

Fabrications of Self: Identity Formation in the *Odyssey*

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Abstract: *This interpretation of the Odyssey challenges conventional readings in a way that recaptures the strangeness in a text that has been colonized by interpretative strategies, interpretations that impose certain cultural and gendered stereotypes. My reading inverts and subverts some of these stereotypes, without claiming to reveal, or aiming to establish, true identities. Rather, my point is that identities are unstable and unpredictable; the main characters in the Odyssey can be understood best by analysing their characteristic style of dealing with these uncertainties. In this light, Odysseus appears as much less stable and much less 'in control' than in standard readings. His presumed, and famed, autonomy is shown to be largely a product of self-deception, deriving from an inability to confront himself. The women in the Odyssey, on the other hand, are stronger characters, both less helpless, and more helpful, than standard readings allow for. Calypso and Circe play a positive role in liberating and educating Odysseus. Penelope, for her part, turns out to be involved in a much more subtle and elusive form of self-fabrication than Odysseus. Rather than applying stereotypes of 'cunning' or 'faithful', we should understand both Odysseus' and Penelope's actions as the product of their own idiosyncratic way of dealing with contingency, within the bounds set by cultural and natural circumstance.*

Homer's tale is a temporal category floating, so to speak, on time, always longing to make itself present (Paz, 1956, p. 186).

Introduction: Identity Formation and the *Odyssey*

After many trials and tribulations, following the Greek victory in the Trojan war, the resourceful hero Odysseus finally returns to Ithaca. There his wife, Penelope, has been waiting for twenty years, surrounded by shameless suitors. Disguised as beggar, Odysseus enters his own palace. His true identity remains shrouded until after the competition with the bow; Odysseus then manages to kill all the suitors. Penelope overcomes her residual distrustful hesitation through her clever trick with the bed. Both are then happily reunited.

These are some of the highlights traditionally brought out in the *Odyssey*. They describe the story at its simplest, filled with stereotypes of love, war and adventure. Stereotypes of persons abound especially: the resourceful hero, the faithful wife. In my reading of the *Odyssey*, I will dismantle such stereotypes of fixed identities to reveal complex and fragile processes of psychological development. Using Odysseus and Penelope as case studies, I will describe and analyse elements from their stories as indicative of both personal and universal dimensions of identity formation.

Inevitably, given everything that has happened to them during twenty years, both Penelope and Odysseus have been subject to processes of psychological change. The most fascinating aspect of the *Odyssey* is how the identities of both are expressed in the way they deal with powerful alienating forces. I will therefore read the *Odyssey* as a story about the dynamics of psychological settling and unsettling. My aim is to show that both Penelope and Odysseus develop their identity in a particular, personal style. They deal with favourable as well as adverse circumstances, with suffering and anxiety, with hope and fear, in their own, very personal way. Both personality and contingency play a decisive role in identity formation. My analysis of the *Odyssey* brings out how these factors can explain differences as well as similarities in Odysseus's and Penelope's actions. Both act and react in their own way, spurred both by cultural and natural circumstance, and by the force of their own identity. It is through appreciation of the largely uncertain and unpredictable mix of these ingredients, rather than through stereotypes of morality or gender, that we should understand the actions of the protagonists. And, needless to say, those of ourselves in daily life.

The first section deals with the question of how to read the *Odyssey* today — a reading that gets rid of stereotypes of love, war, gender and adventure. I will propose alternative readings for several key passages from the *Odyssey*, also referring to other modern 'rereadings' of the story. The second section sketches the conceptual framework for the analysis of identity. In this framework, conscious or 'experiential', and unconscious or 'structural' elements of identity are brought together.

This view on identity and its constituent elements is found to be represented in the *Odyssey* through the metaphor of *weaving*. Identity is something woven, and as specialists in weaving, women play a central role in identity formation. Weaving thus forms the female counterpart to the male activity of adventuring in the *Odyssey*. The remaining sections analyse the action in the *Odyssey* from this perspective. Sections four and five discuss, respectively, Odysseus' and Penelope's identity struggles during Odysseus' absence from Ithaca, describing both the similarities and the differences in their respective 'fabrications of self'. Section six finally analyses how this struggle is continued, transformed and 'resolved' after Odysseus' return.

Modern Perspectives on the *Odyssey*

Although the *Odyssey* is one of the oldest texts we possess, it is quite easy to read. Deceptively easy, in fact, as is attested by the fairy tale nature of the common interpretation I alluded to. A less naive reading requires an understanding of events that is less naive and more imaginative, using insights from classical studies, philosophy, and cultural studies. In this first section, I will discuss some of the main aspects of the *Odyssey* that require reinterpretation before meaningful insights on identity formation can be expected to arise. In doing so, I will also comment on some prominent, contemporary re-readings of the *Odyssey*.

First, there is the matter of the gods. They play an important role in the *Odyssey*, but it is a confused and confusing one. Some of them are said to determine an 'immutable course of things'. Others hinder or help human beings, and therefore inevitably become involved with them — even love or desire them. Still others merely argue amongst themselves, or have inconsequential fun ('homeric laughter'). To fit them in our modern, post-enlightenment universe, we will have to find plausible present-day interpretations of what the homeric god-discourse is about.

Some of the gods' decisions seem completely inaccessible to human comprehension. Take for instance what happens to Odysseus and his men on Sicily, the isle of Hyperion the sun-god. They have just dealt with the Sirens, and passed through Scylla and Charybdis. Physically and emotionally exhausted they reach Sicily, where well-fed cattle abound. Odysseus, however, forbids his men to slaughter them. After starving for a month the men, like Job, revolt; they defy the inscrutable command. Hyperion then punishes them by letting them perish in a storm at sea; only Odysseus is saved. This ordeal seems cruel and senseless. What meaning can a divine order have, if we can only infer its existence from the death sentences it apparently pronounces on people?

To answer this question even partially requires a huge metaphysical shift, undertaken only millennia later by Immanuel Kant. Kant confirmed that divine or natural order is inaccessible to human understanding, but he showed this to be the precondition of human freedom rather than its obstacle. Epistemological limitation makes for practical capacity. From then on, command and punishment can come from human beings only. Either Odysseus' men should have had the opportunity to understand the moral law they were subjected to, or their death must be considered purely contingent, an 'act of god' in the modern sense.

Most divine behaviour in Homer's narrative universe is more palatable than Hyperion's, even if the acting gods do not take human shape. Think for instance of the passage through Scylla and Charybdis. So horrible is the experience, that Odysseus later describes it to the Phaeacians as 'the most piteous sight of my whole journey' (Od 12, 258). Its horrendousness notwithstanding, the story has entered modern consciousness as expressing a common existential dilemma, maybe even the most typical one: the necessity of a choice between two evils — although usually with the hope of being able to steer a middle course between them. We can do without gods here also, trusting in our own faculty of judgement.

Other divine interventions appear to us as mere contingencies, dressed up with fanciful superhuman motives. Poseidon's stratagems to wreck Odysseus' return to Ithaca are typical examples. Interventions like these cause delay, and sometimes grief and hardship, but their impact is not devastating. Moreover, their anthropomorphically structured explanation, 'divine emotion', makes them amenable to human meaning. The sea, personalized as Poseidon, acts out of wrath — just as Achilles does, in the Iliad. Sometimes gods partial to humans actually appear in human shape. The best example is certainly Pallas Athena. She knows Odysseus better than he knows himself. She is so partial to him that she may almost be considered his alter-ego. She is inside, rather than outside of Odysseus' head, moving him internally rather than externally. Indeed, I feel that Athena is best understood as the persisting memory of Penelope inside Odysseus' psyche. It is this memory that often counsels him, makes him change his attitude, and spurs him on in desperate situations. Or Athena could even be considered, more generally, the 'intersubjective' memory that Odysseus, Penelope and Telemachos share. After all, she appears to, or with, all of them, in various guises, alluding to the physical or psychological state of the others, and suggesting courses of action for their eventual reunion.

The divine context of the *Odyssey* story (and that of the Iliad) is thus amenable to 'translation' into our own (post-)modern cultural universe. This makes it a meaningful exercise to try and understand human behaviour as it is represented in Homer.¹ The prime protagonist of the

Odyssey is, of course, Odysseus, and it is him we need to understand most of all. Who is he, what does he think, whom does he loves, what moves him? And, from our present day (post-)feminist perspective, the same questions arise concerning the female protagonist, Penelope. What part does she play in the story? In the remainder of this section, I will review some relevant modern views regarding this question: how to understand the *Odyssey* protagonists from our, present-day cultural perspective?

The person of Odysseus has often, in a very general sense, been thought of as the archetype of man. 'In the *Odyssey* are shown, for the first time in recorded history, in one linear narrative, the crossroads in human life, the key moments in which man expresses, restricts, and interprets himself, understands himself, acts autonomously, and goes in search of recognition for his existence' (Chazo and Chazo, 1996, p. 12). The importance of this symbolic reading lies not in a supposed uncovering of 'timeless truths about man', but in its redirection of our attention from the physical to the symbolical and psychological context in which the story unfolds. Consider the notion of a scar. Odysseus' old nurse Euryclea literally recognizes Odysseus by a physical scar. Symbolically, all people are recognized by the scars they have incurred during life. The identity formation of Penelope and Odysseus involves the recognition and negotiation of psychological scars, a difficult and often intractable affair.

The symbolic reading, however, can only discuss these problems in the most general terms. It cannot accommodate historical change in human self-perception. Nor can it account for the idiosyncratic perception of self and other that characterizes concrete, individual persons. A more historically informed interpretation of the *Odyssey* has been put forward by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. In their famous book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, they describe Odysseus' self as one typical to western, 'bourgeois' man. Their account poignantly presents the journey of the *Odyssey* as one of identity formation, including the efforts Odysseus has to make to 'save' his own identity. Identity formation is driven by the dialectic between alienation of self and attempts at self-understanding. The problem with western man, represented in the character of Odysseus, is that he is so excessively reflective. This is what enables him to restrain himself, thus creating distance between the self and contingency or context — in a word, to act autonomously. But he pays a heavy price for this ability. He alienates himself ever more from nature, even developing an antagonistic relation to it. Western bourgeois man vainly tries to dominate nature through reason, sacrificing enchantment and contingency on the altar of reason and control. Moreover, he is tempted to put excessive trust in his powers of reason. Calculation and deception become part of his nature.

Horkheimer and Adorno thus provide a valuable critique of western, 'bourgeois' rationality and its influence on identity formation. But like the symbolic reading, their account fails to capture the personal dimension of the *Odyssey* story — the story of two quite normal, idiosyncratic individuals called Penelope and Odysseus. This aspect of the *Odyssey* is caught uncannily well in James Joyce's literary masterwork *Ulysses*. This modernist novel reduces twenty agonising years of roaming the world to one uneventful day in the city of Dublin. The heroic desire for fame is replaced by ordinary people's unheroic preoccupation with daily life.

As Joyce translates the stream of exterior action into a stream of consciousness in the interior, the emphasis of the story shifts from physical to psychological matters. His rereading of the *Odyssey* expresses how all ordinary life, as given in our own consciousness and that of those around us, can be perceived as an *Odyssey*. And conversely, it makes us see how 'common' is the behaviour of the protagonists of the *Odyssey*. Their motives, drives and fears are those of ordinary human beings, not those of cardboard heroes or dummy wives. The hero Odysseus becomes an insecure, disoriented character, obsessed with his wife's fidelity. Penelope, on the other hand, is cast in a decisive role. Through Molly Bloom's famous closing monologue, Joyce arguably makes Penelope's thought the main key to the story as a whole. As Stanley Sultan notes in his study of Joyce's work, 'the conclusion of *Ulysses* is whatever happens to be the estranged wife's attitude' (Sultan, 1987, p. 419).

The deceptive nature of Odysseus and the rehabilitation of Penelope are also the main themes of a recent novel by the Italian writer Luigi Malerba, *Itaca per sempre* (1997). The novel follows most of the overt action of the reunion scenes. Its chapters, however, alternate between Odysseus' and Penelope's perspective. Furthermore, Malerba changes the psychological setting, by supposing that in fact Penelope has recognized Odysseus immediately. Given this configuration, both are led to speculate ever more, and ever more desperately, on why the other is holding back. This psychological twist give the reunion scenes a dark, disturbing and even tragic character. Discounting the awkward happy end, featuring a retired Odysseus writing his memoirs called *Ilias* and *Odyssey*, Malerba's account perceptively highlights the extent to which the action of the *Odyssey* — and possibly action in general — is propelled by fruitless speculation and misunderstanding. This includes the idea of homecoming itself, maybe the *Odyssey's* greatest illusion.

The depth of this illusion features even more prominently in Milan Kundera's most recent, *Odyssey*-inspired novel *La Ignorancia* (2000). Kundera emphasizes the disorientation, disillusionment and self-deception involved in 'returning home' after twenty years. His two protagonists, Irene and Josef, do not share a marriage but only an

ephemeral love in a distant past — as may well be have been true of Penelope and Odysseus. Furthermore, in Kundera's version, both partners undergo the experiences of exile, absence, oblivion, and nostalgia. Their reunion is disappointing, especially for her. As it turns out, he in fact hasn't recognized her at all, or so she feels. Kundera's story is therefore tragic 'all the way down', making lost identity irrecoverable. My account is slightly more optimistic than Kundera's (although more pessimistic than Malerba's), allowing for the possibility of non-purposive, unconsciously induced recognition.

In this section, I have taken the first of two preliminary steps in my project of discussing the process of identity formation in the *Odyssey*: the (re)setting of the psychological beacons for (re)reading the *Odyssey*. Following the course of this reorientation, the second section will clarify what I mean by 'identity' and 'identity formation', and in what way both themes can be said to be present in the *Odyssey*.

Identity Formation and Its Context

It is tempting to see identity formation as a 'project', a subjective effort to realize some particular form (namely, one's own) in matter, to put it in an Aristotelian way. Certainly, the *idea* of carrying out such a project is important to us. But the discussion in the first paragraph has already made clear that this road knows many pitfalls. Identity, we have seen, has to do with alienation and consequent attempts at self-understanding. Such attempts are both necessary, and necessarily flawed. They are necessary, because the drive for self-understanding forms an important part of human life, maybe even the most important part. And they are necessarily flawed, because self-transparency is unattainable for human beings.² Because of this combination, self-deception is always close at hand. One of the guiding ideas behind this article is therefore that someone's identity is to a rather large extent determined by the particular form, or style, of such self-deception.

The notion of a 'project' therefore seems too strong to characterize identity formation. A more appropriate concept is the German notion of *Entwurf*, as famously employed by Martin Heidegger. First, *Entwurf* carries the notion of *geworfen sein*, or 'thrownness'. This indicates how we are always 'sub-jected' to an antecedent and independent symbolic order. Our 'lifeplan' thus consists, to a significant degree, in adapting to circumstances and contingencies. Secondly, *Entwurf* carries the meaning of 'design', indicating that such adaptations are not completely random or indifferent. Each person adapts in a form that is specific to him or her. And thirdly, *Entwurf* carries the implication of negation ('ent-wurf'). Identity formation proceeds through negation, in the sense that a person negates his or her identity in the attempt to adapt to the outside order,

and similarly negates this order in attempting to remain ‘himself’ (or ‘herself’).

I propose to order the elements of identity formation along two dimensions: a structural and an experiential one. Both dimensions again contain two levels, a collective and an individual level. The first dimension expresses structural elements of identity formation, meaning elements that resist subjective reflection because they *determine* the way in which we reflect. Because of their resistance to reflection and conscious control, it seems appropriate to describe this dimension in terms derived from psychoanalysis. The structural elements at the collective level may be equated with what Jacques Lacan has called the ‘symbolic order’: the web of cultural relations in which I, as a speaking subject, am always involved. The individual dimension can be associated with Lacan’s ‘imaginary’: the idiosyncratic way in which each of us constructs his or her own particular illusion of wholeness, or the narcissistic illusions of the ego. This narcissism is broken through by the entrance into language, the symbolic order. This world of language however does not replace, but merely ‘covers over’ the world of the imaginary. The particularities of our very private, imaginary constructions thus always ‘show through’ in our symbolic functioning. This typical, personal ‘twist’ in our social functioning forms an important part of our identity. We might call it, in a felicitous phrase from Louis-Ferdinand Céline, ‘our own little music’.³

Thus one dimension of identity formation is unconscious. Identity is constituted through the inevitable confrontation with the symbolic order; in that sense it is impersonal, or a product of ‘power’. Yet this impersonal product also carries a very personal, idiosyncratic ‘stamp’ or twist, put on it by the inscrutable workings of the ‘imaginary’. The imaginary signifies the impossibility of fully symbolic or discursive constitution of identity. As Judith Butler notes, the imaginary is always a site where identity is contested (Butler, 1997, p. 96). Poststructuralist perspectives like Butler’s often rightly emphasize the disruptive, or even ‘subversive’ or ‘insurrectionary’ potential of the imaginary, but are not always able to relate this to particular traits or actions of individuals. To provide such a link is one of the main aims of this article — although of course, given the nature of the imaginary, such a link must always remain somewhat speculative.

But there is more to identity than just unconscious structures and processes. Accordingly, the second dimension of identity formation represents how we (consciously) *experience* identity. This second dimension ‘overlays’ the first (which in turn consists of two overlaying layers, the imaginary and the symbolic), making it personally and socially acceptable and manageable, without however erasing or fully replacing it. The individual level of this dimension is concerned with how we view and evaluate ourselves, while the collective level expresses

how we seek recognition for our particular identity from others. Recognition is thus *intersubjective*, trying to show how (the image of) the self answers to socially formed, and transformed, expectations. Personal evaluation on the other hand is subjective, or even 'intrasubjective', answering only to one's unique, personal 'expectations'.⁴

How can we transfer these analytical dimensions to Homeric reality? I propose to do so through the metaphor of *weaving*. The (Lacanian) imaginary could then be seen as a very personal motive or pattern that always shows up in our weaving, with or without our conscious perception. And I have already described the symbolic order as a 'web' of cultural relations in which we are always involved. Personal identity patterns are always carried by, and thus dependent on, many different strands that form all sorts of background patterns, in which our identity either blends in or stands out in contrast. The dimension of experience, in turn, captures our self-understanding as being interconnected by countless 'threads', or relations to others. At the subjective level, this refers to our private perception and evaluation of the degree to which the pattern of our woven identity is of our own making, a product of our own actions and thoughts. At the intersubjective level, it refers to our need to have others appreciate and recognize our subjective identity accounts.

The metaphor of weaving further captures how the 'ontology' of identity is like 'texture', a tightly woven but also open structure consisting of many strands, in which patterns and motives appear as a dialectic between 'text', con-text and even sub-text. And identity is thus like a recognizable, unique pattern of threads woven through a complex whole of social and cultural relationships. It is partly determined by the imaginary motive, partly by the 'formats' pre-provided by our 'web' of culture; and, of course, they are also affected by their articulation, the way the 'texture' is transformed into 'text'. This metaphorical model enables us better to understand how identity is both text and context, self-made as well as imposed, a fragile interaction between surface and background in a continually changing whole of threads and patterns. Identity is thus always 'in progress', always being woven and unwoven, by both internal and external forces.

Weaving is an activity undertaken throughout the *Odyssey*, typically by women (Lateiner, 1998, p. 14). It is, not by coincidence, the craft of the goddess Pallas Athena. When Odysseus arrives at Scheria, the isle of the Phaeacians, it provides a peaceful scene of women at work weaving. And Circe is also busy weaving when Odysseus and his crew arrive at her island. It is not difficult to interpret this state of affairs as a stereotype of gender relations. Women are at home weaving, while men (ad)venture abroad. And indeed the relation between Odysseus and Penelope seems static and asymmetrical. Static, because both protagonists, as individuals and partners, seem to remain fundamentally

unchanged and stable despite their twenty-year separation. Asymmetrical, because all the action and transformation is located on Odysseus' side. The stereotype is enhanced by the fact that all the male action seems to be *about* women. Odysseus' adventures are all set in the framework of *nostos*, his reunion with Penelope. During his absence, local suitors vie to become her husband. And the same is true for the Iliad, the story of the 'wrath of Achilles'. Although this story concerns a quarrel among stubborn men, its cause is a disagreement over the rightful ownership of a woman, the captured girl Briseis. More importantly, the Trojan war as a whole turns on a woman, Helena. She has allowed herself to be abducted by the Trojan Paris, and the entire Trojan war is fought in order to bring her back to her lawful husband Menelaus.

This traditional picture changes drastically, however, once we take the female activity of 'weaving' not in a literal but in a metaphorical sense, that of identity formation. It then becomes a fitting counterbalance to the male activity of adventuring (see Papadopoulou-Belmehdi, 1994). Weaving represents the psychological counterpart to adventuring: the inward, instead of the outward journey. Women sustain as much adventure, danger, and challenge as men in the *Odyssey*; only they are more concerned with the psychological than with the physical dimension of these activities. Weaving thus metaphorically becomes the female psychological counterpart to the physical male role of adventure. Either naturally or culturally, women are therefore more directly involved in identity formation than men, both of themselves and of those around them.⁵

Women are thus more interested in identity formation than men, and probably more skilful at it. But not necessarily more successful. As we saw, the elements involved in identity formation are such that they cannot easily be controlled, or shaped, at will. We have no fundamental 'control' over either the imaginary or the symbolic order at all. We can merely try to become more aware of these forces, and to understand their workings better. What we of course *can* do is style our language and behaviour to emphasize, or dissimulate, elements of our imaginary/symbolic make-up. In this article, I try to make plausible that Odysseus is mainly a dissimulator, who uses his intelligence primarily to deny or repress his fundamental make-up. Penelope is more aware of her fundamental psychological idiosyncrasies, and more subtle in her attempts to control them.

I do not want to claim, with regard to the *Odyssey* or in general, that men are more deceitful or evasive than women. This would be too general an inversion of stereotype. My aim is simply to show that there are many reasons to distrust and question stereotypes, gendered or otherwise. Although it seems likely that such a questioning, or inversion, could be applied to many of the characters in the *Odyssey*, or

for that matter the Iliad, I restrict my analysis in this article to Penelope and Odysseus, with some occasional remarks on minor characters like Circe, and the Sirens.

Styles of Identity Formation I: Deceptive Odysseus

Like Dante's *Divina Commedia*, the *Odyssey* starts with a man lost 'in the midst of life'. After finally leaving Troy, Odysseus was captured, or maybe rather captivated, by the nymph Calypso. As the story goes, Calypso lives as a solitary on her isle Ogygia; she desires to marry Odysseus so as to be delivered from her loneliness. Odysseus, however, refuses the offer, wanting to continue his *nostos*, his journey 'home'. Seven years pass. Then Pallas Athena pleads Odysseus' cause with Zeus, who sends his messenger Hermes to Ogygia, to order Odysseus' release.

Beginnings are always essentially mysterious, as they must bring forth something out of nothing. The Calypso fairy tale serves as the 'cover' for the *Odyssey's* beginning; appropriately, the name Calypso means 'I cover up', or 'I shroud in darkness'. The 'nothing' here is the seven-year stand-off between Calypso and Odysseus, a kind of limbo in which all action is suspended. Octavio Paz beautifully analysed this situation in his treatment of Richard Dadd's painting *The fairy-feller's masterstroke*: the action in the painting is frozen, the actors wait — seemingly forever — for the fairy-feller's axe to fall, breaking the ban (Paz, 1998, p 20). The 'masterstroke' that starts the *Odyssey* story is delivered by Calypso, tragically, by giving up the hope of her own delivery. By letting the axe fall on herself, she sacrifices her future with Odysseus, and gives life to the story of the *Odyssey*.

Both before and after the Ogygia interlude, Odysseus went through tortuous processes of personal development and change. He spent ten years with the Greek army before the gates of Troy, and ten years wandering between Troy and Ithaca. He has met, and left behind, many people (many, by the way, women). He has confronted many challenges and dangers, and has done much battle. Several times he was near death. In his unprecedented adventures at both land and sea, and even in the underworld, he 'boldly went where no man has gone before'. All these experiences, recounted at length in the *Odyssey*, must have had repercussions on his identity. He must have changed significantly. And if he hasn't, much must have happened to accomplish this non-change, so to speak.

Relatively much has already been written about the psychology of Odysseus. His most prominent characteristic, as it appears from these writings, is surely his cunning. While most Greek heroes appear to have clear-cut, 'straight' personalities, determining their actions in a rather direct way, Odysseus' case is different. He seems able to reconfigure his

identity, at least temporarily, when circumstances require. Usually, these are circumstances in which opposition is best coped with indirectly, through strategy, diplomacy, cunning, or downright deceit. This capacity has earned Odysseus epithets like *polytlas* (much-enduring), *polymetis* (resourceful), and *polytropos* (flexible) (e.g. Od. 5, 171; 2, 173; 1, 1). Rather than contesting that these traits are indeed characteristic of Odysseus, my aim is to show them in a different light, mainly by probing Odysseus' psychological make-up.

Let us look at some of the episodes in which Odysseus' cunning is — supposedly — revealed. The most straightforward one is the well-known passage in which Odysseus identifies himself to the cyclops Polyfemos as 'nobody' (Od. 9, 366). Odysseus here provides a rather apt description of himself, as someone without a determinate or tangible identity. Its contradictory nature suffices to confuse the cyclops, who is after all barely human, and therefore easily deceived. But it is unclear whether Odysseus himself here understands the darker implications of his own self-description — probably not, considering his compulsion to hurl his 'true' identity on the mutilated cyclops from the safety of his ship.

Considerably less gullible than the cyclops is Odysseus' opponent in the next episode, the female trickster Circe. Traditionally portrayed as a witch, she is better described as the typical 'enchanted woman'; men who meet her turn into swine. In Joyce's *Ulysses*, this translates into Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus visiting a brothel, 'like Homeric wanderers, temporarily partaking of the bestial atmosphere of Circe's den' (Gilbert, 1955, p. 20). Although this is a plausible enough everyday rendering of the episode, I prefer a psychological reading of the Circe episode. Her 'magic staff' changes the identity of men, by forcing them to take a hard look at themselves. The magic staff is like a mirror. Odysseus' men look into it, and see what they are, or rather what they have become: swine. Circe's mirror-staff brings to light the alienation and self-deception to which they are prey. Consequently, the men need a full year (!) to recover from this shocking inducement to self-search (Od. 10, 466).

Only Odysseus does not become bestialized. In the traditional, moralistic view this appears as an asset: only steadfast Odysseus holds on to humanity, while all others fall into bestiality. But we might ask whether it is not rather a liability. Odysseus, it may be argued, is unwilling, or unable, to face the beast in himself. His cunning and deceit have spared him the experiences that have affected his shipmates so dramatically; consequently, he was able to avoid the confrontation with the bitter realities of both the world and the self that his companions had gone through. This confrontation profoundly changed their identities, but his is still untouched. He did not truly have to face reality yet —

neither the reality of the world, nor that of his inner self. Circe's treatment has not caught on with him.

Possibly as punishment for his evasive behaviour and lack of self-knowledge, or as an alternative form of treatment, Odysseus' next assignment from Circe is a trip into the underworld. In symbolic terms, she forces a self-search upon him, an *Odyssey* within an *Odyssey*, this time within his own mind and his own past. On this journey, recounted in the eleventh book, he is confronted with many a ghost from his past. Not by accident, from a psychoanalytic point of view, his mother is prominent among them. But most disturbing is his meeting with Agamemnon's ghost, who tells him the bitter climax of his own homecoming: he was killed by his wife Clytemnestra upon arrival. Odysseus now realizes that his own welcome-home kiss may be the kiss of the spider woman, too. Many things at home may not be as he thinks; and Penelope may not be the woman he remembers and fantasizes about.

Thus in the underworld Odysseus is faced with unnerving truths, or possible truths, in order to force self-knowledge upon him. He must now come to terms with these unsettling thoughts and experiences. His reaction, however, is defensive and stereotypical. Like Agamemnon, he immediately exchanges the 'good wife' stereotype for the 'bad wife' stereotype, represented by Clytemnestra and Helena: both married women, the first killed her lawful husband and the second seduced other men. Thus the underworld-'therapy' certainly does not work immediately, and maybe not at all.

After emerging from the underworld, another test of his degree of self-understanding follows: the temptation of the Sirens. Famously, Odysseus lets himself be tied to the mast of his ship, to prevent being seduced by the Sirens. According to the standard philosophical interpretation of this episode, Odysseus is the first man to constrain himself in order to be free — the first person to pass the test of autonomy. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno have already pointed out that Odysseus passes this test by trickery. He did not so much honour an agreement, as take advantage of a loophole in it. Therefore he becomes the first 'disenchanted man'. The cunning person, they observe, can survive only through relinquishing his own dream; he barter's it away to the extent that he disenchant's himself and the external powers alike (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1986, pp. 65-6).

Certainly Horkheimer and Adorno are right to argue that the emergence of a new type of self, Odysseus-style, implies not only gains but also important losses for enlightened, rational western society. For my purposes however, it is most relevant to focus on the consequences of this 'tricking' for Odysseus' psychological make-up. Such consequences have been imaginatively described by Jean-Joseph Goux in his exposé on the identity consequences of a very similar trick, the one

that Oedipus pulled on the Sphinx (Goux, 1993). In the traditional view, Oedipus defeated the Sphinx by solving her riddle (and in a sense, from then on 'man' was to be the answer to all riddles). But with his clever answer, Goux argues, Oedipus did not so much solve as side-step the real confrontation with the Sphinx, which in fact entails a test for manhood, or maturity. In order to sever all ties of dependency, the aspirant must go through the ritual passage of being devoured by a monster, in order to defeat it from within. Oedipus however talks his way out of trouble, thus scoring an intellectual rather than an emotional victory. His separation from the Sphinx/mother was therefore inadequate. Oedipus, 'weak-footed but strong-minded', learned to rely on reason rather than character.

In my view, this is part of the lesson in self-understanding for which Circe sent Odysseus to Hades, and for which the passage by the Sirens was to be the test. As Circe says, 'whoever approaches in ignorance' and hears the voice of the Sirens will not return home (Od. 12, 41), quite possibly not meaning ignorance of the seductive powers of the Sirens but ignorance of self. Disappointingly, for Circe, Odysseus has not learned the lesson. Instead of approaching knowingly, he approached in deceit. He does not face the Sirens, but instead makes himself invulnerable to them. Again Odysseus manages to evade confrontation with a disturbing reality, and again his identity remains in suspense, 'on hold'.

This indeterminacy therefore does not result from a deliberate strategy on his part, as for instance Sheila Murnaghan has argued (Murnaghan, 1987). Much less is Odysseus 'using his intelligence, judgement, and inner strength to overcome obstacles and, finally, to accomplish his goal' (Schwartz, 1987, p. 37). My interpretation is also at odds with Jon Elster's view, which promotes Odysseus as the archetype of autonomy, defined as 'being weak and knowing it' (Elster, 1979, p. 36). My reading proposes that Odysseus is especially susceptible to fraud and deceit because of his weakness of character, his inclination to elusiveness and circumvention. Remember the observation by Odysseus' alter ego Athena upon his return to Ithaca: 'fraud and deceit have grown deep into your heart' (Od. 13, 296). Therefore he is weak, but doesn't know, or at least not sufficiently. Alternatively, as I have described above, there are indeed episodes in which Odysseus does 'know' his weaknesses. Circumventing the Sirens and outguessing the Sphinx are commonly taken as prudent measures expressing insight into one's weakness. But knowing one's weaknesses does not equal overcoming them. Indeed, it seems plausible that the most dramatic forms of self-deception exactly imply the assumption that intellectual efforts can compensate for emotional defects. My reading shows how Odysseus, like Oedipus, does not meet the test posed to him, but instead commits the same mistake once more.⁶

My reading suggests that Odysseus, although he may appear to be a strong, resourceful hero, in fact is a weak character, at least on the 'structural' level of his identity, as analysed above in the second section. His cleverness and cunning enable him to cover this over, avoiding painful confrontations with reality. The world and the people Odysseus encounters do not make a real impression on him, due to his structural inclination to avoid, ignore or side-step possibly unpleasant realities. This 'indeterminacy' in his identity made it impossible for others, but also for Odysseus himself, to 'get to him'. My analysis aims to show that Odysseus' success in camouflaging his identity during his journey is more an unintended consequence of a character flaw than the result of a masterfully executed strategy. What seems to be controlled and autonomous behaviour, is in fact the result of denial of reality and insufficient self-knowledge.

Styles of identity formation II: Penelope' self-analysis

And how about Penelope? The *Odyssey* does not tell us much about her. From what we can gather, she is a static, unchanging character, her identity dependent upon that of Odysseus. She stands for his never changing 'home'; secluded, she awaits the ever more unlikely return of her husband. She is described in the stereotype of Homeric verse: 'she surpasses all women in beauty, appearance, and intelligence' (Od. 18, 249). Generally, she is pictured as passive and static, the counterpoint of the active, wandering Odysseus. While Odysseus' world is in constant turbulence, Penelope's world seems remain constant. Odysseus gets the role of master strategist, and Penelope in contrast that of flat character, the proverbial beacon that guides Odysseus' return. Even otherwise unconventional and perceptive accounts of the *Odyssey* usually hold on to this stereotypical view of Penelope.⁷

When we reflect a little more on her situation, however, we must conclude that Penelope is also surrounded by turmoil, and that she is just as well exposed to potentially unsettling forces, like the suitors, who intimidate her and pressure her to remarry. They form an ever present, unruly force in her life. And then there is her son, Telemachos. She has raised, nurtured and protected him, for many years. And now, like the suitors, he is becoming impatient. Now that he has almost grown up, he is starting to take an interest in Odysseus' heritage, too. The longer his mother prevaricates, the less there will be left of it. Therefore Penelope is under constant pressure, especially during the last few years. We must assume that for her, too, this pressure forms a constant impetus for development and change.

How does she deal with this pressure? The key to the solution of this matter is the famous story of the shroud Penelope was supposedly

weaving for king Laertes, Odysseus' father. She has told the presumptuous suitors that she will remarry, but only after finishing the shroud. Everyday she was apparently busy weaving, but at night, in secrecy, she undoes her daytime work. More than three years pass before some of her maidservants, Odysseus' slaves, catch her in the act, unveiling the deceit. Penelope must yield, and promises to marry soon.

This is not a very plausible story. How can Penelope be weaving a shroud for more than three years, and not make any significant progress, without arousing suspicion? Yet, the story is clearly of central importance for the *Odyssey*, as it marks the (apparent) end of the bond between Penelope and Odysseus, and is recounted no less than three times (Od. 2, 93; 19, 138; 24, 127). Ioanna Papadopoulou-Belmehti, noting the dearth of plausible interpretations of the shroud story, describes the gown as 'a ruse both feminine and textual', as 'a coded language that contains all the major themes of the *Odyssey* — remembering and forgetting, marriage and death — rendering a large part of its intrigue dark and ambiguous' (Papadopoulou-Belmehti, 1994, p. 20). Although interesting, this description is quite abstract, and mystifying rather than clarifying. My own interpretation follows more naturally from the notion of weaving as identity formation. The shroud stands for Penelope's identity, or rather for the development of her identity in the absence of Odysseus. The finished shroud will mark her future identity as no-longer-wife-of-Odysseus. The finished shroud thus signifies not so much the death of Laertes, as the death of Penelope as Odysseus' wife.

A parallel motive to Penelope weaving her identity appears, by the way, in the *Iliad* (Il. 3, 125). There we find Helena weaving a tapestry showing the battle between Greeks and Trojans — exactly that which constitutes her identity. In both cases, the weaving also represents female cunning and empowerment.⁸ Like Circe and Helena, Penelope commands and controls her enchanted flock. As Lateiner has suggestively put it, all spin fine textiles and tales while nurturing docile herds of sexually enthralled men (Lateiner, 1998, p. 266). In general, the women are making inward journeys, developing and scrutinizing identity, trying to dissimulate outwardly what goes on inwardly.

As mentioned earlier, the development of Penelope's identity is influenced by the suitors' soliciting and Telemachos's growing up. At the time she starts all the spinning and entertaining, her identity is still tightly intermeshed with that of Odysseus. But the more the weaving progresses, the more the old 'Odyssean' threads tend to disappear from her identity pattern. This is where the secret, nightly 'unweaving' of the shroud comes in. What Penelope unweaves is not a shroud, but her identity, in order to remain who she is: Odysseus' wife. At night, 'in the flicker of the torches', she undoes her potential identity changes, through an original kind of 'self-analysis'. The text of the *Odyssey*

precisely calls her un-weaving *ana-lyoo* (Od. 19, 150): dissecting, or literally 'analysing', the daytime developments in her identity. Don't we all dream at night, processing daytime events in semi-conscious dreamthought? Dreams are necessary for psychic health. And, as Freud has shown, analysing them provides us with a privileged insight into processes of identity formation. And doesn't Penelope spend countless nights awake, or alternating between waking, dreaming and sleeping? I propose that she uses all that time for the 'analysis' of her 'alienation', and finds ways to undo what has been done in the day-time.

In the traditional account, the pretence of weaving is ended when one of her slaves 'catches her in the act'. Given the interpretation that she is dreaming, it seems likely that a maid overhears her talking in her sleep about Odysseus. Or maybe even more metaphorically, she is just talking to one of her servants, exchanging confidentialities and gossip, when she has a 'slip of the tongue', caught in the web of her own analysis. Maybe the servants are 'spinsters', too, actively imposing themselves on Penelope's weaving (Penelope calls them 'impudent' or 'shameless', Od. 19, 154), making life ever more complicated for her. Or maybe, pushing the metaphor even further, we should see the servants as parts of Penelope's own identity, like captain Ahab's first, second and third mates in *Moby Dick*, and her altercations with them as inner conflicts. In that case, we should conclude that one of her inner critics finally persuades her to stop fooling herself, to no longer count on Odysseus' return. This situation makes the reunion, soon to follow, even harder on her psychologically

Penelope has to deal with a difficult situation: she is left by her husband, who probably would never return. To deal with this reality, she resorts to both deception and self-deception, just as Odysseus does. She holds on to her basic self, to her symbolic and imaginary constitution, by both subjective and intersubjective dissimulation. But she goes about this in a more controlled, careful, and self-conscious way than Odysseus. She survives not by tricks or cleverness, but by a patient and difficult mixture of self-control and self-denial. This difference can be understood as the (inter)subjective expression of the very personal, idiosyncratic functioning of the imaginary order.

Of course there are many identity factors that both cannot control, as I mentioned already in the second section above. The symbolic order, for instance, poses certain social and cultural constraints that 'pre-format' behaviour. And there are simple contingency and circumstance; Odysseus and Penelope face different circumstances, and partly for that reason acted in different ways. But the most significant difference lies in how both articulate and deal with their typical, imaginary constitution at the subjective level. Odysseus is carried away by his own deceptions, Penelope isn't. Odysseus even enjoys them, thinking he can capitalize on 'being weak and knowing it'; Penelope has no such illusions. And

Odysseus desires, and attains, (intersubjective) recognition for his deceiving self, to the point of becoming the (first) ‘autonomous man’ — maybe even exactly because he believes his own deceptions. Penelope, on the other hand, manages to do without public recognition of her identity, possibly understanding that this would hurt rather than help her case.

Consummating the *Odyssey*: The Vicissitudes of Recognition

The identity strategies of Penelope and Odysseus are propelled by the prospect of their eventual reunion, in Ithaca. But, as I wrote earlier, the threads of the text(ure) of their identities do not tightly intermesh anymore. How are Odysseus and Penelope to approach each other again, after almost twenty years of living apart? One of the most important and controversial elements of the reunion scenes is that Odysseus approaches his home and wife in disguise, pretending to be a beggar. In the traditional story, this is explained by strategic motives: caution is required to defeat the suitors. Penelope’s actions, on the other hand, remain largely unexplained. If she hasn’t recognized him, why does she arrange the competition with the bow?

Again, a psychological interpretation seems more to the point. In the reunion scenes, both Odysseus and Penelope appear ‘shrouded’. In that sense, the end of the *Odyssey* is as much concealed as was its beginning. Odysseus is externally shrouded by his beggar outfit, and — more importantly — internally by his deep-seated habit of fraud, deceit and (self-)deception. Furthermore he is, like Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*, a worried husband, preoccupied with how he might find his wife upon returning home. And he is, like Hamlet, a man who delays the search for himself through tactics aimed at evading unpleasant realities, a man who cons others but also himself, eventually bringing death and destruction upon many of those near him, above all his shipmates. Penelope’s ‘shrouding’ is exclusively internal, as she has forced herself to ‘remain the same’, to retain her identity of Odysseus’ wife, twenty years ago. And she also is worried, and distrustful, about how her spouse will turn out to be.

As Luigi Malerba’s novel imaginatively brings out, Odysseus’ behaviour on Ithaca is as deceitful and fraudulent as that of the previous nine years, especially towards Penelope. He roams in and around the palace in a sorry disguise. He concocts plans, confiding in both his son and in old servants like Eumaios and Euryclea, while keeping his own wife completely in the dark. Isn’t it supreme *hybris* on his part to assume that she will not recognize him in his disguise? Penelope’s behaviour, in

turn, only makes him more suspicious. Why isn't she moved more by the stories and prophecies of Odysseus' impending return? Why doesn't she give some sign of recognition? Isn't she secretly enjoying the attention of the suitors? Maybe she does have a secret lover. What are her intentions in proposing the contest with the bow, and why does she show up for it in such a provocative dress? Odysseus, after arriving back at Ithaca, is more prone to doubt and insecurity than ever before.

What about Penelope? Malerba's novelistic account convincingly suggests that she has indeed recognized Odysseus as soon as he arrived. His behaviour must be taunting her. Why doesn't he confide in her? Inevitably, she must become suspicious — after all, many rumours about Odysseus' affairs with women arrived during those long twenty years, most recently his liaison with Nausicaa. And during all that time, Penelope's nights have been filled with a turmoil of proposals, rejections, stratagems, and insecurities — as famously represented in Molly Bloom's inner monologue, the 'stream of consciousness' that closes Joyce's *Ulysses*. Joyce's own 'analysis' of Penelope underlines how her final resolve in favour of Bloom/Odysseus is not a fixed, unproblematic given, but a hard-fought choice involving much consideration and agony. It must infuriate her that Odysseus seems to question *her* loyalty. In these circumstances, as Malerba suggests, it is only natural for Penelope to reciprocate Odysseus' distrust and apparent bitterness.

Thus, both partners struggle to approach each other. Their reunion involves a complicated process of adjustment and recognition, in which both precariously balance between trust and suspicion, hope and fear, reality and illusion. There is of course no guarantee that the reunion will be successful. Despite their efforts to 'remain the same', things have changed between them, as have circumstances. Homecoming and reunion may remain illusory, as Kundera's version of the *Odyssey* brings out.

Given these vicissitudes of recognition, it is not surprising that the reunion scenes present a confusing and drawn-out series of confrontations between Odysseus and Penelope, in which the behaviour of both at times seems incomprehensible.⁹ They try to anticipate one another's reaction, and search for clues. Most of the time, this only leads to more misunderstanding and apprehension on both sides. Take for instance the slaying of the suitors. For Odysseus, it is extremely disconcerting to learn that even this proud and dangerous exhibition of strength, which should definitely reveal himself to her, does not appear to move her much at all. As he says in despair: '*Daimoniè*, to no woman did the Olympian gods give such an implacable heart' (Od. 23, 170). To her, in turn, it might seem as if he is more interested in restoring his reign as king of Ithaca than in restoring his relationship with her.

With each round of disillusion, the stand-off becomes harder to break. In this respect also, the situation is similar to that at the beginning of the *Odyssey*. Something dramatic must happen to break the spell — in this case, not to start the action, but to bring it to an end. This is effected by the scene with the bed. Penelope asks Euryclea to take the great bed out of the marital bedroom to accommodate her guest. Then the well-known climax follows, in which Odysseus hurls out the secret of the bed: he himself has cut it out of the trunk of an olive tree, still rooted in the soil. It is thus unmoveable, ‘real estate’, as Horkheimer and Adorno might say. This scene is often interpreted as if Odysseus’ reaction finally provides Penelope with hard, literal proof of his identity. But even if one supposes that Penelope has not really recognized Odysseus up till here, it should be clear that a crisis of faith or trust cannot be resolved by empirical findings. What is needed is psychological ‘proof’; the point to be scored is not a factual but a psychological one.

The ‘password’ is therefore not so much what Odysseus says, as his attitude in saying it. If not, he would still be like Oedipus retorting the Sphinx, talking his way out of trouble instead of confronting himself emotionally. What counts in his reaction is his distress at the suggestion that the bed be moved, which he himself concedes is not actually impossible: ‘I do not know whether the bed is still firmly in place, or that someone transported it elsewhere, after having cut the olive at the root’ (Od. 23, 203). It is this distress that forms the real, psychological sign of recognition that Penelope is looking for. Moreover, it is a fitting counterpart to the countless moments of distress that the bed must have caused Penelope, being the unmoveable thing that moved her so much, the place of her thousand nights of ‘unweaving’, of doubts, anxiety, fear, confusion and uncertainty. The test with the bed is a suitable one: Odysseus must confront a difficult and disturbing situation, without recourse to deceit. He finds the right response, without knowing it.

Conclusion

My interpretation of the *Odyssey* challenges conventional readings, in a way that recaptures the strangeness of a text that has been ‘colonized’ by interpretative strategies, strategies that project certain cultural, gendered stereotypes. I do not claim that my interpretation is ‘correct’; I merely claim that a reversal of stereotypes is possible, and often desirable. I took my clue for this interpretation from the action of the *Odyssey* itself — although not from the action as it is usually understood, Odysseus’ wanderings, but from the typically female action of weaving. Weaving can plausibly be understood as a metaphor for identity formation, once we apply insights from (Lacanian) psychoanalysis and cultural studies to the text of the *Odyssey*.

To a certain extent, my reading suggested that the common stereotypes can be inverted. Odysseus appeared to be a hero determined to return to his wife, but turned out to be an insecure wanderer, mostly running from himself. His presumed, and famed, autonomy is largely a product of self-deception, deriving from his inability to confront himself. Penelope, on her part, appeared to be passive and faithful, but turned out to be active, analytical, and self-critical. Her apparently rather vulgar trick with the shroud proves to be an unparalleled psychological achievement. Additionally, it appeared possible to understand Circe not as a malevolent witch, but rather as a supportive therapist. More than any other character in the *Odyssey*, she tries to counsel Odysseus in a fundamental way, trying to make him confront, instead of evade or deny, his constitutive weaknesses. And although Calypso may have aspects of a possessive, jealous 'stalker', her final decision to let Odysseus go is a supreme act of selflessness, a 'deliverance' of both Odysseus and the *Odyssey*.

The weaving metaphor also brought out that 'projects' of identity formation are 'weak', and easily unsettled. That is to say, they are only in a very limited sense under the deliberate, conscious control of their 'designers'. As I pointed out, 'identity projects' are carried out in contexts largely 'thrown' onto their designers, rather than voluntarily chosen or grasped. Much hinges on decisions that are as important as unpredictable. Another *Odyssey* would probably have produced a very different Odysseus. Here also, it is difficult to tell the dancer from the dance.

In a sense, this strong contingency of identity supports my attempt to reverse stereotypes, because it accords with my contention that Odysseus is much less stable and 'in control' than the usual reading assumes. Still, it is important to point out that the weakness of identity projects undermines stereotypes not so much in the sense of reversing, as in the sense of dissolving, or dismantling them. My aim is therefore not so much to reverse the roles, or images, of Penelope and Odysseus, as to 'open them up' for interpretations that are both more imaginative, and more sensitive to their respective idiosyncracies.

Especially important here is the element of personal 'style'. All projects, however weak, passive, or unchosen, have a characteristic form, or 'style', that reflects their designer's idiosyncratic psychological make-up. On the one hand, this 'make-up' is obviously influenced by natural and cultural stereotypes. I described the relevant processes in terms of the way in which we 'negotiate', in our psychological development, the imaginary and the symbolic order. The symbolic order largely determines the cultural 'repertoire' available for our identity development, for instance by imposing stereotypes, including gendered ones. On the other hand, the stereotypes produced by the symbolic order 'overlay', but do not completely suppress or supplant our

imaginary make-up, that is much more idiosyncratic and (therefore) much less amenable to cultural or social disciplining. Although extremely personal, it is even largely inaccessible to its 'owner'. The imaginary thus resists stereotyping, either of a 'straight' or an inverted nature.

Although (or exactly because) it is hard to know, or change, our imaginary make-up, it is ethically important how we come to terms with it. Self-understanding is a matter of how we, both subjectively and intersubjectively, come to terms with, and express, the structural (and thus semi- or unconscious) elements of our person. Crucial for self-understanding, as I discussed, is the issue of deception and self-deception. I argued that Odysseus engages in a rather large degree of self-deception. Penelope inevitably does this also, but her kind of self-deception is more self-consciously styled and controlled. Moreover, Odysseus is much more prone to thinking that he can overcome his own weaknesses through understanding. I argued that this aggravated, rather than improved his condition. Autonomy cannot simply be the result of 'being weak and knowing it'. We are weak, but usually do not know when or why. Of course, presumed insight and intellect may function to cover up such weaknesses. Oedipus does destroy the Sphinx, and Odysseus does return home. But instead of autonomy, this behaviour mostly expresses self-deception. Just as the *Odyssey* could only set off once Calypso put an end to her self-deception, it could only come to an end once Odysseus finally stops pretending to understand himself.

Notes

1. This concurs with what Bernard Williams (1992) argues.
2. For an account of both the Aristotelian and the Freudian side of this question, see Lear, 1998.
3. See the interview in (and the title of) Chapsal, 1984.
4. There is of course more to intersubjective identity formation than I can discuss here. Axel Honneth has developed a theory of intersubjective identity formation, involving three dimensions (a personal, a moral and a social) at which a specific 'practical relation-to-self' is established. My analysis could be seen as aimed at the first of these levels. Cf. Honneth, 1995.
5. Literal and metaphorical weaving explicitly come together when Odysseus is about to drown near the Phaiakian coast and is thrown a lifesaving 'magic veil', a *kedemnon*, by the goddess Ino/Leukotheia (Od. 5, 346). This veil quite literally provides him with a new identity and a new lease on life.
6. Elster argues that although possible, such self-deception must be the exception rather than the rule. As exceptional situations, he accepts those set up by an Omniscient Being, or by an impossible love. (1979, p. 172). But Elster here

thinks only of 'knowingly fooling oneself', discounting all other ways in which we can downplay our own weaknesses.

7. Such as Murnaghan, 1987. An exception, as noted, is Malerba, 1997.
8. On the similarity between Penelope and Helen, confer Papadopoulou-Belmehdi, 1994, p. 165.
9. For more conventional explanations, see. Latacz, 1991.

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