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## WOMEN'S SPACE AND WINGLESS WORDS IN THE *ODYSSEY*

JUDITH FLETCHER

THE MAJOR NARRATIVE TENSION OF THE *ODYSSEY* is spatially determined: the separation of Odysseus from Penelope. He wanders far and wide, yearning for his homecoming; she never leaves the house as she longs for his return. Even after his arrival in disguise, husband and wife occupy different social spaces until their long awaited reunion. The house in Ithaca is not a homogeneous unit, but rather a collection of disparate spaces, some public and occupied by men, others more intimate and inaccessible, available for the most part only to women. The suitors and Telemachus spend most of their time in the *megaron*, the communal and open portion of the palace, where they feast, listen to the bard's songs and receive guests. Penelope appears to have a salon on the main floor of the house, where she eventually entertains the beggar, but from which the suitors are excluded, and an upstairs bedroom leading from this chamber.

As Lateiner puts it, "The house has its keeper and servants, but Penelope from beginning to end controls its deepest spaces."<sup>1</sup> Yet Penelope's cloistered existence is not entirely typical of Homeric women such as Helen or Arete who do join men in the *megaron*. This rigid separation is indicative, comments de Jong, of the extreme disorder of the house of Odysseus.<sup>2</sup> Penelope's appearances among the suitors, usually at the edge of the *megaron*, are discreet and infrequent. She is all veils and chaperones when she makes these appearances, as if she were not in her own home, but rather an exterior public space. The inner chambers, which only Penelope's long-lost husband can penetrate, also function as a symbol of her chastity. Her faithless maids, on the other hand, keep company with the suitors, lighting their fires—and worse—in the public and male-defined halls and courtyard.

This paper will examine how the *Odyssey* exploits the ideological construction of social space in order to emphasize women's chastity or lack of it. I will argue that a series of references to women and space is linked to another signifier of feminine chastity, silence. Feminine silence is idealized, if not realized, in Greek thought, while the unrestrained speech of women is frequently equated with a lack of sexual restraint. Women's voices pose a variety of threats to men

<sup>1</sup>Lateiner 1998: 251. Lateiner gives a cogent account of the gendered spaces of the palace (1998: 127–129) and describes Penelope as occupying a "ground floor sitting room" (*Od.* 17.492–493, 20.387–389) with a staircase leading to an upper story bedroom. On Penelope's association with the house, see in particular 259–260. It is not necessary for my argument to make any pronouncements on the connections between Homeric and Mycenaean architecture, but see Lateiner's bibliography at 131, n. 45.

<sup>2</sup>De Jong 2001: 35. She notes that other Homeric women wear veils only when they leave the house, while Penelope is sometimes veiled within her home.

throughout the *Odyssey*. At the opening of the poem Odysseus languishes on the island of Ogygia, transfixed by the spellbinding words of Calypso (1.56–58), who also compels him to have sex with her—a very obvious conflation of the twin dangers of women’s language and sexuality. Similarly Circe’s melodious song attracts the companions of Odysseus (10.220–228); his son is fascinated by the drug-enhanced story of Helen (4.220–225). She presents no danger to Telemachus in Sparta, but Menelaus recounts how she imitated the voices of the wives of every man locked inside the wooden horse (4.280–284), very nearly exposing the ruse.<sup>3</sup> Most famously, the song of the Sirens (12.39–46), like the voices of Calypso and Circe heard far beyond any domestic enclosure, has the power to lure men to their deaths.<sup>4</sup> And of course it is the sexually active maids, lacking restraint in both body and voice, who reveal to the suitors the secret of Penelope’s chambers, that she is unraveling the shroud of Laertes to forestall her remarriage.<sup>5</sup> Even chaste Penelope cannot be wholly trusted to keep Odysseus’ secret when he returns, and, influenced by Agamemnon’s misogynistic complaints and advice in the Underworld, he keeps his identity concealed from his wife until the revenge is complete.<sup>6</sup>

This anxiety about women’s voices is also manifested in a series of passages in which women are silenced and sent away from the men’s spaces at particularly sensitive moments of the plot. Some of these passages are notorious philological cruces, and conservative scholarship has done strange things to them, assigning them the status of interpolations or empty formulae. I prefer to seek sense in language by examining these passages or rather *speech type scenes* (to follow Martin)<sup>7</sup> in their cumulative format. Taken together they create an interdependent meaning especially in connection with Telemachus, who is on the cusp of maturity as the poem opens. He signifies his coming of age by asserting authority over his mother and the other women of the household, who until now have had authority over him.<sup>8</sup>

The first such passage occurs in the earliest part of the poem. Telemachus, his guest Athena/Mentor, and the suitors have been listening to the bard Phemius, who sings “of the Greeks’ bitter homecoming from Troy” (1.325–330). The song,

<sup>3</sup> Heath (2005: 72–73) suggests that Helen’s behaviour at Sparta corroborates Menelaus’ insinuation that his wife “does not know when to shut up”: she blurts out Telemachus’ name (4.137), and although Menelaus wants to postpone conversation until morning (4.214), she drugs the wine and starts the *muthoi*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Wohl 1993: 34. For further discussion of the danger of women’s speech in early Greek poetry, see Bergren 1983: 69–95.

<sup>5</sup> Telemachus conflates speech and sexuality by accusing the maids of verbally abusing his mother and sleeping with the suitors (22.463–464).

<sup>6</sup> *Od.* 11.427–434, 441–456. See Murnaghan 1987: 124–125; de Jong 2001: 288–289.

<sup>7</sup> Martin 1989: 1–42.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Heath 2005: 79–118, noting a correspondence between Telemachus’ coming of age and his ability to speak with authority in a chapter entitled “Controlling Language: Telemachus Learns to Speak.”

which reaches her upper chamber, displeases Penelope, who descends to the edge of the *megaron*, accompanied by two maids, with her veil stretched in front of her face, and asks the bard to sing a different song. Telemachus responds in anger, defending the bard's choice, and he orders his mother (1.356–359):

ἀλλ' εἰς οἶκον ἰούσα τὰ σ' αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε,  
 ἱστόν τ' ἠλακάτην τε καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε  
 ἔργον ἐποίχεσθαι. μῦθος δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει  
 πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοὶ· τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ.

But go into the house, and take your work with you,  
 the loom and the distaff, and bid your handmaids  
 to do their work. But stories concern men,  
 all men, but especially me, for mine is the power in the house.

Penelope is surprised by her son's sudden assertiveness but immediately goes upstairs to her chamber. It might seem strange that Telemachus separates the *megaron* from the *oikos* here, but the distinction emphasizes how public the *megaron* has become, in contrast to the more private, domestic architecture.

This passage did not sit well with commentators: it was athetized by Aristarchus, and is missing from some ancient editions. West suggests the lines were an interpolation inserted to account for Penelope's departure from the *megaron*—a rather insensitive, in her mind, quotation of Hector's similar objection to Andromache's advice (*Il.* 21.350–353), with *muthos* replacing *polemos*.<sup>9</sup> But Katz's compelling analysis of this formulaic passage demonstrates its suitability to both Hector and Telemachus. Hector identifies the specifically gendered behaviors and spaces pertinent to the *Iliad*: men's work is public, in this case war; women's is private and domestic, working wool. It is for men to seek honor in the public world, and for women to uphold men's honor by behaving in such a way as to preserve their reputation. A similar dichotomy is presented here, and at a very early stage in the poem. As Katz contends, the passage is “a demonstration of Telemachus' maturity,”<sup>10</sup> and this is a sensitive moment: as an adult male he will become the *kyrios* (“official guardian”) of his mother, who has been placed rather awkwardly in a position of authority during her husband's absence.

The text defines Telemachus' new adult status by setting him apart from the women's spaces, and having him exercise his new authority to send women back to those spaces throughout the epic. Public spaces are repeatedly defined and emphasized as masculine by articulating other domestic places where women are silent; by acknowledging this distinction the poem shows us how Telemachus eventually takes his rightful place in this masculine public world. As the young

<sup>9</sup> Heubeck, West, and Hainsworth 1990: 120.

<sup>10</sup> Katz (Arthur) 1981: 36. Clark (2001: 339) responds to West by emphasizing that the passage is a formula used in the *Odyssey* as it was in the *Iliad* “to indicate a socially sanctioned gender distinction.” He notes the similarity to Alcinous' attempt to put Arete in her place (11.350–353). See also Martin 1993: 236; Heath 2005: 71–72.

man emphatically states, this is a place where men speak *muthoi*. Yet the term *muthos* requires further consideration. In this context it obviously refers to stories, but the term has a broader meaning. According to Martin *muthoi* are authoritative speech acts in the *Iliad*, and this meaning has some applicability to the *Odyssey* as well.<sup>11</sup> Clark argues that the Iliadic connotations of *muthos* persist in the *Odyssey* in heroic and public contexts. Of course Penelope does at times speak *muthoi*—more than anyone else in the poem, in fact, including her son; thus Martin's thesis must be adapted to include the domestic valence of the term in the *Odyssey*. Clark concludes that Telemachus is using *muthos* here in the sense of a public speech act; his abrupt dismissal of his mother is appropriate for the unusual social dynamics of the situation.<sup>12</sup> Penelope has, in the absence of her husband, been the head of the household; at the beginning of the poem, however, Telemachus is nearly ready to take over. This particular *megaron* is no place for a lady, and its discursive practices, be they story-telling or Iliadic speech acts, are entirely masculine.

The peremptory command of Telemachus not only signals the impending crisis precipitated by the combination of the suitors' presence and his coming of age, but also underscores the extraordinary spatial constitution of the house of Odysseus.<sup>13</sup> Penelope is banished not from her own living room, as it were, but from a space that becomes inordinately public due to the incursion of the suitors, a place where men speak the kind of *muthoi* that they do in the *Iliad*. Indeed, the *megaron* will become a battle site before it can be re-domesticated, and husband and wife can exchange *muthoi*.

Throughout the *Odyssey* as Telemachus grows into his masculine role he repeatedly performs his gender by sending his mother and her handmaids away from this public space to a supposedly silent domestic interior. The prescribed activity in these women's spaces is working wool, a defining feminine pursuit. In all likelihood such places would be quite noisy, with conversation and story telling, but the *Odyssey* represents an ideological construction, not a lived reality.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Martin 1989: 66.

<sup>12</sup>Clark (2001: 339) examines the distribution of *muthoi* speeches in the *Odyssey* and concludes that the poem integrates the domestic sphere in which women, and especially Penelope, do speak *muthoi*.

<sup>13</sup>It is a truism that in Greek thought the house is regularly posited as domestic female space, while the outdoors is masculine and public. Yet even private homes were divided into gendered spaces, with women's quarters and more public male areas: see Antonaccio 2000. The house of Odysseus exaggerates this distinction. The *megaron's* inherently public nature as a reception area for guests has been amplified by the incursion of the suitors.

<sup>14</sup>Textile manufacture would be an opportunity for women to speak among themselves, but we are looking at how the symbolic value of spinning and weaving contributes to a formulaic theme in epic. For further discussion of the implications of textile manufacture, see Pantelia 1993, noting a symbolic distinction between the activities of spinning and weaving in both epics: weaving is an "escape from a state of domestic disorder" for Penelope, Helen, and Andromache, but three powerful women (Helen, Penelope, and Arete) who achieve "domestic stability" in the *Odyssey* cease weaving and are depicted

Woolworking, and especially weaving, is a polyvalent symbol in Greek literature; it includes implications of narrativity and story-telling, for instance, an idea that is implicit in Helen's woven tapestry (*Il.* 3.125),<sup>15</sup> or cunning and trickery, as in the case of Penelope's ruse. But it is the well-established connotation of chastity that the following discussion will explore.<sup>16</sup>

While Penelope exhibits a restraint exemplifying the conventional female virtues—stay inside, work wool, and keep quiet—Melantho, the most obnoxious maid, functions as a negative exemplum.<sup>17</sup> The clearest display of her character occurs after Penelope has solicited gifts from the suitors and withdrawn to her upper chamber. The suitors are setting up their evening entertainment in the courtyard with the twelve maids in attendance. Odysseus, nearly forgetting that he is in disguise, rebukes them (18.313–316):

δμοφαὶ Ὀδυσσῆος, δὴν οἰχομένοιο ἄνακτος,  
 ἔρχεσθε πρὸς δώμαθ', ἴν' αἰδοίῃ βασιλεια·  
 τῇ δὲ παρ' ἡλάκατα στροφαλίζετε, τερπέτε δ' αὐτὴν  
 ἦμεναι ἐν μεγάρῳ, ἢ εἴρια πείκετε χερσίν.

You maids of Odysseus, who has been absent so long,  
 go to the chambers of your revered queen,  
 turn your distaffs beside her, be pleasing to her  
 as you sit in the chamber, or card the wool with your hands.

Odysseus offers the familiar instructions to go inside and tend to wool-working, but rather than silently obeying like Penelope, Melantho impudently scolds the old beggar. Admittedly she is under no obligation to obey a ragged old stranger, but the text uses a formulaic theme to suggest a marked contrast to Penelope, who responded silently to similar commands and who knew when it was time to remove herself from the company of men. Penelope judiciously leaves at Telemachus' bidding at three points in the poem, doing precisely what Odysseus commands the maids to do—go inside and work wool. Homer exploits the same thematic cluster to characterize the foolish Melantho and her companions who

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as spinning, an activity that grants them more mobility, but which can also be associated with the activity of the Fates (499–500).

<sup>15</sup> Pantelia (1993: 495) compares Helen in this passage to an epic poet who preserves heroic deeds through song. Cf. Roisman 2006: 10 on Helen as “an interpreter of history and maker of meaning.”

<sup>16</sup> Clayton (2004: 5–7) surveys a rich body of work discussing the relationships between weaving and storytelling in the epics. Felson-Rubin (1994: 18–19) provides one of the most detailed and sophisticated analyses of Penelope's act of weaving and unweaving in relation to the indeterminacy of her character and in terms of its role in the plot. Clayton (2004) expands upon this while critiquing analyses of Penelope which situate her within an androcentric narrative.

<sup>17</sup> Felson-Rubin (1994: 30) sees Melantho as “acting out what Penelope could be doing but is not,” and thereby functioning as a scapegoat figure. See also Fulkerson's comments (2002: 343–345) on Melantho, who by sleeping with Eurymachus, Penelope's favorite suitor, may be read as Penelope's alter ego.

indiscreetly remain in the men's area long after it is respectable and who talk back after being told to go inside.

It is the old nurse Eurycleia who taught the maids their wool-working (specifically carding, 22.422). She is the antithesis of Melanthe and her friends: her celibacy is emphasized (1.433), and her capacity for keeping silent corroborates this portrait of restraint. Eurycleia plays an important role in Books 19–22; her silence is stressed at key moments in the events before and after the contest of the bow. One of her occupations is to serve as a doorkeeper. Indeed, her name might be cognate with κλείς (“lock”), as if to signify her most important duty. Throughout the poem she locks and unlocks doors, and functions as a liminal figure who keeps watch over the provisions and people of the household. As we shall see, her role as a doorkeeper has important implications for the connection between speech, space, and gender.

Eurycleia enters the story at the end of the first book as she accompanies Telemachus to his bedchamber the evening before he leaves to seek news of his father. The old nurse attends his bedtime preparations, perhaps for the last time, and then (1.441–442):

βῆ ῥ' ἴμεν ἐκ θαλάμοιο, θύρην δ' ἐπέρυσσε κορώνη  
ἀργυρέη, ἐπὶ δὲ κληῖδ' ἐτάνυσσεν ἰμάντι.

She left the chamber, and fastened the door with a latch  
of silver, and clasped the door-bolt with a strap.

The next time we encounter Eurycleia she is again supervising a door, and here words and doors are associated for the first time. Telemachus is making preparations for his first journey abroad, another sign of his increasing maturity (2.349–360). As he gathers provisions for the sea journey he encounters Eurycleia, who watches the stout double doors of the storeroom and from whom he is obliged to requisition supplies. To do so he must recount his plan to seek news of Odysseus, but this must be a clandestine departure undetected by the suitors. And so Telemachus tenders an oath from the old woman not to speak about his voyage until after his departure (2.372–378).<sup>18</sup> Eurycleia is charged with guarding important knowledge which allows Telemachus to dodge the suitors' ambush. According to a popular etymology, *horkos* (“oath”) is derived from *herkos* (“boundary”).<sup>19</sup> In this case the oath of Eurycleia does function as a barrier to speech. She guards the precious knowledge of Telemachus' plan as responsibly as she guards the doors of the storeroom. Bound by the oath, Eurycleia keeps this knowledge to herself and does not unlock the truth until after Penelope has learned it through Medon the herald.

Eurycleia's oath of silence sworn at the doors of the storeroom helps to establish a connection between space and speech, doors and silence, which recurs

<sup>18</sup> See Arend 1933: 122–123 for the oath as a type-scene.

<sup>19</sup> See Frisk 1954: 418–419.

throughout the *Odyssey*. Significantly, her oath of silence occurs in the symbolically rich position of the door to the storeroom, which emphasizes the conceptual link between locked doors and restrained speech. This link is cognate with the common formula: "What a word has escaped the boundary of your teeth" (ἔρκος ὀδόντων, e.g., 19.492). The teeth are envisioned as a kind of door through which words can pass. Various scholars have associated the ἔρκος ὀδόντων with another common Homeric formula, ἔπεα πτερόεντα, "winged words" (e.g., 8.459), most likely a metaphor envisioning words as birds.<sup>20</sup> A foolish or indiscreet person cannot restrain words from flying through this *herkos* or boundary. Eurycleia, keeper of doors and oaths, however, is able to restrain her words. Connected with her linguistic restraint, I would argue, is her apparent lack of sexual activity. Laertes refrained from sleeping with her (1.433), and Eurycleia's advanced age precludes any notion of her sexuality, effectively separating her from Penelope and the maids, whose sexuality is always problematic. Her apparently permanent celibacy helps to secure her loyalty to her household, and so of all the women in the house, Penelope included, she alone can be entrusted with the secrets of its masters, both Telemachus and, later in the story, his father Odysseus. It is almost as if this asexual character stationed at the door is also in a liminal position with regard to her gender identity. As several scholars observe, she is associated with the males of the family, and is to be found within the male social spaces more often than in the women's spaces.<sup>21</sup>

One exception to this pattern occurs in Penelope's downstairs salon, which the beggar Odysseus has managed to infiltrate. Odysseus gains a foothold in the *megaron*, working his way from his position on the threshold to the intimate space at Penelope's hearth. It is here that he encounters his old nurse, the only member of his household, with the exception of his dog, to recognize him without any prompting. After Penelope offers the footbath, Odysseus specifically asks for an older woman to perform this function. We can only speculate about his motive for inviting close physical contact with a woman who knows his body so intimately.<sup>22</sup> Even before the foot bath, Eurycleia's suspicions are alerted; she remarks on the beggar's similarity to Odysseus, and for a moment her thoughts

<sup>20</sup>This is one of the most famous and enigmatic Homeric formulae; its interpretation ranges from Parry's (1971: 414–418) contention that the phrase is meaningless to Martin's (1989: 30–35) analysis of the phrase as a directive speech act.

<sup>21</sup>Thalman 1998: 32. Scott (1918: 75–79) observes that Eurycleia is the servant first of Odysseus, then of Telemachus. Interestingly Eurycleia is the only servant to whom Telemachus gives orders. For Eurycleia's affiliation with Odysseus, see Fenik (1974: 189–191), who summarizes Eurycleia's important actions while noting that her doublet Eurynome has a closer association with Penelope. See Murnaghan 1987: 41 for a discussion of Eurycleia's role as doublet for Anticleia, mother of Odysseus.

<sup>22</sup>Eurycleia suggests (19.372–374) that he wants to avoid contact with the nasty maids, who, as de Jong (1985: 475) observes, have already insulted him. Karydas (1998: 55) maintains that Odysseus instigates Eurycleia's recognition because he wants to test her loyalty, but other than having Eurycleia remark on the maids' rudeness the text does not reveal his motives. Otherwise Karydas makes good observations on the intelligence and control demonstrated by Eurycleia in this scene.



become transparent, as the process of her recognition is presented as a lengthy digression on the circumstances of Odysseus' scar.<sup>23</sup> This is a suspenseful moment, extended by the digression, the vivid description of the footbath tipping over, and Eurycleia's astonished reaction. Realizing the truth, the old nurse attempts to catch Penelope's attention, which has been momentarily diverted thanks to Athena. Odysseus has to act fast; he grabs Eurycleia by the throat, pulls her close to him, and urges her to keep silent under threat of death. She responds (19.493–494):

οἶσθα μὲν οἶον ἐμὸν μένος ἔμπεδον οὐδ' ἐπιεκτόν,  
ἔξω δ' ὡς ὅτε τις στερεὴ λίθος ἢ σίδηρος.

You know what strength is steady in me, and it will not give way  
at all, but I shall hold as stubborn as stone or iron.

Eurycleia has been criticized for her lack of caution at this sensitive moment, but it is really Odysseus who has let his guard slip, and who has been less than circumspect in his request for the ministrations of his wise old nurse. She does indeed have enough self-control to keep this knowledge to herself; her initial response to her discovery is understandably joyful, but also remarkably restrained. Compared to the effusive reactions of Eumaeus and Philoetius when Odysseus later reveals himself and his scar to them, Eurycleia recovers her composure quite easily. She is clever and self-controlled; even when Odysseus threatens her she has the shrewdness to show her loyalty by offering to expose the faithless maids.<sup>24</sup> Her fidelity and restraint are thus in direct contrast to Melanthe and her companions. The incident bears some similarity to Telemachus' encounter with Eurycleia at the storeroom. The youth used an oath as a form of compulsion, while his father used violence, but both depend on Eurycleia to keep their secrets from Penelope and the suitors. And she does.

As noted above, the first two appearances of Eurycleia are set at doors. Eurycleia is also associated with doors when she appears for the third time in the poem, just after Telemachus finally returns home from his trip abroad (17.29–30):

αὐτὸς δ' εἴσω ἵεν καὶ ὑπέρβη λάϊνον οὐδόν.  
τὸν δὲ πολὺ πρώτη εἶδε τροφὸς Εὐρύκλεια

He came inside and he went over the stone threshold.  
And the nurse Eurycleia was the very first to see him.

Eurycleia joins in the emotional throng of *dmoai* ("female domestic slaves") around the young man, but it is Penelope, coming out of her chamber, who addresses her son with winged words (17.40–44). This is the first time that she has seen him since he left without her knowledge. She chides him gently and inquires about

<sup>23</sup> De Jong 1985: 517–518.

<sup>24</sup> Olson (1992: 223) notes that Odysseus does take her up on her offer when it is time to deal with the maids. This is consistent with how he deals with his servants, who often have valuable suggestions.

his journey, a natural enough reaction to her son's disappearance. I borrow his response from Lombardo's translation (17.46–50):

Don't make me weep, mother, or get me all worked up.  
I barely escaped with my life. Now bathe yourself  
and put on clean clothes, then go upstairs with your maids  
and vow formal sacrifice to the immortal gods.

For the second time Telemachus exercises his new status as a man with some authority over his mother. Once again he orders her to her chambers; Penelope silently obeys.

We are now in a position to examine what Russo has called one of the greatest cruces of the *Odyssey*.<sup>25</sup> Homer indicates the end of Telemachus' speech (17.57) with a line that will recur three more times in the poem, "Ὡς ἄρ' ἐφώνησεν, τῆ δ' ἄπτερος ἔπλετο μῦθος, which I translate as "And so he spoke, and speech was wingless for her." If words can be winged, then the opposite would presumably be *apteros muthos*, wingless words. As Stanford puts it, "conversation [is] regarded as a bird that flies back and forth between speakers; here the bird fails to fly back."<sup>26</sup> According to this interpretation, which I accept, words are wingless if speech is unaccomplished or suppressed. Russo and Hainsworth, however, argue that *apteros muthos* is a synonym for *epea pteroenta*, winged words, and refers to the male speaker of the preceding lines, whose words are swift.<sup>27</sup> According to this line of thought the formula has become, in the words of Hainsworth, "trite and meaningless."<sup>28</sup> Each side of the argument offers competing philological evidence to support their opposing translations.<sup>29</sup> But surely the preferred translation is the

<sup>25</sup> Russo in Russo, Fernandez-Galiano, and Heubeck 1992: 22.

<sup>26</sup> Stanford 1965: 282–283.

<sup>27</sup> Russo in Russo, Fernandez-Galiano, and Heubeck 1992: 22–24 and Hainsworth 1960: 263–268. At issue is whether the alpha of ἄπτερος is intensive ("swift") or privative ("wingless"), and consequently whether ἄπτερος . . . μῦθος of the second hemistich refers to the male speaker of the first hemistich, or the female receiver of his words.

<sup>28</sup> Hainsworth (1960: 263–268), in the most extreme version of the alpha intensive theory, posits an original \*ἄπτερόεις with πτερόεντα formed by a false division (ἔπε' ἀπτερόεντα). According to this hypothesis the earlier form, ἀπτερόεις ("fluttering") had acquired the meaning "swift." Supposedly the repetitive nature of Homeric epic drained the formula of any live metaphor, so that connotations of "winged" ceased to exist in Homer, whatever the word meant originally. According to this interpretation both ἄπτερος and πτερόεντα connote "swift."

<sup>29</sup> See Russo's (1992: 22–24) long note summarizing the philological arguments. A third alternative is presented by Thomson (1936: 1–3), who argues that ἔπεα πτερόεντα connotes "feathered" like arrows which fly straight to their target; ἄπτερος . . . μῦθος must therefore mean that the word flies wide of the mark, like an unfeathered arrow (cf. Jacks 1922: 70–71). This rather flaccid interpretation does not seem suitable for the responses of Eurycleia, who certainly has some comprehension of what is going on. In general I agree with Latacz (1968) that the woman in question suppresses a response to the man who issued the command. It would help if we knew how an ancient audience might understand the formula, but ἄπτερος and its variants appear to mean either "swift" or "wingless" to different ancient authors. Montiglio (2000: 273) makes the most sensible remarks on the varying semantic values of the term in Aeschylus and Hesiod. As she notes, the "interpretation of *apteros* as 'silent' has the advantage of referring to the equally Homeric expression *epea pteroenta*, 'winged word'."

one that understands the formulaic system to have meaning rather than a lack of meaning, and to be part of a larger metaphorical cluster: in other words the *muthos* belongs to Penelope, but remains unspoken. Perhaps the literal meaning of the term is irrelevant, since whenever it occurs in the poem a woman silently obeys a man.<sup>30</sup> So why is Penelope silent here? There is certainly much that she could have said, questions to be asked, indignation to be registered, but the conversation is at an end, and does not fly back and forth between speakers. Latacz contends that she is too emotionally distraught to speak.<sup>31</sup> It seems just as valid to read her silence as a form of restraint, related somehow to sexual restraint, as it is to interpret it as a form of feminine emotion. This woman whose intelligence is stressed throughout the poem is obviously attuned to the urgency of the situation, and understands that silent compliance is required in the circumstances. Telemachus has just returned from his trip abroad, having successfully outmaneuvered the suitors' ambush. Danger is everywhere, and in this crisis Penelope, who is aware of the suitors' plotting, is not going to second guess her son's command, brusque though it may be.<sup>32</sup> As we have seen, Telemachus has already identified the more public spaces of the house as suitable only for masculine *muthoi*, and his command to his mother is consistent with that sentiment.

The next three examples of the formula feature Eurycleia, whose words remain wingless after Telemachus, his agent the swineherd, and Odysseus have given her a command. The second instance of the *apteros muthos* formula marks the beginning of the preparations for the revenge. Following his father's instructions Telemachus orders Eurycleia to divert the maids while he and Odysseus remove the weapons to a storeroom away from the suitors. She commends his action, but wonders who will light the passage for him.<sup>32</sup> He answers that the beggar will, since he should do something to earn his keep. Eurycleia does not respond verbally, and the narrator comments (19.29–30):

ᾠς ἄρ' ἐφώνησεν, τῆ δ' ἄπτερος ἔπλετο μῦθος.  
κλήϊσεν δὲ θύρας μεγάρων εὖ ναιεταόντων.

And thus he spoke, and words were wingless for her,  
but she locked the door of the well-built *megaron*.

Latacz argues that Eurycleia is, like Penelope, too startled by Telemachus' curt reply to say anything.<sup>33</sup> But Eurycleia has already been ordered about by Telemachus, and although she is unaware of the beggar's identity at this point,

<sup>30</sup>As the anonymous referee pointed out, this is a case of what Foley (1999: 254–255) calls “traditional referentiality.”

<sup>31</sup>Latacz 1968: 27–30.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Montiglio 2000: 273: “The voice of Telemachus' speech reaches its addressees all the more audibly because it resonates against their silence; a silence that signals the deep upheaval provoked by Telemachus' authority, which demands an immediate action without words.” See also 273, n. 79.

<sup>32</sup>Scodel (1998: 6–7) observes that the incident prepares the audience for the importance of Eurycleia later in the book, and notes that she is more dangerous here than the suitors.

<sup>33</sup>Latacz 1968: 32–33.

she has learned that Telemachus has become a man of action. She makes suggestions which are rebuffed, she is silent because silence is required, and she responds to Telemachus' instructions without further remonstrance. Again there are words she could have said, questions to ask, advice to give, but her *muthos* remains unfledged. Telemachus and his cohorts do not need to draw attention to their engagement in concealing the weapons from the suitors (at this point the treacherous Melanthe at least is present), and Eurycleia, who is "wise and circumspect,"<sup>34</sup> immediately fulfills her role. Yet again she performs the function of doorkeeper. Telemachus has instructed Eurycleia to detain the women within the palace (19.16) while he hides the armor. Her speechless response to his insistence that he do this without her is to bolt the doors of the *megaron* according to his request.

The link between space and speech—locked lips and locked doors—is especially obvious here. As Griffith puts it "the image of the bird-like words escaping from a cage through an open door has spilled over from the vehicle into the tenor of the metaphor."<sup>35</sup> The final two occurrences of the formula again refer to Eurycleia's function as a doorkeeper. The next day the contest of the bow begins. None of the suitors is successful in stringing the bow; the old beggar wants to give it a try but Penelope demurs. Telemachus sends her away yet again (*Od.* 21.350–353):

ἀλλ' εἰς οἶκον ἰοῦσα τὰ σ' αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε,  
 ἰστόν τ' ἠλακάτην τε καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε  
 ἔργον ἐποίχεσθαι. τόξον δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει  
 πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοὶ· τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ.

But go into the house, and take your work with you,  
 the loom and the distaff, and bid your handmaids  
 to do their work. But the bow concerns men,  
 all men, but especially me, for mine is the power in the house.

This is the third time that Telemachus has dismissed his mother, and the second time he has used a variation of the "go to your room and weave" formula. The poem is reaching its climax, the slaughter of the suitors, and the hyper-masculinity of the *megaron* is emphasized by women's exclusion from it. Telemachus will fight his first battle right in this very space. Odysseus now sends Eumaeus with a message to his nurse, and the swineherd, unaware that Eurycleia knows that Odysseus is present, puts it this way (21.381–385):

Τηλέμαχος κέλεταιί σε περίφρων Εὐρύκλεια,  
 κληῖσαι μεγάροιο θύρας πυκινῶς ἀραρυίας

<sup>34</sup>For example, *Od.* 19.357. Eurycleia's various epithets connote her wisdom, prudence, and nobility. According to Karydas (1998: 57) the old nurse has a greater variety of epithets than Penelope, and shares some epithets with Odysseus. See Karydas 1998: 60–61 for a compilation of her epithets.

<sup>35</sup>Griffith 1995: 2. Griffith provides a persuasive complex of references from archaic and classical poetry to support the notion that the tongue is conceived as a door. Curiously Hainsworth (1960: 268) concludes his argument that the *apteros muthos* formula has become "trite and meaningless" by noting "a link through Telemachus and locking and unlocking of doors."

ἦν δὲ τις ἢ στοναχῆς ἢ κτύπου ἔνδον ἀκούσῃ  
 ἀνδρῶν ἡμετέροισιν ἐν ἔρκεσι, μὴ τι θύραζε  
 προβλώσκειν ἀλλ' αὐτοῦ ἀκὴν ἔμεναι παρὰ ἔργῳ.

Prudent Eurycleia, Telemachus bids you  
 to lock the doors of the *megaron* tightly shut  
 and if any of you hear cries or banging within  
 from men caught in our traps, don't open the door at all  
 and don't look in, but stay there silently at your work.

Compare this situation with the first episode of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, where Eteocles repeatedly tries to silence and send away the chorus of women (*Sept.* 180–201), whose obstreperous presence is not welcome in the public space of Thebes currently under invasion. Since they are the chorus, the women cannot leave, but here they must. And once again Eurycleia controls the door of the inner chamber within which women, including most notably the disloyal maids, are expected to work their wool. Eurycleia says nothing, and immediately attends to the tasks (21.386–387):

ᾠς ἄρ' ἐφώνησεν, τῇ δ' ἄπτερος ἔπλετο μῦθος,  
 κλήϊσεν δὲ θύρας μεγάρων εὖ ναιεταόντων.

And thus he spoke, and words were wingless for her,  
 but she locked the door of the well-built *megaron*.

During the momentous events in the halls all the women are closeted within the interior of the house: Penelope has fallen asleep, Eurycleia and the maids are in their chambers, supposedly working wool. When the suitors have all been slaughtered, Odysseus sends Telemachus for his faithful nurse. In the fourth and final instance of the wingless word formula doors again figure as Telemachus bids Eurycleia to come into the *megaron* (22.398–399):

ᾠς ἄρ' ἐφώνησεν, τῇ δ' ἄπτερος ἔπλετο μῦθος,  
 ὄϊξεν δὲ θύρας μεγάρων εὖ ναιεταόντων.

And thus he spoke, and words were wingless for her,  
 and she opened the door of the well-built *megaron*.

Eurycleia opens the door and enters the *megaron*. What has been bound, will now become unbound, it would seem: the verb κλήϊσεν, “closed,” has significantly been replaced by ὄϊξεν, “opened,” but this does not yet mean that the words of Eurycleia have wings. Women's speech is still fettered by masculine constraint. As Eurycleia starts to howl with delight at the sight of the carnage, Odysseus silences her a second time, reminding her that it is unseemly to gloat over the dead. Here she has the opportunity to make good on her earlier promise to reveal the names of the disloyal maids, and she does indeed perform a symbolic unlocking as she identifies them to her master. And what has been unbound will become bound: the loose maids are now hung by Telemachus in one of the most

shocking episodes of the poem. They are silenced for the final time, not within the house itself, which they have betrayed, but in a separate outbuilding.<sup>36</sup>

I have argued that there is a sustained metaphor in the *Odyssey* linking speech and sexuality, doors and chastity, which is supported by the idea that a word has a physical nature, and that to speak is to let a word cross a boundary. This metaphor is facilitated by the figure of Eurycleia, a threshold guardian, a celibate body and a sealed vessel, so to speak, who locks women in their places and words in her heart. There are moments when she nearly jeopardizes the revenge by talking too much, and risks becoming a stereotype, a garrulous old woman. But she reins herself in, and exhibits a restraint that she shares with Odysseus, who has learned the value of silence after throwing his name out to the Cyclops. And because of her self-control Eurycleia alone of all the women in the household becomes a member of her master's team, helping to implement the revenge.<sup>37</sup> Her final task is to awaken Penelope from her slumber to report that Odysseus is home and the suitors dispatched.<sup>38</sup> Although Penelope is skeptical of Eurycleia's report she does indeed wake up to a far different environment than the one she left behind—the *megaron* has been purged with sulfur; all traces of its status as a public meeting place for the suitors and then a battle site have been expunged.

Penelope will learn the truth for herself when she finally exchanges *muthoi* with her husband, and the spaces of the house which they will now share become normalized. The extreme division between male and female spaces is no longer necessary. The presence of the suitors had necessitated discursive barriers which imposed a certain inflection of the word *muthoi*. When Eurycleia crosses from male to female social space to deliver the news of her master's arrival she unites these gendered spaces which have for long been entirely separate, and where she previously kept women's voices, including her own, under lock and key.

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<sup>36</sup>Fulkerson (2002: 243) comments on the association between mouths and female genitals, and notes the appropriateness of Telemachus' decision to strangle the treacherous women, "because each of the maids' 'mouth' brings trouble upon the household."

<sup>37</sup>I can only mention here the beguiling possibility that Penelope has suspicions about the beggar's identity, which of course would make her the most restrained figure of the entire poem. The veiling of Penelope's thoughts within the text (events are never focalized through her, nor are we given any indication of what she is thinking) helps to define her as a figure simultaneously of restraint and of mystery. For an excellent evaluation of the literature on the "Penelope question," see Doherty 1995: 31–52.

<sup>38</sup>See Felson-Rubin's (1994: 122–123) observations on Penelope's skeptical response to Eurycleia's news and her gradual acceptance of the true nature of the suitors.

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