

### Penelope's Final Dream? *Odyssey* 23.1-9

Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* contain several examples of dreams, some of which are very memorable and moving. In addition to larger studies of dreams in antiquity (Kessels, 1978; Näf, 2004), the bulk of research on dreams in the *Odyssey* has, naturally enough, focused on the somewhat baffling dream (about the eagle and the pet geese) that Penelope recounts to the disguised Odysseus (19.508-88). Much has been made of the way this dream may offer us an entrée to Penelope's innermost thoughts, whether her sorrow over the slaughtered geese represents her own repressed or at least unrecognized pleasure in the ardent attentions of her youthful suitors, whether she recognizes Odysseus in the beggar, etc (Harsh, 1950; Rankin, 1962; Russo, 1982; Katz, 1991; Latacz, 1992; Doherty, 1995; Rozokoki, 2001; etc.). There is one dream-like scene, however, which has been largely overlooked in the analysis of Penelope's emotions and attitude toward Odysseus' possible return. Eurycleia, after the *Mnesterophonia*, rushes upstairs to announce to her mistress the happy news (23.1-9). I termed this scene dream-like because of our poet's use of a surprising formula to describe Eurycleia's stance when she delivers her good news. We hear that Eurycleia stands over/above Penelope's head when she delivers this message (23.4):  $\sigma\tau\eta\ \delta\prime\ \acute{\alpha}\rho\prime\ \acute{\upsilon}\pi\epsilon\rho\ \kappa\epsilon\phi\alpha\lambda\eta\varsigma\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \mu\iota\nu\ \pi\rho\delta\varsigma\ \mu\tilde{\upsilon}\theta\omicron\nu\ \xi\epsilon\iota\pi\epsilon\nu$ . This line is, in fact, a recurring formula. It appears four other times in Homeric epic (*Iliad* 23.68, 24.682; *Odyssey* 4.803, 6.21), and in each of these instances either a god or an apparition addresses the sleeper. What is so striking here, however, is that 23.4 does not introduce a dream. This has not gone unnoticed. Kessels (1978), in her study on dreams, discusses this formula and notes its appearance here, but she states that such a line is clearly not used in dreams alone. But, as mentioned above, no other example of such an introductory formula occurs in a non-dream sequence, and Kessels' simple dismissal does not address the issue. Others have noted some

inherent pathos and even irony in the dream-like language (Austin, 1975; Lowenstam, 1993; Ahl and Roisman, 1996; Saïd, 2011), with which I would agree, but no one appears to have addressed directly the implications of the formulaic nature of this line and what it adds to the characterization of Penelope moments before she is to meet Odysseus face to face. I posit that the *Odyssey* poet intentionally adapts this formula to a non-dream scene to further add to the aura of unreality and perhaps apprehension that Penelope now feels about the real possibility of Odysseus' return. She has been awaiting this moment for twenty years, and now, suddenly, she has been overcome with numerous signs that he may actually be close at hand. And for Penelope, who has known Odysseus in marriage for a mere fraction of the time that he has been gone, is the dream better than the waking reality? The only image she has of him is how he looked when he left for Troy (Book 20.88-90); he was then a young man, and she a young bride. Penelope also hesitates and appears not so eager to meet this long lost husband (23.93-5; Gregory, 1996). What Eurycleia tells her mistress in 23.1-9 is the very stuff of Penelope's dreams, but this is now also reality. Penelope's last 'dream', then, sets the stage for the unfolding of the final recognition, but does so with a hint of the ambiguous nature of this moment for our faithful Penelope.

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