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Eurycleia: *the* *Odyssey's* Best Supporting Character¹

Abstract

Homer's *Odyssey* provides enough detail for us, as interpreters, to piece together a coherent character under the proper name "Eurycleia". To establish who she is in the poem and what roles she fills, I first examine all her appearances in the poem and all her interactions with the main characters of the family that rules Ithaca (Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus) and with the other servants ("small people") in the poem: Eumaeus the swineherd, Eurynome Penelope's chambermaid, and Melantho the traitorous handmaid. Eurycleia is especially loyal to three generations of males in the family and is dedicated to ensuring the reunion of Penelope and Odysseus — in part as a foundation for her security. In the homecoming drama, she plays the critical role of matchmaker who helps (re)unite the couple. Her first two attempts as matchmaker fail, but in her final appearance the silent Eurycleia is Penelope's unwitting accomplice in tricking Odysseus into revealing his knowledge of the marriage bed he built and thus his true identity. In my Epilogue, I offer seven potential stagings that spotlight Eurycleia, including her final silent role, in which I imagine her starting to obey Penelope's command to move the unmovable bed to the hall.

KEYWORDS: *The Odyssey*; Eurycleia; wet nurse; loyal slave; confidante; matchmaker; arbiter of justice

In his famous first chapter of *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach describes the housekeeper Eurycleia as having no life of her own, no feelings of her own: "she has only the life and feelings of her master." (2003, 21). In fact, the opposite is true. Despite limited appearances, Eurycleia has deep emotional connections to Telemachus and Odysseus, and she plays an important role at critical, dramatic moments in their lives. Though a minor character — one of the "small people" in the world of the text — she is multi-faceted and consequential.

Homer, as I shall call the poet-narrator, invites us to piece together a

¹ I would like to thank friends and colleagues for reading drafts of this paper and discussing interpretive matters: Rosy Colombo (the editor), Seth Schein, Laura Slatkin, and Greg Thalmann. I am indebted to Grace Blaxill, undergraduate Classics major at Yale University, for cheerful, efficient, and helpful library and editorial assistance. I quote throughout from Lattimore's 1965 translation of the *Odyssey*, with which I take occasional liberties for the sake of precision and modern idiom.

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coherent personality for Eurycleia from the fragments dispersed in Books 1, 2, 4 and 14-23. All her appearances take place in the palace of Odysseus. As their former nurse and nanny, she has loving relations with Telemachus and (once she recognizes him in Book 19) with the stranger who turns out to be Odysseus. Eurycleia is an indexical sign of the palace that she inhabits and runs, which in turn stands, by synecdoche, for the entire οἶκος [household] of Odysseus.² Consequently, for Odysseus to regain control over the οἶκος, he needs the full support and cooperation of his old nurse. Eurycleia. He needs to be sure that she is in line with the hierarchic structure that underlies his aristocratic way of life. Of course, she is already firmly on his side. Like Athena, she doesn't resist the patriarch structure; she supports it. The basic social unit of a royal or aristocratic οἶκος in Homeric society consists of a male head, his family, and their dwelling place. It also includes the farmland and herds, dependent workers, and slaves. All these, taken together, plus stored up luxury goods (κεμήλια), constitute their wealth.³ These goods can be booty gained in war as tokens of excellence, goods handed down within the family, bride-price wealth (in exchange for daughters), and gifts acquired in travels abroad as tokens of guest-friendship with the elite of other communities. The non-elite characters attached to this οἶκος – slaves and other dependents – are acquired in diverse ways: by purchase, inheritance, gift exchange or as war booty. These male and female characters supply the labor that supports the family's leisured aristocratic way of life, with its feasts and sacrifices, hospitality, and gift exchanges. As subordinates, they depend on their master for sustenance and livelihood and for the smooth running of the household, and the master and mistress depend on their skills and expertise.⁴

Eurycleia, the nurse to two successive princes, Odysseus and Telemachus, now holds the keys to the palace and manages the staff of maidservants whom she has trained. She is trusted for her judgment and knowledge of what needs to be done and how. Though her title of ταμὴν [housekeeper]⁵ is a

² An indexical sign is based on contiguity between the sign-image and its object, in contrast to an iconic sign, based on similarity. For an overview of semiotic terms, see Felson, ed. (1983), "Introduction" and "Glossary," with references.

³ Vernant (1965, 104-26), makes a fundamental distinction between inside (female) and outside (male): κемеῖλια (< κемеῖ [to lie]) belong to the fixed space of the house's interior, while πρόβατα [things that move forward, flocks] belong to the more fluid exterior,

⁴ For an excellent overview of the Homeric οἶκος, with extensive analysis of the secondary literature and an understanding of the need to be mindful of coincidences and dissonances between the values and institutions of Homer's world and of our own, see Thalmann (1998, 49-107).

⁵ The term ταμὴν, derived from τέμνω [cut], seems to refer to the one who divides up and distributes goods – a female servant's task.

general term shared by other maidservants, she is clearly in charge. Though a slave herself, she operates at a higher level than the others, like a member of the royal family, and she guides those under her as to how to endure their own slavery (22.423: δουλοσύνην ἀνέχεσθαι). Her interests are those of her master, but she understands the work that needs to be done for the household to run smoothly. She is intelligent,⁶ an aristocrat by birth who fell into servitude. In recognition of her aristocratic background, she is known not just by her personal name, but also by the thrice mentioned names of her father Ops and grandfather Peisenor (1.429, 2.347 and 20.148). Her grandfather's name may have aristocratic implications.

Orderliness and predictability in the palace are important to Eurycleia, yet this οἶκος is virtually under siege. For more than three years 108 unruly suitors have undermined the household's day-to-day routines and drained its resources. Odysseus' long absence provided the conditions for such disarray.⁷ Eurycleia does not have the authority to deny hospitality to the suitors, nor is she able to control the behavior of all fifty handmaids who are supposed to answer to her.

Odysseus, when he left for Troy, entrusted his entire οἶκος to his companion Mentor (2.225), who blames his fellow Ithacans for not restraining the unruly suitors (2.229-41). but he cannot persuade these fellow townsmen to intervene. In his parting words, Odysseus left the palace under the care of Penelope (18.266). But twelve of the handmaids whom Penelope and Eurycleia supervise sleep with the suitors. Moreover, the suitors chafe under Penelope's effort to control them. They claim that she sends messages to each,

⁶ Eurycleia shares Penelope's epithet περίφρων [circumspect, thinking all around] twice in the narrator's description (19.491 and 20.134) and twice when a character addresses her: Penelope at 19.357 and the swineherd Eumaius at 21.381. Similarly, she shares one term with Odysseus: the narrator describes her as caring for the storeroom "in the wisdom of her mind" (2.346: νόου πολυδρεΐησιν) and Penelope calls her "very astute" (23.82: πολυῖδριν); five lines earlier, at 23.77, Eurycleia describes Odysseus as acting "in the great wisdom of his mind" (πολυκερδίησι νόοιο). For an overview of all references to Eurycleia's intelligence by the narrator and by characters, see Karydos (1998, 60-61).

⁷ The neglected hunting dog Argos signals the disarray of the οἶκος in the master's absence. Odysseus' compliment to Penelope contradicts that state of affairs. In a reverse gender simile, he compares her to a blameless and god-fearing king whose land and flocks prosper under his good leadership, and whose people prosper (19.109-14). Here Odysseus uses the compliment as a strategic ploy to win favor, as when he compares Nausicaa to a goddess and to young palm tree he once saw in Delos (6.149-69).

Penelope deflects his praise. She emphasizes the disarray: how the suitors wear her house out and how she wastes away longing for Odysseus (19.124-36).

giving each one hope. Antinous at 2.92 (addressing Telemachus) and Athena at 13.381 (addressing Odysseus) add the phrase “while her mind is set on other things.”⁸ As proof that Penelope is deceiving them and has no intention to remarry, they quote her request that they wait, though eager to marry her, until she finishes weaving the shroud for Laertes. They then expose her deceitful ploy of unraveling by night what she wove by day (2.96-102, 19.141-7, 24.131-7).⁹ The fact that no one is willing or able to restore order in the οἶκος in Odysseus’ absence leaves Eurycleia in an impossible situation.

Characters in Homeric epic do not unfold in an orderly, linear fashion. Members of the audience (whether listening or reading) who are familiar with the poetic tradition may reconstruct the stories and reorder their elements as the epic moves forward. In presenting Eurycleia, Homer includes isolated and descriptive “character indicators”.¹⁰ The character’s proper name enables the interpreter to construct that character from the assemblage of textual elements. Dispersed as these are throughout the text, they can be assembled into an illusion of fullness, as they must have been in Homer’s time by members of his live audiences.¹¹

⁸ ἤδη γὰρ τρίτον ἐστὶν ἔτος, τάχα δ’ εἰσι τέταρτον
ἐξ οὗ ἀτέμβει θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν Ἀχαιῶν.
πάντας μὲν ῥ’ ἔλπει καὶ ὑπίσχεται ἀνδρὶ ἐκάστῳ
ἀγγελίας προῖεῖσα, νόος δέ οἱ ἄλλα μενοινᾷ. (2.89-92.)

[And now it is the third year, and will be the fourth year presently, / since she has been denying the desires of the Achaeans. / For she holds out hope to all, and makes promises to each man, / sending us messages, but her mind is intent on other things.]

After Antinous blames Penelope for leading the suitors on, he quotes her, as she urged her suitors to be patient, though eager to marry, while she completed the weaving of Laertes’ shroud (2.96-102). Penelope herself quotes these very words to the stranger (Odysseus) in the interview at the hearth (19.141-7), as does the shade of Amphimedon in his complaint at 24.124-5, when he recounts the suitors’ version of the slaughter. Though Penelope at the interview omits the details of giving hope and sending messages to each suitor, Athena confirms that detail at 13.379-81, though without the quote. Penelope’s public words function almost like an edict, reproducible in fixed, formulaic language.

⁹ Telemachus makes the same complaint to Athena-Mentes:

ἡ δ’ οὐτ’ ἀρνέϊται στυγερὸν γάμον οὔτε τελευτὴν / ποιῆσαι δύναται [“my mother does not refuse the hateful marriage, nor is she able/ to make an end of the matter”] (1.249-50). What motivates Penelope to give the suitors encouragement is never explained; in Felson (1994) I suggest that she enjoys being much-wooed.

¹⁰ On “character-indicators” see Rimmon-Kenan (1983, 59-70).

¹¹ This effect is enhanced if the proper name is delayed, as in the case of Odysseus, who is first named in Book 1, line 21, after his circumstances have been described.

Constructing Eurycleia's character from the scattered clues in the text involves making sense of her psychologically in all her complexity. Narratologically, it requires that we note her physical presence at critical events, examine her impact on other characters as the plot advances, and capture her focalization of events as they unfold.

Eurycleia has close ties to the male line of the Ithacan royal family. Her connection began when Laertes, father of Odysseus, bought her from her father for a price comparable to a bride-price. In a brief back-story situated within her first appearance,¹² we learn:

Εὐρύκλει', Ὀπος θυγάτηρ Πεισηνορίδαο
 τήν ποτε Λαέρτης πρίατο κτεάτεσσιν ἑοῖσι
 πρωθήβην ἔτ' ἐοῦσαν, ἑικοσάβοια δ' ἔδωκεν,
 ἴσα δέ μιν κεδνῇ ἀλόχῳ τίεν ἐν μεγάροισιν,
 εὐνῇ δ' οὐ ποτ' ἔμικτο, χόλον δ' ἀλέεινε γυναικός
 (1.429-33)

[She was the daughter of Ops the son of Peisenor, / and Laertes had purchased her long ago with his own possessions / when she was still in her first youth (πρωθήβην), and gave twenty oxen for her,¹³ / and he honored her in his house as much as his own devoted / wife, but never slept with her, for fear of his wife's anger]

We do not know why Laertes paid such a high price for the young Eurycleia. We can speculate that he was captivated by her beauty and that he expected to take her to bed. But Laertes declined to do so, instead, honoring the wishes of his jealous wife, even though to sleep with a slave was an accepted social practice.¹⁴ I speculate that Laertes made Eurycleia the nurse to his son and heir as a way of honoring her for her sexual attractiveness and her high birth without making her his bedmate. Although Homer does not expand on Eurycleia's subsequent relations with Anticleia, the complementarity of their names is striking: "Widespread Glory" and "Opposed to Glory".¹⁵

My approach to character follows Bal (1987, 107-8) and Barthes (1974,94); cf. Felson (1994, 126-8).

¹² On Homeric treatments of first appearances, see Race (1993).

¹³ Cf. *Iliad* 23.704-5, where a skilled slave-woman is worth four oxen.

¹⁴ The Ithacan lead family was unique in having a single line of sons. This underscores Laertes' decision not to sleep with a slave-woman, in fear of his wife's anger. Contrast the indifference to his wife's feelings of Heracles, when he introduces the captive Iole into their bedchamber in Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, and of Agamemnon, when he brings Cassandra home as his war-prize in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Pedrick (1994, 97-118) discusses these situational parallels.

¹⁵ On Eurycleia as a doublet for Anticleia, especially in the naming scene of Book 19, see Murnaghan (1987, 40-41) and Peradotto (1990, 138).

We also do not know what motivated Ops to sell his daughter. Perhaps she was secretly pregnant¹⁶ or had otherwise earned her father's disapproval, or perhaps he had fallen on hard times and needed the payment to enhance his wealth.

When Odysseus was growing up, both his nurse and his mother acted maternally toward Odysseus. Later, both suffered from his absence in the Trojan War: Anticleia died of longing for him (11.202) and Eurycleia still sorely laments his absence.

After Anticleia dies, the aged and despondent Laertes does not turn to Eurycleia. He retires to the countryside and is looked after by an aged Sicilian servant. Eurycleia remains at the palace and is dedicated to its protection and perpetuation. But she still empathizes with her old master and wants to protect him from further anxiety and grief. She urges Penelope not to inform him about the suitors' plot against his grandson, but instead to pray to Athena (4.734-41 and 752-4).

When we first encounter Eurycleia, she is an old woman. Both Odysseus and Telemachus still address her as "dear nurse" or "dear μάϊα" ("good mother"), and she still treats them both as if they were still children under her care.¹⁷ They talk to her lovingly, but, at times of urgency, they simply give her orders, as her superiors, and expect her to obey. She expresses herself freely to them, not holding back, trying to convince them to do what she believes to be best. But when pressed, she loyally obeys their commands.

1. Eurycleia and Telemachus

Eurycleia is caring and maternal to Telemachus. They first appear together at the end of Book 1, when Telemachus goes off to bed (1.424-44), soon after Athena (in the guise of Mentos) has prompted him to search for his father. His heart is troubled. Devoted Eurycleia, who of all the servants especially would tend to him (435: φιλέσκει), having been his nurse since he was a little boy, escorts him to his bedchamber off the courtyard and carries the flaring torches. Once there, she folds his soft tunic and hangs it on a peg, treating him like a child.

¹⁶ The fact that Eurycleia became the wet nurse of Odysseus implies that she had been pregnant, since a young virgin would not lactate.

¹⁷ When Eurycleia first recognizes Odysseus, she exclaims: ἦ μάλ' Ὀδυσσεύς ἐσσι, φίλον τέκος: οὐδέ σ' ἐγὼ γε / πρὶν ἔγνω, πρὶν πάντα ἄνακτ' ἐμὸν ἀμφαράσθαι ["Then, dear child, you are really Odysseus. I did not know you / before; not until I had touched you all over."] (19.474-5). Then, shocked that he would physically harm her, she cries out: τέκνον ἐμὸν, ποῖόν σε ἔπος φύγεν ἕρκος ὀδόντων. ["My child, what sort of word escaped your teeth's barrier?"] (19.492).

When Telemachus asks Eurycleia for help in preparing for his journey, her ambivalence is evident. On the one hand, she is apprehensive about his taking risks; on the other, she senses that it is time for him to come of age and act for himself. The two meet up near the storeroom εὐρύν, ὅθι νητὸς χρυσὸς καὶ χαλκὸς ἔκειτο / ἐσθὴς τ' ἐν χηλοῖσιν ἄλῃς τ' ἐὺῶδες ἔλαιον: / ἐν δὲ πίθοι οἴνοιο παλαιοῦ ἡδυπότοιο / ἔστασαν, ἄκρητον θεῖον ποτὸν ἐντὸς ἔχοντες (2.338-41) [where gold and bronze were lying piled, / and abundant clothing in the bins, and fragrant olive oil, / and in it jars of wine, sweet to drink, aged, / were standing, keeping the unmixed divine drink inside them . . .]. The woman in charge of this storeroom is Eurycleia, who watched over all this night and day with much shrewdness of mind (2.345-7).¹⁸ This description of her role implies that she is protecting the wealth of the οἶκος from the suitors and those who serve them. There Telemachus asks her, as the one in charge, to supply him with provisions for his journey – sweet wine in twelve handled jars with covers and twenty measures of the choice of milled barley poured into leather bags. He will pick up the supplies in the evening, after his mother goes to bed (2.349-58). Then he tells her his plan, to go to Sparta and Pylos “to ask after my dear father’s homecoming, if I might hear something” (2.359-60).

At first, wanting to keep him safe, Eurycleia cries out, bitterly lamenting, and tries to persuade him to stay and guard his possessions. She asks him why he, an only and beloved (ἀγαπητός) child, wishes to wander over much land and suffer hardships on the barren wide sea (2.363-70). Telemachus’ determination overrides her qualms. Reassured that the plan was made with a god’s will, she swears an oath not to inform his beloved mother of the trip until the eleventh or twelfth day, or until she misses him herself or hears he is absent. Then she prepares the provisions, as directed. And, when he boards the ship, he tells his crew that only one serving woman knows the story. That one is, of course, Eurycleia.

In a matching scene, Eurycleia is by far the first to see Telemachus when he returns from the swineherd’s hut to the palace, having completed his journey to the Peloponnesus and having escaped the suitors’ ambush. She weeps with joy and the other maids surround Telemachus and kiss his head and shoulders in loving welcome (17.31-5). Later, she will weep again when she discovers that the stranger is her master (19.471-2) and the loyal maids will kiss his head and shoulders after the slaughter (22.497-500).¹⁹

¹⁸ This description by the narrator captures Telemachus’ focalization as he enters the storeroom and sees the wealth. Cf. the awe that he and Peisistratus, son of Nestor, experience when they see the glorious wealth at Menelaus’ palace (4.43-46), which he compares to the court of Olympian Zeus (4.71-5).

¹⁹ I see “welcoming the returning hero” an epic “type-scene,” an arrival scene fo-

Eurycleia's presence in critical scenes accentuates the parallels between the life-stories of Odysseus and Telemachus. Her emotional engagement at the departure and return of Telemachus and at the return of Odysseus mark her as a "threshold" or "boundary figure." In the case of Telemachus, she sends the inexperienced youth off on his journey, equipped with what he needs from the storeroom. Later, when he returns, she is the first to welcome him to the palace. The pattern is not quite so marked for Odysseus when he returns from Parnassus and from Troy.

There are parallels between Eurycleia and the loyal swineherd Eumaeus, who is a generation younger than she. When Anticleia raised Eumaeus in the palace alongside her daughter Ktimene (15.363), Eurycleia probably would have played a role. As Eumaeus represents the care of Odysseus' livestock, Eurycleia stands for the care of the palace itself. As Eumaeus functions as a surrogate father for Telemachus, Eurycleia is his surrogate ("as if") mother, even though Penelope is present. For example, she is complicit in Telemachus' maturation journey (and thus keenly aware of his absence), in sharp contrast to Penelope. Both servants ease Telemachus' transition from sheltered youth to adulthood. Both enable him even though both (like all parents) might want to keep him in the "nest," young and dependent on them.²⁰

2. Odysseus and Eurycleia

Eurycleia has had a similar intimacy with the young Odysseus. She raised him from infancy to adulthood and still addresses him as "child" (ref). She nursed him at her breast (19.482-3) and played an active role in his naming. Just after Anticleia had given birth to him, her father Autolycus paid a visit.

calized by the welcomers. (Other type-scenes describe visits, embassies, sacrifice, dreams, boat and wagon journeys, arming and dressing, sleep, meetings, oaths, and baths.) A type-scene expresses a regular sequence of action in formulaic language. It is an "oft repeated block of words and phrases arranged in a characteristic sequence that describes a commonly occurring activity in Homer" (Finkelberg 2011, 905-7 [Steven T. Reece]). On "type-scenes" in Homeric epic, see Finkelberg 2011, with citations to Arend 1933, who introduced the term, and to Parry, Lord, Fenik 1968, and Edwards 1980, 1987: 72-4, and 1997, and others. The welcoming type-scene recurs at 23.203-4 when Penelope kisses Odysseus' head and shoulders.

²⁰ Penelope, though present at the palace throughout Telemachus' life-stages, is less of a day-to-day presence than Eurycleia. She only notices her son's absence when Medon the herald informs her of the suitors' nefarious plot. Pedrick (1994) makes the interesting point that Eurycleia and Penelope must occupy different parts of the palace.

The young nurse laid the child she was holding on his grandfather's knees and said: Αὐτόλυκ', αὐτὸς νῦν ὄνομ' εὔρεο ὅττι κε θῆαι / παιδὸς παιδὶ φίλῳ: πολυάρητος δέ τοί ἐστιν. (19.403-4) [Autolycus, now find yourself that name you will bestow / on your own child's dear child, for you have prayed much to have him].²¹

In a break with tradition, Autolycus, prodded by Eurycleia, determines what the name will be. Normally the father and mother chose the name of their child. He tells Laertes and Anticleia: τίθεσθ' ὄνομ' ὅττι κεν εἴπω: / πολλοῖσιν γὰρ ἐγὼ γε ὀδυσσάμενος τόδ' ἰκάνω, / ἀνδράσιν ἡδὲ γυναιξὶν ἀνὰ χθόνα πουλυβότειραν: / τῷ δ' Ὀδυσσεὺς ὄνομ' ἔστω ἐπώνυμον ["Give him the name I tell you . . ., the name Odysseus, he that is hated / he that brings trouble, since I have come to this place hateful to and causing pain to (ὀδυσσάμενος) many,²² women and men alike on the prospering earth . . ."] (19.406-9).

Autolycus proposes the journey his grandson will make when he comes of age:

ὁππότε ἂν ἡβήσας μητρῷον ἐς μέγα δῶμα
ἔλθῃ Παρνησόνδ', ὅθι πού μοι κτήματ' ἔασι,
τῶν οἱ ἐγὼ δώσω καὶ μιν χαίροντ' ἀποπέμψω.
(19.410-12)

[Then when he grows up (ἡβήσας), / and comes to the great house of his mother's line, and Parnassus, / where there are possessions that are called mine, I will give him / freely of these to make him happy and send him back to you.]

Eurycleia witnessed all this: the naming and the invitation to visit, with the promise of a transfer of wealth. At these pivotal junctures, as at Odysseus' return and "re-marriage" to Penelope, the dear nurse plays a role.

The narrative structure in which the naming ceremony is embedded is three-layered. The outer layer is the frame story: Eurycleia, as she washes the stranger's feet, feels the scar (19.393) and recognizes that this is Odysseus.²³ But her full reaction is deferred by the long flashback or analepsis at the second layer, an account of the youth's maturation journey where he

²¹ Eurycleia seems to be proposing the name Πολυάρητος ("long prayed for") for the child, as if she were the mother. Polyaretus is a not uncommon Greek name (Dimock 1995, 265 n. 8). Normally, the parents would name their offspring.

²² Cf. Dimock (1995: vol.1, on 1.62) ?interprets ὀδυσσάμενος as "being hated" and "bringing trouble to." For insightful studies of the active and passive aspects of Odysseus' name, see Dimock 1956 and Peradotto 1990.

²³ Eurycleia is the only one who recognizes Odysseus on her own, without his first revealing himself, as he did to Telemachus.

got that scar. Within that 53-line analepsis, at the third layer, is the story of Autolycus' choice of a name for Odysseus.

The scar (οὐλήν) is a visual image that Eurycleia and her master notice or think of at almost the same moment. Odysseus, when he thought of it in his heart (19.390 κατὰ θυμὸν οἶσατο), turned toward the shadows, lest the old nurse might recognize the scar as she handled it and expose his identity. Going near her lord, Eurycleia immediately recognized the scar. The relative pronoun "which" (τήν) is the gateway to the second level analepsis: τήν ποτέ μιν σὺς ἤλασε λευκῷ ὀδόντι / Παρνησόνδ' ἐλθόντα μετ' Αὐτόλυκόν τε καὶ υἱᾶς ["which once the boar with his white tusk had inflicted / on him, when he went to Parnassus, to Autolycus and his children"] (19.393-4).

The entire account of the journey to Mt. Parnassus and back, told by the narrator, is focalized by Eurycleia, as de Jong argues. Handling the scar triggers her memory of how the young Odysseus acquired that scar on a boar hunt with his maternal uncles.²⁴

Odysseus' maturation tale ends happily. When he returns to Ithaca, his parents are the welcomers, though Eurycleia may be present in the background:

τὸν μὲν ἄρ' Αὐτόλυκός τε καὶ υἱέες Αὐτολύκοιο
εὖ ἰησάμενοι ἦδ' ἀγλαὰ δῶρα πορόντες
καρπαλίμως χαίροντα φίλην ἐς πατρίδ' ἔπεμπον
εἰς Ἰθάκην. τῷ μὲν ῥά πατήρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ
χαῖρον νοστήσαντι καὶ ἐξερέεινον ἕκαστα,
οὐλήν ὅτι πάθοι: ὁ δ' ἄρα σφίσιν εὖ κατέλεξεν
ὥς μιν θηρεύοντ' ἔλασεν σὺς λευκῷ ὀδόντι,
Παρνησόνδ' ἐλθόντα σὺν υἱάσιν Αὐτολύκοιο.
(19.459-66)

[Autolycus and the sons of Autolycus, / healing him well and giving him shining presents, sent him / speedily back rejoicing to his own beloved country / in Ithaca, and there his father and queenly mother / were glad in his homecoming, and asked about all that had happened, / and how he came by his wound, and he told well his story, / how in the hunt the boar with his white tusk had wounded him / as he went up to Parnassus with the sons of Autolycus.]

The long digression postpones the description of Eurycleia's emotional outburst and Odysseus' violent response. When the frame story resumes, the old nurse recognizes the scar through her tactile familiarity with his body. She lets go of his foot, causing the water basin to tip over. Then she reacts with spontaneous pain and joy:

²⁴ de Jong (1985, 393-466).

τὴν δ' ἅμα χάρμα καὶ ἄλγος ἔλε φρένα, τὼ δέ οἱ ὄσσε
 δακρυόφι πλησθεν, θαλερὴ δέ οἱ ἔσχετο φωνή.
 ἀψαμένη δὲ γενείου Ὀδυσσῆα προσέειπεν:
 ἦ μάλ' Ὀδυσσεύς ἐσσι, φίλον τέκος· οὐδέ σ' ἐγὼ γε
 πρὶν ἔγνω, πρὶν πάντα ἄνακτ' ἐμὸν ἀμφαφάσθαι.
 (19.471-5)

[Pain and joy seized her at once, and both eyes / filled with tears, and the blossoming voice (θαλερὴ . . . φωνή) was held within her. / She took the beard of Odysseus in her hands and spoke to him: / "Then, dear child, you are really Odysseus. I did not know you / before; not until I had touched my lord all over."]

Eurycleia turns her eyes toward Penelope, "wishing to indicate to her her beloved husband's presence." She wants to share the good news with her mistress and to point to the scar as proof.²⁵ Odysseus intervenes. But Odysseus, forewarned by Agamemnon's shade and by Athena that wives can be treacherous, still wants to test Penelope. And he must not reveal his identity too soon, since his plot to entrap and slaughter the suitors depends on secrecy and surprise. Thus, before Eurycleia can expose his identity to Penelope, who is sitting nearby, or to any maidservants in the vicinity, Odysseus grabs the nurse's throat and pulls her to him. This is one of the rare occasions when Odysseus loses his composure, as later when he thinks the marriage-bed has been moved. His vehemence with his nurse foreshadows his state of mind when he and his three allies slaughter the suitors and later, when he orders the death of the disloyal handmaids. In his threat, he associates Eurycleia with them, should she speak out and not keep silent:

μαῖα, τίη μ' ἐθέλεις ὀλέσαι; σὺ δέ μ' ἔτρεφες αὐτὴ
 τῷ σῶ ἐπὶ μαζῶ: νῦν δ' ἄλγεα πολλὰ μογήσας
 ἤλυθον εἰκοστῷ ἔτεϊ ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν.
 ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ ἐφράσθης καὶ τοι θεὸς ἔμβαλε θυμῷ,
 σίγα, μή τίς τ' ἄλλος ἐνὶ μεγάροισι πύθεται.
 ὧδε γὰρ ἐξερέω, καὶ μὴν τετελεσμένον ἔσται:
 εἴ χ' ὑπ' ἐμοί γε θεὸς δαμάσῃ μνηστῆρας ἀγαπούς,
 οὐδὲ τροφοῦ οὔσης σεῦ ἀφέξομαι, ὅπποτ' ἂν ἄλλας
 δμῶας ἐν μεγάροισιν ἐμοῖς κτείνωμι γυναῖκας.
 (19.482-90)

[Nurse, why are you trying to kill me? You yourself suckled me at your breast; and now at last after suffering much, I have come, in the twentieth year, back to my own country.

²⁵ This is Eurycleia's first attempt to play matchmaker, as she tries to inform her mistress of the stranger's identity (19.386-93 and 467-94).

But now that you have learned who I am, and the god put it into your mind, hush, let nobody else in the palace know of it. For so I tell you straight out, and it will be a thing accomplished. If you do, and by my hands the god beats down the arrogant suitors, nurse of mine though you are, I will not spare you when I kill the rest of the serving maids in my palace.]

Meanwhile, Athena helps Odysseus keep his identity secret. She causes Penelope to avert her eyes so she won't see Eurycleia's joyous surprise and Odysseus' violent reaction. This is a crucial and fully staged dramatic moment.

Eurycleia plays a minor but crucial role in Odysseus' encounters with the suitors. At 21.381-7, before Odysseus takes his turn at stringing his bow, Eumaeus orders circumspect Eurycleia to bar the double doors to the megaron to prevent any suitors from escaping. He tells her to keep the handmaids in the women's quarters and to work in silence, ignoring whatever outcry they might hear from the megaron.

After the slaughter, Eurycleia performs several tasks at Odysseus' command. She identifies which handmaids are guilty and which ones are innocent (22.419-29), information that she had earlier tried to share (19.495-502). Then she summons the twelve disloyal ones and orders them to cleanse the megaron of the gore of battle (22.479-501). She knows that they will soon be led out into the courtyard to be executed. Next she brings her master the fire and sulfur he needs to purify the megaron. And finally, she gets his permission to awaken Penelope and tell her of his return.

3. Eurycleia and Penelope (19.1-84)

In the world of Homer's *Odyssey*, where servants are divided into two groups, the loyal and the treacherous, Eurycleia, like the two loyal herdsmen, is unequivocally loyal. She is strongly committed to Telemachus' safety and to Odysseus' reasserting his position in the household and the community. But while she is attached to the royal family emotionally, she is also aware of the risks she faces as an individual and of her dependency on the patrilineal succession for her personal security. The fact that she was purchased by Laertes means that she is severed from her own family and her own community. In several possible scenarios, she would likely lose her position of authority: if Telemachus were to lose his inheritance, or if Odysseus were to be killed in the battle, or if Penelope were to marry one of the suitors who could then become *ἄναξ* of the *οἶκος* and *βασιλεύς* of Ithaca and the surrounding islands.

From the moment Eurycleia recognizes Odysseus by his boar-hunt scar and knows that the stranger-guest is Odysseus (19.467-8), she sees that her goals can be realized. She wants, first, to help him restore order in the *οἶκος*

(by eliminating the suitors and the guilty handmaids). Second, she hopes to reunite him with her mistress.²⁶ For her position as keeper of the palace to be secure, there must be harmony between the husband and the wife. Odysseus earlier articulated that principle to the Phaeacian princess Nausicaa when he was wishing her a marriage based on like-mindedness:

σοὶ δὲ θεοὶ τόσα δοῖεν ὅσα φρεσὶ σῇσι μενοινᾷς,
 ἄνδρα τε καὶ οἶκον, καὶ ὁμοφροσύνην ὀπάσειαν
 ἐσθλήν: οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ γε κρεῖσσον καὶ ἄρειον,
 ἢ ὅθ' ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχρητον
 ἀνὴρ ἡδὲ γυνή: πόλλ' ἄλγεα δυσμενέεσσι,
 χάρματα δ' εὐμενέτησι, μάλιστα δέ τ' ἔκλυον αὐτοί.
 (6.180-5)

[. . . nothing is better than this, more steadfast / than when two people, a man and his wife, keep a harmonious / household (ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχρητον); a thing that brings much distress to / the people who hate them / .and pleasure to their well-wishers, and for them the best reputation.]

Eurycleia is forced to reconcile conflicting loyalties. Telemachus had forced her to swear not to tell anyone, including his mother, of his journey. Keeping these secrets from Penelope may strain their connection, but in both instances, Eurycleia had no choice. Slaves in the patriarchal world of Homeric ultimately have to align themselves with their master. Yet Eurycleia feels the need to explain herself and to set things right with his mistress.

In Book 4, Penelope learns from Medon the herald that her son has gone on a potentially dangerous trip without letting her know, and that now the suitors are lying in wait to ambush him in the harbor. Eurycleia, using hyperbole, confesses that she knew of his trip all along:

‘νύμφα φίλη, σὺ μὲν ἄρ με κατάκτανε νηλεὶ χαλκῷ
 ἢ ἔα ἐν μεγάρω: μῦθον δέ τοι οὐκ ἐπικεύσω.
 ἦδε' ἐγὼ τάδε πάντα, πόρον δέ οἱ ὅσσ' ἐκέλευε,
 σῖτον καὶ μέθυ ἡδύ: ἐμεῦ δ' ἔλετο μέγαν ὄρκον
 μὴ πρὶν σοὶ ἐρέειν, πρὶν δωδεκάτην γε γενέσθαι
 ἢ σ' αὐτὴν ποθέσαι καὶ ἀφορμηθέντος ἀκοῦσαι,
 ὥς ἂν μὴ κλαίουσα κατὰ χροῶ καλὸν ἰάπτῃς.
 (4.744-9)

[My dear bride, kill me then, with the pitiless bronze;²⁷ or else / let me

²⁶ Eumaeus too plays a mediating role when he negotiates a time and place for Penelope and the disguised Odysseus to meet (17.542-88).

²⁷ The hyperbolic expression “kill me” in Eurycleia’s second apology, as in her

be in the halls. I will not hide the story from you. / I did know all these things, and I gave him all that he asked for, / both bread and sweet wine, but he took a great oath from me / never to tell you of it until it came to the twelfth day, / or until you might miss him yourself or hear he was absent, / so that you might not ruin your lovely skin with weeping.]

Yet even in this scene the two use φίλη [dear] when they address one another, indicating their family-like relationship.²⁸

Once the suitors have been slaughtered and there is no need for secrecy, Eurycleia tries to set things right with Penelope. Only then does she confess that she saw the scar while washing the stranger's feet and wanted to tell her about it, εἰπέμεν: ἀλλά με κεῖνος ἔλων ἐπὶ μάστακα χερσὶν / οὐκ ἔα εἰπέμεναι πολυῖδρεΐησι νόοιο. ["but he stopped my mouth with his hands, would not / let me speak, for his mind sought every advantage"] (23.76-77).

These two instances of keeping important information from Penelope illustrate the difficulty of Eurycleia's position. It is impossible for her to keep secrets for Telemachus and Odysseus and at the same time be truthful to Penelope. This tension of loyalties points to a less than seamless harmony in the οἶκος and the potential for tensions between genders. It comes after the two women have kept the palace running for the twenty years of Odysseus' absence. Interestingly, it is slaves who reflect and reveal this tension.²⁹

Meanwhile, after the slaughter of the suitors and the execution of the treacherous handmaids and the disloyal goatherd Melanthus, Eurycleia helps Odysseus get the palace back to order. The megaron where the slaughter took place is cleansed and purified. The loyal handmaids welcome Odysseus and he greets them warmly. Finally, after several requests, he grants his dear nurse permission to awaken Penelope and inform her that he is home.

This leads to the richest and most revealing scene between Eurycleia

earlier apology for not informing Penelope of Telemachus' journey (4.743), has rhetorical force as a threat that achieves its purpose. It presupposes the master's control over the bodies of his slaves, echoing the violent diction of Odysseus's threat at 19.489-90. Though an integral part of the family, the slaves' status is precarious: they can be killed, should they displease their master – an aspect of the social structure that the *Odyssey* plays down.

²⁸ See Table I-III in Karydos (1998, 59-63), which provide a thorough assemblage of the Eurycleia scenes and of the forms of address between Eurycleia and members of Odysseus's family.

²⁹ After the reunion, Eurycleia and Eurynome join forces as they make up the marriage-bed (23.289-90). This joint action by a servant from Odysseus's family and a servant from Penelope's symbolizes the reunion of husband and wife in their richly symbolic marriage bed.

and Penelope (23.1-85), as Eurycleia tries to convince her mistress that the stranger is indeed Odysseus. Laughing, she ascends to Penelope's upper bed-chamber. In the exchange that follows, they use tender, familiar forms of address: Eurycleia calls Penelope φίλον τέκος [dear child] and φίλη νύμφα [dear bride], and Penelope calls Eurycleia μαῖα φίλη [dear good mother] and τροφός φίλη [dear nurse].³⁰ The emotions that permeate this conversation may be seen as a compressed version of how the two have related to one another during Odysseus' long absence.

The question of whether Odysseus will return was resolved at the Council on Olympus in Book 1. Now the question for Penelope is whether the stranger is in fact Odysseus, or an imposter, human or divine. Penelope wants a guarantee that he is the real Odysseus, her Odysseus, the one she has remembered all these years. Audiences know, of course, that Eurycleia's report is accurate; their narrative desire is for Penelope to believe Eurycleia's words. Eurycleia thinks that the problems are all over. The stranger is clearly Odysseus (not just a matter of identity but also of prowess: no one else could have accomplished such feats against such odds.)

After the nurse delivers her simple message, Penelope at first expresses disbelief. She accuses Eurycleia of being mad and of insulting her. In a veiled threat, she tells her that only her age has saved her from repercussions. Eurycleia replies that she is not insulting her mistress, and she reiterates that Odysseus is indeed in the house: "He is that stranger-guest, whom all in the house were abusing." Now Penelope responds as Eurycleia had hoped and expected: she springs up from the bed in her joy and embraces the old woman, her eyes streaming tears (23.32-34). Then the dear nurse gives a synopsis of what she ear- and eye-witnessed, stressing how Penelope would have been cheered to see Odysseus triumphant:

οὐκ ἴδον, οὐ πυθόμην, ἀλλὰ στόνον οἷον ἄκουσα
 κτεινομένων: ἡμεῖς δὲ μυχῶ θαλάμων εὐπήκτων
 ἤμεθ' ἀτυζόμεναι, σανίδες δ' ἔχον εὖ ἀραρυῖαι,
 πρίν γ' ὅτε δή με σὸς υἱὸς ἀπὸ μεγάροιο κάλεσσε
 Τηλέμαχος: τὸν γάρ ῥα πατήρ προέηκε καλέσσαι.
 εὖρον ἔπειτ' Ὀδυσῆα μετὰ κταμένοιισι νέκυσσιν
 ἑσταόθ': οἱ δέ μιν ἀμφί, κραταίπεδον οὔδας ἔχοντες,
 κείατ' ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισιν: ἰδοῦσά κε θυμὸν ἰάνθης.
 νῦν δ' οἱ μὲν δὴ πάντες ἐπ' αὐλείησι θύρῃσιν

³⁰ Eurycleia uses the same forms of address with Telemachus and Odysseus, and they with her; cf. Karydos (1998).

When Eurycleia calls Penelope φίλη νύμφα [dear bride], she reveals that she is thinking of her as she was when she married Odysseus.

ἄθροοι, αὐτὰρ ὁ δῶμα θεειοῦται περικαλλές,
 πῦρ μέγα κῆάμενος· σὲ δέ με προέηκε καλέσσαι.
 (23. 40-51)

[I did not see, I was not told, but I heard the outcry / of them being killed; we, hidden away in the strong built storerooms, / sat there terrified, and the closed doors held us prisoner, / until from inside the great hall your son Telemachus / summoned me, because his father told him to do it. / There I found Odysseus standing among the dead men / he had killed, and they covered the hardened earth, lying / piled on each other around him. You would have been cheered to see him, / spattered over with gore and battle filth, like a lion. / Now they lie all together, by the doors of the courtyard, / while he is burning a great fire, and cleaning the beautiful / house with brimstone. He has sent me on to summon you.]

Eurycleia mentions the outcry that she herself heard from the storeroom and what she saw once she entered the megaron. But she does not describe her cry of celebration nor Odysseus' response (22.401-16). And she stops short of telling Penelope about her role as Odysseus' helper (22:420-34 and 480-501).³¹ Her assertion, "You would have warmed your θυμός seeing . . .," shows a character-narrator representing the focalization of her interlocutor whom she thereby transports vicariously to the scene in question, where Penelope herself would see Odysseus befouled with blood and the corpses lying atop one another. She uses such vivid detail, hoping to convince Penelope that she is telling the truth.³²

But Penelope suddenly pulls back and denies the revelation. She offers her own brief explanation for the slaughter. Her self-protective denial is reminiscent of her reaction in Book 19, when she heard the stranger's interpretation of her dream of the geese and the eagle.

By the end of the scene Penelope knows it is her husband: the narrator-focalizer gives us a glimpse of her private thoughts when he describes her descending the stairs to the megaron and debating how to greet "her husband" (23.86). But Penelope still needs to test him, to find out if he has been changed by war and twenty years of absence or if this is still the man she married.

Penelope's final test of Odysseus' identity and character – the ruse of the

³¹ After the slaughter, Eurycleia plays her part by separate the guilty from the innocent handmaidens, summoning the wicked ones, bringing Odysseus sulfur to purify the halls, summoning the 38 loyal handmadens, and informing Penelope.

³² Two lines in Eurycleia's account to Penelope of what she found when she entered the megaron match two in the narrator's description: 23.45 = 22.401 and 23.48 = 22 402. (Some editors omit 23.48).

marriage-bed – involves Eurycleia as a silent character and unwitting helper. Eurycleia is present when Odysseus comes from the bath and, looking like an immortal, rejoins Penelope in the megaron and sits opposite her. He complains of her stubborn heart and orders Eurycleia to make up a bed. Penelope replies. “I know very well what you looked like / when you went in the ship with the sweeping oars, from Ithaca,” Then she issues her own order, refining his:

ἀλλ' ἄγε οἱ στόρεσον πυκινὸν λέχος, Εὐρύκλεια,
ἐκτὸς εὖσταθὲος θαλάμου, τὸν ῥ' αὐτὸς ἐποίει:
ἔνθα οἱ ἐκθεῖσαι πυκινὸν λέχος ἐμβάλετ' εὐνήν,
κώεα καὶ χλαίνας καὶ ῥήγεα σιγαλόεντα.
(23.177-80)

[Come then, Eurycleia, and make up a firm bed for him / outside the well-fashioned chamber: that very bed that he himself / built. Put the firm bed here outside for him, and cover it / over with fleeces and blankets and with shining coverlets.]

Eurycleia, who is not privy to the secret of the construction of the marriage bed, is silent. But we can imagine moving toward the bedchamber as she starts to obey this command. Her hopes, that Penelope would joyfully embrace Odysseus, and the story would have a fairy-tale ending, have been dashed. They will sleep in separate rooms, in separate beds. She will have to move the marriage-bed out of the bedchamber as she makes it up. (Eurynome would have known it was immovable, that it was constructed from a tree trunk still anchored to the ground. Presumably, she would have balked at such a command.

Hearing those words (and perhaps seeing Eurycleia's innocent reaction), Odysseus explodes with anger and interrupts any action Eurycleia might have begun to take. Deeply shaken, he describes how he himself made the bed from an olive tree and used the trunk as a bedpost (23.189-201). He concludes:

οὕτω τοι τόδε σῆμα πιφάυσκομαι: οὐδέ τι οἶδα,
ἢ μοι ἔτ' ἔμπεδόν ἐστι, γύναι, λέχος, ἢέ τις ἦδη
ἀνδρῶν ἄλλοσε θῆκε, ταμῶν ὕπο πυθμέν' ἐλαίης.
(23.202-4)

[There is its character, as I tell you; but I do not know now, / dear lady, whether my bed is still in place, or if some man / has cut underneath the stump of the olive and moved it elsewhere.]

At this, Penelope's τῆς δ' αὐτοῦ λύτο γούνατα καὶ φίλον ἦτορ, / σήματ' ἀναγνούσῃ τά οἱ ἔμπεδα πέφραδ' Ὀδυσσεύς: / δακρύσασα δ' ἔπειτ' ἰθὺς

δράμεν, ἀμφὶ δὲ χεῖρας / δειρῇ βάλλ' Ὀδυσῆϊ, κάρη δ' ἔκυσ' ["knees and the heart within her went slack,/ as she recognized the clear proofs that Odysseus had given; / but then she burst into tears and ran straight to him, throwing / her arms around the neck of Odysseus, and kissed his head"] ³³ (2.205-9).

4. Epilogue: Eurycleia on Stage

Here I consider seven examples of how Eurycleia might be portrayed on the stage. As the wide range of possibilities illustrates, and contrary to Auerbach's assertion, she does have a life of her own and feelings of her own. She is much more complex than the typical supporting character.

1. One could stage a soliloquy in which Eurycleia gives her account of dealing with the 108 unwelcome guests and the twelve disobedient handmaids for over three years. Like the shade of the suitor Amphimedon in Book 24,³⁴ she could recount her own version of the return of Odysseus, based on what she knew and when she knew it. She could include her private speculation on whether (and if so, when) Penelope guessed the identity of the stranger before she trapped him into self-revelation with her marriage-bed lie. She might exaggerate her own role in the reunion, taking credit for reuniting the couple and thereby stabilizing the household. And she might conclude the soliloquy by articulating what kind of future she expects: would Odysseus reward her for her loyalty, as he promises to the loyal herdsmen? And if he leaves for an extended period on his journey inland, according to Tiresias' prophecy, will she even be among the living at his final return?

2. One could stage a conversation among Eurycleia, the handmaids, and other dependents of the royal family. Such a scene might address the servant-master relationships and the status hierarchy among servants, as among servants in such television series as "Downton Abbey" and "Upstairs Downstairs." In the series, they are employees, not slaves; but some of them strive for a better lot in life. Often their narratives intersect meaningfully with the lives of their superiors; at other times, they have stories all their own, as part of a community with its own hierarchies and emotional upheavals.

For example, Eurycleia and Eumaeus might talk about the behavior of servants when their masters are away. The scene could build on Eumaeus'

³³ On the symbolism of the marriage-bed, see the excellent essay by Zeitlin (1996) 117-52.

³⁴ From the perspective of the slain suitor, Amphimedon, when he tells Agamemnon's shade how Odysseus returned and slaughter them in his halls (24.121-90), Penelope participated actively in the vengeance plot. She recognized Odysseus early on and helped plan their demise.

comments on slavery and the life of a slave. For example, in explaining to the stranger why Odysseus' dog, Argos, is in such a sorry state, Eumaeus generalizes about the impact of slavery on the virtue (ἀρετή) of the servants:

δμῶες δ', εὖτ' ἂν μηκέτ' ἐπικρατέωσιν ἄνακτες,
οὐκέτ' ἔπειτ' ἐθέλουσιν ἐναΐσιμα ἐργάζεσθαι:
ἥμισυ γάρ τ' ἀρετῆς ἀποαίνυται εὐρύοπα Ζεὺς
ἀνέρος, εὖτ' ἂν μιν κατὰ δούλιον ἥμαρ ἔλυσιν.
(17.320-23)

[His [Argos'] master, far from his country, / has perished, and the women are careless, and do not look after him; / and serving men, when their masters are no longer about, to make them / work, are no longer willing to do their rightful duties. / For Zeus of the wide brows takes away one half of the virtue / from a man, once the day of slavery closes upon him.]

Eurycleia could engage with Eumaeus about the plight of slaves in general, and of privileged slaves in Odysseus' household. She could defend herself against his generalization about what slaves do in their master's absence. And if she overheard Eumaeus using the neglect of Argos as a metaphor for the disarray of the household, with its implication that she might be responsible, she might respond by displacing the blame on bad character.

In addition, Eurycleia could comment on Eumaeus' great expectations when he speculates on what his master would have done for him, if he had grown old in Ithaca (14:63-7). Would she anticipate comparable perks, comparable rewards for loyalty?

Finally, a fictionalized, staged Eurycleia and a fictionalized, stage Eumaeus might discuss the economic aspects of slavery, or the issue of looking out for yourself, if you are the property of another. Would she ever purchase a slave of her own, as Eumaeus once did, when he bought Mesaulius from the Taphians with his own possessions, when aged Laertes was away (14.449-53)? Has she too stored up wealth of her own?

3. Another scene could pit Eurycleia against Eurynome (Actoris, daughter of Actor). This servant, as Penelope reminds Odysseus, used to guard their bedchamber. She alone of the servants knows the secret construction of the marriage bed (23.225-9).³⁵ She came to Ithaca with Penelope at the time of her marriage to Odysseus and seems to be her mistress' confidante. Perhaps she was Penelope's nurse in Autolycus' οἶκος. She is more aligned with Pe-

³⁵ Phaeacian servants have a similar division of labor. Nausicaa's nurse, Eury-medousa ("Wise Counselor"), is "mistress of the chamber" (θαλαμηπόλος) for the virgin princess (7.7-13). The θαλαμηπόλος Eurynome attends Penelope (23.291-5); we don't know if she was once her nurse.

nelope, in contrast to Eurycleia, who is aligned with Odysseus. Eurynome might explain why she encouraged Penelope to remarry, ἔρχευ, ἐπεὶ κάκιον πενθήμεναι ἄκριτον αἰεὶ. / ἤδη μὲν γάρ τοι παῖς τηλίκος, ὃν σὺ μάλιστα / ἡρῶ ἀθανάτοισι γενειήσαντα ἰδέσθαι. [now that your son is come of age, and you know you always / prayed the immortals, beyond all else, to see him bearded] (18.174-6). And Eurycleia, out of allegiance to her master, even in his absence, and also out of self-interest, would want her mistress to continue to delay. Both servants would know of her ruse of the loom and understand it as a delaying tactic. They may even know which of the maidservants betrayed her trick to the suitors. They would probably have different takes on Penelope's motives for encouraging individual suitors. Was either of them a carrier of her secret messages?

4. Another soliloquy could feature the blatantly disloyal handmaid Melantho, daughter of the loyal slave Dolius and sister of the insolent and treacherous goatherd Melanthius. Though Penelope reared her from girlhood, cared for her like a daughter, and cheered her with gifts, Melantho betrayed Penelope by regularly sleeping with one of the leading suitors, Eurymachus. She is also the most likely informer on Penelope for her trickery with the loom.³⁶

Melantho might justify her actions and plead for leniency before the brutal hanging in the courtyard. Or, afterwards as a shade, she could bitterly complain about the cruelty of Odysseus and Telemachus.

As an alternative, Eurycleia and Eurynome might join Melantho onstage to rebut her self-defense. Such a scene could draw on the language that Penelope and Odysseus used when chiding the young handmaid for her rude behavior (18.338-9, 19.81-8, and 90-5).

Melantho's defense could echo the language in Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*, where the shades of the disloyal maidservants express their outrage at the severity of their punishment. Melantho's attitude toward her lot in life and toward Penelope (though based on little in the text itself) could make compelling theater.

5. The scene of Eurycleia's discovery of her master's identity when she washes the feet of the stranger could be staged with no changes. The text sets out the scene in great detail. Penelope would be seated at an angle and at a distance so that Athena's can distract her, so she doesn't witness the dramatic encounter between Odysseus and his nurse.

6. One could stage the dialogue between Eurycleia and Penelope at the beginning of Book 23 (lines 1-84) in the upper bedchamber. Penelope rises from the bed, irritable at being awakened by Eurycleia, who had simply wanted to share her good news. Penelope resists at first but, after Eurycleia's vivid de-

³⁶ Cf. Winkler (1990:149-50) on Melantho's betrayal.

scription of what she heard and saw, she melts and embraces the dear nurse. Then, abruptly, she pulls back, regaining her reserve. Finally, she decides to go to see her son and to look upon the scene of the slaughter. She no longer doubts that the stranger <who killed the suitors> is her husband: the narrator describes her heart as “pondering much, whether to keep away and question her dear husband, / or to go up to him and kiss his head and take his hands” (23.85-7). This line sets forth her private thoughts. But once she steps over the threshold of the megaron, she sits apart from him, silent, still needing to test him in her own way.

Eurycleia would be on stage, watching, waiting, hoping her mistress would not remain hard-hearted.

7. Staging the marriage-bed scene would shine a spotlight on Eurycleia's silent but crucial role. This is her last appearance in the poem. Eurycleia is present when Odysseus comes from the bath and, looking like an immortal, sits opposite Penelope in the megaron. She refutes his complaint, that her heart is stubborn. Then she springs her trap. She turns to the nurse and says:

ἀλλ' ἄγε οἱ στόρεσον πυκινὸν λέχος, Εὐρύκλεια,
ἐκτὸς εὐσταθέος θαλάμου, τὸν ῥ' αὐτὸς ἐποίει:
ἔνθα οἱ ἐκθεῖσαι πυκινὸν λέχος ἐμβάλετ' εὐνήν,
κώεα καὶ χλαίνας καὶ ῥήγεα σιγαλόεντα.
(23.177-80)

[Come then, Eurycleia, and make up a firm bed for him / outside the well-fashioned chamber: that very bed that he himself / built. Put the firm bed here outside for him, and cover it / over with fleeces and blankets, and with shining coverlets.]

Because she knows nothing of the secret construction of the marriage bed, Eurycleia starts to obey this command, as if moving the bed would be a simple matter. (Eurynome would have known it was immovable, that it was constructed from a tree trunk still anchored to the ground.)

Odysseus' angry outburst stops Eurycleia in her tracks. With passion, he describes how he himself made the bed from an olive tree and used the trunk as a bedpost (23.183-204) and concludes:

οὕτω τοι τόδε σῆμα πιφάυσκομαι: οὐδέ τι οἶδα,
ἧ μοι ἔτ' ἔμπεδόν ἐστι, γύναι, λέχος, ἧέ τις ἦδη
ἀνδρῶν ἄλλοσε θῆκε, ταμῶν ὕπο πυθμέν' ἐλαίης.
(23.202-4)

[“There is its character, as I tell you; but I do not know now, / dear lady, whether my bed is still in place, or if some man / has cut underneath the stump of the olive and moved it elsewhere.”]

This scene could call attention to Eurycleia's body language. Her ignorance of the nature of the marriage bed means she acts naturally, without hesitation. Her gestures and facial expressions authenticate Penelope's trick, allowing Odysseus to leap to the wrong conclusions. She became Penelope's unwitting accomplice. Caught off guard, Odysseus reveals his intimate knowledge of the secret the couple shared, in all its symbolic force. This leads Penelope to embrace him as her husband (23.205-8). At this point, Eurycleia witnesses what she had long hoped for and what she had twice before tried to make happen. Unwittingly and silently, she fulfills the role of matchmaker. With the husband and wife in harmony, the future of the royal family and their οἶκος (including all the dependents) is secure, at least for now.

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