

Women in the odyssey

[Literature](#), [Mythology](#)



Women in The Odyssey After following an epic that revolved so completely around men, The Odyssey has quite a lot of female roles. True, the ancient Greeks had a better androgynous balance than other civilizations, and this is reflected very clearly in The Odyssey. Femininity has not only a bigger role in this epic, but it seems as though it is honored with its own unique power. This is shown in characters like Circe and Athena, but also subtextually in the many female weavers throughout the story. Overall, women and feminine power have a very influential role in the plot of the Odyssey. Let us begin with the obvious female powers in the immortal goddesses and nymphs. As far as the Olympian Gods, Athena is by far the most involved, regardless of gender. This is made very clear, for example, we see Telemachus preparing for his journey, " When they had made fast the running gear all along the black ship, then they set up the mixing bowls, filling them brimful with wine, and poured to the gods immortal and everlasting, but beyond all other gods they poured to Zeus' gray-eyed daughter. " (2. 430-433) Also, Calypso and Circe play the role of " Women as Temptress" which greatly hinders Odysseus' journey. Circe especially has those powerful witch qualities that she uses specifically against the male gender. Luckily, however, she learns compassion for Odysseus and the crew in general. Thus she becomes not only kind but actually a very helpful component in the overall voyage. Calypso needed more convincing about releasing Odysseus, but afterwards she also became somewhat helpful. Other helpful supernatural women appear such as the water nymph, Ino, who saves Odysseus from drowning on his way to the Phaeacians. Already we see a huge increase in female importance and their affect on the plot. One of the biggest reflections of

ancient Greek culture is the amount of weaving done by the women. However, I think that the images of weaving in the Odyssey have little to do with making a cultural point. In Greek mythology, everyone's destiny was weaved by the Fates. I think that because of that, weaving has many connections to destiny. This even transfers into the literal sense, from baby blankets to death shrouds. Thus, the women in the epic who are seen weaving are technically weaving the destinies of the characters of the story. Let's start with Penelope, for her image of weaving is very specific. She weaves by day and " by night, with torches lit beside her, she would unravel all she'd done. " (2. 106-107) This represents the fact that she keeps her life monotonously the same, and refuses to allow her life/destiny/weaving to progress. We see another very interesting image of weaving with Helen. She is making her yarn, which the preparation work before the actual weaving. To me this means that she was the one who informed the destinies before anything even took place in the Odyssey. Her decisions before and during the Iliad were her major contributions, as she set the stage for the female weavers of the Odyssey. These weavers also include Calypso and Circe, who we have already decided are major parts in the book. There are a few more women in this epic who really deserve to be mentioned. Two of them are Phaeacians, Princess Nausicaa and Queen Arete. Nausicaa, inspired by our goddess Athena, really helped Odysseus. In her curiosity and level-headedness, she helped Odysseus return to her palace and find the help and support he needed to return home. Once he arrived there, he met with Arete, and it was she who Odysseus chose to plead hospitality, " flung his arms around her knees, " (7. 167) instead of her husband (the king). From

the moment I read this, I thought that Arete must be a very powerful and respected woman, especially if she has power over decisions like that. Another woman I found very influential was Eurycleia. She practically raised both Odysseus and Telemachus, making that bond/parallel between father and son even clearer. She is also the only person to recognize Odysseus before he meant to reveal himself to her. However, when she saw his unmistakable scar, she "let his foot fall, down it dropped in the basin-the bronze clanged, tipping over, tipping water across the floor." (19. 530-533). This uninherently shows her wisdom and compassion at an old age. Another (somewhat graphic) image of women in the Odyssey is the maidens that were hung across the rope by their faces at the end of the battle. This shows the flipside of feminine power, as these are the women who didn't advocate for themselves or their masters in the least, but decided to live a lazy life of gluttony and pleasure instead. The last woman I would like to mention is Odysseus' mother, Anticleia. We only get to see her as a shadow, which is the least powerful state of any woman throughout the epic. However, she still stirs a deep emotional response out of Odysseus, which, in turn, most definitely affects the actions he takes and thus the plot as a whole. Overall, I think that women play a very inspiring role in this epic. They show us time and time again that each of us is powerful enough to help write or own destinies, and to be cooperative components in the lives of others. We see again that compassion trumps hatred, and that being helpful is better than being selfish. Setting someone you love free can not only just turn out for the best, but it also might just be what needs to happen in the fate of their life. How different would the story be if Odysseus wasn't eventually allowed to

leave Aeaëa or Ogygia? So in conclusion, the women of the Odyssey show us to be present and compassionate in our lives, because who knows? You may just have a lasting effect on the life of another.