμ[ένη].

No longer sing of Penelope or Euadne, who once mounted the pyre⁶⁵ alongside Capaneus, nor even of Laodameia, who accompanied the son of Iphiclus from their home, shedding tears. And let Alcestis’s name lie silent, she for whom the Fates first unraveled(?)⁶⁶ the threads of destiny, after they had spun them twice for Admetus. These much-celebrated heroines, whom ancient time⁶⁷ has inscribed in eternity, Atilia surpasses among the late-born, she who prayed for a most unbelievable fate in place of her husband Philippus.

The author of this epigram asserts the superiority of Atilia Pomptilla over exemplary women of the mythical past, reworking Antinous’s own Odyssean rhetoric. Not only does the poet list these women in catalogue form but he also describes them as “much-talked-of heroines” (τὰς πο[λ]υθρυλ[ήτο]υ[ς] ἡρῶ[ίδα]ς, 64), inscribed in eternity by “ancient time” (ὁ π[αλαιός | αἰ]ώ[ν], 64–

65 φ[λογ]μὸν evokes not only the flames of the thunderbolt by which Euadne died but also her flames of love (cf. *LSJ* s. v. 3 “metaph., *heat of passion*”).

66 Translating Kaibel and Peek’s πρῶ[τον] ἔλυσ[αν].

67 Or “long time,” if we follow Magnelli 2007: 37–38 in reading π[ερ]ισσός] at the end of verse 28.

65), expressions which mark their traditionality, just like Antinous's appeals to hearsay and antiquity.⁶⁸ Given this larger echo of the *Odyssey*, it is perhaps no surprise that Penelope seems to have topped the list of *comparanda*.⁶⁹ The *Odyssey*'s competitive positioning of its female heroine proved a recurring pattern to elevate women of the present. But however pre-eminent Homer's Penelope may have been, she was eventually subsumed within a wider throng of past female exemplars.

Appendix

The women of the Odyssean and Hesiodic catalogues

Name	<i>Odyssey</i>	Hesiod fragments	Other early epic sources
1. Tyro	11.235–259	30.24–42 M-W [27 M, 20 H] 31 M-W [30 M, 24 H] 32 M-W [29 M, 23 H] 38 M-W [37 M] 157 M	
2. Antiope	11.260–265	181 M-W [124 M, 87 H] 182 M-W [125 M] 183 M-W [126 M]	<i>Cypria</i> argumentum 4b <i>GEF</i> Asius fragment 1 <i>GEF</i>
3. Alcmene	11.266–268	193.19–20 M-W [136 M, 90 H] 195.8–63 M-W [138 M, 91 H = <i>Scutum</i> 1–56] 248 M-W [187a M, <i>Meg. Ēh.</i> 10 H] 249 M-W [187b M, <i>Meg. Ēh.</i> 11 H]	<i>Iliad</i> 14.323, 19.99, 19.119 <i>Theogony</i> 526, 943, 950 <i>Scutum</i> 1–56, 86–89, 467 <i>Homeric Hymn</i> 15.3 Asius fragment 4 <i>GEF</i>
4. Megara	11.269–270	?	<i>Cypria</i> argumentum 4b <i>GEF</i> Panyassis fragment 1 <i>GEF</i>
5. Epicaste	11.271–280	? ⁷⁰	<i>Cypria</i> argumentum 4b <i>GEF</i> <i>Oedipodea</i> fragment 1 <i>GEF</i>

68 For the verb θρυλέω (“chatter”) functioning as an “Alexandrian footnote,” see O’Connell 2018: 254–256 on θρύλησθα in Sappho’s Brothers Poem.

69 Πηνελόπην is a supplement in the first verse but a very plausible one: another epigram from the same location describes Attilia Pomptilla as περίφρων (6.47 Cugusi), Penelope’s archetypal epic epithet (*Odyssey* 1.329, 4.787, etc.): Coppola 1931: 413; Cugusi 2003: 138.

70 Oedipus’s funeral is mentioned in the *Catalogue* (fragment 192 M-W [135 M], fragment 193.4 M-W [136 M]), although he there seems to be the husband of Astymedusa (his third

The women of the Odyssean and Hesiodic catalogues (*cont.*)

Name	<i>Odyssey</i>	Hesiod fragments	Other early epic sources
6. Chloris	11.281–297	33a.1–12 M-W [31 M, 25 H] 37.1–16 M-W [35 M, 27 H]	
7. Leda	11.298–304	23a.7–10 M-W [19 M, 15 H] 24 M-W [21 M]	<i>Cypria</i> fragment 11 <i>GEF</i> <i>Homeric Hymn</i> 17.3–4, 33.2 Eumelus fragment 25 <i>GEF</i> Asius fragment 6 <i>GEF</i>
8. Iphimedeia	11.305–320	19 M-W [16 M] 20 M-W [17 M] 21 M-W [9 H] 157 M	[<i>Iliad</i> 5.385–391: Otus and Ephialtes]
9. Phaedra	11.321	? ⁷¹	<i>Theseis</i> fragment 1 <i>GEF</i>
10. Procris	11.321	332 M-W [282 M]	
11. Ariadne	11.321–325	147 M-W [243 M] 298 M-W [235a–b M]	<i>Iliad</i> 18.592 <i>Theogony</i> 947–949 <i>Cypria</i> argumentum 4b <i>GEF</i>
12. Maera	11.326	?	<i>Nostoi</i> fragment 5 <i>GEF</i>
13. Clymene	11.326	62 M-W [61 M] 261a M	<i>Nostoi</i> fragment 4 <i>GEF</i>
14. Eriphyle	11.326–327	?	<i>Thebaid</i> fragment 7 <i>GEF</i> Asius fragment 4 <i>GEF</i>

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wife: cf. Pherecydes fragment 95 *EGM*; West 1985: 110–111; Fowler 2013: 402–408); for his funeral, cf. too *Iliad* 23.679–680.

71 According to Athenaeus, “Hesiod” mentioned a number of Theseus’s wives (fragment 147 M-W [243 M]); Athenaeus does not name Phaedra explicitly, but West 1985: 108 suspects that she might have featured.

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