

When analyzing the odyssey it is intriguing to evaluate the roles of women opposed to men and the differences and similarities between the two. From the book, we receive a representation of the role of women in the ancient Greek culture. Women in the Odyssey are placed on pedestals as beautiful creatures but were often inferior to men, and had little participation and involvement in the government and often had to resort to deception and treachery to get what they wanted. In the odyssey, it shows us the different ways women were looked upon. Women and Goddesses were vied as two separate groups of people and portrayed differently.

Firstly Penelope, a faithful and loving wife to Odysseus, Homer reveals to us that that is how the Greeks believed wives should act. She was loyal to Odysseus even when it had appeared that he was dead. She resisted the suitors on the basis that she loved Odysseus and could not see herself with any other man than her husband. Although at the same time, she is in conflict with herself if she should remarry or stay faithful to Odysseus. Penelope's astute delaying tactics reveal her sly and artful side. The notion of not remarrying until she completes a burial shroud that she will never complete cleverly buys her time. The constant pressure under which she lives has the effect of turning her into a woman who hangs grimly on to the past, and finds comfort in only the world of sleep and dreams, and even those can be painful sometimes. However, Athene sometime comes into her dreams to comfort and reassure her. Penelope anticipates for the return of her husband but at the same time doubts, he will ever come back. Athene and Telemachus often prefer to leave Penelope in the dark side about matters rather than upsetting her and maybe even raising her hopes. The archery contest in book 21 might also show her sly personality, she is aware that only Odysseus can win it, but she still puts all the suitors to the test.

In the Odyssey, women do not have jurisdiction over their own lives; an example of this is arranged marriages. For example how Naussica, the young princess of Scheria and daughter of King Alcinous, has no problem of her father offering her to Odysseus without her knowing. In the Greek culture, this was just seen as a loyal daughter; even though she referred to him as 'the excellent father' this seem rather inconsiderate. Many beautiful and highborn females are compared to the gods, which is one of the things that adds to the glorification of women. The women in Odyssey are never presented as individuals, but as dependents. Their social status, reputation and lives depend on the men. Some women are known for the deeds of their sons or husbands, but never for a heroic action of their own. Also everywhere, when there is a description of a person it states who their father was or any male figure that was relevant to her.

A total different kind of attitude is given to Athene, the goddess of wisdom and battle. 'The grey eyed goddess' is the most admired female in the entire book and actually runs the show. She has more power than many men. She is also able to convince Zeus the ruler of all the gods, to set Odysseus free. She has a soft spot for Odysseus. She helps him through many tough situations, but mostly takes interest in him for the talents he has and actively demonstrates. Although during the battles, she does not become fully involved and prefers to watch Odysseus fight and prevail on his own.