

The role of women in homer's iliad

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



The Iliad, by Homer, primarily revolves around the male characters in the epic poem, but the few women in the story play a salient role. The women are seen as nothing but trophies for the dauntless works of men, but the roles that they depict play a crucial role in the development of the plot and storyline. Gender roles are a social construct that outlines the 'appropriate' attitudes, behaviors, and actions of men in women in the context of society. They aid in defining what is masculine or feminine, and show the way people should be regarded.

In Homeric epics, female characters are vital to the plot because they act as a basis of comparison for the men, as the outrageousness of their actions can be seen when in juxtaposition with a woman's. Additionally, they add depth and create a theatrical aspect. For example, The Iliad would not have happened had there not been a quarrel over Helen. Historically, women are seen as the inferior gender, regularly being viewed as weak and inadequate. The female population has been continuously ostracized from society and its major decisions. In more recent years, the subject of gender roles has become a very controversial topic, as the majority of people believe women are being treated unfairly compared to men. In the Iliad, women are written with little thought put into the character, and they are thrown into the story merely for the plot, but in modern literature, the female characters play a more integral and involved role in terms of the plot, dissimilar from female objectification displayed in past literature.

Masculinity in The Iliad is portrayed by men who seize a place as a master, while femininity is encapsulated by women who have little say in the decisions made in society, and are accustomed to being seen as the property

of men. In present-day literature, women are deeply embedded into stories and often play a heroic role but in the Iliad, women are complex characters written simply to enhance the storyline and create drama. Take Helen for example. Her story greatly altered the plot, as she indirectly started the Trojan war. Helen is regarded as the most beautiful women in the world, which led to a conflict over her hand in marriage. She was already wedded to Menelaus, who was on the Greek side, but left him to run away with Paris, who was on the Trojan side. After the war had begun, Iris stated "...you [Helen] will be called the dear wife of whichever one wins". This shows that while Helen has intense emotions and feelings pertaining to her situation, she had no say in anything that took place.

Another example of using the objectification of women for the purpose of writing is the characters of Briseis and Chryseis. When Chryseis was forced to be returned to her father, Agamemnon was angry, yet consented to avoid more of his men falling to the plague. Following the agreement to return Chryseis, Agamemnon states, " But you must provide a prize for me at once. For me to be the only Argive here, Without some gift of honor would hardly be right!". The men in The Iliad believe that their bravery in the war warrants a reward, most commonly a girl. Without a trophy girl to fuel their pride, men feel inferior. Agamemnon tried to appropriate Briseis (Achilles war prize) as compensation for his loss. This caused Achilles to descend into a fit of rage as he was insulted that Agamemnon had the audacity to try and steal what he believed he deserved. Ultimately, Briseis is treated as a pawn between these two men to create a conflict in the long war, and advance the plot.

In contrast, the women in novels today are often written in heroic roles or as main characters. Numerous female characters in modernized literature break stereotypical gender roles by not needing the help of a man to save them, or though letting women exist on their own by disincluding the idea of a love interest in the novel entirely.