

Penelope “Dreamer”: Homeric Exceptions to the Dream Type-Scene

This paper shows that Penelope’s dream of the geese and the eagle (Od.19.534-50) is presented not as a naturalistic dream, but as a story similar to the fictionalized dream of Odysseus in *Od.*14.495-506. Most interpreters have read Penelope’s dream according to the Freudian idea of wish-fulfillment (Kessels, Russo), but several scholars (Oppenheim, Bar, Flannery-Dailey) have shown that Homer’s dream-scenes share in a larger Near Eastern tradition that governs how dream narration operates in literature. On this basis, Morris has argued that Penelope’s dream is best read in terms of the dream type-scene. In this paper, I build on Morris’ findings to argue that Penelope’s dream narration deviates from the norm in such an extreme fashion that it should not be regarded as a dream at all, but instead as a fiction constructed by Penelope in order to reveal her knowledge in a way that only Odysseus will recognize.

Out of five Iliadic and six Odyssean dream narratives, all but two exhibit the expected scene requirements. The only exceptions are Odysseus’ fictional dream employed within a tale told to Eumaius in *Od.*14, which makes only the slightest nod to the conventions of the scene, and Penelope’s dream in *Od.*19, which is entirely without conventional elements. Odysseus’ “dream” is clearly an invention and is meant to be recognized as such by the poem’s audience. After this “dream,” the next one to occur in the poem is that of Penelope. By following Odysseus’ false “dream” and by going still farther in dispensing with the identifying elements of the dream type-scene, the narrative signals to the audience that Penelope is not, in fact, relating an “actual” dream (i.e. a dream that Penelope had within the fiction of the poem), but that she is instead telling a story that she has invented and that she disguises as a dream so that Odysseus alone will understand her.

Homer’s audience was one for whom subtle manipulation of formulae could have great impact, and this paper shows how one variety of that – deviation from the conventions of the dream-scene – reveals another manifestation of the familiar like-mindedness of Penelope and Odysseus: both of them are artful storytellers who, like the poet himself, can mold formulae to force action.

Preliminary Bibliography

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