

Penelope's autobiography: *homophrosune*, female heroism, and Atwoodian invention in *the Penelopiad*

- A. "Daughters of Naiads were a dime a dozen in those days, the place was crawling with them." (7)
- B. "plain-Jane Penelope" (37); "at best only second prize" (35); "radiant" Helen (37).
- C. "My mother, like all Naiads, was beautiful, but chilly at heart. She had waving hair and dimples, and rippling laughter. She was elusive. When I was little I often tried to throw my arms around her, but she had a habit of sliding away." (10-11)
- D. "short attention span and rapidly changing emotions" (11)
- E. "As for my mother, she'd stopped swimming around like a porpoise long enough to attend my wedding, for which I was less grateful than I ought to have been. There she sat on her throne beside my father, robed in cool blue, a small puddle gathering at her feet." (43)
- F. "*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 goes 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 around it. Water does.*" (43)
- G. "When I was quite young my father ordered me to be thrown into the sea." (7)
- H. "I never knew exactly why, during my lifetime, but now I suspect he'd been told by an oracle that I would weave his shroud. Possibly he thought that if he killed me first, his shroud would never be woven and he would live forever....But he must have misheard, or else the oracle herself misheard – the gods often mumble – because it was not his shroud that was at issue, but my father-in-law's shroud. If that was the prophecy it was a true one, and indeed the weaving of this particular shroud proved a great convenience to me later on in my life." (7-8)
- I. "There was something in the way Odysseus told the story that made me suspect there was more to it. Why had the boar savaged Odysseus, but not the others? Had they known where the boar was hiding out, had they led him into a trap?"
- "I liked to think so. I liked to think I had something in common with my husband: both of us had almost been destroyed in our youth by family members. All the more reason that we should stick together and not be too quick to trust others" (47)
- J. "It was stupid of Icarus to try to drown the daughter of a Naiad, however....Although we are not such good swimmers as our mothers, we do have a way of floating, and we're well connected among the fish and seabirds. A flock of purple-striped ducks came to my rescue and towed me ashore." (9)
- K. "Possibly I had an aversion to the ocean due to my childhood experience, or possibly the sea-god Poseidon was still annoyed by his failure to devour me." (55)

- L. “mistrust of other people’s intentions” (9); “a child who learned early the virtues – if such they are – of self-sufficiency” (11)
- M. “duck was my new nickname” (10)
- N. “‘Hello there, little cousin duck,’ she said to me with her usual affable condescension” (153); “‘I think Odysseus would make a very suitable husband for our little duckie....She and Odysseus are two of a kind. They both have such short legs.’” (33)
- O. In return for his story about the scar, I told Odysseus my own story about almost drowning and being rescued by ducks. He was interested in it, and asked me questions about it, and was sympathetic – everything you would wish a listener to be. ‘My poor duckling,’ he said, stroking me. ‘Don’t worry. I would never throw such a precious girl into the ocean.’” (48)
- P. It was then – so the rumour goes – that he struck the bargain with Tyndareus: in return for assuring a peaceful and very profitable wedding for the radiant Helen, Odysseus would get plain-Jane Penelope.” (36-37)
- Q. “Odysseus cheated and won the race. I saw Helen smiling maliciously as she watched the marriage rites. She thought I was being pawned off on an uncouth dolt who would haul me off to a dreary backwater, and she was not displeased.” (37-38)
- R. “But he wasn’t looking at me, and neither was anyone else. They were all staring at Helen, who was dispensing dazzling smiles right and left, not missing a single man. She had a way of smiling that made each of them feel that secretly she was in love with him alone.” (42)
- S. “She thought she could do anything she wanted, just like the gods from whom – she was convinced – she was descended.” (76)
- “The sad fact is that people had praised her so often and lavished her with so many gifts and adjectives that it had turned her head.” (75-76)
- “wicked” (78); “poison on legs” (79); “cousin Helen, Helen the lovely, Helen the septic bitch, root cause of all my misfortunes” (131)
- T. “He was always so plausible. Many people have believed that his version of events was the true one, give or take a few murders, a few beautiful seductresses, a few one-eyed monsters. Even I believed him, from time to time. I knew he was tricky and a liar, I just didn’t think he would play his tricks and try out his lies on me. Hadn’t I been faithful? Hadn’t I waited, and waited, and waited, despite the temptation – almost the compulsion – to do otherwise?” (2)
- U. “...if you can find a minor rascal of some sort – a pickpocket, a stockbroker, a small-time pimp. Like a lot of goody-goody girls, I was always secretly attracted to men of that kind” (16)
- V. “Amphinomus usually won on the grounds of good manners, although he was far from being the most vigorous. I have to admit that I occasionally daydreamed about which one I would rather go to bed with, if it came to that.” (105)

- W. “I feel I must address the various items of slanderous gossip that have been going the rounds for the past two or three thousand years....The charges concern my sexual conduct. It is alleged, for example, that I slept with Amphinomous, the politest of the suitors.” (143)
- X. “These stories are completely untrue. Many have said that there’s no smoke without fire, but that is a fatuous argument.” (143)
- “The songs say I found his conversation agreeable, or more agreeable than that of the others, and this is true; but it’s a long jump from there into bed. It’s also true that I led the Suitors on and made private promises to some of them, but this was a matter of policy.” (143)
- Y. “We took up our old habits of story-telling. Odysseus told me...the nobler versions,...rather than the more sordid ones...He recounted the many lies he’d invented, the false names...the fraudulent life histories he’d concocted...In my turn, I related the tale of the Suitors, and my trick...and my deceitful encouragings...and the skillful ways in which I’d misdirected them...The two of us were – by our own admission – proficient and shameless liars of long standing. It’s a wonder either one of us believed a word the other said. But we did. Or so we told each other.” (172-173)

Z. Odysseus the liar in Homer’s *Odyssey*:

1. (7.305-306) Odysseus lies to Alkinoos, claims that it was his idea to follow Nausikaa rather than walk beside her; although he is protecting her reputation, he lies.
2. (9.283-285) He tells Polyphemos that his ship was destroyed by Poseidon.
3. (9.187-199) His initial description of Polyphemos as “a monstrous man who tended his flocks / far off and did not associate with others / but apart from them knew only his lawless ways” is suspect, since we know that when Polyphemos cries out for help, all the other Cyclopes gather around quickly to ask whether he was alright (9.401-406).
4. (13.256-286) He lies to Athena, concocting an identity and travels; she is amused and admires his lie.
5. (14.192-359) He lies to Eumaios, to persuade him that Odysseus will soon return (Eumaios remains skeptical).
6. (17.419-444) He lies to Antinoos, to test his character.
7. (19.172-202) He lies to Penelope, when he invents the story that he is from Crete and his name is Aethon, and again (237-243) when he describes the cloak she made for Odysseus and claims not to know where it came from or whether he wore it at home.
8. (24.265-314) He lies to Laertes, telling him a tale about playing host to Odysseus and calling himself Eperitos.

Odysseus the liar in Atwood’s *Penelopiad*:

1. “What a fool he made of me, some say. It was a specialty of his: making fools. He got away with everything, which is another of his specialities: getting away.” (2)

2. “He was always so plausible...I even believed him, from time to time. I knew he was tricky and a liar, I just didn’t think he would play his tricks and try out his lies on me.” (2)
3. “Of course I had inklings, about his slipperiness, his wiliness, his foxiness, his – how can I put this? – his unscrupulousness, but I turned a blind eye.” (3)
4. “The other young men made jokes about him – ‘Don’t gamble with Odysseus, the friend of Hermes,’ they said. ‘You’ll never win.’ This was like saying he was a cheat and a thief.” (31)
5. “Thus I missed the race itself. Odysseus won it. He cheated, as I later learned.” (35)
6. “Whatever was behind it, Odysseus cheated and won the race.” (37)
7. “Even my father, King Icarius...suspected he’d had a trick played on him by Tyndareus and Odysseus, he was almost sure they’d cheated, but he couldn’t figure out how they’d done it.” (41)
8. Odysseus himself did not get drunk. He had a way of appearing to drink a lot without actually doing it. He told me later that if a man lives by his wits, as he did, he needs to have those wits always at hand and kept sharp.” (41)
9. “...Odysseus took me by the hand and sat me down on the bed. ‘forget everything you’ve been told,’ he whispered. ‘I’m not going to hurt you, or not very much. But it would help us both if you could pretend. I’ve been told you’re a clever girl. Do you think you could manage a few screams? That will satisfy them – they’re listening at the door...’” (44)
10. “This was one of his great secrets as a persuader – he could convince another person that the two of them together faced a common obstacle, and that they needed to join forces in order to overcome it. He could draw almost any listener into a collaboration, a little conspiracy of his own making. Nobody could do this better than he: for once, the stories don’t lie.” (45)
11. “As I’ve already mentioned, his grandfather was Autolycus, who claimed the god Hermes was his father. That may have been a way of saying that he was a crafty old thief, cheat, and liar, and that luck favoured him in these kinds of activities.” (46)
12. [Anticleia] “had been seduced by Sisyphus, who was the true father of Odysseus....was a man so tricky he was said to have cheated Death twice.” (46)
13. “So if we admit the rumour about Anticleia’s infidelity, Odysseus had crafty and unscrupulous men on two of the main branches of his family tree.” (46-47)