

Portrayal of women in the odyssey essay sample

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



In Homer's *Odyssey*, the women are portrayed in many different ways, some are said to be wise while others are cruel, but many are treated differently from the opposite gender. One of the women in the story, Penelope, was portrayed as very wise but because of her gender she was expected to obey many of the men. Similarly to Penelope, Arete, queen of the Phaeacians, was equally wise but was viewed almost as an equal to the men. In contrast to the other two women, Melanthe was very malicious and was treated similarly to the men in the end of the book.

To begin, Penelope was considered to be extremely wise, but was expected to listen and comply with many of the men. To avoid becoming married, Penelope used her wisdom to devise a trick to keep the Suitors from forcing her to choose one of them. In book two, it is stated, "...she began weaving a large and delicate piece of work...for Lord Laertes...by day she used to weave at the great web, but every night had torches set beside it and undid the work." This clearly shows that she was cleverer than the Suitors, and also that she applied her wisdom for her family's benefit. However, despite her wisdom Penelope, because of her sex, was expected to obey many people of the opposite gender. This is proven in book 21 when it says, "' As for the bow, mother,' shrewd Telemachus interposed... ' is the men's concern, and mine above all; for I am the master in this house...so go to your quarters now and attend to your own work'..." This shows that Penelope was required to obey most men, including her own son who was still too young to take over Odysseus' position in the house. Clearly, although Penelope was wiser than many men, she was still expected to comply with their orders.

Similarly to Penelope, Arete who was the queen of Phaeacia, was very wise, but unlike Penelope was treated almost as an equal to the men. Odysseus was instructed by Athene when he went into Alcinous' place to speak with Arete first because she would make sure Odysseus would reach his home again. Book seven supports this in lines 72-78, " For she is also a wise woman...so if only you can secure her friendly interest, you may well hope to see your friends once more, to return to the high roof of your own house and to your native land." This clearly shows that Arete was very wise and had much influence on the people of Phaeacia in order to be able to guarantee Odysseus a passage to Ithaca. Contrary to Penelope, Arete was treated almost as an equal to the men of her country. This is proven in the same book when it states, "...and when her sympathies are enlisted she settles even men's disputes." Obviously, this shows that she was treated similarly to men otherwise they would probably not allow or welcome her to settle their arguments. Arete was clearly treated better than most women of her time and was also given credit to her wisdom by many of the men of her country.

Melantho, one of Penelope's maids, was unlike Arete and her mistress, because she was very cruel, and in the end of the book she was treated similarly to the Suitors. Melantho had no respect or sympathy for Penelope even though her mistress had treated her as her own child. This is supported by the story when it says,

" But Melantho of the pretty cheeks jeered at him outrageously. She was a daughter of Dolius, whom Penelope had reared and looked after as tenderly as her own child.... But in spite of Penelope's woes; she was in love with

Eurymachus...Melantho now renewed her abuse of Odysseus. ' Still here...to plague us all night long'...Wise Penelope, who had listened, rounded on the maid with a rebuke... ' I am not unaware of your disgraceful behaviour and you shall pay dearly for it. For you knew perfectly well – you heard me say so myself – that in my ever-present distress I meant to question this stranger here in my house for any news he might have of my husband.'"

This shows that Melantho, despite Penelope's wishes, had made fun of Odysseus and was a lover of Eurymachus, which was very disloyal and unsympathetic. At the end the book, Melantho along with the other disloyal maids were treated similarly to the Suitors. Book 22 supports this when it states, "...Odysseus looked round his house to see whether any survivors were hiding to escape black Death. But he found the whole company lying in heaps in the blood and dust...Then the thoughtful Telemachus spoke. ' I swear I will not give a decent death to women who have heaped insults on my head and on my mother's, and slept with the Suitors.'" This shows that all the Suitors were killed and the disloyal maids were also killed by an indecent death despite their gender. Clearly, although Melantho was a woman she was treated no differently from the Suitors because of her treacherous crimes.

In conclusion, women in The Odyssey were usually treated differently from the opposite gender and were portrayed in many different ways. For example, Penelope devised many tricks to deceive her suitors but was treated inferior to the men in the story. Arete was revered by her society because of her wisdom and was even called upon to settle men's disputes

which was very uncommon in that time. Finally, Melanthe was very different from the other women in the story because she was disloyal as well as unwise and was still killed in an indecent death despite her gender.