

The females portrayed in greek literature based on odyssey, oedipus rex, the apol...

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



The woman in Greece is depicted in the accounts of Odysseus, Oedipus, Apology and the writings of Sapphos based on their roles and functions in the present day Greek society as wife and mother, and based on their characteristics as impulsive and irrational, sentimental, and passionate, cruel and kind. Women wield no power beyond the confines of the home. These views are of course founded upon the opinions of the male-dominated society and so this perspective is taken on a patriarchal slant. Women, whether human or goddess, share qualities and condition: eroticism, sensuality, maternal instinct, subordination by men,

In Greece, women are wives and mothers, bound to honour, respect, serve and be faithful to their husbands and to raise their children. Wifhood is assumed for most Greek women. Wifhood and motherhood are regarded as the universally accepted and noble station of the woman. Being unmarried in Greece is unthinkable and barrenness means shame, and disgrace. Odysseus foresees the doom of his ill-fated daughters who will suffer in the future for his blind mistakes. No honourable and decent man marries maidens who have a tarnished family name and whose parents bear a curse. Odysseus laments for the fate of his daughters Antigone and Ismene for "such reproach must still be yours to virgin solitude...and a barren bed."

On the other hand, while in Hades, a theogony of some gods is presented to us which is made possible through marriage and conception. Penelope is a paragon of Greek femininity for she represents the virtuous, loyal and dutiful Greek wife and the maternal, caring, nurturing parent. When Laius dies, his widow Jocasta is given to Oedipus for wife and when Odysseus is assumed

dead, many suitors clamour Penelope pressing her to marry them. Parent in the theogony are married and fertile women who bare children - a function inextricable from the function as wife. The titles and functions of the wife and mother are not merely for the Greek society's gain but for the personal survival of the female as well. Without a husband, women sink " in penury and woe." Oedipus begs Creon to take care of his orphaned and unmarried daughters for he knows that without a husband they have to struggle for survival.

In Greece, women are perceived as wives who can be most treacherous, crafty and deceitful to their husbands. Greek men are wary of their wives who are always prone to be unfaithful to them and to dishonour their name. Sapphos, famous female Greek poet, draws from her own experience and the stereotype of Greek society. " Young brides have hearts that can be persuaded easily, light things, palpitant to passion" (Sappho). Hence one observes that Greek husbands are always suspicious of their covert, subtle wives. In Odysseus, the warning of Agamemnon reverberates with truth for his wife, Clytemnestra's infidelity and spousal murder. Alluding to the treachery of his own wife plotting his downfall with her lover, Aegisthus, Agamemnon warns that there is no more faith in woman." Indeed, Clytemnestra is characterized as a " crafty" and " brutal woman." In Theogony, Earth plots the punishment and castration of her own husband, Heaven, with her children thus an example clarifies and confirms the lack of confidence Greek husbands reposed in their wives.

Women of Greece are perceived as wives who can be the most treacherous, crafty and deceitful to their husbands and in whom lay the pernicious potential to betray her honour. Men are wary of their wives who are always prone to be unfaithful to them and dishonour their name. Sapphos, famous female Greek poet, draws from her own experience and the stereotyped image of the wife in Greek society, relates that “ young brides have hearts that can be persuaded easily, light things, palpitant to passion.” Hence, one observes that Greek husbands are always suspicious of their subtle wives. In Odysseus, the warning of Agamemnon reverberates and supports this view of women because of Clytemnestra’s (his wife’s) own infidelity and his murder at her hands. Alluding to his wife’s extramarital affair with her paramour Aegisthus, Agamemnon strongly maintains that “ there is no more faith in woman” (Odysseus). Clytemnestra is characterized as a “ crafty” and “ brutal woman.”

Greek women are viewed as fickle, temperamental, irrational and evil. Circe, Calypso, and Sphinx are all women who thwart the efforts of man, blight good fortune and make irrational decisions. Circe is the witch-goddess who transforms Odysseus’ crew into swine but then retransforms them, sumptuously banquets them and releases the men because of Odysseus’ request and persuasion after detaining them for a year. Calypso is a nymph goddess who holds Odysseus captive for seven years but who liberates him due to the appeal and persuasion of Hermes. The Sphinx terrorizes and devours the men of Thebes who are unable to answer her riddle but after Oedipus solves the riddle, she kills herself and therefore ceases to be a

threat to the city. All of these females share one common denominator that is that they are all impulsive, capricious, and are at times cruel and kind. They inflict suffering and bestow good on mankind hence women are here portrayed as flighty and again untrustworthy because of these attributes.

Women are powerless creatures and have no vested authority to take part in the public life which includes the processes of making important decisions. In Apology, before the court of justice and the body, the Council of five-hundred constitutes only the male Greek citizens. Socrates appeals to this council of men when he is accused of treason. The divine council of the gods at Mount Olympus, where Zeus (male) presides is also comprised solely of male members. The only female present who is allowed voice is Athena and that is because she is Zeus daughter. Queen Penelope has virtually no power to wield in the absence of her husband for the state of the household and nation is in disarray. Although she bears the title of queen which provides and invests in her authority, she is very limited in her powers to assert her wishes in the court and in the land. Suitors anxiously await Penelope to choose a husband and king for they too are cognizant of the fact that she cannot bear sway alone. Queen Jocasta has no regal authority either for alone, without the support of the governing power of her deceased husband King Laius she cannot assume power alone. She is wedded to Oedipus and only through him is her authority validated.