

# The penelopiad in reshaping the odyssey



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In the novella "The Penelopiad" written by Margaret Atwood, Ancient Greek values predominant in "The Odyssey" are reshaped, including Penelope's contemporary perspective on justice as one that portrays the maids and suitors as unworthy of losing mortality in a malevolent and inhumane way and desire for a stronger female authority and voice, and abandoning archetypes of women as temptresses and maids, which is contrasted within "the Odyssey", where justice is defined as giving divine and omniscient authorities to male citizens and gods, and Odysseus, as a hero, admired through physical values of strength and emotional values of deception and independence. Justice is depicted through Penelope giving the maids omniscience and a sarcastic tone, which questions Odysseus's character and fulfillment of the archetype of a hero, and her sense of passionate femininity, that challenges the audience to revisit the suppressed identity of women and how society deems their innocence. This is justified through the elimination of female archetypes, which embody the emotional values of frailty, fidelity, and obedience, which have been the first male orientated in "The Odyssey". Therefore, Ancient Greece values of alienating female rights and voice through their low status on the social hierarchy, is subverted, as female figures begin to possess an opinionated stance towards their social expectations and idealized character, which is seductive, alluring and loyal, in contemporary society, through the utilization of literary techniques including repetition, symbolism, and metaphors.

The novella challenges the aspect of justice in "the Odyssey", as the protagonist violently murders the suitors and maids, conveying valued Greek heroic, masculine traits including authority, deception, and assertiveness,

compared to Atwood's depiction of justice as giving the narrative perspective from the weaker and disadvantaged party. It is evident in "the Chorus line", where "Think of us as real girls, real flesh and blood", the repetition of "real", suggests the maids' passionate desire to be perceived through humane and emotional qualities including independence, virtue and honesty, rather than being merely reduced to an object of sexual objectification and that of a lower status between women and laborers in the patriarchal dominated society. In "greedy for prolonged life and power", "greedy" possesses negative connotations including selfishness and egotism, further highlighting Odysseus's tragic flaw of obsession for attention and glory and the flawed myth of the protagonist's triumphant victory in Trojan war. In "We're walking behind you, A love song", Penelope allows the audience to sympathize with the maid's loss of mortality, by giving them a voice that echoes the brutality of Odysseus, evidently where "You roped us in, you strung us up, you left us dangling on a clothes line...how virtuous you felt, how righteous", "a clothes line" represents domestic responsibilities of cleaning. The metaphor compares clothes to the maids, further conveying that women are valued for their appearance and sexual appeal, rather than their talents and wisdom. Being "roped" signifies physical imprisonment as the loss of hand utilization prevents women from cooking, cleaning, voting and caring for the children, their significance in society diminishes and it threatens their survival, ultimately, resulting in their death and "roped" hanging. "How virtuous you felt, how righteous", is juxtaposed against the villainous act of Odysseus murdering the innocent individuals and positively connotes the idea of losing mortality and subverts against Christian moral attitudes, heightening an atmosphere of fear and sinister nature towards the

hero archetype. Thus, the audience is challenged as contemporary values of punishing the individual guilty of a crime is differed with masculine traits of deception, violence, and independence is glorified. Therefore, the desire for justice in alienating feminine stereotypical traits creates the division between contemporary society and the Bronze age Greece society and ultimately, reshapes the significance of traditional values.

Similarly, women are presented with a passionate and knowledgeable voice, that subverts their stereotypical submissive nature and traditional expectations of marriage and domestic responsibility. It is evident in "Heart of Flint", "Odysseus told me...travels and difficulties - the nobler versions, with monsters and goddesses, rather than the sordid ones with the innkeepers and whores", "goddesses" symbolizes beauty, luster, and peace, in contrast with "whores", which possesses negative connotations including disgust and immorality. The glorious appearance portrayed through the heroic, Greek, masculine values of combating sinister supernatural beings and positive hospitality by beautiful goddesses are contrasted to the reality of Odysseus's sexual involvement of another woman and violent murders, insulted by Penelope as she claims the loss of moral superiority of her husband. This creates a sense of sympathy for the audience as such dull reality is veiled from Penelope, and is relatable as contemporary values and most religious values condone adultery. Similarly, this is depicted in "Waiting", where the protagonist grows confidence and rebels against social norms after the alienation of her husband in the Trojan war. It is evident where "My policy was to build up the estates... more wealth than when he left - more sheep, more cows, more pigs, more field of grains", the

accumulation of animals and edible objects allows the audience to confront the idea of women being stripped physically, consumed and left with no identity like that of an animal, who are preyed on by humans for consumption. A woman loses authority and humane respect after losing chastity to another man and is considered the property of a man, without an occupation and inheritance, at marriage. By directing herself to comply against the rule of building estates for Odysseus, role reversal is highlighted, in that the protagonist desires to be in a position of authority and higher social status like her male counterparts. Therefore, the novella integrates limited feminine social values apparent in Greek society, including frailty, fidelity and the suppressed female voice.

In conclusion, "The Penelopiad" reshapes the value of "the Odyssey" through the exploration of contemporary justice in a positive light where Penelope and the maids are given a chance to evoke anger against their innocent loss of mortality and subjection of emotional abuse from male counterparts and the portrayal of women as assertive against feminine ideals. Ancient Greece presents justice as the omniscient authority of males who utilize violence and deception against sinister complications including the Cyclops that Odysseus face and the hanging of the maids. It also subverts the lower status of women, which is reflected through their limited authority in decision making, inheritance and ability to be involved outside jobs and hobbies including sewing, nursing children and cooking, and values of familial affection, compassion, and obedience. Therefore, the frail and inferior nature of women with little emotional and physical freedom and

materialistic entitlements of inheritance and ownership of housing is alienated through the contemporary attitudes within the novella.